

## **Body Contact and Body Language: Moments of Personal Development and Social and Cultural Learning Processes in Movement Psychology and Education**

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**Key words:** body contact, body language, trust, personal development, social and cultural

**Abstract:** Body contact and body language are unique and existential and, although culturally dependent and socially embodied, they are also universal communication forms. For small children all over the world, warm, close and nourishing body contact is fundamental to their embodied experience of themselves and the boundaries between self and world. In western societies, the modern premises for contact are in some ways developing from close contact to virtual communication. With this breadth of perspective in mind, the question is whether conscious and experimental work with body contact and body language in movement psychology and education provide potential for intense personal development as well as for social and cultural learning processes.

This performative research project originates from the research project entitled, *Movement Psychology: The Language of the Body and the Psychology of Movement based on the Dance Therapy Form Dansergia*<sup>1</sup>. The author, who is a practitioner-researcher, is methodologically inspired by phenomenology, performative methods and a narrative and auto-ethnographic approach.

The project will be presented in an organic, creative and performative way. Through a moving dialogue between a written text and a visceral on-line performance involving photographs and music, the reader/audience has the possibility to be touched both sensually and intellectually, although through communication is in cyberspace, missing the liveliness of direct body language.

See online performance: <http://www.viddler.com/player/c3c7a343/>.

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<sup>1</sup> Dansergia is a Life Energy Process dance therapeutic method developed by Stéphane SABETTI in the 1980ies. Even though the author of the present article has written other articles about Dansergia, Dansergia is not a part of this article.

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## 1. Room with Space for Chaos—Introduction

### The room

I step into  
Is big and bright.

The windows are large  
And reach down to the floor...

There are no

**LINES**

on the *floor*.

It is not a room  
In which things are to be measured in

= **Results**

and **records.**

It is a room with space for *Chaos.*

Here, there are no activities with **RULES** –  
It's more like a room for

learning **and**

**EXPERIENCES.**

("Hannah")

This narrative is written by Hannah. A few weeks ago, she began her university degree in the field of sport and movement. Together with her new class mates,

she is participating in a compulsory movement course that, among other themes, focuses on body contact and body language. [1]

Body contact and body language are unique and existential and, although culturally dependent and socially embodied, also universal communication forms. In western societies, the modern premises for contact are in some ways developing from close contact to virtual communication. With this breadth of perspective in mind, the question is whether conscious and experimental work with body contact and body language in movement psychology and education can open up possibilities for personal development, as well as for social and cultural learning processes. [2]

In order to answer this question, this performative research project takes a journey into two interwoven spaces. The concept of space is used both literally and metaphorically. At the architectural and experiential levels, it is a journey into intense moments from movement pedagogical sessions at the University of Copenhagen, a large space without common lines and rules--a space for chaos, liveliness and bodily communication. [3]

At the methodological and metaphorically level, the project takes a journey into the relatively new and large research space of Performative Social Science. The project moves, also in this regard, into a larger space in which the frames of traditional science, rules and guidelines for results are challenged by the non-linearity of narrative and performative methods. [4]

The project unfolds through a written text with bodily poetic and creatively presented narratives, and through a visceral on-line performance which contains photos, speech and music. The intention is to give the reader/audience an opportunity to go into a sensual and, perhaps, self-reflecting dialogue with the on-line performance as well as with the written text. [5]

The movement-pedagogical space is populated by 206 undergraduate students. They participate in the course *Bodybasis*, which lasts for two months, but which is part of a longer educational program. The chosen narratives used in this project build on autoethnographically inspired short stories written by these young students. The narratives have a movement psychological approach, and while they are sharply limited in time and space, and play out over only a few hours, minutes or seconds, the condensed meaning of the embodied experiences, in lived time and subjective space, has a far deeper substance. [6]

## 2. Closer to the Body—About the Purposes

The multiple subjectively felt meanings and relationships between body and psyche have in recent years been the subject of renewed attention in psychology, philosophy and body sociology (CSORDAS, 1999; KØPPE, 2004; PETZHOLD, 2006; KOCH, 2006; MERLEAU-PONTY, 1962/2004). In spite of many different theoretical views, there is today a large degree of agreement that the body and psyche, as well as the individuals relationship with the surrounding world, must be regarded as a cohesive dynamic and organic unit. The written text is based on this primary theoretical view, but the findings are also challenged by the critique raised by SPARKES (2002, p.146).

"Where bodies have been focused on, they have been heavenly theorized bodies, detached, distant, and for the most part lacking intimate connection to lived experiences of the corporal beings that are the objects of analytical scrutiny (...). Against this backdrop I have asked the question of how we might begin to take more seriously the lived body, the phenomenological and subjective experiences of those involved in sport and physical activity." [7]

One purpose of this project is to unfold the concepts of body language and body contact, and to explore why work with these concepts in the field of movement pedagogy and education may contribute to a movement psychology and be a fundamental raw material for learning and personal development, and social and cultural learning processes. As this article is based on intense moments, in a very short time sequence, the narratives can illustrate only development possibilities and not deeper or longer processes of change. [8]

Another purpose is to take SPARKES critique seriously, and thus contribute to the development of Performative Social Science: to find ways to research into the language of the body and hereby open up new methodological possibilities of moving closer to the body's senses, feelings and multidimensional communication. For traditional science, this language has often been an inaccessible universe. [9]

## 3. Narrative Methods—From Body to Language

The project originates from a research project entitled *Movement Psychology: The Language of the Body and the Psychology of Movement based on the Dance Therapy Form Dansergia* (WINTHER, 2006). Here, I research on my own practice, inspired by what JARVIS (1999) and PAYNE (1993) have termed practitioner research. Practitioner research is unavoidably subjective in its nature, and transcends, therefore, the positivistic research tradition's inherent criteria of objectivity and validity. [10]

On the one hand, this may be regarded as a serious point of criticism. On the other hand, the practitioner researcher has the possibility, as JARVIS (1999) writes, to catch and register nuances in various situations of practice which are

accessible only to experience-based and qualitatively deep involvement. When I research my own practice, I seek data from bodily experiences that cannot be put into an equation or can be focused through a consideration of traditional forms of evidence, results or effect measures. On the contrary, I use narrative, experimental and performative methods to illuminate what is constantly moving, accessible and processual. [11]

In order to capture the challenge of translating body experiences into the world of words and written language and find a place where, as SNOWBER (2002, p.20) writes, "the soul can sing and the bones dance," I am inspired by phenomenological, narrative, autoethnographic and performative research methods (SNOWBER, 2002; MERLEAU-PONTY, 1962/2004; ENGEL, RØNHOLT, SVENDLER NIELSEN & WINTHER, 2006; SPARKES, 2002, 2003). The purpose of these methods is to be able to keep the living, expressive and sensual quality in both the research process and its mediation. Phenomenological descriptions capture the experienced, and keep the phenomenon alive in a process which challenges the researcher's subjective involvement in a critical dialogue between intuition and reflection (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1962/2004). [12]

I allow myself to term this approach autoethnographically inspired, in spite of an indirect use of my own personal processes as material. As SPARKES (2003) points out, auto-ethnography allows a wide spectrum of ways of recording material and, in this project, I have encouraged the students as co-researchers to record their experiences in a vast array of ways. These sources, as SPARKES writes, may, for example, be free writing processes, introspection and, most prominently, emotionally toned descriptions of the life of the body. In this text, I relate the students' personal short stories (also termed experience descriptions) to cultural themes in order to embrace multiple layers of consciousness (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000; ENGEL et al., 2006; SPARKES, 2003). [13]

While other methods seek general conclusions, narrative sources seek to be polyvocal. These methods are often a provocative attempt to challenge traditional scientific patterns by giving the reader/audience the possibility to see, feel, hear and relate sensually to the research material (SPARKES, 2003; JONES, 2006). The researcher is part of the material and subjectively involved in the production, which can be said to be neither subjective nor objective, but contextual, constructed, and a form of dialogue (JONES, 2006). [14]

As this project is a sampling from some few hours of learning processes, it may be termed an untraditional case study. Even if the study builds on the phenomenological and autoethnographically inspired embodied experience descriptions and short stories from 206 students, time and space is sharply framed. [15]

The students were in eight different classes and all of them worked during three lessons with the theme of body contact. They were then asked to focus on important, challenging or meaningful moments and, through introspection, write

freely and poetically about their personal processes and stories. Even though I, as practitioner researcher and teacher, had worked with some of the students over a period of two years, in this study, I have still chosen to illuminate this first phase of a longer learning sequence in order to closely examine moments and possibilities for personal development. For ethical reasons, I have obtained written permission to use the students' data. All names in the written material have been anonymized, while the visual/pictorial material is presented with the permission of those photographed. [16]

#### **4. Performative Methods—From Language to Body**

Since transforming the body's language to a written language is complex, one might glibly ask: Are there other ways to represent bodily data, which are more true to the body and seem *truer*, in the meaning of "*truer to life*" (SPARKES, 2003). Even though the transformation process may seem difficult, it is unavoidable, considering that it is in the field of tension between body and language that new perspectives may be brought forth. At the same time, it may be pertinent, through a constantly and spirally moving interpretation process, to bring the data back to the bodily universe. [17]

In this context I am especially inspired by the English mode of transforming and presenting research data in *artistic* productions, either as ethnodrama, performance or dance (BAGLEY & CINCIENNE, 2002; SNOWBER, 2002; SPARKES, 2002; JONES, 2006). Such performances emphasize the dynamic and expressive tone of the data, and hence have the possibility to sustain the full range of sensory life in the experiences which other forms of representation may not have. Dialogue between a written text and an artistic production may bring the data back to the bodily universe, thus bringing new light to both the bodily and language-based landscape. It is obvious that this provides many possibilities for working across disciplines and involving artists in performative productions (JONES, 2006; SPARKES, 2003). The visceral performance here is one example of such cooperation. [18]

As this project is designed for the Internet, I have chosen, in cooperation with a photographer and professional musicians, composers and singers, to create a performative expression on the basis of photos from one of the teaching sessions, combined with a spoken text consisting of condensed extracts from the students' embodied short stories. The music was based on student's quotes, the atmosphere present, and an analyses of these may be read in this article. The project is thus an attempt to give the reader/audience the opportunity, in a dialogue with the written text, to see, sense and experience a transformation of meaning from the movement pedagogical education space. In order to keep the quotes anonymous and also to underline the impression that there are no specific gender issues at play, male and female voices are randomly mixed in the audio clips. [19]

## 5. Keep Moving

In order to create a lively dialogue between practice and theory, this text defies the normal structure of a research article: "first the theory and then the findings." The article will, therefore, be built up through a constantly dancing dialogue between data and theory, and will thus unfold in different, though interwoven, themes. Some of the central themes that emerge in the narratives are in the written text mirrored in a body-theoretical and social kaleidoscope, dancing between micro-analytic and macro-analytic perspectives. On personal, social and societal levels, these perspectives evolve in a field of tension between separation and recognition, inhibiting and expressing, limiting and openness, courage and confidence, individuality and commonality. In order to underline the dimensions of embodiment and movement in the narratives, there is also a performative aspect to the way they are graphically represented.

*The article is written as movement.*

*Just keep moving and follow the flow.*

## 6. Holding Yourself Back—A Challenging Starting Point

"There's a *high ceiling* here

*and*

*lots of space*

*TO EXPRESS YOURSELF"*

Still, I feel inhibited...

I'm holding myself back in some way or other.

I act a bit reserved and keep to myself a little. ("Mikkel") [20]

The students, whom we'll meet in the course of the few hours the project lasts, have different backgrounds, but many of them are elite athletes who have spent their lives paying attention to their bodies. They are not only accustomed to seeking space, but also competing for first place. They are used to performing, doing well, working with themselves, following international sports rules and strenuous training programs. Still, or perhaps for these reasons, in the first few minutes of the movement teaching, many of them feel on their guard or, as one student Mikkel writes, have a feeling of "holding back." The theme of body contact is, in fact, radically different from conventional physical training. Body contact works from a movement psychological basis through a dance/martial arts inspired

praxis, and from a multidimensional, phenomenological and energetic view of the body. [21]

Movement psychology, a construct still in development, seeks a deeper understanding of the connection between the language of the body, the psychology of movement and the human emotional dynamic. Movement psychology has been inspired by body psychology (LOWEN, 1988; BOADELLA, 2006; DOWNING, 2006; PETZHOLD, 2006), phenomenology (MERLEAU PONTY, 1962/2004), and to a large degree by energy psychology (SABETTI, 1986; SABETTI & FRELIGH, 2001). It springs from a wholeness-oriented and energetic view of the human organism, where body, soul, thoughts and feelings are regarded as a connected system in constant exchange with cultural, societal and universal movements. [22]

In movement psychology, but also very *concretely* in its access to practice, the body is conceived as a living and experiencing entity, as in MERLEAU PONTY's concept *the lived body*, which refers to the fact that life is basically lived and expressed through the always relational body (1962/2004). According to phenomenology, our momentary existence is an anonymous and all-pervasive embodiment with an expressive presence. We are thusly, in light of our embodiment, not static, but in movement, changeable, receptive and equipped with the potential to get in contact with our surroundings. On the other hand, we may perhaps be partially *absent* and thus not necessarily in *contact* with our body. Sense experiences, hurt feelings, childhood, culture and the norms for the upbringing of children become part of our bodily, emotional and behavioral disposition and our way of relating to others. [23]

In spite of the apparently free space of western societies, with great potential for expression, one might question whether not only Mikkel, but also the modern individual in the age of reflexivity, hold themselves back and move away from bodily contact and *away* from the movement and expressive presence in their own and others' bodies. Working with body language and bodily contact may thus seem transgressive and liberating at the same time. This contrast is described in two students' (Mary and Kasper) experience descriptions (below), which describe the initial phase of the movement process. [24]

## 7. Separate or Together?—Overcodes and Subcodes in Body Language

"We walk around between each other on the floor,  
I'm in my own world, even though I notice them,  
they are around me.

*I'm in my own*

*space*

*and am still*

**s e p a r a t e**

from the others.

*We walk closer together, the separation is still there but it's more psychological.  
Something decisive happens when I begin to *look* at the others.  
Meeting them, noticing them and not just registering that they are in the room as  
neutral others.*

*I smile and get smiles back, we play and the energy rises in the room.  
We communicate without words.  
I notice a more definite contact to myself, my own movements and my partners'.  
There is a strong dynamic every time I have eye contact with a person and  
discover that he/she and I want to meet each other. I feel safe, happy, respected  
and **SEEN.**" ("Mary")*

About the same situation, Kasper writes:

*"An insecure feeling is rolling through my body. A tense and nervous feeling. The  
contact with the others, whom I actually really don't know yet, is challenging my  
boundaries, but it is also freeing.  
I feel the first eye contact, we pass intensely by each other while we are looking  
deeply into each others' eyes; it is like feeling the other person's pulse and the  
rhythm of the music at the same time. The experience is total. I forget the  
insecure feeling I had before we started.*

*It is like my*  
**boundaries**

*have opened up*

for **new** impulses to my body."

("Kasper") [25]

Even though Mary and Kasper are in a room with other people, in these first minutes of the session, Mary is at the same time really in her *own world* and in her *own space*. While Kasper feels that contact with the others is going beyond his boundaries, Mary feels herself as separate. Physically she is moving around close to the others, but an observant eye and her own description reveal that her psychological, emotional and social movements are inhibited and held back, keeping her from a feeling of contact. [26]

In order to get close to the potential of body language and contact, it is necessary to ask the why the body language meetings change Mary's bodily experience so that she notices *a strong dynamic*, which cause the *energy to rise* and the contact more definite. Why does she experience the bodily meetings as decisive? Why are they changing her experience of contact from something neutral to something that makes her feel *safe, happy, respected and seen*? [27]

How can Kasper, in these few minutes, move from a situation that challenges his boundaries to a total experience in which his boundaries have opened up? [28]

In the universe of daily life, bodily communication reflects a dynamic between conscious and apparently not conscious signs. DAMKJÆR (1991) terms the conscious signs *overcodes*, whereas GOFFMAN (1959) terms the signals we give *staging*. The staging manifests itself as *artifacts*, unspoken codes and messages in clothing, makeup, bodily gestures, the surroundings, conscious placements and conscious choices of activities and relationships. In postmodern society, overcodes are perhaps more important than ever. In a rapid, unpredictable, pulsating and globalised world in which the modern individual, to a large degree, must create and realize himself, it also becomes important to signal to the environment who we are, or at least, whom we would like to be *seen* and *perceived* as being! Behind the tendency towards extreme visibility is a polarity, an anxiety for being made invisible, an anxiety for not being seen or overseen. [29]

Subcodes of communication are, on the other hand, often body language reactions and signals which are immediate, implicit and apparently not conscious. Subcodes may consist of spontaneous and often minimal movement expressions which tell of the emotional state of the situation. Subcodes are also always influenced by cultural, historical and personal meanings, and inhabited in the lived

body (DAMKJÆR, 1991). The balance between overcodes and subcodes demands a more complex and symbolic communication, as well as knowledge about signs in many social arenas. [30]

Subcodes also include the concept of *proximic*, the human territorial limits and perceptions of space that, although derived from sensory experiences, which all humans share and are created and patterned by culture (GEBAUER & WULF, 2001; HALL, 1966). Territorial limits are dynamic, and indicate distance and closeness between bodies. Territorial spaces of the body may be divided into four different spaces: *intimate*, *personal*, *social* and *public*, in order of progression from close physical contact in intimate space, where we can perceive the heat and smell of the body, to greater physical distance and the distant senses at larger distances (GEBAUER & WULF, 2001; HALL, 1966). We move in and out of these different spaces all the time depending on context and relationship. In addition, we often don't recognize that we are keeping territorial boundaries, but we certainly feel when they are breached or challenged, for example when meeting people from other cultures or, as in this project, new cultural spaces. [31]

In the movement space, there is a constant game going on involving the dynamics of the territorial boundaries of the moment. Working with body contact, martial arts and dance may, therefore, be challenging and provoke insecurity, while at the same time be meaningful. It is also clear that the underlying norms of space and contact are disrupted. When people work spontaneously and consciously with clear simple signals, levels of subcodes become visible in light of bodily communication, and it is here that Kasper moves from going beyond his usual boundaries, to an opening up of them. [32]

However, the dynamic of territorial limits is maintained, and from an energetic and movement psychological point of view this occurs not only through *physical* movement. For example, Mary finds herself relatively close to the others. Physically she is perhaps in the personal or intimate space in relation to the others in the group, but she *keeps* herself *apart* by what she experiences as a psychological movement. A bit later, she is relatively far away from the others when she experiences a decisive change through eye contact. Eye contact is in fact very finely tuned, and the duration of this type of emotional expression is often a strong body language signal, sent and received in a split second. In this case eye contact may contribute to Mary moving into the intimate space of seeing and being seen. [33]

Sensual communication is often polarized and always double, and the phenomenon of seeing and being seen is crucial for the dynamics of separateness or recognition (MERLEAU-PONTY; 1962/2004; ARGYLE, 2002; HONNETH, 2003). Recognition is also a basic social need, and the visible/existing and the made invisible/separate and non-existing is closely connected to body language communication in social groups and communities (HONNETH, 1996). Conscious work with body language, territorial limits, and "visibility," means that recognition and respect constitute an important

developmental potential. Recognition then, in a deep sense, is related to body contact. [34]

## 8. Double Touch and Body Contact

"The wrestling is so physically close that the room has become very small. A room filled with shouts, arms, legs, backs, bodies, sweat. We struggle and roll around and everything is upside down. Roll around all axes without any feeling of what is up or down. Hands and feet search for the floor to cling to.

For a moment, I can do it. The tempo is reduced. I can just manage to orient myself, and feel that I have control, and then I notice that I get shoved across the floor. Even though I resist, my hands and feet slide over the floor and I'm shoved sideways. We are both the same size and both use our whole weight against each other to resist. Then one of us falls over, and then the fight is on again in a very high tempo.

Suddenly we stop and our bodies are folded totally into each other, as if they aren't two separate bodies that have struggled, but only a big organic lump which has rolled around (...)

Even though everything is now going on calmly, the energy is still high.

**Every** *movement* in the room,  
**every** *touch* is registered.

I experience that in the fight while the energy is high, norms and limits are broken down so that challenges may be met. The framework is in place, we know each other and that's safe. After all, there's more seriousness than play in it. We get into it totally.

I have not offended anyone, no one has offended me." ("Gitte") [35]

In this short bodily fight with *high energy*, is a constant weighing of each other's power and strength. The students rapidly estimate and determine how hard, where and who is regarded as an adversary. When everything is turned upside down and body-to-body contact is very close, Gitte experiences that limits and norms are broken down, *at the same time as* the framework is in place. Thus, something may be broken down because there is a new clear structure. Limits are broken down, but the close bodily fighting contact is quite chaotic and, in this sense, transgression is at the same time *limit-setting*. Gitte does say that she and her opponent use their weight *against* each other, and through this limit-setting body contact, the spirit of struggle, spontaneity and laughter are set free. [36]

The word *contact* is a physical concept having to do with touch and togetherness. Etymologically, the word *contact* comes from the Latin word *contactus* which again has roots in *com* (together), and *tangere* (to touch). As for all other concepts, the word *contact* has developed a symbolic meaning; that is why body contact also emphasizes a sensual and bodily dimension. Sensual communica-

tion through body contact is termed *double touching* by ARGYLE (2002). Body contact, as ARGYLE states, is the most original form of social communication for both animals and human beings. Seen from this perspective, the subject is bodily present and interrelating from the beginning (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1962/2004; KØPPE, 2004). EHDIN (2003) describes this process beginning long before a child is born. For example, during nine months in the mother's womb, skin is constantly stimulated by rhythmic impulses. When the mother is walking, moving or dancing, the child gets rocked. When the child is born, the nerves in the skin are stimulated. The skin is, at the same time, a boundary and an area for contact between ourselves and the surrounding world. [37]

There is a connection between touch and a newborn baby's chances to survive. Lack of love and body contact can be life-threatening for small children (EHDIN, 2003; ARGYLE, 2002). Body contact is, at the same time, touching for both partners, and together with fundamental rhythms and very small bodily signs, called bodily-micro-practices (DOWNING, 2006). Body contact is the primary form of communication during the first years when a strong arm, a round hip, a soft breast and a warm hand give the small child contact, presence, boundaries and trust (ibid.; ARGYLE, 2002; WINTHER, 2007). This has decisive influence on the child's early impression of identity and integrity. The need for stimulation through the skin, for touch and body contact exists throughout life (EHDIN, 2003). Children may be insistent in their need for body contact; adults and especially older people may experience what practitioners term *skin hunger*, when the body "screams" to be touched. For small children all over the world, the warm, close and nourishing contact body-to-body is fundamental to their embodied experience of themselves and boundaries between self and world. [38]

Touch is the most basic form of interpersonal communication. All other forms of both verbal and nonverbal communication are connected to later developmental stages (ARGYLE, 2002; DOWNING, 2006). Even if body contact in the adult world (except for sexual contact) is often, less intense and intimate, and more ritualized and symbolic, these later forms of communication are still based on the basic communication form of body contact (ARGYLE, 2002). [39]

The relationship between *near senses* and *distant senses* play an important role both in the development of the small child and in the development of our civilization. Close involvement has to do with the near senses of smell, taste and kinesthetics, while distance has to do with sight and the sense of hearing. Near senses have been considered less worthy in the development of western civilization and, as ELIAS (1939/1989) writes, are consequently slipped into the background in favor of more distance and self-control. [40]

What relationship one should have to body contact, the various ways of interacting, and the boundaries of what is permitted or not, are slowly acculturated into the body in close connection to the family, society and culture into which the small child grows up. In western societies, there are also strong tendencies to stimulate the baby's distant senses. The baby is in a baby carrier, in an auto seat,

sleeps in her/his own bed, and is left to professional babysitters at an early age. In contrast, children in the third world are often carried by their mothers for one or two years. They are breast-fed for a longer period, and sleep closer to their mother in a near sensual continuum. [41]

Seen from this perspective, body contact may, perhaps, support basic and essential communication forms, and a basic feeling of identity and self-awareness about limits and potentials. The question is whether we, in the western world, more and more dominated by overcode communication and a focus on distant senses through phones, internet and TV, also lose or become unclear about important communication tools. [42]

In the near-sensual bodily contact space in the movement pedagogical context, so-called "normal" communication forms are replaced by the core qualities of dance, martial arts and play. These are challenged and explored, while other frameworks, as Gitte writes, are created. Through close bodily contact, elements of control, rolls and staging melt gradually. It is as if working with body contact and double touch creates a direct path to possibly pre-reflective communication forms which, as soon as they get opened up, touch upon "frozen" resources which may then be re-created anew, and re-conquered to allow for joy, togetherness and openness. [43]

## **9. Joy, Community and Trust—Moving Between Hardness and Softness**

"I begin to walk four steps forward and four steps back and hold Mette's hand. At the same time the music begins to play. It's a cool Brazilian song with good rhythms, and I can't keep my body still, so I start to improvise dance steps fitting the rhythm, at the same time as I keep the basic steps.

The contact is good and intense, and I make eye contact with several others, and we smile to each other. We get physically closer together than we do in daily life. People open up in this group situation, and show new sides of themselves ... People dare to loosen up and most of them don't think whether or not it's embarrassing, or if their movements are ugly.

I feel open to learning new things, and want to contribute to creating a good atmosphere and making the dance fun

My feelings are easy to see, and I show my enthusiasm by humming the Brazilian song, and by doing improvised dance steps. I have a good feeling in my body. I can see almost everyone in the circle.

There is safety and unity in the class, so **IDARE to express Myself.**"  
("Erik")

Dance, martial arts and play are movement phenomena which all have universal qualities, even though they are constantly changed, colored and transformed by cultural expression. Dance, martial arts and play have existed in all cultures

through all the ages, and are in essence pre-cultural. Animals play and learn to know their strength through fighting (HUIZINGA, 1993). In the context of this performative research project, there must be potentials in these forms of movement, which, by their very nature, have easy access to the basic communicative resources and expressive existence of the body. [44]

The question is: what does it mean to give oneself over to the dance, rhythm, joy and to *loosen up* in a way that is so emotionally transparent and so un-self-conscious that Erik experiences that no one thinks about "embarrassment", and thus perhaps also not about the overcodes, staging, the controlling visibility, and the judgments of the other? What is "it" that has been loosened up in body language communication or the dance, and dares to *express itself* together with others? [45]

BØJE (2002) sees the concepts of fighting, dance and play as essential forms of movement. Fighting is a developmental basis for human meetings, because it in compressed form illustrates a theme and a central challenge in human existence and development. While the good fight and resistance reveals opportunities of experiencing how the individual's physical and psychological performance is put to the test, and invites one to a basic clarification of identity, the psychological tension of play makes it possible to test the serious sides of life: we play life/death, prisoner and freedom (BØJE, 2002; HUIZINGA, 1993; SUTTON-SCHMIDT, 1979). Dance is thus the expressive dimension of bodily communication and has its roots in joy and appetite for life, un-self-consciousness, spontaneity, and rhythmic union which is connected to the concepts *flow* and *energy* (BØJE, 2002). [46]

Based on a body psychological as well as an energetic viewpoint, LOWEN (1995) explains how the phenomenon of *joy*—giving in to immediate spontaneity and joy of life—in the western world most often is seen in children "*whose innocence have not been destroyed and whose freedom has not been lost*" (Ibid., p.323). This immediate spontaneity and freedom of expression may also be experienced in adult life, especially in bodily activities connected to self-expression, for example, dance. Surrendering to spontaneous joy is, according to LOWEN, an extraordinary feeling for adults, who are often ego-directed and controlled, while children, on the other hand, act bodily and spontaneously without thinking first, because they are often in contact with *a deep center* in the body (Ibid). SABETTI (1986) writes that the concept *control* etymologically comes from *contra-roll*, thereby both symbolically and movement-wise moving *against* a flow, whereas *con-roll* means moving *with* the flow, which in Erik's case means a movement that is both physically, emotionally and relationally harmonious. Perhaps it is this form of rhythm, energy, flow and joy that momentarily enters Erik's experience of his and the others' world of experience; moments which also give a basis for immediate unity and the courage to *loosen up*. [47]

Such a meeting is, as Erik says, inextricably tied to safety and trust. Body contact evolves in the space of movements, constantly varying between hard and soft. It

is as if the direct confrontations and the limit-defining contact in struggle and play, the joy of the dance, and the unifying atmosphere strengthen the courage and enable participants to move further into the sphere of intimacy. The slowness and the calmness obviously intensify the senses and the meaning of signs from the body in a near-sensual and, as we shall now see, empty room that, in spite of only a few minutes having passed, is surrounded by infinity and time that stood still. [48]

## 10. Winning Trust—A Romantic Escape from Scary Risks?

"My eyes are closed and his body is close to mine. We are warm and damp with sweat, and I feel vulnerable and unsure. He is too close to me. I don't know him, and I feel that he is evaluating and judging me. The music tells us that we should dance. Slowly we move closer together. It feels intimate and intense. I notice him, smell him and hear him, but can't see him. Our eyes cannot meet and communicate, so I sense him and visualize him. He holds me firmly and decisively close, and leads in the dance, consistently and willfully. It feels as if the people around us disappear one by one. The room is empty—we are the only ones there. I can't see anything, just feel, and I notice what he wants from his movements—he tells me with his body. I let go of my inhibitions and let my touch be guided by impulse.

He has won my trust and I let myself be led, surrounded by darkness and infinity.

Time stands still and I surrender." ("Andrea")

## *Winning* TRUST.

One of the words that comes up again and again in the students' stories is *trust*. Many of them have chosen to write intensely about a situation which lasted about five minutes, but which has been richly imprinted in their subjective consciousness. [49]

Trust is not just a mental movement. Trust may be noticed, felt, conquered and won through the body. At its deepest level, trust is regarded by most psychological theorists as being connected to the very first near-senses relationships and bodily-micro-practices of the very small child, and thereby something that exists far under the level of verbal language (ERIKSON; 1968/1983; DOWNING, 2006; LOWEN, 1988; SABETTI, 1986). Trust is, as GIDDENS (1990, p.87) writes, an enduring and returning psychological need, and in our adult lives it is the substance of constant emotional re-establishment. [50]

The situation described below can help us examine the meaning of body contact and the significance of giving and receiving small touches in consideration of both the giver's and the receiver's limits in the situation. [51]

Very quietly, familiarity is building up in the room. Irene feels this too.

"Just before he/she leaves, I get a goodbye-nuzzle, a small affectionate touch on my neck, or is it my hair?

I am touched. It comes suddenly: the feeling that this person wishes me well. I don't know what the sender thinks or feels, but I receive and experience it as a big lump of tender caring in a very small touch. So much caring in a touch from a person I've only known for a couple of weeks. I'm enchanted by the feeling of wellness, vulnerability and tenderness. I notice so clearly how many barriers I have in fact set up in everyday life, even though I regard myself as outgoing and sociable. The contrast is sharp, because I'm just now in this moment full of trust and have the greatest confidence towards everything that may come my way. In short: I'm in a wonderful peaceful place, in which I both relax in my body and dare to be open and feel happy. The negative section of my experience data base is erased in a split second. The memory and feeling of that contact sits with me for several days afterward. I'm thinking, how important physical contact is for adults too." ("Irene") [54]

Irene's description of how she experiences a *big* lump of caring in a *very small* touch indicates the intensity of the relational universe of body language and, moreover, the enormous significance of body contact and small gestures. A significance which perhaps just for that reason makes it necessary for Irene, like so many others in our contemporary culture, to protect themselves by having so *many barriers set up*. [52]

So why work with teaching that challenges limits? Is it a romantic escape to a safe little oasis in which the scary risks of being, dangers and barriers disappear? Is it an oasis filled with joy, where barriers are broken down and young people can express themselves and feel that they are seen? Is it a space where, in spite of the hint of chaos, there may be a defense against the constant and infinite challenges of modern existence? In light of the present life circumstances in the western world, one might critically maintain that it is necessary to find out how we, on personal, social and cultural levels, might be able to create and strengthen trust and basic joy in life. In this context it may be important to notice the potentials in body language work and explorations of bodily contacts and, more concisely, the potentials in giving the body a chance. [53]

## 11. Movement Psychology—on Giving the Body a Chance in Modern Society

*"On the whole, I haven't been conscious of my own  
body or given it a **chance** at all.*

*This is the very first time I'm taking it seriously.*

*I'm wildly fascinated by the personal development—both psychologically and physically—which I have experienced in the last few minutes.*

*Finally it occurs to me as something very basic.*

*One should of course be able to work with oneself, before one can work with others.*

*Today I learned to know my own body ...!!!" ("Susanne")*

Even if this article is based on short time sequences and, therefore, only can illustrate possibilities for personal development and not deeper or longer processes of change, it is still thought-provoking that change processes may be felt as something taking place in minutes. It is surprising that a young woman who has lived her whole life in sport settings can experience that she has never before given her body a chance! [54]

After having finished their degrees, many of these students will become high school teachers. But also in other future careers, such as doctors, nurses, and physical therapists, professions that get close to not just physical, but also existential bodies, they will probably come in contact with several hundred children and adolescents. In light of the extensive psychical and social problems in modern society, it may be necessary to give, not only the apparently objective physical body, but also the multidimensional body a chance. From this perspective it will be important to sharpen the awareness about the interrelated phenomena of trust, body language and body contact, and the developmental possibilities in the area of movement psychology. [55]

## 12. A Kaleidoscopic View Seen from a Micro-analytic and a Macro-analytic Perspective

I will now sum up these developmental possibilities and add a kaleidoscopic view which dances between the movement pedagogic micro-analytic and the societal macro-analytic perspective, and discusses the potentials of body language and body contact: why body contact and body language may be overseen possibilities for personal development. [56]

The learning space of bodily communication which forms the story zone in this project is intense because it is a large and experience-based space. The intensity is not brought forth by a usual, safe, controlling, rule-bound framework. The intensity is brought forth by working with the courage to come into the unsure space by a process which creates the basis for joy in life, fighting spirit, openness

and sensuality, and the courage to notice the meaning of also very small body language signs. [57]

Courage, openness and chaos mastery is challenged in the apparently free spaces of modern society, which is characterized by the constant transgression of limits that are built up and renewed in an ever larger pluralism of norms (GIDDENS, 1990; JØRGENSEN, 2002). Each individual must live and struggle with herself in a constant dialogue with reflexivity, impermanence, rapid change and risk-taking. We should be able to move in and out of temporary groups and different cultural spaces as a matter of course and with a constant process of identity development as the result. This circumstance affect children, adolescents, adults and the elderly, and may be challenges that are also relevant to pedagogic and movement psychological work. In the development of movement psychology it is thus important to find a way to include, not only intense, but also essential resources. [58]

Given the existential power of the body and its multidimensionality, the narratives of the students presented in both the written text and in the performance part of the project can be regarded as connected with basic essential themes. Even though the students' stories primarily concern developmental potentials for personal and social development, they also have importance for both culture and society. Through body contact, we are able to enter the fields of tension between courage and trust, separation and recognition. These themes may be termed essential, as they, on the one hand, touch basic existential themes and, on the other hand, themes which are relevant in the modern era. One of the clearest themes that emerges is *trust*. Some maintain that just this lack of trust, and what GIDDENS (1990, p.93) terms ontological insecurity, is an inevitable outcome of growing in modern times (THYSSEN, 2001; JØRGENSEN, 2002). Emotionally based security, which is built up in close, early and, as seen in the context of this project decisive *bodily* relationships between parents, children and significant others has, therefore, acquired even more importance in relation to building up a basic—if not blind—confidence in the world and other people. The need for trust grows at the pace of the lack of trust, and trust has, as GIDDENS maintains, decisive importance for the individual's ability to navigate and thrive in modern times. [59]

### **13. Further Reflections: Body Contact in Relation to Unbalanced Polarities in Modern Society**

Giving the body a chance is then not just about the physical dimension, but also about the expressivity and multidimensionality of the living body. Through body work, it is possible for individuals to open up so that they *dare to* express themselves in the group, and *dare to* feel openness and joy. [60]

The intense moments in which young adults find a place where "trust is gained" and/or where "the negative section of an experience data base may be erased in a split second," may be important. Seen from another perspective, a collection of

experience data is, of course, not erased in a split second. However, such bodily processes may contribute to renewing strength in order to master complex challenges, because contact with a bodily rooted joy in life and basic trust may, on the deepest level, strengthen a feeling of stability in a reality characterized by instability, fragmentation, unpredictability and chaos. In a movement psychological context, this trust may paradoxically develop in a seemingly chaotic and, for many, challengingly transgressive space with close bodily contact and honest acceptance. [61]

Courage and trust, control and chaos, separation and recognition, what holds us back and what encourages expression, limiting and opening, individuality and community may, in the deepest sense, be regarded as constantly moving polarities, woven into each other. This project literally takes pictures of how we may work with such a dynamic. It demands courage to work with trust, and it takes limits to work with openness, in the same way that individuality and communality are woven together, not as complementary opposites, but as prerequisites for each other. [62]

In modern society, these polarities are, in many ways, out of balance and, in the life of each individual, it may feel impossible to do anything about it. Perhaps we just try to survive. Perhaps body work may constitute a resource of possibility when it comes to feeling the joy of life, and meet the challenges on personal, social, cultural and societal levels of finding larger spaces with room for chaos. [63]

#### **14. The Challenging High Ceiling—Reflections on this Project's Contribution to Performative Social Science**

There's a *high* *ceiling* here  
.....("Mikkel")

Giving form to the performative project has been a paradoxical challenge which has been about getting closer to the body, even though the communication has taken place in cyberspace. I hope that the focus on the sensual, expressive and creative dimension in both the written text and the on-line performance contributes to the development of research ideas in the sphere of Performative Social Science. The idea of a visceral, online performance would not have arisen if the Internet had not been a precondition for publishing this project. Thus creativity often arises from what the Danish film director, VON TRIER, calls "tripping up." Even though the research space in Performative Social Science has been raised, in so far as the movement pedagogical space has been expanded, it also puts the researcher in a challenging position. Well-known paradigms may be

exclusive and limiting for new developmental perspectives, but through accepted and handed-down norms of academic practice, the researcher may experience a framework of liberating control. Unlimited heights and new possibilities in Performative Social Science may be frightening, because they open up an unending stream of questions and possibilities which, to a large degree, are to be both answered and filtered by the researcher who, at the same time, must satisfy a number of research quality criteria. During the process of working on this project, I have experienced the constant and sometimes frustrating, but also joyful and liberating, challenge of having to balance between creativity and quality, expression and evaluation, intuition and reflection, in order to give the body a chance. This is a chance and a challenge, which is ultimately necessary to illustrate for traditional science, as well as for Performative Social Science. [64]

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