

BJÖRN

SÄFSTEN

INDIOTS

MDT program texts

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Transgressive discipline

Foucault "Rituals of Exclusion":

My problem is essentially the definition of the implicit systems in which we find ourselves prisoners; what I would like to grasp is the system of limits and exclusions which we practice without knowing it; I would like to make the cultural unconscious apparent.

In our heritage, in the history of the body, the controlling concepts are hidden. They are treacherously hidden as a consciousness, an understanding and a practice. They are treacherous in the sense that they are avoiding a critical discourse because they are linked to our understanding of the concepts behind which they are hiding. It is as if comprehension itself poses a barrier to bringing them into the light of day and this might be conceiving. They are the flipside of our intellectual and tactile thinking. They are hidden much as what tends to follow the paths of logic, the physical paths of the body is hidden. It moves as if "naturally", like the movements of the body, the movements of what we are not thinking. The way the joints bend in relation to muscles that we think we are using "naturally". Like a kind of subconscious language of movement that the body always produces. Here there seems to exist a kind of production that we cannot turn away from, something that is always lying beneath the thing we are actually trying to look at. How can we see or bring out the concepts that pursue us but which never give us their names? This is a political subconscious, a choreographical subconsciousness, with its social, political and historical horizons; the concept surrounding thinking and dancing as such. The thinking itself pursues, as if its strategy cannot criticise something that moves outside its own territory. When we attack it, are we not doing so with thought? Can thinking think outside itself? In the same way, reflection is always objectifying, standing outside the object and talking about it. How can physical thinking move within, inside the physical? Thinking about something involves a risk of violent reduction; in working things out in practice, intellectual reflection always poses a risk. The aim is not not to think, but to also think within and make conscious the risks surrounding the reductive and objectifying mechanisms of the consciousness. The consciously conscious is not the only consciousness that moves.

Nor can I think about a choreography without thought. Choreography means thinking about movement, deciding, analysing, writing movement. We cannot move without thought; whatever we do there will always be something that is thinking. If we are not thinking in concepts, the body thinks for us. And that body and its movements are always produced by concepts. Hidden or explicit. In the movements that bring out the explicit, other concepts affect other aspects. I would like to say that we cannot be aware of all the thought systems that control our movements while we move either. It does not matter how extremely detailed the choreographical instructions are, they always bring with them and take up other choreographies too. We cannot make conscious all the movements in one movement at the same time, and here the subconscious/tactile thinking/hidden choreographies take over (or at least they force their way in, seizing their opportunity to be danced) and there, in those movements, is where the strongest paradigms of disciplining the body lie in wait. The hardest thing to get hold of. The most avoidant and the strongest. It seems almost to be the case that they are at their strongest when it comes to creating bodies. The choreography creates movement schematically but the body is already choreographed and so is dependent on choreography for its existence. In this sense, there are no bodies that are not choreographed, no bodies that are not shaped through choreography. Can we dance outside a choreographic discourse? Can we choose which choreographies we dance? If choreography is about thinking about movement in a certain way that both reduces movement and imbues it with information, it thus reveals other choreographical (conscious, unconscious, tactile or thought) concepts. Can we then, through these reductions, attempt to see not what we control but what controls us? If we do not look in the direction of these choreographies, there is a great risk that they will devour the whole dance. That they are the machinery that drives us back into the representation of dance and choreography and away from dance as an activity for genesis. Here the outcome is only a representation of dance/choreography, a reproduction of language, old language and rigid concepts. The outcome is all the choreographies that we attempt to criticise in practice. How do we get hold of this machinery? How can we over-ride its paradigm? How can the dance become the thing that bends the boundaries of choreography? A dancing agent.

Nor is it sufficient only to look at the choreography, we must dance it, we must relate to its heritage in a tactile way while doing so. Can it, in its outcome, be forced to bend? There, can we throw it off balance so that we ourselves do not know where it will land? Can collapse throw consciousness off balance? We cannot understand the construction of the choreography without also feeling it, seeing its coming outcome/effect, supposing it is a way of preventing its progress; in this sense, recognition is a methodology and a prison. Can we trace it from within, experience how it constructs itself physically and linguistically? Here we can say that the patterns of the choreography give us impulses of direction. Wanting to follow the choreographies that we have danced so many times before. Being able to follow the path of habit. The body is comfortable in its discipline, it is reluctant to revolt against the paradigms that bind it. This means that we have to be extremely disciplined if we are to trick the other disciplines out into the light of day.

This is not about running away, it is about walking straight ahead, with one misstep. A misstep that we ourselves even cannot predict. Is it a feint they cannot counter? Because the machinery is inside ourselves, and it is we ourselves, disciplined and intricate, that we must trick. Where does our misstep see us land? If we do not know in advance that we are going to trip, is the paradigm able to defend itself? We land in a place that our consciousness could never predict, idealise or structure. We land in a place that in our perception of it is not spatial but intense. We do not land but are rather engulfed by the intensity. If the reflection itself attempts to decide or understand that place by analysis once we have come out the other side, that place is never there again. That tactic is never valid again. That intensity is lost for ever. Nostalgia is the strongest paradigm there is. The risk is that an unsuccessful and thus successful tactic profits by and is rooted in signals of aesthetics. Here it becomes a cultural product that starts to be reproduced. Once more the machinery is there, swallowing, profiting and incorporating the result of the past outcome as aesthetics.

We cannot think of choreography only as something that creates, we must primarily think of choreography as a choreographical criticism in an activity of de-creation. An agent that criticises the normative choreographies. In the process of thinking of concepts, in variations of concepts, the goal is constantly to transform concepts and practices. Seeking practices that demand concentration within a body that cannot make conscious its representative production. In the gap between doing and bringing to light, there exists perhaps an opportunity for de-creation. Here we can justify why the consciousness must be tricked through sufficiently complicated conceptual (thought) systems and physical (tactilely thought/sensing systems/mechanisms) so as to throw the consciousness out of its understanding (for thought) and analysing (perception/reflection) in order to transcend the bounds that bind the dance in choreography, where the genesis can become performative in relation to a bodily creation that is not controlled by any of them but is a consequence of their collapse, a de-creation, yet falling within the discipline. A faulty outcome or effect where it was not decided how and when it might potentially happen.







PRACTICE

Thoughts beyond a plastic bag. Thoughts from inside a practice.

Throwing a plastic bag in the air, trying to copy its exact movements, is at least double layered.

1. One layer is playing on a surface of fictive signification (being together, following, hugging, playing, being children, jumping around, being ghosts, etc.), pointless in its syntax; as characters they do not even relate to a predominant concept, but we see them, and choose to love them. They are in fact only a result, something that happens to become, something that is valued and analysed by its spectator, but not chosen to create meaning.

As Deleuze and Guattari hold in *Anti-Oedipus* “there are great differences between . . . a linguistics of flows and a linguistics of the signifier” (1984, 241), insofar as a linguistics of the signifier remains territorialised on tautological questions of representation (on the question, ‘what does it mean?’), rather than on axiomatic determinations of force or command (the question ‘what does it do?’). For Deleuze and Guattari, ‘language no longer signifies something that must be believed; it signals what is going to be done’ (1984, 250): ‘There is no problem of meaning, but only of usage’.”

2. Then the other more productive layer, has to do with the desire of the performers to change, to be in the event of becoming different, a practice and a doing. In this case throwing an empty plastic bag in the air, looking at and sensing its movements, shapes and rhythm, in order to transform the body. The use of clothes comes into play too. Whatever the activities, or chosen objects, we will never succeed in creating the body exactly in their form; instead they function as tools for becoming something unknown. These activities might seem idiotic from an outside perspective, but this is only because we can never understand the underlying machinery involved in the activity, from the point of representation.

Thoughts beyond meaning-less meaning

Idiotic practices are contextualised as being important through repetition. Empty containers important enough to be practised, moving the focus/paradigm away from the production of meaning to the possibility for the spectators to partake in the performers’ relationship to a specific Doing, that is in itself meaningless, but can also point to activities done in our society that in themselves do not produce anything, but must still be defined as activities. These activities strive towards a doing that produces presence for the performer and through that something else for the spectator. What we see and how we reduce their doing is not their activity, but ours. In this triangle of horizons what is produced is not aware of its representation and thus we hope to de-write our selves.

EXHAUSTION

Why are they stopping?
Were the movements of the plastic not interesting enough?
Ah, it is to direct our focus towards the sound of the plastic! (?)
Why are they just standing there, still?
Stop motion?
Maybe they are statues?
Representation? Which one?
Presentation?
Revolution?
Showbiz?
(What) Are they presenting to us? Theatre?
Haven't we seen this before?
What do you represent?
Is there going to be a transformation?
Desire for freedom? Belief? Wish for something on a higher plane?
Longing for somewhere else? Something else?
Left by the bag?
Or could it be a fight?
Is this generating them, or are they generating this?
I've got it. Come on, let's go! (?)
Stop! Representation of stopping?
Why are they waiting so long?
Is this self-inflicted?
Are they idiots? Am I an idiot for looking at this?
Is it exhaustion, or its representation?
Is it for real?
Well what's that (?)
Are they stupid or brave?
Why are they doing this to themselves?
Why pain?
All the joy is gone?
Is this weirdly interesting?
Halting?
Stopping?
Being there?
Staying here
Are they going to stay for long?
Do I want to watch this any more?
Should I go? Is the performance over?
Are there hidden depths to this that were not visible at first sight?
Are they doing this for us?
Are they doing this for me?
Why can't they stop this now?
How long will it go on for?
How long can they manage for?
Will they never stop?
This seems heavy
Is this discipline?
Are we part of this?
Why am I watching this?
By not caring about us, are they being rude? Or just incredibly stubborn?
Should anyone do something?
What is going on in their heads?
This is getting serious now! (?)
Oh, I hope they didn't hurt themselves! (?)
Should I do something?

Where in this 50-minute duration of a performance can I see the idiot? Can one really practise one, and if so, what types of practices/undertakings can exist under what would be recognised as the Idiot. Is it their repetitions? But how do I locate the difference within the repetition? Is there one even? The Idiot is not a “public person” according to Wikipedia, but what, or who, isn’t public these days? Or is there something about being so overwhelmed by activities that you can’t know what it looks like? Do they know what it looks like? Isn’t the Idiot defined by the person watching? Is it even possible to become an idiot? Isn’t the idiot only interested in activities of becoming? Or perhaps simply carefree of its production, careless about the people watching.

At one of his talks at DOCH in Stockholm in December 2011 André Lepecki talked about the difference between stupidity and idiocy. He defined them as follows: “Stupid people are the ones who are not ambitious enough to inform themselves, idiots are the ones who do not understand social regimes and therefore get us others to see how the norms are constructed. The idiot is the one who is truly creative!”

By studying the way in which dance and choreography reduce activities to aesthetics, we seek to reveal our approach to representations. How they as signs steer our thinking and our movements. This is a criticism of how reductions, despite their frequent linguistic necessity, also close off our idea of the world. This applies to and takes place within choreographical practices as much as it does to other human activities. By disrupting the representational and its construction the signs fall into place and the body benefits. If the symbols cease to be trustworthy in that their construction is seen as insufficient, the ontology needs to be reformulated or at least shaken by uncertainty. In this situation, returning to the body is a must and the only clear refuge.

We want to show how choreography actively takes part in producing representation and how it demands obedience from the subject within contemporary power structures. To think the relationship between choreography, representation and subjectivity you need not only to understand what is specific to mimesis (what is really theatrical within theatre) but to see it as an ontological force, a force that in the contemporary West has captured subjectivity within a series of isomorphic agreements. Our idea of what choreography is thus prevents us from investigating choreography as such.

Francis Barker noted that Shakespeare’s Hamlet first, clearly, points to a system of presence in which “the deadly subjectivity of the modern is already beginning to emerge”. For Barker, Hamlet’s conflicts are those informing the emergence of contemporary subjectivity as a system of presence subjugated to visibility, melancholia and discipline. Hamlet announces the invention of the modern monadic subject, a subject centred on a self, contained by the limits of the body, bearer of a biography housing private secrets and unique ghosts. It is important to demonstrate that this picture too is a representation within a choreographical economy, but also within a wholly cultural logic in the Western world.

We want to show that the body is not only a bearer of multitudes of representations but is also an instrument for rewriting it. Exhausting representations and dancing them to pieces, criticises the actual construction of representation and shows the insufficiency/fragility of how it works. The work thus processes the perversions of dance, placing the dancer as a writing subject unaware of their responsibility. It is about coming back to choreography as an exploratory practice of activities and so approaching the activity as presence. A presence in its way of approaching the world and its self-understanding. In this way we want to develop our choreographical practice, our understanding of it, the audience’s view of it and create a conversation that drives ontological criticism forwards. We may perhaps appear/be shown as idiots, but it is not the representation of the idiot that is shown but the limits of choreography and the challenging of them.

MDT

MDT is an international co-production platform and a leading venue for contemporary choreography and performance in Stockholm. MDT was founded in 1986 and has ever since presented Swedish and international emerging artists. MDT is supported by Kulturförvaltningen Stockholm stad, Kulturrådet and Kulturförvaltningen Stockholms läns landsting.

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