

TURNS



DANCING OUT OF LINE – A CHOREOGRAPHIC REFLECTION

EMILYN CLAUD

‘Don’t walk behind me; I may not lead. Don’t walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend’. Albert Camus

The first time we all meet together is a Saturday afternoon in March 2016, at the Community Hub in Pegswood, South East Northumberland. At the meeting are the Elderflowers, the film crew, choreographers, assistants and friends. We have one week of filming ahead of us and there is a buzz of excited chatter and curiosity...

As the filming week progresses, our process for creating a choreographic film with the Elderflowers becomes a kind of falling out of fixing things, rather than building daily-rehearsed set dances. Choreographically, ‘falling out of fixing things’, suggests an attempt to reveal what is shared *between* each other and our environment. This is a fluid process of collaborating together, meeting each other on a daily basis without expectations. We find pleasure in recognizing how the potential of choreography on film lies in capturing relationships between people and places during a process of playing.

‘These are the days when no one should rely unduly on his “competence”. Strength lies in improvisation’. Walter Benjamin

We begin each day sharing a curiosity, a question, a movement score or a specific landscape. The Elderflowers improvise with fragments of ideas, talking, laughing, walking, eating and dancing together. In spontaneous, lively ways they tumble out of any pre-conceived notions we might have, offering us, instead, an opportunity to witness the richness of their lives and histories. A theme of procession unravels into a meandering gaggle of people who pause to chat and gaze out to sea.

This delightful gathering is filmed. An improvisational movement score that depends on a group understanding of space and time fails to materialize. Yet the discussion that follows demonstrates the Elderflowers’ committed engagement with the task. It is this discussion that is captured on film. The subtly performed, slightly tongue-in-cheek ‘Can I have your chair?’ duets emerge from a conversation about how each Elderflower likes to sit in the same chair, in the same place each week. We are unravelling what seems fixed and Lucy (filmmaker) is filming moments behind the scenes, around edges, catching the unexpected in the everyday reality of the Elderflowers’ lives.

Chats over fish and chips, sandwich making, and coffee in a café at Newbiggin-by-the-Sea; these casual meetings reveal an intricate hub of stories. We learn of childhoods spent picking and eating whelks during the war when sweets were expensive. We gather information about two local industries, fishing and mining. Doris explains and demonstrates The Slosh Dance. We hear Tommy sing and we listen to a rendition of Alan’s fisher-boy newspaper story. Performed sketches are interspersed amongst caught fragments of everyday lives.

‘Growing old means experiencing the alterations of permanence’. Paul Valery

Something intriguing emerges – between formal and informal – that is key to the structure of the film. A Long Side becomes a film about this unique group of people, in this specific part of the UK, in this particular week in early Spring; an outcome of collaboration; a moment of time that reveals a medley of genuine portraits; a reflection of memories, landscapes and strength in community.

Emilyn Claud is a choreographer, writer, performer, grandmother, and professor at Roehampton University.





ON SMALL REVOLUTIONS – THE ART OF TURNING... PAULA TURNER

Everything revolves; everything is in flux.

Human beings live by the revolution of particles, by the revolution of the blood in their bodies, and by the revolution of the stages of their lives by the coming from the earth and the returning to it...

As a dance artist I am interested in movement: how we are moved, what it is that moves us, shapes our experiences and our sense of self. How we can develop more intuitive understandings and connections by paying attention to how we are and where we are.

I felt privileged to have worked alongside the Elderflowers each Monday from September 2015.

Turns and turning were a recurrent theme throughout this research and development phase which eventually led to the making of the film *A Long Side*.

I always felt that here were people who knew a thing or two about turning, who knew that a connection

to ground, a connection to roots, made turning and change possible and sustainable.

You start here, you turn round and find yourself back here again - life they say goes in circles.

Our weekly dance classes were a means for us to try new approaches in a safe and supported environment... new things, new outlooks in a familiar place.

Much is made of resilience and the Elderflowers have demonstrated this quality in buckets throughout the whole process and usually with considerable use of their chuckle muscles!

Their positive outlook, the expectation and celebration of what they can do is what excites and moves me. It is also why a creative and artistic focus is so important and so effective in enhancing overall wellbeing and an enjoyment of life.

They have moved more, stretched more, experimented more because there was a focus... something to work toward and also because they discovered that when you do more... more becomes a possibility that you can turn toward. Horizons broaden, life expands...

According to the whirling dervishes it can take one's life to learn the turn and perhaps that is what I see and feel when I reflect on my time with the Elderflowers.

The Elderflowers know how to turn, how to go with life's pull instinctively and with good grace.

We have moved from giggles and raised eyebrows at me and my "arty farty" ideas in the first few weeks to the last weekly session where you could hear a pin drop as we moved together, sensing, being and enjoying the gift of dancing together.

It was a real treat to journey with them, to turn with them and to prepare the ground for the film week and another set of new experiences brought by a new group of artists and a new way of working.

*'A secret turning in us
Makes the universe turn.
Head unaware of feet,
And feet head. Neither cares.
They keep turning.'*
Rumi

Paula Turner is a dance artist, performer and writer who is interested in people, place and possibility.



THE CHAIR, THE SEA, HANDS

LUCY CASH

“What is a likeness? When a person dies, they leave behind, for those who knew them, an emptiness, a space: the space has contours and is different for each person mourned. This space with its contours is the person’s likeness and is what the artist searches for when making a living portrait. A likeness is something left behind invisibly.”
John Berger, *The Shape of a Pocket*

A Long Side is a film portrait of a group of people (the Elderflowers), in a particular place, (South East Northumberland) over a few particular days in the beginning of March, 2016. It collages moments of dancing with movements of the wind and of crows, and fragments of thoughts and memories. It observes the doing of things and listens to the talking about the doing.

What was created and filmed during the space of a week in fact had its roots and beginnings in a process that was initiated during the previous summer and continued through Winter into Spring: through meetings and conversations, and walks along the shore-line and visits to dance halls in the area. Encounters that I feel exquisitely privileged to have seen and heard and which have shaped me in ways that I can’t quite describe.

Each moment of experience as it happens and then disappears has a quality to it, which is felt by us all as it’s happening but which is only, but not always, later nameable. For instance, the release of effort after the long, group walk up Collier’s Hill in Pegswood, or the lively debate over a shared movement task gone awry.

The process of making a film, with its sudden shifts of rhythm, its need for repetition and its responsiveness to light and weather, provides a kind of net for what might often remain invisible or overlooked in these experiences and in the world around us. For capturing ‘likeness’.

If the net is well-made it can provide a democratic setting in which the gentle turning of hands can tell us about a whole life or the fluctuating shape of a beach can disclose the decades-long misfortune of a coastline.

This quality of feeling extends to objects as well as people and places.

The red plastic chairs in Pegswood Miners’ Welfare are at the same time just a splash of vibrant colour in a particular shape and also an infinite array of past conversations, moments of rest, and bridges between performer and audience.

The more we spent time with the chairs in Pegswood, the more they quietly revealed about the friendships in the community they support. After a while, it began to feel like the chairs were equally getting to know us and to suggest how we might want to pile them up or position them at a certain angle in a passing moment of late-afternoon sun.

The process of things appearing and disappearing or revealing and concealing themselves carries on all the way through to the moment on a film when the picture is finally ‘locked’ and the sound, ‘mixed’. There are always more than a few images, or pieces of dialogue that never find their place in the final edit but which somehow, mysteriously, lend something of their presence to the place they might have occupied. Or so we aim.

For instance a story that Doris recalled about an early memory of dancing in the street at night - the street lamps newly lit for the first time after six years of blackouts during the Second World War, was one that we kept returning to in the edit of the film. The stillness of the dark November night suddenly flickering into light and life again – movement and singing as celebration, as defiance, spontaneous and improvised.

What we imagined this moment felt like – the giddy, exhausted exuberance – the powerful ritual of a group dancing, felt essential in what it reveals about a shared energy in space and time.

But every time we tried to include Doris’ narration of this moment, ironically, it made the energy of the film dip. It was almost as if the story were too complete, (from another time), too powerful by itself to lend itself to be part of something new. And this is just one example from a dozen more that you, dear viewer, won’t actually see in the film.

However, we hope, if we’ve looked and listened well enough, that something of their colour and defiance appears in *A Long Side*.

Lucy Cash is an artist, filmmaker and writer whose work is inspired by the different people and places that she collaborates with.
www.lucycash.com

SOME FRAGMENTS OF CONVERSATIONS (WITH THE ELDERFLOWERS)

On the process

...If we couldn't do it right then we did it our own way...

...I have enjoyed the movement and doing things... it's amazing how many ways of doing a turn. It's the thinking about it... and new experiences every day... I found I was looking forward to each day...

...I have done things I would never have done without the encouragement of others...

...I have arthritis in my hands and I like to move them when possible. When we first started they were painful – as we went on, they got better. As we did the movement I was thinking about the beach – the ripples in the sand...

...I am amazed at how I feel... I feel fine and I expected I would be ill but actually I am fine... I mean walking along the beach with your coat off!...

...I've danced all my life, I remember as a little girl at the end of the 2nd World War, that I had never ever seen lights in the street – it was pitch black at night during the war and I remember when they came to light up the gas lights for the first time. There was about ten or twelve of us watching and we got together and started dancing around the lights and singing 'When The Lights Go On, Again.'...

...Working with strangers... who are now our friends... we'd never met them before but we had no fear...

...The man in the chip shop has asked if it's been like Calendar Girls... If we do that next we will need very large bouquets for coverage!

On watching a cut of the film

...Looking at the sea, remembering the miners...

...I liked seeing parts of different places... the view from the hill...

...It's a documentary about people and about how we have come together and how friendships have developed...

...When I was at school we used to walk across to Holy Island and that's what it looks like when we're in a line along the beach – like we're pilgrims...

...You can see from the movements and the way we are together that we're friends, that we're close...

CREDITS

TURN'S Exhibition

Film *A Long Side*

Performers

Tommy Appleby
Norma B Woolly Back
Norma Charlton
Pat Dixon
Jean Foster
Elsie Lewis
Walther Matthews
Linda McGeever
Kevan McGeever
Jill Merrick
Margaret Muckle
Lynn Munro
Lillian Read
Cynthia Richardon
Allan Robinson
Evelyn Scott
Doris White
Ella Wonders aka
Ella of the Elderflowers
Claudine Zardi

Many thanks to Grand Gestures
Dance Collective for peer mentoring,
friendship and support.

Filmmaker
Lucy Cash

Artistic director
Emilyn Claid

Choreographic development
Paula Turner

Assistant choreographer
Luke Pell

Composer
Fraya Thomsen

Sound designer
Chu-Li Shewring

Sound recordist
Duncan Whitley

Focus puller
Jason Walker

Musicians
ELB

With thanks to:

Ashington Brass Band,
Ellington Brass Band,
Ole Birkeland, Rosie Morris,
Café Bertorelli, Newbiggin,
Metro Imaging.

Live performance
at preview opening
Small Revolutions

Performers
(see above, for film)

Choreographer
Paula Turner

Photographs: *Taking Turns*
Frances Anderson

Booklet design
David Caines

Exhibition Production
Woodhorn Trust Team

Commissioning
Bait Team

The Elderflowers are Ella, Doris, Jean, Elsie, Jean, Joan, June, Margaret, Blanche, Evelyn, Mary, Pat, Norma and Lynn who meet on Mondays in Pegswood, Northumberland for movement and conversation. The sessions are led by choreographer, Paula Turner.

TURN'S has been commissioned
by Woodhorn Museum
through the bait programme



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