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## **Embodied knowledge in high-school dance students; communicating the bodily experience**



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**NTNU – Trondheim**  
Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology

Nordic Master's in Dance (NoMAds)  
Faculty of Humanities Department of Music, Dance studies  
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## **Introduction**

Several times as a dance teacher I have experienced my students having difficulties speaking or writing about movement and dance. Sometimes I can see them very eager to share some sort of experience they have had when dancing, however it seems like they do not have an appropriate language to use in communicating these experiences. I can see how they have discovered certain things in their bodies and thus gained new knowledge situated in the body, however the difficulty of translating this knowledge into words become evident.

In this paper I have wanted to look closer at the relations between bodily experiences and language. Is it possible to bridge the gap between them? And is it necessary? In the process of looking at how to communicate the knowledge of the body, I realised that I might use the knowledge in my own body in new ways. If I applied my body as a research tool to gain knowledge, I might be able to move or dance that knowledge and perhaps (or perhaps not) communicate some meaning to other people directly through my movement. However, if I wanted to end up with a written paper saying something about the communication of embodied knowledge (which was indeed my purpose for this study) what tools would be at my disposal to make this possible? In order to share the findings with anyone in an academic context one has to translate the body's knowledge into words. Is it possible to bridge the gap between the system of representation through words and the system of representation through movement?

In the first part of my paper I am looking at the dancer body from a Foucauldian perspective, reflecting upon how the body has been viewed in modern western society and how power structures in the society may influence the way we look at and experience our bodies in dance training today. I am also reflecting upon my interview material from dance teachers and dance students to see how it relates to the theories of Foucault and the thoughts of Jill Green who has applied these theories in the dance field.

In the second part of my paper I look at the communication of embodied knowledge. I look at how the body might be seen as a system of representation and I use William's semasiology as an example of how dance might be treated as a system of meaningful signs. I also reflect upon my own previous dance and language project in high school to highlight the challenges of

talking about movement experiences and to suggest a place to start for building a common ground from which to talk about and share movement experiences.

The last part of my paper is a discussion about why it is important to both acknowledge the embodied knowledge and also to be able to communicate this kind of knowledge. I look at how dance<sup>1</sup> has been taught traditionally in Norway and reflect upon the changes that have been happening in the last decades. I also look at phenomenology in relation to dance and the embodied experience. Towards the end (and in the appendix), I try to look at some possible directions for further investigations.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I refer to dance as western theatrical dance.

## Methodology

In my research I have not been trying to find any universal truths, laws of nature or any conclusions that can be generalized to a whole society. Where the positivists aimed for a research free of value and truly objective, postpositivists<sup>2</sup> claim “subjectivity is not only unavoidable but may even be helpful in giving researchers and participants a more meaningful understanding of people and research themes.” (Green & Stinson in Fraleigh & Hanstein, 1999:93) By making the body an active and communicative tool in both the research as well as in the interpretation process, subjectivity is definitely unavoidable. At the same time one allows for a different and hopefully enriching perspective on the phenomena of study. In the phenomenological hermeneutic way of doing research, the traditional definition of reliability as getting the same result from an experiment if repeating it (Howe, Høium, Kvernmo and Knutsen eds. 2005), would be impossible as it is to a large degree someone’s subjective experience of a phenomenon that is being investigated. My hopes have therefore rather been that in revisiting some of my earlier collected data I might look at them in a new way and discover different meanings due to my changes as an always experiencing and developing subject in the world. I have been looking into a group of Norwegian dance students in high school (15 – 19 years of age), and how they can express their movement experiences or their embodied knowledge. My research deals with subjects and their movement experiences, and that also includes my own pre-understandings based on my experiences from living in the world, and more specifically from being part of a Western theatrical dance world. In this paper I am referring to dance as western theatrical dance and particularly within the context of a high school dance programme. Being a teacher in a dance programme in high school I have had easy access to informants. However, because I know the students and even more importantly because I am going to grade them in different dance subjects two things have been of great importance to me in this project. First, I have talked with all my students (and my colleagues) about my studies and this project. Because this project has changed several times during the past two years however, different groups of students might have heard somewhat different versions of my plans, but the main point is that I have been honest and open with them all the way. And I have assured my students that any information I gain in relation to this study was not going to affect their grades. Secondly, I

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<sup>2</sup> According to Fraleigh & Hanstein the term postpositivism is used “as an umbrella term to describe the variety of approaches to research that have arisen in response to a recognition of the limitations of the positivist tradition in research.” (1999: 92)



have assured my students that they will be treated anonymously. I have gotten their permission to use their answers from questionnaires and interviews as well as their journals. I have also asked them if I could refer to events that happened in dance classes and they have agreed to that as well. One of the student interviews was a semi-structured interview recorded on film February 2011, and five were structured written interviews from November 2009. I also did three semi-structured interviews orally with dance teachers and one structured written interview in November 2009. The student journals I have used as source material are from 2007 – 2011.

I have been working with my research for this paper much in the same way as I work creatively in dance. By that I mean that I did not know precisely what I was looking for, how I was going to get to my end result or what I would find. I did not know exactly how to approach this study in order to find results. Unlike the positivist researcher (Liebert & Liebert 1973), who has a very clear hypothesis and a clear plan as to how to conduct the needed experiments with the proper tools, my research for this project needed to develop as I was on my way. I could not map out the path in advance because I was not exactly sure where this investigation was taking me. My study is hermeneutical in character and hopefully it has spiralled to create some new or different insights. I was also hoping that I would be able to draw on the knowledge that was situated in my body as part of my research, as Ylönen writes: “My hermeneutical study forms a spiral, where theoretical cycles overlap with my experiences, creating continuous reinterpretations and dialogues between the bodily and the verbal” (p.556) The data I have used for this research, I have collected in different situations during the last four years. Most of the interviews I have conducted in the past two years (with dance teachers and dance students) have been made with the intention of using the data in this paper. However, I have chosen to also return to some of the interview material I had from previous work as I felt this could shed some light on my current work. Returning to different material several times during the two years of this Masters programme has made me see the material a little differently every time and thus given me new insights parallel with the course of my studies. It has definitely given me the feeling of living in a spiral although sometimes I was not quite sure in what direction I was moving. I have chosen not to include the transcribed interviews or results from the questionnaires in this paper because the amount of material is very large, rather I have only included the excerpts that I felt best could represent the information I received and that could best shed light on the topic of research. In the last part of this paper I have written about The 2006 Knowledge Promotion Reform in Norwegian

schools. As a high school teacher part of my work has been to analyse this document and adjust it to our local profile as well as adjusting our teaching in accordance with the document, this work has been going on continuously for the last five years and has also contributed to my hermeneutic spiral of this project.

## Part 1

### Foucault and the dancer body

#### The separation of mind and body

One of the premises for this paper is that there exists such a thing as embodied knowledge. During the past twenty years there has been a growing interest in the body and the information one might find in both the body and movement<sup>3</sup>, however there is a strong tradition of Cartesian dualism that has to be overcome in order to validate the knowledge of the body. According to Skjeringstad, Gumbrecht shows how:

“it has been a tendency in western culture at least since the Renaissance to devalue the concrete, bodily, immediate and present in favour of the abstract, spiritual, actual and absent. As a consequence, the hermeneutical tradition [...] has shown less interest for the dance as a research field. Because the dance has had nothing to hide, no profound meaning in which one could legitimise an interest”<sup>4</sup> (2008: 168 – 169).

Ever since Descartes (1596 – 1650), there has been a deep-rooted sense of mind-body dualism in our western society. Cogito ergo sum, I think therefore I am, established the mind as sacred, rational and transcendent while treating the body as the opposite, mundane, irrational<sup>5</sup> and perishable. With the Enlightenment and the focus on scientific progress, the sense of objectifying the body became even more evident, the body became an instrument that could be analysed, controlled and scientifically explained for example in terms of medicine and anatomy. It is interesting to look at how dance has been taught traditionally in the institutions of dance education in relation to this instrumentalist view of the body, something I will return to later.

Farnell (in Buckland 1999: 149 – 150) shows us some of the pairs of oppositions prevailing as a result of Cartesian dualist thinking that in her opinion have led to a “bifurcation of the embodied person into a body plus a mind”:

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Featherstone (1999), Lakoff & Johnson (1999), Sheets-Johnstone (1998), Williams (2004) etc.

<sup>4</sup> My translation.

<sup>5</sup> This was with reference to our emotions, which were seen to “belong to” the body, rather than the mind.

Mind	Body
Logic and reason	Emotion
Thinking	Feeling
Language	Non-language
Verbal	Non-verbal
Spirit	Matter
Culture	Nature

(Farnell in Buckland 1999: 150)

In the same way as Skjeringstad, Farnell points out how western academia have not seen the potential for meaning or contributions of bodily movement. She holds that the opposition between the verbal and the non-verbal has consequently separated the language and the mind from the rest of our bodies including such features as posture, gesture and facial expressions (Ibid: 150). Farnell, writing from the point of view of a dance anthropologist, claims that “most anthropologists, socialised according to the mores of western academia, find it hard to imagine what bodily movement might ‘mean’ at all, far less contribute to our understanding of social and cultural practices” (Ibid: 149).

In this paper however, I will look at movement and dance as a structured system of meaningful human actions (Williams 2004), and I will look for ways of making this kind of meaning and knowledge explicit in the context of teaching western theatrical dance to high school students who are following a dance programme. However, as we have seen, the Cartesian tradition has for a long time coloured the way we understand the world, so before I can try to look for any embodied knowledge I need to look at the possibility that the body itself might also be coloured by existing opinions, myths or power structures relating to what the body is, how it should look and function, and how we might create our sense of self through our bodies in dance and also how the body’s history contributes to the present experiences. For this purpose I will look at some of Foucault’s theories of the body and in particular how these are discussed in Jill Green’s essay “Docile Bodies: A threat or a necessity in educating dancers” (2004) and also look at if or why this is important in relation to me as a researcher and my high school dance students in the process of becoming aware of our embodied knowledge.

### Foucault and the malleable body

In his essay “Docile Bodies” from “Discipline and Punish”, Foucault talks about how one came to look at the body very differently from the beginning of modernity. He uses the example of the soldier’s body. In earlier times it was easy to recognize who would fit to be a soldier; he would have a certain body type, muscular with broad shoulders, and an erect head (Rabinow 1984: 179). From modernity onwards however, everyone could be made into a soldier, it was only a question of proper training and manipulation of the body (Ibid: 179). From the late 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the sciences developed immensely. The laws of physics, biology and mathematics and so on became the number one bearer of truth. By providing empirical proof, science replaced myths, traditional folk-stories and religion as the foundation for truth and explanation of life and death. This development in the sciences led to a belief that everything could be explained mechanically and everything, including the body, was looked upon as a machine that could be analyzed by the functioning of its parts and hence manipulated and improved both in form and function. Consciousness was placed in the mind so to speak, and the body was given the role of ‘the obedient server’. “As an objective system of parts, the body is often regarded as an instrument of consciousness, an instrument explicitly recognized as carrying out whatever consciousness intends (...)” (Sheets-Johnstone in Karoblis 2007: 334). As we can see this is very much in consistency with the Cartesian dualistic thinking about the mind and the body. According to Foucault:

“The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down, and rearranges it. A “political anatomy,” which was also a “mechanics of power,” was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed, and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, “docile” bodies.” (Foucault in Rabinow 1984:182)

### Self-surveillance and conforming to the norm in dance training

As Green noted in her essay, Foucault believed that schools were primarily designed to train docile bodies; these are bodies that are self-regulated and habituated in accordance with the prevalent regimes of power (2004:38 – 39). As I understand it, our actions, behaviour and sense of normality is controlled and shaped through different disciplines in order to maintain a certain structure of power in society according to Foucault. Green notices how, in the context of dance training, the notion of self-surveillance has become the prevalent “system for

maintaining proper behavior” (ibid: 38). The dance student is expected to conform to the norm both in appearances, dress code, and manner of training the body as well as how to move and how to behave in the dance studio according to the specific dance technique in question. Foucault shows how this strive for normality works on the level of maintaining power and control through the indirect punishment of feeling shame and non-affiliation in a hierarchy where normality is the most valued feature:

“(…) the art of punishing, in the regime of disciplinary power, (…) refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation, and the principle of a rule to be followed. It differentiates individuals from one another, in terms of the following overall rule: that the rule be made to function as a minimal threshold, as an average to be respected, or as an optimum toward which one must move. It measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the “nature” of individuals. It introduces through this “value-giving” measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved. (…) [It] compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes.” (Foucault in Rabinow 1984: 195)

Being different or outside the norm will evoke undesired reactions from the surroundings and as such work as a form of punishment and the aim is to redirect the lost body back on track.

Jill Green writes:

“This shift towards surveillance, and particularly self-surveillance, has been effective in training docile dance performers, but not so effective in producing dance artists who take ownership of their bodies and artistic processes. As Lee Quinby (1991) suggests, perhaps the halt of creative energies that subvert the dominant paradigm is just the point. By producing docile bodies in dance classes, there is less of a chance of ending up with political artists who question norms of ideology as well as practice.” (2004:39)

This production of non-questioning dancers may be a highly relevant problem in relation to the traditional instrumentalist way of teaching dance in Norway too, however looking at the new school reform it seems like there is an important shift happening. I will return to this in part three of this paper.

### The body as a symbol of power

Today, in our western society, we can also see power directly linked to the body in a different way. Not only is the body a tool for controlling oneself and others, it has become one of the most important and evident symbols of power in itself. By showing off our perfectly trained, beautiful and healthy bodies, we immediately send out signals of being in control, possessing a great amount of willpower and being successful. It might even indicate that we are wealthy, as we obviously have the time to work out, we have the means needed to improve our bodies by plastic surgery and we can afford the new expensive anti-wrinkle products and so on. In the book “The Body - Social Process and Cultural Theory” (Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner eds. 1999), Featherstone puts it like this:

“[...] bodily qualities [are] regarded as plastic – with effort and ‘body work’ individuals are persuaded that they can achieve a certain desired appearance. Advertising, feature articles and advice columns in magazines and newspapers ask individuals to assume self-responsibility for the way they look. This becomes important not just in the first flush of adolescence and early adulthood, for notions of ‘natural’ bodily deterioration and the bodily betrayals that accompany ageing become interpreted as signs of moral laxitude (Hepworth and Featherstone 1982). The wrinkles, sagging flesh, tendency towards middle-age spread, hair loss, etc., which accompany ageing should be combated by energetic body maintenance on the part of the individual – with help from the cosmetic, beauty, fitness and leisure industries.” (1999:178)

The notion of self-control and self-surveillance in relation to our own bodies is clear. This quote also shows clearly how the ‘body-industries’ maintain and reinforce the existing power structures of the consumer society.

The concerns with how the body looks, how it feels and how it works are coming at us from endless holds today, from fashion magazines, television programmes, commercials, etc. The ideal of having a beautiful, trained and toned, healthy, and preferably young-looking body seems almost extreme. This set of ideals creates and supports a gigantic economic consumer-based industry. Obviously several people have posed the question of who really benefits from this. But different discourses such as media, arts, sports etc. keep overwhelming us with the information that supports and strengthens these common beliefs, assumptions and conceptions of the body. According to Featherstone “The perception of the body within consumer culture is dominated by the existence of a vast array of visual images.” (1999: 178) This is interesting in relation to both Bull’s (in Thomas 2003) and Hippe’s (2002) points about how the dance

student often compares herself to and tries to reach an image of the ideal body and the ideal movement (I will return to this in part 3). The shared cultural conventions concerning what the body is, how it should look and how it should function have been built over a long period of time, and they are not changed over night. This is of course also something that the dance students bring with them, more or less consciously, into their dance training and into their own construction of their sense of self. This process of subjectification<sup>6</sup>, or the dance students' experience and construction of who (or perhaps in some cases what) they are, is also problematised in Greens essay:

“What disturbed me the most was that some of the participants had on several occasions indicated that they enjoyed the harshness of dance classes and what they perceived to be the strength and reward of shaping their bodies into dancers. For them, the ideal dance body was a way to happiness and enjoyment of making a self. (...) From a Foucauldian perspective this shift from the direct shaping of student bodies by the teacher to, what I call, a science of dance training creates a culture of silence rather than one of creativity and action where students constantly observe, judge, and correct themselves. (...) Thus, according to the concept of “care of the self” dance students, as well, may understand their choices as freely derived and attained. They may not see the larger normalization process whereby they train their bodies in an attempt to fit an external ideal; and they may not see how their docility is experienced as control, power and pleasure” (2004:40, 37)

When it comes to the common conception of the dancer-body in western theatrical dance, one can argue that it is expected to be slim, strong, athletic and young. According to Rouhiainen, the contemporary freelance dancers she interviewed in Helsinki claimed that the body was “a source of pain and confusion” and furthermore “the dance artist’s body relations included an anxiety about ageing and about losing their health” (2006:153). However it should also be noted that these Finnish dancers experienced their bodies and their dancing to bring forth “a sense of oneness, pleasure and transcendence or liberation” and that for them, the dancing “proved to be an important way of gaining a sense of their selves” (ibid). It seems to me like these Finnish dancers constructed their sense of subjectivity much in the same way as Green noticed in her informants by suffering through the shaping of their dance bodies in order to find their selves in the dance. Their fear of ageing and losing their health also reflects both a cultural view of the body as noted by Featherstone in consumer society and more importantly a particular view of the body prevalent in the contemporary western theatre dance culture.

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<sup>6</sup> See Foucault.



### Regulations through old conventions and through results of more recent reflections

In my own work place, a Norwegian high school dance programme, there are certainly examples of how the institution implements and encourages both teacher-surveillance as well as self-surveillance of the student body (or bodies). Some of these regulations are a result of traditional conventions for dance education and may or may not be reflected upon in a more recent context. Examples of this may be that the classes often take place in studios where there are windows so that anyone walking by may watch and see what is happening inside the studios. The students are only allowed to eat and drink in allocated places and at specific times, which to some degree control their intake of food and drink. In the dance class students are also expected to wear tight-fitting clothes revealing their bodies and they are dancing in front of mirrors so that they may constantly compare themselves to both the teacher and fellow students. Other aspects are regulated through the 2006 Knowledge Promotion Reform and other documents from the Department of Education. First of all, the dance students are expected to attend their dance classes and any absence is reported and stated on the student's diploma. The amount of training and the specifics of the type of training conducted are also controlled by the national curriculum through dividing the technical dance subjects into the three main areas classical ballet, jazz dance and modern / contemporary dance. However, it seems to me like the regulations from the Department of Education are in fact quite open and flexible, and that the conventions of dance education, which I mentioned above, actually direct the details of the dance training to a large degree perhaps without being reflected upon in a contemporary context. I would however like to point out that the teachers working in the dance department focus on developing both the practice of dance technique, creative movement work and reflection in relation to dance and movement in all dance-related subjects. The aim of this is to include and develop the whole person in dance (not just the physical aspect), to stimulate the students' individuality and encourage them to question and reflect upon their own dance practice. With this in mind, I expected to find (clear) differences in my interview material regarding the teachers' experiences of their own dance education, which I assumed was based on a much more traditional instrumentalist view of the dancer (body) and our present students' experiences of their dance education.

### Moving away from pretty and proper

In my material from the teachers' interviews I found some evidence that pointed towards the docility, or unconscious subjectification based on some ideal communicated through the discipline and the institutions of dance, that Green discussed above. One of the teachers told me: "I wanted to be my ballet teacher, I wanted to *be* her. She was so pretty and kind and such a good dancer." Not only did she reach for an ideal image, she literally wanted to change who she was in order to become this image of perfection symbolised through her teacher. She also talked about the harshness of training her body into becoming a dancer; "I love it, but there is so much pain, worry, the feeling of inadequacy, the war against ones body, injury and fatigue. But one has to hold it together and deliver the goods no matter what!" It seems to me like she is proud of all the suffering she has endured in order to be a dancer, and this effort to reach her goal is visible in the traces of her body showing some of her personal qualities such as determination and will power. She also tells me about how already from childhood, she was trained to adjust to a norm and not be different from the others in her dance training:

"As a child, the intention was to copy the teacher, to look the same. Not to make the movements our own, or find a personal way of doing it. This was, I would like to point out, in classical ballet training, where there traditionally has not been much room for personal interpretations. I felt like a failure if I was unable to do it just like the teacher did it. What was communicated to me was that in order to become a good dancer one had to be able to imitate the teacher's movements. When it came to appearances, the dress code was very important, we were often sent out of the studio to remove excess clothing. Everybody had to have her hair tied up and no jewellery or any such nonsense. Pink or black leotard, white tights and shoes. I think this way of making us uniform was meant to hold back our own personalities. We had to look pretty and proper, we did not have the opportunity to show our individuality [...] I based my self-conception on a comparison with the others."<sup>7</sup>

Another teacher tells me how she has always thought of herself as a body, and how nothing else has been important. Even though she clearly expresses how her feelings of self and body are one and the same thing for her, she also says "a negative relationship with my own body and with myself has made a huge impact on my life." I think it is interesting the way she actually differentiates between her body and her self in her language even if she claims that there is no difference between them in her experience. When I ask her to what extent she felt acknowledged as a person in her dance training her answer also insinuates the kind of docility

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<sup>7</sup> All the quotes from dance teachers and dance students in this paper are translated by me as the interviews were done in Norwegian.

described in Green's essay, however the practice she yields to is not one that makes her feel good:

“I don't know if I'm exaggerating now, but I think I will have to say no extent at all...there was never anything other than technical feedback...No requirements for reflection, my own thoughts concerning the training or my own development etc. I wonder now how I and many with me could make ourselves so small and not stand up for ourselves and speak up about things we considered wrong...”

In the teacher interviews I also found comments showing an awareness of creating a sense of self through the body. These were both negative comments about how the perception of ones body had a negative effect on ones self esteem: “we were weighed and measured in the middle of dance classes, this was not a good thing and it had a very negative impact on both motivation and self esteem”. Another one said that being skilful gave her value as a person. However one of the teachers expressed clearly how she experiences her growth and development as situated in her body:

“Dancing is about being seen, be at the centre of attention, expose oneself and express oneself. It is like extreme sport both physically and emotionally. Moving boundaries, breaking boundaries. It is about perfection. It is about self-development. The thing that makes dance so special: the body as an instrument, we are in our bodies, we can not make the excuse that something is not properly tuned, or that a cord broke, that the score went missing or that we spilt coffee on it. We can never put away our instrument. One can feel the movement for a long time, it does not disappear, and it is still in our bodies. The visual image of a dance may be ephemeral, but it stays in the body and does not disappear. It may suddenly reappear, for instance by listening to certain music, associated movement or emotions may come back. [...] Earlier I had no conscious idea that I was my body, that my emotions were situated in my arms, legs, my head etc. And that my personality is the whole me, that is how I look at it today. All of my experiences and emotions, my history, is situated in my body, in the ligaments, in the muscles, in the bones. Everything that has contributed to mould me is in the body.”

Another interesting element to notice in the teachers' interviews was the differences between how they described their own experiences from dance training and how they described what was important to them in their own teaching. In the latter they also show how they perceive of the body as carrying traces of experiences and as being a potential vehicle for communication and experience through movement and dance. One of them told me she wanted her students to be able to use the dance as a tool for self-expression. She said that she always ended her classes with reflection through discussion about what they had done in that particular class

and why. She also emphasised that she hoped this could lead the students to be more reflective in other contexts as well. Another teacher said she wanted to guide her students as best she could, and to make them understand that they were allowed to both try and fail in dance class and that she acknowledged the students' different needs. To me it seems like these teachers are interested in making some changes from their own dance education. Rather than treating the dance students as docile instruments, they wish to encourage individuality and courage to question and challenge existing norms.

“Often it feels like I am ‘outside’ myself”

When it came to the students' interview material I was, as mentioned above, expecting to find a clear difference in relation to the teachers and perhaps fewer signs of docility. This expectation was grounded not only in the fact that our pedagogical vision in the dance department is founded on the notion of developing the whole person in her education, stimulating both the technical, creative and reflective aspects, but also I expected a difference because these students do not study dance at a professional level and the high school dance programme is open for all kinds of students not only the ones with ambitions to get a professional dance carrier. When I revisited the material from the student interviews it surprised me to discover how much more similar their answers were to the teachers than I had anticipated. Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that the four teachers interviewed were all relatively young, between thirty and thirty seven years of age. They may themselves have been a part of a shift in dance training (from an instrumentalist view towards a more holistic view of the dance student). Two of them also had their education partly from the United Kingdom from institutions focusing more on theoretical and creative aspects of the dance training than was common in traditional Norwegian dance education. Another possibility is that this pedagogical shift had not been strong enough for any results to be visible in the students' interview material, or that our current teaching is still characterised by some of the traditional conventions of dance training that we have not yet reflected upon.

I would like to quote one of the students to show what I interpret as an ambiguity in relation to the experience of her body in dance:

“I think it is amazing what one can create with the body through movement, and it is something I really want to explore further. The positive thing is that I always have the opportunity to express myself creatively and challenge the body and the mind in new areas. [...] Being a dance student means that one has to be dangerously near oneself

and one's body. I spend all my time outside of the dance classes trying to create a distance to my self and more importantly my body; because of this it is scary and unfamiliar to have to 'enter myself' and in addition having to share whatever it is I might find in there through movement. [...] Before the dance classes I am anxious, because I am often far behind the other students in terms of technique and I feel ashamed. I am also anxious about being in a room full of mirrors, where I no longer can avoid myself and I am anxious about wearing certain clothing... I often feel embarrassed around the other students and the teachers because I am falling behind.[...] Often, it feels like I am 'outside' myself, and look at myself from the outside. At the same time I *am* my body. This is difficult to explain I think..."

The student clearly expresses how she is confused about both being her body and trying to distance herself from her body at the same time. I find it particularly interesting how she wants to abandon both her 'self' and her 'body'; she seems confused as to how the body relates to her 'self' while at the same time she says that she *is* her body, and she shows an enthusiasm about expressing herself through movement. She is obviously aware of the body's potential for expression and creation, which might reflect the dance department's pedagogy, however she also shows clear signs of docility. It is clear that she is trying to live up to some ideal of normality (or perhaps perfection). She is comparing herself to this norm through the image of her fellow students and teachers and is being punished through feelings of shame for not controlling herself properly.

Because we are born into and raised in a specific culture and society with shared conventions and norms as a basis for learning what is right and what is wrong, it is of course sometimes difficult to pose questions about the very disciplines that teaches us how to live and what to believe in. This is one of the reasons why the structures of power are not always easy to shift. The society's prevailing view of the ideal body serves as a norm and every body is measured up to and given value according to it. In a paradoxical way, one identifies with what one is criticizing. In the article "Towards a Phenomenological Method in the Body's Movement Analysis", Parviainen writes:

"Although the scientist, in order to investigate something theoretically, tries to remove it from the everyday attitude to a scientific discourse, their prior attitude may influence on their scientific presuppositions about the world. Husserl argues that the change from the everyday attitude or/and the theoretical attitude to the phenomenological attitude involved a questioning of all one's presuppositions about the world." (2006: 137)

Foucault on the other hand, asks us to question the more concrete institutions and disciplines functioning and maintaining the power structures in our world. In part 3 of this paper I will return to the shifts happening in the institution in which I teach dance, however for the moment I feel the need to examine my own body-history and how it may affect my research.

### When dancer and thinker is one

What kinds of implications could my own dance training (and other aspects of my background<sup>8</sup>) have had on me as an embodied dance researcher? Is it possible for me to allow my body to remain open to the information I can gain through the bodies of others, or have my training made me carry a profound value system in my body based on some image of perfection or the aesthetics of western theatre dance? Does my body listen in the same way to an Asian gymnastics-body and a European ballet-body? Probably not. The traces of my experiences and knowledge exist in my body and will on some level always affect the way I perceive the world. Traditionally the dancer has done the dancing and the academic has done the thinking, as Copeland puts it in Carter: “What we really suffer from is a shortage of genuine dance intellectuals, whom we might define as critics for whom ideas are as palpable as pirouettes” (1998:107) And Thomas notes how the body has to a large degree been ignored in academia:

“Much of the work on the body in recent years has been saturated by theory at the expense of empirical investigation, thus continuing the theory/practice divide [...] Because dance does not exist in a cultural vacuum, but rather is a situated embodied aesthetic practice, it can also highlight and reflect the presence of these very dualisms [mind/body] in the cultural domain” (2003: 63,93).

As we have seen, there is still evidence to support that dancers are controlled and shaped both when it comes to their physical bodies and also when it comes to their sense of identity through the discipline and institutions of dance education. This may work to maintain existing conventions, however the picture is more nuanced and it seems as though a shift is occurring in dance education<sup>9</sup> that might have consequences for the existing paradigm of Cartesian dualism. With these shifts we are seeing in dance training today, the dancer is no longer reduced to a physical instrument, she is rather encouraged to integrate her intellectual and

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<sup>8</sup> After completing my BA in dance theatre, I studied to become a Certified Movement Analyst and I have also undertaken studies within the fields of psychology, pedagogy and Nordic languages.

<sup>9</sup> See part 3.

physical skills and to reflect upon the knowledge she gains through dance. Even if there are challenges in relation to how the body can or should contribute to research, it can no longer be ignored as a source of knowledge, and dance scholars need to further investigate the knowledge of the body and how to document and communicate this. As mentioned in the beginning of this part, I hold that embodied knowledge exists and that human dance and movement can be seen as a structured system of meaningful human actions (Williams 2004). However both Green's research and my own findings show that it is important to educate dance students and enable them to become aware of and to communicate their embodied knowledge.

## Part 2

### Communication of embodied knowledge

#### Body as language

In the research paper “Learning in movement: children’s experiences and expressions of embodiment and meaning”, Charlotte Svendler Nielsen describes embodiment as “ways of experiencing, being and participating as ‘body’”. For the purpose of this paper, I would like to add two more aspects, and propose a description of embodiment as ways of experiencing, being, participating, understanding and communicating as body. I look at movement and dance as a system of representation with the potential for creating and communicating meaning within a specific culture<sup>10</sup>. As such we might talk about ‘body languages’<sup>11</sup>, however even if there are similarities it is important not to confuse representation or communication through movement and dance with spoken or written language. In the research paper “Bevegelsens nesten – tanker mellom den skrivende kroppen og det dansende ordet”, Skjeringstad compares dance and literature:

“In this perspective literature is the opposite of dance: While the dance conventionally is regarded as an art form of the present, in which the display is what it is, literature invites interpretation [...] Of course we can ask what movements and gestures mean, but that does not change the fact that dance first and foremost is bodies in movement. As an aesthetic expression, the dance is the most superficial of the art forms. The most superficial and the most bodily. And the superficial is not necessarily less valuable”<sup>12</sup> (2008: 168)

Even if I appreciate Skjeringstad’s acknowledgement that the superficiality of dance does not necessarily make it less valuable, I cannot agree that dance actually is superficial. In my experience dance and movement is not only about something existing on the surface (to me that sounds like an activity performed by our skin), to me it is about something that is potentially meaning-bearing, initiated from an inner intention and expressed through the body in three-dimensional movement and can as such be seen as its own system of representation. Dance anthropologist Drid Williams has developed the concept of semasiology, which is according to Farnell “theoretical resources for a specifically human semiotics of action” in which Williams employs a linguistic analogy inspired by some of the ideas of Saussure

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<sup>10</sup> See Williams 2004 or Hall 1997

<sup>11</sup> See Williams 2004: 149

<sup>12</sup> My translation



(Williams 2004: 219). As opposed to Skjeringstad's view of movement and dance as superficial, William's semasiology emphasises intentionality and human agency and claims that dance is a structured system of meaningful human actions (Ibid).

As I mentioned the language of movement and the spoken language should not be confused, however it is important for dance students to try to learn ways of verbalising their physical experiences in order to communicate and document bodily experiences or embodied knowledge. Unfortunately this is no easy translation. This difficulty of speaking about bodily experiences (which we could see in the student's quote in part 1) is something I have encountered as a dance teacher several times. The student has had an experience and I can see how the body is almost shivering, eager to share it, however the words will not come out. As Thomas noted when working with a group of dancers about the same age as my own informants:

“Trisha went on to say that it was difficult to explain how she felt [when dancing] (...) I would need to experience it to understand it and if I had, then there would be no need for words. What Trisha was pointing to here, is the problem of bringing feelings about an activity like dancing, which engages both the mind and the body in a corporeal manner, into the domain of verbal language. In part what these young dancers are referring to is dance's difference to language, its constitution as an-other voice.” (1995: 78)

In this second part of my thesis I will look briefly at semiotics and its relation to dance and movement before I look at William's work on semasiology and then relate this to my own dance and language project that I did in our high school dance programme in 2007.

### Dance and language – cultural forms of representation

Both dance and verbal language could be considered cultural forms of representation. They are activities with potential to create, express and communicate meaning. According to Stuart Hall language is the medium through which we create and share meanings within a culture because it is a system of representation (1997). We use different signs and symbols to represent something else such as concepts, ideas and emotions. “The embodying of concepts, ideas and emotions in a symbolic form which can be transmitted and meaningfully interpreted is what we mean by “the practices of representation”.” (Hall, S. 1997:10) In order to share and communicate meanings within a culture there has to be a set of shared codes and conventions so that the members of that culture has some sort of common understanding of

what the different signs and symbols represent. The meanings of these symbols or representations depend on their context. A piece of wood might be a bookshelf, or placed between two houses it might be a boundary. The meaning is created or constructed in a social context.



(This painting by Magritte states clearly that this is not a pipe. This is however a representation of the thing we know as a pipe.)

Semiotics was developed from the basis of Saussure's linguistic theories as a method of studying the signs in a culture. The focus shifted from verbal language to culture, where the culture was treated as a form of language. Stuart Hall writes about the foundation for semiotics: "(...) since all cultural objects convey meaning, and all cultural practices depend on meaning, they must make use of signs; and in so far as they do, they must work like language works (...)" (1997: 10). Semiotics as a method of analysis uncovers meaning by looking both at the surface and at the deep structures of a text. According to Trine Ørbæk, in her Masters thesis "Living Bodies", this can also be transmitted to dance. In an interview conducted in March 2007, Ørbæk told me that in her dance education in Norway there had been little emphasis on talking about dance. The focus was to find their own personal choreographic language, however this made it very difficult to communicate with other people.

"When I started my Masters degree in England, I was introduced to several ways of talking about dance. I chose to investigate semiotics further. Through semiotic analytical tools, I learned to analyse dance as a form of non-verbal communication. I was able to analyse choreographies in their sociocultural context. This enabled me to communicate with dancers and other colleagues from both my own as well as other professions. It is important to have a language that can communicate something about what it is one is doing, how one is doing it, the intentions behind, the results, and to see these elements in different perspectives." (Ørbæk in interview March 2007).

According to Ørbæk, the movement may be called text, the choreographer a writer, the dancer a performer and the audience readers (Ørbæk 2001). Even if Ørbæk's model relates to choreography, it might be adjusted to work in a pedagogical context as well. With the shift of semiotics towards a cultural level, the terms denotation and connotation become central. Starting from Saussure's theories we already established the sign as made up by the signifier and the signified, and for the sign to carry meaning there had to be a shared code which enabled all of those familiar with that code to understand or interpret the meaning of that sign. This basic meaning of a sign that we share and agree upon is called denotation. The term connotation is used about another level of meaning where the meaning depends upon the context rather than an objective representation. Connotations emerge in the relations where the sign meets the emotions and values of the people in a culture (Barthes 1993). There does not exist a fully developed set of shared codes in dance as a form of expression that can support or convey the denotation of signs. If we were to look at the movement as text it would be through connotations that meaning would be found or communicated. This allows for abstract concepts, but demands more of the reader or audience when it comes to interpretation. Dance can thus be seen as an open concept in which meaning to a large degree is created through association. It is the reader (or recipient) of the signs who constructs the meaning, and in dance there is a disproportion between the signifier and the signified that allows for difference of subjective interpretations. There are however many factors that contribute to the creation of meaning in dance. The relations between dancers, costumes, music, props, lighting, space etc may function as signs in a choreography and open up for creation of meaning. The reader (or audience) will always meet the dance with his or her own background and his or her own suppositions and he or she will necessarily be an active agent in the creation of meaning in that particular dance experience. In a pedagogical context I use my own background in Laban movement analysis (LMA) in order to look for signs and meaning in different movement qualities such as efforts, shaping qualities, spatial pathways etc.

### Semasiology – a theory of human body language

According to Drid Williams, in the field of social anthropology, the notion that “body languages comprise systems of the same degree of logical and semantic complexity as spoken languages” (2004: 151), is nothing new (even if it may not be the general understanding). Both Kaeppler’s structural analysis of dance<sup>13</sup> and William’s semasiology are based on linguistic analogies to movement (Ibid: 187) and both systems recognise similarities and correspondences between language and movement, however neither of them “ treat ‘movement utterances’ and ‘linguistic utterances’ as if they are the same.” (Ibid: 187). Williams speaks from a theoretical standpoint that is not a theory of the dance per se, “Rather, it is a theory of culturally and semantically laden actions: a theory of human body language” (Ibid: 161). Langer explains (in Williams 2004) how an action that is a sign of self-expression is performed with an inner momentary compulsion. If the action works as a symbol it is expressive in a logical sense but it is not a sign of the emotion expressed. Williams holds that “Until movements are employed as signs or symbols, semasiologists treat them as natural. When movements are employed as signs and symbols [...] they are cultural” (Ibid: 168). The cultural sign is not a direct result of a state or a feeling, but may bring it to mind as a denotation and according to Langer; the action becomes a gesture when it acquires such a meaning (Ibid: 167). Williams continues: “When we see a dance, we are not seeing *symptoms* of the dancers’ feelings (Langer 1957:7). We are seeing a symbolic exposition of the composer’s and participants’ knowledge of human feelings and experience, manifest through culture-specific forms of body language.” (Ibid: 167). According to Williams, a symbolic system such as a body language or a spoken language is basically about the function of meaning. However in order to convey meaning what is said or moved must be employed as signals or symbols and they must mean something to someone as signals or symbols. In semasiology these signs and symbols are called ‘action signs’ (Ibid: 168). In the context of a dance, “gestures become vehicles for *conceptions* of people, objects, attitudes, or situations” (Ibid: 169). According to Williams:

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<sup>13</sup> See Kaeppler and Dunin 2007.

“In the human domain, movement has undergone an initial transformation that makes it body language. It thus makes sense to say that dancing is essentially the termination – through actions – of human, symbolic transformations of experience. The terminal symbols of speech (that which we hear or which we see on a page) are expressed in words, sentences, and paragraphs. The terminal symbols of a dance (that which we apperceive visually) in performances or on a printed page (as in movement texts) are expressed in gestures and movement phrases.” (2004: 169)

Just as different phones may sound the same in different languages, different movements may also look the same in different body languages; this does not mean however that they mean the same thing (ibid: 166). Semasiologists such as Hart-Johnson and Farnell have conducted specific research that shows how even if an “-eme of movement” (ibid: 166), the smallest unit of meaning bearing movement, may be quite similar to another kinesiologically there is necessarily no semasiological connection (ibid: 166). Saussure claimed that sound was different than language, and that phonation did not affect the language system itself (Ibid: 198). In the same way, Williams argues that

*“the physical body is external to the notion of body languages – as semasiologists conceive of them [...] Performance in no way affects the system of body language. No amount of measurement of the physical bodies of dancers is ever going to lead to an understanding of the semantic and communicational properties of any danced form of human expression – or any other form of expression that uses movement as its primary medium of communication”* (Ibid: 198).

As we saw in part 1, the body itself may be regarded as a strong cultural symbol in western consumer culture, however the symbol of the body is different from the symbols of a structured system of meaningful human actions carried out through the body. Williams holds that “[...] human beings are themselves symbols in a non-linguistic semiotic of action signs” (ibid: 217), where linguistic and action signs overlap or coexist. In semasiological terms, there has to be an intention behind the sign (or movement) for it to be an action sign. I wonder however, if the process of moulding ones body into an idealised dancer-body-form through training could not be regarded as a clearly intentional symbolic act, and if the dancer-body then could be seen as both an action sign in itself as well as a symbol of a particular cultural and social affiliation?

### Movement as primitive or universal

Williams points to the fact that movement studies have lagged behind conventional language studies and just like Skjeringstad, she says that the seemingly common idea that movement has some kind of a-priori or universal character, has led to the belief that movement is also some kind of ‘primitive’ and ‘anti-intellectual’ activity not worth studying (ibid).

“Not so humorous are those writers to whom “the body” is the last stronghold of a kind of cultic searching out of some experience that is behind or beyond appearances – a kind of *real* Reality that, as far as I can determine, is ahistorical, alinguistic, acultural, and aconceptual, based on “embodied experience” and “bodily praxis” (not my words). Such notions do not hold up very well, even though their authors (notably Jackson 1983) are convinced that recent emphases on semiotic, linguistic approaches to the study of movement are overly intellectualized and that such approaches either subjugate or ignore the somatic and the biological.” (Williams: 164)

In my opinion the embodied experience is absolutely a valuable term and I think it is very important not to lose touch with the material body when intellectualising about movement and the body. Even if the body that is moving always is culturally and historically situated and should be treated as such, there are definitely occasions where in my opinion the troubles of translating physical or dance related experiences demands both negotiation and a common effort to find a bridge of understanding and the term embodied experience I think, lays a good starting point for exploring such a connection. However as Williams points out, it is important not to treat body languages (or bodily experiences) as something ‘primitive’ or universal but to be aware of the historical, social and cultural context of the experience discussed.

I do not believe what Jackson claims, that “one’s body is ‘the nearest approach to the universe’ which lies beyond cognition and words” (Jackson in Williams 2004: 164), however I see a clear connection between Jackson’s thoughts and the philosophy behind Laban’s concept of Space Harmony where he looks at movement as universal and transcendent and he writes about the movement scales and how they may enable people to move in the rhythms of the universe (Laban 1966). Even though I am using LMA as a method or tool in my own teaching today, I am looking at movement in a very different context and I am not drawing any universal conclusions based on my observations of my students. My aim is rather to observe different movement qualities and to be able to draw some conclusions about that particular student’s way of moving and look for ways to enable her/him to express and communicate the experience or the knowledge situated in her/his body. One might ask if

movement in dance has to work as signs representing something else? I have often heard people saying about abstract dances such as the works of Cunningham that the dance does not mean anything. In an interview I did with choreographer Rikke Sundberg, she said:

”I like that one as an artist cannot dictate the audiences’ experience. Watching dance always gives me some kind of experience. I cannot always talk about it afterwards, the verbal language is limited when it comes to expressing emotions because emotions are subjective and abstract [...] What I like about the dance is that one may create experiences for which there are no words. People always try to find meaning in everything, and they use language to try to create a meaning. The audience will normally try to find words to describe their experience even though the artist originally had no intention of or desire for them to do this.<sup>14</sup>”

However, even if the choreographer does not intend to communicate something in particular, the movement will still convey meaning through the way it works in a specific historical and cultural context. It may not comment on a particular political topic for instance, but it may still work as a sign conveying something about the aesthetics of a certain culture at a specific time. In the context of dance pedagogy, physical explorations in improvisations or creative processes may also carry meaning within their cultural and historical context, even if the students perceive of the movements as natural (to them) and without any clear intention of communication. Even if the students talk about these kinds of movements as natural, and may not see the larger context, the knowledge of the meaning and communication of their movement is in fact in their bodies and it becomes very clear for instance when they work with contact improvisation.

Farnell writes in her essay “It Goes Without Saying – But Not Always” (Farnell in Buckland ed. 1999: 151):

“What are we to make, then, of statements such as Isadora Duncan’s when she said, ‘If I could tell you what it meant there would be no point in dancing it’? Certainly she is correct, if she meant to reject the notion that there is a spoken language version of the meaning of a movement performance that somehow echoes in the mind of the mover or observer. She may also have been trying to make the point that her dances involve a symbolic transformation of human experience into a choreographic form with its own structure and semantic content that had to be understood in its own terms... It would

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<sup>14</sup> My translation.

be a mistake, however, to interpret Duncan's statement to mean that such non-narrative danced meanings have no cognitive content, or that they cannot be talked about."

According to Farnell, when people 'talk' from the body through dance and movement this is closely linked to what they do when they use verbal language, and the "mind that uses spoken language does not somehow switch off when it comes to moving" (ibid: 147). Just as Williams does, Farnell also recognises that there are important connections between language and movement as semiotic practices. Referring to Williams, she writes:

"Let us start from the semasiological premise that human bodily movement, or 'action-sign-systems', in addition to providing the physical means for embodied activity in the world, are simultaneously a dynamic expressive medium used by embodied persons for the construction and negotiation of meaning." (Ibid: 147)

This is necessarily also a premise for my project in teaching dance if I want to look for embodied knowledge through the meaning in movement. By observing, moving and talking about different movement qualities within the culture of our dance class, we may be able to help each other develop a way of sharing this construction and negotiation of meaning both in our movement and through our words. Farnell writes about one of her experiences from fieldwork in dance that:

"[...] it suddenly dawned on me that what I was writing down was what I thought they were doing – *I had no way at all of knowing what they thought they were doing*. In other words, I was busy interpreting and making judgements about the meaning of their body movements and their uses of the performance space entirely according to my own language and culture." (Ibid: 147)

This is written from Farnell's meeting with a different culture, however I think that it can also make an important point when it comes to understanding other bodies within the same culture. In relation to my students we are part of the same culture even though our age difference and personal interests may divide us into different sub cultures. Even if we do belong to a rather homogenous group (Norwegian, female, young, dancers), we do not have a direct access to understanding each other's bodily experiences and we need to create a common ground from which to communicate these experiences. I believe that this needs to be done through the semiotics of both spoken and body language. As Farnell notices:



“It is instructive in this regard to watch and listen to any dance teacher or choreographer of modern dance or ballet at work, instructing dancers in the correct performance of a particular action-sign or sections of a new work. Students learn the basics of the technique, and the rules concerning the structure and semantics attached to their chosen idiom, not in silence, but through the simultaneous use of speech and action. Successful teachers are often those who put creative spoken metaphors to skilful effect: evoking appropriate imagery and understanding that results in changes in the student’s kinesthetic concepts and neuro-muscular patterning and so in their physical performance.” (Farnell in Buckland 1999: 151)

Referring to the semasiology of Williams, Farnell points out how “The concept of ‘action-sign’ brings a post-Cartesian embodied model of person and agency into the discourse and substantially realigns how we might conceive of relationships between speech and action” (ibid: 151). Through a ‘language and dance project’ I did with my high school dance students in 2007, I hoped to lay the grounds for a development of reflective dance students who had a conscious relationship to the systems of movement and language and how they could work together and enhance the creation of knowledge.

#### Learning to talk about bodily experiences through creative work

In the autumn semester of 2007 I did a project with 13 first year students (15 – 16 years of age) in the high school dance programme where I work as a dance teacher. The aim was to look for ways to help the students verbalise their physical experiences and make a foundation for the students’ further reflection in relation to dance. The impetus for the project came from my previous observations of students who lacked the ability to talk about their dance related experiences as well as my own desire to integrate the technical, creative and reflective aspects of the dance in my teaching. During the project period (app. 7 weeks) all the students wrote and handed in journals about their experiences weekly.

The main part of the practical realisation of this project was organised through seven 90 minutes sessions of teaching in which the aim was to find a way to talk about the students’ subjective, physical experiences. It was important to me to use the students’ own creative processes as a starting point so that the movements came from themselves as living, experiencing subjects and thus I chose to emphasise inductive and somative approaches in my teaching. Considering the students’ different backgrounds and previous experiences, I wanted to use different approaches and different stimuli for creative movement work in order to let the students sometimes work within their zones of comfort but also be challenged to broaden their perspectives.

### Session one

In the first class I had with the students I told them about the project I wanted to do<sup>15</sup> and after a few questions we started with a movement task. I asked them to find a specific memory from their lives, to think about it and visualise it clearly and then to make a movement phrase (a very short solo) inspired by this. They could use different aspects of the memory such as the concrete action, how the surroundings were, the feeling it created etc., so that they could find a method they were comfortable with. My intention was that this task would give the students the opportunity to work from themselves and stimulate them to find a personal expression as opposed to imitate someone else. The students' (most of them) initial reaction to the task was that it seemed difficult, however from my observations they quickly became focused and engaged in the work. Towards the end of the class the atmosphere was very emotional, some of the students were crying and others were laughing as a result of bringing up personal memories, however they showed a genuine support for each other and somehow they created a safe space for each other to be in and share their experiences. It was obvious from these physical reactions that the students had had some kind of experience through the movement work. At the end of this first session we had a sharing-circle in which everyone were encouraged to verbalise any movement experiences. Even though this proved to be difficult, all of them tried to say something, however the descriptions were more about their feelings than about the movements.

### Session two

In the second session, the students received a different task. I showed them a movement phrase that I had made with the intention that it should be as dynamically neutral or plain as possible. The students learned the movement design and then got the task to fill the movement with dynamics by using Laban's effort theories (which they were already familiar with) to make it more personal. The students also had the liberty to change the movements if they wanted to do that. To use a metaphor, this would be like giving the students a knitting pattern and then let them decide on material, texture and colour. The students worked very well with this task and we ended up with many different personalised expressions of the same phrase. After this I asked the students to sit down two by two to talk about this movement

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<sup>15</sup> I also had them fill out a questionnaire with questions concerning movement and language, which they answered again at the end of the project period, however I will not go into the results from that in this paper.

task. I gave them a strict framework as to how this conversation was going to happen. First one of them was to talk uninterrupted for one minute, while the other one was just present and focused on listening. The listener was going to try not to express any agreement or disagreement, just allowing her partner to talk. Afterwards they switched roles, and when they both had finished talking they showed each other their movement work. According to Laban, movement is always an expression of man's inner state (Laban 1966) and he thought that effort qualities reflected and communicated our emotions<sup>16</sup>. I wanted to see if a manipulation of the students' chosen effort qualities would give them a different physical and emotional experience of the same (in design<sup>17</sup>) movement phrase. Thus the next step was to change the effort qualities. This time I decided that the students had to fill the sequence with the yielding effort qualities; Light Weight Effort, Sustained Time Effort, Free Flow Effort and Indirect Space Effort. They worked with this individually first and then in pairs so that they could give each other feedback and corrections in order to get it as 'correct' as possible. Here are two examples from the students' journals after this session:

“In the end we talked about how we experienced changing our own qualities with only the yielding efforts. Some people felt that this was very comfortable and that they became calm, relaxed and sleepy. But I felt almost the opposite. I felt that it was unfair that we had to change what was ours, and even if it was still me who did it [the movement phrase], it was like a half-fake version of me and I felt that I had to put on a mask when I was going to show it.”

“After this session, the comments [from the sharing-circle at the end] were much more interesting. Already now, I felt like people were better at expressing what they felt. [...] In my case, the story, or my intention changed a lot. I felt sad and alone even though light, free, indirect and sustained sound like positive and happy things, it wasn't for me today. But it hit me that this thing about story and intention can change from day to day, it can depend on your mood [...] and I noticed how one thing can change so drastically just by small adjustments.”

I could see from the students' journals how this exploration with different effort qualities had resulted in many different movement experiences even though we started from the same place. It is also interesting to notice how the students start to reflect about intention in their dancing both in relation to their experience and the expression of the movements.

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<sup>16</sup> This seems more in line with Jackson's theories of movement as a universal expression than William's culture specific action signs.

<sup>17</sup> In other words: we changed the 'how', but not the 'what' of the movement phrase.

### Session three

The third session was following up the theme from session two and the students worked further with the same movement phrase. The instructions this time however, were to change the yielding effort qualities into the fighting ones, namely Strong Weight Effort, Quick Time Effort, Bound Flow Effort and Direct Space Effort. Afterwards the students had to write down some words to describe how they experienced working with only fighting effort elements in their movement phrase. Here are some examples:

- Bitter
- Jealous
- Angry
- Inadequate
- Not strong enough
- Not good enough
- Unfair
- Warm
- Nervous

Another one wrote in her journal:

“I learned a lot about how the same movements can create very different impressions of the same movement. I felt angry, happy, scared and calm all depending on how the dance was. It was fun to see how large impact dance can have on my emotions, especially sad and angry feelings that I can’t remember having been able to express well in a dance until now.”

In the next part of session three we changed the focus to working with relations. The students still worked with the same movement phrase, however they were free to use whatever qualities they wanted. The task was to work in pairs and decide what kind of relationship there was between the two of them and adjust the movement to express this relationship to the audience in a clear way. This way, the task turned from having a personal focus to having a social focus. After the task was done the students had to talk about how the movements and the experience changed from the first task to the next. In this session I could see that the students continued their development and reflections about intention and motivation for movement through experiencing how the same movement design can give different experiences not only for the dancers but also for the audience by small manipulations and changed intentions. This relates to the openness of dance as a system of representation by

communicating on a level that is open for associations, interpretations and connotations (see earlier in this part). I wanted to let the students discover this through practical movement experience. However, when it came to the verbalisation of these experiences, I wanted to focus on a concrete description of the movements as I assumed this would be a necessary basis for further reflection. Still, it was obvious that the students needed to talk about their feelings and their experiences rather than stick to a strict movement description.

#### Session four

In the fourth session we worked with pictures and drawings as a stimulus for movement. I wanted to find out what would happen when the students moved between different forms of expression. First they had to choose a picture (there were seven different motives so most of the students would end up with the same motive as one of the others), and spend some time just looking at it. They then had to write down associations they had from looking at the picture and from those words they were asked to make their own drawing. The drawing was not meant to be an imitation of the picture they had chosen, rather a reflection of their written associations. The first physical task was to make a short solo based on their own drawing, afterwards they had to switch drawings with the other person who had originally chosen the same picture as them, and then make a new short solo based on this drawing. Here is what one of the students wrote in her journal after this session:

“Her drawing was very different to mine. She had drawn the dancer in the same position as we had seen in the picture. But what I noticed was how all of the joints on the right side of the body were drawn with red lines, such as the shoulder, elbow etc., but this was not the case on the other side. It gave me a feeling that one side was different than the other. While the right side was flexible, indirect, happy and light, the left side was hard, direct, quick and angry! It was like these two sides were fighting, and the weakest side lost in the end. Still I got the feeling that the weak side didn't really mind and didn't try to change it, this was a feeling I had because the man in the drawing had a very huge smile.”

I think it is interesting to see how after four sessions of focusing on finding words to describe movement, the student is starting to use some of these words in her personal language. Even though she is telling a story from her personal interpretation, she uses words as flexible, light, direct and quick to support what she is writing. These are words that can describe qualities in both the drawing and the movements and as such work as a verbal bridge between the two forms of expression.

### Session five

In session five, I wanted to use the different modalities of the senses as stimuli for a creative process. Traditionally in dance, looking has been emphasised in relation to the other senses<sup>18</sup>. The student is expected to look at the teacher and repeatedly imitate exercises. In this session however, I wanted to use auditive, tactile and taste-stimuli to inspire to creativity in movement work. First the students were blindfolded and they had to listen to two different sounds and make a movement that reflected their bodies' reaction to these sounds. The next stimulus was a tactile one. The students, still blindfolded, were to feel two different materials with different texture (for instance a sand paper and a silk scarf), listen to the body's reaction and turn this into a movement. In the last task the blindfolded students got to taste four different kinds of food (fried onion, reddish, lime and chocolate mousse), and again they had to notice their physical reactions to the tastes and make movements based on these. After doing these movement tasks the students formed small groups in which they showed each other the movements and tried to describe both the movement and the experience of doing the movement to the other group members. I encouraged the students to help each other to find appropriate words and sentences to describe the movement experience and the movement itself. In the end, the group had to choose one movement that they were going to show the whole class and then describe verbally. I wanted to keep a focus on descriptive words that could say something about the movement itself rather than encouraging the students' sharing of emotions. Here is an example from one of the students that shows this shift in a good way:

“We chose X's movement from the sound-sequence. She was curious in the beginning, but a little sceptical and anxious, because of this the movements were slow, indirect, and careful and the focus was down on the floor around her own stance. The next movement was quick, spontaneous and direct. This was because she was frightened and surprised.”

### Session six

The sixth session was our last physical session in this project period. I wanted to let the students work with contact improvisation. This is an intuitive approach where the movements cannot be planned in advance, but is created in the meeting with other bodies. One has to take responsibility for one self and the fellow students by listening to the bodies' communication, be open to physical meetings, and be aware of others' actions, reactions and invitations. We

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<sup>18</sup> See also part 3.

had done some contact improvisation work before this project, so the students had some previous knowledge and practice when it came to this form of moving together. We started to warm up by doing simple exercises where the students worked in pairs with basic manipulations such as pushing, pulling, leaning, climbing, trying out small lifts etc. Then we did a short repetition of elements they had learned in this and previous classes that they might use in an improvisation. I decided that the rule for this improvisation session was that there were always going to be five people dancing at the same time. (There were nine dancing students in this session). The ones dancing occupied most of the floor space, and the others kept to the sides. Whenever one of the dancers stepped out of the dance space another person had to take her place. This way, the dancers and the observers constantly changed, but there were always five people dancing and four people watching. This way of working, in my experience, often leads to exciting meetings and experiences as a result of unexpected and spontaneous situations. The second part of the session was spent making a word-bank. I wanted the students to 'collect' as many words to describe movements as possible, and then to post all of these words up on the wall in the dance studio so that we could look at them later if we needed some verbal inspiration. That way we would also have a visible reminder that could help us to stay conscious about how we used language even after the project ended.

### Session seven

The last session was spent filling out questionnaires and continuing our work with the word-bank. We decided that we could divide our movement words into several categories, for instance action-words, dynamic-words or relation-words. One of the students wrote in her journal: "We found quite a lot of words, and I was actually surprised as to how many different words we can use to describe dance. I use many of these words myself when talking about dance, without really thinking about it."

### Summing up the project

Through the seven practical sessions with my first year students, I hoped to have given them opportunities for individual, meaningful movement experiences. I had wanted them to be able to talk about these experiences by describing the movement, however I found myself struggling to escape the description of their personal feelings instead. By this I mean that the students often described their feelings without being able to say anything about what it was in the movement that made them feel a certain way. At first I experienced this as frustrating, however after a while I realised that I had to let them talk about their feelings and then

encourage them to see the connection between the feeling and the movement. This made us practice making sentences in which their feelings were supported by a movement description such as for instance: “I felt alone as I slowly sank downwards with my head bent and my shoulders pressing against each other”. This project laid a base for the students’ consciousness in relation to both motivation and intention in their movement as well as their ability to verbalise movement experiences. When returning to the data again three years later however, I wondered why I had been so afraid of these emotional statements. Perhaps this was exactly what was essential for the students’ communication of their movement experiences, and perhaps I had fallen into a Cartesian trap by devaluing feelings in relation to what I perceived as ‘more objective’ descriptions of movement actions? Reflecting on this material certainly made me aware of the difficulty of stepping out of ones preconceptions, even if they are the very same preconceptions one is trying to criticise. Still, looking at the students’ journals I would claim that this project contributed to developing a conscious attitude towards dance as a potentially representational system. The students experienced how small adjustments could alter the intention and message in the movement, which indicated the openness of communicational codes. Several of the students also discovered new aspects of dance as an art form through verbal reflection. I had initiated the project wondering if an awareness of the use of language in dance teaching could foster a level of reflection that again could be a prerequisite for developing a bridge between the verbal and the physical expression? This implies a kind of developmental spiral in which language and reflection are two aspects in reciprocal interaction<sup>19</sup>. In this project I also included the bodily language, and I think that by strengthening the awareness and the ability to bridge the verbal and the physical expression, the movement itself can (and should) be included in this kind of developmental spiral and benefit from the verbal language and the conscious reflection. This way, neither the physical and the verbal expression, nor the corporeal and the intellectual, need to be seen as opposites, but rather different aspects stimulating mutual growth and development. In this project I used my background as a CMA and the students’ pre-knowledge about Laban’s effort-theory. However this does not mean that I included Laban’s philosophy of universality in movement. Perhaps we do express ourselves differently through movement in different cultures as suggested by Williams among others. Being a part of the same culture as my students, I have intrinsic cultural knowledge and I know the internal codes that might be inherent in our movement culture. However, there might also be individual

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<sup>19</sup> See Vygotsky in Imsen 2005: 283.



differences when it comes to movement expressions and thus it is important not only that we share a language that we can use to talk about movement, but also that we can continually negotiate the codes of our movement language.

### Part 3

#### Why are these questions important in today's dance education?

##### Traditional dance teaching

In our Western society, the method of learning theatrical dance has to a great extent been through imitation. This method of teaching is based on a traditionalistic view, with strict discipline, where the skills and ability to perform physically has been given a more important focus than the student herself. Through strict classroom discipline, the focus has been on developing physical skills and bodily control. The development of the students' sense of identity through individual reflection, action and creation has not been emphasised.<sup>20</sup> The dance student is expected to learn her craft by observing and imitating the teacher. This leads to a reproduction of skills rather than individual explorations and individuation by enabling the student's ability to think for herself, act for herself and be creative and different from others. This is clearly in accordance with the training of docile dancers noted by Green in the first part of this MA Thesis. Bull is quoted in Thomas: "The dancers in the corps de ballet should give no sign of their individuality; rather, they should strive to move as one body in 'perfect unison'" (2003:100). Today this method of teaching dance is changing; however it is still an important part of the training, particularly when it comes to technique classes like classical ballet, but also to a great extent in jazz dance and modern/contemporary techniques. In her article *An-Other Voice*, Thomas notes how "(...) the idea of the mirror, of looking at oneself as if one were being looked at, the sense of surveillance, the relationship of how one looks to one's sense of identity or self-worth, for the most part, is gender-specific" (1995: 89). The question of gender is of course of interest, however I will not pursue it further here due to the limitations of this paper. What is interesting in this context is Thomas' observation of the dancer's "as-if-outside" gaze valuing and controlling herself. To look has become essential in dance training. The dance student looks at the teacher, the movements, others' bodies and her own body in the mirror. By this look at the body from outside, her movement, or perhaps she, is valued through the right or wrong body aesthetic<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> This is according to a traditional style of teaching dance. Later I will return to some of the changes we have seen in the past 30 – 40 years.

<sup>21</sup> See also part 1.

“Bull notes that although ballet students are trained to ‘feel the flow of the movement’, their training stresses ‘sight as the primary process of artistic conception, perception and kinaesthetic awareness’ [...] As a dancer moves, she or he carries a mental picture of the perfect performance of each step, comparing the mirrored image with that ideal.” (Bull in Thomas 2003: 98 – 99)

This traditional approach to dance training both reflects and enhances to some degree the dualistic view of the mind and the body as separate entities and the attitude towards the body as being only an instrument. The dancer’s body is seen as an object rather than part of her identity, which can be controlled and manipulated by herself and the choreographer. Over time, this has led to an objectification of the dancer’s body, while the dancer’s own need for self-expression has not been considered<sup>22</sup>. Even though the Cartesian view is challenged in today’s philosophy and human sciences and several dance teachers are starting to change their approach to teaching dance, I can still see clear traces of this dualism every day. For instance, many of my dance students speak about their bodies in third person, as if their bodies were not part of themselves, one student told me in an interview: “My body has to do what it is told, and if it is not capable then it is being corrected”. In the dance training, the focus has been to overcome physical challenges and acquire an extreme control over the body, so that the dancer can be used almost as a medium on stage through which any choreographer may express his or her intentions to the audience. The dancer’s own need for self-expression has not been considered very much. It seems to me that there has been little room for the dancer or dance student to be an individual, different from the others, with her own thoughts, feelings and needs to express herself. The Norwegian dance-artist, pedagogue and gestalt therapist, Ingebjørg Hippe writes in her MA Thesis “Kroppens Spor” about the problems of the dancer’s feeling of identity and experience of the body as a subject and an object:

”The art of dance carries strict ideals and role models. The students strive to imitate and copy these. It is, in my opinion, contributing to move the focus away from the inner centre of the dancer to a desired image of oneself. In my professional understanding, one is through this taught to ‘leave’ one’s body and lose oneself. The body becomes an object separated from the dancer’s emotional and mental being.<sup>23</sup>” (Hippe, I. 2002: 7)

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<sup>22</sup> See for instance Hippe 2002

<sup>23</sup> My translation.

### Changes today

We can see some changes happening both in the education of dancers as well as in the demands of dancers in the professional working field today. In the west we can see these changes over a period of the last fifty years and probably most evident in the last decades. From around the 1960's a new way of thinking about dance emerged. One example is the work of the dancers connected to Judson church. These dancers sought to redefine dance. They questioned among other things the need for technique and for a certain body type. According to some, all movement could be called dance. The emphasis needed no longer to be on creating the perfect body<sup>24</sup>, but rather; on exploring the body as it were and its potential for moving. If we use the Judson Dance Theatre as an example, the focus was stronger on the process than it was on the product. With this shift followed as well a tendency to shift from the outward-in glance towards the inward-out experience. As Thomas writes about the training in contact improvisation from the 1970's:

“The body was perceived to have its ‘own intelligence’ or ‘truth’, which had been damaged by culture and civilisation and which could be born again, as it were, by listening internally to the body through the explorations of weight and touch [...] Attention is directed towards the students’ internal experience of the body in motion and stillness in the context of the class at that point in time, not on the external presentation of the body *per se*. The concern is to feel what is happening in the body, not to survey it from the outside or the mirror” (2003: 103, 105).

In Norway we can see some development in the area of dance education, where the focus of the dance field has shifted away from dance as only technique towards dance as an academic discipline as well and where the focus in education covers both the technical, creative and reflective aspects of dance. This is probably a result of influence from dance studies in other European countries as well as U.S.A., however it is interesting to see how The 2006 Knowledge Promotion Reform seems to support and develop the changes that already was beginning to happen in dance. Today professional dancers are not just expected to be body-instruments for a choreographer. They are expected to take part in and contribute to the creative process, and many choreographers are interested in letting their dancers express themselves as individuals in the dance. This requires that the dancers have experience with both the technical, creative and reflective aspects of dance. This requires in turn that dancers

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<sup>24</sup> This was not true for everyone or everywhere of course, if we turn to the classical ballet for example; strict demands on the body were still upheld.

in their training have had the opportunity to explore their individual qualities, their different traits and their own creativity. From this perspective the focus on the dancer as a subject, an individual who needs an integrated development of both her physical, emotional and creative sides is strengthened. If we look at the government's guidelines for the dance programme in high school, this view is certainly reflected. I believe it is very important to look at the physical, emotional and mental aspects as integrated parts in a human being. In my experience, this way of working helps the students to become more secure about themselves and who they are.

### The 2006 Knowledge Promotion Reform

In the autumn of 2006 a new school reform was implemented to lift the educational standard in Norway. The overall goal was to strengthen the basic skills defined as: the ability to express oneself orally, the ability to express oneself through writing, the ability to read, the ability to calculate, and finally the ability to utilise digital equipment<sup>25</sup> (The 2006 Knowledge Promotion Reform). These five basic skills were also defined within every subject, dance subjects being no exceptions. One might wonder why these basic skills all seem to be focusing on cognitive aspects of human learning (linguistic and mathematical in particular) and why there is no skill mentioning physical or aesthetic understanding.<sup>26</sup> If we look at how the five basic skills are interpreted for instance in the subject called theatre dance (scenisk dans), which is the subject that has the clearest focus on dance technique, the findings are interesting. The ability to express oneself orally in dance is understood as "being able to describe symbols in ones own creative work and in communication. Being able to use a proper language for experience, reflection and evaluation of dance". The ability to express oneself in writing in this subject is interpreted as follows: "the ability to give form to and write down movements and document and reflect upon ones own technical and artistic progression." The basic skill of reading in dance translates to: "being able to interpret symbols in different artistic and cultural expressions. In addition to this, texts are important, both as a source of knowledge and reflection, and as inspiration for commitment and creative activity." Despite this focus on literacy and dance as a symbolic activity, I do not know of any high school dance programmes that teaches dance notation beyond perhaps a very brief introduction to one of the existing systems. The emphasis on dance as a symbolic system

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<sup>25</sup> All excerpts from the curriculum are translated by me.

<sup>26</sup> One could of course also ask why nothing is mentioned about skills relating to nature, socialising, music etc. See for instance Gardner's theory on multiple intelligences.

should also imply that the students were made aware of the existence of theories such as for example semiotics, or that they were introduced to some kind of notation system, however this is not mentioned anywhere in the documents<sup>27</sup>. In her interpretation of the curriculum in the subject dance in perspective<sup>28</sup> (dans i perspektiv), Trine Ørbæk shares with me this sense of juxtaposition. She feels that in this new school reform, dance as a subject has lost its position as merely a subject of physical education, and gained status as a subject of the arts (Svee (Ørbæk) 2008: 116). She emphasises how the Cartesian view of the body is replaced with a view that values the knowledge of the subjective body and that focuses on the experience, aesthetic perspectives and theoretical competence. Still, she asks; how is it that the embodied knowledge is totally ignored in the five basic skills that form the foundation for this educational reform? (Ibid)

”How can the basic skills exclude the embodied knowledge? [...] In my opinion, this creates an artificial relation between the basic skills and the curriculum for dance. It seems as though it has been difficult to integrate the basic skills in the dance curriculum. This shows a lack of knowledge when it comes to the value of physical-aesthetic subjects. One leaves out the possibility that the body can be an arena for learning, and the possibility of reflecting through our bodily experiences.”<sup>29</sup> (Ibid: 116)

In the curriculum there is also a description of what the student is supposed to know when he or she has finished the course of the particular subject. With the interpretation of the basic skills in mind, it is interesting to read these objectives in the subject of theatre dance. The subject is divided into three main areas: classical ballet, jazz dance and modern / contemporary dance. In classical ballet, the objectives are defined as follows: “The student should be able to show basic technique in classical ballet, describe the correct alignment and use of turn-out, use relevant terminology, and describe the structure of a ballet class.” The objectives in jazz dance and modern / contemporary dance more or less follow the same structure as in classical ballet. To me the relationship between the five basic skills and the concrete objectives seem paradoxical. It seems to me as if they were descriptions of two different dance subjects. However, when it comes to the actual teaching, the objectives become more important as these lay the foundations for the students’ grades and these are

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix for my experiment with motif writing.

<sup>28</sup> Dance in perspective is the subject that is most clearly has a theoretical focus, divided into two main areas; dance history and aesthetics, and choreography.

<sup>29</sup> My translation.

first and foremost focused on the technical aspect of dance. Shapiro makes a valid point when writing about dance pedagogy:

”By listening to the language of our own teaching we find the gaping absence of a discourse that might make it possible for students to question why they dance, what body experiences they have when dancing, and how they might make sense of them in relation to their everyday body experiences; such classes can encourage them to critically reflect upon who they are, and how that is influenced by the larger culture in which they live. Such a pedagogy might make apparent that our bodies mirror the culture from which we come.” (1999: 136)

This comment reflects, in my view, the traditional way of teaching dance and looking at the objectives of the subject ‘theatre dance’ from the reform of 2006 one can understand the lack of contextual focus. However, when reading the curriculum it is clear that the five basic skills are to be emphasised in all subjects, and in all dance subjects one is supposed to teach dance through technique, creative work and reflection. My hope is that projects such as my own language and dance project might contribute to educating students who are not afraid to ask questions, who are aware of what they are doing when they dance and how movement and dance can function as systems of representation. After all, The 2006 Knowledge Promotion Reform does state that:

“As a form of art, dance appears in many different forms with different theatrical expressions of dance and dance techniques. At the same time, dance reflects a society’s artistic and cultural diversity, and it has an educating function as a basis for communication, aesthetic reflection and cultural understanding. [...] The subject should encompass the performative, the creative and the reflective dimension of dance.” (The 2006 Knowledge Promotion Reform)

### Dance in education

Skjeringstad looks at the body and the word from an interesting perspective when he points out that:

“Between the bodiless word and the wordless body there is not an unmanageable dichotomy, but an overlapping gap about which to think and in which to think and thus also probably in which to be. The dance and the writing then no longer belong to separate fields, but the same: The field of the body and movement [...] The dancing movement comes from somewhere, and we might also conclude that neither the movement nor the thought that does not come from anywhere can dance. Or on the other hand, suggest that the dancing writing is motivated movement, while

unmotivated writing, or the writing that comes from nowhere, is neither movement nor moving, exploring or curious.”(2008: 169)

If the writing that is motivated, that comes from somewhere and moves towards somewhere else necessarily is moving or dancing, just imagine if the schools were filled with students whose thoughts danced!<sup>30</sup> Clearly the Norwegian politicians have felt the need to strengthen the basic forms of knowledge defined through the five basic skills, however, it seems to me that they have missed how dance<sup>31</sup> may contribute substantially to learning in every subject.

“The dance is not what it is, it is what it is not, it is what it is becoming. [...] The prospective beauty of the dance and the aesthetic of the thought as well as the writing and learning, does not lie in the present movement, but in the movements next: in what it is becoming.” (Skjeringstad 2008: 171)<sup>32</sup>

UNESCO launched in 1999 the International Appeal for the Promotion of Arts Education and Creativity at School to Help Construct a Culture of Peace. The appeal, among other things, stated that: “we are today clearly and strongly aware of the important influence of the creative spirit in shaping the human personality, bringing out the full potential of people and maintaining their emotional balance.” (www.unesco.org) Anne Bamford, who was a World Scholar for UNESCO and researched and wrote "The Wow Factor: Global research compendium on the impact of the arts in education" in 2006 shows in a lecture why the arts are important in education based on research from the United Kingdom:

“The arts are important because they are intrinsic components of human culture, heritage and creativity and are ways of knowing, representing, presenting, interpreting and symbolising human experience. Contact with the arts requires the abilities to question, explore and collaborate; and to extend and develop one’s ideas, and the ideas of others. The creation of art requires a sense of structure, discipline, rigour, and a positive response to challenge.” (Bamford 2006)

In her research paper “Learning in movement: children’s experiences and expressions of embodiment and meaning” Charlotte Svendler Nielsen emphasises that embodiment is multidimensional and she describes six different dimensions or ‘bodies’ that she has observed in her work with children in dance, these are “the physical, the relational, the kinaesthetic, the creative, the artistic and the symbolic dimension” (ibid: 136). According to Nielsen “It is also

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<sup>30</sup> See Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science*.

<sup>31</sup> Probably as well as other physical and aesthetic subjects.

<sup>32</sup> My translation



central that dance can help widen the notion of the body in movement education in schools because in dance there is focus on ‘bodies’ [dimensions] that in practise are not so often in focus in physical education lessons” (Ibid: 135). This multidimensional focus found in dance can contribute, I would argue, not only to physical education, but also to other subjects in school, by for example promoting creativity, teaching the students to present their work for others, allowing them to experience symbolic meaning and through cooperation with others. I would also presume that by developing more dimensions of the body through which we learn about and experience the world, we would spark a motivation for learning through sensation, curiosity and direction<sup>33</sup>.

“If an educational system is to take seriously the notion that the body is a critically important resource for learning, development and health in a broad sense, it is important that children learn to be attentive to their own and others’ experiences and to communicate about what they sense, see and feel in a bodily-based language. Thereby they can develop a greater consciousness in and about movement. If we understand movement as the base of our whole existence – not just the physical dimension, but also the cognitive, experiential and social, it seems inexcusable that focus on body and movement is given so little time and attention in our educational system. [...] At the end of the day bodily movement has a societal significance which can affect children’s health and quality of life.” (Nielsen 2008: 137 – 138)

### Dance and language revisited

Reflecting back to my language and dance project I somehow expected the bridge from movements to words to result in a specific kind of language, something that seemed like an objective and ‘scientific’ language. However the embodied experiences may not always translate into words in a predictable way. When I was working with a movement project exploring a few chosen effort qualities in 2004 I always made an entry in my journal after moving in order to document my experience. One day after moving these were the words I came up with:

There is a Weeping Willow in my heart  
Her branches hang heavy towards the earth  
Around her are a thousand little devils  
But I cannot see them  
They are covered by her black tears.

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<sup>33</sup> See also Skjeringstad about direction, motivation and learning in page 44 of this paper.

Perhaps the most important thing to realise is that movement experiences constitute a form of knowledge in its own right. One can definitely talk about them, and one might use systems such as for instance semasiology to analyse them, however the embodied knowledge that lies in dance and movement experiences cannot be reduced to words. It is important to acknowledge that the ability to express oneself through movement is valuable in itself, and that the way we understand the world through our bodies – although not easily translated into words – plays a most important role in how we live our lives and in what ways we move through them. As one of the dance teachers told me in an interview: “Dance has been such a big part of my life, an enrichment, and I have always wanted to communicate and share that fantastic feeling I get when everything works just as I want it to work, an experience of being in the dance. That is what I want the students to experience!”

### Phenomenology in dance

Several dance scholars have turned to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty because he in his *Phenomenology of Perception*<sup>34</sup> starts with the body and claims that it is through our bodies that we experience and learn to make sense of the world (Torvik in Svee 2008: 58).

Merleau-Ponty offers an approach to the body, not as an instrument, but by using the sense of the lived-body as what experiences and makes sense of an inter-subjective world. According to Torvik, Merleau-Ponty is one of the most influential thinkers when it comes to erasing the Cartesian dualism (ibid). Using the body as a point of departure for experiencing and understanding the world, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty might be placed within an essentialist approach to understanding the body. The body exists in the world, and it is through our individual body that we relate to the world and can experience the essence of things-in-the-world and others as different from ourselves. However this essentialist way of thinking about the body is criticised by Rothfield in her essay “Differentiating Phenomenology and Dance”:

“Although Merleau-Ponty recognised human corporeality as the means by which the world is understood, the whole relationship is articulated in the most general of terms: concerning *the* body rather than, for example, *this* body. The residual universalism of phenomenological analysis urges a breadth of analysis which is not always achieved” (2005: 43 – 44).

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<sup>34</sup> First published in 1945 entitled *Phénoménologie de la perception*.

Rothfield's criticism touches on the same weakness as William's critique against Jackson in part 2 of this paper. Regarding the body as something pre-reflective and universal, one seems to think that we can, through our bodies, experience the world devoid of historical or cultural context. As noted by Rothfield however, the thinking of Foucault might function "to remind us that the 'putting-into-play' of universal structures is always socio-historically specific" (ibid: 43). In my opinion we need to acknowledge both the value of the knowledge situated in the body and in the immediate movement experience, however not forgetting that we are always historically and culturally situated bodies and that this will necessarily colour our perception of our own and others' embodied knowledge and experiences. Rothfield continues to look at how Sheets-Johnstone in her book 'The Phenomenology of Dance' emphasises the immediacy of the experience of dance and how it "precludes reflection, criticism and evaluation", as this would change the dance from being an immediate experience into being an object of reflection (ibid: 45). According to Rothfield:

"The disjunction between immediate, lived experience and the reflective realm is sustained throughout Sheets-Johnstone's analysis. Put simply, the action of reflection nullifies lived experience [...] hence, the importance of protecting the immediate experience of dance from the polluting action of reflection, criticism and so forth" (ibid: 45 – 46).

According to Matthews, Merleau-Ponty holds that "to be embodied means that living in the world comes before *conscious* thought about the world: experience is 'pre-reflective' at base, and reflection concerns what is pre-reflectively given" (2006: 56). I would claim however, that embodiment is not pre-reflective, rather that being culturally and historically situated, experiencing and moving bodies in the world is in itself a form of reflection and that the immediate lived experience of dancing is a kind of reflecting upon the world that is being experienced, a kind of bodily reflection if you will. I do not think that Merleau-Ponty and I actually mean different things, however it is important to me to be able to use the word reflection to describe what happens in movement experiences, to emphasise how movement in itself is a valuable arena for creation of knowledge<sup>35</sup>. As Torvik notices, the emphasis on experience and meaning and the experience of being a body in movement is characteristic to

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<sup>35</sup> Referring to The 2006 Knowledge Promotion Reform, one can see the emphasis on reflection as an important aspect of education, however I want to make clear that reflection is not necessarily only an action of the mind as understood in Cartesian thinking, but that reflection can also be happening in the body, or more correctly to emphasise that there should not be a separation between the mind and the body.

the phenomenology of the body (in Svee 2008: 57). “The creation of knowledge in accordance with the phenomenological tradition is about turning to the ‘silent experience’ and give it an expression (Engelsrud 2002: 19). What it tries to capture is how the individual experiences this reality in which the body is situated<sup>36</sup>” (ibid: 57). Rothfield also includes both the importance of the lived experience and the importance of the awareness that the body is socio-historically situated in dance when she claims:

“Dance is not a phenomenal presence whose totality can be apprehended in the immediate and particular instance. It is a heterogeneous, emergent field of practice and performance which is encountered by a range of subjects in a variety of ways. [...] In other words, experience is not a pure zone whose analysis can reveal a set of structures whose totality expresses the phenomenological essence of dance. But it is an important aspect of the practice of dancing and its perception” (Rothfield 2005: 47).

### Somatic attention

The ethnographer and cultural phenomenologist Thomas Csordas writes about somatic attention as “culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one’s body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others” (Csordas in Rothfield 2005: 48). In Rothfield’s words: “I understand what is happening in my own and others’ bodies through my own body” (ibid: 48). It is through lived corporealities that we as persons engage with each other and according to Csordas this implies that the body itself is to be understood as a research tool (ibid). However Rothfield criticises Csordas when it comes to the documentation of this somatic attention. She claims that his work ‘The Sacred Self’ “deals with people’s somatic experiences as verbally reported rather than somatically apprehended on the part of the researcher” (ibid: 48). This shows the challenge of actually putting into words our embodied knowledge and thus it indicates the importance of developing a common language that might at least within a certain cultural and historical context, enable us to document our embodied knowledge in more appropriate ways, recognising the body’s role as a tool for research and carrier and communicator of knowledge.

This brings me back to one of my high school dance students. This spring I had given them a task that was to result in a 20-minute lecture and a 5-minute choreography. This particular student had chosen to work with the topic ‘perspectives on art’. In their textbook, four

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<sup>36</sup> My translation.

different perspectives on art are defined: the mimetic perspective, the expressionist perspective, the formalist perspective and the conceptual perspective. After a while she approached me and told me that she felt that something was missing. I responded by challenging her to suggest a different perspective from the ones mentioned in her book. She came back a few days later wondering if she could present 'the intuitive perspective'. In her lecture she talked about how she wanted the audience to let their bodies be open to the experience of her choreography and how she had worked with the choreographic process always listening to her body in interaction with her dancers' bodies and how her choreographic choices were no result of a conscious reflection of the choreographic tools at her disposal, rather they were a result of a silent communication between bodies, or in her words: intuition. As I was sitting back, watching or experiencing her choreography through my body, I suddenly realised that this communication between the student and myself through her choreographic work could be a most important part in bridging the inner experience with the outer communication. In the future it would be interesting to further investigate the potential for communicating the embodied knowledge and experience through students' creative work, and perhaps search for a method to incorporate this in my teaching in a way that not only offers me a valuable insight into knowledge that the students possess, but also creates a foundation for dialogue and reflection about embodied knowledge for the students.

## **Conclusion:**

I started to write this thesis with the intention of finding out something about embodied knowledge and the communication of this in the context of a high school dance programme. As mentioned in the introduction I had on several occasions experienced my students' apparent lack of ability to describe bodily experiences and I wondered how I could enable them to bridge the knowledge in their bodies and their ability to communicate through words. I also wanted to reflect upon whether there was a way for me to gain access to their embodied knowledge or at least to be able to relate to their embodied experiences through my own body.

In the first part of this thesis I started by looking at an example of how Foucauldian theories have been applied in the dance field in order to show how we as embodied persons might be shaped and controlled by the structures of power in society. It was important to me to be aware of how my own body also bore traces of the culture and society of which I am a part and to be able to reflect upon this in my research and in my meeting with other bodies during this time of research. I looked at the data from interviews with both current dance students as well as dance teachers, expecting the experiences of dance training in the two groups to be clearly different due to changes in dance education in the last decades, however I found the results to be surprisingly similar. This might show how difficult it is to change the traditional conventions and that such shifts take time. In the second part I looked at dance and movement as a system of representation and how this might relate to language as a system of representation using the theories of semiotics and semasiology as applied by Williams in the dance field. I also revisited my previous project from 2007 in which I tried to teach my students to talk about their dance experiences. Going back to my dance and language project and reflecting upon it again with the theories of Foucault fresh in mind, made me realise how my initial reactions and conclusions drawn from that project might have been coloured by the mind-body dualism prevalent in the culture that contributed to form me and the way I think and experience the world. In the last part of my thesis I looked at how dance education in high schools in Norway has been changing recently and how The 2006 Knowledge Promotion Reform emphasises the necessity for students to be able to reflect upon, communicate and document the bodily knowledge they gain through dancing by incorporating the five basic skills in every dance subject. However, by excluding bodily knowledge as a basic skill in itself, the reform is characterised by a lack of acknowledging the body and movement as an

arena for learning and the possibility of reflection through bodily experiences. In order to get closer to the students' embodied experiences I have suggested to allow my own body to be as open as possible in the meeting with the students' creative movement work, and to continuously work together with the students in order to develop a language that might work to describe these experiences so that we can share them with each other.

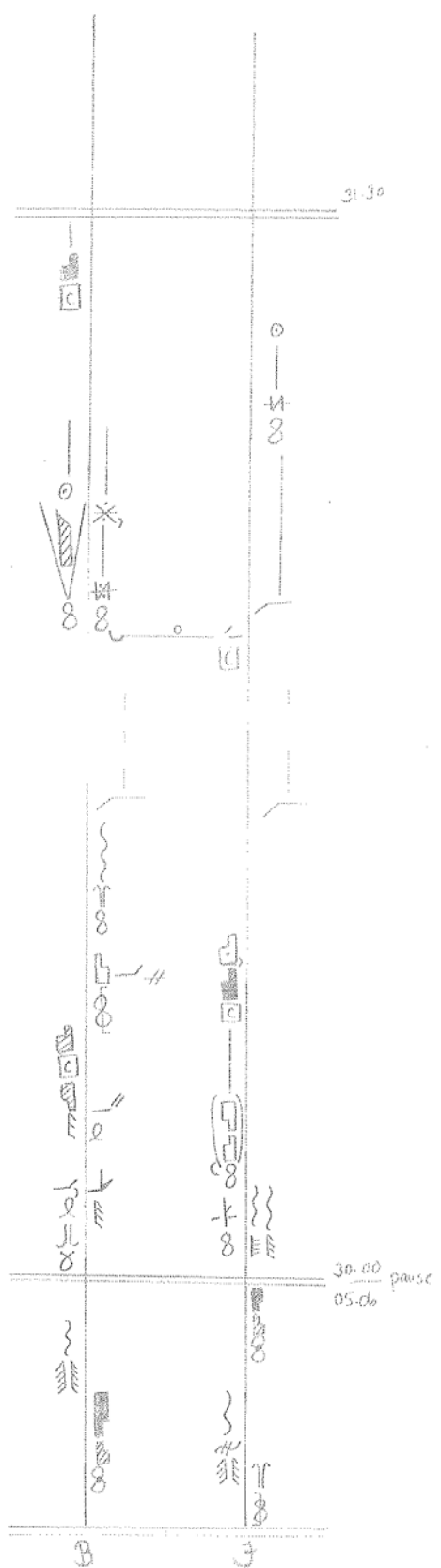
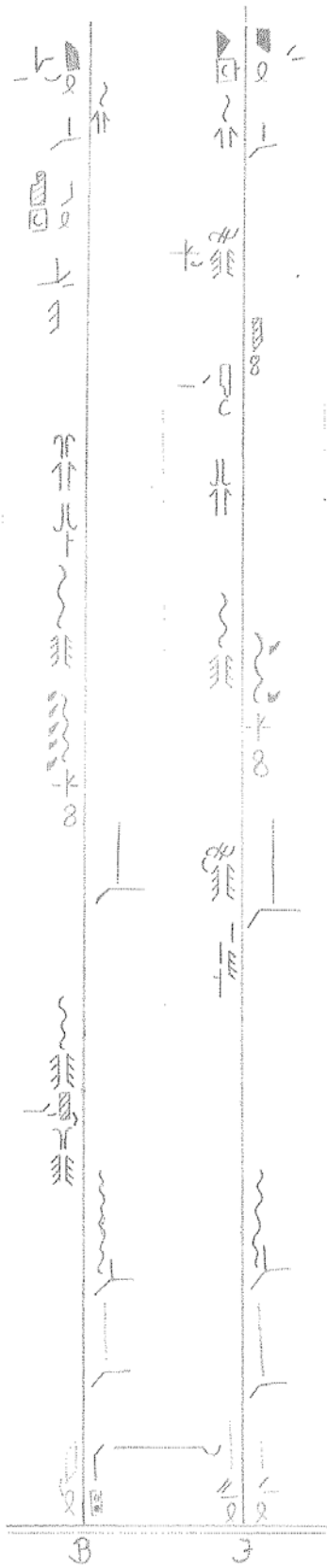
I have certainly found many more new questions than I have found answers in the process of doing this MA Thesis, however I have been able to re-approach some of my earlier research data and look at it from a different perspective. The challenge of reuniting body and mind in Western society is not small, but it is very much facing academia today and scholars from the dance field have a valuable perspective to offer. The process of translating or transmitting bodily knowledge or information into a written document however entails challenges that are worth investigating further. However it is important to me to emphasise that I have not attempted to reduce bodily experiences to words, I have only attempted to bridge two different systems of representation in order to facilitate communication and sharing of the body's knowledge. If academia welcomed empiricism based also from feeling and sensing through the body it might more easily enable the continuous dialogue between the body and thought that Ylönen was referring to in her embodied research. The question remaining would be whether or not it is possible for the body to remain open to the experience as in Csorda's definition of somatic attention? As mentioned in the beginning of my thesis, I can see similarities between the way I have worked with this project and the way I work creatively in dance. I have used my experiences from dance to help me not only to structure, but also to explore, to look at something from different angles, to allow myself to get lost and to trust I will find a path again, and last but not least to listen to my body in the process. Hopefully the words in this MA Thesis have been dancing words. They have certainly come from somewhere and moved in a direction even though the direction may have been a spiralling one, and they have been motivated by curiosity and a desire to explore. As dance scholars today we must not forget, nor lose touch with the materiality of the body and the experience of having and being a sensing, moving body in the world. We should strive to find better ways of sharing our embodied knowledge. First of all perhaps by starting to acknowledge and reflect upon our own embodiment.

## **Appendix:**

### Writing down the movement in one of the interviews

In search for different ways of obtaining embodied knowledge, I wanted to do an experiment using my own knowledge about movement writing to search for the body in written symbols. I decided to film one interview I recently made with a third-year student in a high-school dance program so that I later could go back and look at what happened in our bodies during the conversation. Perhaps I would discover different kinds of structures that might be closer to the grammar of the body than the grammar of verbal language? I made a decision to use motif writing from Laban Movement Analysis. This is not as detailed as Labanotation, however it gives me as a notator the freedom to include the features I consider most important in the movement. The disadvantage of this is of course that I might unconsciously censor away salient movement information that I might not have discovered until after the process of notation. The advantage seemed to me to be two things; it would be less time-consuming and therefore enable me to notate a longer duration of movement, and it would be less focused on body part and direction signs and more open other signs such as Effort and Shape qualities. I found that in my notation process I had to watch the film without sound to better be able to observe what was going on in both my own body and the interviewee's body. This motif writing would then serve as a test to find out whether or not this could be a different approach to find meaning in the inter-bodily communication and if this could supplement or offer a new perspective to the information gained through the interview through a perhaps more direct connection with the movement and as such both the embodied researcher and informant.





### The body in the language of informant and researcher

Because the interview lasted for more than an hour I knew I had to motif only a part of it for this experiment. I chose to motif a few minutes from the very beginning as well as another part from 30 minutes into the conversation when the atmosphere probably was less nervous and more natural. I chose to use a staff moving upwards, however the timing in my motif is to be read as relative and not strictly accurate. I placed the staff for my interviewee next to mine to emphasise the relationship between the two bodies involved in this conversation. The staff for my interviewee is marked with the letter B at the beginning (and I will continue to refer to her as B), while mine is marked with J.

At the beginning of the conversation the motif shows how we are both adjusting our bodies, B is grounding her body through Strong Weight Effort while turning her upper body towards me while I am simultaneously Retreating quickly. B is addressing me and we both keep a sense of Direct Space Effort towards each other for a while before the attitude towards space starts to fluctuate between Direct and Indirect in both of us. B continues to gesture with her hands using the shaping quality of scattering and I respond by following up with gestures of the left leg and right hand. Then we regain the Directness in Space Effort and hold it for a while. B breaks the focus by going into a Near (rhythm) State (Weight and Time Efforts) using an impactive (loaded at the end) phrasing with five quick accents. I mirror this Near State, however the phrasing is more impulsive (loaded at the beginning) and the accents occur only twice. After this I start gesturing with my hands and B soon follows to mirror this. B does a gathering movement with her leg and I follow by gathering my arms. B opens up and does a scattering movement with both arms and I respond by moving my head backwards with Quick Time Effort.

This is what a verbal description of the beginning of my motif based on the terminology of LMA would look like. It is not my intention to translate the whole motif here as the information I am searching for is not to be found in the words but in the symbols and their interrelationship. What I noticed however, when trying to look for any structures of meaning, was that certain things became clear through the score. The sense of mirroring each other's movement either through the use of the same body parts or similar Effort qualities and taking turns and responding to the other body both in the movement and in stillness seemed to reoccur. Both of us also showed very quick responses to the other's Space Effort (almost

simultaneously) through the score. It was also more obvious whole body movement in the last part, which might indicate a more active bodily engagement deeper into the conversation. I also noticed that the visual image when looking at the score was very balanced between the two bodies, however some more activity on B's behalf and a little less activity on my behalf was evident in the last part and it looks on paper as if my body might have taken a quieter listening role while B was more outwardly engaged. This was of course only an experiment and no scientific conclusions can be drawn from such little data, however it is interesting to see what information emerges from a different kind of language. In the future it would be interesting to include the high school dance students in working with motif-writing to give them an opportunity to express their embodied experience in a different way and to see what kind of contributions this might bring to bridging the gap between the corporeal experience and the documentation and communication of this to others. This would also lay a foundation for the students, introducing them to a system of notation and to some of the symbols from Labanotation, so that it would be easier for the institutions of higher education in dance to incorporate Labanotation in their curriculum and perhaps literacy in dance might prosper.

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## Sammendrag

I denne masteroppgaven har jeg forsøkt å se på sammenhengen mellom kroppslig kunnskap og evnen til å verbalisere denne hos danseelever i videregående skole. Jeg har ved flere anledninger erfart at elevene mine ved danselinjen har hatt tydelige problemer med å sette ord på sine fysiske erfaringer og sin kroppslige kunnskap. Jeg ønsket i denne oppgaven å se på forholdene mellom bevegelse og språk ut i fra mitt arbeid med elever på videregående skole. Jeg har brukt en hermeneutisk metode, hvor jeg har benyttet meg av både kroppslig erfaring og teori og jeg har samlet nye data gjennom intervjuer men også gått tilbake til eldre intervjudata og reflektert over dem på nytt i en ny sammenheng.

I den første delen av oppgaven ønsket jeg å se på Foucaults tanker om den disiplinerte kroppen samt hvordan Green ser disse teoriene i praksis hos dansestudenter. Jeg ønsket med dette å vise at kroppen ikke er et nøytralt forskningsverktøy og skape bevissthet rundt erfaringer som kan ha farget min egen kropp og min egen oppfatning av verden slik at jeg hadde dette i bakhodet gjennom denne prosessen. Jeg forsøkte også å se på data fra intervjuer gjort av danselærere og danseelever i videregående skole i forhold til Foucaults teorier.

I den andre delen av masteroppgaven så jeg nærmere på forholdet mellom språk og bevegelse, og jeg brukte teorier om semiotikk og semasiologi som utgangspunkt for dette. Jeg gikk også tilbake til et prosjekt jeg gjorde i 2007 om språk og dans i skolen og så på dataene herfra på nytt i lys av både semiotiske teorier og også Foucaults tanker. I den siste delen viste jeg hvorfor det er viktig å belyse temaet kroppslig kunnskap og hvorfor det er viktig å kunne snakke om og dokumentere kroppslige erfaringer og kroppslig kunnskap. Jeg så på hvordan dans er blitt undervist tradisjonelt og hvordan dette kan støtte oppunder en Kartesisk dualistisk tankegang om at kropp og sinn er splittet samt endringene som har skjedd i løpet av de siste tiårene både innenfor danseundervisning i Norge, men også generelt i academia. Jeg tok utgangspunkt i Kunnskapsløftet fra 2006 for å konkretisere noen av disse endringene i danseundervisningen på videregående skole. Mot slutten av oppgaven har jeg foreslått å bruke ens egen kropp mer aktivt i kommunikasjonen med elevene for å kunne møte dem i den kroppslige erfaringen. Jeg har foreslått at man burde legge større vekt på å utvikle et felles språk som gjør det mulig å dokumentere og kommunisere slike erfaringer og som gjør elevene bevisste på verdien av kroppslig kunnskap. Jeg understrekte imidlertid at til tross for viktigheten av å snakke om og reflektere over kroppslige erfaringer og dans, kan vi likevel ikke redusere denne type kunnskap til ord, men vi må anerkjenne verdien av bevegelsens og kroppens kunnskap også i seg selv.