

EXCAVATION SITES & PHENOMENOLOGICAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

A MOVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE
BY MICHAEL KLIËN
2008—



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Concept and implementation: Michael Kliën

Duration: Minimum 45 minutes

Encouraged duration: 2.5–3 hours

Excavation Sites take an opposite strategy: Instead of building (constructing, creating, inventing etc.) upon established ideas and knowledge, they aim to determine new knowledge by revealing the thicket of mental relations that bind us; to build by digging. KLIËN

- *Excavation Sites* is a unique format for dance encompassing observation, research and performance.
- *Excavation Sites* is a movement practice to expand and reveal embodied knowledge.
- *Excavation Sites* are physical, communal spaces dedicated to uncover embodied realities, and to recognize collective and individual pathologies in order to cultivate sustainable modes of 'being in the world'.
- The simplicity of the format allows participants, dancers and non-dancers alike, to suspend their dominant modes of perception and delve into the thicket of life and living.
- *Excavation Sites* supports participants to develop their own movement and thought patterns, unearthing the inner-workings of individual and collective minds.

MAIN EXCAVATION SITES AS PERFORMANCE FORMATS TO DATE

Nothing Fields: 2007 onwards (Ireland: curated by Michael Klien; Finland: curated by Giorgio Convertito);
Field Studies: 2007; *An Afternoon in the Valley of Glades*: 2008—2012 formulated as *Excavation Site*: 2013
 (What Now Festival, London)

INITIATION PROCEDURE

An *Excavation Site* follows an initiation procedure, facilitated by someone who has previously experienced *Excavation Sites* as a participant. This procedure can considerably vary, but a common method is as follows: The facilitator asks everyone present 'to dance' for 20 minutes. The aim of this initial proposition is for all individuals to own the statement: 'I have danced.' The facilitator can join in, but should not watch passively to overly influence the dynamic at play. He/She can leave of the room, converse etc. After the agreed time the facilitator asks everyone individually: 'How much of the available time did you dance, can you confidently say, I was dancing?' The answers will range from 'moments' to '20 minutes' and quickly throws up the question: 'What do you mean by dancing?' At this stage one always returns to the objective of one's own statement. It is not about anyone's idea of dancing but the individual's him/herself. The facilitator follows the short discussion with the question: 'Did you ever feel like you were dancing more? More intensively?' Most of the time everyone agrees that they felt 'more in a state of dance' than in the previous 20 minutes. Thereafter the facilitator refines the exercise: For the next 20 minutes are dedicated to 'really dance', so that afterwards each and everyone can own the statement: 'I have really danced.' The music, if wished for, can be chosen by participants directly and changed at anytime by anyone in the room. Once the time has passed the facilitator one more enquires into the time spent 'really dancing' and thereafter asks if anyone had a more intense experience of dancing beforehand. It is likely that most people had such experience. In the following conversation the group discusses what could constitute such an intense experience of dance (for example with the help of the Alain Badiou's *Dance as a Figure of Thought*), discuss the original encounter of dancing (childhood, revelations etc.) and start to develop a clear sense of difference of one's personal sense of dancing vis-à-vis dance in its 'institutional arrangements', as practiced as dance and identified as dance by large segments of society. The facilitator might join the group that conducts the *Excavation Site* after the initiation procedure or maintain a facilitation mechanism as long as deemed necessary by the group.

Do not try to be meaningful—You are already meaningful.

SETUP EXCAVATION SITES

Thereafter the facilitator introduces the *Excavation Site*, as a field in which to cultivate one's very own dancing, whilst, in time negotiate a communal understanding of dance. Although a specific floor space is agreed upon for dancing, all participants constitute the *Excavations Site*, whether actively moving, sleeping, reading, or leaving to get something to drink. In this regard an *Excavation Site* is a communal agreement, primarily a collective suspension of a certain status quo in favour of another, rather than the specific physical space offered for dance. Everyone requires individual strategies to engage in and with their dancing state, which do not start/end, inside a dancing studio and a particular time frame (potentially including music, diet, sleep, conversations etc.). This practice encourages participants to proactively take notice of these requirements and dynamics, to engage them during the durations of an *Excavation Site*, as nothing is outside of the frame. The facilitator might propose a small number of strategies to start off the process (an indicative list below). These might include simple instructions that help participants to reach a state of dance, encourage participants to find new patterns of movement, or to simply focus one's bodily awareness in the presence. The applications of such strategies during an *Excavations Site* are referred to as *Field Studies*. The participants are encouraged to make themselves aware of their very own strategies they potentially use, develop new ones and/or disregard all strategies altogether in favour of moving and dancing in the *Excavation Site* (which could be seen as a strategy in itself). Participants will, in time, considerably expend their repertoire of strategies and gain clearer knowledge of what constitutes their dancing state. Initially individual *Field Studies* are encouraged to focus on the processes within one's very own thoughtbody, exchanging with other participants later one in the process. Although a personal practice, *Excavation Site* can equally be seen as a communal practice that recursively entangles one's own place in the negotiation of community with others (Social Choreography). This way a body can be defined in Keeney's words as 'a participant in a conversation' and a mind 'as the pattern of a conversation'. We are always many bodies in many minds. At the end of each session participants share their experiences of the particular installment of *Excavation Site* and can share their personal strategies for others to potentially experience during the next installment. This process is voluntary, and at all times, there is no particular procedure, pressure or requirement to follow or develop particular strategies, and the facilitator neither encourages nor discourages note-taking or a particular way of conducting one's *Field Studies*.

Attention is the purest form of generosity. SIMONE WEIL

SPECIFICS OF PARTICULAR EXCAVATION SITES

Excavation Sites might be proposed for open or closed groups, as a daily/weekly practice and/or performative situations. Depending on the aims and objectives of the group conducting the *Excavation Site*, the field can be 'charged' accordingly. An *Excavation Site* that at some point becomes a public performance might focus more on specific processes such as various states of dancing, whereby an *Excavation Site* aimed at children might be more concerned with differentiated *Field Studies*. *Excavation Sites* are always attuned (collectively and/or through the facilitator) to their context and their participants.

REFLECTIONS SESSIONS—FACILITATION OF ORIGINAL THOUGHT

It might prove particularly conducive for a group to conduct dialogue sessions in which embodied knowledge gained through the process of *Excavation Site* is channeled through raw thinking processes and abductive logic (Bateson) into other fields of human productions, thereby acting to facilitate new thinking in other disciplines through lived experiences.



EXCAVATION SITES AND CHANGE

Excavation Site encourages and enables a thorough re-sensing of one's thoughtbody, and its positions in the world, the premises that binds it together and gives meaning as well as making palpable unnecessary or outdated assumptions and procedures. It allows access to one's personal cultured flesh to re-negotiate its present validity in response to the challenges it faces. Thereby the process acts as a subtle catalyst to abandon assumption of one's own identity and given a secure environment to reposition oneself towards the other.

We have no time to rush. **BATESON**

In a deeply interconnect world, knowledge has to be first and foremost grounded in, and raised from within, embodied knowledge, the naïve realism of the sense. To integrate our most abstract concepts into our own physical existence and redefine our assumptions by moving right through them, we disclose a sense of being to the world, and simultaneously align ourselves with mental health. In this practice thinking about life and living, thinking about dance and dancing, becomes a singularity. It is a truly dedicated practice, the dancer holding the rare technology to eradicate the artificial ground of rational assumption and place the feet right upon dead ancestors. To align the world anew. To give the world a new name. **KLIËN**

BIOGRAPHY

MICHAEL KLIËN (*1973, AUSTRIA)

Michael Kliën is an acclaimed choreographer, curator and producer of numerous touring productions, installations and events. In 1994 he co-founded the performance collective Barriedale Operahouse (in operation till 2000) and worked as a choreographer for Ballett Frankfurt, Volksoper Wien etc. From 2003 to 2011 he was Artistic Director/CEO of Daghdha Dance Company, one of Ireland's premiere dance organisations. His artistic practice encompasses interdisciplinary thinking, critical writing, curatorial projects, and centrally, choreographic works equally at home in the Performing as well as the Fine Arts. Michael Kliën's choreographies are predominantly dance-based works of art, situated in galleries, museums or on stages. Increasingly, visual art works form part of his choreographic output; yet, other creations may act directly upon the social sphere (Social Choreography). His choreographies for dance are marked by a distinctive improvisation methodology and the subsequent movement aesthetic. Amongst a considerable body of work, Michael Kliën's seminal choreographies include *Einem* for Ballett Frankfurt, *Sediments of an Ordinary Mind* and *Sense and Meaning* for Daghdha Dance Company (Limerick) as well as *Choreography for Blackboards* for Daghdha Dance Company and Hayward Gallery (London) and *Slattery's Lamp* of IMMA's (Irish Museum of Modern Art) permanent collection. www.michaelklien.com



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