

Trace the relationship structures in two contrasting dance works and their role in the work.

Within this essay I will trace the relationship structures of two contrasting dance works and their role in the works. The first, *youandyouandyou*, choreographed by Anneke Hansen, was performed at University Settlement, New York 16-19 November 2011 and also at APAP, New York January 5-9th 2012. The second, *Listowel Syndrome*, choreographed by Emma Martin, was performed at The Project Arts Centre, Dublin 17-20 September 2010 as part of Absolute Fringe, Dublin.

Both works are vastly different in terms of the sheer size and structure of the cast. *youandyouandyou* includes three female dancers (including Hansen herself) and a live musician whereas *Listowel Syndrome* consists of a cast of twelve. These include the chorus performers (two male, two female), one solo female performer (the rape victim), an older male actor, an older female actor and five musicians. *Listowel Syndrome's* programme describes the piece as,

“A dark tale of small-town solidarity. Majority rules and a close knit community turns on one of its own. Emma Martin tackles a subject matter rooted deep in the Irish unconsciousness, and utterly of the moment.” (Project Arts Centre, 2010)

The subject matter refers to a sexual assault case in a small community in the west of Ireland whereby a man was convicted of raping a local woman. The incident was captured on CCTV and the man was found guilty and sentenced to seven years in prison. After the court case fifty people, including a priest shook hands with the local man showing their support in full view of the victim. This caused uproar in Ireland at the time.

When choreographer Martin decided to create a dance work inspired by the case this resulted in a predictable outburst of media attention. The Listowel mayor “expressed his outrage at a show that will again attract unwanted attention upon Listowel.” (Hughes, 2010).

(McCarthy, 2010) quoted the director of the Dublin Fringe Festival saying she “fully supports Emma and the right of all artists to question the values of the society in which they live”.

This contrasts greatly with *youandyouandyou* which is described in a very different manner:

“Hansen’s choreography seeks to create a sympathetic kinesthetic response in the audience. As individuals working as part of a collective “we”, the dancers seek the emotional resonance of their moving bodies, stretching their minds with movement and pushing the edges of the space.” (Jowers 2011)

Using the communication model to trace the relationship structure in both works it is evident that the injunctive function is significantly different. Hansen wants her audience to experience a kinesthetic response whereas Martin wants the audience to think about the ingrained Irish consciousness in relation to this dark subject matter. Hansen is motivated by her interest in aesthetic / the work. This can be seen within *youandyouandyou* where Hansen has elegantly crafted the intricate and “nuanced movements”. (Jowett 2012) Hansen is interested in crafting movement on the micro level and she does this with clarity and an innate understanding of the chorological order of movement. The result of this choreographic process is a highly visceral aesthetic work on the macro level. The performative is highly important. The performers’ full embodiment of the movement has created an aesthetic work whereby the phenomenal is visible. We feel a strong connection with the three dancers as we see and hear them keep their own rhythmic structures and track them together. (Jowitt, 2012) notes that:

“it always comes as a surprise when two of them, or all three, slip into momentary unison. Your eyes get used to darting. There are bursts of speed and pockets of quiet”.

Relatedness is evident in terms of the motion factors within the piece, specifically focusing on time, space and flow. Seeing all three dancers moving together sharing this time relationship carry’s meaning and audience feedback has been consistently similar after the many performances in both Ireland and New York.

Many spectators suggested that they understood the work to be about friendship. As quoted, Hansen is interested in individuals working as part of a collective “we” and this really comes across in *youandyouandyou*. There is no particular theme or heavy political content to this work however one cannot help but experience this element of the community which (Jowitt 2012) describes as “beautiful, sensual, thoughtful work- neither dreamy or indulgent and full of surprises.” Here we have the subtle yet present referential function within *youandyouandyou*.

Contrast this with *Listowel Syndrome* where the performers’ capacity for interpretation and personalisation of the material would simply be out of place. It could thus be argued that the performative is not as important in this piece as in *youandyouandyou*. I have seen *Listowel Syndrome* performed by two different casts and it must be noted that both were of an equal level of proficiency. Within this work the referential element is highly significant and can be traced throughout the duration of this dance work. For example the costume alone is loaded with semiotic content. The solo female performer (i.e. the rape victim) wears a layering of tops all various shades of red while the other performers are all dressed in dark tones. The female performers wear dresses above the knee with bare legs on show as they whirl through the space. The floor is covered in soil like material to give a sense of place. The music and sound exactly reflect what is happening in the movement. The nexial connections within *Listowel Syndrome* are very much integrated ie. the sound / space and the movement / sound nexus all add to the dramatic effect of the work.

In one review (Walsh, 2010) cites that:

“While the production is laudible as an artistic intervention, it’s a pity that it spreads its focus over the stages of predation, which could apply to any context, and not on the issue of sympathising with the convict, which is a more specific and complex issue. This is the syndrome that the production fails to diagnose.”

It could, however, be argued that it is not Martin's intention to sympathise with the victim within this work. She wants audiences think about this event that took place and decide themselves what their own stance on it is. The structure of this work is there to enable audiences to do this. It follows the stages of predation instead of a narrative. Martin uses movement, text, song, live movement, costume, lighting and props in an integrated fashion within *Listowel Syndrome*. Valerie Preston Dunlop (2002) suggests that it is this interlock of the strands that make up the form of the work. Despite the theatrical success of much of these nexial connections it can be argued that *Listowel Syndrome* may be so integrated that on the macro level it loses much of its dramatic impact on audiences. In contrast Hansen enjoys the ephemerality of movement, "Structure and form are used to craft a space for meanings to be built, to accrue, and to dissolve." (Hansen, 2011) *youandyouandyou* adopts a co-existing sound / movement nexial connection, sometimes coming together and at times juxtaposing. On the other hand the costumes of the dancers designed by Deborah Black match eloquently the walls of the gymnasium. This simple detail highlights a sense of deliberateness and quiet confidence in the work on a micro and macro level and I feel satisfied watching it that this dance work has been carefully considered.

The sound score created by Nathan Koci allows the audience the space to really see the movement while the dancers have space to embody and bring our full attention to certain aspects of it. While the music compliments the movement it also at times drops in unexpected discordance. There is a real sense of play between the dancers and the musician, the movement and the sound. This space created allows the audience to watch, experience and find/create their own meaning of the dance work. In this sense *youandyouandyou* emanates a feeling of life, flow, moving body's "all part of this day's work". (Jowitt, 2012)

Both the intrapersonal and interpersonal structural relationships are visible within *youandyouandyou*. We see the dancers primarily focusing on, surrounding without touch, near to, going towards and away from. They touch (each other) only occasionally but (Jowitt, 2012) states that "their intimacy is palpable".

These intrinsic relationships both within the dancer's body and in relation to the other dancers gives a real sense of humanity to the overall work. Within *Listowel Syndrome* the interpersonal structural relationships are evident throughout the work and are saturated in meaning. We can read the rape and the alienation by the community of the solo performer by tracing the interpersonal relationships. In contrast regardless of the fact that *youandyouandyou* is not heavily themed or steeped in meaning, the audience can still read meaning. At one point within the work the dancer's hands mimic a beating heart. The semiotic content of this can be read in many ways but it is important to note that the movement is not so abstracted that one cannot create meaning from it. *Listowel Syndrome* deals a great deal with space and Martin crafts the group spacial patterns skillfully to create meaning. We read the alienation of the solo performer / rape victim. Martin uses the space to explore the collective unconsciousness deeply rooted in a community. According to (Hall, 1959):

“Spatial changes give a tone to a communication, accent it, and at times even override the spoken word. The flow and shift of distance between people as they interact with each other is part and parcel of the communication process.”

There is a clear sense of cohesion and clarity to the movement within *youandyouandyou* that is satisfying to the the eye and a sense of ease and flow can be felt watching it. (Jowitt, 2012) cites that this is “all part of this day's work”. This speaks volumes to me about the relatedness present within this dance work. There is no heavy theme or political content, instead Hansen saw the gymnasium back in 2008 and “simply saw dance movements within the space”. (Jowers 2011). She then began work developing movement phrases for the space. Hansen is primarily interested in what possibilities are present within the subtleties of movement.

Upon further investigation of these contrasting dance works, both are in fact dealing with the idea of community. Hansen refers to the collective “we” in *youandyouandyou* and Martin explores the collective unconsciousness in *Listowel Syndrome*. Hansen creates a phenomenal / aesthetic work by elegantly crafting her movements on the micro level whereas Martin works with the nexus

of the strands crafting a dance work that deals with a sense of place and power on the macro level.

Hansen has a very strong interest in movement and her approach to creating a work begins in the studio and creating movement phrases with the dancers. In comparison Martin begins by researching a theme in great detail and everything then grows out of this process.

In conclusion it is evident upon watching dance works *youandyouandyou* and *Listowel Syndrome* that the choreographers of have contrasting choreographic processes. Looking at the communication model it is clear that the injunctive function of choreographers Hansen and Martin are dissimilar. However both achieved what they set out to achieve. The nexus of the strands was significant within these dance works as again their treatment was notably different.

The structural relationships within both works vary thus affecting the semiotic content / meanings created by audiences. It is interesting to read what Laban writes about community,

“A genuine belief in the power of unity, [and] in an unspoilt core within the human being” (Laban 1975)

It could be argued that both *youandyouandyou* and *Listowel Syndrome* are concerned with this concept and that the use of contrasting relationship structure's and their roles within the works is ultimately where the most significant difference of all lies.

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