Writings on Dance

16

Performing Institution

Winter 1997

Preface

Talking is talking
Dancing is dancing...

Talking is not dancing
Dancing is not talking...

Talking is dancing
Dancing is talking...

This edited quote from Douglas Dunn's contribution to the book *Merce Cunningham* serves to suggest the organising theme of this issue of *Writings on Dance*. In Dunn's set of couplings we might substitute 'writing' for 'talking' – although several of the papers published here were first presented as talks.

Most of the articles collected here suggest that dancing (or performance) is, or has, something that is lost or reduced in a translation to verbal, written or 'institutionalised' forms. Such a view is indicated, for example, in Mark Minchinton's *textual paradigm threatens to paralyse dance studies* in 'Dancing the Bridge', or Steve Paxton's *you are into "dancing" not "dance"* in his book review 'T.M.O.M.'. Stephanie Jordan, too, quotes those who want to *get the dancing back* into academic dance studies ('The Dancing Back'); and Zsuzsanna Soboslay, in an interview with Angela Badolato, argues that the bodily aspects of knowledges are rarely recognised or valued in universities.

But none of these writers maintains that 'dance' and 'discourse' are or ought to be in mutually exclusive opposition. Each writer attempts to negotiate a territory in between. In 'Strange Alliances: A Question of Taste' Eleanor Brickhill employs a number of writing voices in attempting to come to terms with the position of critic / observer. In 'Writing beneath the surface' Deborah Jowitt makes a response to suggestions that *description* of 'what goes on on-stage' does not constitute 'ideas'. 'Ideas', she argues, do not come in only one (discursive) form: descriptions of physical events can constitute ideas as can the physical events themselves.

Meaghan Morris steers well clear of the unproductive impasse of oppositions. Her article 'Indigestion: a rhetoric of reviewing' calls for a consideration of films (read 'dances') and writing about films, not as though they were in some relation of confrontation, of one to one or gut to gut opposition, but as, equally, products and 'expressions' of institutionalised forms and organisations of power and value – of what can and can't be said and done in different institutional contexts.

Dancing is after all not a redemptive activity: what gets danced where and when is as much an expression of institutionalised power as anything else, even if we wish to formulate dancing as one of the activities that can actively shape those institutions. Lucy Guerin discusses some of these issues in an interview with us about her experience as a dancer and choreographer in the great dance institution of New York.

What all these negotiations between dance and discourse suggest is that we need to avoid the idea that 'dance' pre-exists what we do with it. As Mark Minchinton suggests, we might, for example, see 'dancing' as a possible means of 'rorting the system' (or systems) – wherever those systems seem most limiting.

Sally Gardner

Cover image Lucy Guerin and Sarah Perron in Lucy Guerin's *Ghost in Bloom*
Photograph by A. Hitzenburger

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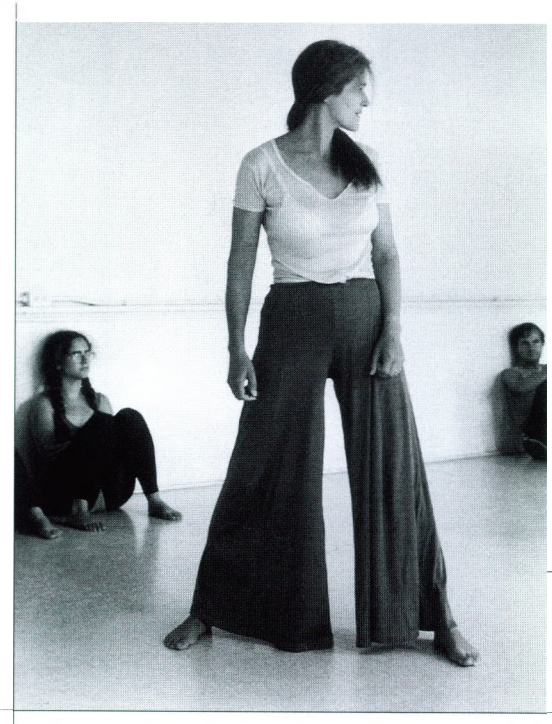


Deborah Jowitt

Writing Beneath Beyond Description

In a 1990 review of Susan Marshall's 'Articles of Faith', Joan Acocella noted the references one might draw from the dance – tall Eileen Thomas as a shaman or priest, Jews pushing through the desert, a community struggling to fight the ugliness within, and so on. However, she went on to say that the power of the piece does not lie in our ability to connect Marshall's work with social meanings or to deduce 'archetypal dramatic' action: 'It is the qualities that belong specifically to the movement – its shape in the air, its weight, speed, attack – that speak to us secretly. That is why a would-be profound dance may seem frivolous, a happy dance seem sad, or vice versa; because the movement has told us the secret truth behind the narrative.'

And that is one reason why it has always seemed so important to me that we who write about the famously evanescent art of dance, ground our responses in the work itself, providing enough of a sense of what happened to support formal analogies, considerations of meaning, style, social significance, historical connections, opinionated response – whatever criticism can legitimately take up. The point is, in searching for what a dance may mean, not to lose sight of what it is, or appears to be. The other reason that description figures more importantly in criticism of dance than in criticism of any other art form is dance's (let us not forget it for a minute) ephemerality. It doesn't hang about on walls to be revisited or wait by your bed with a bookmark in it or spill out of your glove compartment ready to be popped into a car's cassette deck.

This article was first presented as a paper to the International Academic Conference on Dance KIDE '95, Seoul, Korea

the Surface

left: Deborah Jowitt (Photograph: Lois Greenfield)
facing page: Deborah Jowitt directing daily Masters Session Critics's Conference, 1980

Descriptive writing – a certain kind of it – is the best way I know to assert the interdependence of content and form, of narration and movement's 'secret truths'. Suzanne Langer, or perhaps one of her exegetes (from whom I once took a course at the New School), offered the example of the whirlpool made by water flowing down a drain. We can explain the phenomenon in terms of impetus, gravity, and the shape of the basin, but the whirlpool itself is a created thing and vanishes when the faucet is turned off. We can attempt to dissect the mutual wizardry that form and content in art exercise upon each other, but the impact of the whole may slip away in the process. It is that created illusion that I yearn to evoke through words.

Martha Graham's *Night Journey* can't be reduced to a synopsis claiming it as the tragedy of Oedipus told from Jocasta's point of view, any more than it can be explained only by an analysis of the huge, angular, percussive moves that wrench the dancers' bodies and psyches around the stage. Ceremonious processions give it immense formality; like a Noh actor, the protagonist moves from remembering action to re-entering it. So her hobbled advance – hands lifting to frame silent calls for help, while Oedipus reaches from behind to touch her breasts, her belly – affects us in a complex way: we see a woman fleeing impending rape *and* a woman in the act of remembering that moment, her gestures polished and restrained by the passage of time (in itself an artistic illusion). *And* we see a creature stalked by an intruder (we feel the disruption in our own senses), her every step forward blocked by a new impediment hooking around her, invisible until it touches her.
In recent years, there has been grumbling about the attention some American dance critics (me certainly among them) give

to descriptive writing. Complaints link it to now suspect 'formalism'. In 1993, an article by Roger Copeland, entitled 'Dance Criticism and the Descriptive Bias' appeared in Britain's *Dance Theatre Journal*. Copeland laments dance's failure to produce a Clement Greenberg, a Charles Rosen, a Lionel Trilling. True, he praises dance writers' ability to capture in words the quality of dancing. Nor is he pushing for theorizing unmoored to the art in question ('I for one am not anxious to see the sensuous surface of the dancer's body vaporized beneath the blowtorch of deconstruction').

However, Copeland sets up a (to me) disturbing polarity between 'description' and 'ideas', which he finds descriptive writing essentially devoid of (although he fails to clarify what he means by 'ideas' and how they differ from 'theory'). He blames the supposed 'bias for description' on a semi-conscious collusion among choreographers, spectators, and writers to preserve the ineffableness of dance – a desire he considers a kind of wilful primitivism, related to dance's power to induce kinaesthesia, and to the allure its ritual roots and its semblance of wholeness have for a fractured contemporary society. It's as if the anti-intellectual stance legendarily attributed to dancers and choreographers is now presumed to have infected critics as well, and that the 'describer's' responses are too intuitive, too close to the work, or demand too little brain power to count as intellectual. In other words, we dive in and come up dripping.

Interestingly, judging by their remarks, some choreographers agree with Copeland. They want their work dignified by the intellectual display and distanced tone they see in some film criticism and art criticism. They want to be linked to trends in art and popular culture and *fin de siècle* malaise (as indeed I'm eager to do – if not on a weekly basis).

The casting of description in an adversarial role to 'ideas' troubles me – as if the more description a review contains, the lighter it becomes. This is a new wrinkle in the mind-body split. Before I attempt to argue further, or to analyze 'description', I'd like to examine it as an aspect of critical theories that stress focusing on the work itself. The 'new' literary criticism that emerged in America in the 1920s and became prominent in the 1940s and 1950s concerned itself less with what a text meant than with how it revealed that meaning. To T.S. Eliot, reducing a poem to its 'prose core' indeed reduced it; instead, the task of the critic was to exhibit the 'differential, residue, or tissue which keeps the object poetical or entire'. Such a view was certainly once shared by artists (Picasso dismissed some art critics with 'People who try to *explain* pictures are usually barking up the wrong tree').

It was a critical bias toward content (narrative, artistic biography, social ramifications, etc.) that Susan Sontag reacted to in her influential 1960s essays *Against Interpretation*. She was not, remember, against interpretation in its broadest sense; brilliant analysis, as in her examination of Alain Resnais' film *Muriel*, give the lie to that. I for one gladly latched on to Sontag's ideas as vindication of my goals. She put it enticingly: 'The best criticism dissolves considerations of content into those of form'. And: 'Equally valuable would be acts of criticism which would supply a really accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work of art'. I believed that for many years, and, to some extent, still believe it.

If I have slightly altered my view of critical writing, it is in part because dance has changed; so have the contexts in which we can view it. Although dance videos are not as common or as numerous as CDs on store shelves, the critic of the nineties has access to enough of them (and affordable home equipment to play them on) to make comparing and tracing bloodlines a process you can fall right into, entranced. (Coincidence handed me, juxtaposed on one tape, Shirley Clarke's 1957 film of Anna Sokolow's solo *Bullfight* and Madonna's recent video *Say Goodbye*. Guess which woman ends up on satin sheets with the matador.)

Also, much of the art that we were writing about in the 1960s and early 1970s seemed designed to thwart attempts to psychoanalyse it. Choreographers like Trisha Brown and Twyla Tharp shunned fiction and drew our attention to structure and process (and profoundly luscious movement). For some time, Merce Cunningham and George Balanchine had been telling us in maddeningly, charmingly, elliptical statements that the movement was the meaning. The 'sensuous surfaces' Sontag

referred to had almost nothing to do with superficiality, and writing about them – describing them – could be an intoxicatingly deep experience.

Since the mid-eighties, however, dance has fallen in love with narrative, drama, text, social and political commentary, and the heady postmodern welter of eclecticism, historical reference, and deconstruction of previous works of art. Art critic Suzy Gablik writes, ***In the multi-dimensional and slippery world of postmodern art, anything goes with anything, like a game without rules. Floating images such as those we see in the painting of David Salle maintain no relationship with anything at all, and meaning becomes detachable like keys on a keyring.***

If this is true, today's art and structuralist critique are made for one another. Digging into the work to extract allusions and archetypal elements can become a seductive brain game.

I resist this to a degree. Certainly the dance of today and my own studies in history have made me more aware that, individual creativity notwithstanding, art is indeed a cultural artefact, and as anthropologist Clifford Geertz points out, so are our responses to it. But because of that we need to keep grounding speculation in the created worlds before us. Performance artist Diane Torr disguises herself as a man to perform wildly stereotypical male 'numbers'. She gives cross-dressing workshops. Amid the critical discourse on empowerment of women and how a woman feels in drag, surely it is important to confront (although I didn't until the act of writing this) the conflicts within the image itself: an 'imperfect' or ersatz male masquerading as a self-defined quintessential male. Surely the contrast between round, smooth cheeks and assertive moustache, the loud, depthless voice, and the big, gruff gestures that make us laugh – *because* we know that this is a woman – need to be attended to, to be 'described'. In them reside truths about contemporary gender styles and essential gender differences.

Description at its best is not simply about surface. It hints at what lurks within a work. It links images through imaginative wordplay. The patterns of language can echo the rhythms and the impetus of dancing, as well as the responses of the spectator. I am not plumping for reportage or for reviews that are 80% description. Certainly facts are useful, as in Edwin Denby's squaring off, early in his great review of Balanchine's *Agon* in 1957, ***The curtain rises on a stage bare and silent. Upstage four boys are seen with their backs to the public and motionless. They wear the company's dance uniform. Lightly they stand in an intent stillness. They whirl, four at once, to face you. The soundless whirl is a downbeat that starts the action.***

This is an elegant and necessary laying of the framework within which other less linear forms of description will bloom. But blow-by-blow accounts of physical actions are useful only in small, skilled doses. To say, ***She slowly extends her right arm diagonally forward, at the same time stretching one leg to the rear. Then she bends the leg on which she is standing and inclines her ribcage slightly toward her hipbone...*** is not only singularly unentrancing to read, its pacing may actually violate the truth of an image that the eye and mind have grasped in a second or two as a fluid entity. Denby could get away with following a vivid, forthright image of Tamara Toumanova ('the force with which she rams her squared-off toe shoe into the floor') with a questionably fancy one ('her free leg deploys its mass from the leg she stands on'). A leg deploying its mass is hard enough to countenance in Denby. Those influenced by Denby (as indeed we all were) can flounder quite dreadfully attempting similar exercises.

Criticism can't provide a print analogue for a dance. Why should it? For one thing, criticism is irrevocably subjective, however fair-minded it may be; description can only offer some accurate facts, a pinpointing of style, and an evocation of a work's essential nature – a vision filtered through particular eyes and a particular sensibility.

In descriptive passages I admire, the self-reflection that Copeland misses in dance criticism has sometimes occurred (perhaps

even half-consciously) *before* the description is written, and is embedded in it. Back in 1981, I followed a not especially memorable description of a Senegalese dance troupe (the polyrhythmic display of softly thudding feet, the nodding heads, rolling shoulders, and churning hips) by this sentence: 'I imagine the dancers take their bodies apart at night before sleeping and put a pat of butter in every joint'. I was startled then to see this sentence appear, typed, apparently, by my fingers. It surprises me now. Where did it come from? It says something, it seems to me, about the secret aura that surrounds ritual, about my own awe in the face of admired 'otherness', about the bedrock of African tradition still informing this modern theatrical company, and about my (and by implication, possibly other spectators') connection to the whole thing on some intuitive level. Perhaps I'm making one frail sentence bear too much weight. The burden may not be theories, but I *think* they are ideas.

Years ago, Laura Shapiro produced a dead-on image of Murray Louis showing off his impishly flexible body ***like a housewife with a new kitchen, every dial and switch activating something sudden and impressive. Quick shifts of weight, spontaneous rebounds from one extremity to the next, the twitch of a shoulder or a knee, these charge him with a recurrent flow of power.***

Not only do I find this a supremely accurate picture of Louis's personal style, but the simile situates him in a playful, possibly lightweight world in which the body is separated from its controlling agent – a gadget for its owner's endlessly delighted manipulating. Puppet and puppeteer rolled into one. Shapiro *could* have gone on to discuss the relation between Louis and his mentor Alwin Nikolais, who was once a puppeteer, to lay out Nikolais' reaction against the ego-centered dramas of modern dance, and theories about the puppet by Heinrich Kleist and Gordon Craig. But the ideas gleaming in her description are provocative in themselves.

Marcia Siegel's account of Douglas Dunn in *Graz* in 1976 creates print structures that evoke Dunn's casualness, bluntness, and eccentricity: ***Later, arriving downstage in a corner, he found some stairs and a door in a wall. There he did a set of variations on whether to continue or make his escape. He'd lunge determinedly at the stairs, panic, whirl down them again, put a hand out the door, reconsider – till he was weaving and feinting in an ecstasy of indecision.***

How telling that ***he found some stairs ...***

When we write about something as informal as Douglas Dunn moseying around in *Graz*, our choice of words and the length and shape of sentences may – with luck – differ from those used to evoke Balanchine's ripe, dreamily romantic *Liebeslieder Waltzes* or Molissa Fenley's amazonian solo *Rite of Spring*. Often, in great criticism, the prose style mirrors something of the dance style.

Joan Acocella fixes her eye and heart on Mark Morris's *Strict Songs:* ***Five couples (the full cast) are on-stage. In each couple, one person lies down on the floor on his back, and the other person, placing the first person's feet against his stomach, launches himself into the air, where he levitates, balanced atop the first person's legs, as the curtain comes down. This is a hellishly difficult manoeuvre. For the second person – the 'flier' – not to fall, the feet must be placed exactly right on the abdomen, and the takeoff into the air must be done with exactly the right thrust. We watch the dancers going through all this with immense care and deliberation. But then once fliers are launched, we are shown an amazing sight: five people floating in the air. They have died and gone to heaven. At the same time, in the effort they have gone through – there – we see how hard it is to die, how hard to get to heaven. Or rather, we feel it, in the body, because it is the body's struggle that we have witnessed.***

As in Morris's dance, the meticulous, factual setting up of the situation not only anchors the last burst of poetry, it engenders it, just as the actions of the dancers produce an image that goes beyond the placement of foot and the girding of muscles.

Sometimes the insights that emerge through the descriptive mode can literally bring tears to my eyes. When Arlene Croce says of Balanchine's *Ivesiana*, ***[It] is about that American distance, that equalizing yet comfortless space that separates Americans from Americans under the neutral American sky. It is about the lack of perimeters and journeys pressing onward despite that lack. It is about situations, not destinations, and in it the stage is a box with no sides. Dancers come and go and seem to fall off the edges into eternity.***

Analogy is rooted in observation – as fluid as the transactions between pond water and fish. In such an ecosystem, everything nourishes everything else. And ideas spring like water lilies.

Stephanie Jordan

Current debates and the discipline

Dancing Back

This paper was first presented at the Roehampton Institute, London, in October 1995 on the occasion of Stephanie Jordan's inaugural professorial lecture.

I begin with some images from the Balanchine-Stravinsky ballet *Agon*. This is how the celebrated American dance critic Edwin Denby described the opening of the work after the premiere in New York in 1957. *Four men: Lightly they stand in an intent stillness. They whirl, four at once, to face you. The soundless whirl is a downbeat that starts the action. On the upbeat, a fanfare begins, like cars honking a block away.*[1]

And here Denby writes about the 'acrobatic' duet in *Agon*, the centre of gravity of the work: *The sweetness is athletic The absurdity of what they do startles by a grandeur of scale and of sensuousness... the silence interpenetrates the sound... as in a Beethoven quartet... You hear the music gasp and fail, while the two dancers move ahead confidently across the open void.*[2]

Denby is talking about dance and music and silence and the rhythm between them. Hardly a radical enterprise, it would seem, yet his contribution to the dance literature about what is going on in movement, when, how, and to what sound, I believe, is not only unmatched, but also highly unusual. Denby's kind of project has always been close to my heart, as a woman of a certain age, with a background in both dance and music, good old modernist dance concerns, dare I say 'steps', the styles of Merce Cunningham and Cecchetti ballet, and a music background in performance, history and analysis of the traditional formalist kind. However, I am aware that this heritage carries with it a theoretical baggage that raises considerable problems in terms of today's intellectual thinking. Is it still useful today? Denby was a modernist at heart. Is Denby's thinking totally outmoded and not what our students should be concerning themselves with? Why is Denby so rare in writing about dance and music and silence and the rhythm between them?

Geroge Balanchine *Agon*

In this lecture, I hope to address these questions and also my next point, about the youthfulness and vulnerability of dance as an artform and academic discipline. What measure of intellectual heritage do we have here?

First, I want to look at the artform, dance, the youngest of the artforms in terms of intellectual debate, at least in the West, and I hasten to add that the main thread of my lecture is about Western theatre dance and dance analysis. Dance has only recently begun to build a developed sense of itself intellectually, largely, I believe, because it has not developed much sense of its own past. It is an art form with built–in problems that work against its creating the tradition for itself that gives other artforms credibility and aura – and, by tradition, I mean more than a smattering of works from the 19th century like *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*. Dance is ephemeral: it so often disappears without trace. With something of a history of disrespect, dance has often been on the edge, if at all present, of intellectual discourse – anything to do with bodily presentation seen as silly or, worse, dangerous, the body as suspect 'other', the ballet dancer as whore. And remember the old saying, that dancing is 'a perpendicular expression of a horizontal desire'.[3] Whoever said it hadn't seen any of the recent Tango sensations to hit London. Dance has also proved remarkably evasive in terms of reproduction and documentation, notoriously hard to grasp, with no hard copy to sell. Its repertoire is inadequately recorded in film/video and notation, and it is a matter of luck whether its key works are available to be perused at leisure on a recording, which, unlike in music, is no substitute for the live event. The point came home to me when Richard Alston explained his different approach to creating work that would be seen in repertory: in other words, the dancegoer might see it more than once. For *Rainbow Bandit* (1978), which you see revived during this season's Dance Umbrella, he decided to *first present the material in so dense a form that it could not easily be grasped... There are passages which quite deliberately overload the eye or alternatively confuse it by distracting the focus.*

He realised that the piece would be repeated regularly within the London Contemporary Dance Theatre repertoire and therefore could be re-viewed to catch more detail in the manner of 're-reading a detective novel'.[4] No such good fortune for work that is funded and made as a oneoff project for a single, brief season. Or, as Ashley Page once said about making work for the Royal Ballet: *I have always to go on the assumption that each piece I do will not last beyond the initial lifespan of its first four or five scheduled performances.*[5]

The most acclaimed works of the century often fail to travel – it took over fifty years for Antony Tudor's *Pillar of Fire* (1942) to make it into the repertoire of a British company, this year, danced brilliantly by Marion Tait with the Birmingham Royal Ballet, for one brief season, 11 performances (four of them in Germany). And that's a ballet. The younger and less moneyed contemporary dance has even less of a past. Many works, highly acclaimed, have been lost for ever: for instance, early works by Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham, his *Untitled Solo* (1953), her *Revolt* (1927), then Antony Tudor's *Shadow of the Wind* (1948) to Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* or an Isadora Duncan danced symphony. There is a sort of dance canon, but it is a strange phenomenon, very slight and very recent.

Debra Saxon of the Siobhan Davies Dance Company
Photograph: Hugo Glendinning

But dance clearly wants more of a past. It wants to grow up. Today, more questions are being asked about heritage. A generation of current contemporary dance choreographers in this country, Alston, Siobhan Davies, Rosemary Butcher, are keen to reshow work that they made some time ago (to see it for themselves too!), to allow us to compare older work with the brand new, to encourage re-readings in new contexts (rather like Nicholas Serota did when he re-hung the Tate). Until now, outside the established repertory companies, the Arts Council has funded choreographer-based dance companies for new work. It is now actively encouraging choreographers to apply for the funding that they must have in order to look at and share their own pasts. If we pause to think, it is extraordinary that this is a new trend, but our contemporary dance culture has customarily lurched from one novelty to the next. The young, the fashion-conscious, the talented and less talented attract new, young audiences who surf with the dance and hop off their boards as the current tide turns. There is something very attractive, marketable and anti-canonic about the very new and very young, but we can also enjoy a mature generation of contemporary dance choreographers now. There are also more contemporary dancers keen to get their teeth into fine work, which doesn't always have to be new work. A new performers' consciousness exists, and the consciousness of mature performers too.

There is also a vogue for reconstruction from an older past today – witness the tremendous contribution of Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer in bringing to us Nijinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps* (1913), Ann Hutchinson Guest and Claudia Jeshke in bringing us his *L'apres midi d'un faune* (1912), the reconstruction of Martha Graham's *Primitive Mysteries* (1931), not to mention the Massine ballets *Les Présages* and *Choreartium* to symphonies of Tchaikovsky and Brahms (1933). But then, when we look at the 20th century, there are the most straitjacketed views about revival, those in charge of certain choreographers' estates, and some choreographers too, being surprisingly rigid on matters of interpretation and style. In music, in contrast, the born-again authenticists who treat compositions like holy scriptures are a dying breed. Creative attitudes to reconstruction and performance practice are much more in the air.

Now, dance has a few exciting postmodern commentators, witness the deconstructions of the classics: *The Nutcracker*, here by Matthew Bourne of Adventures in Motion Pictures (1992), or in America by Mark Morris as *The Hardnut* (1991), or the Swede Mats Ek's *Giselle* (1982). But, if I can distinguish between deconstruction and reconstruction, and I realise that there is no hard dividing line between them, in the latter field, reconstruction, dance is not yet a culture of choice and informed decision.

In dance, we have become extraordinarily precious about the recent past, as much as we admit re-hashes of the classics, postmodern or

otherwise, precious about the fixed, ideal identity of a work as the choreographer first made it, or we first knew it – the no-Margot-no-*Ondine* attitude. It's interesting how critics compared the Rambert Dance Company's Cunningham with the Cunningham company's Cunningham: the latter was the model, the standard by which other performances were measured. Some enlightened choreographers are fascinated by seeing their work enjoying new life with a new company, inflected by another company or choreographer's style. Trisha Brown said that she was delighted and grateful that Rambert was doing her *Opal Loop*, 'archiving' the work, she put it.[6] The irony of such an exaggerated term for simply having a work in the repertoire! Now that we want our past, we can well afford to be imaginative and flexible about it.

The historical sense is important in dance. Juxtaposing our culture with some inkling of another broadens our humanity, heightens our awareness and appreciation of difference. The dance artists now want this. Now, the new dance may signify the presence of tomorrow, especially given the prominence of the body in discourse today – it may be the best place for overturning and renewing our basic suppositions about art, but I have a feeling that we are also at a point when we want to debate our own difference and argue our position in relation to a past.

But history also has important implications for dance theory, and for dance as a critical, academic subject. I need hardly point out that dance is a late arrival. It is very much a discipline of the 20th century, and, in the last 20 years or so, the whole dance theoretical base has exploded, a long way from the seminal work in movement theory begun in the 1920s by the Hungarian scholar Rudolf Laban, and now covering not only dance as theatre and dance as a Western form, but also dance as a community practice, as therapy, and as the project of a variety of cultural bases.

Now, for excellent reasons, dance academe today is eager to site dance within an interdisciplinary framework, to look sideways, to raise the level of dance scholarship itself by drawing on academic traditions of longer standing, and to respond to the key academic debates of our times. The major thrust of this interdisciplinarity has been towards contextual studies of dance, using models from feminist theory, literary criticism and the social sciences, with the responsibility for meaning, in accordance with poststructuralist theory, transferred from author to reader or interpreter. The newest, youngest dance has changed too in its more overt embrace of meaning and literary connections, like DV8, Adventures in Motion Pictures, the Cholmondeleys and Featherstonehaughs, V-Tol – though not necessarily, I hasten to add, in any overt embrace of post-structuralist theory.

Brilliant work is being done that relates dance to a broad cultural context, but, I believe, now is the time also to draw from that expansion, for some of those ideas to be turned back on the dance texts themselves in all their complexity, and particularly their movement aspects, even if post-structuralist theory has suggested the ultimate instability and variability of all texts. Few as they are, the number of dance texts is building fast (and I refer here to a text as a work, whether or not the work has been notated). But dance is in a strange position here, with its sketchy analytical past in terms of its own developed methodologies. There is no comparison with the other arts and humanities.

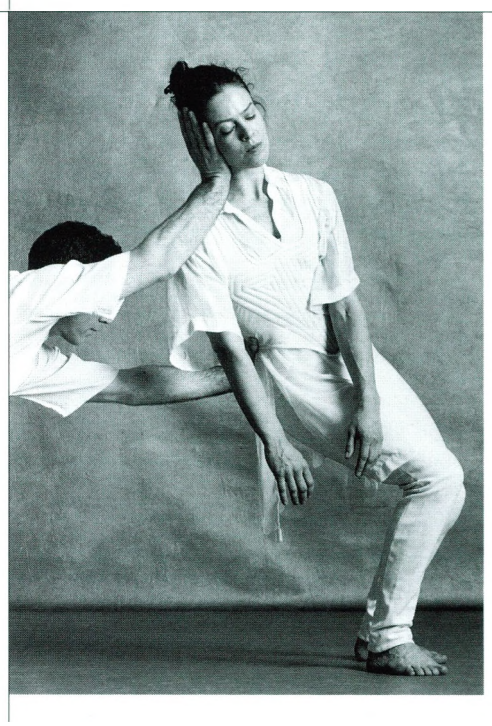
In recognising their responsibility to take part in the over-arching debates of today, many dance scholars have recently tended to distance themselves from those aspects that some would say are special to dance and derived from a dance literacy.

Furthermore, the few but powerful dance publishers, obliged to take on books with selling power, are naturally nervous about work that is technical, specialist and less widely accessible. A point in question is the remoteness still of dance scores (Benesh or Laban) from most scholars. Perhaps 'dance notation' seems removed from the sexiest concerns of today and now even perhaps older-generation scholarship, although I am interested to see that dance anthropologists don't look at it this way. But, as musicologists know well, scores offer another kind of looking sideways – structural issues do relate to the broader issues of context in remarkable ways. I'd like to think that score-reading in dance, as in music, could be something so natural that it is not even considered worth talking about.

Movement, structure and the new dance analysis. I'd like to suggest that it is possible to integrate these apparently oppositional perspectives, dance theory and broad cultural theory, and to open a dialogue between them. After all, the issue of form becoming narrative is a concept common to other 'representational' arts.

I hear others now saying that they want the dance more strongly in the picture again, they want the 'Dancing Back': Professor Christopher Bannerman, for instance, in his recent and much more 'danced' inaugural lecture than mine.[7] But we know that we have to have it back on new terms, and with a new self-consciousness about the relative truth of any of our analytical techniques. I am also proposing that we bring together our tools and skills much more, like academics do in other disciplines, and that includes notation, choreography and performance as well as a variety of theoretical perspectives. One of the pleasures of working in the Roehampton dance department is that we have that range of skills amongst the staff and are combining our skills in undergraduate and post-graduate teaching and research, and eager to share with each other more. We have a commitment to a contextual approach, but the dance can still be central, including the movement of dance, which is after all what seduced most of us into dance in the first place.

A measure of this is the research seminar focusing on dance movement that the Centre for Dance Research at Roehampton is holding on November 11th, 1995, entitled 'Dance Analysis: Movement Perspectives', movement seen as an integral part of the analysis of dance. We were initially led by the needs of several of our research students. This will be the opportunity to compare different methodologies, choreutics, Laban Movement Analysis and rhythm, and to take the debate on analysis of dance movement further – with illustrations ranging between African/Caribbean styles, ballet and postmodern dance. We are alert to issues of meaning, and mindful of the problem that textual facts, rather than being the objects of interpretation, are its products, yet we are, unapologetically – you can't do everything all the time – getting our teeth into the matter of movement structures and qualities in relation to specific dance examples.



Siobhan Davies Dance Company *White Bird Featheries*
Photograph: Hugo Glendinning

Later, in the spring of 1996, during the residency of Siobhan Davies, now a Senior Research Fellow in the Department, we will hold a seminar on the politics of the relationship between artist and audience, but we will also be examining Davies' movement style and its development over her career.

Now here are some examples to illustrate my point.

In terms of Siobhan Davies, and in the light of certain reductive gender analyses of dances, in a recent article in Dance Research, Dr. Helen Thomas and I were interested in exploring the formal, intrinsic aspects of her 1982 work *Rushes*, leading to a reading that operated in interesting tension with a denotative/extrinsic reading of the dance. Referring to Jakobson's linguistic model, we were admitting the poetic function of art, with the focus on connotation or symbolisation.[8] We had looked closely at the movement and the structuring of movement in space and time, and this contributed to what we interpreted (without anything as specific as character or story) as the progression towards a violent rush of activity, a metaphor for a growing crowd pressure.

If we wished to read the duets in *Rushes* denotatively, we might, for instance, consider the symmetry between the man and woman in terms of physical activity, in the two distinct lines of counterpoint and in the reciprocity of movement motivation, but there are other asymmetrical relations in the contact element of the work, with the male dancer taking on the traditional role, for instance, in lifts, or of being physically stronger and more powerful than the female. We could suggest that these relations of symmetry and asymmetry speak

to and of the changes and continuities in contemporary gender relations in our culture – there has been a movement towards women's liberation and equality of the sexes at least in certain aspects of social life, but these have been underpinned by the continued existence of the status quo insofar as the traditional power bases in society remain male dominated.

Siobhan Davies Dance Company *Wild Translations*
Photograph: Hugo Glendinning

But there is a good deal of analytical interest other than gender relations in Davies' work, formal relations coming into play along with the man/woman relation, which provide interesting tension with the reading that I have just given. Lifts and supporting of women can be seen as climaxes, dynamically speaking, or as a high point in space in relation to the rest of a dance phrase, or climaxes of resolution after counterpoint and spatial tensions between a couple. It is interesting to speculate that, if Davies had shifted from the physical conventions between man and woman more than she did, the duet could well have developed into a statement about gender, and obscured her formal issues (and the poetic function) in the process, and, indeed, what we read as a statement primarily about crowd pressure and a violent rush of activity. If she had taken this idea to the extreme, the dance could have been reduced to a piece of agitprop with the concomitant loss of what Marcuse calls art's 'otherness'.[9] By using the conventions of male/female behaviour in dance, Davies might be seen in one sense not to have put gender on the agenda.

Davies then seems to have been touched by the consciousness of the women's movement – the relative democracy of her duet style demonstrates this – but only insofar as this does not reduce the richness of her formal content, which celebrates the poetic function of dance.

Ironically, and potentially diminishing my argument perhaps, a more recent Davies work, *Make-make*, made in 1992, ten years after *Rushes*, shows a much more democratic approach even towards partnering. The piece takes its name from an Easter Island god and uses the island idea as something of a trap: there are no entrances and exits. Is gender on the agenda here? Again yes, and no. The bald and least interesting fact about the partnering here is that this too can be seen as conventional now, part of an extremely weight-led style, and like the earlier form of partnering, conventional behaviour can so easily become invisible behaviour. In this sense, this duet too becomes less about gender, power relations and a woman with a man. But *Make-make* is interesting as a metaphor for an oppressive relationship, each partner needing the other, but locked into a battle of wills. They test energy against energy, and there is a central climactic image of distraction as she pounces on to his back and thrusts her face into her hands. I am not forgetting formal concerns as they too inform the 'story' here: the modulated pace across the duet as a whole, the drama of the many held moments, their discontinuity in juxtaposition, the shift from emphasis on sharp design with spatial tension in it to pressures or subtle dynamic qualities, different kinds of quality. For me, Davies' claim that she sees her dancers first and foremost as people, with dance personalities, more than men or women, still holds.

Shobana Jeyasingh had something related to say about formal concerns in the South Asian dance genre Bharata Natyam. In an interview with me for *The Independent* five years ago, she spoke of how *the gesture of the widespread fingers can mean 'flower', but it can just as well be used abstractly as decorative detail.*[10]

The hand can be enjoyed simply as a 'pattern-making object'; many gestures are part of a jointed, angular style, the principle of broken lines at the joints of the shoulder, elbow and ankle taken into the fingers. This is rather like Martha Graham saying: *Why should a hand try to be rain? Think of what a wonderful thing the hand is, and what vast potentialities it has as a hand and not as a poor imitation of something else!*[11] Now, Jeyasingh was using the word 'abstract' in a particular way here. There is meaning again here from the structure of the movement. But she is talking about a different order of meaning other than literal representation.

Ballet is of course quite another affair, and there have been wholly pertinent critiques of the medium by modern dancers and dance writers through the 20th century. There are important moral problems too inherent in 'dragging a 19th century form into the present', a phrase Monica Mason recently used,[12] and I mention in particular the lot of the corps de ballet dancer, with a short ballet dancer's life, the nightly drudgery of being a swan, fairy, peasant, courtier, in the armies of such creatures that inhabit *Swan Lake, Giselle*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*. But I insist that ballet does not have to be read retrogressively. The Balanchine woman is not simply the manipulated, passive woman that some feel her to be.[13] When I look at the movement in *The Four Temperaments* (1946), I am much more inclined to agree with Edwin Denby's observation of 'girls dancing hard and boys soft'.[14] Forget for now the allusion to boys and girls – I will return to that in a minute. But I cannot read here the manipulated, passive image of woman, nor in *Agon* either. It is quite clear too that many of Balanchine's women dancers have invested their roles with quite different and wide-ranging representations of women, and possibly these dancers in the light of changing representations of women in life around them. Performers work with a text that now has a life independent from its creator. They can have agency: indeed, within ballet, they may find opportunities for resistance. But all ballet dancers today might do well to research their own image, beyond the immediacy of their own roles and in relation to the whole poetic context of a ballet. That is the pressing issue for ballet, a more open and educated spirit, freed from the rigidity that automatically assumes that a woman in pointe shoes must have a man to hold her up, or that an anonymous ensemble is necessary to show off the star, grown-up and freed too from the language of 'boys and girls'. In my opinion, Ashley Page and William Forsythe are taking the form forward into a different future.

Ballet in relation to music is my current research project,[15] and I would now like to share with you some ideas that have arisen from my work as this relates to the broader debates of today. The discipline of musicology has been extremely useful as a methodological model, though I hasten to add that I am not advocating at all that one can apply every musical idea unreservedly to dance.

First, however, as these are increasingly affecting my own work, it might be useful to consider the recent upheavals within the discipline of Western musicology itself, since the 1970s, when musical works were regarded as autonomous, unified entities, aching for strictly abstract, non-contextualised formal analysis. There have been major changes in musicology during the 1980s, and anthropological /ethnomusicological thinking was by this time proving highly influential. 'Emotion and meaning are coming out of the musicological closet,'[16] writes Rose Subotnik. Even in its most 'abstract' form, similar to the 'abstract' Bharata Natyam hands, music becomes both narrative and socially circumscribed discourse.

An interesting adjunct to these changes in musicology is the new self-awareness of musicologists, about the fact that not only the music itself but the theory and theorists attached to it, and performance practice, are a product of context and period. A contextualization itself can now be seen as a contextualized phenomenon. We are back to the point about historical awareness. However, the new wave of musicologists does not deny the value of formal analysis – indeed they draw on the means of formal analysis to unmask its claims.

I do not apologise that in order to pursue my discussion of musical/choreographic relationships, I needed to develop a formal, theoretical base. The augmentation of rhythmic concepts was crucial, and here again I am especially indebted to music theory. I have sought a richer and more precise terminology than, for instance, being 'on' or going 'through' the music, or 'cross-phrasing'. Now I would like to introduce some more dance examples. All that needs to be considered at this stage are two concepts of grouping, metrical grouping, of beats or pulses into bars and the grouping of notes or moves between or across the beats and pulses and bars. Dance can respond to musical metre or the grouping of notes or can be incongruent with both of these. This has meaning implications.

My example is the ballerina's second solo from Ashton's *Scenes de Ballet* of 1948, a plotless work to Stravinsky, very much a comment on the 19th century Petipa tradition. The ballerina is described here by Antoinette Sibley as 'a black pearl'; and, incidentally, I am using a recording of the lecture-demonstration by Sibley with Fiona Chadwick of the Royal Ballet during our Ashton conference last November.[17] I take pleasure in using an archive resource in a new way, for a different kind of analysis. There is something dark and manipulative about the solo: she is seductive, and Sibley's image for one passage is that 'she conjures up spirits.' But one of the most intriguing features of the solo is its play with Stravinsky's musical structure and the implications of this play. The music is in a tight ABA form, with a 6-count in a bar, 3/4 in the music, ostinato or repeating rhythm, and legato melody lines that wind freely and lazily around the established metre (here are the two kinds of grouping, the grouping of the notes of the melody and the metre). This is the kind of music, like much neo-classical Stravinsky, that makes a pretence about its own mobility: it doesn't really go anywhere at all.

The dancer's style is sinuous too, with big, free use of arms and play in the hips, and she keeps to the large structural outline of the music, also tapping out the ostinato with her pointe at both the beginning and end of the solo. But she makes much more of the tension between stability and instability, with precarious balances along the way, but particularly through her approach to the music, operating as an independent voice that constantly connects and reconnects with different aspects of the musical texture, sometimes selecting the ostinato rhythm, or just the underlying metre but not specifically the rhythm, sometimes the sweep or the detail of the melody. Bear in mind that melody and musical metre create very different groupings here (the 1 of 1–6 counts isn't necessarily the 1 that you hear in the melody). It is the kind of restless musical analysis by the dancer that entangles your ear.

In the last section A, she does not repeat with the music. She drives on against musical implications, she takes her freedom and swims across the musical metre (6 counts in a bar) in a fast waltz (3 counts) across the back and several series of little hops in arabesque (in five counts). Here, then, is an example of metrical incongruence, dance against music, and incidentally, we have a long tradition, in both folk and high art, of reading conflicting rhythmic structures in terms of heightened tension or excitement. Then, at the very end, after the toe-tapping motif which implies closure, she extends a hand lightly to her partner, turns away to print a quiet fourth position on pointe, but, as if her ambiguity is totally planned and not a matter of partner power, she pulls away with one arm extended diagonally upwards. The solo ends 'open', just a little, tantalisingly so. The music too has an open edge.

I refer to meaning, and in respect of this, a most fascinating point for subverting musical implications is the centre of the solo, section B, where two upward moving intervals are singled out by the choreographer as gestures for special attention. Bear in mind the centuries-old semiotic significance of moving upwards in pitch, meaning idealism, aspirations heaven-wards, overcoming earthliness, or literally just going upwards. At points of major emphasis at least, choreographers over the years have tended to visualize this upward movement. But not the ballerina here. She cancels it out. On both occasions, a développé to the side is emphatically folded down across behind the body into tendu. The second occasion needles with particular irony, with its wider interval in the music (breaking in before the bar-line) and the checked tempo around this point. The relationship between the music and the choreography is crucial here. Not one element but both together inextricably create the effect. And it was important to be alive to the distinctive grouping of metre and melody, formal analysis involved, as well as to the semiotic conventions for reading pitch, in order to rationalise how the effect is achieved.

The point about openness and ambiguity is fascinating to me and I am interested to see how musicologists are now admitting dissonance, multiple voices, in structures that were conventionally considered unified. Some work now stems, for instance, from Bhaktin's model of the dialogic text. Balanchine clearly saw some musical structures as more ready for open choreographic structures than others. As an example, I have always been fascinated by his *Ballet Imperial* (1941), that there is something inconclusive or untidy about it.[18] This is another comment on the tradition of Petipa, the 19th century tradition, set to Tchaikovsky's Second Piano Concerto, which has three separate movements or frames. There is the major ballerina and her partner, as usual, but I am struck by the emphatic weighting of the second ballerina towards the end of the first movement; it leaves an effect of 'dissonance' unmatched in the music, which is repeating what we have already heard and signifying closure. She appears in a trio with two 'new' solo men taken from the group just for this section; it is a surprisingly long trio and it begins in a strange, quiet mood. The ballerina is very much the 'other' too, dressed in black in

Eugene Berman's designs for the Royal Ballet production. After this, the end of the first movement, which brings the first ballerina back (minus her partner) seems rushed and inconclusive. There is another dissonance late in the third movement, a solo for the man, rather like an afterthought. Critics seem to have concentrated on the 'positive' aspects of Balanchine's references to Petipa in *Ballet Imperial*: they have not alluded to these odd, underside, deconstructive, unbalanced aspects of the ballet. But then, time and time again, we want to claim unity – as such unity is a direct reflection of the consoling, comfortable unity and stability that we want for ourselves.

My final example focuses on the issue of performance practice in dance. It is from Antony Tudor's *The Leaves are Fading* (1976), set to lesser known chamber works by Dvorak. Tudor's style has been variously described in terms of dancing between the notes and flowing through the music, which gives a useful impression for starters, although I have to say a generalization about a style that is highly varied. This late work suggests a link with Tudor's adoption of Zen Buddhism.[19] It is 'empty' in the sense of having no story and downplaying character, so prominent in most of Tudor's work, but it also demonstrates a non-progressive 'oriental' attitude towards time. It is a series of dances that suggest youthful love, and a touch of melancholy about its passing, and at its centre is a wonderful duet created for Gelsey Kirkland and Jonas Kage.

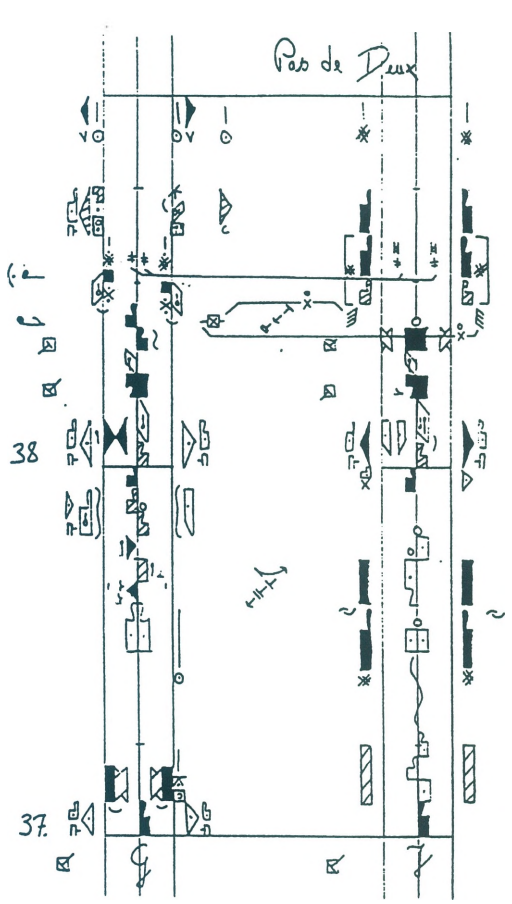
I have been examining the musicality of a number of different performances of this duet and this is a good example of the difficulties that we face in dance with resources. I glanced through two films in the New York Public Library Dance Collection, both with Kirkland and Kage, and Kirkland so light, but strong and economical in her approach. I say glance because you are not allowed to wind back and forth endlessly for analysis in the Dance Collection: indeed, I will need to go back and recheck these sources, now that I know the dance better. One of these films, incidentally, featured a shrill bell ringing every 10 seconds, protecting musicians' rights. Imagine analysing musicality with that going on. I found two more versions of the duet on commercial video more by chance and a friend's advice than any system, both hidden within highly unlikely compilations, 'The Erik Bruhn Gala: World Ballet Competition' (with a U.S.-only distribution) and 'Essential Ballet: Stars of Russian Ballet.' Scraps of the duet appear on a Swedish documentary about Tudor, a bit in rehearsal, a bit more in performance.[20]I also used a Labanotation score written by Airi Hynninen, Tudor's regular notator, at the time of the work's creation.[21] Now videos are a problem, the camera interprets, and a dancer's mistakes too easily become truth – the balance that does not come off becomes choreographic structure. Nor do I give scores a status they don't always deserve: they still should be assessed as just one thread of a work, just as 'suspect' perhaps as the rest, but this one does conform to much of the other existing evidence of Tudor's style that I have found. And I am admitting too that all interpretations are and should be different. In fact, this is a highly unusual amount of resource available for detailed analysis of any 20th century piece of dance. (*Ballet Imperial* is not available at all for home viewing). Alas, we can't muse over Gelsey Kirkland.

I will guide you through certain features of the duet. The opening and closing musical material is characterized by a phrase ending with a pair of descending notes like a sigh, two such phrases at the beginning, just one with a sigh during the recapitulation, and then the second phrase continues differently. At the end of each of the first two phrases, the woman falls, giving easily into weight, and the man catches her. The notation indicates a clear relationship between the fall and the musical sigh. To the last of these sighs, towards the end of the duet, the woman flies into a luxurious kneel along his thighs: she performs a few steps simply, between the notes, into fourth position on pointe, turns round and then goes to him. She lands, or, if you like, breathes out, again with the sigh, and then holds briefly (see notation example).

Second feature: all the movement after this point is written in the notation across the music, lifts down the diagonal that return her to his thighs and then a series of winding turns that give the impression of going on for ever. The seams of the dance and music don't coincide, they overlap, and that is what creates an effect of timelessness, extreme continuity. The dancers on the Swedish video perform this last material more or less as written in the score. The duet was staged here by the notator Hynninen.
But now we might look at the differences in the Kirov Ballet version, danced by Altynai Asylmuratova and Konstantin Zaklinsky. This too was staged by Hynninen, although she had less direct control over this video performance. There is a harp added to the string orchestration here – needless to say, not a part of Dvorak's thinking! I cannot say that I do not admire the dancing: it is compelling. But

just how far out can you get? The movement to kneel on his thighs is no longer with the musical sigh, it is no longer the end of a musical phrase, it is a beginning with a new musical beginning. And the approach from here onwards is about fitting with the musical units, not going across them. And yet it is musically alive. Asylmuratova makes us listen. In her own way, she draws attention to the sound, even the harp. She articulates the little steps, too, to fit the musical notes, not to go between them. It is as if the dance sings the music.

Although I am not going to argue the point here about the limits of Tudor interpretation, I would suggest that this interpretation is far distant from his musical style as he rehearsed it, and as I'm beginning to build the picture of this for myself. Two of the 'sigh' coincidences are blurred and therefore no longer operate as structural markers in this duet, markers which emphasise giving into weight and abandon. Other performers also tend to blur these sighs. This is not just a matter of Russian fantasy! These moments contrast with, point up the seamlessness and timelessness of the duet as a whole, from constantly overlapping phrases, but this effect too is absent from the Kirov performance, which is dramatic, punctuated and keen to articulate personal identity, including a little-girl flirtatiousness.



Antony Tudor, Excerpt from *The Leaves are Fading*

Shifts such as these happen all the time in dance, but rather than worry here about right and wrong, or the limits of interpretation, I would rather ask the questions, are the changes noticed? Are their implications fully understood? Is there a clear point of view in the choice that is made? I am no born-again authenticist. I am not necessarily advocating a blinkered attempt to do what we believe a choreographer intended (or what we believe to be her/ his style). We are recreating something that will work for us today. Furthermore, it is dangerous to be too mechanical: performers, dancers, and musicians must have freedom to give life to their work. However, I am asking for consideration of the implications of our choices and decisions about dance (and music) in reconstruction – these do affect the structure and meaning of a work in important ways. Post-structuralism frees us from a rigid attitude towards the past, but we are better for knowing as much as we can about the past so that we can make informed choices.

Finally, I'd like to think that, as in music, there might be the possibility of an annotated text, with editor's comments on performance style and notes on structure, but not in a prescriptive fashion, and possibly suggesting a variety of options. Is it presumptuous to suggest that academia might have a fruitful dialogue with the profession here?

I'm very excited by that prospect – that there could be thoughtful sharing and learning both ways. We have a long, very sound relationship between the department and the profession at Roehampton developed under my predecessor Dr. Mollie Davies, and, under the umbrella of the new Centre for Dance Research, this kind of discussion was for me the most exciting aspect of the Ashton conference.

Back to *Agon*, which by now has drawn to a close, and back to Edwin Denby who remembers seeing: *detached for an instant the hidden grace of the dancer's individual move, a chance event that passes with a small smile and a musical sound forever into nowhere.*[22]

Forever into nowhere? We celebrate that in dance – and nothing, nothing must diminish the strength of its presence as trace in live performance and fleeting physicality. But we can all enjoy together the challenge: to support that rare moment in the theatre, understanding the dialectical relationship between past and present, through our grasp of the world that exists outside dance, and with an acute sense of what goes on inside the dance and the dancing.

Notes

1 E. Denby, 'Three Sides of "Agon",' (1959) in Denby, *Dance Writings* (London: Dance Books, 1986), p. 460.

2 Ibid., pp. 462-63.

3 Anon., in Cohen, J.M. and M.J. *The Penguin Dictionary of Modern Quotations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p.4.

4 R. Alston,'Two Recent Dances,' *Artscribe,* 16 (February, 1979), p. 44.

5 Page quoted by A. Robertson, 'Ashley Page: Decalogue,' *Dance Now,* 3/2 (Summer, 1994), p. 28.

6 See Jordan, 'Eclectic Currents,' *The Listener,* September 22nd, 1988.

7 Bannerman's inaugural lecture was given at Middlesex University, June 7th, 1995.

8 S. Jordan and H. Thomas, 'Dance and Gender: Formalism and Semiotics,' *Dance Research,* 12/2 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 3-14; R. Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics,' in R.& F. De George (eds.), *The Structuralists: From Marx to Levi-Strauss* (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), pp. 85-122.

9 H. Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

10 Jeyasingh quoted by Jordan in 'Putting Your Finger On It,' *The Independent,* October 12th, 1990.

11 Graham in M. Armitage (1937), *Martha Graham* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1966), p. 107.

12 Mason speaking at the conference The Dancer in Transition, University of Lausanne, Switzerland, May 5th, 1995.

13 See, for instance, A. Daly, 'The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers,' *The Drama Review* Vol 31/1 (1987), pp. 8-21.

14 Denby, p. 417.

15 Preparation is underway for a book on music and ballet to be published by Dance Books in 1997.

16 R. Subotnik, 'Towards a Deconstruction of Structural Listening: A Critique of Schoenberg, Adorno, and Stravinsky,' in E. Narmour and R. Solie (Eds.), *Explorations in Music, the Arts, and Ideas: Essays in Honour of Leonard B. Meyer* (New York: Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press), p. 88.

17 'Following Sir Fred's Steps: A Conference Celebrating Ashton's Work', November 11th-13th, 1994, Roehampton Institute. The conference papers, panels and reports on other activities will be published by Dance Books (London) in 1996.

18 See Jordan *'Ballet Imperial,' Dance Now, 2/4* (Winter, 1993/94), pp.28-37.

19 M. Farkas, 'Antony Tudor: The First Zen Institute,' *Choreography and Dance, 1* (1989), p. 66.

20 'The Erik Bruhn Gala: World Ballet Competition', Primedia Productions, 1988;'Essential Ballet: Stars of Russian Ballet', Philips Classics Productions, 1993; 'Antony Tudor,' *Dance Horizons,* 1992.

21 A. Hynninen, *The Leaves are Fading* [Labanotation score] (New York: Dance Notation Bureau, 1975).

22 Denby, p. 465.

Angela Badolato

An interview with

Zsuzsanna Soboslay

Zsuzsanna Soboslay is a teacher, performer, and 'bodyworker' who has worked within an institutional context on and off over a number of years, both as a student and a teacher. Her contact with universities has been coloured by a strongly and literally 'felt' sense that institutionalised forms and processes of knowledge often offer only a reductive and limiting construction of embodied experience. Zsuzsy is convinced that her own vision of performance requires a context in which all knowledges are recognised as 'body knowledges', and their emotional and existential resonances concretely addressed. At the same time, however, she indicates that the problem for 'body knowledges' is not simply one of 'performance' vs 'the university', but a problem, particularly amongst practitioners, of the depth of engagement and understanding that are possible within the broader social and cultural contexts. [Eds]

BADOLATO ***What do you do at the moment as a teacher, performer and bodyworker? Where do you work?***

SOBOSLAY I work freelance at the moment and that is by necessity and partly by choice. It's because of the way of questioning I have. I realised I was working on a margin and I had to go outside institutions for a while because I think within institutions only certain questions are asked and you're working against those questions implicitly. So I'd like to explain why I have evolved the process that I have. I started to ponder what the equation E=mc2 meant. That if energy is mass times velocity squared, then mass is just a more dense form of energy. We actually are part of a continuum. What is the body and what's outside the body are very closely related to each other. And what is language, and what is thinking, what is about to speak, what happens before language, are very closely related to each other. And I think that case of tapping into the vibrations of things before they are substances, spoken or material, is something that is accessible. If you just contemplate the logic of it long enough, you begin to start thinking, oh yes, of course, there's no reason why we can't tap into those other

dimensions which hitherto have been treated as either psychic or crazy or taboo. The theory of relativity itself is also something that confounds our sense of identity and performance capacity. If we stand on one side of the globe and you follow the curve of space a little bit more, past tense is actually spinning in the present tense somewhere else. If you follow that logic through then more of the boundaries between here and before, me and not me are confounded as well. I think chaos theory and mathematical formulae popularise and/or theorise knowledges that we have in our own bodies, knowledges that we can have access to and if we've got a reason to access them then we can actually show and speak to them in performance. Or in healing work which for me is simply breaking open to information that's been closed off or shut off in some way, with our changing patterns and changing directions.

One morning I woke up with a sense of curved space in my body and it was the most ecstatic feeling I'd ever had. It lasted for the whole day and I was walking around town feeling extraordinary. I could really feel the edge of the ocean tucked up underneath my belly and curving round, coming up with the wave. I just knew the feeling and described it and a friend said, 'that's curved space, you're feeling curved space in your body. That's amazing', and if I were Galileo I would have been able to swear that the earth was round. Even if it was an Inquisition that I was living under, I would still do it. If someone was trying to prove it was a flat earth I would say, 'No, I know it's round, I've felt it!'

I think a lot of these innate knowledges have been persecuted, have been knowledges that we have been persecuted for, but they exist. There are senses of difference and difference is a very popular theory at the moment. But to sit in difference, hover in difference and actually speak it is a volatile thing. It's something that demands a different kind of political negotiation between people and nations – out of the patterns of our usual exchange.

I've always had a sense that there are other things that have yet to be spoken. And that's what started me off on the solo performance work about four years ago. In fact a bit earlier when I started leading training workshops. I was handed them basically and started working with people's bodies, and by instinct I was working with what we call the aura, but to me it was just a big energy block somewhere. I would flick my fingers and something fundamental would change, someone would be able to move a part of their body or a colour would change in front of their eyes, their breathing would change. It was the process of discovering that kind of thing building up and what it meant that's lead me to develop the Body Knowledge process which I apply in performance training and more therapeutic situations. For me it's a process of listening and listening in a way in which the senses aren't divided from each other. There was a book published in 1991 on the phenomenon of synaesthesia written by an American M.D. who to my horror called it a disease. He was talking about a man whom he met at dinner one day who opened the oven and saw a chicken which he said had too many points. Now I can understand that a chicken with too many points meant it's undercooked, but the good Doctor dutifully called it a disease. But synaesthesia is what is made use of in poetry continually. Keats is a diseased person if what the doctor says is true. To speak one sense in terms of another, to have the smell of a colour, to have the taste of an image is what all of art fundamentally relies on – that association of images and senses: and I think that attitude of treating such sensibility as a common disease is actually a poison and has closed down the world.

I think in theatre, when the house lights go down those other parts wake up again. Ordinarily, language is dissociated from the senses too. It becomes something that negotiates strategies and normally isn't allowed to speak the senses or to speak doubt, the edges between things.

BADOLATO ***You said that you have to go outside institutions now to work. But institutions have also been quite formative of what you do. You have undertaken formal study of various kinds and have taught within universities.***

SOBOSLAY I think one of the really important things was to have been trained as a musician, a classical musician, for about fifteen years and to have attained a licentiate performance diploma. The understanding of rhythm and breath being so interconnected with pitch and tone. I studied and played piano and a little bit of cello. I stopped when I was twenty one because I was cramping at the piano and a whole lot of other things were cramping very painfully. It was as if a whole lot of other things were meant to be said but not through that medium. I had to face the fact that the body itself is an instrument

and a medium. Grotowski calls it a yantra – in its own terms, an organ, a musical organ. I had to find what was sounding in my own body first, I suppose. I began to write a lot but it felt violently traumatic to speak. It might have taken about ten years to let this language come out and be heard.

I started leading workshops in 1986. Up until then I was doing a thesis on Gertrude Stein and of course because Gertrude Stein goes into all the things under language and between words and at the roots of language – like what hovers in the first emanations of language – I just couldn't stay in the English Department any more. I'd been on a scholarship for eighteen months and rang them up and said, I have to stop. I have to go and experience what this is about, all the synaesthesia and all of what that means physically, in a bodily sense, the bodily knowledge that Stein is relying on for that meaning. Some people hate her as a writer because they don't want logic disordered to that extent. But to me it's totally comprehensible. When I had left the English Department I'd started teaching theatre. That's where the idea of Body Knowledge came to me. I've often found myself teaching the things I'm about to open into. It's because of my tuning to another person that I then found out what that knowledge is. In teaching theatre I was then able to find out what opening to performance is. And I have to say I was also scared shitless at the start.

Let me give you the example of Grotowski, who is very inspiring, but you may also know that seven of his actors committed suicide when the company folded. You think, what is this that he got into? I'm not actually incredibly ego driven. I don't have a monstrous middle European male ego to say, yes, my theatre company is going to go this far and everyone is going to follow me. More's the pity sometimes, but most of the time I'm grateful for that. I didn't want to be responsible for seven people jumping off a cliff. I had to sort this out. For Grotowski the actors are sacrificed to the performance, to the audience. The authority of the work is placed in a God who belongs to a Polish Catholic tradition. The body stretches, yearns, as if hooked out of itself towards Heaven. I fell very sick. The sacrificial nature of the work compounded my own history of being a Roman Catholic Hungarian, well-rehearsed in self-sacrifice and self-annihilation (nothingness). I knew I didn't want that, I didn't want other actors to do that either. I wanted to find out what the source energy was. What it is that you are opening to and how to remain grounded and to close off the process too, so that one is then secured back in the body. With this work, I was flying – flying away from fear I think, because of the authorities I displaced. That's how I started asking these particular questions. It's a combination of understanding things on a level of vibrations – at a rhythmic and musical and molecular level – that, later, I found in that search. I think it's a kind of tuning.

I didn't actually study performance history, nor the history of Australian drama, thank god, because that kind of ultra-realist kitchen sink stuff isn't my sense of reality. I'm quite happy with my sense of reality. I don't think I'm mad any more. Once – I might have been about twelve – I was watching kids playing in a park and I saw them as molecules. I saw their motion on a molecular level. That kind of experience was common to me when I was young. I understood what it was later, but it wasn't a problem then. It's only a problem when people start telling you it's a problem.

It's taken a long time to accept working as a healer because I have been very scared of the knowledge that I've got because it crosses boundaries. The work has a lot of political ramifications which I wasn't ready to take on until I understood what its source was. And it is powerful, but it's not about me having that power, it's about the individual I'm working with having that power and that in itself is a volatile thing within our social structures.

Whenever I was teaching in performance classes I would see that someone was ready and I would pull them out and say we're going to work for an hour or two hours more. That would continually happen because to me it wasn't separate to teaching or performance. Sensing when something was about to change, something was in transition and that something needed assistance was just part of the process. It was important, however, that it was anchored in the body.

In the last two years of tertiary work I felt I was abused in that situation. Working within tertiary institutions, particularly, your knowledge can be made use of without being supported, that is, adequately recognised or – especially – recompensed. Largely, in places like universities, they're not going to take care of the soul, which with the intellectual property they keep opening up, needs a lot of support on physical, emotional and psychic levels. They're just dropped, like the heart's dropped off the edge of a cliff. For example, there is a lot of devastating material that studying feminism brings up and it can't just be processed in an intellectual fashion. Some French feminists are the worst fascists in academe and I know

people who are disillusioned by going over to study with them and finding their behaviour is as bad as any brutal masculinist academics they have come across. The sense that I had of the urgency of finding out the interrelationship of language and the bodily knowledges of theory and where it comes from, what the source of what language is in relationship to other people and performance, that was a pretty urgent thing for me, because I was very split, very divided in my body. From my heart a lot too. So I had to find out what the connection was. So, the questioning process for me had to link. And it's taken quite a while to find where language can reconnect. I know in improvisations sometimes I couldn't talk – I mean, a lot of us have done Theatre Sports in our dim dark past. I could complete a physical action but the pathway connecting fluid improvisation with fluid linguistic improvisation was not reconnected yet. Or it was happily disrupted by going into a physical process. A Butoh teacher I had, Yoko Ashikawa, who runs Hakutobo, if you watch her, you watch a molecular transformation across 500 years and she might play a thousand women in ten minutes and she would suddenly become a peacock with the mountain beside her. You could feel the temperature, you could feel the grass under her feet, you could smell the dust in her tail, and an extraordinary transformation so that there was absolutely no doubt what she was in that moment. To speak in the middle of such transformation is mind boggling to contemplate and it does take a long time to find how language can be allowed to enter that space, into that shifting place. I discovered that there were a lot of linkages between sensual and conceptual worlds and physical worlds that had to come together.

That is also one of the other things I do in my teaching if I do teach in a university context. I do very deliberately set out to expand the conceptual basis from which a person might approach an art form. So if we do a dance course, we define the parameters and then ask what's outside those parameters. If people haven't ever had to look at a movement piece before and don't know how to speak about it, first we start to train up the senses involved, reminding them of taste and touch and smell, and say, you have to write this because this is your experience and it will be incomplete unless your language also lets that come into the description.

BADOLATO ***In universities, courses are named and listed in the handbook. In these terms what is it that you teach?***

SOBOSLAY It depends on what the school's hang-ups are whether they call it dance or...I never called myself a dancer. I taught at Melbourne University, I've taught at Wollongong University, I've done guest workshops at Adelaide University. I have taught fairly sporadically. At Sydney University I taught a theory course where I felt I was bound to a chair. The professor said, you're not allowed to move, you can't get them on the floor because this is a theory course. I thought, God, you know me, I was itching to get them to move. I tried to get them looking at language in different ways. It was difficult when it's a static form of intake of knowledge. Mostly if I'm asked to come in and do some movement, a consultation, a play, then I'm a movement consultant or a choreographer or I take 'movement classes for actors'. The freelance workshops I run have also been titled 'body awareness' classes, if they are for non-performers. You learn what to call it by what other people's perceptions are of what the work is that you do.

I sometimes do workshops specifically for women, trying to ground them in their bodies. I like to work with men as well. I call the work Body Knowledge: that name seems to resonate for a lot of people, more people than I thought would respond to it. It took four years in itself to be able to describe it in a brochure. I've never done anything so hard and I understood why. Body Knowledge is actually very substantial work, it's very concrete work, though it can get lumped amongst all sorts of fairyland stuff and loose esoteric irresponsible knowledges, because it is anchored within the body system and the energetic system. It's not abstract, it's very concrete and it's meeting those worlds, that's the important thing, so that there is interpretation but it's not remote, nothing remote about it.

BADOLATO ***So if you've taught in a university would you say they've accepted you there or do they just bring you in as a freelance movement consultant?***

SOBOSLAY Yes, sometimes students have asked for more classes because they've had a feeling of what it is. They have a joke going round: 'on a good day she can read your aura'. It's a funny way of putting it, because I don't separate out awareness of the 'aura' from the rest of the body. If a student shows an aura – that is, an energy pattern that extends beyond the physical body, but always in relation to it – then I'll read it. In a way this is common or garden 'presence', although tuning to it as such is not so common. In a lot of contexts, you know, people don't let it show: it takes a lot of work to get there. A lot of safety I suppose, a lot of embracing of many different things. It can actually work quite quickly. Some things initially which would have taken four hours to set up, now take about two or one. Probably because I'm clearer about the process I'm not having to find out what that process is now.

It's interesting teaching when a student is split as a person – has difficulty improvising with language perhaps, or there's a division at the neck, between the head and the torso. It's sometimes frustrating but you just have to accept that there's quite a long process to integration. In most contexts in which people work or train, it's also apparent one is only asked to show one aspect or another, they're not asked for any integration. So it can be quite confronting to bring things together.

BADOLATO So would you say that your work is seen by institutions as something quite different to what they usually teach?

SOBOSLAY There are lot of things happening in institutions but in order to define itself, any system is a closure. I always think of my work as a principle which seeks to expand the resources you draw on as you work. One of the things that has been difficult is that I can't say I teach Suzuki or Decroux. I've learnt from very different methods, and in each one I've learnt what questions they ask and what questions they don't ask of you as a performer – as a performer with a psyche and a history and the possibility of something else as well. Often in performance you surprise yourself: 'Where did that come from', 'I didn't know I could do that. Where did that come from?' and that's because being open and available is a state that's not yet defined. Training for me is about being open to that surprise so that you can hear it coming from somewhere and you just let it happen. It's a transformation that happens, it mightn't be following the same wave motion at all. It might come out in a gesture or word or an inflection through any of the disciplines in which you practice. I suppose the aim of my work is to have the performer available in those different forms. You can apply this bodily knowledge, this bodily tuning in a straight play or devise a movement based process, because you're finding out what questions you're asking that other people haven't asked. If you're really on about expression, then it's important to recognise a form and it's conceptual limits and therefore its physical limits.

BADOLATO How do you think Suzuki and Butoh are used in Australia or how are they performed here? How do you see these forms being practised by performance artists. How are they interpreted here culturally?

SOBOSLAY Learning a new form is fine provided that it's about opening a new space rather than closing into or mimicking an established space. I think there are principles of Suzuki that are really worked out and there are principles that Tanaka Min had worked out. Min's body manipulations are extraordinary. I haven't done much of it, but in terms of opening your body it's pretty extraordinary stuff. It's also quite extreme. Suzuki work can be very damaging to the spine, inappropriate, say, during pregnancy. I've seen people who are very unfit and should not be doing the work. A lot of teachers don't say that before people come. Ultimately, I think it then becomes the responsibility of the performer. But it's also a question of information about it – what is it that they're doing?

I think they are trends. I think a lot of teaching is done as a form and not about the way a person meets a form and what questions they ask for themselves if they do it, which is really where the work of defining your own art comes from. I find there are questions about the Suzuki work which itself asks specific questions of language. And they're not answered by most practitioners in Australia – the relationship of language to that work. It's also not an intrinsically Japanese form. It's Suzuki's work and it's often taught as a Japanese form but in Japan you'll have people saying he's one category over there

and here's fifty others, which is also a cultural perception because he's a very good marketer, he's a great entrepreneur.

But perhaps I'm not the best person to comment because of my reservations about these forms for certain people and because of the claim that's often made about the way it opens you up to certain things. But I know that there are other ways, there are softer ways or ways on a different route. There are always many ways to a single route, I think that's one of the fundamental Daoist teachings. But Suzuki fanatics have the attitude that, this is the way to centre. For me it's not. Because of the nature of my spine, it would actually cripple me rather than open up to my centre. Chin Kham Yoke taught me a gentle Tai Chi form which works very quickly to centre the body's energies in the abdomen. Butoh, through its image work – this is Ashikawa's Butoh – taught me how to get the voice centred through opening space in the body (even though, interestingly, the Hakutobo company is a dance troupe and does not use the voice). But it was actually following its principle of questioning and my own interpretation of that, that taught me a lot of things in similar ways. I think, again, it's like a codification that becomes popular, or it's there for you, you don't have to figure it out.

BADOLATO Do you see your movement work related to any other ways of approaching the body in Australian culture, like in dance culture or like the way you were talking about Tai Chi or the way that yoga has an understanding of the Chakra energies? Or do you see your work connected to other modes of thinking perhaps?

SOBOSLAY I think there are echoes from lots of different things. I suppose because it's a principle rather than a form. In my next project – which is a multi-media work called *Awakenings* – I have been exploring the principle to the extent of shaping a performance work. But it is a principle rather than a pre-supposed form. I think that's the difference.

Indigestion

A Rhetoric of Reviewing

Meaghan Morris

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This article is a revised version of a paper given at a Sydney Film Festival forum on film criticism in 1982. In that context, it had two aims. One was to challenge the overpowering conviction expressed at the dead end of most such forums that reviewing is merely a matter of 'personal taste'. The other was to suggest that while theorizations of reading and writing have to some extent transformed the study of cinema, literature, philosophy and art, many of the humbler practices of a mass media culture (like reviewing) have not been seriously re-examined but left in the limbo of the 'personal intention'. Today, it seems to me that a critique of explanation via the 'personal' can be as difficult to defend in broad public debate as ever it was: partly because the simulacra of 'new subjectivity' and 'neo-humanism' now offer a mirage of relief to critics after a phase of theory fetishism; partly because academically situated cultural theorists have still paid little attention to either the material constraints on production of meaning in mass media practices, or the 'theories' of practice that circulate between media producers and consumers alike.

So the aim of this article now is to take seriously one such theory (the 'gut reaction' thesis), and criticize it in relation to the everyday conduct of 'reviewing' as a mode of work. Therefore the article does not in itself constitute a re-examination of reviewing, but I hope that it does suggest some questions from which one might depart.

The Critical Anatomy

I'd like to begin by questioning a curious metaphor that has been disgorged at a couple of film festival sessions I've attended in the past on criticism. On those occasions, when an assortment of Sydney critics was asked to describe criteria for 'judging' films, each time most of us fell back sooner or later on a notion of Gut Reaction. The scenario should be familiar: the critic on the spot shrugs, mutters about the diversity of films in the world, the straitjacket of 'standards', the scarcity of time, the delusions of objectivity – and then announces, modestly or triumphantly, 'I just depend on my gut reaction'.

This common chorus (which partakes of the same anonymity shared by those thousands of artists who all line up to intone in unison 'I just make very personal work') does not subsume everybody all the time. John Hinde, for example, has always been prepared to discuss problems of critical values and critical responsibility.[1] But on the whole, most of us have found refuge in this one basic trope for the convulsions of our subjectivity: gulp it down, chew it over, throw it up.

At which point, someone in the audience always says, 'Well, what makes your gut reaction so much better than mine?'. Since few Australian critics have so far felt willing or able to do what American film writers usually do on such occasions – namely, go ahead and *tell* the audience why they think that their critical subjectivity is more qualified to judge than another sort might be – the debate then hiccoughs away into a silence ruptured only by the odd gurgle of disgust.

I don't think that the Australians' refusal to indulge in a grading of gut reactions should in itself be a cause for complaint, but I do think that these stagings of an inability to articulate some principles of a critical practice is symptomatic of a certain malaise about how reviewing works in Australia. For there are a number of possible responses to this recurrent question of 'criteria' which do not require resort to some transcendent – and irrefutable – intestinal principle.

One could, for example, argue that the initial question about criteria is inappropriate, and therefore unanswerable, in the first place – since films in circulation impose expectations on critics (and on audiences) as well as the reverse. One could also argue (and I will later) that media criticism and reviewing are not, essentially, activities of judgement or evaluation at all. Or one could say that the question of criteria can never be answered in general terms and in advance, but only in relation to, and after, specific evaluations of particular films.

However, one problem with that last response would be that the inability to articulate values has not only bedevilled the film criticism forums – but also the annual agony of the forum on the Greater Union Awards.[2] There we have a clear use of an activity of judgement, rather than of reviewing or criticism, and an equally clear case of a set of particular films which have been judged. Yet at most festivals there has been a noticeable difference between the pinched and furtive speech of the Australian judges (if they turn up at all), and the relative plenitude of critical assurance assumed by the overseas judges of the Mamoulian Award.

So one *could* connect the gut-reaction coyness of the critics with the timid or nonchalant vagueness of the judges, and then do one of at least two things. One would be to rebuke the 'Australian' practices in terms of an opposition with those of 'overseas': unkindly, by suggesting that the locals are bumbling, incompetent amateurs, or kindly, by pointing to the relative lack of credit accorded to critical activity by Australian culture in general. This strategy of rebuke is used, for example, in David Stratton's book *The Last New Wave* – and I don't think it tells us very much, since it reinforces that dubious logic whereby Australians are found wanting in comparison with the overseas, simply by virtue of their national origin.[3]

Another possibility would be to claim that the problem is not one of confidence and quality in judgement, but one of understanding and possibly changing the protocol of public speech: that what is at stake is not the competence of speakers, but the significance of the act of speaking; and that here, as in other areas of cultural politics, a history might be written. After all, there must be some powerful tradition at work when groups ritualistically submit (and not only at festival forums) to the torture of bunging a few people on a stage, insisting that there need be no formality or preparation, listening to most of the people spend half their time announcing that they have nothing much to say, and then finding that through lack of preparation and of something to say, nothing, in fact and informally, is said.

But rather than pursue these mysteries, I want to return to the Gut Reaction to try to squeeze a bit more sense from the metaphor – from the image of subjectivity convulsed. I think that the Gut Reaction is, in fact, a rubric for a theory of criticism –

even if the metaphor itself operates to conjure up some dark domain of interiority immune to theorization. It's a romantic theory, it's an expressive theory, and to the extent that it allows for debate about whether a critic can or cannot accurately 'describe' (like a nineteenth-century novelist) what's sometimes called the 'surface' or the 'detail' of a film, it's a realist theory.

In brute form, however, it goes like this: the critic goes along to a film as either representative or uniquely idiosyncratic consumer, tests out the quality of the product by monitoring his or her immediate taste sensations, then expresses the experience in the form of a review.

Someone might object here that I'm using the term 'critic' to dignify the activities of mere reviewers – a different species from critics, and to whom alone the Gut Reaction thesis might apply. Thus an old, but classic, polemic from the self-styled critic John Simon:

> *Reviewing is something that newspaper editors have invented: it stems from the notion that the critic is someone who must see with the eyes of the Average Man or Typical Reader (whoever that is) and predict for his fellows what their reaction will be. To this end, the newspapers carefully screen their reviewers to be representative common men, say, former obituary writers or mail-room clerks, anything but trained specialists. To accept such a reviewer as critic and guide is like expecting school children to teach one another, or patients in a hospital ward to undertake one another's cure.*[4]

There is much to object to in Simon's formulation; not least, the equation of the film public with children and sick people in need of teacherly, doctorly critic – and, indeed, the suggestion that children and patients can't help each other without interference from 'authority'.

But Simon is one of the American critics prepared to say what qualifies a 'critical' subjectivity in its difference from that of the Average Man (sic); and it's clear that for Simon, the critic is distinguished by His 'status as intellectual *superhero* – artist, teacher, philosopher, someone "very, very intelligent".'[5] The reviewer is vulgar, untrained and (by implication) very, very dumb.

Now in the 1950s and early 1960s there were quite lively debates about a distinction between criticism and reviewing (which later died down in the assiduous casualness of the late 1960s and early 1970s). Most of these were also structured, or crossed, by equally polemical distinctions between 'the cinema' and 'the movies', Art and Industry, Culture and Entertainment. Simon is very much a criticism/cinema/Art/Culture man.

But if one turns to the work of Pauline Kael, whose position in that period might be to some extent described as veering towards that of a reviewing / movies / Industry / Entertainment woman – though not, of course, an anti-intellectual one – it seems that the whole debate was in fact worked out within the terms of the Gut Reaction theory. Thus, Kael on Bazin might be Simon on Simon:

> *I rather imagine Bazin's stature as a critic has less to do with 'universals' than with intelligence, knowledge, experience, sensitivity, perception, fervour, imagination, dedication, lucidity.*[6]

Whatever their differences, both these writers are engaged in a process of listing the special psychological and biographical (i.e. social) characteristics which constitute the critic as a certain kind of person. Criticism, in this logic, is not a particular practice but a sort of byproduct or after effect of pure personality. Both Simon and Kael distinguish The Critic from the Average Man/Reviewer by virtue of the former's superior Gut Reaction. The Critical gut is more trained ('experience', 'knowledge'). Critics have a finer palate and, presumably, they bring up better prose.

Both share, in fact, the same theory of reviewing as the newspaper editors they despise. For if one stretches Simon's formulation a little further, it becomes easy to see the figures of The Reviewer and The Critic as metonyms of an (imagined) social group. The brute gut of The Reviewer is the emblem of the Average Man, who convulses for The General Public. The trained gut (or 'sensibility' in this code) of The Critic stands for the general figure of The Intellectual – who quivers, chews things over, and emits for that *part* of 'the public' imagined as, say, 'informed lovers of the arts'.

The classical criticism/reviewing debate simply offered only a choice of populist and elitist versions of the *same model* – one which worked to generate a fantasy of audience 'bodies' in an 'organic' society. (The only procedural difference would be that professional guts are supposed to predict the reactions of the general body, while professional sensibilities attempt to shape the growth of the select.) It is thus entirely logical that the aggressively populist intellectuals working in the organo-

cosmic ambience of the late 1960s should have collapsed the choice of versions and refused to bother with a criticism/reviewing distinction, leaving the schema with only two terms – the *my gut/a public* of the Modest Person, or the *my gut/the public* of the Megalomaniac.

Here and now, it's probably easy to dismiss these accounts as quaint. Yet the personality cult is still active: not only amongst critics themselves, but in the anti-critical rebellion of the 'personal response' that we hear about every year when the argument gets tricky. People say that all judgements (and, they assume, by extension all criticisms) are 'just personal': if the social organism is made up of a lot of personal bodies who all react in their unique personal ways, then it is clearly more democratic to have a large body of persons all having personal gut reactions to films (whistling, cheering or booing to 'express' them), than it is to have a small body of judges or critics doing that same personal thing. The political logic of that is impeccable, and I'm not concerned to contest it. I simply want to object to the point of departure for the entire argument, and to its effects.

Those effects are, firstly, to mesmerize us with an infinitely regressive mirror exchange between an audience confronting critics who have nothing to affirm but their status as persons, and critics confronting an audience which has also nothing to affirm but its (pluralized) personal status: and secondly – by means of that mesmerization – to obliterate any possibility of public speech about the competing social, economic and political investments at stake in a situation where some people are PAID for their gut reactions while others are not, and in which various desires, demands and imperatives about what 'good' Australian short film looks like, or should look like, circulate silently through the elimination process known as 'judging'. After all, when we all agree that we're all 'just' persons, there is really no basis for disagreement ...We're all always already on the same old human side.

Thus the point of departure – the Gut Reaction – is perfectly geared to disguise the fact that a great deal has changed since the time when it might have been sufficient to celebrate the mere making of films in Australia as a miracle in and for itself; and to protect critics and judges from criticism and judgement, with the full complicity of those filmmakers and film-goers who – in the guise of questioning critics and judges – simply rabbit on with that very same personalist rhetoric which always provides its own response: 'You claim to be a critic but you're only one person.' 'Yes, that's right, I'm only a person so I like what I like.' They have an interest in doing so, of course, for the rhetoric is reversible – and can, in turn, protect their own work as filmmakers or as film audience members from any demand for critical intelligence.

The Personal and the Printed

There are at least two elements of professional (i.e. paid) critical activity which the Gut Reaction theory conveniently elides. One is cultural *politics*: and in ignoring this, the Gut Reaction is always a defence of the current regime, even if it takes the form of a burp from the margins. The other is the politics of *discourse* (critics write and/or speak): and in ignoring this – by, say, accusing critics of 'being' frustrated filmmakers – Gut Reactors exempt us from ever examining what critics actually do, or what criticism does.

Politics

1

To rework a cliché : commentaries on films are not just personal, they're political. This is not to argue that the 'personal' does not exist, nor is it to argue that the personal is not political. But it is to argue that the political is not only personal – it's social and it's cultural. It defines points of conflict.

Where the 'personal' can only be stated or shared (in the twin states of catatonia and empathy), the political can be debated, discussed, fought over – and is thereby open to the possibility, at least, of change. It is only when all criticism (and not just that which signifies itself as 'feminist', 'marxist', etc.) is seen as political, that one can talk sensibly about changing criticism, and about using criticism to change something other than itself – even if the change desired is something as small-

scale and difficult as an improvement in the conditions in which film-makers make, and above all screen, their films. For in citing 'politics' – an unfashionable value in an age of corporatist consensus and of guerilla entrepreneurial chic – I am not dreaming of Winter Palaces or of a correctness in 'lines'; but of a recognition that in a society where criticism can be a wage-earning activity, economic and ideological interests are always at stake.

An Australian film director once told me that I was an ideologue, and I'm quite happy to accept that description – as long as it's understood that I think that's exactly what all reviewers, and most critics, are. It seems to me to be nostalgically pre-industrial nonsense to conceive of a bunch of cultivated souls sitting round mulling over the Good, the Beautiful and the True for the sheer love of aesthetic play, and for the good of their own, aristocratically homogeneous, ruling class. In the heterogeneity of a post–industrial culture, reviewers of film are not arbiters of taste, or judges, or even representative consumers, but mercenaries in the stabilizing force of the Thought Police. We do not decree what should be thought about any particular *film*; but we do help to patrol the limits of what is safely or adventurously think-able as *cinema* at any given time.

2

If the social role of reviewing is something that the Gut Reaction theory does not describe, my second objection concerns something that I think it cannot describe – namely, what goes on between the gut, or the sensibility, and the printed page?

Film reviews, I'd suggest, are not made of shreds of stomach lining, bits of sensibility, or even of frustrated urges to make films. They are made of words, sentences, paragraphing, headlines, layout, rhetorical strategies, generic plays, reference procedures and fictional personae ('I' the writer, 'you' the reader, 'him/her/them' the filmmakers, 'it' the film) and of the constraints imposed in and by the economics of various media.

This is, or ought to be, ludicrously obvious. But in a large pile of American and British film criticism that I read while preparing this paper, I was only able to find two references to the fact that film reviewing is a practice of writing – or, at least, only two that were at all specific.[7] Other references to the language of criticism were rather of the order of general attempts to establish criticism as an 'art', or as a minor branch of 'literature'. Whatever one thinks of such attempts (I find them anachronistically self-defeating), the point is that they are only concerned with the intellectual status of criticism, not with an analysis of critical writing activities. Criticism, I suggest, is not a matter of 'being' but of 'doing' – and of different kinds of doing at that. It is not a personality problem, but a practice. So if a discussion of film criticism in Australia is to advance beyond the level of the question 'Why didn't you (they) like my (this) film?' – a question which really deserves the resounding response DUNNO – then analyses need to be based not on the gurgling of guts but on the assumption that all criticism, right down to and especially that least literary and most formal of activities, the three-line consumer guide, is writing. This is not to call for some aesthetics of criticism whereby one could distinguish 'good' from 'bad' critical writing; but it is to claim that no understanding of the general social function of film criticism, and no intervention within or against it, is possible without an exact understanding of how it works, and what sort of work it is.

If an analysis began from that assumption, then several cherished postures about criticism would have to be abandoned – or, at least, revised. It would no longer be automatically clear at the outset, for example, whether – or how – criticism should so easily be distinguished from other signifying practices, and whether 'criticism' could be usefully conceived of as a single entity at all. And notions of censorship – all too often stuck in the 'blue pencil' conspiracy thesis about editorial interference – would have to be considerably refined.

Censorship

People often ask critics 'are you able to write what you think?' I can only reply that I am not – because I do not 'think' in 500-word slices of *Sydney Morning Herald* prose, nor in 1,000 word slices of *Australian Financial Review* prose. This is not only to point, pedantically perhaps, to the absolute non-fit between 'thought' and the verbal which is the fundamental condition of all language. Whatever I 'think' about any given film usually exceeds (but occasionally falls short of) what can effectively be said using the space and the codes available in any given context. What should follow from this is NOT an image of the poor embattled critic struggling apologetically against the harsh limitations imposed by nasty newspaper magnates – but rather an

axiom that the politics of a review will consist in selections made and combinations effected (of 'topics', of modes of address, of vocabulary, of contexts for reading the film, etc.). It will also thus consist in what has *not* been said – but might have been.

It's true that the 'writing what you think' question is really an inquiry about conscious interference by another person, or by house rules, and deserves an answer. I think that instances of directly political censorship (say, via pressures from advertisers) are quite rare in the insignificant and relatively non-sensitive area of arts commentary: not only because newspaper policies are much less monolithic and much more subtle than lefties like to think, but because 1) anyone who can keep a job reviewing does so because they are already willing and able to keep all the unwritten rules about what does and does not constitute an appropriate 'style' for any given publication, and; 2) because apart from clearly defined problem-points like defamation, 99.9 per cent of 'editing' decisions (again, speaking only of arts commentary) are made for reasons of space and layout design.

This means that the 'edited' writer can never be sure why a particular paragraph is cut out. It could be that it formed the right-sized chunk (i.e., purely formal criteria), or because the editor judged it *more* redundant than other paragraphs (semantic-aesthetic criteria), or because it is judged 'less interesting', 'less important', 'less essential' (an interpretative decision about both the structure of the text, and the likely interests of readers). In the latter case, *interesting*, *important* and *essential* are all names for ideological decisions referring not just to the personal tastes of the editor but to a professional consensus about 'what really matters' when writing about film for the audience of that publication. That consensus is a cultural one: at the moment, for example, we have the assumption that matters of cinematography are somehow more technical and less essential than those of plot – so one's token paragraph about camera angles, or lighting, is most likely to be up for the chop.[8]

I'm not convinced that 'censorship' is an appropriate term for this process. Firstly, because the process itself is too random and irrational in practice to carry the weight of systematic intention implied by that term; and secondly, because it exempts the critic from the complicity in helping to define 'what really matters' which is a condition of one's own activity. For example, what if the cinematography paragraph were not token? How long would someone last writing 1,000 words a week about zooms and pans? Who knows – and who has tried? But whether this is censorship or something more subtle, it's clear that the editorial and critical administration of the limits of much of what can be said about cinema is, broadly speaking, political (and thus open to the kind of change which consists in producing *different* limits); and that it is exercised not in the gastric juices, but in the fine print on the page.

Authorship

If considering film criticism as writing could lead us to rethink some aspects of censorship (and thus of the cultural role of reviewing as censor-*ing* rather than censored), then it would also require a revision of the Authorship principle often assumed by people who ask critics to account for or defend 'their' opinions.

Newspaper and magazine reviewing operates between the poles of a flagrant contradiction. On the one hand, critics tend to develop – and occasionally, they are encouraged to develop – a *persona*. They are not exactly stars in Australia, even in cultural hanger-on circles. But they do, in the reiteration of certain tastes and values, or in the repetition over time of certain pet clichés, favoured syntactic structures, rhythms, jokes, didactic obsessions etc., produce an effect of Identity which is sometimes taken to be that of an Authorial Voice. This tendency is intensified by the regular (i.e. potentially mechanical) nature of the job, and by the principle that the faster you write the more you earn by the hour: both of which can encourage reliance on tried and trusty formulas for producing a mirage of one's own presence in the text.

Yet reviewers are quite clearly not Authors in the traditional literary sense. The production of the meaning of a review is a collaborative process – even without taking into account the role of the reader. Not only do the editing procedures mentioned above work to modify or sometimes change a text which nevertheless still bears one's name (occasionally with embarrassing or disastrous consequences), but other factors such as rewriting, hidden typographical error, the cropping of accompanying photos and – above all – headlines, can all converge at random to inflect what is said several degrees away from whatever it was that one 'meant' to say. Headlines, in particular, are crucial (I have never written my own). They can

often accidentally or even deliberately contradict the text, and they *always* interpret it – so if one can assume that many readers simply read the headline, the first paragraph and the last, then one can also assume that what they think you think bears little relation to what you said. Or later, to any memory you might have of having said anything at all: for the ultimate stage of the reviewing process is achieved when a few words or phrases float off for endless recycling in publicity material, 'signed' by one's proper name or simply that of the newspaper in which they first appeared. The review as *quoted* object is a collectively, institutionally produced, and perfectly depersonalized text. Indeed, it's not far-fetched to argue that a reviewer's main commercial function is merely to supply resource material to advertising copy-writers, and to lend a name for author-effect – a name which can become interchangeable with that of a media 'source' of authority ("*See this film!*' – *Sydney Morning Herald*').

I'd want to make two points about this contradiction. One is that it should in no way be seen as constituting an excuse for *reviewers.* Because I am not interested in critics as Persons, I am not saying that these occupational details constitute 'difficulties' for which sympathetic readers should make allowance. On the contrary, I think the contradiction is constitutive of *reviewing* : it is positive, in the sense that it helps to define what reviewing actually is as an activity in Australia at the moment.

The second point follows from this. If reviewing is a non-authorial activity which nevertheless produces a persona-effect – for example, the effect of '*a bit of your Meaghan Morris type stuff*', as Geoff Burrowes once put it[9] – then it might be more useful for critics of reviewing to consider it as a process of constructing not Authors, but fictional characters. Or rather, fictional stereotypes – emblematically 'personal' figures conforming to, and thus exemplary of, a limited set of conventions defining currently acceptable modes of speaking about (in this case) film. Some examples might be: the bush philosopher ('I know a thing or two, but I learned it at the school of hard knocks'); the breathless enthusiast (loves-loves-loves the Movies); the no-bullshit hard-nose ('I know a bit of crap when I see it'); the tough feminist, the passionately purple poet, the judicious weigher of pros and cons and, yes, the male or female Average Man – that most presumptuously imperialist of figures, which symbolically incorporates the entire population in its own aggressive display of self-deprecation.

One could go on. But I should stress that the point of scrutinizing reviews in this manner would not be to better 'understand' or attack individual critics – which would hardly be worth so much work – nor even to examine the function of reviewing as an isolated phenomenon of our culture. The point is rather that newspaper and magazine reviewing is an activity carried out at a site of intersection of *several* cultural practices and institutions: the media, the 'arts', the film industry, advertising, propaganda, the academy, promotion and marketing. Consequently, the fictional stereotypes of reviewing not only tell us something about the 'state' of film criticism in Australia. They also tell us something about prevailing modes of normalizing knowledge and 'opinion', fixing conventions of what is 'appropriate' for whom to say what about what and how, in our culture at large.

Here is an obvious (indeed blatant, therefore trivial) example of the intertwinings of persona-production and censoring taken from my own practice. Writing about some scenes of men talking about how men talk about women in the Australian film *Yakkety Yak* (*Sydney Morning Herald,* 13 September 1980), I came up with the following:

> *Still, more learned friends of mine tell me that European philosophers now have a name for that too. It's called phallogocentricity. That's hard to pronounce but – like* ***Yakkety Yak*** *– it's fun to try if you're in the mood.*

I do not know what would have happened had I written this instead:

> ***Yakkety Yak*** *thus presents us with an interesting study in what the philosopher Jacques Derrida has termed 'phallogocentricity'.*

I don't know whether it would have been published or not – very likely it would have been. I only know that it never occured to me to try.

The difference between the two versions is not one of the difficulty or abstractness of words (and 'phallogocentricity' was defined, albeit shonkily, in the published review). The difference is in an enunciative shift from a speaking position which gives responsibility for a bit of knowledge to a third party ('they tell me, and I pass it on to you') to one in which the speaker

admits to knowledge ('I tell you').

Clearly, my choice of the former rather than the latter had nothing to do with my gut reaction to *Yakkety Yak* (yes, I liked the film). Retrospectively, I imagine that what I was trying to do was simultaneously make the film sound quirky but attractive to that vague 'general public' whom reviewers vaguely imagine they address ('fun to try if you're in the mood'), and also use a trigger-term immediately identifiable to particular people interested in, say, film theory, and to whom I thought the film would be of special interest ('phallogocentricity').

But in fusing those two 'you's in the way I did, I automatically fell back on the persona of film critic as Middle-Brow, bumbling cheerfully yet untainted through the perils of Learning ('more learned *friends* of mine tell me') – keeping a cool head, irreverence and that precious Common Sense. This is one of the most widespread and poisonous of media-intellectual tricks: knowledge is flaunted and yet denied, wielded and yet apparently neutralized by the simple expedient of admitting ideas *only* on condition that they be attributed to someone else, who is then made to seem slightly comic. Thus is theory rendered ridiculous, yet maintained as the province of the few; and thus – in an 'automatic' decision that it would be inappropriate for a film reviewer to write in a daily paper as a closet Derrida reader – is ideology reproduced.

Criticism / Reviewing

So far I have been using the terms 'criticism' and 'reviewing' more or less interchangeably. I have also been discussing both at a level of generality which would make most of my remarks applicable to arts commentary in general, and possibly to wine, cheese, or football reviews as well.

I think that there are good reasons for beginning with generalities, because one of the things I wish to contest is the idea that film criticism/reviewing is a single entity defined by the 'IT' to which it refers – i.e.'film'. In order to pursue this (and to define one specific activity which it will then be possible to examine in relation to the film industry), I would like to suggest that it is, in fact, useful to make a distinction between criticism and reviewing.

There are two established ways of distinguishing criticism from reviewing without setting up an opposition between intelligent Persons and dumb ones, good writers and bad, or between superior and inferior versions of the same thing. I first heard both of them from John Flaus (who is not, however, responsible for what I make of them).[10]

1

If all film production ceased tomorrow, criticism would continue but reviewing would not.

I'm not sure that this is true, insofar as film reviewing could continue for as long as films were shown. One would simply review what was on at the 'museum' or 'gallery' (or TV), much as art critics can review travelling Masterpiece shows. However, that very shift of venue – and thus of the social significance of what one was promoting and of the act of promoting it – suggests that it is plausible to make a distinction in what would be, roughly, socio-economic terms.

It isn't just that reviewing is directly 'dependent' on the day-to-day functioning of the film industry to a degree that criticism (a practice that can ignore release dates, efface the difference between commercial distributors and libraries or archives, and produce a range of referents – e.g. films – unconstrained by problems of print availability, etc.) is not.

It's also that reviewing, unlike criticism, is *necessarily* involved in the production of Novelty, of Here-and-Nowness, which characterizes both the film industry and the media within which reviewing is inscribed. This is not to say that criticism is not constrained by the Here-and-Now: obviously, a book about Longford and a book about the *Star Wars* cycle are equally books about, and for, the time in which they are written rather than the time about which they write. But reviewing is consecrated to producing an infinite, repetitive series of *concrete novel events* – a new video 'this month', a Longford season 'this week', a *Star Wars* release 'today'.

It thus participates directly in at least two of the key processes of post–industrial capitalism: it helps to produce and regulate desire for new and (strictly speaking) unnecessary products; and it contributes to the media's unceasing reconstitution of the present in the image of what the Present really is (c.f. Schlondorff's *Circle of Deceit* on the Western media's construction

of the Middle East as 'news' site).

Criticism may be caught up in and by these processes, but it does not necessarily derive from them. Reviewing does. This is why, although individual films and film-makers may not 'need' reviewers, the cinema as a capitalist institution needs reviewing as a practice. This is also why television 're-viewing' (snippeted glimpses of the What's-On, of the Here-and-Now) is currently in the forefront of the business since it has laid to rest the ghost of Aesthetic Judgement which still haunts much newspaper reviewing, and which marks it as a survivor of an older economy.

2

Reviewing assumes that the reader hasn't seen the film; criticism assumes that the reader has, will or should have seen the film.

I think that this distinction – a rhetorical one, distinguishing different techniques of persuasion, reference procedures, and modes of inscribing desire – could easily be derived from the first. If reviewing produces desire in and for Here-and-Nowness, then it does so in part by (for example) imitating the narrative mechanism of *mystery*: the 'plot outline' which takes up one-third to two-thirds of the vast bulk of reviews, and in which the ending is usually either withheld or teasingly flaunted, acts as the posing of a problem to which seeing or not seeing the film becomes the solution.

This is a point which should be expanded. It's interesting, for example, that reviewers who tend not to specialize in plain, neutral, obedient plot summary also tend to specialize in what comes very close to Authorial prose. It is the persona-effect that becomes, in a sense, the obscure object of desire ('What's X got to say this week?') – and the mystery, the joke, and the pleasure can be the problem of the relation, or nonrelation, between film and review.[11]

However, I'd like to confine myself here to pointing out that this difference of aspect between criticism and reviewing – the former refers to the film retrospectively while the latter refers prospectively – can be used to define a fundamental difference in the way criticism and reviewing respectively construct their object FILM – a difference in the 'it' to which they refer.

The object 'film' defined in and by reviewing is necessarily incomplete, partial, veiled. Criticism, on the other hand, *may* (though not must) speak of a film as though it were finished, whole and – thanks perhaps to the very operation of criticism – now revealed in all its inexhaustible fullness. The IT of criticism *may* be a closed structure; potentially, at least, it has a beginning, a middle and an end (though not necessarily in that order). The IT of reviewing *can only be* an open structure – the ending is suspended, deferred – or an *ad hoc* series of items.

In practical terms, one could argue that this explains one of the famous 'inadequacies' of Australian reviewing, and allows us to see it rather as a defining-problem of reviewing – the inability to 'do justice', as filmmakers say, to the 'complete project' of a film. Quite simply, the object predicated by reviewing is never complete. Quite crudely, it also follows that if you can't/don't reveal the ending then you can't discuss structure, and if you can't discuss structure then it is practically impossible to admit the concept of double or contradictory readings.

The weakness of the retrospective/prospective distinction is that it is too pure, and flagrantly conventional. (Reviewers can and do give away endings, etc., though often to a howl of protest from readers.)

As I have used it here, it also depends fairly strongly, though not entirely, on an assumption that narrative film is the normal object of reviewing. This is not an unreasonable assumption, since reviewing usually colludes with industrial cinema in upholding that 'norm' – if only by relegating documentary and experimental work to a lower priority in the choice of what one writes about. It might also be a useful assumption: since a complicity between industrial narrative cinema and reviewing's production of desire might help to explain why most reviews of, say, documentary or non-narrative experimental work, usually manage – whatever the writer's intentions – to signify *themselves* (let alone the film) as boring, dutiful, routine.

But if it is 'only' a convention that reviewing is prospective in orientation, defining the what-you-are-about-to-see, then it's clear that such conventions are open to change to some extent. And it is in this sense that it might be a properly political task for writers to undermine reviewing with criticism, for example, or to do the opposite and push the partiality of reviewing to more radical limits.

However I would like to propose two further working definitions of reviewing, differentiating it from criticism on formal

and technical grounds – in order to specify more clearly what kinds of limits are at stake, and therefore what kinds of 'politics' may be involved.

3

Reviewing is a signifying practice in which pre-existing formal constraints are primary and determining.

What distinguishes writing for a magazine like *Filmnews* from writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald* is not that the former gives the liberty to 'say what you think' while the latter doesn't. It is that when writing for *Filmnews* one is able to invent an appropriate form (with the qualification, of course, that it is never possible to say everything in every possible way in any publication). One can't write a 40,000 word article, perhaps, but one can use greatly varying lengths, paragraph sizes, sentence constructions, styles. One can write essays with all sorts of different structures, divisions, spacings. One can, therefore, simultaneously think form and substance. That simultaneity currently constitutes criticism (of whatever quality).

When writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald* or any other mass-market newspaper (and exceptions would merely revert to the *Filmnews* model), one cannot normally invent a form. One plays with an already given genre (the 'review') and a set of rules with a very limited range for flexibility and variation. The content of those rules will vary from paper to paper, house to house ('no oxymorons here!' a friend of mine was once told); but they will always be present as every writer's point of departure, and they will constrain the kinds of meanings, and the kinds of representation of film, that are possible in a particular context at any given time. [12]

Three examples must suffice.

Space: a set of priorities about what to include (and therefore what to exclude) will develop according to whether one's normal allocated space is four inches, eight inches, ten... In this context, for example, I think that people's complaints about the absence of cinematographic analysis in reviews are deliriously misplaced; for unless one *did* go to the radical extreme of writing about nothing else, the function of a half-inch or so on the subject is simply to signify *the reviewer's* technical competence – and thus help construct his or her persona.

Semantics: if there is vocabulary control exerted in arts commentary, I think it has as much to do with the visual properties of long and Latinate words in newspaper columns as it has to do with ideologies of the Average Reader – or rather, the two things help to produce each other. Too many long words wreck the look (i.e. the readability, especially when standing in trains and buses) of the column as they spill over the edge and swallow up whole lines, while too many Latinisms clump together in blobs that signify themselves as abstract, even if the words themselves are quite common (e.g. 'construct in order to locate' v. 'set up so as to find').

This visual play-off between the columns and the words is one of the sources of the humour that newspapers can create from apparently pompous or 'academic' speech – much of which would be perfectly clear if laid out across a full page, and properly punctuated (few papers, in my experience, will use a semi-colon or a colon). It is also one reason for the exclusion of most technical terms from reviewing, and for a certain preference for the Straight Talk posture. While a *spade* may, at a pinch and for author-effect, become a *bloody shovel*, it's just too LONG to call it a *gardening implement*.

Paragraphs : like the words, most of these are very short – two sentences at most, or sometimes three at the outside. This in turn limits the possibilities in sentence construction; so that on the whole, one cannot carry more than one dependent clause. (One breaks this rule at the risk of sticking out like a sore thumb visually from the rest of the page, thus finding oneself cast in the role of Breathless Enthusiast, Purple Proser, etc.)

And this, in turn, means that reviewing tends to be an abrasively *assertive* mode of discourse – tick, cross, wham, bam – or an *exclamatory* one (gee whiz, wowie zowie, gasp, sigh, yuk). For without either a more complex clausal structure *or* a generously stretchable space, it is very difficult to introduce nuance, qualification, or the civilized right to contradict oneself.

I stress once again that this is not a matter for apologetic. It is not to say 'we poor reviewers do our best, despite those nasty insensitive subs'. It is to say that if reviewing differs from criticism it is not a matter of one's Personal tastes and abilities, since the same person may practice both. It is because reviewing, unlike criticism, is currently set up as a *formalist activity* – just like sonnet writing, acrostics, crossword puzzles, or writing stories by beginning with a first and last word chosen initially at random. And if one is to speak of 'qualifications' for reviewing, as many do at Film Criticism forums, then I'd argue that the

first and fundamental qualification for reviewers at the moment is that they be, for the duration of the job, literary formalists to the back teeth (if not the gut). Knowing or caring about film is merely a bonus.[13]

And so at this level – which is the level of *how* reviews are written – I'd argue that any politics of reviewing must be a 'formalist' politics. It should be concerned with working on and against the rules that define reviewing itself in any particular context. It should not indulge in the fantasy that reviewing directly changes or influences film: changing film is the business of film–makers. Political reviewing is a matter of changing what can be *said* about film, and how: and if this has any importance at all, it is that filmic discourse and discourse on film are inextricably related in and by the institutions of the existing economy; and because film – and the cinema – matters for reasons other than and beyond that mythic entity, 'itself'.

Institutions, plural: my last working definition of reviewing follows from this, and I leave it undeveloped both by way of a last polemic against the idea of the unity of criticism, and as a recognition that most of what I have said applies in detail only to print media:

4

A review is a signifying element in the discourse of the medium in which it appears. It is not a parasite on the film industry nor an extension of a personality, but a bit of a newspaper, a journal, a radio programme, a television show.

Notes

1 An eminent reviewer in both radio and television, John Hinde is also an author of *Other People's Pictures*, Sydney 1981.

2 The Greater Union Awards for Australian short films are decided annually by panels of local judges for the Sydney Film Festival. The twelve finalists are then screened to the Festival's international guests, who select one film to receive the Mamoulian Award.

3 David Stratton, *The Last New Wave: The Australian Film Revival*, London and Sydney 1980. Stratton was for many years Director of the Sydney Film Festival.

4 John Simon, *Movies into Films: Film Criticism 1967–70*, New York 1971, p.171.

5 Ibid.,p. 177.

6 Pauline Kael, 'Circles and Squares', *I Lost It At The Movies*, London 1966, pp.307–8.

7 These were 'Circles and Squares', p.300 – 'A film critic needs not to be a theoretician, but it is necessary that he know how to use words. This might, indeed, be a first premise for a theory.'; and Paul Rotha's introduction to Richard Winnington, *Criticism and Caricatures* 1943–53, London 1975, pp.14–15.

8 I refer to careful editing, now a rather eccentric practice after computerization and the disappearance of hard copy. More common is the routine of cutting from the bottom up – a procedure responsible for the majority of brutally abrupt and 'dismissive' reviews ('If the film's lousy, why waste the space?'). Experienced reviewers structure their comments with this possibility in mind.

9 George Tosi, 'Geoff Burrowes and George Miller: Interview', *Cinema Papers*, June 1982, p.209. Burrowes is a producer, whose projects include *The Man from Snowy River.*

10 Private conversation with John Flaus – film critic, historian, actor, teacher.

11 I'm not suggesting that people necessarily go to the films such critics recommend, but that both the 'plot outline' *and* the 'personality' methods of reviewing work to keep desire circulating through the cinematic institution – which includes not only films but texts about films.

12 My thanks to Peter Kemp, both for this anecdote and for his help with research for this essay.

13 This is why former obituary writers can in fact move over to become perfectly persuasive reviewers. This is also why someone who knows and cares about film does not necessarily make a persuasive *reviewer*. Whether or not one is competent in relation to film (and however such competence may be assessed), one needs first to be able to use the codes of journalism to signify 'competence' competently.

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
— T S ELIOT

Eleanor Brickhill

Strange Alliances

A Question of Taste

This work, 'The Cutting Room', has been tampered with, run through the sweaty hands of many people, worked over and over, questioned, worn down, until it's become something else. What I look at now in my mind seems a strange and tangled thing, and as I write, it changes still more under my gaze, day by day. Each thought I have entwines itself within the original flesh, and each day, on coming back to it, I'm less and less sure which is mine and which is not.

The Cutting Room was performed in July 1995, and my involvement started around early March with an initial meeting at Ros's studio. Subsequently, Ros and I discussed many aspects of the new work, as well as how I envisioned my own role as observer/writer/artist.

For some time, I had been curious about Ros's portrayal of Lucy, a persona at the centre of three previous short solos. What had captivated me about Lucy wasn't so much Ros's dancing, beautiful as it was, but the stillnesses in between the movements, a kind of mute but articulate engagement with something which seemed, in my mind at least, to render the more overt action almost gratuitous. When it came to the subtleties of physical expression, I felt my instincts served me well, and I didn't doubt that here was something to notice, a culturally eloquent statement. So we talked about Lucy, and these still places, and how it was there that the techniques she'd been exploring became most apparent.

Ros Crisp in *The Cutting Room*
Photograph: Heidrun Lohr

Lucy spoke to me about being 'person-bound', flesh-bound, context-bound, of the world, not something illusionistic, other-worldly or fantastic. Lucy's expression was heavy with doubt, perplexity, hesitancy, defiance, standing there as if she had nothing more to lose. Her stance dared, challenged, but was insistent, expectant, a demand for recognition that she herself was vulnerable, insistent, expectant. She felt herself to have been found wanting, simultaneously desiring and lacking, vulnerable to ridicule, but she presented her position in such a way that gave it validity and strength. Ros said later about her engagement with the material in *The Cutting Room*, 'You're strongest when you're revealed, as a performer or a person. You've got nothing to lose', but I had already found this in Lucy, as she stood enlivening what might have been a 'fixed and formulated' relationship between her own and the spectators' mutually interlocking gaze.

Concerning her collaboration on this new work with director Nigel Jamieson, she said, 'Some people have said that they needed something to hang on to, they missed some kind of context to put [Lucy] in, although other people liked it, and could sort of go along with it like a mood. ... I'm conscious that my own method is fusing many processes to do with subtle body work, emotion, imagery, thought and memory. I want that complexity, that matrix of processes to be better grasped by an audience.'

During the rehearsal period, I saw two run-throughs late in the process, and then spoke with Ros again after the performances were over. If watching the process unfold, develop and then slowly dissipate was my primary interest, I had no doubt that it was initiated by *Lucy*, and had as much to do with my own particular kind of personal inquiry as it had with Ros's.

A feature of my writing project was to get a close glimpse of the dynamics of this working relationship, to find out perhaps how things that happened within the collaboration might find expression, be reflected in the work itself. I wanted to see what impact an observer might have on this creative process, in order to glimpse, perhaps distantly, the kind of effort that might be needed to make something meaningful out of one's chaotic internal life. As it happened, the three of us together decided very

quickly that my species of 'fly on the wall' involvement was unrealistic. What they did, even as I sat there 'quietly', 'minding my own business', was clearly modified by the presence of this observer, disturbing whatever delicate web of understanding they needed to generate between them. Nigel murmured, 'You're an awful big fly on the wall.'

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Ros Crisp in *Lucy*
Photograph: Heidrun Lohr

My response to *The Cutting Room* was different enough to that of my friends so that I simply had to find out why, and indeed, found myself in unexpected company. A notable Sydney critic seemed to have fallen in love with Ros, and was hardly an impartial witness. At this stage, perhaps neither was I. There was something I was caught in, a way of seeing, being enamoured of some quality.[2]

Was my lack of some requisite critical stance just a lazy slide into intellectual oblivion? Was it a need to by-pass something, to *not* see, in order to grasp some other thing which I might want to get at? I continued to sift obsessively through my own mind and whatever theoretical material I could find, looking for explanations, validations, for my sudden and uncharacteristic swing away from some acceptably intellectually rigorous view.

Later, if momentarily, I was foolishly surprised that this feeling I had could become the stuff that art is made of. I clung to my shaky but intuitively serviceable understanding of the likes of Lyotard, Derrida, Freud, Kant, trying to force my dilemma to fit their arguments. No doubt I made it fit. After all, I am a modern girl.

Now, here's a thing. There's something's going on in my brain, happening without my consent I might add, and not something I could have ever expected: a kind of irresistible desire to drop everything, by-pass all the familiar ways of working, ways which used to feel valid, admirable. – All that discipline and rigour, that blissful logic, what we went to school for and gloried in, all that finding out how to think. People spend years learning how to do it, winning awards and gaining glory, but don't they see, in the midst of such a difficult and consuming endeavour, that it is a neat fabrication to keep us from chaos.

I need to see another kind of terrain, feel the texture of some deeper foundation of thought . Is this an experience of staggering revelation, or merely incipient insanity? Or perhaps it's just the murmuring of some insistent but unidentified 'other'?

I thought: Poetic, serviceable, definitely a goer. I can use this.

But all the time I felt like something was wrong. Do I really need to go to these extremes? Couldn't I see that it just hadn't worked, wasn't worked through, was incomplete in some way?[3] Hadn't I just been taken in, overcome by some inexplicable error of judgement? Why couldn't I just accept that, smile embarrassedly, apologise for my wayward taste, admit my laziness, be done with it?

No, I couldn't, and so here's what happened.

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The dilemma of division between love and hate.

So, a divided opinion, a work simultaneously loved and hated – well, if not actively hated, then more or less dismissed as somehow lacking. I thought that the polarisation of opinion might provide a window on the assumptions with which we view the work. How do expectations function in proclaiming a work's validity?

At this point I started to back off at first. This was far too much for me to deal with, needing a PhD thesis at least. Foolishly I stumbled on.

I felt myself to be strung out across that division, not satisfied, happy or even sane except that I resolve the dilemma in some way; so that I quieten whatever it was inside me which threatens to dismember me. It is not something I choose to do, but rather something unavoidable. Essential for me to hear the murmurings of the 'other' and speak about them, before they drive me senseless.

Strange Alliances – A question of involvement.

With *The Cutting Room* I was taken right from the start. 'Taken in' really isn't the right word, sounding as if there is some kind of confidence trick going on. So that's really my point: there was no trick. I was set to not so much 'like' *The Cutting Room*, as to be 'for' it, on their 'side', 'aligned' with it. Not so much a question of *art* as *solidarity*. It's a question of involvement, a degree of receptivity, a kind of love, wanting it to work.

What does this dance mean to you or me? Where, collectively or separately, do our interests lie? Or should I say 'loyalties'? What might we want to push? What does it mean to be an artist, or to love one's work, or to be critical? Does a critic love all art, or just some art? Do they have to? And is love the operative word? Do they need to 'care for', or 'enjoy'? If not, what is their attitude? Are they 'supportive', are they 'pleased', do they get annoyed, disgusted, disappointed?

If you are too 'open', sometimes you don't 'get' it. The functional point of a work might be that you need to be able to recognise certain boundaries, to identify with a special kind of humour or a certain kind of talk, a stance on life, a philosophical position. There's nothing like a common sense of irony to create little pockets of 'taste', which grow to become great big waves of cultural demeanour.

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Diary entry: Saturday 30 July, 1995

There are still a lot of questions I need to ask Ros about *The Cutting Room*, now that it's over. I'm left with a lap full of unresolved issues, saying, 'Yes but .....?' I feel there's something missing, I don't have enough information. But what is it I expect Ros to resolve? Hasn't she done her job? Worked with people, made art, said something important? Just what is my problem? I want to ask her, 'Well, what about now? I have to write this article about the "creative process".'

In an artistic endeavour, the emergence of real identity, of personal vision and expression, is almost always assumed to be happening. The uniqueness of the individual performer/creator is often spoken of glibly as a "given" and is overlooked and undervalued by very easy talk about the "creative" process.

Lucy *and* The Cutting Room *are jumping off points from where I hope to discuss these issues, using her own process and mine to bring to light some of the difficult nature of self development and the creative/artistic process, the recognition of personal*

history, as lived through the body, via the images, values and codes of behaviour inscribed, perceived and conceived within a person's body.

So, that's what I said in the application then, anyway. Now I think it's a bit ambitious. Nevertheless, I need a response to some of my more irritating questions, and although I look to Ros, I'm aware that this is my undertaking, not hers. I construct an imaginary dialogue.

I imagine myself asking this:

EB *Well, how was it? Did people understand what it was you were saying? Did it work?*

I answer myself: *Well, I think some people did. Maybe not everyone, but a lot of people.*

EB *Where did the name come from,* The Cutting Room*? Why is it about dead meat? Or is it an editing suite? What about the sheep noises? I thought you said that was a joke. Where did the other piece of writing go? Who wrote the programme? Whose idea were the hanging bags? What did you think about them? What did Nigel think?*

What about the lights and set? Who made the final decisions there? What did you think about the collaboration with lighting and music people? Were they worked on? I had the impression that it was all just dumped on top of all the other work that both you and Nigel had done over all those weeks. What did it feel like to you?

A lot of people were confused about the idea of the sacks of meat, the baby motif (was it an abortion or what?). The fact that they thought it was an abattoir really affected the way they saw the piece. You said that the quote from the top of the programme should not have had that sort of prominence. Why then did it? And was that only in hindsight? In his review for the Sydney Star Observer*, Jonathan Parsons pointed out that reading the programme gave a distinct slant to what might have been understood in the work.*

Do you agree that the important material in the work, the 'fuzzy stuff', the 'still points', wasn't there in performance, was obscured by the lighting?

And I answer: *Yuk, I can't be bothered thinking about it any more. My job's done. I've re-invented myself adequately for the time being. I said what I had to say, as well as I could.*

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How can I write about *The Cutting Room* without writing about Ros herself, what I know of her, what she seems to be doing, how she looks as she does it, her 'style'? There are still unresolved questions like, how do you measure success? Questions about other people's criticisms; questions about the people who were working with you:

How do you get that tidal wave effect, that avalanche, that inundation of well being? Those people positively glow with achievement. What did they do, really? And why do they glow? What have you done to them, Ros? It's like they're in love. People around you are enamoured.

In teaching, people politely talk about 'personal style'. We make allowances for it these days, accept it or hate it, a brief nod to 'individuality'. But it's hardly ever dealt with, cultivated or encouraged. You're kind of lumped with it, expected to get on with it, preferably keep it out of sight – if it breaks through we smile embarrassedly, apologise. Yet strangely enough, in the end it's the prize you're always aiming for, in teaching, dancing, making 'your own' work, writing. No-one ever addresses it directly.

What has happened to the art? When did that get made? Did you see the segue between you and the art? We have

made art, but not by way of art. And what of the critical powers of decision making? Your decisions are an expression of the agreements made between people, and they are agreements about who gets to say what happens, and why. They are agreements about how much of the intimacy between you and I we can allow to be seen. They are not just about things in space. They are made with feeling, in love, in hate, in awe, in play. They are made within the context of relationships between people.

• • • •

And so I inquired—
As if it were possible to know
What the substance is between you and I—
As to the mechanics of writing.
Your voice comes out
A brittle lace,
As if the substance of your thoughts
Is caught fluttering in your mouth,
As if misplaced.

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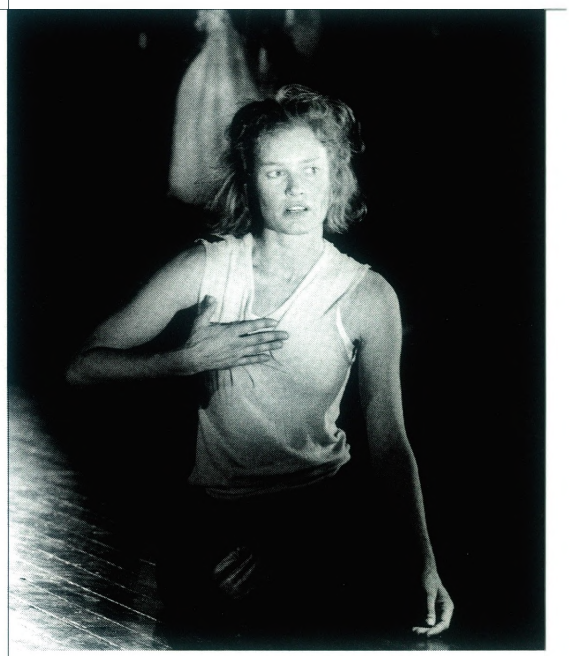
Some more imaginary criticism:

You failed to make the transition from studio to performance[4]. Now there's something to think about. What I saw in rehearsal was not there in performance. Too many lighting effects, too many visual distractions, obscuring the wealth of action. It was lit as if it was a murder mystery, a plot of some kind, ominous, sinister, or even a gallery of statues.

Not a living breathing person, who's every move is a teeming articulate response to ...to... to what?

Is there a plan of action? Is she creating it new every time? How is that possible? Well, yes she does have a plan, you see. But if you knew nothing about performance, if you were a Martian visiting earth for the first time, you might think it was all spontaneous. And so of course it is, in a way.

Ros Crisp in *The Cutting Room*
Photograph: Heidrun Lohr



Another imaginary conversation:

I say: *What about the people who said that you completely failed to say anything at all?*

In my imagination, this among other things, comes back: *Well, I guess they just didn't see. It was all there if they looked.*

And I say: *Yes but how do you get them to look in the right place? To look with the right kind of eyes? Through the right kind of lenses?*

And you say: *Well, I don't know, really. You win some, you lose some.*

And I say: *Yes, but was this any different to how it's always been in the past? You have said that you wanted to communicate better to the people who thought Lucy needed more of a context, who wanted to know what it was 'about'. What did you achieve in terms of what you were trying to do?*

And you say: *Well, I guess that whether it was more successful in those terms than the earlier stuff is debatable. What it really was was just bigger. It was a bigger statement, – or maybe just longer. Anyway it cost more, and that meant that a lot more people were involved, let more things happen. Whether it was more successful in helping people to understand it, well, who knows?*

So I say: *Well, then, it was just the same in terms of successful communication, only bigger. And then I say, well, is that what you wanted? Is that OK?*

And you say: *Well I guess it has to be, because that's all there is. I thought I wanted to make more people understand better, but now it's over, I certainly can't call it a failure just because I didn't achieve that.*

And I say: *Well, if that's how it is, then maybe you were really working on something else.*

Yes, you say. *Of course, it was really about the process.*

The process of what? I ask.

Well, if what *I was saying didn't seem clearer, then the way of saying it must have been ... somehow better.*

And what was that way, and how was it better? I ask.

I imagine you saying: *So that it has more resonance. So that I can say what my body is like in a more eloquent way. I'm saying* this *is what I'm like.* This *is how it is. It's about inventing myself from moment to moment. It's about saying, look, see how articulate I am. See how I speak, feel what I say, take my words, my breath. This is what I am.*

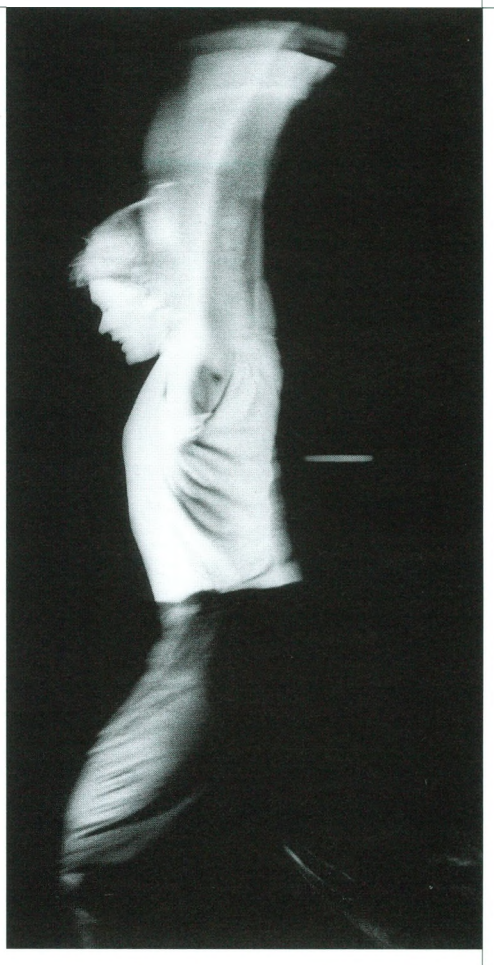
Wait a minute. That's something else. That's dangerous territory you've just entered there. Do you really want to put that down as a comment on art? Just someone wanting attention, to be looked at. That's not art, is it?

And I say: *So that's where the success was? And it was real, wasn't it? We didn't just imagine it. But is this kind of success really about art? Isn't this about personal fulfilment, not artistic craft? Self expression, and the desperate human need to articulate how one is? Aren't you just asking us to bear with you, to see you out, recognise how it is with you?*

And you say: *Well, yes, perhaps. But was it any less successful because of that?*

And I say: *Well, I don't think so.*

Ros Crisp in *The Cutting Room*
Photograph: Heidrun Lohr



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There are some kinds of work which I respond to like someone dying of thirst responds to water. I am also aware that my response has as much to do with me as it has to do with the work.

With other kinds of work I have to take a deep breath with, and plough on in, as if into a closed room where something has died. I hold my breath, and try to look at what's there. Sometimes it strikes me like a rescue mission. To be kind, to save face, to make the best of an unfortunate situation. Anything else is a waste of breath and thought.

Other times it's a clean up operation, like looking at a failed birthday cake. Great idea, good ingredients, but it just didn't rise. Not cooked well enough, in the right environment, too slow, too hot. Texture a bit wet, needs a lighter touch. Too much handling. Maybe that's all.

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An imaginary viewer's delight: Sometimes her movement is simple, familiar, romantic, passionate, dancerly. Her limbs fly, a studied physical release, a practised technique. Her body emphasises a story of anguish, in all degrees. At other times, she stands mute, gesturing, half speaking, mimetic, demonstrating something, searching the audience for response. Often we do not see her face, but her flesh alternately glows pale white and vulnerable in the murky light, or is chiselled and hollowed sharply by shadow. The images she gives us conjure up a peculiar aloneness and loss, a dismal and damp isolation and abandonment.

Now she is close up in light, her face beseeching, pleading, showing us fragility, loss, chaos. She is speaking to us. If her lips move, we don't need to hear the words. Her muteness, her frailty is there for us to see. We have been led to this place and we bear witness to something at first unspeakable. Slowly, tearing back and forth through anguish and solitude, she unearths a body, her body. She gathers and holds the fragments of herself together, reconstructing her own shape, finally finding definition in her own flesh. She has safely contained some indefinable horror, transmuting it into a kind of strength inside herself.

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At first, both in rehearsal and performance, I see Ros seeing herself as freeing herself from some painful mode of existence. I like the effort, passion, intensity and integrity she brings to this task. I see her genuineness, and then I see it being compromised by its own staging.

Initially I am puzzled and disappointed by the staging, but it is not foremost in my mind. Her belief, intensity, effort, will, struggle, openness and strength carry both of us over any distortion of what I see as her most valuable performance asset, her capacity to engender a permeability and open-endedness in her engagement with the audience.

That 'fuzzy stuff' we talked about, that questioning of the audience, that germ that was in Lucy, that vulnerable stance, that sliver of revelation, of unresolve in the mind, that allowing to be seen, that rawness. Is that the same chaos that we now flinch at? Has the context changed?

The flavour of my disappointment is disturbing, I kept running Ros's image in performance across my mind alongside earlier images of rehearsal, and earlier performances of *Lucy*.

With Nigel, Ros is using the character to tell a story, but finally it is an idealised treck, the end of which is fake. The outcome is manipulated to serve the needs of some fantasised audience/performer relationship. And so, discussions in the foyer

highlighted the gap between this particular performance and my imagined ones.

But this is not how the story of Ros's own work ended. She hasn't come to that, yet. There is also another story – mine – which finds itself wading neck-deep through a division of opinion, a confusion of interests, questions of involvement.

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I find myself caught in some endless hall of mirrors, of trying to locate both the work and myself. Perhaps I am uncomfortably aware of my own need to feel secure, so I stumble between protecting dual interests: to support Ros's expression of my own concerns, and to free myself from the possibility of suspect intellectual judgement. The appeal and comfort of 'solidarity' seems more immediately to the point than a dispassionate approach. So my 'objectivity' begins by being compromised by a need to feel part of something, a maker of 'art', my own special interests. But which art am I talking about? A need to resolve some infernal gap between views fires further consideration of the work.

Showing the show

The Cutting Room has shown us something: an artful rendition of genuineness. If Ros's intention is to be genuine then she has shown us a show. In the middle of it, she is unable at first to see this inherently problematic perspective.

It's unclear where the work really lies in this venture: in the explication of her personal quest for truth and self discovery and its expression by means of a two-way exchange between performer and viewer? Or in her characterisation of a woman in search of self discovery? Or is it something else?

Perhaps it was just expressed ambiguously. We see unassimilated emotional debris, a woman who's face and body are obscured by shadow so we can't see her physical motivations. When we finally do see her face, it shows carefully distanced and staged angst. The choreography tries to pin this down, as if it is the point. If there is another story going on, it's hard to find it amidst the visual distractions of lights, music and set.

Seeing, not seeing

I do not have to exclude a viewpoint if I can't see it. I am caught up in an effort to make sense of something, to not miss the sense in it. In this case, making sense requires that at least some material is discounted and I have to deny some aspect of my own perception.

Here was a narrative, purportedly a genuine open-ended statement of Ros's real physical/emotional presence, but given to us as a non-negotiable *fait accompli*, a closed fictitious story, enacted on some ambiguous territory which required viewers to collude and by-pass any visual dislocation between these two ways of presentation, as if there is no gap. Furthermore, in order for us to want to reconsider ideas which at first glance seem to have already been conspicuously mulled over, we need some new impetus.

The dilemma is that people only like what makes them comfortable, however that is achieved, and they dislike what fails to comfort them, for whatever reason that might be. Collusion is a complex agreement, and in this case we have nothing to gain. In the end we can only accept Ros's story as far as it doesn't seem to ignore or negate our own perceptions.

I wonder at my own pig-headed demand for a particular kind of involvement with a work, that need for dialogue with an artist who recognises and takes account of my experiences, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic.

From one point of view, there is no reason for this work to have developed new language, because what she was saying was an old story, easily expressed and read by the familiar body language: We see Ros, then apprehend her as a being who is caught in the spot light, and has been found wanting. We might infer forced submission, vulnerability, madness, immolation,

pain, anger at 'life', or a struggle to find something on which to base a meaningful life. Her story works at the potential to revisit those places, re-enact those same issues, and perhaps find a semblance of resolution. Some of us are conscious of seeing something real, raw and genuine. I remember that look of Lucy, the way she framed herself, catching the audience's eye, her almost clownish challenge to the world, such as mad people have, and a personal vulnerability and boundarilessness which can only be recognised and hence claimed by its own immediate expression.

But success is limited in this scenario. We also see her vulnerability as simulated, expressed in a distancing kind of vocabulary that simultaneously protects her and the audience from the very experience that we have been invited to participate in. The relationship between us and the simulation is not comfortable.

An imaginary cynical critique: Beautiful technique, no doubt. But the steps say nothing new, repetitive and oozing an emotional, histrionic feel. They re-perform a tired stereotypic embodiment of a woman that we might have witnessed many times before, and now intuitively recoil from. Crisp does not appear to comment on this particular portrayal of a woman's vulnerability, pain, loss, etc. How are we supposed to understand it? If the material genuinely came from the place she wanted it to, said what she wanted it to say, and there was a will and capacity to engage in mutual communion with the audience, why couldn't we go with it, suspend disbelief long enough to try and see something other our first reading of a flimsily romantic account of submission, vulnerability, madness, loss?

Thoughts founder on this unexpectedly shifting and parochial shore. There is nowhere to go intellectually or emotionally in this fictional account apart from the dubious pleasure of revisiting such a dreary and unenlightened place. We want firmness, rigour, disciplined elucidation, something real, not some pre-digested, psychologically naive pretence at self discovery. There's never 'just' language. It's always language in a context, and she seems to have forgotten the context of this particular conversation. We can't engage in any two-way dialogue. She no longer seems to understand us.

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In the end, again which art must I talk about? Ros's genuine engagement with the audience as she had in the Lucy work, with that compelling intensity which is both part of her talent as an artist and as a person. Or a memory of it buried within an artful and synthetic staging?

Notes

1 This paper is my personal response to the making, performing and public reception of *The Cutting Room*, choreographed and performed by Ros Crisp, and directed by Nigel Jamieson. It was performed at The Performance Space, Sydney, in July 1995.

2 I'm looking at an assumption that the basis on which artistic merit is judged is always 'aesthetic'. People can be scathing, too, with equal intensity, rather than as appreciative as this, being under the sway of particular ways of thinking – for better or worse – having more to do with adherence to possibly unrecognised social codes, and mediated by the ideas favoured by whichever particular peer group they aspire to.

3 An apparently non-negotiable 'verdict' which I felt in some way pressured to go along with. I was not the person people came to to say how much the work touched them.

4 At first I wondered what this actually meant. My impression was that somehow that critic wanted it to be different. I wondered what she was looking for, what the criteria were that make the shift successful. I might criticise the same things but not in those terms. What I would say is that Ros worked hard with Nigel on all of that process, and then in the final version, I missed the kind of relationship that she might have had with the musician and the set and lighting designers. That critic might have imagined the process, relating very strongly to the decisions one has to make in that situation, and she knew very clearly what her strategy would be, being like anyone else unavoidably committed to to her perception of the situation. I think one of the things that she might have wanted Ros to do was to take control of the whole thing, and not leave it up to Nigel. But of course, this particular collaborative relationship didn't work like that. People collaborate in the way that they function as people.

Sally Gardner, Elizabeth Dempster

Interview with LucyGuerin

'In my work I aim to create an enclosed abstracted world; a theatre where human drama is formally presented to the audience. I hope that through being drawn into the theatrical space and experienceing the nonverbal communications of dance, the audience will reinterpret their own lives in more revealing aspects. The dance material is derived from intricate phrase-making, set within the larger framework of choreographic structure. It makes use of classical lines to present iconic shapes and then subverts them. My movement vocabulary is often geared towards breaking down these classic forms or exaggerating them past recognition. The themes throughout my dances deal with dual nature and divergence. They explore questions of conflicting choices both emotionally and aesthetically, often pursuing differing paths to an extreme. A dialogue is created that challenges the audience to find a way to accept the presence of disparity in the world and the tension that is thereby created.'

– Lucy Guerin

Lucy Guerin *Incarnadine*
Photograph: Greg Miller

Lucy Guerin was born in Australia and graduated from the Centre for Performing Arts, Adelaide in 1982. She danced in the company of Russell Dumas ('Dance Exchange', Sydney) and with 'Dance Works', Melbourne, and received several travel/study scholarships before moving to New York in 1989. She has been a member of Tere O'Connor Dance, the Bebe Miller Company, and has also worked with Sara Rudner.

Lucy Guerin's dances have been produced in New York at Dance Theater Workshop (DTW), PS 122, the Kitchen, and through Movement Research at the Judson Church and Pace Downtown Theater. Lucy has also shown work in Stockholm, Melbourne and Sydney. In 1994 and 1996 she was selected to attend the Rencontres Choréographiques Internationales de Bagnolet in France, and was awarded funds to create and produce future works. In 1991–92 she was an artist in residence at Movement Research, and in 1994 was a recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts choreographic fellowship. She has also received support from the Australia Council, the New South Wales Performing Arts Board, the Jerome Foundation, and the Harkness Foundation.

In September 1996 Lucy presented *Incarnadine* and the premiere of *Courtabie, 1966* in Melbourne, with dancers Nicole Bishop, Rebecca Hilton, Ros Warby and Jennifer Weaver. *Writings on Dance* spoke to her after this season about the changing environment and contexts that have informed, defined parameters for, and helped produce the development of her artistic vision.

Lucy Guerin *Incarnadine*
Photograph: Manuela Cifra

Lucy Guerin It is pretty straight forward why I went to New York in the first place. I'd been there several times to study – and was getting increasingly frustrated with my dancing options in Australia. I went there pretty much to work with other choreographers. And that changed over a few years. I think I then started to get frustrated with working with choreographers, so started making my own work. And much to my surprise I found that New York was a very supportive environment to do that in. Initially I thought it would be very threatening because it is so competitive and there's so much going on there, but in a way it gives you a kind of anonymity to test out your initial fumblings with choreography. The thing that I think kept me there for so long was that the community there was very strong, it was very supportive. I think part of the reason for that is that there is just so little money there, and so little support for people that it has a kind of integrity. It allows you a kind of freedom. There's no pressure, really, because there's not really any financial support. There are opportunities to be presented by theatres, but there's not a lot of financial gain to be had by anyone, so I think in a way I found that really freeing. Rather than having to respond to market pressures or fashion or whatever the local flavour of the month was, I could pretty much explore what it was I was interested in. But, ultimately, that lack of funding was just the thing that I think got to be too hard – its too hard a life when you are 35 years old and you are still having to wait tables four nights a week and then get up and rehearse in the mornings and go home and have a nap. Yes, I think that's pretty much what made me decide to come back. But also I felt like I don't really need the kind of stimulation that there is in New York any more. It is very full-on, and it is inspirational. But then after a while I didn't need so much external input, I don't think. I felt like I could generate that myself a little better.

When I first got to New York I danced with a choreographer called Tere O'Connor. His work was almost the opposite to work that I had done here, say with Russell (Dumas), which was very much about movement and vocabulary and dancing – very much about dancing. And Tere's work came from I think a much more 'ideas' related place. He has an incredible imaginative reign. That was really strong for me when I first got there – just to experience what seemed like the other side of making work. And also he encouraged me, and when I did start to choreograph we would talk a lot about choreography and what it was. We also came up against the same frustrations with it, I think. You know, because as much as I love dance, I have always had big questions about it. I don't respect it, I don't think, as much as I should some times. Tere was someone who felt the same irreverence in a way. A lot of people in dance take it very seriously I think. Which is good, but I just have never been able to. So I've always felt a little bit like a charlatan, you know, like I didn't have the dedication or whatever it was. But at the same time I feel like it is a really good vehicle for me, for the way that I think, and a good balancer. And to include both those elements – the more physical, dancerly aspect of it, but also a broader, more abstract approach to creating something – that rounded out the picture a bit for me when I went to New York.

SG/ED I am struck by your comment about that sense of irreverence about dancing – that you can't always take it seriously. I'm interested to know how that plays out in your choreographic process. I'm presuming it is more present there than in the dancing you might have done in other people's work. When you said 'irreverence' I remembered noticing that quality in the two works we have just seen here in Melbourne.

Yes. There *is* a little bit of commentary going on, and I do feel like that. And I'm not sure if that's a kind of immaturity or not, or whether it is or not probably doesn't really matter, it might change later. But, yes, our whole approach to rehearsal is, especially Becky (Hilton) and I – we've worked together for quite a long time, and she's the one person who has been in all my work – is like this: not too much of a warm up, and she smokes lots of cigarettes, we drink coffee and talk about what happened yesterday or whatever. And I do think that's part of it. I think the whole approach to the body, that reverence for the body is something that I can't enter into really. I feel like my mind and my body are pretty sort of connected in a way. So that to come in and take my body through a whole series of things that I'm not really very interested in... Some days I am, you know. And I *am* interested in moving and dancing – I like dancing, I've decided after many, many years. I do like it. I don't have a 'joie de danse' kind of approach to it, I don't feel like it's my life. Although I do feel like its my life (laugh). But I think the process and the part that I really enjoy is – and this is the same for everybody, I'm sure – getting to movement sensations or mental movement areas that are outside of my experience – when it comes to actually developing vocabulary. Because structurally and presentationally I'm pretty formal in my choreography. I also get inspiration from Pop and fashion and things like that, because that also helps I think, helps me to cut through that kind of reverent or elitist approach.

So you engage in the business of making a dance because it takes you to things that you haven't experienced before; it's a way of getting to somewhere that you don't know about. It would seem that your interest is not so much in the recreation, reworking or reconfiguring of materials and concepts that are already part of a dance repertoire or tradition. Maybe that's why that whole warming up business is unhelpful, because that process tends to keep recreating a particular, familiar body.

Yes. That's really true. And it is a bit of a problem because a lot of times I want the dancing to be fairly physical and fairly extreme. But if you go in and do a warm up where – you know, you do a barre and then you jump around or whatever – then it does set it up for just *those* things to come out. I think my mind leads me a little bit in this – in making vocabulary. I almost feel like I have to get into a kind of trance-like state. Sometimes I'll think the thing first – the mood – or the style of the movement that I want to make – I'll think about it – you know, you have a little flash of what it could be, or a possibility – and its interesting because... it should take you further, but then you go into the studio and try and do it, and it is amazing how the increments are really small. You get a little bit further, but it is not that different to what you've done before. Every time I make material I do get a little bit further I think, but it is not like the radical leaps that I'd like to make.

In 'Incarnadine' you and Rebecca Hilton stay on those targets that are on the floor, and because of the targets I was reminded of Trisha Brown's piece, 'Glacial Decoy'. That dance is very much about not being able to catch the dancers in the dance because they keep going off – they keep skipping off, slipping off the side. Sometimes they bump into each other. It happens very much as though the frame isn't in the middle. It is one of Brown's first pieces where the movement is very layered and multi-directional through the body. In 'Glacial Decoy' the decoys are very much what you can't catch, what you couldn't possibly keep in sight long enough to shoot down. On one level it is the opposite of your just staying on those targets in 'Incarnadine'. I was wondering whether that need or tendency now to stay put and be very frontal and make a very strong statement in a more readably strong way is an historical shift. At the time of 'Glacial Decoy' there was perhaps much more interest in dancing that you couldn't 'read'.

For me, I'm very self-centredly wrapped up in expressing something about myself. And that thing about going further and looking for the parameters of my movement vocabulary is about that. And I suppose that is always what the creative process is about. Although, say in a situation like what you were talking about with 'Glacial Decoy' it sounds more like it's a system that is set up and then fleshed out, but it probably comes from the other end as well: I imagine it would have involved a certain stylistic exploration – in developing the vocabulary. And they are the two things that I am very strongly interested in – the structural aspect and then the stylistic – the tone, the mood (I've never quite found a way of saying it) which to me comes through in the vocabulary. The meaning expresses itself through the structure, and the emotion or the tone expresses itself through the vocabulary. So in 'Incarnadine' in its very structure its got Becky and I not being able to get off these targets. Our approach is very rigid and pretty relentless. It just goes on and on in unison. We don't divert from each other, and we're very independent. But the whole idea of the piece is dependent on that trio. They're more expressive, they have readable gestures, and they are leaning on each other and wandering all over the space and its – its about those two approaches – to dance, but also just to living. You know, its two different approaches to movement, dynamic, but also just to thinking. On the one hand hammering something, and really trying to get at it directly. Whereas the trio is more submissive, more letting things come in sideways. From the time when 'Glacial Decoy' was made I think there is a tendency – I mean I'm sure everyone's noticed – to want to make personal stylistic statements. Now. I mean in New York I think there is. And I think that is different to how it was then. I feel like I want my work to work on all these different levels. I want it to be accessible, but I want it to have layers of meaning. I want it to be readable but really unique. So, I think in 'Incarnadine' that's a way to getting two different approaches into the same thing and creating the meaning through that dialogue between the two of them.

You mentioned something about the thinking you do before rehearsal actually starts – the intellectual preparations and the imagining of the work. The dances do have that quality in performance; there's a mind at work there. I don't know how better to describe it. There is a very lucid intellectual construct at play in the dances, but it doesn't dominate the really thorough exploration of physicality. It doesn't overpower that at all. But it is clear that the choreographic process you are engaged in is not based upon some sort of simple body-based exploration which is then organised and structured later. You don't sense that in watching the work; that is not its logic, shall we say.

I am also thinking of 'Venus Bay' which you showed in New York. After I'd seen that I thought, I wonder how she is getting that strong sense of a piece with some sort of meaning without having that at all on another level.

I am glad that that comes through (laugh). I mean it is something that I do think about a lot. It is a big preoccupation, and when I first started making work I think the mental structure was a bit heavy handed, and was, well, just too obvious to people. Not even that it was obvious, it just lacked warmth or something. But it is interesting that you say the meaning without actually doing that because I do feel like there's almost a narrative going on but it is not in terms of events – it is more in terms of emotional narrative perhaps. I'm not really sure. It is very hard to talk about these things. And in 'Venus Bay', the one that you saw in

Lucy Guerin *Incarnadine*
Photograph: Manuela Cifra

New York, I think I was playing a little bit more with letting go of having a really overriding structure. I think in those two that I did at the Gasworks their structure was their meaning really. You know, in 'Incarnadine' the dialogue between the two groups being in the same space, and in the second piece ('Courtabie 1966')- doing the piece twice – it was very simple. I feel very comfortable with having that kind of form to work within. And in 'Venus Bay' I was trying to let go of that a little bit. But it felt awful, and by the end I had to quickly organise it for myself, because I just felt like I was rambling on. But I did it: I tried to go from the non-literal down to the literal through the piece, so that it started off fairly abstract and then got anchored more in very readable things, gestures and the sound score. It is very hard for me to proceed with any kind of movement until I have a some kind of mental picture I suppose. If I go into a studio and just start dancing around and making movement, I start getting very depressed and thinking 'Why am I here?' 'What's the meaning of life?' and I end up lying on the floor sobbing. I just get an awful feeling of meaninglessness. I don't quite know what that means. So I think to allow myself to make movement it has to be going somewhere. I guess I'm a bit goal orientated or something.

That also makes sense of what you were saying before about not doing a warm up and so on. You are not buying into that still pervasive notion of dancing as an inherently natural, organic process. That doesn't seem to be a productive notion for you. For others it might be.

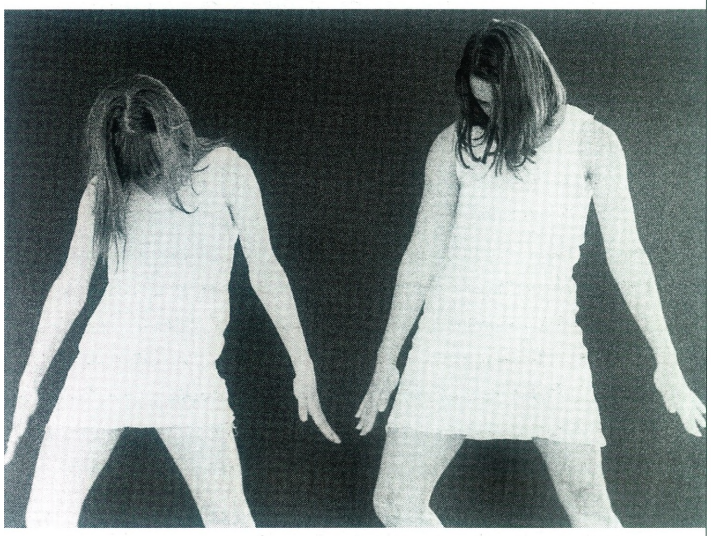
You were talking about the dialogue between the two parts of 'Incarnadine', talking in somewhat formal terms about that, but it certainly wasn't a completely formalist work for me. There are moments in the duet which just kind of cut across that. You have talked about that relentless quality, how it just goes on and on and on – but when you fall so that you're legs are spread open – they're devastating moments, and they're marvellous and shocking – and not shocking at the same time. They're very complex – not images – they're complex moments or complex events. And they just demolish the formality.

Yes. That's been interesting for me, because I didn't consciously 'make' those moments. We're in the short white dresses and we sit up and we have our legs open. I'm a little bit stupid in those ways – because I didn't even realise the implications of that, I don't think. In rehearsal we were just wearing sweat pants and stuff. But once I started performing it – we do it very detached and very removed – so it is almost doll-like or controlled – and very contrived and together, a lot of people commenting thought it was some kind of feminist piece – or at least about women and their sex. So that you've got those two sides, one being more subjugated and controlled, and then there's the women in red who are the more passionate. But it makes sense to me if people had a lot of different interpretations. One person said to me they thought it was about different ways of handling emotion. And the fact is that it is all women too. I feel a little bit confused about that. Because I do work with all women people often read it as that being part of the meaning, but it is not actually for me. Like it is not really a choice, you know.

It was very interesting for me in watching that, because it wasn't as if those moments were marked out. You just continued on and it had a marvellous ambiguity really. I suppose too it is not to take for granted a

certain – I don't know whether it is inscription in dancing – but it is in the way one might perform those things. There's something about that injunction not to mean anything. Again at a certain point historically it was very important not to be performing a meaning on stage – that you had to leave it open, hovering. But that isn't actually easily come by. There's something in being able to perform in that way or to have that relationship to what you're doing that is not an easy thing – or not to be taken for granted I guess. On the one hand it wasn't that that duet could have meant anything at all. For me as a viewer it was definitely going into a particular area, but what I was also savouring was that that sense could continue to come as a surprise, that one would never become facile or predictable with those meanings or suggestions. For the performers to be able to do that or have that relationship to what they're doing – I don't know that you can pull these things apart – is not to be taken for granted. It seems like a very deep commitment.

Yes. I mean its interesting, because after people started having different interpretations about that duet, I think it has probably changed the way we do it a little bit. I mean I think we're now aware – but the thing about it is that it is an amazingly difficult duet to do. Becky will tell you, and she complains to me constantly, it is hard to remember because there's nothing that leads on to anything really organically. It is extremely inorganic. So it is really like remembering however many little moves. It is very hard to get a physical memory of it. And you constantly find yourself going off – because things repeat but they're slightly different – so you constantly go off into the wrong one or you don't stop when you're supposed to. And that is very obvious. (laugh) It is all in unison, obviously. So similarly it is very hard to get into a performance mode of it too. It is quite difficult to take it anywhere presentationally, which I think is actually good. It holds it in place, almost like the targets – it holds it in this fairly – like you say, not unreadable but ambiguous place. You know, it could have become more about being a woman or something like that. But since people have read it that way and I've thought about it that way, I've thought there's some very obvious things there that I have missed, even though I'm the choreographer, but it hasn't really changed that much. It is an interesting question that whole thing about performing something, but allowing it to be – I don't mean to say ambiguous – allowing it to be open to interpretation but at the same time still making a statement.



Lucy Guerin *Incarnadine*
Photograph: Manuela Cifra

I was part of a group of dancers who all started to do their own work. I think I was first but (laugh) all the people that I got to dance in my work – various ones of them have since made their own work, and I've been in their work. Becky has made work and Mia, another dancer, has made work. So there's that opportunity to do that. It was so helpful to me as a starting choreographer to have these people who I've had a very similar history with, but who also know me and are my friends. Because you know how it is very confronting going into a room when you haven't done it before and having six people standing there waiting for you to make genius movement (laugh). And also because I think it is part of the irreverent thing that I was talking about before. I mean, they know me, and if I do something really silly they knew where I was coming from so I didn't feel as self-conscious. I mean I did feel self-conscious, but you know, I think that because they knew me as a person they trusted that I wasn't just doing something that was completely stupid – although not all the time.

I want to be in other people's work actually – a little bit, not too much though. But at the same time it is really difficult being in your own work. And I'm starting to feel a real need to be out of it, and I don't know what that will do. I haven't ever made a piece that I wasn't in. I need to be in it from the movement vocabulary point of view I think at the moment, because I'm still really interested in that and going further with defining that. These whole questions of meaning are something that I'm really interested in trying to get more of a grip on. I think there is a kind of meaning that is developing in what I do – an approach to meaning, but I still haven't grasped quite what it is. And I think you know I'd like to, but maybe when you do that it is over (laugh).

Now that you are back in Australia would you keep working with friends? How would that work?

I am continuing to work with Becky. But the other friends are in America. So I can't do that. But I did reach a point I think with the friends where they were experiencing similar frustrations to me and wanting to go off and do their next thing after having been dancing in companies for 8 or 10 years themselves. And also – it is an interesting question – but in some ways you can't – although they can interpret me incredibly well and easily, at the same time I don't feel like I can push them in the same way because they are my friends and my colleagues – and I have a lot of respect for them – not that I wouldn't for say younger dancers that I didn't know. When you're a choreographer I think you need to be able to push people through things. And I actually don't really need to as much with them, so I guess its a bit of a pay off. There's something appealing to me about working with new people who I am not as connected to I think.

It seems to me what becomes entailed here is this whole question of induction and training or the depth of experience that people have.

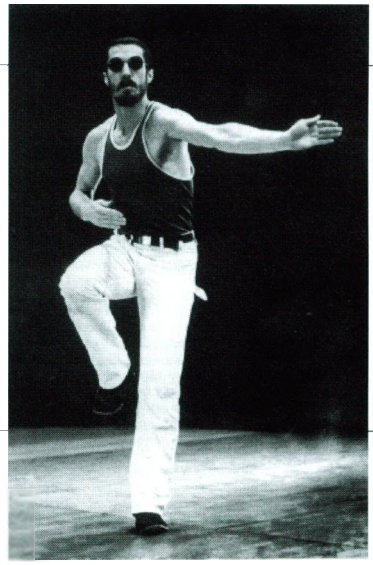
I think that any time you are working with younger dancers anywhere – I mean in America or here – you always have to train them as a choreographer and you have to – I mean they have to absorb your movement quality and your approach to it and all that, and then the next person that they go and work with maybe it is a little easier or ...it depends. I mean if they work with you for 10 years then I think it can then be quite hard to then go on and do a totally different style. And I suppose that's what was good about New York, that there were several other people, not working in the same style as me but working in a place where the dancers could cross over. I think just physically. You know, like using some ballet form and some release technique – I guess that's what you call it – you know, a lot of sequential joint movement. So they had the skills. Whereas, here, I think there's not so much of a mix of the two things that I've noticed. You know, I haven't really seen a lot, but I think it seems to be that people tend to work either in this kind of presentational balletic modern dance style or they're quite formalist. So it's hard to find people that have the two things, which is what I realised – you know, I do rely on people having both those skills. So that's difficult, but its something I think that if they have one, you know you just have to work with them on the other. And there are a lot of dancers here. It is not even just dancers. It took me a really long time in New York to find a composer I wanted to work with, and a lighting designer, and it is just going to take that time again. The historical thing is difficult because, although all the elements are here, all the elements of the history of the kind of work that I'm doing, it doesn't seem like they've been brought together really, which you know they have I think in New York. And so people can read it. But I was worried when I came back here and performed how people would see it and whether they would notice any difference, you know. Well, I think the response has been really good and very perceptive. Its just the same question of how readable is dance and how much can you make your meaning clear especially without that context that I've been working in. I was a little bit worried. Its mainly people in the dance community that I've talked to but I've felt that people do understand it and do see where its coming from. So that's a big relief actually.

You talked about the very tight financial situation in New York before. But you have received several grants and awards, haven't you?

Yes, I've had little bits of money. I got a New York Foundations for the Arts Choreographic Fellowship, which was a nice $7,000. That was the most that I got. The Movement Research grant translates into rehearsal space, and a little bit of money for production, but never enough to pay anyone really. And when I perform at DTW I do get a commission, which is a small amount – but its never anywhere near enough. So basically you have to go into debt, which is what I did – borrowed money from my parents – thank you Mum and Dad. But being presented in New York is really good, you know, you go into a theatre and they do a lot of your publicity and they provide you with a lighting designer and they clean the theatre and all that kind of stuff, and you have a psych – a clean psych (laugh). But you know there's the other side of the coin that you never can pay your dancers, and that's very hard. So you're constantly in a state of feeling like everyone is doing you a favour. All the time. That's hard. It is a bad feeling to always feel indebted and feel that people are having to make these huge sacrifices and that's another reason why you feel like you can't make demands on them too, I think. Because they're all these incredibly accomplished, amazing dancers. Really, you know, fantastic. And they're coming along and they're doing all these other horrible jobs so that they can come in and work for you for nothing basically. I mean they're happy to do that, but its hard to be in that position. I mean it has got to a point just in the last few years where the funding situation is just appalling – its really bad. And a lot of companies have just closed down. And everyone is in a state of almost despair, you know. That's all anyone ever talks about. It gets to a point where you can't support each other really any more. And remember that I was saying that it is such a supportive environment – it just gets to the point where you're stretched to your limit, and to do that extra little favour for, you know, your fellow choreographer – and people still do – but its really hard. I don't mean to make it sound like a sob story, but it has changed since I first went there. It has got, I think, more desperate, and you know I think it is serious actually – it is quite serious. It was kind of shocking to me I suppose when I went to New York and there were these choreographers that I knew about and had heard of that then I would run in to working in restaurants, and I'd think, these amazingly accomplished people that just can't make it work! So I'm starting to think that, there, anyway – and I know it is getting worse here too – its just not about supporting yourself, really, any more. It is not going to support you. Which is very hard to accept – I still don't quite want to accept it, I want there to be a way that it can, but – we'll see.

A book review by

Steve Paxton



Steve Paxton Photo: Ray Abbott

The Moment of Movement: Dance Improvisation
Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin
University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 1988

This review first appeared in 'Contact Quarterly'
Spring/Summer 1989, Volume XIV, Number 2
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T.M.O.M.

The Moment of Movement by Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin is an enormous amount of work on your behalf, and the behalf of the generations of students who will study improvisation in the future. The students who will use this book as a college text will benefit because to make a personal notebook from classes as extensive as is TMOM would take years. So here are thousands of student-hours saved in just getting to the point.

You, however, rarely read at all seriously, and never books on dance. You are into dancing, not dance, and resist any suggestion that art dance, therapy, boogies, Contact Improvisation, or improvising contain any material for setting out in print – you believe that intellectualising ruins the purity of movement, and that over-rehearsing a work (you mean by this going beyond knowing how to start, and sometimes, how to end) spoils it. You are Dionysus. You are hot, and very into 'the moment'. The thought that your efforts are listed in this book is disturbing, a privacy breached.

And you are right, to a degree. It is an uncomfortable translation from hot-living-you to dry print. And very odd to find a book on dance with no pictures – only words.

You who are already dancing will be taken aback at the overall philosophy and cross-referencing in this book. Yet you will have understood that a very simple instruction can yield much that is interesting. However, a student, unsure of their dance, may find much that seems empty here. An instruction like 'walk in straight lines' seems, on reading, very like a desperate attempt to get SOMETHING going.

Yet it seems to add much to an understanding of improvisation to cut away possibilities, to pare the choices to a

minimum. 'Walk in straight lines' presents no threat. As an instruction to a group of 15, it produces, say, 12 different immediate responses. It suggests a number of new possibilities to each person in the group. And the exercise has only started.

One encounters this sort of instruction as a beginning in this book; let me report on some endings – performances. Trisha Brown gave a similar instruction to Grand Union: *Line-up*. She gave it not as a stark, limiting instruction, but as a juicy word game to be solved with action. She then used it as a title for a work for her company, which showed some of her ideas for solutions. Lucinda Childs is apparently hooked on lines. Barbara Dilley has put more than 18 years on lines in her improvisation essays on lines. Her *Grid* was preceded by the *Mandala*, which employed curved lines. Both were performed: *Mandala* once was shown in a fieldhouse and gradually appeared as paths emerged over the eight hours of performance. It was like Corwin walking the pattern at Amber. But I digress. I am pointing out that a simple instruction occupied the extraordinary minds of these women for years (try a rough guess – BD from '71, Trisha from, say, '63, Lucinda from, say, '72: What! Sixty-one years!?) This instruction is obviously a goldmine. What is it doing in an improvisation text where beginners might get a hold of it and make a lot of dances with it?

But the magic is not at all in the instruction. Most students will walk in a straight line, and stop when they come to a wall and that will be that. They will not notice the career potential.

There are 200 or so exercises listed herein. If each of them were studied to the depth-average of Trisha, Lucinda and Barbara – approx. 20 years – then there are 4000 years of work in this book. This is a problem with this book. Even cutting way back on our experience to only 20 minutes per exercise means 4000 minutes of work to turn these words back into the actions from which they came.

If you find this prospect daunting, then you will be quite dismayed to read that this book is far from complete. It comes to us from the academy and is aimed firmly at academic situations – groups of students. There are remarks about how to handle difficult students. There are criteria for semester-by-semester progresses through improvisational skills. There is advice on how to prove improvisation is worthy of classroom status, for credit, to crusty non-dance-oriented faculty.

Ideas circulating in the field get short shrift. Contact Improvisation is mentioned. But I am thinking of the work of several teachers of many years standing each of whom would require a book or books this thick to indicate the avenues their researches have taken.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen works on anatomical systems. She would focus more on groups of muscles, choruses of organs, sequences of nerves, vistas of the senses or the whole body's mind.

Image-release, release or releasing techniques employ images of the anatomy, usually simplified, to enliven connections in imagining or imaging the body's potential. Joan Skinner, Mary Fulkerson, Nancy Topf, John Rolland, and Marsha Paludan might each require their own books by now. [John already has one, *inside motion, an ideokinetic basis for movement education*.]

Lisa Nelson, one of the editors of *Contact Quarterly*, is teaching very interesting work on movement and the perceptual systems. Work on the senses is more food for thought. If you are at all a curious person, walking in a straight line will be followed by questions: first, how is it accomplished? The eyes, primarily. And how does this guidance accomplish guiding us? J.J. Gibson stated it in this title, *The Senses Considered As Perceptual Systems*, which points to the notion that when we look to the right we move a battery of muscles to 'support' the glance. Obviously, looking straight ahead requires muscles and skeleton and all the rest co-operating.

These approaches to the central idea of improvisation (or composition for that matter) add important new vistas to the areas Blom and Chaplin have mapped out. They support with further information. They create an atmosphere which stimulates the connection between imaging, imagination, and the functioning body, with its feelings. Food for thought is a first food for improvising.

With not too great a leap we are back to the mind – the idea to orient one way or another comes from (or to) the mind.

It seems to me that this book becomes more interesting if we consider these other areas as support for its exercises. It is a commendable piece of work to have collected these practices. It becomes much more than a collection of exercises if we understand one is building one's mind.

What sort of mind? Simply, your mind, with enlarged perceptual arenas, more data about what is dancing (composition of the body), deeper and more varied feelings. More thoughts.

A book on improvisation these days has its hands full, and cannot cover all the bases. It is however instructive to turn back to Rudolph Laban's *Modern Educational Dance*. One scenario he presents is that a person who must do repetitive work (assembly line, typing) will not achieve the level of maturity which might be possible if they were not so constrained: remembering that movements switch on parts of babies' brains gives some support for his idea. Noticing the quality of government of industrialised countries lately suggests he may well have been right. At any rate, he believes that the antidote is in improvising. It is a reasonable belief, given that improvising is much the opposite of the assembly line. It remains speculation because millions of people do not practise movement improvisation daily. If they did, and if we understood 'maturity' of a human being, we might see Laban as a prophet rather than an educator.

But he was seen as a prophet by some. For instance, in England an appalling version of his ideas was and is still promoted. Joyce Grenfell, the British comedienne, used to parody it, trilling, 'Let's all be pretty flowers growing in the grass'. Far removed from Merrie England, far too young to understand issues of improvisation or industrial ages, I instantly understood the parody. It was a perfectly useless exercise occupying empty-headed teachers who passed onto unsuspecting children rather vacuous instructions. All good will, no practical help.

My attitude toward 'Let's all be pretty flowers' has considerably softened in the ensuing 40 years. I have, after all, seen Trisha Brown in *Trillium* (a pretty flower which grows in the woods) and been much moved. I saw Simone Forti perform a tree and felt my hackles rise. The magic is not in the instruction.

But the parody points out clearly where the magic isn't, it isn't in enormous good will or a toothy grin. It isn't in instructions which seem empty, if only because they are too vast, and equally, it isn't found in an uninquiring mind.

Perhaps a 5 year-old is wise enough to become a flower at the drop of a hint. I am not. I need an instruction more matched to my mentality: late Twentieth Century, middle-aged male improvisation afficionado. Sceptical, intellectual, willing to admit that I hurt and pleasure in my head and think with my body. 'Walk in a straight line' is about all I can handle. Other instructions casually used in this book, such as 'Becoming: You are neutral, zero, a non-entity; as you move, you become defined...You can become anything from a specific person, animal, or character, to an embodiment of an idea or place, to an interplay of light and energy' strike me as almost religious.

To what mind do Blom and Chaplin speak?

The passive, technoid 'walk in a straight line' requires a neutral, witnessing sort of mind. On the other hand, 'Becoming' begins with a mystical image and goes on to branch into various possible imaginings; the mind is not passive, but active, choosing, creating and interacting. Even if the 'specific person' you choose is 'yourself', the exercise is one compassing your life from conception to the present. And that seems to me the simple option in the exercise. So, maybe they write to a technoid mystic. Is that you? Got an academic bent as well? This, then, is your book.

The overall tone is practical, down-to-earth, occasionally chummy. One instruction was refreshing. Under the headline 'Duet' is the instruction 'Do a duet'. After the robotic 'Walking', and the efflorescent 'Becoming', this wryness was welcome. They must assume you are an inhibited technoid mystic, if they think such a swift kick in the ass is as useful as a more specific instruction.

If you thought dance was ephemeral, notice publishing. It will be impossible to get a book like this when it goes out of print. You'll go to libraries with larceny in your heart, only to find someone else stole it first.

So if you didn't have a pencil handy at the beginning of the program, I'll repeat the name of the book you have been reading about and how to get it. Got your pencil? I can wait, no hurry.

The Moment of Movement: Dance Improvisation
Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin
University of Pittsburgh Press
Pittsburgh PA 15260

PS

You probably *are* an inhibited technoid mystic. You are mystical because humanity has always stretched its imagination with mystical exercises. You are technoid because our society is and you are in and of it. Maybe, however, our society is technoid because it is from and of you. And you are inhibited because you don't get enough exercise. With the equipment you have, you could be out throwing yourself around a landscape every day. If this is not possible then you must find another channel for this energy or repress it completely. So it is inhibited and you feel it. So you read reviews about books on dance improvisation. That simply shouts 'inhibited / technoid / mystic'.

What in *The Moment of Movement* would inspire an inhibited technoid mystic to dance? I found the first chapters exceptionally clear. They set out ideas you may return to from the depths of the exercises.

And on page 65 is this question-and-answer:

'Isn't there a good kind of self-consciousness?'

'Yes. There is a heightened sense of self, an awareness of the self in action, a refined consciousness of perceptions and responses, a non-judgemental observer. This takes time to develop. It is one of the skills of improvising.'

That should encourage an inhibited technoid mystic.

Mark Minchinton

Performance/Research: A polemic

Dancing the Bridge

Groups working to revalue [social formations] must agree to operate within the established limits of individual and collective action. They must behave, act like 'responsible' citizens. They must measure up to Molar Man. Labor, women, Blacks, and at times sexual minorities, may be admitted into positions of power, but only to the extent that they become, for all practical purposes, capitalist, male, white, and straight – honorary members of the majority. The 'Other' (the outside) is interiorised by being identified, and all identification is against the Standard of the European White Male Heterosexual as the Western embodiment of good/common sense, in politics as in personal conduct. Minorities are expected to become equal-in-theory but in practice less powerful versions of the Same: children of Molar Man. 'Neonormalities'. The divide-and-conquer approach of fascism-paranoia is toned down to a paternalistic recognise-and-subdue (Massumi 1992, 121–22).

The Performance Studies section in the Department of Human Movement, Recreation & Performance at Victoria University, Melbourne, which operates an undergraduate degree dealing with contemporary performance making and theory (as opposed to more traditional dance and drama), and in which I lecture, has also introduced performance based research at postgraduate level. Candidates for postgraduate degrees can present either a thesis, a combination of thesis and performance, or, most radically, a (series of) of performance(s); other forms of thesis/artwork – CD-ROMS, novels, and so on – may also be presented. Elsewhere in the University candidates have presented other works of art for assessment – an historical novel on principles of mathematics stands out – but it is the acceptance of performed work without requiring written documentation or other exegesis *for examination* (contextualising material, including any stage plans and an audio and/or video tape of the performance(s), must be deposited in the library) which sets the University's program apart from most postgraduate programs in performance in Australia.[1]

Getting such a program running has not been possible without the goodwill and support of many people within our department and the University, as well as from outside it; the University should be congratulated on its vision and willingness to embrace what is for many a radical rethinking of research paradigms and examination processes, but that goodwill, support, and (mostly) willing embrace have also been earned through our own hardheadedness, our willingness to take a risk, and, crucially, our refusal to be defensive about what we teach and do. We have been fortunate, too, to work in an environment outside a Faculty of Arts/Humanities and inside a Faculty of Human Development that includes departments of Education, Nursing, and Health Sciences, as well as our own; we are thus not dominated by the textual paradigm that threatens to paralyse theatre (and dance) studies. Further, surrounded by researchers of sports processes and techniques, our need for flat-floor space has been largely understood, leaving us with excellent floor and studio space (we have just opened a new building housing two studios to add to our existing theatre and studios; in these straitened times this is a major achievement and signals the University's [present] support for us); the Department's teaching and research in the philosophical, social, psychological, and phenomenological aspects of sport and associated activities has also served us well, as has the University's recent conversion from an Institute: many conservative models of research have either not been in place, have been actively avoided in the search for 'niche' markets amongst the more traditional models of the older universities, or, at least, not allowed to dominate as they might (although part of the price of not dealing with the textual tyranny has been dealing with neo-positivist rhetoric from some individuals – it has certainly not all been easy).

In presenting our postgraduate program to the various committees of the University, and working out protocols for examinations and examiners, we have justified it in many different ways, adopted our rhetoric to our audience(s), accepted strategic retreats, and tried to be as friendly as possible while refusing to back down from our basic position that performance can be, and must be accepted as, research. Our basic arguments to the University have been a mixture of the following related assertions:

- that works of art constitute legitimate 'discourses' that must be recognised alongside the more traditional research discourses;
- that other works of art (particularly visual art) have been accepted as legitimate research activities in some institutions;
- that performance constitutes, or is constituted by, a series of practices that are recognisable and assessable, and indeed are already recognised and assessed outside the university environment;
- that performers use differing sensoriums to 'think through' performance;
- that to demand performers learn an entirely new, and not necessarily more effective or productive, set of

practices or to utilise another sensorium in order to gain recognition is unfair (one of our supporters questioned a resistant group of engineers: How would you feel if you had compiled data and made an analysis for a bridge and then someone said,Okay, now dance the bridge?); and

- that people exist who can recognise and assess these practices and sensoriums.

I don't want to rehearse these arguments in any more detail here; I see them as tactical devices for a more strategic intervention, an intervention which is both political and personal. Here I speak for myself – not for the University, nor for my colleagues there who may hold quite different views – and I return to the writer who has most influenced my thinking about performance, research, and the place of institutions, that is, Gilles Deleuze; and not Deleuze himself, but a commentary: *Deleuze has in the past defined his philosophical perspective as a schematism of difference, a 'transcendental empiricism' that turns inside-out Kant's idealist schematism of identity: 'beginning in the middle' of conflicting schemes of experience in order to experimentally map out the primary dimensions of difference, rather than beginning in a systematic identity, outside experience, in order theoretically to reconstruct all differences within that unitary frame. This conception of philosophy as the empirical mapping of difference is reflected in his frequently repeated view that philosophical discussion in general, and conferences in particular, are a waste of time: driven by a dynamic of 'consensus' within which interlocutors assume they're using words like 'concept', 'difference', 'war-machine' and so on to talk about the same identical thing 'behind' provisional differences of interpretation. Whereas in fact they're talking about different things, the different inscriptions of these within their own incommensurably different schemes of 'the world'* (Joughlin 1993, 63–64).

> ***The question is not, Is it true? But, Does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?*** — MASSUMI (1992, 3)

I want to bend this statement to my own ends, to use it dynamically, strategically, and productively – to deterritorialise it somewhat[2] – to say that I see performance/research at Victoria University, Melbourne, as aiming to turn inside-out the idealist schematism of identity: 'beginning in the middle' of conflicting schemes of experience in order to experimentally map out the primary dimensions of difference, rather than beginning in a systematic identity, outside experience, in order theoretically to reconstruct all differences within that unitary frame. This conception of performance/research is reflected in my frequently repeated view that performance/research discussion in general, and conferences in particular, can often be a waste of time: driven by a dynamic of 'consensus' within which interlocutors assume they're using words like 'concept', 'performance', 'research' and so on to talk about the same identical thing 'behind' provisional differences of interpretation. Whereas in fact we're talking about different things, and the different inscriptions of these within our own incommensurably different schemes of 'the world'.

As I have pointed out, through accident, design, and our pigheadedness, the particular world of Victoria University has in general been/become unusually receptive and supportive, and we in the Performance Studies section have acted quickly and tactically to do what we want. But above all, we have refused to ignore (what I might call somewhat simplistically) the political, social, and personal dimensions of research: *viz,* research isn't simply a neutral tool used to discover 'facts' about the world and performance but a machine that intervenes in and constructs the world and performances. One of the interesting effects of textual based, exegetical, research into theatre and dance has been the way it has favored certain kinds of director and/or choreographer based performances which produce stabilised 'textual' objects[3]: the

> ***Playfulness is a scandal . . . mimesis that somehow clones the world is acceptable. It changes nothing. Being playful in the slightest way suggests that things might be otherwise.***
> — DENING (1992, 79–80).

difficulties of talking about work made in other ways (either in the organisation of roles and the hierarchies of roles within groups, the performance making strategies of groups, or the 'products' of groups) leads to the 'capturing' and valorising of only particular forms, styles, of performance. Additionally, it can also mean raising to prominence what, after all, may be quite retrograde performances, processes, and styles. Without wanting to push this point too far (since it may founder on all too personal a judgement and vague notions of 'relevance' which are already a means of attack on university programs by the corporate fanatics that are our present governments), the all too depressing spectacle of an essay or presentation which offers dense observation/ documentation/explication of what was really a tawdry (performance) work is, unfortunately, not confined to undergraduates' explanations and exegeses of their own work, as a quick perusal of the offerings to any number of Dance and Drama Studies or 'Industry' conferences will confirm.

Experiment, never interpret.

– DELEUZE & PARNET (1987, 48)

It *seems* to be an inescapable fact that the demands of documentation and exegesis mean it is easier to document and explain what has passed, and the more passed it is, the more removed from the everyday, and the more amenable to 'capture' through being preserved as some form of text, the easier it is to write about. I know the (apparent) subject of my own writing lags many years behind what I now do as a performer and maker, so that by the time I see it in print or hear my voice at a conference I am more than bored by it, I'm embarrassed by its misrepresentation of me. But then writing is more than its apparent subject matter – a point to which I hope to return.

Acknowledging the political, social, and personal dimensions of research/performance, taking into account the power structures we operate in (and, depending on the institutions we find ourselves in, these are different in subtle ways for all of us whatever features they may share) means – to grossly paraphrase any number of writers[4] – recognising that we create what we study. In a world which flagrantly demeans and undervalues artists and performers through processes of exclusion to which the academic world contributes through its valorisation of particular forms of research and knowledge, in a political climate which can see the legitimate work of young artists censured by an increasingly paranoid state without being defended by the head of the institution to which the artists belong, where so-called training institutions ('The only thing I've ever trained was my dog', said my colleague Jude Walton a couple of years ago at a National Theatre Training Conference) increasingly buckle under to the demands of the 'industry' and not only adopt but apparently believe the rhetoric of 'quality control' (which leads us into the dangerous territory of 'standards' and 'excellence'), and where performance is increasingly a product for corporate-run festivals, I repeat, in such a world, it is important that there be a place where artists, creators, and performance makers can get access to resources to invent, redescribe, renew, and produce worlds which challenge the majoritarian apparatuses of the institutions.[5]

Scientific and philosophical 'good sense' operates in essentially the same way as common sense: isolation of the typical individual (considered outside the real flow of its actions; as essentially dead); decomposition into parts and determination of intrinsic qualities (dissection); logical recomposition into an organic whole exhibiting signs of 'life' (artificial resuscitation); extrinsic comparison between wholes (analogy).

– MASSUMI (1992, 97)

I'm not describing a simple binary here: I'm not suggesting that all written research into performance 'toes the line', as it were – after all, I have *written* this, and I readily recognise the benefit to me of completing a written doctorate; but that doesn't mean I think I should be a 'gatekeeper' jealously guarding the 'integrity' of academe by making everyone do what I did – there must be a place for performers and performance makers to have their work, their research, recognised. I'm not going to repeat the arguments about different kinds of knowledges, although I do think they're relevant; I'm not going to ask you to believe that such research is without its problems – it *is* often difficult to

articulate clearly *what* has been researched (although I question, again, the necessary benefits of articulation); I'm not going to say that such research couldn't become a site for the production of bad art (so that those who can't get work elsewhere can get a qualification that takes them professionally beyond others more deserving); I'm not going to pretend that examining a performance based project isn't difficult – because it *does* force examiners to confront questions of what they know, and how they know it; and I'm not going to say that bridging the sometime gap between our rhetoric and our 'product' doesn't exhaust me; still less am I going to claim I'm certain the entire Performance Studies program at Victoria University won't disappear tomorrow. But it does depend on what frame we choose to place around it all, which 'system' we address. That research and its assessment requires the active participation of all involved – candidates, examiners, committees – and the constant questioning of positions and values by all concerned is surely better than stale reiteration of known and familiar positions, better than the 'comfortable and relaxed' position enjoined by our conservative government.[6] And we must recognise that artists need the space to produce what an undergraduate student of mine called 'something small and terrible': in calling for which he recognised the tyranny of the demands for 'product' that can so easily stifle so much work, and the productive pleasure that attends performing/researching as process.

Taking into account the political responsibilities of all the participants; that's the theory and practice of creative work: coming up with an actual product is more the investor's demand.
– MUECKE (1995, 144).

Listening to Radio National some time ago I heard it said that artists shouldn't be allowed to 'rort the system', meaning the University system. My immediate thought was, why not? My next thought was, you mean the system isn't being rorted already by countless MBA's, hundreds of well-behaved science graduates presented with ready-made research topics by well funded senior researchers, thousands of drearily persistent drudges dredging up unimportant details on irrelevant topics for perfectly formatted theses that will sit unread on library shelves for decades, and, mostly, by the increasingly prominent corporations that dictate the direction, flow, and production of research and ideas?[7] Again, what system are we talking about?

I want to finish by re-emphasising that I'm not saying writing/documentation is bad, performing/producing is good. That is very far from the case: many performances and performance makers are equally as guilty of supporting majoritarian positions as the most unimaginative and moribund of theses, and writing, of course, too produces worlds. And that is the point: to *produce* the world, to perform/research through production not reproduction. Performance based research (and *all* research is (a) performance, an act of theatre) is a step towards this. Trying to prove that we are responsible citizens through being good sons and daughters dutifully dotting our i's and crossing our t's, embracing the existing research traditions without radically questioning them, will not make performance makers more attractive or legitimate to the institutions, but only signal our acquiescence. Performance must teach us this if anything: we must act as though we believe what we do is important and productive so that others will believe it.

Five strategies for becoming that 'taken together, with others like them, constitute resistance':
1. Stop the world . . .
2. Cherish derelict spaces . . .
3. Study camouflage . . .
4. Sidle and straddle . . .
5. Come out . . . .
– FROM MASSUMI (1992, 103–106).

And if the (small) connections I've drawn between the discourses of party politics, performance, and university research seem far-fetched, or overstated, let me state that we are in a war: the political conservatism and re-emergence of retrograde discourses on race in this country *are* connected to debates on knowledge and research, and the universities should be places of resistance and of not only the articulation, but the production, of difference.

Notes

1 After considerable internal and external consultation, the University decided that Performance-based Masters Degrees should be assessed by two primary external examiners (PhDs by three) and a reserve examiner with expertise in the candidate's area of research. The candidate nominates what constitutes the assessable component of his/her work, including but not requiring any contextualising information the candidate thinks appropriate, and the examiners attend the performance(s) (the definition of a performance has been left open to allow for many options including workshop presentations, one-off interventions, a series of performances, and so on; in practice, financial and logistical considerations limit the size range and number of performances). After the performance(s) the examiners may confer in the presence of the Chair of Examiners, and then must invite the candidate to contextualise his/her performance(s) orally; the candidate can decline to talk with the examiners without penalty (so far no candidate has refused this invitation). After interviewing the candidate the examiners may again confer in the presence of the Chair of Examiners; the examiners may at no point in the conferences discuss grading, and they are requested not to confer outside the agreed examination period. Examiners must submit separate written appraisals and grades two months after the (final) performance. Where the primary examiners arrive at substantially different grades, the external reserve examiner who has attended the performance(s) and conferences but remained silent in any discussion is asked to provide an assessment. This method of examination is probably not perfect, and the University has accepted there may be adjustments, but it reflects the University's and the Performance Studies section's firm belief that performance and performance-making is a legitimate form of knowledge/research that should and can be assessed by other recognised practitioners, and that candidates should have a measure of control over whether they wish to provide an oral 'defense' or explanation of their work. (As a supervisor I think it would be foolish for any candidate to refuse to speak to/with the examiners, but I think the option should be there for candidates to let the performance(s) 'speak' for themselves.

2 'Deterritorialisation' runs through most of the Deleuze and Guattari writings: Massumi provides a provocative use and analysis of it in his commentary to their work, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (1992). For those who prefer a less opaque style, Marie Maclean provides a clear analysis of deterritorialisation in her study of Baudelaire (1988, 45ff.).

3 See Elam 1989, 3–4

4 See for example, Deleuze and Guattari (1987; particularly chapters 1 and 12), de Certeau (1984), and Feyerbrand (1993); from another (related) perspective Dening (1992 & 1993) is interesting too.

5 Deleuze and Guattari contrast minor literatures/languages with major literatures/languages in many writings, most notably, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986); they also say this (1987, 105): *The notion of minority is very complex, with musical, literary, linguistic, as well as judicial and political, references. The opposition between minority and majority is not simply quantitative. Majority implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it. Let us suppose that the constant or standard is the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language... It is obvious that 'man' holds the majority, even if he is less numerous than mosquitoes, children, women, blacks, peasants, homosexuals, etc... Majority assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way around.*
I have used the notion of minority/majority extensively in my own writing: see Minchinton 1994a, 1994b, and 1994–95.

6 In the recent election won by the Liberal (for which read Republican or Conservative) Party, the party leader and now Prime Minister, John Howard, campaigned around a theme of wanting the country to be 'Caring, Comfortable and Relaxed'; since his election there have been unprecedented verbal and institutional attacks on (members of) minority groups, including aborigines. Howard has conspicuously failed to intervene effectively against racist comments made by Independent Member of Parliament, Pauline Hanson.

7 It would be asinine to suggest that all 'traditional' research is worthless, but I think many academics in all fields of study would acknowledge that much postgraduate research is less 'research' than the refinement and reiteration of already known positions and strategies. Just as there is, of course, a place for such refinement and reiteration, there is also a place for innovation, new ideas, and new forms of research.

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Writings on Dance 16
Performing Institution

Editors: Elizabeth Dempster, Sally Gardner
Publishers: Elizabeth Dempster, Sally Gardner

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ISSN 0817 – 3710
Design: Ian Robertson; Printing: Impact Printing
All correspondence to *Writings on Dance*
P.O. Box 1172 Collingwood Victoria 3066 Australia.

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Writings on Dance is assisted by the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body, and the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet. Arts 21 is the Victorian Government's strategy for the arts into the 21st century.