

excursion: france

(ether/the internet)



photo © Richard Siegal

Open Sourcing *If/Then*

by Richard Siegal

Publishing one's methodology is an unconventional step to make as a choreographer. This gesture, aimed squarely at the issue of authorship in collaborative efforts, is germane to much of contemporary dance making. It is aligned with the values of contact improvisation and of its communication hub, *Contact Quarterly*. And it was the prime concern motivating me to choreograph *If/Then*.

In March of 2005, I premiered *If/Then*, a duet of linked choreographic systems for Janis Brenner and Jeanine Durning. The piece was made in three short rehearsal periods beginning in August 2004. My journal entries follow:

November 2004

SYSTEM-STRUCTURES

I have started creating tiny games between two dancers based on the syntactical system: If-Then. The games are composed of simple gestures and rules, very binary: If you do x, then I do y. If I do y, you can do z or n, etc. The games are, therefore, extremely dialogic in that one dancer's response depends on the other dancer's preceding gesture.

[above] Richard Siegal in *IF*, Danspace Project, New York City, March 4, 2005.

Each game is differentiated by content; some contain only movement, others include only text, while still others have both movement and text.

Each game shares a common configuration that links it to another game (a spatial relationship, a repetition of elements, etc.). I call these common configurations "hubs." They are akin to hyperlinks in web design or branching mechanisms of non-linear narrative. In this fashion, the dancers can progress from one game to another. So although in performance the attitudes of the dancers seem to be competitive, they are in fact cooperating. There is an imperative for them to achieve these "hub" configurations; it's the only way they can enter into a new game.

The structure, therefore, unfolds in real time, as determined by the dancers themselves. There is only one "hub" per game and, unlike hyperlinks, I have made a rule that once the dancers pass into a new game, they may not return to an old one. The dance progresses linearly. I am also considering the possibility of including multiple "hubs," each leading to a different game. This would create a network of game play in which the performance could have multiple structural itineraries with multiple conclusions.

METHODOLOGY

The rapid proliferation of rules demands a careful documentation. Because the structure is composed of choices, a flow chart is the model of transcription which best

to the work's performance.



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