



Collecting Thoughts on Collectivity

RISK, Copenhagen #1

By: Ida-Elisabeth Larsen

Months back, I think it was during the winter of 2013, Fanclub approached me upon receiving confirmation that a Nordic tour of their latest production DEATH would be possible to schedule. They explained to me that they were concerned about the current culture of touring, which to them felt somewhat depleted – presenting work, but not having time to establish an understanding of the different contexts and cities visited under such circumstances. Fanclub was interested in doing something different – something that would in one way or another engage, or at least to some extent make conversation, with the local communities of makers and audiences. So, with this in mind we worked together to develop a little side project called Collecting Thoughts on Collectivity.

We imagined it manifesting itself through three different initiatives; a series of talks, a series of interviews and a subsequent article. Firstly, the series of moderated talks – between Fanclub, myself, and whomever else would be interested in participating – would discuss openly the way Fanclub functioned as a collective and how they organised themselves in periods of producing stage works. Secondly, the series of interviews with local artist collectives discussing their works, methods, etc. And lastly, the formulation of a small article, which would further expand upon some of the ideas about collectivity discovered along the way.

The following is a sum-up from a conversation I had with my own collective RISK in April 2014; a few weeks before I went on tour with Fanclub. We were in New York on a residency together at the time. I thought this would be an interesting way to start off this line of interviews; by checking-in with my own collective. These are some of our reflections on Collective Pace. It is about how things tend to take longer when you're working in a landscape of many voices and why it is interesting to be sensitive towards this slowed down pace. RISK-members are choreographers Marie-Louise Stentebjerg, Gry Raaby, Marie Topp and myself, Ida-Elisabeth Larsen

What is RISK

RISK is a collective of four female choreographers. We first met up back in 2008. In the beginning we were more people, but eventually we ended up being just the four of us. Back then we were interested in hosting a platform, where artists from different disciplines could meet up and present their work to each other. This idea was a direct response to what we felt Copenhagen lacked for people like ourselves. It was an interest in creating a kind of space of availability through sharing work and establishing a cross disciplinary network of young artists in the city. RISK started out as a group of people working towards realising this single event, it was only later we thought of continuing the collaboration as a collective.

Since then we've hosted a series of events that investigate space of availability. This we've done through a diverse pamphlet of events such as platforms, sharing-events, writing projects, mapping projects, group performances and workshops. However, this past year we've developed a pressing interest in creating a more formal choreographic work together. It's caused us to begin a reformulation of what RISK is in the realm of this more recognisable and formal format. How do the values of the collective transgress in a process, which does not include other people than ourselves?

How does RISK affect us individually

RISK has always investigated availability in one sense or the other through a close dialogue with a local community of artists. The borders of RISK can therefore sometimes be hard to pinpoint. At the same time we can say that the core of RISK is something that concerns only the four of us. Over the years we've come to a thorough understanding of what it means to be a part of this collective. We feel that the force of being many voices strengthens the level of our conversations and enables us to formulate projects that resonate beyond ourselves. Furthermore, we see now, after having worked together for almost six years, how much the 'collective spirit' spills and effects our individual practises too. There is a value to having three other choreographers following closely, engaging and supporting the development of our respective works without necessarily being in it. At times of no, or very little formal support, that kind of attention has quite an impact.

What interests us as a collective

Inside RISK we are first and foremost interested in the collective practise itself. It's about finding ways together, where we can see more clearly *what* it is that we do and *how* we do it. The collective conversation has become the necessary, critical eye on our individual habits and ideologies and how we express these. An awareness within the collective practise, which constantly asks us to devise and think in more sustainable terms, to try and maintain a broader collective potential in mind while working. In comparison to other places we are really lucky that there is still quite a healthy stately support system for the arts in Denmark. Nevertheless, we should consider carefully how the available means are helping the scene as a whole and not only individual premieres. We'd like to think of RISK as an entity that can offer spaces or opportunities for more people to be able to visit their practises without full funding of their own. This is perhaps where one could talk about an aspect of resistance within our work. To insist on thinking about a community (rather than individual legacies). What we have available to us for establishing a more widespread way of collaborating, which is not solely functioning on state support, is a critical thinking, the opportunity to share and a desire to take responsibility for each other. We do this by offering space to others when it's made available to us, sharing methods and ideas and supporting each others work.

Confronting ideas of 'time' and 'efficiency'

One of the fundamental 'charms' of working collectively is that a lot of things seem to take longer than when you're working on your own. As annoying as it might be in certain moments, as much it is also a precious aspect to care for and preserve. We try to insist on letting things take the time

they need in an attempt to stay true to the collective nature, even if it feels close to impossible some times.

Actually, especially 'time' has been a big confrontation in this new process of creating a more formal choreographic piece together. The issue of time (eg. How to comprehend time collectively, how to combine individual rhythms of working according to a collective schedule, how to deal with aesthetic and conceptual decision making in moments of time pressure) is something we are still in the process of learning. We all know our individual tendencies even if they are somewhat un-elaborated, but in our collective process there are all of a sudden three other people to consider. People who demand an understanding of your ways. When it comes to that point of having to make decisions, we need very different things in order to reach a sense of conclusion and that takes time.

Collective pace

Speaking of collective time, it offers another extreme pace also. Besides the slowed down time, where it's almost as if nothing happens for a very long time it can, in the next moment, move a light year or mobilise big groups of people without too much effort. When we underline the slowed down pace it is because it seems to be a type of time, which is not very wanted these days and therefor may cause occasional conflicts. To work towards preserving it and letting it be an evident part of our work, brings an element of resistance (or insistence) into our practise.

A process in any regard should take all the the time it needs, but in terms of the 'slow pace' we can think of it in even more specific terms: It's about the process of materialising ideas and not thinking of this materialisation as finalising a product. If so, we are again stuck in the current problem of dealing with time and processes as something that has deadlines and expectations to some sort of conclusive finalities. Instead we feel it should be about sharing ideas and materialising them according to where we are in the process when that time arrives. Approaching our process as something that starts with an already conceived 'end' is to us a type of stagnation. We could even say that this is actually the opposite of giving time (...)

For more info on RISK see: www.risk.nu

For more info on Fanclub see: www.fanclubdance.com

Collecting Thoughts on Collectivity
was made possible with the support
of Nordic Culture Fund.