

## **VARIA** - *Various things; variable, changeable...*

VARIA is dedicated to Improvisation, a versatile art and performance form - in live time. Furthermore VARIA is an acknowledgement to the interaction of multiple art forms and people. Since 2006 four international Improvisation Festivals has been arranged in Sweden from its base in Gothenburg.

Alongside lots more, VARIA has enabled performers of diverse artistic backgrounds, age and ethnicity to access a broad audience and students via a variety of performance, workshops and lectures etc.

Following text & photo & thoughts is some of the documentation produced in VARIA2009. If you use part of the text in a non commercial purpose – please make sure that you mention where it came from (VARIA2009) and the writers (end of paper).

Thank you and enjoy...



VARIA2009 - Nordic Group, Museum of Art Borås

photo Mona Wallström

## **VARIA2009 - The Art of Improvisation from October 10<sup>th</sup> to November 1<sup>st</sup> 2009.**

The Improvisation Festival VARIA2009 centred in Gothenburg, Sweden with extended venues in Stenungsund and Borås embraced the essence of this fringe art practice with its programme of solo and group performances, coordination of extensive workshop schedules including lectures and discussion forums both formal and informal, contributing to the white cube/black box discourse. An international community was created, holding the prospect of all consuming participation during the mid autumn period of 2009.



VARIA2009 – Andrew Morrish Atalante Göteborg

photo Christina Hallström

### **Short definition - Improvisation**

The practice of improvisation involves working and reworking, constantly redefining skills within artistic domains, which include dance, lighting, sonic, video, the visual arts and action theatre from both an intuitive and technical perspective.

The combined intensifying of all five senses allows the practitioner to become acutely present and open, in the moment. Refining perception and cognition of the moment allow the practitioner to act in any given situation, in relation to a wide range of choices, without prior experience of the same or similar situations. New cycles of perception and cognition are created, as new thought patterns, new structures and practices evolve and revolve.

Andrew Morrish performance artist from Australia/France participated in VARIA2009 believes that - *there is an Improvisational State, or an Improvisational attitude – and also an Improvisational Space, marked by presence and openness.*

He goes on to say - *In improvisational performance practice the performers ability to find material is endorsed and it is these skills which form the basis of becoming an improvisational performer and it is these skills which have to be honed and refined in the search of satisfying theatrical experiences. Although I see it happening a lot, I do not believe that improvisation is a short cut to making a performance. I believe that the hours, weeks and months that are used to create a choreographed piece are equivalent to years of improvisational skill development that should be undertaken by the committed improvisational performer.*

*The relationship between developing skills (in a workshop, class or ensemble setting) and actually performing is relatively slight. You cannot practice performing, you have to practice performing by doing it. It is necessary to perform a great deal, and also to develop skills in a consistent but parallel way.*

Our mind is constantly traveling, due to a natural process...

Every moment during improvisation involves the constant choice making - of how to use not only your intellect and its wave of ideas, but also the "thought" messages received from your physical awareness and senses, together with the ability to see and make use of the space and images that occur in on-going scenarios...

In improvisation performance practice it is essential to work with a variety of skills, which among other things, encourage the capacity to stay in contact with the existing.

The combined intensifying of all five senses allows the practitioner to become acutely present and open, in the moment.



VARIA2009 – Christian Skjødt Dansbyrån Göteborg

photo Mona Wallström

It is these skills, which form the basis of becoming an improvisational performer and it is these skills, which have to be honed and refined in the search of satisfying theatrical experiences.

*Conventional logic (linear logical connections between related thoughts) is a highly unnatural process, which is why we spend so much time in school trying to learn how to do it. It has proved to be extremely useful for things like building bridges. However associations of more subtle form, such as leaps of topic, unfinished sentences, cycles of association, patterns of meaning are much more the way humans really are. It is dangerous to start to want to connect your material as trying to connect material is generally tedious to watch. Connections occur if we let them- so a basic training strategy is to preoccupy the performers mind with concrete (structural) tasks that will keep them busy enough to let the connections occur (Andrew Morrish).*

The professional practitioner is accordingly able to use these qualified skills either in delivering solo performances or within group performances which in turn create the structure for offer/response relationships between practitioner(s) and audience.

The audiences' task is not one of passive viewer but rather proactive discerner of personal taste. Not to discriminate the good from the bad but to find what they like personally. It is this self-developmental experience of proactive discernment the viewer takes with him/herself on leaving the performance venue.



VARIA2009 – Niklas Pohlman Dansbyrån Göteborg photo Mona Wallström

## The Nordic Group VARIA2009

From the 13<sup>th</sup> of October until the 24<sup>th</sup> October, a special Nordic Group were invited to VARIA2009. The group consisted of Pia Lindy dance Finland, Giorgio Convertito dance Finland, Erikk McKenzie dance Norway, Mona Bentzen video Norway, Christina Hallström video Sweden/The Netherlands, Christian Skjødt music Denmark, Lisa Dillan music Norway, Niklas Pohlman light Sweden, Johan Rödström light Sweden, and Lisa Larsdotter Petersson festival organiser and dancer from Sweden.

The group worked and participated in a series of workshops/work in progress which allowed just one day for leisure and revival. During this period they performed together several times, at Borås - Museum of Art and at the venue Atalante in Gothenburg, alongside performance in Stenungsund at the Cultural House Fregatten.

The artists in The Nordic Group chose to work according to a few set rules for their work in progress. They included twelve/ten minute duration slots followed by four/two-minute discussion slots in which the participants expressed in a simple manner that which they "saw" (including "felt" and heard") and without discriminating the good from the bad, during the sessions. Various media were also omitted e.g. light or sound or movement or video during these slots.



VARIA2009 – The Nordic Group

photo Mona Wallström

## **The Domains**

Dance incorporates a kinaesthetic approach to physical activity, to the physical movement of dance. Acutely aware of body aesthetics and in relation to time and space, the dancer's movements direct the artist towards new thought patterns. Instantly composed choreographies are achieved as the fragility of the human body is exposed, creating unique and innovative movement, spatial configuration, dynamics and unpredictable rhythms.

Sonic Art includes a pallet of vocal, acoustic, electric and digital instrumentation. This pallet initiates an extensive range of parameters in pitch, rhythm, duration, dynamics and timbre with which the musician connects within the offer/reaction dialogue with the other artist domains and in response to the stimulus of the immediate environment and inner feelings.

Video Art includes digital video clips and still images. The sometimes heavy and cumbersome equipment including endless reels of cable become an extension of the artist's physical presence as mobile cameras and projectors move into the offer and response dialogue, triggered by the audio or physical rhythm. Video clips, still images and live camera sequences advance and retreat within the environment, including stage, props and artists, as live editing tunes into the performance.

Lighting Design includes a pallet of lighting options from the static stage lighting options with light-board to domestic lamps, torches - the variables are endless. If it is pre-decided, the designer may work from outside the stage otherwise the designer works interactively on stage, without an overview of the performance. It is more common in performances where the lighting designer works from outside that rules are set. These may include a "silent" pause in the performance in which light presents the offer and the participating artists respond or to wave the option of overview i.e. to not look at the stage whilst participating.

The visual art domain or white cube element is achieved through the interaction of visual imagery including still-images, pre-recorded video clips and live video editing and projection during the performance, reacting within the lighting offer and response relationship and to the physical presence/movement of the performers, all according to the structure of the improvisation.



VARIA2009 – Nordic Group Atalante Göteborg

photo Mona Wallström

### **The Solo performers and the Solo performances in VARIA2009.**

"Rich " and "innovative" are two words which come to mind concerning the four solo performances performed by outstanding artists in VARIA2009.

Michael Schumacher, dancer

Sten Rudström, performance artist

Rosalind Crisp, dancer

Andrew Morrish, performance artist

The special guest in Roland Crisp´s solo was Hansueli Tischhauser, musician from Switzerland.



VARIA2009 – Michael Schumacher Atalante Göteborg

photo Christina Hallström

From the very first moment in each of these performances there was quality, clarity and inspiration combined with powerful imagery – VARIA2009 and improvisation as an art-form were enhanced... With subtle details... in small movements and gestures, spatial adventures, the contrast between movement and voice... alongside developed and changing patterns, sounds of breathing and words... sound-scapes became landscapes which then became a story... wild conversations with the giggling audience interrupted by non-linear movements...



VARIA2009 – Sten Rudström Atalante Göteborg

photo Christina Hallström

### **"Biology Session Nr. 9"**

A solo by Michael Schumacher dancer, choreographer USA/The Netherlands.

*Biology Session Nr. 9 is the most recent in a series of improvisation performances that Michael Schumacher initiated several years ago in Japan. In these events, Schumacher brings the realm of sensory perception into focus by creating a unique dialogue between himself and his environment. Seeing scent, smelling sound, and listening to light are a few of the thoughts proposed throughout this performance. Michael Schumacher.*

### **"An empty room..."**

Solo by Sten Rudstrøm movement and performance artist Germany/USA.

*"An empty room. Sten Rudstrøm enters the stage. He doesn't know what is going to happen. There's no script, no preconceived thoughts or ideas. From out of the emptiness he crafts a landscape of dance, speech and song. At the intersection of the present, imagination and life experience he morphs into stories of strange characters, pictures, places and things. A wild, unpredictable, unique journey through raw human nature." Sten Rudstrøm.*

### **"after dance... before the end"**

A Solo by Rosalind Crisp dancer, choreographer from Australia/France.

*Rosalind Crisp generates movement from any part of her body, at any speed or level, with any force or direction, for any duration ... at any time. Her solo is about the body dancing, about the person who is dancing, and about this 'body' in response to the context of this event. Rosalind Crisp*

### **"Lying, stealing, cheating & self deception"**

A Solo by Andrew Morrish performance artist Australia/France.

*Andrew Morrish's performance aesthetic is a kind of postmodern, physical stand-up comedy. He runs with the moment, gets lost in a thought - a master storyteller, weaving non-linear tales with incredible dexterity and textural complexity. Improvisation is the key to Morrish's performance style, as he riffs on words, meditates on moments and sporadically leaps around the stage.*

Tessa Needham.



VARIA2009 – Rosalind Crisp Atalante Göteborg

photo Christina Hallström

## **The Experience**

The most overwhelming experience of these workshops and performances was the feeling of participation. Improvisation is about participation as the practitioner connects with him/herself, other participants and the audience sustained by the creative media of movement, sound, image, video and light, in time and space.

A sublime and mutual experience of the world ebbs and fades, regenerating and self-morphing into crescendos of complete absorption and participation only to withdraw, dispersing, in anticipation, of the next surge. Is this not a defining and fundamental purpose of the fine arts – to heighten our perception of being?

This is Live Art – on leaving the improvisation forum we take with us a heightened perception of ourselves, our capacity to connect, extra receptive to the infinite variables, in sharing our world.

## **Festivals like VARIA2009 are invaluable for many reasons.**

As ensembles of time (VARIA2009 ran for three weeks) they create the opportunity for meeting like-minded practitioners of improvisation within a well-developed and coordinated event.

There is time to both create and explore the interdisciplinary experience of the white cube within the spirit of black box milieu, from both practitioner and audience perspective. International communities evolve as the festivals maintain and reinforce the sharing of practice, skills and competence within the creative domains and moreover supported by the generous nature of the Fine Art form itself.

## **As Nina Bondesson observed in her opening speech:**

*“Art does not seem to represent any particular value unless it can be bought or sold or instrumentally used.*

*What a big mistake. Huge...*

*An overwhelming get-together like VARIA2009 does indeed contribute.*

*It excites me, comforts me and confirms my belief that we are all predisposed to make art...*

*A society that wants to be an open society needs to acknowledge and appreciate the different ways we express our lived experience....”*

## **And there was VARIA!**



VARIA2009 – Lisa Larsson Petersson Atalante Göteborg

photo Mona Wallström

## **Texts by;**

Debby Almqvist

Nina Bondesson

Andrew Morrish

Lisa Larsson Petersson