

TEACHING DANCE SPACIOUSLY

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Teaching dance spaciously is a somewhat peculiar phrase that includes a riddle with words. In this article, my aim is to discuss how the concept of space, as a theoretical tool in connection with dance pedagogy, might contribute to the dance teacher's awareness about the fact that she operates in, and also creates, many different spaces as she teaches. This awareness might, I propose, support the teacher in broadening the space for dance in order to embrace the differences between dancers. The dance class can thus become more spacious, giving this phrase a second meaning: generous¹². With the phrase *teaching dance spaciously*, I therefore mean that considering the teaching of dance as something that happens in many spaces, holds the possibility for teaching that generously allows for difference and diversity in the dance class.

Teaching dance spaciously also supports an understanding that multiple ways of meaning-making can take place within these different spaces. In this article, my main focus will be on how I find the concept of space interesting as a theoretical device in connection with dance pedagogy. I will only briefly focus on meaning-making. Still, it should be emphasised that one main advantage of regarding the dance class as spacious, is that it allows for an understanding that meaning-making can happen in different ways, within different spaces, for different students. To put it briefly, in connection with dance, I view meaning-making as a bodily, mobile and transformative process.¹³ Meaning-making is not just an inner, personal process. Neither is meaning-making only a thought process. Instead, the making of meaning is a lived act, it is a bodily act, it can only be partly narrated, it happens between people, it is multimodal and it energizes and changes people.

My interest in the concept of space as a possible theoretical device that aids an understanding of what goes on in a dance class was born as I worked on analyzing the video material collected for my PhD study (Østern, 2009) in dance. The practical investigation dealt with formulating an approach to dance pedagogy with a mixed-ability group of dancers based on an understanding of the meaning-making processes between the different dancers in the project. The study was constructed with a comprehensive hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, most importantly informed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002).

An important part of the research material consists of video recordings of dance classes that involve

Teacher and dancer investigating dance in the Dance Laboratory



12 In Norwegian the word for spacious, which is romslig, holds this double meaning. Romslig can mean both a lot of space or generous, according to the context.

13 For a thorough description of how I define meaning-making in this context I refer to Østern, 2009 pp. 57-60 where I dialogue with researchers like Inkeri Sava (1994), Jack Mezirow (1991) and Jerome Bruner (1986) and dance artists like Adam Benjamin (2002) and Nancy Stark-Smith (1987).



The teacher moves through her teaching

my own teaching practice in the Dance Laboratory¹⁴, which is a dance improvisation project with differently bodied dancers. As I was trying to make sense of my observations of the video material in dialogue with my lived teaching experience, the concept of space as discussed primarily by Valerie Briginshaw (2001), Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi (2008) and Leena Rouhiainen (2007) gave me insightful perspectives from which to look at the project. This is something I will continue discussing here. First, however, I will describe how the Dance Laboratory and my PhD project came to be, as this is the context in which I have learnt to teach dance spaciously.

Developing a space for the Dance Laboratory

The Dance Laboratory is an artistic and art educational project in which choreography is created through improvisation. To outline the pedagogical frames for the project, the basic themes of scholars like John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Mikhail Bakhtin, Paulo Freire and Jack Mezirow are included in the pedagogical context of the Dance Laboratory. Dewey (1934/1980) focuses on the importance of learning through experience. Vygotsky (1978) introduces a socio-cultural perspective on learning and considers learning to be both a social and an individual process. Based on Vygotsky, Bruner (1986) develops the notion of scaffolding, which I have found inspiring. Bakhtin (1991) emphasises authentic *dialogue* as a means of developing knowledge. His notion of laughter and carnival – an upside-down turning of perspectives – relates to the idea of disorientation commonly used in improvisation. In turn, Freire's (1970) pedagogy of hope gives a strong emancipatory perspective to interaction. Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory explains how adults change through new meaning perspectives (cf. Østern, 2009 p. 49). In the Dance Laboratory, an authentic dialogue and interaction

¹⁴ See www.danselaboratoriet.no for up-to-date information (accessed 10th of January 2010)

between the dancers and the teacher is emphasised. The dancers are appreciated as co-creative, especially when it comes to their own learning process and the choreographic material created in the group. Also, pedagogical effort is made to create an authentic dialogue between the dancers, despite their differences. The dancers are challenged to work together on equal terms.

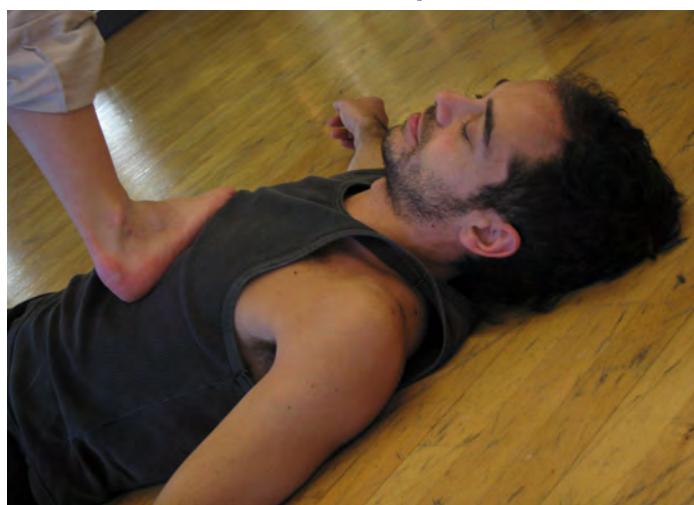
Within dance research, my study of the Dance Laboratory leans mainly on critical, postmodern and also cultural research on dance pedagogy, receiving inspiration especially from the work of Eeva Anttila (2003; 2007), Soili Hämäläinen (1999; 2007), Leena Rouhiainen (2007; 2008), Sherry Shapiro (1998), Sherry Shapiro and Svi Shapiro (2002), Jill Green (1999; 2002-2003; 2007) and Isabel Marques (1998).

In 2010 the Dance Laboratory has evolved into a stable group of around 15 dancers led by a dance teacher/ choreographer. The dancers are professionals and amateurs, with and without disabilities. The group is financed by *Kulturenbeten*¹⁵, the cultural services of the municipality of Trondheim in Norway. The Dance Laboratory's work is based on improvisation that moves towards choreography, and it performs its dance pieces each year in various settings, mostly in or around Trondheim, but also occasionally in other cities and countries.

This has not always been the situation. Instead, the existence of the Dance Laboratory is the result of a long journey and fight – starting with an artistic curiosity in the meeting between differently bodied dancers and a political will to broaden the dance field into a more inclusive one. This curiosity of mine was born while as a dance student in London in the middle of the 1990s, I became familiar with the work of *CandoCo Dance Company*¹⁶. Today I see this meeting with the company's work as a turning point that my work as a dance artist and teacher pivots around.

In 1999 I moved to Trondheim where I established myself as a freelance dance artist and teacher. Together with another dancer I founded *Inclusive Dance Company*¹⁷, a small project-based independent dance company, which since then has produced and toured its own performances. In the beginning the company also offered dance classes and in 2001 we started an improvisation forum called the *Mixed Ability Group*. This forum, led by me, welcomed dancers with and without disabilities to explore what dance could be in the meeting between them. The group, consisting of six female participants with and without disabilities, met once a week during one autumn term. My curiosity grew even further and I turned to the *Theatre Academy* in Helsinki to formulate an idea for a PhD study. As a result, I started the group again in 2003, under the new name of

The dancers put their bodies in the teacher's hands.



15 See www.trondheim.kommune.no for up-to-date information (accessed 15th of January 2010)

16 See www.candoco.co.uk for up-to-date information (accessed 13th of January 2010)

17 See www.dance-company.no for up-to-date information (accessed 10th of January 2010)

the Dance Laboratory, designed to both function as an artistic group supported by *Kulturenheten* and as the site of fieldwork for my PhD study. As a researcher, my main interest was the meaning-making processes between the dancers in the group. Very shortly, I was interested in what the dancers experienced in the dance classes and the ways in which dance created meaning for them. Based on an interpretation of their meaning-making processes I entered a discussion about what dance can be and mean for different people and how this knowledge feeds into the field of dance art and dance pedagogy (Østern, 2009).

The establishment of the group in 2003 was announced in newspapers and flyers and it was open for anyone to sign up – a serious interest in dance being the only criterion for joining. The problem was, however, that very few people seemed interested. When the project began it only had two participants. Initially it was difficult to attract any interest in the work of the Dance Laboratory from professionals and amateurs as well as people with and without disabilities. This reveals something of the landscape in which I tried to operate and create this project. Frankly, there was no obvious space for a project like this. The idea of inviting disabled and non-disabled dancers to improvise together seemed strange to most people. It was difficult to recruit both disabled and non-disabled dancers. I tried to promote the project by informing a lot of people, running around in cafes and other places to tell them about it.

For the people with disabilities or the people new to dance whom I tried to invite into the project, the strange aspect seemed to be *this kind* of dance. Improvisation? Contact improvisation? What is that? The whole idea of dance as expression and communication seemed new. Since the people I talked to had no embodied experience of dancing and moving other than maybe as a means of training and improving the body, it was difficult to explain what improvising through touch is. I had little luck: it was difficult to kindle an interest in the project among people with disabilities and beginners (cf. Østern, 2009, 34).

But then, it seemed even more difficult to recruit non-disabled, more advanced dancers to the Dance Laboratory. The great barrier seemed to be the fact that the project was for both non-disabled and disabled dancers. When I presented the project to non-disabled, more advanced dancers it appeared that the very moment I mentioned the word “disabled dancer”, they lost interest in the project. Having uttered that word, it seemed almost impossible to explain anything more about the group. Whatever I said, the people I talked to seemed to assume that what I was introducing them to was some kind of special needs activity for the disabled, being of no interest to them personally. The idea that this was intended as an artistic project in which disabled and non-disabled dancers could meet to create dance together, seemed out of reach (cf. Østern, 2009, 35).

Hoping that this situation would change, I initiated the Dance Laboratory in September 2003 with just the two participants. I started to collect the research material for my PhD study that autumn. However, in the spring of 2004 there was a sudden increase in interest in the project and six new dancers joined the Dance Laboratory. It was during this term, from these eight different dancers, that I collected most of my research material consisting of interviews, video material and my own field notes (cf. Østern, 2009, 35).

From this uncertain start, a space for the Dance Laboratory in the dance field in Trondheim has slowly developed. A core group of dancers continues from year to year and the Dance Laboratory now takes part in many artistic and educational settings alongside other groups and companies. This background story explains how the establishment of the Dance Laboratory and the research project connected to it has included elements of artistic, educational, dance developmental and research work. I was not explicitly aware of it then, but I had a political compassion to support mixed-ability dance practice. Today I describe myself as what Jill Green and Sue Stinson (1999, 104) refer to as an emancipatory teacher with a social advocacy project. My project includes a wish to extend the dance field to embrace a broader spectrum of dancers. Since the autumn term of 2009 the Dance Laboratory has had a new dance teacher/choreographer. My role in the group has shifted. I now attend it as a dancer and researcher.¹⁸

18 I do this as part of my new job as an Associate Professor at the Program for Teacher Education at NTNU university in Trondheim, Norway.
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Developing space as a theoretical device for looking at the Dance Laboratory

The need to develop a theoretical device for understanding and conceptualising the different meaning-making processes in the Dance Laboratory arose as I was circling into and out of the different parts of the empirical material collected for my PhD study. An important part of the research material consisted of my own lived teaching experience. I was there with the dancers. All the meetings with the different dancers and all the felt-sense experience I had access to while teaching were gathered in my body. Therefore, based on a comprehensive phenomenological approach to my material, as a researcher I wanted to actively use my own body to understand and generate knowledge.

Introspection is a suitable description of the method I used when making sense of my experiences. I am especially inspired by Anttila's (2007) work on the affiliation between the conscious body and the reflective mind. She leans on Pierre Vermersch (1999) in applying the notion of introspection in connection with bodily practice. Anttila (2007, 82), citing Vermersch (1999, 20), sees that introspection is closely related to phenomenological reduction, a method based on extending our natural attitude into a phenomenological attitude towards our experiences. By focusing on my experiences and related inner reflections with a heightened phenomenological awareness, I created narratives about my teaching experiences in the Dance Laboratory. They became part of my research material and report. One example of a written narrative based on introspection is about my first meeting with Vera, one of the dancers in the group.

As the teacher-choreographer in the Dance Laboratory, the first dancer with a disability who I found myself meeting was Vera. Face to face – or, more precisely, *body to body* – with her, much of what I had learnt to build my teaching on teetered. She could not walk. So then we could not work with steps. She could not use her legs. So then we could not create patterns standing up. Transition on wheels is different than on foot. All of this influences the use of time and rhythm. She could not move in a controlled, precise manner or in unison with other dancers. Suddenly, the things I knew about space, time and body seemed disintegrated and splintered, a discovery which also Adam Benjamin (2002, 25) writes about. So I tripped, not just a little, I really tripped over splintered parts of my dance knowledge. And I fell. Still, while falling, I was fascinated by the woman in the wheelchair in front of me. She had presence and looked me straight in my eye. I approached her, to lessen the distance between us. As I reached out to touch her, she touched me right back. When I released my weight into her, she pressed back firmly. The wheelchair swayed around its own axis and I had to follow or I would fall (again). The contact point between us rolled from arms and shoulders to the head. Her skull was hard and offered support as I leaned towards her, off-balance, and ran around the wheelchair to avoid falling. The sound of our hair crunching mixed with the squeaking sound of the wheel when Vera put the brakes on. The force of momentum as the chair stopped sent my running body further, right out of contact with her, and I finally fell, ending up on my bottom (cf. Østern 2009, 45).

In that meeting, I realised that the elements of space, time and dynamics were still there, just in a different to what I was used to. Vera had focus, strength, presence, and she dealt with the use of time, space, weight and dynamics in our duet. This made me think and question. Do you have to take so many steps in order to call it dance? Do you have to move symmetrically and be precise and fast? Not that I have ever thought that dance must be fast, precise and have focus on taking steps, but still the meeting with Vera really challenged me to look for and create new possibilities in dance. It seemed completely meaningless to try to fit her into forms in dance that I already knew. Instead, I needed to be willing to engage in a discovery of what dance could be in her body and in her meeting with me (cf. Østern 2009, 45).

The understanding of the dance improvisation class as a spacious phenomenon developed specifically as a result of the dialogue between my own lived teaching experience, described in narratives like the one just

referred to, and the video observations I made.¹⁹ As I was watching the video material (which I was part of myself as teacher) over and over again and parallel to the observations I recalled of my bodily sensations and experiences from the teaching situations, I slowly, in a somewhat intuitive way, started to understand the class as a place where many spaces co-existed and overlapped at the same time. My lived experience in dialogue with the observations of the video material told me that as dancers and dance teacher in an improvisation class we both created and moved in and out of these different spaces.

The different spaces that I finally defined in the Dance Laboratory - as a result of a circling movement between theory and the empirical material - were a lived, fictive, aesthetic, narrative, cultural and political space. From my perspective as a dance teacher and researcher in the Dance Laboratory, dance operates in, shapes and holds the possibilities to transform these spaces. For the definition of these spaces, I dialogued with the writings of a range of different scholars.²⁰

In the meeting with Vera that I described above, I was touching on these different spaces. I lived the situation deeply, in a most bodily way. I was put in contact with an aesthetic dimension: how the elements of dance were present in our improvisation. I realised that we moved into a terrain of still fictive, unseen possibilities about what dance could be like. I was struggling with my own dance heritage, which I recognized as a cultural space. In our meeting we were clearly creating and moving in a political space where I suddenly heard her voice and recognized her strengths in a new way. These experiences made me create new stories about and use new words for dance, which pushed me into a space for language and narration.

Although my understanding of space as a possible theoretical tool for looking at dance classes developed in a somewhat intuitive manner, my reading of especially Briginshaw (2001), Gallagher and Zahavi (2008) and Rouhiainen (2007) was important in order to move from an intuitive to a more theoretical understanding. In addition, both Laban's (1948/1988) and Merleau-Ponty's (1962/2002) spatial conceptions form a basis for my understanding of space in connection with the body and dance.

I wanted to use the concept *space* instead of, for example, dimension or aspect. This was a conscious choice, which was based on my assumption that space, dance and body cannot be separated. Rouhiainen (2007, 112) refers to Merleau-Ponty (1962/1995) when writing that our existence primordially is spatial because it is already oriented and mobile. Space also has a very central place in dance as an art form and the way space is used has a lot to say about the evolving aesthetics of dance. Rouhiainen (2007, 112) points out that space is never simply neutral space. Similarly the space where teaching takes place is never neutral space as revealed by the interpretation of my collected research material. By using the concept of space to look at the dance class I try to open up to re-negotiations about space for differently bodied dancers. Space can always be de-constructed, redefined and filled with new meaning.

Leaning on Merleau-Ponty (1962), Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, p. 142) discuss the body as a *spatiality of situation*, a frame of reference that applies to the lived body as perceiver and actor. This is a view on the connection between the body and space that I share. I understand lived space as a situation and any situation can be understood from many perspectives (on space). Merleau-Ponty (1962/1995, 286-287; 1962/2002, 335; cf. Rouhiainen 2007) claims that there are as many spaces as there are distinct spatial experiences and that the description of human space could be developed indefinitely. And indeed, when I observe and take part in the Dance Laboratory, roll around over and under the dancers, run across the floor, hear the studio filled with laughter, blush because I am moved, sense the tension between dancers struggling to find out, fly on top of tilted wheelchairs, listen to quite different dancers' reflections and sweat as I try to create choreographic material, these are complex situations; complex lived space. In this lived space I understand the dancing bodies in the studio,

19 For a lengthy description of how I used video as research material in the study, I refer to Østern (2009, 64-74).

20 For a reading of this I refer to Østern (2009, 94-133).

including my own, as both perceivers and actors. As perceiving and acting bodies we feed into and create a space that is by no means neutral, objective or one-dimensional. This space becomes meaningful through the actions of the subjects in space and their interplay with each other and cultural conventions. In each and every aspect this is a space with huge aesthetic and pedagogical implications and possibilities. It is a space for learning – at its best, a generous and spacious one.

Briginshaw (2001) has analysed space in connection with dance as an observer and from a position informed by post-structuralism. With a focus on space she has watched, analysed and de-constructed dance performances from the outside. I, on the other hand, have been an insider in my own research material, using a comprehensive hermeneutic-phenomenological approach. Still, I found Briginshaw's analysis of space and dance most interesting because I recognised her understanding of space in my own, lived experience. Following the thoughts of sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1991, 162) Briginshaw (2001, 4) argues that it is by "means of the body that space is perceived, lived and produced" in the first place. In a similar way I sense how the space for dance in dance class is produced, lived and perceived in a bodily way. The teacher's bodily attitude and pedagogical moves set the frames for the character of this space, but all present dancers feed into how the space extends or shrinks; how the space rejects or embraces different bodies and ideas. And the character of this space – what meaning-making possibilities this space opens up for and creates - is constantly changing and developing in dance class; during a single class and as a group develops over time. In the Dance Laboratory there seems to be a constantly evolving theory of meaning, which I understand to be connected to the spaciousness (also in the sense of the meaning generosity) of the space created, but this theory is ever-changing. Put very simply: the more spacious a dance class is, the more possibilities there are to make meaning in different ways. Meaning can be made within these different spaces that are emphasised (or not) in a specific dance class. In trying to catch a description of this ever-changing theory of meaning I have connected social-constructionistic and phenomenological understandings of how space is perceived and produced, and in this I have found Briginshaw's work informative.

The motive to clarify my teacher-researcher perspective on space in dance is related to the fact that I acknowledge the body as a spatiality of situation. Both when I am in the situation of teaching, as an insider in the group, and when I take an outsider position (which can never be a complete outsider position, though) and observe the video recordings of the dance classes I teach, I recognize how we as movers produce, feed into and exist in the space of dance that is created in that very class. A range of different aspects clings to and affects this space, and this becomes extra visible in the Dance Laboratory because it is a diverse group.

As already written, I have defined a lived, fictive, aesthetic, narrative, cultural and political space in connection with the Dance Laboratory. The mentioned spaces are those that I distinguished and constructed as spaces in which a practical theory of meaning evolved in connection with the Dance Laboratory, through an interpretation of the research material in dialogue with relevant theory. This has increased my awareness as a teacher and choreographer of what is going on in the dance class and how in them meaning is made in different ways, touching on and producing different spaces. The definition of these spaces allowed me to discuss different situations in the dance class, for example, how an aesthetic space seemed to open up when we were drawn into an investigation of how the elements of dance can be used in our specific bodies. Sometimes we were thrown into a vibrating political space, where dominance and unequal possibilities could be felt or observed. Space to create in and contribute to is not given to a non-professional dancer with cerebral palsy as obviously or automatically as it is to a professional, non-disabled dancer. Instead, a conscious effort had to be made in order to create this more spacious space. And this is, I claim, both an artistic and pedagogical challenge. Space needs to be created for differently bodied dancers both in the dance class and on stage. I agree with Birginshaw (2001, 6) that through a focus on space in dance, dance can challenge, trouble and question fixed perceptions of subjectivity and fixed cultural narratives about different bodies.

Figure 1 visualizes the different perspectives on space in dance, constructed through an investigation of the empirical research material in the Dance Laboratory in dialogue with relevant theory.²¹

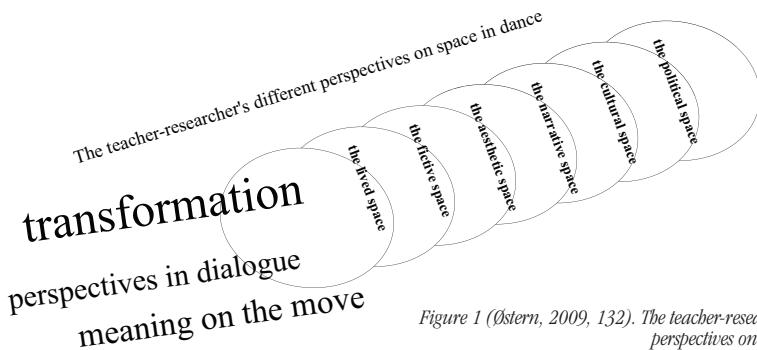


Figure 1 (Østern, 2009, 132). *The teacher-researcher's different perspectives on space in dance.*

The point of distinguishing different perspectives on space in dance is not to separate them; that is neither possible nor advisable. All perspectives on space in dance cling together and are in constant dialogue. The point of distinguishing them is rather to create awareness and to see different meaning-making possibilities, operating within different spaces, in dance and to allow this knowledge to feed into a discussion about dance pedagogy (cf. Østern, 2009, 132).

In the meeting between differently bodied dancers there are great opportunities for discovering new meanings inherent to the different spaces that constitute dance. I argue that to negotiate space in a way that is appreciative of the difference between dancers is important for every *body*. I find it equally important for the dance field itself. The field of dance needs to open up and reach out to touch and be touched by a variety of different people and ideas. Unexplored space exists in the meeting between different dancers, or more precisely, in the space which *we create* through who we are and what we bring with us. Dancers and teachers have the opportunity to negotiate new space, and not least, they get the chance to ask themselves some questions: What are my perspectives? What are my prejudices? And further, as also Benjamin (2002, 40) asks himself: What are the consequences of my prejudices and attitudes? Who do I embrace and who do I exclude in dance? Who has admittance to the studio and to the stage – which is a public space with public debates attached to it – as a place to share her experiences, dreams and visions about new and different ways of living? The different perspectives of space in dance are keys to unlock or lock the other perspectives, as they work together and are in constant dialogue (cf. Østern, 2009, 132).

Dance teachers as negotiators for space.

The concept of 'space' is vividly discussed within many different disciplines like dance, sport, architecture and philosophy. The possibility of using the concept of 'space' as a theoretical tool in connection with dance pedagogy, as elaborated in my interpretation of the research material collected in the Dance Laboratory, is a mere beginning of an investigation which I wish to continue and which hopefully other dance researchers will find interesting.

By focusing on how a dance class is spacious and how the space for dance can be understood as consisting of many different spaces, I suggest that dance teachers can play an important role in negotiating space for differently bodied dancers. I propose that the questions of who can take part in dance and develop as a dancer, who is allowed

21 For a reading of this investigation, I refer to Østern (2009, 94-133).

to influence the form and conditions of dance aesthetics and who is allowed access to the stage as a public place say something about how human experience is connected to space – from many different perspectives. This needs to be acknowledged already in the dance class. I find this important of two reasons. One reason is that in this way, dance can become accessible to and meaningful for a range of different people. The other reason is that this will make dance as an art form more important for the world as the world is today – diverse. If there is no space in the dance class for people who would love to dance, but who in one way or other are defined as different, they will never make it to that point where they could enjoy dance as amateurs or contribute as professional dancers, choreographers and dance teachers. And this is a shame both for these possible dancers personally, because they are excluded from moving, dancing experiences, and for society at large because it limits the range of visions, lived life and dreams constructed in dance that reaches out to the public. In this, there is a lost dance, a lost narrative about dance, a lost discussion about dance and not least – a lost space for diversity in dance.

I suggest that the different perspectives on space in dance are keys for unlocking or locking other perspectives, as they work together and are in constant dialogue. When awareness about the political space in dance is created, this will affect and change the aesthetic space in dance. As a consequence the dance form itself will start to change. With awareness about the lived space in dance, the dance teacher can more fully understand and use her bodily competence. Rouhianen (2008, 241) argues that there is a connection between bodily awareness of the self and embodied ethical relationships with others. She claims that working with the body through a socially informed somatic approach improves students' self-understanding and capacity to relate to others in an ethical and integral manner. I wish to extend this thought to dance teachers as well. The dance teacher can keep the channels open between her conscious body and reflective mind (see Anttila 2007, 79-99), and benefit from and use the information she gains while being attuned to how she lives the teaching situation in dialogue with an awareness about the different spaces she operates in and produces as she teaches. In this, she can in a more ethical manner handle her knowledge about and power over her students, as they lay their dancing bodies in her hands.

I wish to emphasise that in order to create an understanding of how I moved in and out of different spaces as a dance teacher in the Dance Laboratory, it was necessary to utilize a method triangulation. As long as I was only teaching and collecting field notes, I was caught in my personal experience. It was a very lively and intense experience to teach in the Dance Laboratory. I often found it most difficult, I did not know what to do, I struggled with the development of methodology and I felt insecure. Sometimes it was great and I experienced a flow of joy! Based only on these experiences, in reflecting about my practice I would have emphasised how the teaching situation was a lived space for me. I embodied the teaching experiences as quite concrete bodily sensations: I was sweating, my pulse went up and down and I experienced how my skin closed or opened up to impulses. It was not until I heard the voices of the dancers through the interviews and observed the video-recordings that I started to distinguish and construct other spaces in the dance improvisation class. As I have emphasised in this article, the circling dialogue between my lived experience while teaching and the video observations were particularly important as my understanding of space as a possible theoretical tool to look at dance class started to emerge.

In the dance class the dance teacher constitutes the major resource. Everything that happens there depends on the teacher. As Marion Gough (1993, 27-28) argues, this requires the dance teacher to display an ongoing curiosity regarding the process of teaching and learning and openness to find ways of improving the quality of the teaching. In my work I have found it valuable to use space as a theoretical lens while exploring what is going on in the dance class, how meaning is made in class and in order to understand the different spaces that the dance teacher both operates in and feeds into. By thinking about the dance class as being spacious, I suggest that dance teachers can strengthen a hermeneutic type of immediate situational competence. In this, they can teach dance spaciously and negotiate about space in dance for a range of different dancers.

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Tone Pernille Østern (Doctor of Arts in dance) is a dance artist, teacher and researcher based in Trondheim, Norway. She is the artistic leader of the Inclusive Dance Company (www.dance-company.no) which is a small independent contemporary dance company. She has developed the Dance Laboratory (www.danselaboratoriet.no) which is a performing group with differently bodied dancers. The Dance Laboratory also formed the basis of her field work in relation to her PhD in Dance at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki (Østern, 2009). Østern is also the leader of the MultiPlié Dance and Diversity Festival, a biennial in Trondheim since 2004. The festival tries to stretch and discuss ideas about what dancing is and who can be a dancer. From 2009 she also takes up the position as assistant professor at the Program for Teacher Education at the NTNU University where she teaches and carries out research.

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