



**WILLIAM FORSYTHE & ALVA NOË**

**October 9, 2009**

**Celeste Bartos Forum**

**LIVE from the New York Public Library**

**[www.nypl.org/live](http://www.nypl.org/live)**

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** I'd like you to welcome you all to the New York Public Library. My name is Paul Holdengräber. I'm the Director of Public Programs at the New York Public Library, now known as LIVE from the New York Public Library. I haven't said this for a while, but my goal here is simply to make the lions roar. I would like to encourage you all to become Friends of the Library. If you become a Friend, your donation will help us greatly. We need it greatly. You'll also be getting discounts to all of

our upcoming programs. I won't go through them, they're on your little announcement, which you have on your chair.

It's a great pleasure to do this first and hopefully not last program at lunchtime. We have never explored the possibility of doing something in the middle of the afternoon. I think this is a wonderful way of breaking the day, but it's also very much in the spirit of what we're doing today. As I see it, today we are dealing with an essay, a trial, a trial always presupposes the possibility of success but also the possibility of failure. I have no idea what these two gentlemen are going to speak about, and that excites me greatly. I love the notion that I am bringing together, or that we are bringing together, a dancer and a philosopher, and I will let them dance together and philosophize together in a few minutes from now. Improvisation I often say quoting the words of Pierre Mac Orlan is something you prepare, and you prepare it to a certain point and today I think we will be living a kind of improvisational dance in the spirit. I have been asked often also to define my mission statement and another way of talking about it is using two words, and I think today will be an illustration of these two words, what we try to provide here is a form of cognitive theater. Now, lastly, one more quotation from Nietzsche. Nietzsche once said that a dancer needs to know where to put his feet. I leave you with that line. **(laughter)**

World-renowned choreographer William Forsythe and philosopher and cognitive scientist Alva Noë, I don't know quite—he told me how to pronounce it, but I think it's Noë, author of *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness*, which, by the way, he will sign after this program, 192 Books,

our independent bookstore—I love the fact that they are independent—will be servicing us after this event and we love them, will examine consciousness as a kind of dance. Together, they will explore today Noë's assertion that consciousness is not something that happens inside of us in our brains or anywhere else, it is something we *do* in our active engagement with the world. When I read these words, I was reminded by a quotation which I passed on to William Forsythe and Alva Noë when we spoke, a wonderful line by Kierkegaard, where he said that the goal is to arrive at immediacy after reflection, and maybe we'll speak about that, maybe they will speak about that in a moment. Alva Noë is a professor of philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley, but not for very long, he might tell us why, where he's also a member of the Institute of Cognitive and Brain Sciences. He's not out of a job, don't worry. **(laughter)** His previous book, *Action in Perception*, was published in 2004 and he is a—he has a position which I would love to have. He is a philosopher in residence in William Forsythe's company, this is something. I mean, it is wonderful. I've always loved the notion that people have chairs, I mean, I've always thought that they were folding chairs, but it's marvelous.

William Forsythe is a choreographer, as you know, considered one of the world's outstanding representatives of contemporary dance. His work has redefined classical ballet, transforming it into a dynamic, twenty-first-century form of artistic expression. From performance and visual arts to architecture and multimedia projects, Forsythe's choreographic thinking has both contributed and continuously responded to the contemporary innovation at an international scale. Now, important for you to know, he doesn't only of course speak as today, but he choreographers, he's a choreographer, so go

to my favorite New York institution, BAM, tonight, and see Forsythe's choreography of the *Decreation*, a work that challenges our notion of dance in the twenty-first century and asserts his place as one of the innovative choreographers. A piece on love, jealousy, and the soul, *Decreation* explores the forces that shape and render our relationship with one another and ourselves possible. I highly recommend that you go. I myself am going to try to go, though it might be hard, because I simply have not yet quite devised the gift of ubiquity. I hand this over to both of them. Thank you very much.

**(applause)**

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Now it's our turn, right?

**ALVA NOË:** Now it's our turn.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Alva's going to go first.

**ALVA NOË:** We said I would go first, and I thought I would just say a few things that would sort of begin to answer the question, which maybe all of you have, which is what does a philosopher and a cognitive scientist have to do with the work of an artist and dancer and choreographer. I'm at a slight disadvantage, because my parents are in the front row, **(laughter)** and I don't think yours are, and my therapist, **(laughter)** but I'm not going to point him out, but actually just picking up on what Paul said, it is kind of special for me to be here because I have just accepted a job at the CUNY Graduate

Center, and I'm coming back to New York City, where I grew up, so this is a kind of first professional or conversational event for me. I'm a philosopher and philosophers are conversationalists, professionally. So the first return, so I'm very excited to be here.

Let me say something about consciousness, and it is about my work, and I think about some of the shared interests that Bill and I have. I'll be very brief, I just kind of want to get the ball rolling. We tend to think of consciousness, of experience, as something that happens inside us. Descartes thought it happened in the kind of immaterial medium of the soul. The contemporary view is that it happens in the brain—the brain produces consciousness. Interestingly, we don't actually understand how the brain gives rise to consciousness, gives rise to experience, in fact, we don't understand how it does it, any more than Descartes understood how it happens in the soul. And this has inspired me in my writing, and in this book that Paul mentioned, to suggest that maybe we're looking for consciousness in the wrong place. Maybe we shouldn't think of it as something that happens inside of us, in our heads, in our brains, or anywhere else, let's think of consciousness as something we do, or enact, or achieve, or perform.

And like everything else that we do or enact or achieve or perform, we do so in the world, in an environment. I can't swim—we talked about this before—I can't swim if there's no water. The water and its availability is part of that which enables me to be a swimmer, and likewise the world around me and other people are part of what enable me to perform or enact my experience. Now, I won't go into some of the other details I might say about this, because one of the things which I think is interesting is that this view is actually

supported by the best neuroscience, it's supported by the best psychology, and actually finally helps us break out of our heads and begin to see how we might move forward to understand consciousness as a natural phenomenon. But what I wanted to say for Bill and with Bill is that, in a way, it opens up something like the possibility that not that experience is *like* dance, but that experience *is* dance.

Now, one of the big problems that people always have in science and in philosophy is how do I investigate experience, how do I make consciousness or my lived experience a subject for me, how do I bring it into focus for myself? Because, look, I'm looking at you now, I see you. Now I want to see my seeing of you. Well, I don't see my seeing of you, I just see more of you, or I have my experience of seeing you. So the philosophers call that the problem of phenomenology. Phenomenology means the study of experience. How do I study experience? Well, if philosophy, or if experience, rather, is a dance, then, first of all, a choreographer is in the business of making experience and of giving us opportunities to do phenomenology. To catch ourselves in the act of experiencing.

The problem I face when I go to one of your works is that of bringing something which is manifold, ongoing, real time, complicated, transcendent in the sense that it's constantly outstripping what I know, what I can see, what I can touch, and I try to bring it into focus, and that is the project of philosophy and phenomenology, so I'm going to sum up this sort of introductory comment by just saying that there's a way in which I see Bill's work, or the work of art in general, actually, as a kind of philosophical research practice, and this is something which my own colleagues, I don't know if there are any of my own

colleagues here, but people in sort of the philosophy/cognitive science world, and this is something they will find a little surprising, but I actually therefore see my job as an aesthetic practice, which is not to say that it's not also a scientific practice or a research practice, but there's a kind of—the threshold between art and philosophy or art and research begins to become very fluid, and this is what we're exploring together, I think.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** And? That's my job. And?

**ALVA NOË:** Actually, I was hoping you would say something.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Yes, I agree, entirely. You are probably wondering why I have a position like this in the company, it's not just because I have someone coming in now and then replacing him, it's because Alva is in the world, and having read his work, I thought he did have something in common obviously. So I think part of the large, or one of the large parts of making art has to do with a word that you used before, which is maybe, and you said maybe this is—has to do with consciousness or something, and I think a large part of artistic practice is saying, “Hmm, maybe if this was placed next to that, something new would emerge,” you know, a new question would emerge, and I think this issue of questions is at the top of my list. We have to constantly question what we receive. There are a lot of expectations, let's say in *my* field, about how we deal with tradition, those received notions of making, how do you use dancers, for example. What's the proper way to use a dancer? Dancers are there to dance, aren't they? Well, what if dancers are using their bodies as vehicles for speech, for example, or what if they are

music instruments in the sense of being the originating musical object, as opposed to relying on music for them to react to.

I am constantly having to question the function of givens, and I don't know whether my questions are valid or have been asked already, so I have to—I need a sounding board, you know, to ask, I'll say, “is this a dumb question, or is this an interesting way to think about this, or am I completely off the mark, or has everybody else already thought about this,” and I'm just—I haven't read enough?

**ALVA NOË:** That's so interesting to hear you say that, because you've just described what philosophy is, philosophy is that conversation in search of questions or in response to questions against the background of what you think you already know. I mean, going back to the very first philosophical writing, Plato's early Socratic dialogues, what are they? They're dramas, they're dramas, they're conversations, they're conversational dramas that begin with somebody thinking there's a received background they can know, that's agreed on, and they end with the recognition that, well, they didn't know, or that there's a—some transformation happens through the questioning process.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Well, this didn't know thing, I have this motto in the company, there are company members there, and I'm always saying it's a Buddhist slogan which says, “keep that don't know mind.” And that's a very difficult thing to keep. Yeah? You're always assuming that with experience you're accumulating knowledge and therefore you know more. Now, that is not necessarily true. Actually, the



further you go, you realize that the questions are becoming wider and wider and wider, so I think the project of choreography is actually almost lexicographical. Is that a word, lexicographical? Like a lexicographifer?

**ALVA NOË:** Or lexicographical? Lexigraphical?

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** If somebody out there knows it, don't be shy.

**ALVA NOË:** Having to do with the word? Lexography?

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Creating definitions that work that work for you in your work, so every choreographer, every artist, obviously has to confront the idea what is a novel, you know, what is a painting, or what is painting, what is painting. Fontana says, "Oh, I do painting with a knife." You know, boom, and so these people had questions about the medium, the history, et cetera, et cetera, and for me I've been working for a number of years trying to figure out what is the choreographic kernel, you know, the dark matter of choreography, what is the point where you're going it's no longer choreography, it's actually fallen into another category, and we had this conversation last weekend about these, what do you call them, supercategorical—

**ALVA NOË:** It was an improvisation.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** I know, we were there.

**ALVA NOË:** Categories and supercategories. Categories of categories.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** That we assume that there's this sort of—I often notice if I read critiques that apparently they've read a book that I haven't read, yeah, that—which explains everything and puts things clearly in a hierarchy, you know, about what's important and what's not and when I get a hold of that book, watch out.

**(laughter)**

**ALVA NOË:** It's here.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** So I think one of the nice things about language and our—the way we frame things, our inquiries and our observations and how we judge things, is how fluid those positions are, those words that create hierarchies of let's say dominance or prevalence or preference, how quickly and easily they shift position, and I see work in aesthetics or art, whatever it is, as understanding the agility of language, its ability to spring so quickly from one state to another. It's a bit like those electrons that somehow jump and we didn't know how they got from A to B, but suddenly you're doing one thing and bam it's another. And that all depends, not all, but a lot depends on your worldview, there's politics behind it, your own, what you want to accomplish, you're dealing in my case with people, you want it to be persuasive, you want to communicate with the past, you want to create a future, ba-ba-ba-ba, so there's this very complicated—not dialogue

but multilogue going on with the world and the question what is the subject. Now, what did Andy Warhol say? “No one told me what to talk about.” And I think that applies for us, but in the meantime there is something to talk about. What is it and how do we speak?

**ALVA NOË:** When you bring up knowledge and the don’t know mind, that’s actually— That cuts both ways, because without expectations or without some knowledge or without some ability to enter into—to know what questions to ask of that which is right in front of you, it leaves you untouched, if you’re—so there is a way in which, what you want is to—you know—for an example, when I actually, in rehearsal, I was in—we were in Munich and I overheard you say something to the dancers. I think I can say something I heard you say privately to them and you said—and these are accomplished professional dancers. You said, “It’s never too late for you to learn new degrees of awareness. It’s never too late to learn new degrees of awareness.” And I thought, “wow, that’s interesting. That’s the task he’s giving the dancers,” which is actually a life task, right, that’s a task for any of us in our lives. “It’s never too late to learn new degrees of sensation,” you then repeated it a second time with that phrase. You know, that’s the object of meditation, or religious or spiritual practice, or life. And but it’s that—that’s the achievement of a kind of competence, that’s the achievement of a kind of skill, that’s kind of knowledge, that’s knowledge, that’s “wow, I am attentive, I capable of perceiving degrees of consciousness.”

And likewise, from the audience side, if you go to one of Bill’s shows, and you don’t know anything about contemporary dance, it’s a challenge to make sense of it and then

one of the things that you try to do, I think anybody with your project tries to do, is give the audience the knowledge in real time to figure out what they're seeing, so that they can see it. But it's this weird back and forth between not knowing and knowing.

Here's a way—here's actually a way—let me put it as a problem. In my own work I've come to feel that since everything we know—like, this can only show up as a glass for me, because I know how to reach out and pick it up. In the absence—if I had a different kind of body or a different kind of skill, or difference kind of need, I wouldn't have the right kind of access to this cup, to this glass. So everything that we see is relative to what we expect to see, or what we know, what we think we're going to see. And if that's true, then it means we can never see anything new. So how do we ever perceive the new, how do we ever perceive the novel? I don't think that's actually—we probably all in this room would like to think, “well, of course, we do have new experiences,” but do we? Do we ever have new experiences?

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Is that my question?

**ALVA NOË:** Yes, sorry.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** You know, Daniel Barenboim asked me that also. He's also a philosopher, he did the biennale, and I'm trying to think. Well, there's degrees. For example, let's say there's Roberta. Raise your hand, Roberta. There's Roberta. And every night Roberta does this in the show. She does a particular solo, I hope you don't mind,

yeah, it's this sort of amazing, very strange human event. I don't understand it, and that's what I love about it. I have no idea what will emerge, but it's consistent. She is consistent in its aesthetics, its dynamics, its timing, its—the density. It's always Roberta in that solo, but **it** is never, ever the same thing, but it is always different.

**ALVA NOË:** It's never the same thing, but it's always the same.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Always the same, yeah. But it's not the same.

**ALVA NOË:** But it's not the same.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** I'm like, "what is that," you know? And it's not so much a question of the thing she's doing, but "what is Roberta?" You know, what is it to be Roberta the artist? What is it to be Roberta onstage at that moment in that position with those conditions, with those expectations for herself, from the audience? What is a Roberta? And that for me is just—amazing. Sorry, dear.

**ALVA NOË:** Which is related to "what is a language?" Because a language—every time we speak in some sense we're always doing something new, something novel, trying to get an idea across in a particular situation in response to a particular demand, but we're always doing it also—there's some sense in which we're always doing the same thing. We're just using words we all know and phrases we all know, and yet—So there's ability

to make something which is actually a one-of-a-kind, temporally existent event to make it the same is a style—it's a style that unifies it.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** I have an idea. Let's question the idea of novelty, since we're being philosophical right now, you know. What is novelty—is there some demand, some imperative, for novelty? When did novelty enter the cultural dialogue? When did novelty enter our society as something as valuable as truth and beauty and whatever? Where was the emergence of the idea of novelty as having a positive attribute for aesthetic practice, let's say. And *is* it an imperative? Must one be novel in order to be let's say—achieve communication on some level, and that I really question.

**ALVA NOË:** So when I was talking about novelty and this sort of the value of novelty or I implied a value of novelty, I didn't quite mean originality or+ novelty for the artist. I meant something more like actually being able to see what there is without preconceptions, so there's—you know, we all know the experience of being in a room and something's going on and you don't notice it. Like, I just noticed that some friends of mine are sitting five rows back, I hadn't see them before, but actually I am sure that they had stimulated my retina before now. They stimulated my retina but I didn't do the—I didn't make the response that was necessary to bring Robert and Jonathan into focus. They were there stimulating me, but I wasn't touching them. You need to have the skills to reach out and touch them to perceive them. But that means, if you need to have skills to perceive at all, then what is beyond your skill domain is not there for you. It's like

graffiti on a wall in a language you can't read, it's not there for you, it's nothing but marks on the wall.

Alex Nagel, who is also in the audience, told me, let me just give you an anecdote. Alex told me this anecdote, supposedly Schubert said it. Somebody asked Schubert, "How do you write a good song?" And Schubert said, "Well, you write a song that nobody's ever heard before that sounds like a song they've heard before." **(laughter)** That they recognize, otherwise they don't get it. You know, that's what we mean when we say an artist is beyond his or her time, it's just not—it's not perceptible, so it's a threshold phenomenon. It's a give and take, a bootstrapping, a kind of—it's not there and then you make it there by—and maybe that's why what you do is such a moving experience. Because what you're essentially saying to your audience is, "Change yourself, get new skills so that you can see what I'm showing you." Because it's not really there. You can go to one of your shows or go to a museum and look at a work by a painter and see nothing, you can be blind to what is there. Most of us *are* blind *most* of the time to *most* of what is going on around us, and that's why we educate our children and teach them languages and encourage them to draw—because we want to open up their worlds.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** My wife, who I think is rather wise, once we were talking and she said, "You know, the interesting thing about seeing art that shifts your perceptions is that one says to oneself, 'Oh, I didn't know this could do that,'" you know. "I didn't know." And you had that experience of assuming you knew how it worked and what it did and what the rules were and all of a sudden all the rules changed, and you're going,

“Oh, I didn’t know that perhaps in this environment there was flexibility or there was movement possible.” It’s not progression, it’s just a *shift*, that there’s this perceptible shift, you know, and I guess it’s a shift in perception, too.

**ALVA NOË:** Which is what we do when—So there’s an experience which I like to think of, it’s a kind of proto-experience of art, I’m sure we’ve all had it. You go a gallery and you look at a painting and you don’t get it, it’s flat, it’s opaque, it just doesn’t speak to you in any way, but maybe you’ve gone to the gallery with a friend who loves that piece and says, “But didn’t you see *this*, or didn’t you know that this happened in response to that?” And this picture, which is in one sense purely flat, it’s purely two-dimensional, all of a sudden can disclose a structure to you, it can reveal a depth, so something has changed. The picture didn’t change. You changed, and you changed through a conversation and a dynamic of looking, talking, looking, talking.

I think that that which we’ve just enacted there, this transformation that allows you to see the thing in front of you differently, is really, on the one hand, a paradigm of all perceptual consciousness, and it’s a clue to why art is so important to us, because it gives us that opportunity to live that, to encounter that on an afternoon in the museum, this basic fact about how conversation with other people can transform us by opening us up to the world, to what was there, because that picture was there, but so there’s a wonderful kind of—and by the way that is also philosophy, that’s what philosophy is about. Philosophy is about acquiring new forms of access to the world through conversation. That’s what philosophy is.



**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** I guess that's what art is.

**ALVA NOË:** And that's what art is.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** That's one of the things—but probably, mainly.

**ALVA NOË:** That's why you're a philosopher and I'm a dancer.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** There you go! We're in trouble now.

**ALVA NOË:** It takes time. Toni Morrison just asked what about time? What about time? It all unfolds in time and time—there is no experience at an instant. That's in a way—there's no painting at an instant. And your show—so that's another example in which the performing artist is making experience, because you're making these events which have these arcs and temporal unity, this internal logic, they're not just random happenings, although momentarily it can seem like it is—"There are seven things going on onstage, what am I supposed to be paying attention to?" So through time we discover the meaning, and it takes time to do it and experience itself is temporal.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** A somewhat strange difference between sitting before a painting and sitting in an audience before a performance. An audience is a creature, it's an entity, you know, and how many of you are at a performance, how many thousand of

you, and often comes up the question “I didn’t know whether to laugh,” for example. “Maybe I shouldn’t laugh.” “I wanted to laugh, but I was too embarrassed.” And it’s very interesting the messages you get, about how it’s okay to understand a certain way, from this collective. That’s why people probably go to church. You know, it’s—you can have your spiritual enthusiasm in that kind of environment. And I often wonder about the various inhibitions to understanding that pressure of the group puts on the audience while they’re watching. Especially happens in Europe, when, for example, because we do shows in English, people are a little uncertain about the language, or often uncertain, and they’re unsure about laughing. Yesterday there was a tremendous amount of confidence about their—people’s understanding, which is not necessarily, I feel—

**ALVA NOË:** At BAM last night.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** At BAM. But the dynamics of the actual situation of viewing, observing, like whether you’re in a gallery where you have to do the work by yourself. What do you do when you’re sitting and you’re going like, “I don’t get this,” you know? Or “I want to get it,” or “am I not supposed to get it, and is there a message, is there no message, should I wait?” And the same questions come up in front of a painting. “What am I looking at? Am I looking at technique? Do I know the history of painting? When was this made? Is this brand-new? Is this twenty years ago?”

**ALVA NOË:** And in theater, in theaters you get this further factor which is that you’re supposed to sit quietly and just you can’t cough or fidget too much because the people

around you will complain and you can quickly gain the hostility of an audience if you don't relieve their anxiety about what they're supposed to be feeling. So that's—is that something you concern yourself with?

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Well I mean, you can make the audience aware of themselves, and that's a device. I was talking about that last night in the audience talk, the so-called fourth wall is something that you can use, you can break it down, in order to create dynamic structure and tension, so if I knock that wall down, and I say, "Okay, hi," like that, people are suddenly aware that we're aware. They assume we're not aware of them, assume that's it something like the window of, you know, Lord and Taylor's Christmas there, it's a little show going on, but we're acutely aware. A painting's not aware, or at least as far as I know, and so you have a live entity, and you have another live entity, two live things communicating with each other in these very unusual ways. But I find that there are devices which unite an audience and devices which can divide an audience, you know. There's people's ideas of how to behave in theater, obviously. Last night there was this one device where we sustained something for a very, very long time, you know, which was actually a pretty amazing performance, and then one of the characters said, "This is really irritating," and everyone cracks up, and last night, in the history of the performance, there was this huge applause and I was like . . . **(laughter)** And then at another point, there's this kind of really heavy scene at the end, it's basically the immolation and at one point one of the characters very rudely blows cigarette smoke in poor Roberta's face, and the audience *completely* cracked up. Not in Japan, London, Berlin, Rio, nowhere on earth has anyone laughed except in New York.

**(laughter)**

**ALVA NOË:** But they didn't laugh Wednesday night either. It was something about the timings of last night. It's different from one night to the next.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** But it's so strange. It's a collective thing. It's not just one person, and I can't figure out what it is, but I know there's a curious thing here, it's fascinating, actually.

**ALVA NOË:** But just going back to this, to this, the difference between sort of theater and painting or sculpture. I've just been thinking a lot about Robert Lazzarini's sculpture, I wrote a paper for his catalog, and he's got these—he makes sculptures, for example, make a gun, I'm not going to describe it perfectly, forgive me. But he'll make a gun, but it's distorted, it's been warped in such a way that it's as if you're seeing it in a perspective other than the perspective you're seeing it from. And so you naturally adjust your position in relation to the object in order to bring it into focus, but then you quickly realize that there is no perspective that brings it into focus, and one of the—so it's very destabilizing.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** It's a choreographic object.

**ALVA NOË:** It's a choreographic object.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** That's a very interesting point, that choreography exists in visual arts very much.

**ALVA NOË:** And it makes it and then what it does it is it shifts the focus of what the problem is, so one the interesting things is one of the effects of these pieces—I hope Robert would agree with this—is that it gives them kind of a quasi-pictoriality. Because all of sudden you realize that none of your movements in relation to it make any difference to your relationship to it in the way that you expect it to, and that's characteristic of your relationship to a depicted object. You can't—if I move closer to the picture, I don't move closer to the depicted person, and yet all of a sudden you also realize that what's *really* going on there is a kind of an enacted performance, that you are now—that picture has forced you to engage in a dance. And so there's a way in which it is—I'm sorry, not the picture, the sculpture, has invited you to do exactly what we do when we visit BAM.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** That's one of the questions I was having, which is where is the threshold of choreographic practice, and obviously it's not within dance, quite frankly. A sculpture like that is, from my perspective, and maybe not, Robert, are you there? It's not maybe from your perspective, I don't know how you feel about the phenomenology of that particular work, but I feel that it's highly choreographic. I mean, that is it, that's the point, you cannot know the work without motion, you can't have an

experience of the work, and the work is meant to be experienced. You had some intentions in that respect?

**(inaudible)**

Among a thousand other subjects. It's dense.

**ALVA NOË:** There's many other things going on, but there's this, because the point—I was just trying to meet Bill on this one point, which is that you make—a sculptor, I don't mean you personally, but you make a thing, an object, but the value of it as an opportunity for art is not sort of static, it's extended and it's temporal and it's—really it's an invitation to do something and so, in a sense, I think that's what Bill means when he says it's a choreographic object, it's an invitation to dance or to enact something, or to create something, and that's—I think that's also even if you're sitting in a dark theater watching the stage, something like that is going on, because you can't—if you are really just sitting there in the dark watching, if you're like watching TV, if you're in that TV modality, passive, you're not there, you're not getting it.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** You can turn it off, too, you can pause it, usually, these days. I want to go back to Robert's thing. It's like it's a different kind of—activity but very similar to Richard Serra in that respect. I'm sure some of you wandered by the Met while it was up there, MOMA rather, with Richard you had this visceral moment where something in you says “I'm going to protect myself, because geological time is now, New

York might shake,” you never know, and you decide to move away from the wall that is hanging over you like this that weighs forty thousand tons and on the other hand you want to investigate the vertiginous aspects of it and how you feel and you’re interested in how you feel. What happens to your inner ear as you walk around it, how your eyes connect to your ears, connect to your sense of self-preservation, and there’s all this whole network going on (of) experience and yours has also—but it’s like the guns for that matter, it’s like the guns are rendered harmless but are creepy in a different way, you know what I mean?

**ALVA NOË:** At Robert’s show at the Aldrich, there was a school group there, and, as I recall, the kids weren’t allowed—they were concerned about the kids being confronted with these gun images. You know, like a public school. Guns—guns aren’t neutral. And likewise, I mean, I think there *should* be warnings put on Serra’s sculptures, **(laughter)** I love them, but they’re scary. They’re scary. I mean, they, as my father once said, they get under your skin, I mean, they really, they really get under your skin.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** There’s another, a less, or more benign version. Anish Kapoor has recently made some mirrors and they’re composed like insect eyes. They are thousands of hexagons in a concave part of a sphere, it’s actually a sphere, and in order to understand it, you go like this, and your image shifts very quickly like this, it’s not sort of, you know, smoothly, you know, it’s not contiguous, and so to figure out how this object works, you end up going like this, and you watch people, and everyone’s going

like this, **(laughter)** and I'm going, "Anish, it's a choreographic object," and "I guess so."

**ALVA NOË:** But what I would then want to say is that all works are in that sense choreographic if you sufficiently expand—

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Some are more, some are less.

**ALVA NOË:** It depends on how narrow you are with what your conception of what the choreographic is. For instance, I was suggesting that even a painting is an opportunity, *requires* a conversation, so that there's a kind of choreography of words and ideas.

People sometimes think that there's art and then there's the babble that people make about art, that there's this, the criticism. But actually the criticism, that's the life of the art, because the art is just an opportunity for that, which is where the transformation happens—in your encounter with the world, so even just looking at a flat, two-dimensional painting that doesn't—although even there, you walk into a gallery, and there's a picture on the wall, and you immediately have to decide where to stand in relationship to it.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Well, is the movement of my mind any less valuable than the movement of my body, for that matter?

**ALVA NOË:** And its movement. And its movement.



**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** You know what I mean?

**ALVA NOË:** And its movement.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** So if I'm standing in front of Sigmar Polke, I'm looking at twenty layers of strategy, I'm going "how the hell did he get those polka dots to come off before the line," I'm trying to figure, "how the hell did he make that?" and there I am going and I feel like I've had a workout, you know, **(laughter)** I really do. And on the other hand, there's a—in my profession there's a sort of—I would almost say prejudice, but it's sort of a nostalgia, and a kind of boring nostalgia, where dance is supposed to be evoke certain, just a small spectrum of emotions, like awe and that one, you know, I don't have a name for it—

**ALVA NOË:** Verklemt.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** It's supposed to verklem you. There was a blog and I just finally to—I was like this, she had written "I'm not about emotions, I'm only about ideas." And I wrote back and I said, "I am a member of the class of people to whom emotions give pleasure—I mean, emotions, ideas, give pleasure." So ideas give me pleasure. I like ideas, they feel good, you know what I mean? I'm happy, someone has a great idea, someone choreographs something, and I go like, "That is fucking great," and

you're happy, you know, and it doesn't have to do with someone dying in someone's arms and the whole thing, you know.

**ALVA NOË:** Actually, that raises this really fascinating question, which I think brings us back to knowledge, which is the role of the understanding and skill and the intellect in our emotional lives, in our emotional experience. For instance, people might think of philosophy, my art, as the paradigm dry, intellectual activity. As if to say *merely* intellectual activity. But in fact, philosophy begins in puzzlement, and puzzlement is an emotion. Wittgenstein said—he's my favorite philosopher—he said that the form of a philosophical problem is "I don't know my way around, I'm lost," and then so what you're doing is you're just trying to find your way home. Or, as he said, getting a kind of a sense of where you are, asort of a perspicuous overview of the city, of the town, of the place where I am.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** When I mentioned at the beginning getting my bearings, for example, why are we working together. I'm trying to get my bearings, or refinement for that matter. Yeah, sure, I know where I am, but do I really know where I am, you know. So that is part of the conversation, you know.

**ALVA NOË:** So ideas are emotional, and emotions have intellectual, or there is, that is, ideas have emotional significance, and it is emotion that drives the interest in ideas. We don't—you know, there's a kind of a fantasy that I think some philosophers have cultivated. Like, maybe Heidegger had this idea and maybe this is sort of the theme of the

1960s, which is that it should all be immediate, the flow, just kind of being in the groove, *no* reflection, *just* immediacy, right? But there is no—well, first of all, reflection is a path to immediacy, but second of all, there is no immediacy for human beings without reflection. I mean, we are constantly trying to, as I said before, bring our experience into focus and likewise, connecting the circles, art is a space—it's like a safe space for us to do that.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Well, art's Roberta. We're going back to Roberta, as Roberta has reflected, you know, on something and she tries to give it immediacy every time she is out there, she is trying—she prepares. It's not like Roberta goes out and “whatever, okay” you know. That's not it. It's a life. It's a life of questioning. What she does with her life. You know, you ask, “is this it?”

**ALVA NOË:** Right, so that's another thing, so if you're in the audience and you're encountering that, it's this challenge, it's this *herausforderung* this invitation to be that, too, or to be in the moment, try to be in the moment, it's very hard to be in the moment, easier said than done, and if you're not in the moment when you're at the dance, it's going to be over, and you're going to have paid fifty dollars, and it's over, so you have to be there, but how do you be there? And again, you can't be just naked, you can't just be untutored, and this is actually related to something else that we've talked a lot about, and I see that Nora Zuniga Shaw is here and one of your projects that you've undertaken with Nora and others is the sequenced objects project, which is this really interesting—do you want to say something about that, but it's this really interesting— I mean here's how I

sort of understand it and I think like anything very interesting, it's much bigger than what one person's understanding of it kind of sums up. It's like a city that needs to be understood, needs to be learned how to navigate.

Bill made this dance a few years ago called *One Flat Thing, Reproduced*, and all dancers, so far as I can tell, constantly feel like they're at the margins of the known world, like nobody really takes them seriously or understands them. And in part that's because we're not very educated in dance, you know, like we all kind of have the Mona Lisa, we all kind of have a sort of picture bank in our memories, but how much do we really know about dance that enables us to—that we can bring to an encounter with a new dance? So Bill like many, many other dancers, I think, choreographers, has been interested in kind of creating an educational opportunity for people to learn the language of a dance and so see what's going on in it.

It's an exact illustration of what I was talking about before—that you can only see that which you have the schools to reach. So there's this very elaborate video project where a film of a sort of a frontal shot of this dance was made and then in a laborious process that involved interrogating the dancers and interrogating Bill and the work of engineers and scientists. They essentially created animations or illustrations or annotations that called attention to structural events, like, for instance, similarities of movement at different places at the same time, what you call counterpoint.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** It's basically a picture of the dancers' minds, it's what they intend, it's what they are intending on doing.

**ALVA NOË:** That can't be right, that can't be right. No, no, because nobody—in fact, there's a nice anecdote that Nora said, Nora said, you know, one of the things they did is they were interested in cuing relationships—when is one dancer giving a cue? When is one dancer doing something which functions as a cue to the other dancers? And it turns out that there's this total mismatch between when they thought they were cuing and when they were actually cuing. People would say, “I am cuing so-and-so here,” but, in fact, that person's not responding. I don't think about what the dancers are thinking—that's about a formal—

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** No, I'm talking about in the frontal view, as opposed to the top view with cues. In the frontal view, they are creating these alignments. All these curves that you see and these verticalities. That's a huge counterpoint, which they are very, very intentionally making. It's this labyrinth of curvature and countercurvature that they are trying to align.

**ALVA NOË:** I would bet money that when the dancers watch this Synchronous Objects website, they have a transformation in the way they see what they're doing.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Because they don't see the entire picture.

**ALVA NOË:** Because it's revealing. I'm very curious—after a little while, maybe the dancers can get in on this conversation, because it seems as if there's a formal structure there, which is kind of emergent in the individual things that are being done, but there's no way—I'd be very surprised, I'm actually making two points. (a), I'd be very surprised if actually that's in their minds, and (b), I'd be surprised if it would be a good thing if it is in their minds. Okay, Fabrice, Fabrice—

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** How about the whole opening when I'm going to teach them how to read, right? Teach them how to read.

**ALVA NOË:** Fabrice, tell Bill that I'm right, please?

**(inaudible)**

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** You're on now.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** It takes the attention, their kind of quality of attention to one another and the choices they're making in the moment, sometimes improvisational, sometimes more structured, that's I think what I'm interpreting as saying it's a picture of their intentions. You can really see their integrity and the community between them in what they do.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** I don't think that people actually grasp the task at hand. This dance took oh, probably, how long, six, seven years, I don't know how long it took—how long did we work on that? For freaking ever, right? I changed it over years. Every time I had the opportunity. Like a word processing document, it just kept getting longer from the middle, you know, more punctuation, another word, et cetera, et cetera, and it kept extending. Of course, not every dancer is aware of every single alignment link that's within it. But part of the project was to communicate to laypeople the depth of awareness that dancers have. It's not like they're sort of going, "Uh, now I do this, and I did it, and I'm sure it worked down the line." It's not like the Rockettes, put it that way, you know, where you get a sense that you're—

**ALVA NOË:** Even the Rockettes.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** So is that this kind of work is equivalent to let's say to orchestral accomplishment, symphonic work where Simon Reynolds, for example, I saw him a little while ago, you know, it's kind of a gag, but in the middle of the symphony he steps away and the orchestra continues without him. In that sense, that's what the dancers do. They're in command of the work, you know, and they're in command of their intentions and the accomplishment of these intentions. And part of the project is to just I would say stir up a little respect for what dancers accomplish. People just think, "Oh that was cool." Do you have any idea how aware they are? What they're actually trying to do, and working against all the forces of physics, you know, gravity being their great partner, how they manage, in real time, this immediacy, you know? Also—I had have the conceit

also of people saying, “oh, choreography, you know, well, you jump around and da-da-da,” is that actually it’s a compositional practice.

When I went to the Berlin Philharmonic to show them this and say, “maybe you’d be interested in doing something like this for music,” and they looked at it and they went, “Oh my God, you’re a composer.” And I went like, “yeah.” I compose dances. But it’s musical, I’m like, “yeah.” They said, “that’s a score.” And I was like, “Yeah.” So there’s a big gap. People just assume it’s some junk, you know. For example, that dance is commonly played in PNB in where is it, Seattle, right? There was *scandal*, can you imagine? It was considered an outrage, letters sent to the board, “How dare you throw this chaotic shit in front of us? This is a ballet company!” and I did that to say that, “Oh, actually, classicism looks like something else right now. It’s a very classical work, it’s highly classical, but classicism has migrated to other kinds of gestalt, you know, other kinds of form.” The principle—they’re just principles, they don’t have to look—what did Magritte say? “An object is not so attached to its own name that one cannot find another or better therefor?” You could sort of reverse that, classicism does not have to look like, whatever, a still life.

**ALVA NOË:** So what is the classical?

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** The classical is a—maybe I’ll quote Roland Barthes saying that it’s relational. It has to do with conditions of agreement and equivalence. It’s about saying that we as an organization agree on certain things and that we will attempt to in a,



let's say, in the best sense of politics exhibit a almost in the practice, not in the message, big difference, an almost utopian state of how do you say, society. That we are agreed about our goals. We agree, and we have consensus about this, and we will try to uphold this without law. So it's a kind of lawless society that functions nonetheless, and it's an interesting community.

**ALVA NOË:** If I could just go back to—By the way this is—you can see this—is it Synchronous Objects—just Google it. It's synchrony, Synchronous Objects. And the thing that I'm interested in is that I said before that conversation is somehow integral to the transformation that brings the work of art into focus, and what this Web site does, and I won't describe the details of it, is that it gives you a tool, or a tool, or a prop, or a conversation that does transform the way you can see it, so I did it with my philosophy students at Berkeley. I showed them the film, which is not the dance, but it's a picture of the dance, it's a film of the dance, and then we played with the tools that enable you to have your attention drawn to alignments and similarities and temporal dynamics and cuing relationships and then we watched it again, and it's an exact example of what I talked about before, where first it was flat and then it was somehow revealed so that the technology afforded an opportunity to allow the meaning of the work to get revealed and allowed us in the audience to have that kind of transformation which is so basic, I think, to understanding what kind of beings we are and what our relationship to the world is.

Part of the reason why I disagreed with you was that for me it's important that that transformation can happen kind of autonomously of what the dancers are thinking about,

even if it's true that the dancers are tasked with certain problems and that those problems in fact have to do with alignments or cues or whatever. What's interesting to me is that you can actually have structure revealed, or, better, can acquire the ability to see into and thus perceive the structure and when you couldn't before, just through a conversation.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** We have no literature, in the sense of documents or objects, we're not reified. Films are actual objects, finally, operas have librettos, there are scores, plays, obviously, sculpture, painting. Everything is there, you can grasp it, you can throw it away, you can burn it, you can, you know, you can do anything you want with it. But dances are very difficult to understand because you don't have the chance of having sustained observation. And part of the problem I had in Frankfurt was that I feel dance was at a general cultural disadvantage from not being able to back itself up with any kind of document. And Nora and I had this experience when *Synchronous Objects* came out, some dance-educated people, you know, burst into tears, and they said, "But this is what—we can see, they're saying what we all know," it's not like I'm reinventing the wheel, this is what we do, this is how we do it, but we had no way of saying it. So I'm wondering if there the possibility of starting now, at this time in history, of creating a literature with this new media? Can we actually have our own literature that people could read and become actually literate? We haven't found—maybe you could help us. It's not just visual literacy, it's sort of like kinetic literacy—I don't know what it is, but it is visual. What is the word? If you find it out, please send it in.

**ALVA NOË:** I want to slightly resist this idea.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** That moment?

**ALVA NOË:** Because—Well, that's why I chose the word prop for this. This is an opportunity for people to get into it. It's an opportunity. And it may be that from a purely political or marketing or cultural point of view, it's actually very useful that there is such a prop.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Think of John Jaspers' performance, the economics. I'm talking about a marginalized, an economically marginalized community that is quite large, you know, people living below the poverty line who are really good artists.

**ALVA NOË:** Right, right. The point I mean is that another way to achieve the same end would be just for lots of people to go to lots of dance and have lots of opportunity to talk about it and develop a relationship to dance.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** In a perfect world.

**ALVA NOË:** But it's such an unusual thing. I mean Obviously there's dancers here, but most of us, you know, we've seen Fred Astaire, and we're kind of familiar roughly with hip-hop and breakdancing and MTV stuff and Gene Kelly and maybe we've seen the *Nutcracker Suite*, but what resources do we have to see somebody who's actually doing something different, or something new. Because everything we do is always standing on

the shoulders of what others have done. So if somebody walks into this auditorium right now, arriving right now, like this man, then he doesn't know what we're talking about. He probably doesn't care. He's probably here to pick up his friend, but he doesn't know what we're talking about, there's no way he can know what we're talking about. It's like—as if somebody goes to one of your performances tonight, having never seen your teachers or seen your other work, how do they know what you're talking about? How do they know where you are?

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Should they?

**ALVA NOË:** You seem to feel that they should, right, that's why you wanted to make Synchronous Objects?

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** No, I'd be happy to be the first dance that they saw, then they'd go, "Why is it like that?" the other stuff.

**(laughter)**

**ALVA NOË:** But then, in a way, that's why one of your jobs then is to give them the resources they need to see it in real time, and then they don't need Synchronous Objects, or they just need to have the opportunity to go and be there.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Just having been through the politics of it. We had a very, very good artistic institution in the Ballet Frankfurt. We carried an entire opera house financially, but when it came down to knowing if we were doing—when there was political infighting that chose us as an object to unseat a politician, there was nothing, nothing that anyone in that political body could refer to to defend us. You know what I mean? There was nothing, There was no way of going, “is this good, is it bad, we don’t know? is it historically valid?” We were just in like Nowhereland. And it isn’t like there’s a culture of dance education or history or literature, even if they could say to someone, you know “So what’s the deal?” And “This related to that, dad a da, and they do that . . .” and they could make an informed decision, but this had only to do with, you know, kind of dirty politics and people not knowing, you know, so—

**ALVA NOË:** What you’re saying it reminds me so much of what people say about philosophy. People say, “What has philosophy taught us? What are the findings? We know what the physicists have found, and we know what the novelists have produced and what the chemists have come up with, but what has philosophy produced? What’s the bottom line?”

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** But physics without philosophy is a funky thing.

**ALVA NOË:** that may be true, but the interesting thing about the philosophy is you don’t read a philosophy book to find out what the philosopher believes, it’s not about the result, it’s about the journey, it’s about the conversation, it’s about the transformation you

undergo working towards the result, so I can tell you, well, Descartes may have thought, “I think, therefore I am,” but that’s nothing, that’s just a tagline to a meditation. He said that in the *Meditations on Philosophy*, which were actually invitations for each of us to follow a certain meditative process and thus come up to this insight to discover for ourselves, and so there’s a weird way in which you know, you don’t measure, you don’t have an object in philosophy, either. You have books, but philosophy books don’t sell well, I mean, you don’t measure philosophy’s impact by book sales.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** But you have salaried positions and, you know, and stuff like that, you know what I mean?

**ALVA NOË:** And thank goodness.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** And thank goodness. Whereas, I dance, therefore I hurt, you know, I ache. **(laughter)** Ibuprofen is bad for you, did you read in the *New York Times*? Don’t dance on ibuprofen, I just want to mention that, okay?

**ALVA NOË:** Why?

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Because apparently it’s kind of really bad. *New York Times*, Science, Health, read it, okay. So. All joking aside, yeah.

**ALVA NOË:** Let’s get serious.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** No supporting, supporting ibuprofen. Should we sign off or open it up? Paul, what do you think we should do?

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** (inaudible)

**Q:** Hi, thanks. Thanks so much for your words and thoughts, and I guess one thing that I'm just curious about. I know you touched on a little bit that the way you learn to dance is a full perceptive experience, so you might see a position, try to mimic it, see yourself in the mirror, refine the way you're mimicking it, and that we learn dance in that way, and I wonder—and it's a form of learning, a physical consciousness, and I wonder how that might parallel to the way we learn a moral consciousness, and then—I mean, do you expose yourself to atrocities in the world or, you know—I don't know what your thoughts are—and then feel the reaction to that and then is there any overlap between growing moral consciousness and growing physical consciousness?

**ALVA NOË:** Wow. It's an amazing question.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** It's a good question.

**ALVA NOË:** It's an amazing question. So the way I frame the problem of consciousness, it's the problem, "How does the world show up for us? How do we achieve access to the world?" You and I share a language, so you just reached me. You

were able to just connect to us, and to this whole room, because of that. If you had been deprived of language, or of that language, in this situation, you couldn't have done that. So there is a sense in which anything we learn is opening up worlds for us, is expanding consciousness, and is morally significant because it's—what greater value can there be than encountering the world? And then the other thing I wanted to associate to what you said, though, is just that—it seems to me that learning anything, this is true with any domain, it's not as though philosophy and dance are special. Anything we learn is—really changes what we are and where we are in relation to things around us and thus is morally important. That's why education is important.

**Q:** That begs the question of your— of where you started, where you claimed something about aesthetics, which sent a shiver up my spine. As I understand it, aesthetics is that which is outside of ethics.

**ALVA NOË:** Aesthetics is just the name of—what aesthetics refers to in its original meaning is perception, is our perceptual sensitivity, and so Kant wrote—

**Q:** In the Greek it means outside of ethics.

**ALVA NOË:** Oh yeah, okay, but why is that an important point, that it's outside of ethics? It's simply—it's a perceptual, it's perception, aesthetics is concerned with perception or possibly with the perception of art.



**Q:** It is also then a claim to a privileged position, which is apoliticized.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Is that what you believe?

**Q:** That's the meaning of the word, and that's why we talk about aesthetics as something which is outside of ethics. And going back to Wittgenstein, with the *Tractatus*. If the *Tractatus* is about anything, it's about the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. No, no, no, fascism is about the relationship of aesthetics and politics—

**(inaudible)**

But this is I think the point I'm trying to make. Why the retreat to aesthetics is problematic.

**ALVA NOË:** I was trying to use “aesthetics” in a way which I don't think was loaded in the way that perhaps the word is freighted for you. Aesthetics is the—well, you see, we use the word narrowly to talk about art and the experience of art, but one can use it more generally to think of the experience of the world, and I think part of what makes art—*part* of what makes, I don't want to make generalizations—art so important to us, is that it is this opportunity to live with the book, with the dance, with the picture, to reenact how we experience the world, or how we bring the world into focus for ourselves. It gives us these opportunities. Now, that always happens in a context, against a

background, which may be politically significant, or may not be, that's not—I don't think that that's really an issue.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** It's interesting that the question still is in the air, though.

**Q:** I wanted to go back to your discussion of experience as dance and the problem of how to investigate experience that you started with—it reminded me of Foucault in *The Order of Things*, saying that with the break, the break of the classical episteme is a moment when man discovers himself as an object of knowledge but can never see himself entirely and therefore discovers the finitude of knowledge, and it seems to me that that's happening a lot in Bill's work, that there is a very—a sense in which the subject is fractured, in the way you work, in the work from last night, and the way you work against representation, and the way you triangulate consciousness in relations, and it's all relational, but not in relation to a subject, and yet also at the same time there's this issue of literacy. That is to say that if we're going to study the problem of how we grasp our own experience and increase our knowledge, as you were discussing at the beginning, then we have to have a form of literacy if dance offers us the most immediate vehicle for this—

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** People don't even realize that we do grasp our experience.

**Q:** Beginning with that, right, but then you, yourself, Bill touched upon the classical aspect of your work, you mentioned it toward the end, this almost sounded to me like a

public sphere concept, we're in agreement, consensus without law, which suggests discussion, rational discussion, and, you know, the Habermasian critical rational argument, which is very harmonious. So I just wonder how we can have this sort of decentered subject of phenomenological self-awareness within a kind of classical framework in which we're sure of our communication with each other.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Would the classical framework suggest something other than that? What does the classical framework in your mind suggest?

**Q:** Well, I'm taking it from both what you said a few minutes ago and also the sense in which personal identity has at least in certain philosophical views, I don't know what you feel about Foucault, but says that the whole phenomenological project that underlies self-awareness, ourselves as our own objects of perception is what makes ourselves finite in our ability to know anything. So that doesn't seem very classical to me.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** What I say often to the dancers is that "what you know is what you feel." The entire breadth of your knowledge is what you sensed. That's why I want to say we don't work so much in mirrors, we don't have mirrors in our studio anymore, because they're counterproductive, actually. It's good to compare but finally when the dancers are onstage, they can't see themselves, but they can feel themselves, and they know the feeling of certain events, you know. And this is the most important thing that a dancer—and I when I say that the dancers become more aware, they become more raw, more sensitive to difference, so that you can sculpt it or shape it in time. That

you know not only where you are but you know *what* you are, and this is a question of just time. It does take time to acquire that experience. Some people actually are very quick. But I think in that sense it's never a finished project for a dancer. That this accretion, accumulation of knowledge is—that is the career. That's all it is, is a never-ending accumulation of knowledge.

**Q:** Just to get back to your question to me of what is classicism. I'll just refer to Foucault and Louis Morin, to those poststructuralists, who looked back at the seventeenth century and say that it's the perfect adequation of the representation of truth.

**ALVA NOË:** Say it again, please.

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** Adequation of representation of truth. I like the adequation part.

**Q:** Which is also to say language as a representation of the truth. And I think that's amazing what you just expressed, that we've shifted away from representation in language to sensation.

**ALVA NOË:** But there's another aspect of it because, well, first of all, when Bill was emphasizing the importance of the intellect, or the importance of the ideas and the work was all about language—the work is through and through saturated with language and trying to communicate, and this reference to the classical is in a way a reference to a kind

of framework structure within which sensations are having whatever significance it is that they have. I would say that in a way—when I heard your question, the problem it raised for me was a way of coming back to this idea of the problem of novelty, of how does one actually have a sensation without a name, or without a concept, or without a classical structure? And that is a real problem for—if we wish to understand ourselves and so it's a problem that comes out in the context of this artist's work.

**Q:** I would love to hear what you would say—what's the requirement, if any at all, of otherness for consciousness to occur, and you keep coming back to the original. So I'm thinking of a baby being born, and the first word it learns and the first concept it has and how it gets bootstrapped in front of its first other, its mother, and I'd love to hear you speak a little bit about that. Also, I remember reading once that consciousness is actually not—it's time stamped backwards, it's not in real time, it's backdated, and so how that affects—so sensations coming in, it seems real-time, but it's actually screwed up a bit there. And lastly I just wanted to say to you, you asked about literature, and something in me came up and I love the idea of the ephemerality of it, it's happening once and for all and never again, and it unites the group in a way that can never be replicated. And when you are reading something that you know you can look at later, like a movie or a book, you listen in a different way, you engage in a different way, and there's something that dance brings out that I think viscerally—and I just would just love to hear you talk about it.

**ALVA NOË:** Great questions. We are always already in relationships with others. I mean, we first see things—mother, I'll just call primary caretaker Mother—Mother directs child's gaze to objects, and we have joint retention of an object. The baby in the beginning can't even regulate its own digestive cycle or will choke in its own vomit, and Mother raises Baby and pats Baby's back and actually starts processes of self-regulation. So it seems to me that we are always—we start out in a kind of dependent way, in a dependent relation to the other. We are coupled with the other, we are not alone. And that's the starting point. And then there's a drama about how we find ourselves as distinct from the other, but that happens later, that happens in time. And I think it's kind of a myth that we ever actually succeed in it. We are always not just ourselves, or we are dependent like a plant that's dependent on the soil, we are dependent on the soil and other people are part of that soil, so that's my general comment on that.

And then about the backwards time stamp. That's a really complicated issue. The thing is there's a tendency. That idea, that many neuroscientists will say, takes for granted a conception of experiences as these temporal, instantaneous sorts of things. My view is that an experience is like a melody. The melody is always all there, but it's never all there. And so is the melody backwards-referring and time stamped falsely? Well, yes, I mean, that's the amazing thing. The sounds I'm hearing now reflect the sounds that haven't played yet, and the sounds I later hear reflect the sounds I haven't heard before, and there's all sorts of curious psychological effects about the way in which what comes after affects how you experience what came before, but that's just the nature of that kind of phenomenon.

**Q: (inaudible)**

**ALVA NOË:** I don't think we live in a world of the raw data. We live in the world of other people and meaningful events. You know, I don't—I'm not like a cinematographer reading the frames of my instantaneous life. I'm talking to you. So everything I'm experiencing is—you're in the foreground of my experience, and I could try to step back from it and try to think about mere sensation or something which is instantaneous, but when I do that I've lost experience.

**PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:** Why did you so much love the notion of immediacy after reflection as a goal? After all, we never are alone, and we can't tickle ourselves, we need others. But in some way the goal, one might say, of a work of art is to rapture us, to seize us, to make us feel as though what we're feeling is new and it's an "as if" situation. No. I see Bill—

**WILLIAM FORSYTHE:** I don't know. I mean I'm loath to say that there are specific categories or goals. I don't think art-making is specifically teleological. It's not like we know that I'm going to accomplish this and I'm going to do this for culture, and that. I don't know. If you suppose, and I'll just say maybe if and then only maybe, but what you do I think try to evaluate is the quality of question that you're proposing.

**ALVA NOË:** I mean, my concern with immediacy really comes back to I think a very basic experience in my life, which is that one is never just in the flow. One is self-conscious. One is striving to play better by being less concerned about how well you're playing, that there's a real value in immediacy. In the phenomenological tradition, there was always this worry about how can you study experience, because you're living experience. And if I'm running to catch the bus, I can't be thinking about myself running to catch the bus. I'm trying to catch the bus, and the signpost that's blocking me from getting in the door doesn't show up for me as an object for me to contemplate and think about, it stands up as something for me to step around fluently as I slide into the bus. So there's this—Sartre was very concerned with this potential sort of schizophrenia of the philosophical standpoint, and I just love this idea in Kierkegaard that a certain kind of self-reflectiveness, that the natural endpoint of it is actually a kind of immediate relationship to that which interests you. And I also want to conclude by saying that I might not be the only person who has an urgent need to go the men's room, and we've been going on for a long time. I would prefer to stop, I mean, I could go and come back, but I want to get off the stage.

**(laughter/applause)**