



*Calling Clavigo 2002 (Roberto Fortuna)*

# Calling Clavigo - The Intellectual as Readymade

By Niels Lehmann

The performance has a distinctive tripartite structure. The first part unfolds as a lecture given by Professor Per Ørngaard on education based on Goethe's special view on formation.<sup>1</sup> Ørngaard is an expert on Goethe and he is an obvious choice for a performance dealing with formation as its theme and staging a part of a drama by Goethe. Nobody else could be better as an intellectual readymade. In *Calling Clavigo* (2002), Ørngaard is staged in a similar position to that the dwarfs and twins in *The Picture of Snow White*. Just as they are selected for the performance because of their mere appearance as dwarfs and twins, Ørngaard functions as a fragment of reality which is incorporated into *Calling Clavigo* because of his actual qualities. However, the difference should also be noted. As opposed to the dwarfs and twins who are chosen because of their physical appearance, he, as an intellectual, is chosen because of the insights he has gained, i.e. for his intellectual properties. This difference between the two types of readymades is ripe with meaning. On the one hand, the use of an intellectual as a readymade prolongs the concretist tradition, from which the involvement of reality fragments and found objects stems, but on the other hand it turns the tradition upside down. Originally, the concretist project was launched in order to help us perceive things anew in a time determined by an occlusion of being. In order to achieve this, the concretists believed, it was necessary to display things in an artistic context that draws them out of their immediate context. Thus, in the original version of the concretist project (which has played an important role for Dehlholm's work) the physical and sensual dimension of things was emphasized. Staging an intellectual as a fragment of reality represents a remarkable shift of interest from the physical to the mental or immaterial. Taking an interest in an intellectual means focusing on the network of concepts, ideas, and theories that have eventually created a particular network of thought in a particular brain rather than focusing on physical appearance.

For an analysis of *Calling Clavigo* it is, however, important to underline the similarity between twins and intellectuals when they are staged as readymades. As a reality fragment an intellectual is neither more nor less real than other types of people or for that matter other physical objects. In *Calling Clavigo*, Ørngaard actually functions as a readymade. He has not been asked to deliver certain points of view on formation. Nor is he asked to perform as an actor speaking specific lines written by Dehlholm. He is, tout court, asked to deliver a lecture by which he presents the position he has obtained after years of studying the subject and, in particular, Goethe's view on formation.

The same logic is applied for the second part of the performance, in which two more

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1) "Formation" is a translation of the German word "Bildung", which may also be translated simply as "education". Sometimes the German word is maintained in order to underline the reference to the German tradition that has played a major role in Denmark, and which functions as an important space of resonance in the performance *Calling Clavigo*.

intellectual readymades appear. Here an abstract dance sequence is added to a dialogue between two intellectuals who have commented on the topic of formation in public. I myself had the pleasure of performing in the second part of the *Calling Clavigo* together with my father. At that time, both of us had recently contributed a couple of articles about the notion of formation (Lehmann, Henning 2002 and Lehmann, Niels 2002). Because of these articles we were asked to act as discussion partners in *Calling Clavigo*, but only once. In line with the ideal of concretism that events shouldn't be repeated as reality unfolds in an irreversible time, Dehlholm wanted to replace the interlocutors after each performance. Thus, the individual performance was not only unique in the sense that some variation is inevitable when dealing with performing art, but also because this part of the performance would indeed vary from evening to evening. Just like Ørhrgaard we were injected into the performance as intellectual reality fragments. As opposed to Ørhrgaard whose presence in the performance depended on his expertise on Goethe, our involvement was due to a far more prosaic rationale. Apart from the fact that we had contributed to the public discussion on education, we also matched another of Dehlholm's starting points. From Dehlholm's request we understood that one of the reasons for staging the production was an interest in investigating how tradition is passed on from generation to generation. Therefore, she was looking for opportunities to bring representatives from two generations on stage. My father and I simply happened to fit "the job description".

For an adequate description of the "second act" of *Calling Clavigo* it should also be noted that we were only allowed "five minutes of fame." As interlocutors, we were asked to deliver a very short conversation about the subject while standing in a spotlight pointed at the centre of the stage. Having started the dialogue, we were escorted to the foyer, where we were supposed to continue the conversation. Even if the action was left to the dancers, however, our exchange of views on formation would still be part of the performance as the debate was still audible for the audience for a certain length of time. Insofar as the first part of the performance is mainly used for theoretical investigation of formation because the aesthetic dimension only works as a backdrop for a lecture, the second part inverts the relationship between figure and ground. Here, the conceptual discussion on formation is basically reduced to a form of "background music" for the dancers' artistic and non-verbal expression. This movement from a theoretical to an aesthetic expression is completed in the final act. Here, the starting point is Goethe's tragedy *Clavigo*, there are no longer any "eggheads" involved, and the theoretical investigations have been silenced.

In the third part of the production Dehlholm has chosen only to make a *mise en scène* of the fifth act of Goethe's drama about Clavigo – and a very formal and abstract one, as it were. Equally because of the reduction of the text and the formalistic approach, the story of the "workaholic" Clavigo, who chooses to terminate his engagement to his beloved Marie in order to devote himself to writing, the storyline loses its importance. Instead of focusing on Clavigo's tragic experience of seeing Marie dying from the loss of her fiancé and being killed himself in a fight with her revenge-seeking brother, the performance offers a sensual presentation of the atmosphere of sadness involved in the tragedy of Clavigo. This very special way of handling Goethe's text sets its mark on the overall expression of the production. If Dehlholm had chosen to tell the whole story using realistic means of expression, she would have created a continuum from the theoretical to the sensual approach to the world and asked the audience to meet the production with reason and sense-making. By formalizing and restraining the narrative of the drama she creates instead an expression that requires a much more sensuous and emotional response.

*Calling Clavigo* doesn't make sense in a classical philosophical sense and is not supposed to. Thus, the performance underlines the separation of the theoretical and aesthetic approaches to the world, carrying the second part by the creation of a complementary relation between the sensual and visible dance and the just audible development of conceptuality coming from afar. This complementarity seems to be the central key to *Calling Clavigo*. By establishing a complementary connection between the conceptual and the physical, the rational and the sensual, the two tracks are allowed to comment on each other without ever reaching a point of dialectical synthesis. The two "voices" of the performance never unite in a third overlapping voice. While the intellectual readymades provide conceptual reflections on formation in their own right, the dances and the sensuous staging of *Calling Clavigo*, in their own right, contribute to an atmosphere that is neither more nor less important than the reflections on formation. This fundamental artistic principle has important consequences for the production's contribution to the discussion about formation.

*Calling Clavigo* not only opens a space for reflection on the theme of formation that favors the multiple by letting many different voices and points of view be heard. More importantly, it challenges all these points of view with dance and other abstract and sensual stage elements that resist an easy incorporation into fixed conceptual frameworks. The performance gives no clear solution to the problem of formation in a late- (or perhaps post)modern world. On the one hand, it undermines any attempt to claim a universal ideal of formation but, on the other hand, it doesn't just leave us education with a broken ideal. Instead, the staging of many possible concepts of formation in a formal aesthetic setting displays the possibility of establishing various manifestations of coherent types of formation and the need to think about a proper consideration of the sensual dimension of life in the various conceptual definitions of formation.