

Aesthetic intensity and presence

“Presence” is a key-concept in contemporary dance. It is through the state of full presence that the performance “works” and really affects the audience. My aim in this paper is to show how aesthetic intensity is related to the idea of presence, using the expertise of dance, which I learned during my fieldwork alongside dancers. I will argue that power and efficiency of gesture is mainly reached by an intense and full performative presence, in other words, when the gesture is *inhabited*.

Part of the response lays in the notions of concentration and awareness. Dancers reach the presence by focusing on what is happening in their body/mind and in the environment around them: focus on the gesture they are shaping by looking at it (e.g following the movement of the hand), focus on what is occupying the space around them (by caressing the objects and feel they size/texture), listening carefully to sounds (music, breath of other dancers, gurgling of stomach, horn of cars coming from the window). This awareness implies affects and intimacy with other bodies and materials. The attention to the ‘here and now’ allows gesture to acquire deepness and strength. This provides sensoriality and meaning. When gesture is inhabited with concentration and awareness, it gains liveliness and can therefore reach the audience. The space between stage and audience is no longer empty but full with energetic vibration.

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