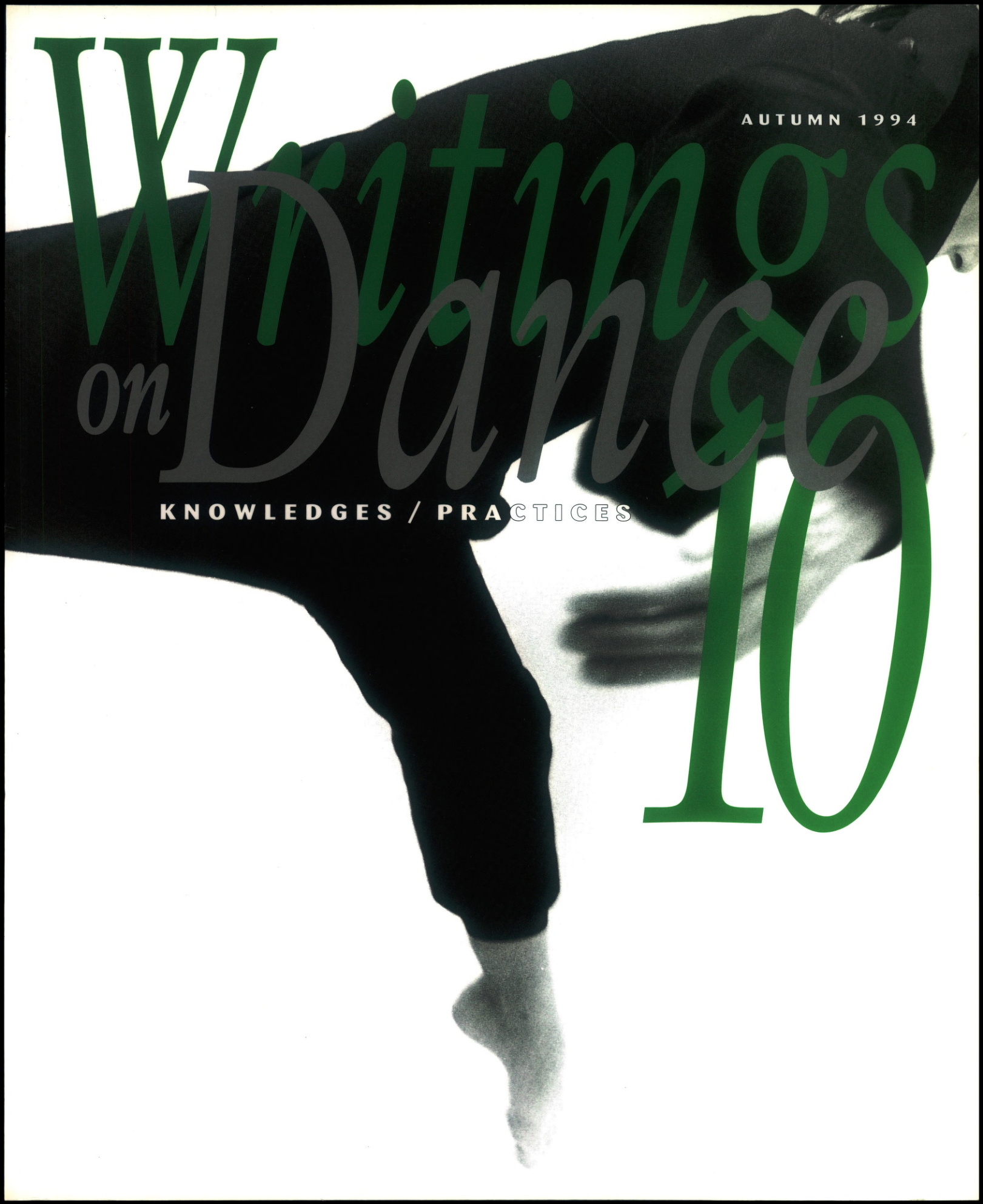

Writings on Dance 10

AUTUMN 1994

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Writings on Dance

10

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Writings on Dance welcomes contributions: letters, articles, and photographs/illustrations. All manuscripts should be original and unpublished material, typed with double-spacing and with words intended for italics underlined. A copy of the mss should be held by the author/s as *Writings on Dance* accepts no responsibility for either loss or return. Pictorial material to accompany articles are appreciated. Please include captions and credits. A self-addressed stamped envelope should be enclosed for materials you wish returned.

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Preface

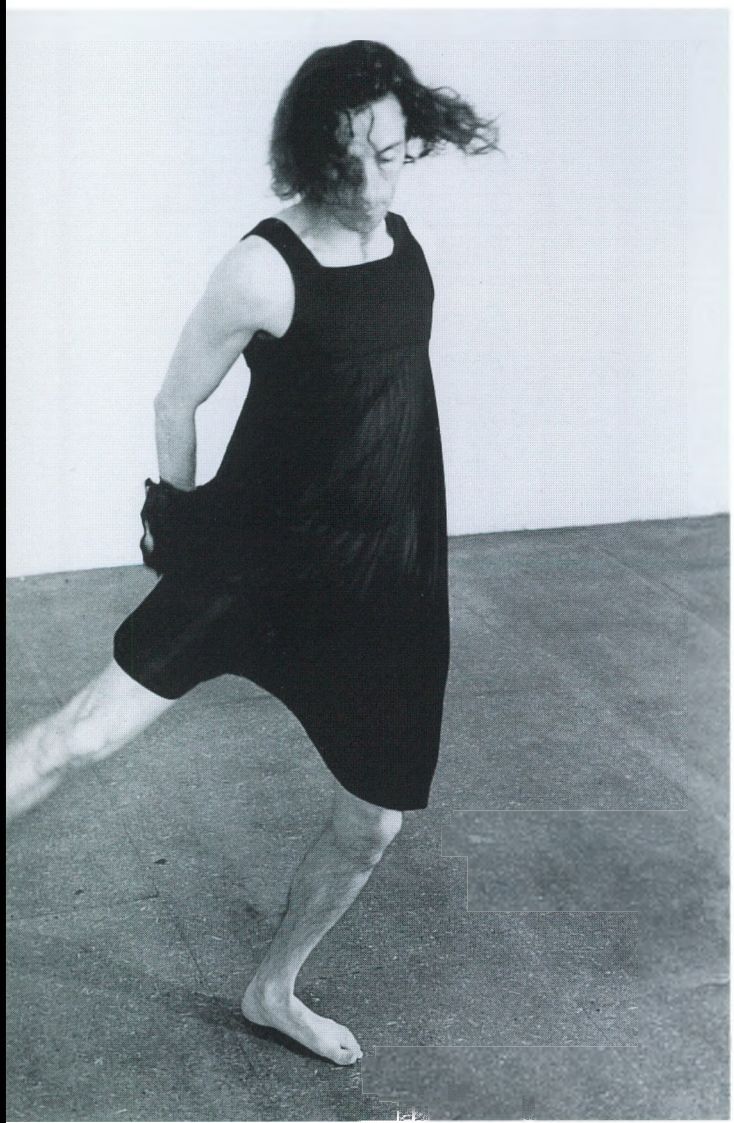
ELIZABETH DEMPSTER

It has become a truism that dance, of all the arts, is the most lacking in theory; the most in need of serious analysis but also the most resistant to it. The reasons commonly cited for this perceived deficiency are many – the ephemerality of the art, its non-discursivity, the lack of coherent and comprehensive methods of documentation and notation, the anti-intellectual bias of its practitioners, the descriptive bias of dance critics. One of the problems which has preoccupied certain dance scholars is the difficulty of determining or fixing in place the object of study. For dance practitioners, dance completes itself in the moment of its disappearance, that is, in performance, and yet it is the nonreproducibility, the *tracelessness* of performance which has been regarded as the greatest impediment to its acceptance as a credible object of research. In an academic field dominated by linguistic paradigms dance suffers from what might be termed its textual instability or insufficiency. But perhaps the difficulty lies not simply with the intractability of dance, with its refusal to conform to existing theoretical paradigms and procedures. One of the key questions explored in this issue of *Writings on Dance* concerns the appropriateness and adaptability of those current models of research: how responsive are they to the challenges of contemporary dance/performance practice?

In recent years there has been an expansion in academic research and publication in the field of performance and dance has shared in this development. Commenting on this proliferation of academic theory focused around performance related work, performer and theorist Mark Minchinton in his paper *Saboteur, Guerrilla, Pedestrian* alerts the reader to the dangers of colonisation by the word. As he notes 'performers' practices are not easily codified or theorised'. In his perception one of the consequences of adopting received academic research models uncritically is the ellision of the performer and his/her productive labour as a maker of meanings.

In the following pages performers and writers open a discussion concerning the knowledges, practices and processes of performance. It is a discussion, a conversation, which wanders across and through (rather like de Certeau's pedestrian in the city to whom Minchinton refers) the traditionally discrete zones of the theorist and the practitioner. In papers which are informed by contrasting disciplinary traditions, Sally Gardner and Mark Minchinton argue for the development of new analytic and interpretative strategies, which perhaps will not replace but function productively alongside a more vigorous extension and application of existing methods and models of research. This issue also includes contributions from dancers Rebecca Hilton and Douglas Dunn who speak in detail about the pragmatics of their work – the processes of training, rehearsal and performing, the economic and social circumstances, and the historical traditions that impact upon and form their performance making.

By focusing upon performers' practices and the knowledges and theories which inhere in processes of performance making we hope to contribute to the development of fuller, more concrete understandings of the psycho-physical processes entailed in performance and to support further recognition of the fact that 'performers' practices are the starting point for theory.'



achy breaky heart

PARIS 1991

TEXT by TREVOR PATRICK

PHOTOGRAPHS by HELLEN SKY

Trevor enters Paul enters

He is walking.
He is walking into the area.
He is simply walking onto and into the space.
He does not stride, or strut, or leap, or appear to be anything but a man in a dress.
He is a person walking across a room.
And again he walks across.
He stops. He takes a breath, and continues his dance.

Trevor dances

Music I ♩ = 96

It is repeated over and over
in a whisper
in his right ear
that not to do what he knows how to do
is the key.

What he knows how to do is to focus
immediately
on the face.

The shadow of the limbs
the spaces in between the limbs
were never his concern.

He said
start focusing on the shadows
on one single limb
then eventually work your way to the whole
figure
not letting your eyes go back
to the face
because the first step
is to allow the body
to 'not do'.

Without remorse
or sadness
or worrying
he focuses his attention on time.
He has none.
And he lets his movements flow accordingly.
He lets each of his acts be the one.

Trevor pauses
Music stops

Trevor: *I told you my father had been a jockey. Well, once I was pursued by a Polish tourist bus for five blocks, in Paris. It was trying to drive between my knees. Thought I was the Arc de Triomphe. Unfortunately, by day three, just when I'd figured out how to barrell roll without splitting the frock, they'd all slipped seamlessly into the past.*
Yes, trapped in Brussels in 1953. And I'm still in Paris trying to release myself from a little black dress.

And thus he dances
till he is done here
up and over his famous mountain
at the end of the day.

Trevor dances.
Music II ♩ = 160

And in his dance
he tells of his joys and bewilderments.
His dance tells about the secrets
and about the marvels he has stored.

And his destiny sits
here
and watches.

His movement concerns remain
simple.
The femur heads still roll
salubriously
in their sockets.
The action
forever radiating
outward
making ripples
to disturb the black surfaces.

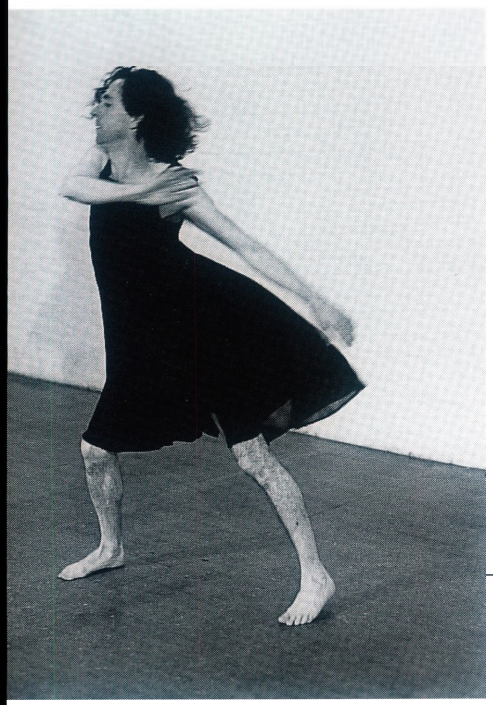
Trevor pauses
Music stops

Trevor: *When I visited Rodney across the rue,*
I found that he was exposed to a far greater range of nakedness than I.
Paul: *Jean-Marie ..... Remi ..... Dominique .....*
Trevor: *Pianists. Jazz musicians particularly, I find, are more inclined towards nakedness than perhaps are writers and painters. Some writers more than others.*

I will show you then
the first movement
of power
he said.
You must add the other movements yourself
as you go on
living.
Every new movement must be obtained through effort.

Trevor dances
Music III ♩ = 90

So
the posture
the form of the person
is the story of his life
a dance that grows
as he grows in strength.
Paul: *Michael ..... Christian ..... Christophe ..... Philipe ..... Rodney .....*
In recounting the toil
of his life
he cannot be passed by time
until he has finished his dance.
Paul: *Didier ..... Vincent ..... Pascal ..... Eric ..... Martin .....*
He feels a strange consuming happiness
in acting
with the full knowledge
that whatever he is doing
may very well be his last
act.
Paul: *Alain ..... Mahammad ..... Youssef ..... Mathieu ..... Olivier .....*



Trevor pauses
Music stops

Trevor: *You know that man across the street was run over and killed.*
Well, she said. That's how long I've had this hat.
Trevor: *Come on ya mug. Try and take it off me. Come on, ya mug. Try and take it off me.*
Try and take it off me. Come on. Take it off me.
My friend Marie went to Lesbos for her summer vacation.
She returned with one hell of a tan. And, it is said, a trick pelvis.

Only as a dancer
can he continue the journey
he said.

Trevor dances
Music IV ♩ = 160

Because the art of a dancer
is to balance the terror
of being alive
with the wonder
of being alive.
Paul: *Jean-Marie ..... Remy ..... Dominique ..... Jerome ..... Karlsson .....*
This is the site of your stand
he said.
the realisation is here
no matter where you are.
Paul: *Michael ..... Christian ..... Christophe ..... Philipe ..... Rodney ..... Didier .....*
Every person has a place.
A chosen place

which is soaked
with unforgettable memories
where
powerful events have left their mark.
Paul: *Vincent ..... Pascal ..... Eric ..... Martin ..... Alain .....*
A place
where he has witnessed marvels
where secrets have been revealed
to him.
Paul: *Mahammad ..... Youssef ..... Mathieu ..... Olivier .....*
Rodney .....

Trevor pauses
Music stops

Trevor: *For the most part he revisited his past by turning his back on it and looking into a mirror held aloft.*

Paul: *Jean-Marie*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Remy*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Dominique*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Jerome*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Karlsson*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Michael*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Christian*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Christophe*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Philipe*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Rodney*
Trevor: Take it off me

Paul: *Didier*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Vincent*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Pascal*
Trevor: take it off me
Paul: *Christian*
Trevor: Take it off me
Paul: *Eric..... Martin ..... Alain ..... Mahammad ..... Youssef ..... Mathieu ..... Olivier .....*
Trevor: Take it off me Take it off me Take it off me Take it off me Take it off me Take it off me Take it off me Take it off me Take it off me Take it off me

And finally
one day when the time is right
and he feels
compelled to glance back
over his left shoulder
his spirit
which is always ready
flies
to the chosen place
and there he dances.

Trevor dances

Paul: *This is not an achy breaky heart.*
Jean-Marie ..... Remi ..... Dominique ..... Jerome ..... Karlsson ..... Michael ..... Christian ..... Christophe ..... Philipe ..... Rodney ..... Didier ..... Olivier .....

Lights fade to black

I made this piece as a duet for Paul Hampton and myself, and dedicate it to my memory of Margaret Lasica. The accompanying soundscape is composed of recorded music, plus text. The music is 'Company' (Phillip Glass) played by Kronos Quartet. The text is both pre-recorded and spoken live and is composed of selections from my own writings, as well as various appropriations of ideas expressed in the writings of Carlos Castaneda, on altered states of consciousness and the transition from life. The piece was first performed in January 1993 as part of the Melbourne Midsumma Festival's lesbian and gay performance programme.

Trevor Patrick October 1993

PHOTOGRAPH by
GENEVIÈVE STEPHENSON

Saboteur, Guerrilla, Pedestrian

by MARK MINCHINTON

Like the skill of a driver in the streets of Rome or Naples, there is a skill that has its connoisseurs and its aesthetics exercised in any labyrinth of powers, a skill ceaselessly recreating opacities and ambiguities – spaces of darkness and trickery – in the universe of technocratic transparency, a skill that disappears into them and reappears again, taking no responsibility for the administration of a totality. – CERTEAU

... the transformative threat of performance seems to require an agency of repression. – BLAU

The notes that follow are drawn from a larger project that is part (auto)biography, part oral history, part documentary, part analysis, part theoretical. I have many aims in writing but in particular I want to

- document and record the particular practices of some of the groups I have been involved with, to establish that this work took place, was important, and underpins the continuing performance work of many artists practising today;
- examine the relationship between directors and actors as I have experienced it;
- express and articulate my experience of the creative space of the performer and its importance to the construction of meaning in a performance;
- offer a theorisation of this space and its processes.

I have made some attempt to keep the material separate, but inter-mixing and mingling is not only inevitable but desirable. If I am arguing anything it is that we must consider the multiple, fragmented subjectivity of the actor that informs and directs the construction of 'dramatic' work and the complex networks of practised communities that underpin the production of any discrete production or work. This demands multiple, fragmentary approaches. As Deleuze and Guattari remark in their discussion of 'minor' literatures, 'only expression gives us the *method*' (1986, 16; emphasis in the original). The usefulness of these multiple approaches must be judged not by any abstract criterion of truth, but by their *functionality*, their ability to generate new insights into the creation of performed work, and ways of creating new work.

My first epigraph comes from Michel de Certeau's *The practice of everyday life* (1984, 18). De Certeau is describing the way popular practices work within and conscript the strategies of imposed systems to resist those same systems. I want to take it as a talisman for performance both as a description of what performers do when they are performing, and what they must (re)learn to do if performance is to survive the raid on it by academic institutions and publishing houses.[1]

There is no doubt that performance is coming increasingly under the purview of academic discourse. This is, in many ways, to be welcomed but raises the danger of the institutional appropriation of performance. The proliferation of academic theory – witness the marked increase in the publication of performance related work in the last five years – and the pervasiveness of crude semiotic analyses present the danger of the performer's fugitive practices becoming the translucent window through which the academic theorist can view the idealised codes of performance texts, the performer either ignored or acknowledged with embarrassment and a metaphorical poke with a stick. In drama performance this would complete the colonising of performance practice by the author(ity) of the word that began at least as far back as Ben Jonson, if not Plato.[2]

Performers' practices are not easily codified or theorised and, with few exceptions, academic theorists have been uneasy about them. A similar uneasiness with people's living practices affects many other areas under academic or institutional scrutiny, for example, nursing, law, and policing. The 'filthy' practices of living people are dangerously incoherent compared to the unities of meaning offered by the quiet places of logic that institutional discourses have traditionally encouraged. De Certeau has remarked that:

> **A particular problem arises when, instead of being a discourse on other discourses, as is usually the case, theory has to advance over an area where there are no longer any discourses (1984, 61).**

This is precisely the terrain of performer's practices. 'Coherence' in performance seems to require the exclusion and marginalisation of the performer. Coherence depends on a circumscribed place, a border to guarantee a place of focus, an area where the variables can be kept to a minimum.

De Certeau (1984) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) point to the way a science constructs its own object of study and its inseparability from social discourse. Deleuze and Guattari remark that 'the way in which a science, or a conception of science, participates in the organisation of the social field, and in particular induces a division of labor, is part of that science itself' (1987, 368).

De Certeau, using a series of metaphors peculiarly productive for performance, argues that the aim of a science of coherence is to convert space to place,[3] itineraries to maps, practices to codes (1984, 117 & 118–22). He argues that the map, homogenising and reifying 'the rich diversity of spatial itineraries and spatial stories' (Harvey 1990, 253), conceals a social agenda beneath a veneer of utility leading to the domination of space *and those who use it.*

Deleuze and Guattari for their part identify the science of coherence, what they call 'Royal' science, as

wedded to reproduction, deduction, and induction. Royal sciences treat 'differences of time and place' – the very substance of the performer's world(s) – as 'so many variables', categorising, conceptualising, and isolating 'all operations from the conditions of intuition' (1987, 372 & 374). Royal science depends on a stable and permanent viewpoint. Royal science is *contemplative* theory (remembering the slide in meaning which occurs from the Greek, *theorein,* to Latin, *contemplatio*),[4] 'external to what is reproduced ... watching the flow from the bank' (1987, 372). In short, Royal science valorises reproduction, iteration, and reiteration to produce a known or knowable object and/or discourse.

De Certeau likens the Royal scientist to an observer at the top of the World Trade Centre mapping the city but divorced from the traffic flows that make it up (1984, 92*ff.* & 1985, 122*ff.*). This detached viewpoint privileges *strategic* understanding at the expense of *tactics*, isolating the subject from its environment. It assumes that there are 'proper' places, positive and limited areas that serve to generate a distinct *outside*.[5] The 'proper' place represents 'a triumph of place over time ... [and] a mastery of places through sight ... [that] makes possible a *panoptic practice* proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured' and that transforms the 'uncertainties of history' into 'readable spaces', a safe arena for the importation of secure objects (1984, 36).

In short, the Enlightenment project to create 'knowable totalities' through linking the perspectival organisation of space in Renaissance painting to the rationalism of Cartesian principles (Harvey 1990, 245–6) creates an epistemology favoring distance, mastery, blinkered vision, and blindness to other ways of knowing and being.[6] Tacitly underlying the construction of coherence from the 'filthy' practices of performers is a 'science' whose effect, if not aim, is to create a social field where the performer is *placed* out-of-sight in the end paddock.[7]

Sight objectifies, keeps things at a distance, *outside* the seer – precisely the distance required for coherent contemplation (slick-slick goes the knife). *Viewing* a performance, without knowledge of the processes that make it, allows it to be conceptualised as a singular event, reduced to beginning-and-endedness, seen only as a measurable, readable, coherent *thing* (1984, 36).[8] Contemplation emphasises the texts, which can be read, reproduced, iterated, and measured for their coherence.[9] The felt experience of the performers (including the audience/spectators as performers) can be ignored.

• • • • •

To the Royal science of reproduction, or iteration, Deleuze and Guattari oppose one of 'itineration', an ambulant science that occupies vectorial, smooth space rather than metrical, striated space (1987, 362);[10] a science derived from the haptic rather than the ocular, filled with unmeasurable events, affects, and intensities rather than measurable quantities, properties, and qualities (1987, 479). Smooth space belongs to the close-range vision of tactics not the long-range vision of strategy. Deleuze and Guattari point out that

> **a painting is done at close range, even if it is seen from a distance ... it is said that composers do not hear: they have close-range hearing, whereas listeners hear from a**

> **distance. Even writers write with short-term memory, whereas readers are assumed to be endowed with long-term memory. The first aspect of the haptic, smooth space of close vision is that its orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation; it operates step by step.** (1987, 493)

Smooth space is the space of the pedestrian moving freely in the city beneath the gaze of the technician in his [sic] tower, the space of performers moving in and between their own felt intensities.[11] In another formulation, it is the space of nonsense that underlies the formulation of sense in language (Deleuze 1990 *passim*).

It is this space that must be spoken. That must be claimed and reclaimed. The filthy practices underlying coherence must be revealed. Performers must begin to speak the pragmatics of their work, to enforce the recognition that a body's work is a body of work, to recuperate *theorein* to *contemplatio*.

• • • • •

It is axiomatic for me that the performer's transformative art/act is *essentially* subversive of homogenising structures – be it script, city, social system, or Royalist science. This transformative art is the performer's *metis* – what de Certeau identifies as a practical intelligence of timing, disguise, and invisibility: the counter-institutional practice of the saboteur, the guerrilla, and the pedestrian (1984, 80*ff.*).[12] *Metis* can be compared with Deleuze and Guattari's characterisation of 'minor literature', a literature that 'begins by expressing itself and doesn't conceptualise until afterward' (1986, 28).

Metis threatens the stability of the striated field of coherence, threatens to undermine the institution within which it is practised. To counter performers' metis they must be viewed as completed artefacts, placed in a field of coherence, a synchronic nowhen substituted for the felt intensities of their practice (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 351–423 & 474–500). This, unfortunately, is how too much academic theory functions.

In Greek mythology Metis, the personification of Prudence, is coaxed, raped, and eaten by Zeus, who then receives her counsel from his belly (Adams 1990, 15, 489 & 96). This 'myth about [the] masculine consumption of female language' (Adams 1990, 15) is an apt illustration of the relationship between the proponents of textual coherence and performers immersed in practice.

Recent critical theory in drama and theatre has largely aimed at creating coherent places through focusing on problems of mise-en-scène and reception. This has led to a view of theatre-performance as the simultaneous presentation of multiple codes and messages coalescing to form a single, coherent text, a known and knowable place. For example, Keir Elam in his influential introduction to theatre semiotics, *The semiotics of theatre and drama*, saw theatre-performance as

> **made up ... of '*multiple messages* in which several channels, or several modes of using a channel in communication, are used simultaneously in an esthetic or perceptual *synthesis*'. The spectator will interpret this complex of messages – speech, gesture, the scenic continuum, etc. – as an integrated *text* ...** (1980, 38; citing Abraham Moles ***Information theory and esthetic reception.*** **(1958), emphasis in original).**

Elaine Aston and George Savona in their more recent study of theatre semiotics, *Theatre as sign-system: a semiotics of text and performance,* assert that

> **the dramatist is the originator of the linguistic sign-system, the director nowadays has control over the theatrical (as opposed to dramatic) shape and is faced with the task of organising the signifying systems of theatre at her/his disposal ... into a codified process *appropriate to the production of a text* (1991, 100; my emphasis).**

and that

> **ideally, theatrical signs should combine (a) to transmit clear messages and (b) to hierarchise the messages sent ... Signs operating within the theatrical frame need to be hierarchised in such a way as to 'fix' meaning (1991, 101).**

Aston and Savona cite Gourville's identification of the actor's problematic occupation of 'double-time' (dramaturgic and scenographic), Gourville explaining the actor's craft as a 'fluctuation between the two loci of the writing' ('The actor-in-project' 1977 in Aston & Savona 1991, 104). They add that the actor synthesises 'the director's scripting of the stage and the writer's scripting of the text' (1991, 104) and go on to identify the actor as 'a site for the transmission of auditive signs relating to text ... and as a principal site of visual signification' (1991, 106) all of which is unarguable but not helpful to understanding *how* actors negotiate the fluctuations, or how they 'transmit' (as if they are some form of radio passively receiving and passing on a signal from elsewhere) and, crucially, obscures the actor's role as self-director, writer, and creator, privileging a particular conservative model of dramatic production.

This focus on texts and codes creates a safe place of coherence and sacrifices the corporeal reality of the performer to conceptual categories –

> **The director has to be suppressed and even the actor has somehow to be 'forgotten' so that the idea of the text can be generated (Sallenave in Pavis 1988, margin note 9; emphasis in original).**

and constructs the director (positioned as the 'ideal spectator' who, seeing all, is alone able to interpret and construct) as the final authority of the performance. The director's exegesis (understood as generating a *single* point of view, whether 'director' means a single person or a number of people) of the text is seen as primary. The 'real' transaction of a performance is seen as taking place between the director, who encodes the texts, and the spectator, who decodes them.[13]

This viewpoint separates the performed and the performer substituting abstracted codes for the complexities of the performer's presence; it conceals an agenda of disempowerment that reduces individual autonomy in both the wider sphere of social action and the narrower sphere of performance production.[14] Sight and the linear progression of events is privileged. As Derrida comments in an essay on Artaud, actors become 'interpretive slaves who faithfully execute the providential designs of the 'master'' (1978, 235).

Actors – those nomadic artisans following the flow of matter through intuition in action (see Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 409) – are obliterated, reduced to inertia and transparency, by the separation of creation from creating, text from event, and the decomposition of space to place. Actors' explorations of space-in-time,

their here-and-nowness in the material world, the intensity of their feelings, memories, perceptions, and pain, which led to the performance, are – like the wanderings of the pedestrian in a city – replaced by a synchronic map, 'disengaged ... from the itineraries that were the condition of its possibility' (de Certeau 1984, 120).

The popular, non-academic press emphasises the writer and the director (or choreographer)-as-*auteur* rather than the anonymous work of actors and dancers that has significantly shaped those writers' and directors' work, and whose creative labor is required to transform ideational concepts into concrete, performed action.

For example, influential critic for the Melbourne *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Leonard Radic, has written a history of contemporary drama in Australia (1991) without mentioning the vital exploratory work of numerous small performance groups taken up in countless new works, or sufficiently acknowledging the importance of performers to the genesis and implementation of work. Countless reviews by Radic and others concentrate on the director's and choreographer's role in shaping meaning. When performers are mentioned it is usually the so-called 'star' performer who gains attention – a status more dependent on luck, fluctuations in casting-agents' and popular taste, and association with financially successful projects (usually film) than on genuine creative power (though I stress that originality, creativity, and star status are not mutually incompatible!).

Academics write histories and analyses of performed works without acknowledging the corporeal reality and personal histories of the performers involved, or set up 'experiments' that disregard, or render invisible, the contribution of the performers, who are studied, or at least presented, as objects, removed from their personal feelings and histories (see, for example, the group of articles in Fitzpatrick 1989a). The many developments in contemporary cultural theory that argue against notions of objectivity have not prevented the academy, in general, receiving proposals to investigate performance work, particularly one's *own* performance work, as dangerously subjective and trivial; to offer performance practice as theory, or knowledge, in itself is to invite incredulity. Despite Blau's proscription that 'theatre is theory, or a shadow of it' the academy is, in general, far more comfortable with studies *of*, rather than studies *by*, performance (Blau 1982, 1).

• • • • •

But there is the beginnings of a recognition for a wider approach. Elam, has more lately argued against the tyranny of the textual viewpoint

> **the text [has] become ... a scientific credit card, the sine qua non of analytic access to the order of things, and it [is] unthinkable that one might found a semiotics of anything without first, a priori, positing the existence of [a] fully and autonomously textual object subject to its own canons of syntactic and semantic coherence, waiting to yield to the expert semiologue its own cherished legibility**

recognising its 'inevitable' favoring of

> **certain kinds of 'experimental' director's and choreographer's theatre which was already decidedly textual, ie, which offered its audiences an authorial product or aesthetic object, a piece of scenic *écriture* replete with the idiolectical traces of its maker** (1989, 3 & 4).

Elam draws on Bert O. States' phenomenological analysis of performance (1985) to point to the danger of flattening performance into being *only* a language (Elam 1989, 89) – I would add, a particular conception of language at that[15] – and the attendant danger

> **of sacrificing precisely what best characterises theatrical performance as a cultural and phenomenological experience, namely its open, dialectical, *pragmatic* character as a *work* or *production* (rather than product) ever in progress and ever in process (Elam 1989, 9).**

Elam wants to develop a '*processual* poetics', 'not so much a textual as a *rhetorical* approach to the theatrical event, concerned no longer with levels, but with strategies, and thus less with the product than with the production' (1989, 11).

On another front, Richard Schechner's argument that one reason for 'the decline of the avant-garde' where, as in earlier performance traditions like circus, there is no written script,[16] applies to performer's practices *per se* – both at the level of the organisation of performance projects and of the 'organisation' of performers' body-minds in performance and workshop – which have been sadly under-documented and under-theorised. The predominantly oral culture of performance traditions has led to the loss of significant bodies of work, contributes to the maintenance of a conservative and repressive view of performance construction, and reinforces the notion of the master-director/choreographer, or director-as-*auteur*.

How is it performers produce texts that are meaningful, moving, and exciting? How can we account for the varying effectiveness of performances of a known text, or the unexpected, incoherent, unarticulated, and inarticulate gasp of voice, movement, or even stillness that suddenly generates excitement and a new text? And what does the experience of creation feel like to the performer? What peculiar spaces must performers inhabit to fluctuate between the 'loci of writing' (see above p.17).

We need a theory of performance production that positions the lived experience of the practitioner at its centre. The static, semiotic models that dominate performance discourse must be replaced by a dynamic model that respects the physical, internal forces of the performer that shape the production of meaning. Performers' practices, their rhetorics, inscribed on and remembered in their bodies, are – as they are for any other performance – the starting point for theory.

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EPIGRAPHS

De Certeau 1984, 18 and Blau, 1990, 270.

NOTES

1 I am aware I am using totalising notions here – 'performance', 'the academy', and so on – and could be legitimately asked Which performance? Which academy? What theories? but I am discussing *tendencies* here.

2 Stallybrass and White argue that Jonson writes at the moment of the appropriation of the collective power of improvising actors in collaboration with a heterogeneous audience by the singular authority of the detached, isolated author,

> the notion of authorship to which Jonson dedicated his poetic career was in every way in contradiction to Saturnalia, the grotesque, even to the theatre itself ... [and] defines the true position of the playwright as that ... of the classical isolated judge standing in opposition to the vulgar throng ... the radical break between Tarlton's theatre and Jonson's can be accounted for by

> the shift from improvisation to 'master poets' who stand above and detached from their audiences ... In separating self from the popular festive scene, authorship after Jonson gradually developed in accordance with the ideal of the individual which was emerging within bourgeois culture – the individual, that is, as 'the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society' (1986, 66–77).

3 For de Certeau, 'a place is ... an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability ... A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables ... In short, space is a practiced place.' (1984, 117)

4 Ulmer, drawing on Heidegger, discusses the slide in meaning from Greek *thea* 'outward aspect' and *horao* 'to look at attentively' to Latin *contemplatio* which emphasises passivity, partition, division, and enclosure (1985, 32*ff.*). Compare with the discussion of de Certeau following and with his claim that –

> not only [does] the scientific method require a delimitation and simplification of its objects, but also because there corresponds to the constitution of a scientific space, as the precondition of any analysis, the necessity of being able to *transfer* the objects of study into it. Only what can be transported can be treated. What cannot be transported remains by definition outside the field of research. Hence, the privilege that these studies accord to *discourses*, the data that can most easily be grasped, recorded, transported, and examined in secure places ... (1984, 20).

5 De Certeau's examples of 'distinct exteriors' are 'competitors, adversaries, "clintèles," "targets," [and] "objects" of research' (1984, *xix*).

6 Barbara Freedman uses Lacan in considering the relationship between perspectivism and rationalism. She cites Heidegger –

> world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture (Heidegger 1977, 'The age of the world picture' in Freedman 1991, 9)

and A. Mark Smith –

> the ulterior concern of the perspectivists was epistemology and [so] ... *perspectiva* should be understood as the science not of visual perception alone, but visual *cognition* (A. Mark Smith 1989, 'Getting the big picture in perspectivist optics' cited in Freedman 1991, 15; ellipsis in Freedman)

in support of her argument that

> the precautions required to see the perspective picture correctly – a careful control over distance and location, a clearly delineated position of mastery for the individual viewer, a privileged single eye, and, above all, a blinded eye – are the same rituals observed in historical practice (1991, 8).

Freedman discusses Dürer's woodcut, *Man drawing reclining woman* – which represents an upright man using a grid device to help him draw a reclining and relaxed woman – pointing out the reversal of spectatorship that occurs if we adopt the perspective of the woman who 'knows that she is seen ... [unlike] the artist [who] is blinded by his viewing apparatus, deluded by his fantasy of objectivity' (1991, 2). See Elizabeth Dempster's article 'Re-visioning the body: feminism, ideokinesis and the new dance' in *Writings on Dance 9*, 9–21 for a discussion of Freedman and issues of viewing in relation to dance.

7 Interestingly, this reflects the hierarchy of conventional, mainstream practice. As, too, it reflects the widespread ambivalence to the performer, simultaneously fêted and denigrated, held up in order to be knocked down. Performers are infantilised, idealised, 'exoticised,' divided, authorised, and controlled in the same way as many 'minority' groups (including women).

8 Writing in 1986 Hélène Cixous linked the need for coherence to a specular economy arguing in 'Aller à la mer' that theatre as it was constructed then was a site of male voyeurism and exhibitionism. She demanded a turn away from the specular to the auditory, to a listening 'beyond' the ear (1986). In the same issue of *Modern Drama* Josette Féral argued that women's performance writing must atempt to move outside dominant representational modes that valorise coherence and the attempt to reduce experience to a single identity, to surface. Féral talked about 'unhinging' meaning, looking to the flows *within* texts, associating feminist discourse with volumes (*vs.* surface) and fluids, a discourse mapped in flows, ebbs, floods, and envelopment (*vs.* digital coding).

9 Adams cites Sebeok on the constituents of a text: (1) 'a recognisable message' that is (2) immutable and recurrent through repetition and (3) a relational system that reveals coherence (1990, ?).

10 In smooth space 'space is occupied without being counted'; in metrical space 'space is occupied in order to be counted' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 362). Metrical space can be compared with De Certeau's conception of 'place', see above page 14, note 4.

11 'To walk is to lack a place ... the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper' (de Certeau 1984, 103). This is not to

argue that writing is inimical to the construction of smooth-space, the *act of writing* subverts place too; says de Certeau, 'writing is born from and deals with the acknowledged doubt of an explicit division, in sum, of the impossibility of one's own place' (de Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire*, cited in Deleuze & Guattari 1978, ix).

12 Disappearing 'into its own action, as though lost in what it does, without any mirror that re-presents it: it has no image of itself' (De Certeau 1984, 82).

13 Says Fitzpatrick, 'the playwright produces the script ... The director then creates the performance' (1986, 23)

14 See Wilden 1987a for a discussion of processes of strategic disempowerment.

15 This is too elaborate a point to argue here, see Deleuze & Guattari 1987 (esp. 75–110).

16 Schechner notes that 'these theatrical traditions with their performance texts were shunned academically: because they couldn't be "reliably recorded" they couldn't be included in the academic canon' (1982, 30).

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Rebecca Hilton

INTERVIEW

A Dancing Consciousness

"My parents gave me a choice between being a Brownie and going to Ballet. I chose Brownies but the pack was full, so I had to go to Ballet."

INTERVIEW by BRYAN SMITH

Rebecca Hilton graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts Tertiary Dance Course in 1983 having begun an involvement in dance at age ten with Ballet Victoria. Following two years of intensive work and study with Russell Dumas' Dance Exchange, she performed and taught throughout Australia and New Zealand with Danceworks, then under the Artistic Directorship of Nanette Hassall. She was awarded an Australia Council Travel Study Grant and travelled to New York in late 1987.

Shortly after her arrival she was invited to join the Stephen Petronio Company with which she has danced ever since, assisting Petronio in resetting work and teaching extensively throughout Europe, South America and the United States. In 1992 she performed her own work at the Judson Memorial Church under the auspices of Movement Research and she continues to teach regularly in New York City through the Movement Research Program.

The following extract is drawn from a series of lengthy interviews with Becky, undertaken by Bryan Smith and Shirley McKechnie during her last visit to Melbourne in January 1992. Although the discussion, as with many interviews of this kind, was very wide ranging, I have chosen, for the purposes of this context and to satisfy my own interest in the material, to focus almost exclusively on aspects of the 'dancer' talking. I am interested in the nitty gritty, the detailed thoughts, values and perceptions that inform dancing.

BRYAN SMITH NOVEMBER 1993

What is it like dancing in a company in New York? How do you organise your working life as a dancer there? Working in Stephen's company, even though we have a lot of work, is still really precarious because the amount of work we have changes drastically and dramatically from year to year. Last year we were on the road a lot. I was working with Michael (Clarke) as well. I was away from New York for eight months out of twelve last year. When we're in New York we only work for sixteen hours a week. So we work four hours, four days a week, which leaves me with the option to work with other people I'm interested in. I've been getting more and more interested in improvisation, so whenever I'm in New York for a period of time, I've been concentrating on that. There's a real freedom for me, at this stage in my life, to have other options and not just be absolutely focused on the company. It changes though; as I say last year it wasn't possible to do many other things but this year it may be a little looser. That's why being in a city like New York is great, the options abound. In the spare time I have I can do whatever I want as far as dance goes. That is basically what New York is about, and why people gravitate there. There is this huge community. It is not like anyone there is better than anyone else, or more talented. It is that the community is so much bigger; the options are so much broader. But it's a real problem for me being in a company. This company has Stephen's name on it and it's his company and his work. I've always had a bit of an authority problem and there are still times where I get completely frustrated by feeling like I'm someone else's tool. On the other hand he is very appreciative of us and our work and tells us so. He lets us know. As a dancer in Stephen's company I make lots of decisions. A lot of the work is made through improvisation and through playing with manipulating phrase material that we've been running for a year and that we know inside out and back to front. I have a lot of artistic control and input into the work. We officially start at 2.30, so it's a three and a half hour work period actually. Usually we will start by running a piece of rep as soon as we get in. Lately its been different because we have had two new members join so a lot of rehearsal time has been taken up with teaching. We have a break and the second half of rehearsal, if we're in New York, is for working on a new piece, which we do in a variety of ways. The whole thing is based on trust and mutual respect and the sharing of information between me and the other dancers, Stephen and I, Stephen and the company and so on. The more familiar I am with him and the more he knows me, the more the mutual trust is growing. There's a real feeling of working with peers. I care for the work as much as he does. That's great, it's what makes it worth it. His work is pretty full on and pretty hard.Without caring for and having a respect for my body I couldn't do it. I couldn't bash it. My body has changed a lot. I've got stronger and broader. My body has more power than it had and I know it better.

It's another four years of examining, finding out more about it, allowing it to change, becoming familiar with it all over again every day because it's a different body everyday. **What do you do about training or informing your body? I presume it is not training in the way we know it in the company system here.** A lot of time I don't go to class. We have an hour at the beginning of rehearsal that we can use to warm up. So a lot of time I'll do my own warm up. People in the company do all sorts of weird and strange things; a lot of people are into aerobics, some go to the gym, do swimming, or yoga. It goes in phases. People are doing yoga at the moment. I swim a lot. You get to a certain age and you have a wealth of knowledge and you know what's best for your body. You wake up in the morning and you know what you need. The whole idea of company class is really bizarre to me. It's just not part of my lifestyle. New York is a place where there are a thousand classes to choose from in the morning and whatever you feel like, you do. I might go and take one of the ballet for modern dancer classes or I study with Susan Klein and Barbara Mahler as much I can because I find that information continually inspiring. It's basically a stretch and alignment technique. In a lot of techniques I've studied there's been that difficult transitional moment between standing still, focusing and imaging and putting that into moving. Being able to take that with you into rehearsal and use it. Susan and Barbara's work immediately sets you in motion with images, so the transition is easy. They have a pretty set series of exercises, I suppose you'd call them, they're very simple but they're all about movement, immediately. It's not a cerebral process; it goes directly from your brain into your body memory because you're already moving. I've done so much study lying in constructive rest and imaging, but I've always had a real problem with the leap from that into Stephen's rehearsal which entails dancing around hysterically and aerobically. I have a great respect for techniques like the Alexander Technique and I've seen them work incredibly for other people but that just wasn't the route for me. I've always responded to things that I can take into motion. I know a lot of people who work with the Alexander technique (Feldenkrais is a little different because it's already pretty much based in motion), they say the idea is to retrain your body in those simple positions, like sitting and standing. Gradually you retrain all your patterns, so that when you go into complex movement, they're already there retrained. But for me, my problem was that I've been a professional dancer since I left school so I can go and do Alexander work but then I have to go and jump around like a maniac, so I don't have the time to integrate it in that way. Now after four years I can actually work with a simple image, like having my tailbone motor me through space, something that simple, and I can think about it as I'm doing this very complex movement. Before I could never make that connection. With Susan and Barbara all the imaging is very anatomical, and that's imagery

REBECCA HILTON IN STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY'S 'HALF WRONG'
PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHANN ELBERS

I could always relate too more easily than images like 'your spine is a river' or something. I'm a realist. Stephen's work is hysterical; its really fast and pushed and I can actually apply concerns I learn from Susan and Barbara while I'm dancing. I've always been attracted to body work that is initiated in movement. It's still a really long period of integration but it happens gradually in the dancing rather than lying on your back on the floor imagining and then forgetting about it while you reaffirm your bad patterns every afternoon in rehearsal and then trying to get rid of them lying on your back in the morning. That was a big discovery for me. **What kind of physical intelligence are you seeking to develop in your body and hence in your moving/dancing? What,now,do you think are the important things for dancers to understand physically?** The kind of physical intelligence I'm building is really in all those kinds of basic alignment things we have been talking about; like allowing your weight to do the work for you rather than muscling it. That doesn't mean I'm not a muscular dancer, I am, I use my muscles a lot. Finding an impulse for moving from a weight base and finding ease, strength and a centre by connecting to the floor allows me to take risks that I feel I wouldn't be able to take if I didn't have that, that connection and familiarity with the floor. From the thrust I get from the floor, the amount of weight I let drop into the floor, I get an equal and opposite amount of thrust that can send me in the widest possible arcs through space that are possible for my body. It's sensual and exciting; I like feeling the breeze rush against my face. I like to be out of control, but in control of being out of control. I find the particular techniques I've been studying allow me to do that. I think you need a fairly comprehensive knowledge of your skeleton and the way joints work. Then I think you need to be aware of the limitations of the body, the skeletal limitations. That's really important, knowing the kinds of movement possibilities you have in the joints. I've studied anatomy since I was young at school and pretty much consistently since then.
Knowing your body means knowing it in an intellectual sense as well, knowing how your body functions. The opposite would be moving from an emotional base, the movement quality you can get from feelings and emotions rather from the way your body moves mechanically. **Can you talk about the process of making work? For example how does the conceptual framework arise? How is the work actually made? How do you rehearse a work that you are making? Where does the movement come from and how long does it take to make a new piece?** Often you'll find that in the piece before there's a germ that goes on to become the focus of the next piece. Stephen's development is very linear in that way. He makes his work for himself. He is very excited by dance and making work. He doesn't labour under the pressure of 'are people going to like it?' He takes a year to make a piece. Stephen has only

made three new pieces in the whole time I've been in the company. And they're usually 25 – 35 minutes long. We don't have a solid block of time; this is where it's different to companies working here. We take work when and where we can get it. We're on the road.When we do have time in New York we develop a series of phrases and they're usually quite long, up to five minutes long. He'll make three or four of them and throughout the year we'll just run those. Where we are on tour, we'll run the new phrases before the show or during the day we'll run the phrases and he'll change them over a period of eight months to a year. It turns out by the time we get to make the piece, when there is a period to make it, which might only be a month long when we're in New York uninterrupted, the material is so in our bodies, the fabric with which he is going to wend the piece is so known, that it's like a dream. The basic phrases are a part of our neuro-muscular patterning. I don't have to think about them, I don't have to think about what comes next or how to do this or that. It's in my body so thoroughly because I've been doing it for a year. It's like you have all the ingredients lined up on the shelf, you don't have to keep going back to the cupboard, as when you make a cake. The places are so familiar, they are like this solid thing you can depart from and come back to without it having moved. It's still where you left it, a weight in the centre of the piece from which things can move out and in. He makes material by standing in front of us and improvising and then seeing who caught it. The process of making the phrases is a very long and involved one. I might have caught a particular thing that he was doing with his lower body, someone else might have caught his upper body and then we'll go through the stage of working till there's something there he's interested in. He doesn't make the phrases and come in and teach us at all. They are made in the studio on us basically. Over

that period of running those phrases the idea for the piece is gestating, along with the material. By the time he comes to make the piece he has a really solid idea of what he wants to do with it, what it is about if you like. The actual time of making the piece is fairly short. In that month we do a number of different manipulations of the material, or not even working with the material at all but working with the physicality that has been developed over the year in terms of the material. The last piece we made, **MSG**, was very much about manipulating each other. There was a lot of partnering in it . We played this thing that we called 'the game' where rôles changed, but it was basically one person being manipulated by the group. That person could either be very passive or very active. They could be leading the group or the group could be leading them. We would improvise and if he saw something that he liked we would spend time trying to get it back, till eventually we had this long and complex series of events. We each often have a personal variation of the material ourselves, which can be very simple like take this phrase and keep it moving through space in the way that it is already but jump, turn or whatever. He works a lot with these simple things.

We work a lot with imagery, which I love. One of his main concerns is in showing forms, as in line, then breaking them down. He made a whole piece called **Walk In**. 'Walk in' is something that happens when you die and your spirit leaves your body but then you get resuscitated and your soul 'walks' back into your body. In that piece we worked a lot with photography. Re-creating, motorising and moving photographic images. And film techniques; he's always talking about zooming in and out and cutting from one thing to another so the transitions are almost invisible. I've found that really useful for teaching. It's a great way to teach people material because it gives it a base that isn't about put your leg there, put your arm there, put your head there. With imagery a shape can be alive in a different way, each time you do it, it can be subtly different. We do things like be angles and run into brick walls. Yeah, we use a lot of imagery. **The other day you were saying how you enjoy making steps and movement phrases but that just doing <u>that</u> doesn't make a choreographer. So, what is the difference between someone making steps and someone being a choreographer?** I think it's about concepts and ideas. A piece of art, a dance, needs to have a context. The steps operate like individual notes in a piece of music. Individual notes aren't by any means the piece of music. Spatial design is important, so is the rhythm of a piece, its rises and falls. Mostly I think it's about having an idea or a concept and you don't resolve or clarify *that* merely with steps. They are one means, one single element amongst a host of other things. I see work that is just steps; they're pretty but they're out of context. People try to contextualise steps by putting everyone in the same costume, or having a long piece of music turned on or doing it with lighting

but it's still not a piece, it's just steps that are dressed up. **What is your perception of the difference between the dance you are involved with in New York and the kind of work that is coming to the fore in Europe?** Just before I left New York to come here a few of the old Judson Church group, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer got back together for a talk. Judson twenty years later kind of thing. The talk gradually got onto their perceptions of what's going on in dance at the moment in New York. People have been talking about New York as if it's no longer the centre of dance, and the new dance centre has shifted to Europe, France and Belgium. They were saying something really interesting, that is, a new form comes when you reject the old. That seems to be the pattern with dance, starting way back with Isadora and then on down the track. This group of luminaries were suggesting that as a community in New York we haven't rejected the forms they set up in the sixties. They had all these forms to break down, they just went for it. Whereas we, because we're still labouring under the set of aesthetics they set up, haven't reacted and we still basically embrace those concerns. The reaction's happened in Europe. So in a way it has shifted, which is not to say there's not still interesting work going on in New York, there is, but the new movement has shifted really for the first time from America to Europe. The response to what they were doing twenty years ago has happened and there's lots of interesting work going on, having those two centres – having the centre of form still in New York and the romantic centre in Europe. And you can see the struggle between those two things in the work. The post-modern has really affected the work in Europe through things like repetition and spatial design. They are still drawing on concerns that have been kicking around in New York for twenty years or so. So work in New York is still very much influenced by the concerns set up in the post-modern era. Dance in New York is a very big scene and I'm only involved in a particular section of it, the downtown scene, and that's what I'm talking about here. People are still very much concerned with ideas in New York. A lot of work is still coming from a very intellectual place, and from thinking about the body. New York is still very much into pure dance, dance as a form unto itself. Dance, movement and the body. In Europe the work is much more emotionally based, a lot more dramatic. It's much more theatrical, more about intense feeling or something and the body is an instrument for drama and for creating passion. It's not that people in New York don't have elements of that too, but I think it's because they've been influenced lately by the Europeans; it's not a movement that's springing up in New York. It's hard to separate what you're interested in doing with your own body and what is 'interesting'. I often really like something if I want to do it and I can feel my body responding. A lot of European work seems to be about the constraints society sets up. Anna

Teresa De Keersmaker, for example, does a lot of things where she'll set up a simple phrase that is incredibly repetitive; it goes on and on and on until you think you're going to go mad watching it. It's emotionally manipulative. She has women in tight dresses and high heels trying to dance. I remember seeing her doing a really long series with women in their tight dresses and high heels and they couldn't get their knees apart. They were doing this specific, structured dance, but they couldn't get their knees apart. I get a really visceral and physical response to her work; I get so tense and then after about twenty minutes I realise I'm on the edge of my seat, clenching every muscle. It's amazing when work can do that to you, make you respond physically and it doesn't have to be in a pleasant way. Vim Vanderkeebus' work is like that too; you respond in a visceral way. But a lot of European work is for me frustratingly heterosexual. Another interesting thing about Stephen's work is that the women are strong, we do a lot of lifting, partnering and so on; the roles aren't traditional in that way. In Europe all those ballet role models are still operating. When we tour Europe and England and we have the 'meet the choreographer' thing afterwards and the audience asks questions, people are fixated on the fact that the women aren't built like sylphs and do a lot of the lifting and are strong. I don't think of myself as this really tough she-man thing. It's just what I do, it's always been one of my skills.

We don't tour much in America, we're not very popular. I mean we're popular in New York and the bigger cities but a lot of the touring network in America is through the universities, middle and general America and I think it might be that Stephen is definitely out as a lot of his work is about his sexuality and our sexuality. There are many different varieties of sexuality in the company and it's not the heterosexual, I love you I

hate you, between a man and a woman thing. It's anything but that. Sexuality is one of his major concerns. Gender and the representations of gender are important issues too; challenging them. His work just isn't about that traditional male-female relationship and people find that threatening and hard to deal with.

I've been horrified by the depiction of women in a lot of European work. Absolutely horrified. It's so incredibly sexist. Work made by both men and women, but mostly men. Most choreographers are men. People think of dance, of all the arts, as the female art, but it is still men in control I think.

Have you experienced your movement patterns as changing significantly since you've been away? I can tell now that my dancing has changed incredibly over the period of time I've been in New York but the process of change isn't one I can really put my finger on. I've been to a number of places. At a certain point a couple of years ago I really allowed myself to go so far with movement that I would end up flat on my back or flat on my face. I definitely noticed that I was changing; I was falling over all the time. That was a stage I needed to go through to discover my limitations and I allowed myself to go through it. It was kind of weird and unstable and scary in a way, plus I was performing the whole time. I didn't have time to just work in a studio. But Stephen's work allows that too, it's about the extreme. The more extreme you can be the better, and if that means you're flat on your face then he's cool about that. It was great to have an avenue to allow myself to do it in. It was a funny period. In the company we seem to go through some of these things together. We're together a lot of the time; we all study pretty much with Susan and Barbara. We became the 'falling down and standing back up again company' for a while. Stephen's work can soak up some of that. It's really exciting for me that my job, which is what it is, can support me in my life and the decisions I'm making about my dancing in that way. **What is it like being in that dancer-choreographer relationship in the company you're working in? What sort of give and take is operating there?** For a start the kind of relationship Stephen has as a choreographer with the dancers he chooses to work with and who choose to work with him, it's a two way street, everyone has a choice, there's a real freedom for us in that. He basically thinks, and I agree, that whatever information we have we bring to his work. We have to be able to meet the needs that *we* have in order to function fully and happily in the situation we're in with him.

But no matter what you think of someone's work and no matter how much respect I have for Stephen's work, that isn't enough to completely inform me and my dancing. I need to gather and garner information from other places and New York gives me the opportunity to do that in a real way, going to classes, seeing performances, taking workshops and so on. Our company operates as a group of people who are all focused

STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY'S 'MIDDLESEX GORGE'
PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS NASH

on and interested in Stephen's work but we all have different backgrounds and interests that we bring into the situation. Rather than getting into the company and closing all those off we seem to have kept the channels open for learning and experiencing other things. So, it's not that Stephen's work feeds me perfectly but it's like I've found something that is right for this time in my life and that's more lucky than a lot of people get. A lot of it is about risk-taking, pushing my body further aerobically, and in every way almost than it would go of its own volition. A lot of it is finding a group of dancers who I can learn from. I look at these dancers who I'm working with, everyday they can stun me with something beautiful, something amazing. I had that here also but I was young when I worked in Australia. I left here when I was just twenty three. I'm twenty seven now; I don't think I could walk into Stephen's audition and be blown away the way I was when I was twenty three and had just left Australia. I don't think I could surrender myself in that way now. At a younger age I think you're much more likely to want to hand yourself over lock, stock and barrel to someone else; the older you get the more you know yourself. One of the most incredible dancers I've ever seen is a woman called Jennifer Monson, who's an improviser in New York. We decided to get together and dance, it's really that simple. We split the cost of hiring a studio a couple of evenings or mornings a week. Some people you meet you just dance with easily. Jennifer and I are like that. We have performed, there are a variety of places to do that. **Hot House Improvisation** which happens every Sunday afternoon has a kind of a performance, **PS122** and **Movement Research** often have improvised shows. But mostly we just dance. I'm really into it because there's no one telling me what to do. Even in a situation like the one I'm in with Stephen where I'm basically having a great time with it, it's still someone else's vision and someone else telling me what to do and how to move. I've definitely gone further with my body in a different way through improvising. It's a different body experience. We work quite a bit with improvisation in the company to develop movement, but it's much more goal oriented. **Does improvising bring you in touch with new understandings in your body?** I've learnt a lot about my movement patterns, the kinds of things I like to do, what my body will do naturally if left alone and a lot about my rhythms. Discovering patterns that I have that I wasn't aware of has been very interesting. It's all a process of rediscovery and you never get there, that's what keeps you going. If you ever got there you may as well just lie down and die. I'll never know my body utterly, it's changing daily, each day it's a new body. Did you know, every seven years every cell in your body is completely replenished? Isn't that amazing? I spent a lot of time when I was younger trying to be someone, trying to be something very particular. Once I got over the hump of accepting that'll never happen, I got this

incredible feeling of freedom and release. **It seems to me that your moving could be characterised by the qualities of strength, precision and freedom. How would you respond to that?**

It's true that the three elements I've been working with since I've been away *are* strength, freedom and precision. They're what I see when I look at dancers I really love to watch. I think too they were the three elements that were there in my body but weren't articulated, weren't clarified. Especially clarity. I'm built strongly, I always had a certain amount of strength and I've always had that rush I was talking about, of enjoying to move, that's the freedom element, but clarity or precision is something I've had to work for. The specificity in my legs, the articulation in my joints and being really clear about the way I was moving through space. I've been using a lot of that proximal and distal information, that's been invaluable. I've also needed to be clear about where movement is being initiated in my body and being totally strict with myself about being clear about that. Is that happening from my knee or is it happening from my upper body? I've been trying to define that area, which for me, has been cloudier than the others. Then I have been taking those three elements and playing between them. I'm glad you noticed that Bryan.

Hermeneutics and

Introduction

In this paper I want to argue that learning dance and performing it ought to be regarded as hermeneutic activities. Drawing on aspects of the historical trajectory of modern dance[1] I will argue that disciplined dance practices are thinking processes: their project, in the broadest sense, is to understand, to interpret and to give meaning to the nature of embodiment. I believe that what can be learned by considering modern dance practices from the perspective of hermeneutics might suggest a way of understanding the nature of other performance disciplines and practices.

This uncommon way of regarding dancing as a process of enquiry and knowledge has consequences for the kinds of dancing body that might be envisaged. Regarding the body as separate from processes of subjectivity, for example, will not provide an adequate account: the body in dance cannot be regarded in an 'objectified' way, as a given, as a fact, or as an object of investigation just for the natural sciences. Instead, we need to think in terms of an embodied thinking subject. In this view the dancer's body is less something (s)he knows *about* than it is part of the very way (s)he knows. The study of this body would be a project, also hermeneutic, for the human and social sciences.

One of the problems for dance generally is that it is often regarded, by dancers as well as by commentators, as a practice of skill, a (minor) art of physical effort and display but not one of value and meaning. By this I do not mean to suggest that dances have no meaning. Clearly they do have meaning (just as they do involve skill) but that meaning is often intended by choreographers, and looked for by viewers, in signifiers that are extraneous to the embodied dance language itself. In this view it is music, decor, costume, programme synopses and so on that are capable of generating meaning, not the embodied dance language itself. This reluctance on both sides – dancers and viewers – to explore the ideas that are generated in the moving body itself cannot be separated from the whole context of the Western metaphysical tradition in which the body has been regarded as a tool or instrument, something that is directed and used by the mind, but not mind itself.

Since the Enlightenment, powerful discourses and practices have worked to define the body as a proper object of investigation for the natural sciences. Still today, in mainstream culture the body appears as the product of a number of discourses and institutions that are essentially positivistic and objectifying: they create the biological body, the medicalised body, the sporting body, the marketable body of advertising, to name a few. It has been one of the roles of the many different kinds of dance to define a fundamentally different kind of body. At the same time, however, the idea of a body that is the object of a 'method', not the subject of knowledge, is often perpetuated in institutionalised forms of training for dance. Here, the process of 'becoming a dancer' is thought to take place as a technical exercise, where both body and movements are regarded as objects to be regulated by a controlling dancer-subject.

Dancing

by SALLY GARDNER

The meaning of dancing necessarily remains limited by this epistemological assumption and context. As in sport, dancing comes to be about the dancer's self-satisfaction in being able to execute difficult physical tasks, and audiences reward technical feats with clapping. Anyone who has been to the ballet will be familiar with this. Another consequence of this limited notion of dance practice as a kind of *techne* is that audiences are often intensely resistant to kinds of dance that do not look physically difficult.

Following from an objectivist approach to the body is a particular conception of the role of dance training: namely, that it is intended to regulate the dancing body so that it will act only in a predictable and law-like way. Similarly the dancer's project in encountering dance material to be learned is conceived as one of reproduction rather than of negotiation and the creation of new meanings. The process of learning styles or forms of dance becomes simply the internalization and embodiment of norms: a process that can be likened to 'a correct mastery of language' without the 'proper understanding of that which takes place through language',[2] which is a distinction that Hans-Georg Gadamer makes. I will take up the idea of dance styles as languages below. An additional point that can be made but which I will not pursue here is that, conceived in this way, dance training and practice often emerge as forms of domination from which new meanings fail to arise.

Modern dance

My concern to articulate processes of dance and dance training arises in relation to, and in an attempt to clarify, particular features of the Australian dance context. Even now Australian dance culture is dominated by (English) ballet which is part of our colonial heritage. In my experience, in many places where dance is discussed and practised classical ballet and other kinds of performance dance (usually called contemporary dance) are elided. They seem to be regarded as if they shared the same philosophical and aesthetic underpinnings – those of ballet. This subsumption of all forms of concert dance by ballet occurs in the context of ignorance and misunderstanding of modern dance which is a specific historical trajectory. This question has been investigated elsewhere by Australian dancers and their insights form the basis of my summary below.[3]

In the early years of the twentieth century the historical trajectory of modern dance began unequivocally in opposition to classical ballet,[4] which had previously been the only form of art dance. The ballet was, and is, intensely hierarchical and institutionalised both in its relation to the body and in its organisational structures. Modern dance stood for the self-definition of the artist, who evolved through developing her own dances,[5] a personal and distinctive interpretation and expression of the relationship between mind and body. A number of these personal mind/body expressions have become codified into what are known as the modern dance styles

or 'techniques':[6] Graham technique, Cunningham technique, Humphrey-Limon technique, for example. This codification occurred partly in response to the artist's wish to amplify his or her choreographic vision (originally a solo enterprise) by involving a company of dancers. Artists undertook this process of codification for teaching purposes because they needed dancers who could 'speak the same physical language'.

Modern dance techniques or styles are now taught in dance training institutions. What does not often appear to be recognised about the various styles is that they are all, like ballet, relatively autonomous forms of embodiment: their distinctive features are acquired at the deep level of the body's neuro-musculature. They are not like styles of clothing that can easily be put on and taken off. Intensive 'de-training' is required to change the acquired patterns of neuro-muscular co-ordination.

Each modern dance style can be thought of as a distinct language or text, distinct also from ballet. Training in one style does not 'equip' a dancer to perform or understand another although it may help; and training in ballet certainly does not equip a dancer to understand and embody all other styles – as is commonly held. Because of its antithetical aesthetic and philosophical foundations training in ballet may in fact raise insurmountable obstacles to an embodied understanding of modern dance forms.[7]

Susan Foster articulates the differences between different dance forms or styles in terms of their being distinct 'cultural systems',[8] autonomous bodily discourses requiring and producing distinct kinds of bodies and dancing subjects: 'The approach taken by the choreographer is consistent throughout: that is, the form the dances take is consonant with each choreographer's creative process, with each one's philosophy of the training and rehearsing required for dance performance, and with each one's expectations regarding viewer's responses'.[9]

The modern dance styles and techniques did not arise in an instrumental way, towards a goal outside themselves. They took shape in relation to, or as the embodiment of, choreographic intention. In themselves they are meaningful, value-laden texts. One does not, therefore, learn dancing *per se*. One learns a particular form of dance, which, in practice, will be more or less incommensurate with other forms. That is, even if learning to dance in a particular way is pursued as a true engagement with that dance form's embodied meanings, which I claim often it does not, it does not necessarily mean that one thereby understands, or can embody, other kinds of dance. Learning to dance, authoritatively, is not about the acquisition of a set of generalised physical skills which can be translated into one style or another. There is no simple, generalised, activity of dancing that people do, just as you cannot use the term 'dance' without specifying what you mean.

The modern dance styles, then, as well as ballet, are in some respects like languages. They are not technical accomplishments that can be used for any purpose. They create and mediate what can be said in them. Each structures a different kind of world.

Dance forms are like languages in another way. Once mastered at a certain level they operate, like language, behind our backs.[10] The dancer, involved in a particular dance form or style, cannot, somehow, hold her/himself aloof from the kind of embodiment that this kind of dancing both assumes and constructs.

A modern dance style or technique, then, is not a 'method'. It is a language which provides frameworks in which we can formulate patterns of embodiment. In studying a dance style the dancer has to engage with this fact. To quote, but also to interpret Gadamer: just as the translator makes mutual understanding possible only by becoming involved in the subject under discussion, so in relation to a dance text it is indispensable that the dancer involve him/herself with its embodied meaning.[11]

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics seems to offer suggestive ways of looking at processes of dance training and performance because it is a tradition of interpretation that acknowledges the central position of the subject in the creation of meanings. From a hermeneutic perspective meaning is not seen to be located primarily in the object of interpretation, the 'text'. Rather, it is seen to arise when a structure like that of a conversation binds the reader and the text together so that neither can be regarded as being a site of meaning independent of the other. In Gadamerian hermeneutics the *hermeneutic conversation* forms the basis for the fundamental idea that interpretation involves a (dialogic) thinking process, not the application of an interpretive method.

In dance, what might be called the text already has a limited and purely formalised independence (it can be notated for example). It really exists as an embodied event. So, in dance, the structure or the context for a hermeneutic conversation is potentially already established. It is the intimately reciprocal relationship between the dancer and the dance 'material' (the spatial and dynamic forms). The similarity of this relationship with the relationship that constitutes the hermeneutic conversation between text and reader seems to offer a way of understanding dancing as an argumentative process in which realities are made.

This thinking of dance in terms of reading and textuality is not original. In her book, *Reading Dancing,* Susan Foster seeks a method for understanding widely differing choreographies through semiotic and post-structuralist interpretations drawn from literary theory.

I am aware, however, that notions of textuality in relation to bodies can have their limits because, in proposing an embodied subjectivity, it is necessary to account for what is produced from within as well as what is inscribed from without. However, conceiving of the dancer as 'reader' in the hermeneutic sense i.e. of one who creates meanings in dialogue with texts, does not, I believe, negate the fact of embodiment. Instead, the idea of the dancer 'reading' dance material in this way allows conceptual

space for the formulation of a non-determined, non-essential body, a body that can question and that is open to meaningful and emancipatory change.

In dancing there is a conversation, directed towards understanding, between the dancer and the movement text of the dance or of the dance style being learned. In this process the hermeneutic idea of prejudice or prejudgement seems useful. For Gadamer, prejudgement is the subject's present standpoint or horizon of understanding. This standpoint is always present for the subject – understanding could not take place without it – even though it may be disavowed or unrecognised. In the Enlightenment, for example, prejudice was discredited. Instead, scientific knowledge based on reason claimed to exclude prejudices entirely on the basis that they had no foundation in the facts. This perspective constituted a refusal to accept that all knowledge is produced in relation to interests.

Texts also present their own horizon of understanding: 'It is precisely in confronting the otherness of the text – in hearing its challenging viewpoint... that the reader's own prejudices are thrown into relief and thus come to critical self-consciousness'.[12] The text becomes the ground for the testing of prejudices; and the task of the subject who seeks to understand a text is one of constant revision and reassessment. Conceived in this way the horizon of the present, constituted in the intersection of reader and text, is in constant formation.

Reading a dance text

Dance material is taught and learned in a situation where people come together in the same time and place. Dancers usually learn dance material by confronting it in its embodiment in the other who created it. The process of learning or coming to a physicalised understanding proceeds through trial and error. The dancer's own horizon of understanding, which will have a neuro-muscular as well as a cognitive foundation, is challenged by that of the artist/teacher. Through repeated bodily 'readings' of the material the dancer enters into a dialogue with it, constantly revising his/her approach until a sense of meaningful embodied understanding is reached.

Certain forms, rhythms, dynamics may be familiar. Ideally, however, a phrase of dance movement is always an event requiring interpretive effort on the part of the dancer. It cannot be reduced to a formula of bodily shapes and gestures which can be reproduced unproblematically. Even where a recognised vocabulary of movements is involved, as it is in the modern dance techniques, the process of understanding cannot be reduced to the observation of this fact. On one level, it is true, the meaning of a movement will have been long since pre-established: at a certain level of training the dancer can no longer come face to face with his/her dance language – it has become 'naturalised' at the level of the neuro-musculature. On another level, however, within the context of different dances the meaning of specific movements and body forms changes and is inflected

and informed by their accumulated previous manifestations and meanings.

Traditionally, certain aspects of the structure of modern dance classes facilitate the process of hermeneutic dialogue. The dancer usually encounters the text first of all in its embodiment in the teacher or choreographer. However, he/she also has access to it in the interpretations of all the other dancers participating in the class or rehearsal. For example those sections of a class where students perform movement sequences in small groups while others stand aside provide occasion for dancers to observe the interpretations of others. During these times they can make detailed observations about how other students approach the dance material in terms of its rhythm and phrasing, how they negotiate certain transitions between recognised forms, how they attend to the very act of dancing itself. In classical ballet, classes have a similar structure, but here the hermeneutic potential may be masked by a context or atmosphere of competition which in many cases may foreclose a genuinely open process of understanding.

The observations made of the variety of interpretations will inform how a dancer attempts his/her own interpretation when the time comes. It is as though the dancer, through watching first the artist-teacher, then the other dancers projects before him/herself a bodily meaning for the text. This projection has still to be tested in practice. In actually performing the dance sequence 'this fore-project... is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as(the dancer) penetrates into the meaning'[13] with his/her body. This kind of encounter in the context of language-based texts has been termed 'the hermeneutic circle'. In encountering the dance material the dancer's own patterns of neuro-muscular co-ordination are challenged. Through finding ways to negotiate unfamiliar transitions for example, these patterns are subtly reorganised. This process is experienced as moments of insight when new meanings are created.

Tradition

Hermeneutics emphasizes the role of tradition in understanding and interpretation. For practical purposes of interpretation the hermeneutic idea of tradition is the history of interpretations by which a text accumulates meanings. New interpretations arise out of a dialogue with those of the past.

In a broader, philosophical sense the encounter with the past plays an important part in the ongoing process of the testing of prejudices and in the constant renewal of the horizon of the present: it is claimed that 'the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past'.[14] In this view tradition is a source of legitimate prejudices. It is the acknowledgement that our vision is always necessarily limited by a particular historical situation: that we do not altogether freely choose the objects of our interest or the questions we ask about them.

In his emphasis on the productive role of tradition Gadamer seeks to overcome an objectifying

relationship to the past. He makes a distinction between tradition and the Enlightenment concept of authority – the 'false prejudice for what is old'.[15] This kind of authority was regarded as being diametrically opposed to reason and freedom. Gadamer, however, argues that the scientific attitude misunderstands itself when it 'relegates... its own historicality to the position of prejudices from which we must free ourselves'.[16] As far as the human sciences are concerned, he claims, 'we stand always within tradition... we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us'.[17] Tradition is not something we want to shake off; rather it is 'affirmed, embraced and cultivated in active preservation'.[18]

My present horizon of understanding of dance practices is formed in an encounter with what I will now call the tradition of modern dance.

As critics have noted, however, the hermeneutic idea of tradition is problematic. Terry Eagleton[19] sees it as an idealised, universalised notion that takes no account of such questions as Which tradition? or Whose? Certainly in the realm of dance practice the ballet tradition often stands in precisely this universalised kind of position.

However, for my present purposes I wish, as a strategic move, to retain the hermeneutic idea of tradition. There are various reasons for this. The first is that modern dance is relatively invisible in the broader cultural arena. Issues such as documentation and the relative lack of informed critical response are clearly important here, but these are secondary issues. Politically, modern dance can be seen to constitute an oppositional movement: the common feature of all the distinct moments, the individual artistic enterprises that make up the historical trajectory of modern dance is the concern to develop alternative, interrogatory languages of the body. The tradition of modern dance, then, is an important one to acknowledge because it is an alternative tradition – different from that of classical ballet and the tradition of regarding the body as an instrument.

Second, there are certain features of the history of modern dance practice that seem more than adequately served by the hermeneutic idea of tradition. For example, dance artist Russell Dumas points out that dance 'is a living tradition whose history and inheritance are passed in direct lineage from dancer to dancer'.[20] In this process there is no objective knowledge of dance – such as a universal training regime would presuppose. Since dance knowledge lives in and through finite, historical bodies it is never separate from tradition. But nor has tradition played a normative or conservative role: rather the history of modern dance has proceeded as a series of revolutionary ruptures, a 'series of avant-gardes'.[21]

Learning a modern dance style or technique involves the dancer in a confrontation with the otherness of an historical bodily text. Ideally, the text one interprets is the moving body of the founder of the bodily discourse, the modern dance technique, one is studying. This particular moving body

is the authority which constitutes the horizon of tradition to which one brings one's own horizon of prejudgment. Access to this direct lineage, however, is limited in the local context where dance styles are taught and learned in isolation from the originating artists, their protégés, or their oeuvre. Nor, frequently, is the historicity of the dance style acknowledged in any other way, such as by an emphasis on its philosophical, aesthetic or historical contextualisation. Consequently it often comes about that authority in dance pedagogy is invested in external structures and regimes – not in the embodied dance material itself.

There is another feature of more recent modern dance practices in which a particular expression of tradition plays an important part: it could be called a 'micro-tradition'. It has to do with the way in which dance artists deliberately create the contexts, through rehearsal or choreographic practice, for dance materials to develop their own histories. In this process identified dance moments are recontextualised or reconsidered in many different ways, such as through formal operations like 'retrograding' (doing movements in reverse),'splicing' with other material, dissecting (doing the arms from this phrase with the legs from another, for example), reorienting spatially (in terms of direction or plane of movement), and so on.

These processes can be seen as a way of inventing new movement forms, that is, as choreographic processes. But perhaps more importantly they establish a particular relationship between the dancer and the dance – a relationship which can never be reduced to one of knowledge of a simple fact. Rather the dancer is implicated in the material, in the way one is implicated in language, because (s)he has been inseparable from its history.

The moment of performance, then – the moment when the dancing communicates – is neither one of mechanical reproduction, nor of interpretation in the common sense of a predetermined or fixed point of view. The dance material for the dancer is not an object or a fixed pattern, it is something that is living, historical, resonant. The dancer's relationship to it is such that it enables her/him as though to 'speak'. What an audience witnesses is an embodied understanding that has nothing to do with 'perfection' – an hypostasized meaning, but which is, instead, more like a questioning – 'a laying open and holding open of possibilites'.[22]

Conclusion

The above attempt, using some concepts offered by Gadamerian hermeneutics, to discuss and elucidate what dancing can be like is intended to point towards a consideration of performance itself – as the performance of understanding or of thinking. Of great value in this regard would be a detailed examination, in the terms outlined above, of practices of improvisation, for example. Another aspect of a 'hermeneutics of performance' would involve a discussion of the audience-performer relationship.

In a more general way I have attempted to locate certain practices of dancing in a place where they

might intersect productively with other disciplines. By considering dancing as a hermeneutic activity I have tried to suggest that dance practices can focus, and create new perspectives on, important questions of knowledge, meaning and subjectivity and their relations to embodiment.

NOTES

1 Modern dance is usually thought to have begun to develop more or less simultaneously in two locations: in Germany and in The United States. Broadly speaking two directions of development are recognised: German Tanztheatr and the more formal, analytic work of the Americans. In this paper I refer to the American tradition with which I am more familiar. I include under the term 'modern' the practices of the post-1960s generations of dancers whose work is sometimes referred to as 'post-modern'.

2 See Gadamer, H.G., *Truth and Method*. New York, The Seaburg Press, 1975, p. 346–7.

3 See especially Elizabeth Dempster, "Alone and palely loitering: the promise of parochialism" in *Writings on Dance*, vol.2 (Spring 1987) and Russell Dumas, "Dislocated, isolated, seduced and abandoned" in *Writings on Dance*, No.3 (Winter 1988).

4 In this paper I am not intending to make an opposition between classical ballet and modern dance forms in terms of whether they can be regarded hermeneutically or not. Ideally the physical understanding of ballet should also proceed hermeneutically. The question I seek to address is of ballet being regarded as a universally applicable 'technique' – as though the kind of work produced will not be influenced by the kind of training. The position of ballet is a symptom of the fact that the activity of dancing is often seen as involving technique but not meaning.

5 The key figures in early twentieth century modern dance were women: Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Mary Wigman.

6 This word is commonly used in the context of dance pedagogy. I am actually arguing that different dance forms ought not to be thought of as 'techniques' in the sense of techne or method.

7 See Elizabeth Dempster, "Re-visioning the body: Feminism, Ideokinesis and the New Dance" in *Writings on Dance*, No.9 (Autumn 1993). Classical ballet is based on a visual aesthetic. The dancer internalises the perspective of the audience viewing his/her performance from a fixed front. Dempster argues that modern dance forms explore other sensory modalities. They create a space of reception that is haptic rather than predominantly visual.

8 Foster, Susan L. *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. p.236

9 ibid. p.2

10 see Habermas, J. "On hermeneutics claim to universality" in *The Hermeneutic Reader*, Mueller-Vollmer, K. ed. Oxford: Blackwell. p.295

11 "Just as the translator makes mutual understanding in the conversation that he is interpreting possible only by becoming involved in the subject under discussion, so in relation to a text it is indispensable that the interpreter involve himself with its meaning". Gadamer op.cit. p.349

12 Linge, David E. ed. Introduction to Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977. p.xxi

13 Gadamer op.cit. p.236

14 Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "The Principle of Effective History" in Mueller-Vollmer ed. op.cit. p.272

15 ibid. p.261

16 ibid. p.265

17 ibid. p.265

18 ibid. p.265

19 Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983

20 Dumas, Russell. "Dislocated, isolated, seduced and abandoned" in *Writings on Dance*, No.3 (Winter 1988) p.28

21 Banes, S. *Judson Dance Theatre, Democracy's Body*, 1962-1964. USA: University Microfilms International authorized facsimile, 1982. p.9

22 Linge op.cit. p.xxi

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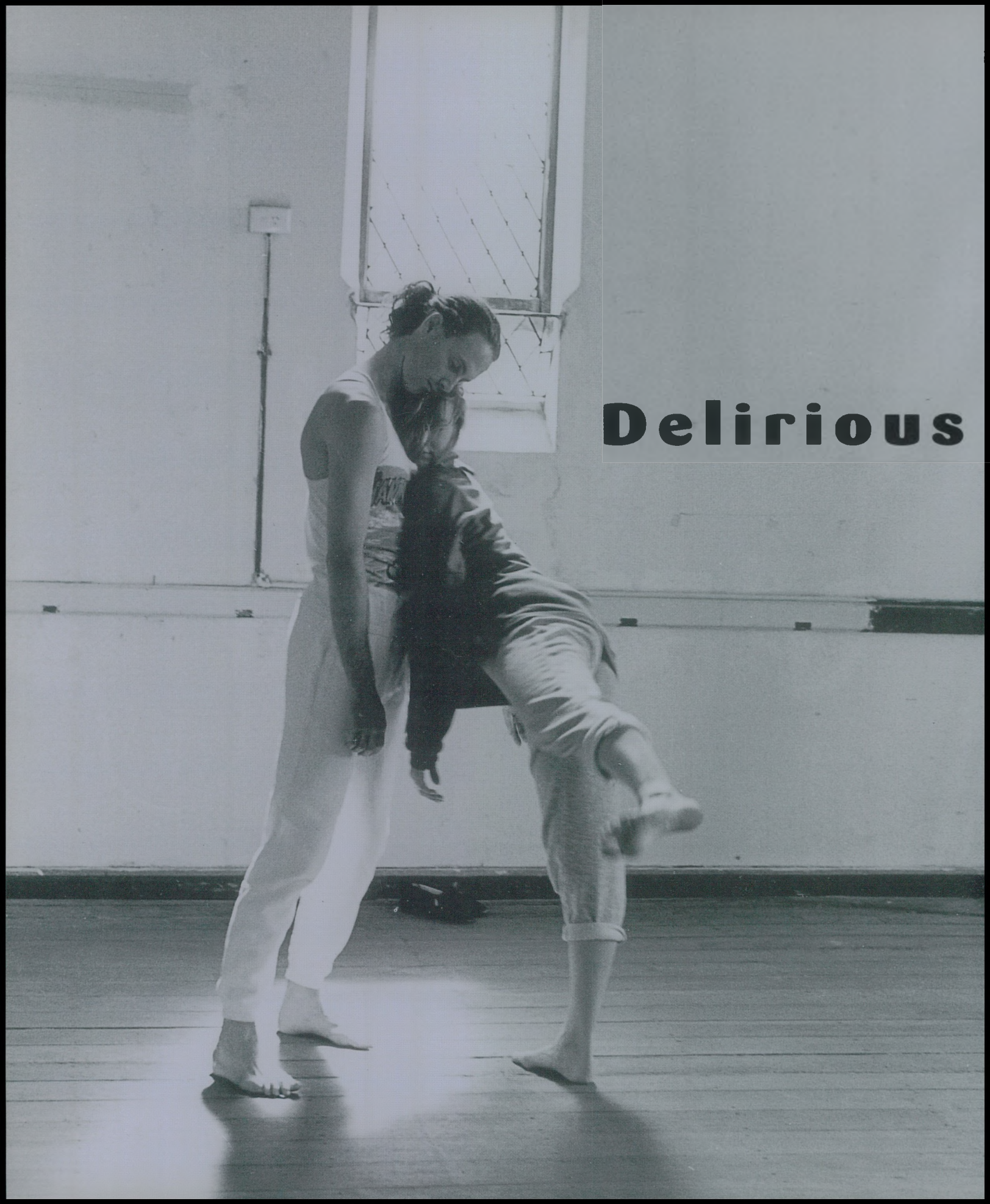
Delirious

LEFT: TIM PRESTON AND JENNY PRESTON PHOTOGRAPH BY WARWICK LONG

"We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do..."

Deleuze & Guattari

notes towards improvisation as a Body without Organs

by MARK MINCHINTON

What is an improvisation? How does it come into being and what are its affects?

An improvisation is a dance of speeds and intensities. The brute, corporeal bodies of the improvisers (including the audience) create an incorporeal event that is itself another body – but a Body without Organs (BwO).

An incorporeal event may be defined as an event that has duration and energy but cannot be isolated, segmented, or pinned down to a location or particular period (in chronos). A battle is an incorporeal event. It is made up of corporeal bodies involved in corporeal events but the battle itself exists everywhere and nowhere over the battle-field; the centre and edges of the battle are difficult to define but we know when we are in it. Summer is another incorporeal event: we may be able define the corporeal characteristics of summer, and even set an arbitrary duration for it, but summer itself is at once less and more than the sum of these characteristics, and can begin or end before or after the period allotted it.

The BwO is created by the practices of corporeal bodies. The BwO is not a place or a concept but a limit that can never be reached. The BwO is contrasted to the organ–ised body that accepts the linear and reductive organ–isation of the organs. The Oxford dictionary points to the tyrannous nature of the organ–ised body with its dependence on structure, systematisation and teleology,

> **Organ** OE. [– OFr. *organe*, *orgene* (mod. *orgue*) – L. *organum* instrument, engine, musical instrument, (eccl) church organ – Gr. _____, f. IE. *worgn̄ *werg – WORK; cf. ORGY.] ... II. A part or member of an animal or plant body adapted by its structure for a particular vital function ... III. A means of action or operation, an instrument, a 'tool'; a person, body of persons or thing by which some purpose is carried out or some function performed (*arch.*) 1548. b. A mental or spiritual faculty regarded as an instrument of the mind or soul 1656.
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> **Organize** ... 1. *trans.* To furnish with organs; to give an organic structure to ... 2. *gen.* To form into a whole with interdependent parts; to give definite and orderly structure to; to systematise; to arrange or 'get up' something involving united action 1623 ...

The BwO, in contrast to the organ–ised body, lies outside the despotism of the organs and a singular, unified and 'coherent' world view. The BwO leads to multiplicities of world views.

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Deleuze and Guattari initially identify five BwOs, or five ways of approaching a BwO – the hypochondriac, paranoid, schizo, drugged, and masochist bodies. Each of these bodies, or ways of being embodied, of being, has a corresponding BwO, a region where the delirium of intensities is experienced – as inertia, attack, catatonia, cold, or pain. The path to these intensities is through a disequilibrium of the organs, a dis–organisation, synaesthesia, breaking down, forgetting. For the masochist it is to script a program of experimentation (remembering Latin *exper_r_*, to try thoroughly, as in 'to experience') that moves beyond fantasy, interpretation, and the unified Self, to create a region where intensities of pain, pain waves, can be experienced. And this region is not a simulacrum, or representation of a primary scene, something that can be interpreted, but a space, *spatium* ('a primal groundless space' (Bogue, 63)), where energy circulates in waves.

The BwO is not limited to the hypochondriac, paranoid, schizo, drugged or masochist bodies. These are just bodies whose delirium, frenzy, passion, we recognise because they most obviously lie outside the singular organisation of the State body, the body that is organised, functional, teleological. (In the *Aeneid* Virgil expresses the State fear of the warrior body that threatens dis–organisation of the Imperial order – *pietas* vs *furor*.) The BwO is as easily ecstatic, joyful, and dancing as 'sucked–dry, catatonicised, vitrified, [and] sewn up' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 150). The improvised body is a BwO. An improvising body is a BwO.

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"For each type of BwO we must ask: (1) What type is it, how is it fabricated, by what procedures and means (predetermining what will come to pass)? (2) What are its modes, what comes to pass, and with what surprises, what is unexpected and what expected?"

Deleuze & Guattari

'Body' ... ?

A body is not simply confined to the brute, corporeal body of an individual. A body may be any assemblage of powers, animate or inanimate, which has the capacity to grow. The powers, forces, which are assembled are undetermined and may be 'physical, moral, cultural, or even aural forces' (Patton, 45–6).

The 'improvised body' is not just the corporeal body of the individual improviser but the energetic body created by the corporeal bodies of the improvisers. The improvised body that is a BwO includes the improvised bodies of the performers and always already includes the improvised bodies of the performers. This is a characteristic of BwOs. What is produced on a BwO (in this case an improvised body) is already part of the production of that BwO (in this case the improvising bodies of the improvisers).

This may seem a tautology, or even perilously close to saying that the improvised BwO is a representation of a 'script' layed down by the improvised bodies of the performers, but what is produced cannot be foreseen since the procedure of making the BwO produces an infinity of passages, pathways, possible a/effects. When the performer takes the step towards an improvised body s/he begins an improvised BwO (remembering that a BwO isn't a concept but a practice).

Let us look at this another way. Think of the non-improvised body of an individual as a body that is creating a series of meanings through goal-oriented, organ–ised behaviour, behaviour that is somehow coded along a syntagmatic path. An individual's improvised body is a body that abandons the goal, de–organises [sic] itself, places itself in a state of disequilibrium, forsaking control and the measure of the specular economy (remembering Latin: *in–*, not; *pr_v_sus*, foreseen; *pr_*, before; *vid_re*, to see). Disequilibrium, delirium, like Deleuze's *délire*, foregrounds the paradigmatic possibilities (Deleuze 1990 *passim*, Lecercle 1985 & 1990 *passim*). There is an explosion of possibilities. The world opens up, not closes down.

This disequilibrium happens twice, must happen twice, if it is to create a BwO. The first disequilibrium creates the BwO, the second makes something flow across it. In the improvised BwO the corporeal individual's disequilibrium creates the BwO and the continuance of that disequilibrium sets up waves of disequilibrium pulsing through the BwO – these waves are experienced as energy, intensities.

Contact-improvisation

An example of the improvised BwO is found in contact-improvisation. Contact-improvisation depends on the flow of weight and contact between participants. In simple terms, participants offer their weight and/or their support to other participants, always maintaining contact with each other. There is a constant flow of weight and support between performer and performer, performer and floor. Weight and support are intensive feelings that cannot be mapped by any simple cartography, they are vectors not locations or signs. To make an offer in this context is to commit oneself to giving or receiving weight, a commitment that is felt intensively through the sensation of weight/support. It is a sensation that is dynamic, fluid, and instantaneous.

Of course, the giving and receiving of weight are not neutral things. Not all people give weight in the same way, even if they share the same physique. There are differences in the intensities of weight and support. People can be said to have extensive or intensive, flowing or blocked, centred or peripheral energy. Their physiques, experience, and individual psychologies will go some way to determining the manner in which they use and are used by their bodies. The development of this interrelationship is not part of my concern. What is of interest to me is not why a person is how they are, but how they use how they are. To ask 'why is . . .?' is to become involved in interpretation and return to a past that cannot affect what happens now, to ask 'how use . . .?', or 'what are the effects of . . .?' is to be involved in a program and to create a future (this is a variation of the anti-psychiatric argument developed by Deleuze and Guattari).

A Contact-improvisation

Two men in a large hall.

One man is tall, supple-limbed, light in movement; he seems to move even when standing still; energy radiates from his body into the space; left to himself he will play with falling and leaping, allowing the body to experience vertigo, the head to fall towards the floor in positions far outside those experienced in daily life. In Laban terms his movement qualities would shift between floating, flicking, dabbing, gliding and slashing.

The other man, myself, is older, average height, heavier and denser in the body with broader shoulders and deeper chest; not as supple, but stronger seeming, and stiller; the body and its movement are more intensive than extensive, energy concentrated in the feet, legs, belly, shoulders and eyes (not the periphery but a line running up the middle of the body); left to myself I will play with stillness, rolling, and vigorous, cartwheeling movements across the space, maintaining a fixed relationship between shoulders, head and hips while the legs do all the work. In Laban terms my movement qualities shift between pushing, punching, wringing, gliding and slashing (!).

We walk to the centre of the space and stand side-by-side facing the same direction our 'inside' forearms touching. *I turn my attention inward, focussing on the feeling where our arms touch, my eyes are open but not focussed on any specific point or place. Often when beginning like this I want to close my eyes to heighten the sensation at the surface of my body. [THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE IMPROVISED BWO: THE FIRST PROCEDURE IS OUR COMING INTO PROXIMITY, TOUCHING EACH OTHER; (THESE ACTIONS ALONE SIGNAL LEAVING THE SPACE OF THE EVERYDAY TO ENTER AN UNKNOWN SPACE: WE ENTER THE SPACE TO CREATE, CONSCIOUSLY, AN UNKNOWN FUTURE)]* **We begin to give weight to each other by leaning into each other's forearms,** *[THIS IS THE SECOND PROCEDURE, WILLING UNBALANCING OF THE (CORPOREAL) BODY (THE GIVING OF WEIGHT INVOLVES SHIFTING THE BALANCE OUTSIDE THE CENTRE-POINT OF YOUR OWN BODY) AND WILLING SUPPORT OF AN–OTHER BODY (PLACING YOUR BODY INSIDE THE CENTRE-POINT OF YOUR TWO BODIES' COMBINED MASS). TOGETHER, THE PROCEDURES ARE CONTACT & MOVEMENT (WHICH INCLUDES WILLING UNBALANCE AND SUPPORT) – THE FUNDAMENTAL TACTICS OF CONTACT IMPROVISATION.]* **this initiates, or coincides with, a twist in both our bodies that moves them towards the floor and back to back, contact is now greatest at the mid-points of our bodies near the hips although they are touching from shoulder to upper thighs along the side and backs of our bodies.** *My attention is now almost fully directed to the points of contact with Tim, my eyes are still open but I'm not seeing the room but, in a 'fundamental synaesthesia' (Derrida?), the feeling of Tim's and my bodies. I feel myself respond to the movement of his/our body. Having made the initial decision to give over my body to falling onto Tim and to supporting him I am making no conscious decisions about what is happening; I follow the flow of weight between us. [THE BWO HAS BEEN FABRICATED BY THIS SURRENDER TO CONTACT AND MOVEMENT BY ALL THE PARTICIPANTS. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IS PREDETERMINED BY THE PROCEDURES OF CONTACT AND MOVEMENT.] As the improvisation develops* – **our bodies are now intertwined on the floor** – *I progressively lose the sense of a differentiated Self and respond 'mindlessly' to the imperatives of maintaining contact and giving and receiving weight, I feel as though I have entered a timeless and immeasurable space, similarly in feeling to that of a dream, where I am able to move forever, tirelessly; I am aware of a feeling of depth going into and beyond my 'own' body. [I AM NOW IN THE DEPTHS OF THE SPATIUM, EXPERIENCING PROFONDEUR: MY EXPERIENCE OF PROFONDEUR DOES NOT, OF COURSE, MEAN THAT TIM OR THE SPECTATORS ARE EXPERIENCING IT, ALTHOUGH EXPERIENCE TELLS ME THAT FOR ME TO BE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE IT IN THIS SITUATION TIM MUST BE AT LEAST MOVING TOWARDS PROFONDEUR, OR ACTUALLY EXPERIENCING IT; ALSO, IF THE SPECTATORS WERE TO INTERVENE, OR SOMEHOW BLOCK THE FLOW OF ENERGY TIM AND I WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE IT.]* **The improvisation continues: we are now standing and the spectators begin to see a pattern of sorts emerging in our work. Tim spins and propels himself off my body seeming to launch himself over and almost off me, while I seem to burrow under him lifting and almost throwing him off me.** *The sensation of profondeur for me is now completely established and I have lost all sense of time and space, there are no moments when I think 'what will I do?' or 'what am I doing?' I am simply HERE, DOING following*

the tactics of my improvisation, literally never staying in a place but always moving on. [THE BwO CIRCULATES WAVES NOW. THE FIRST PHASE WAS TO DE–ORGANISE OUR BODIES, STEPPING OUTSIDE EVERYDAY ORGAN–ISATION THROUGH CONTACT AND MOVEMENT; THE SECOND PHASE WAS TO CONTINUE DE–ORGANISATION THROUGH MAINTAINING CONTACT AND MOVEMENT; THE MODE OF THIS BwO IS EXPERIENCED AS AN INTENSITY OF WEIGHT, WARMTH AND DEPTH (THE FEELINGS ARE NOT LOCATABLE TO ANY SINGLE ORGAN (SYNAESTHESIA))]

Two men in a large hall (another typographic representation) . . .

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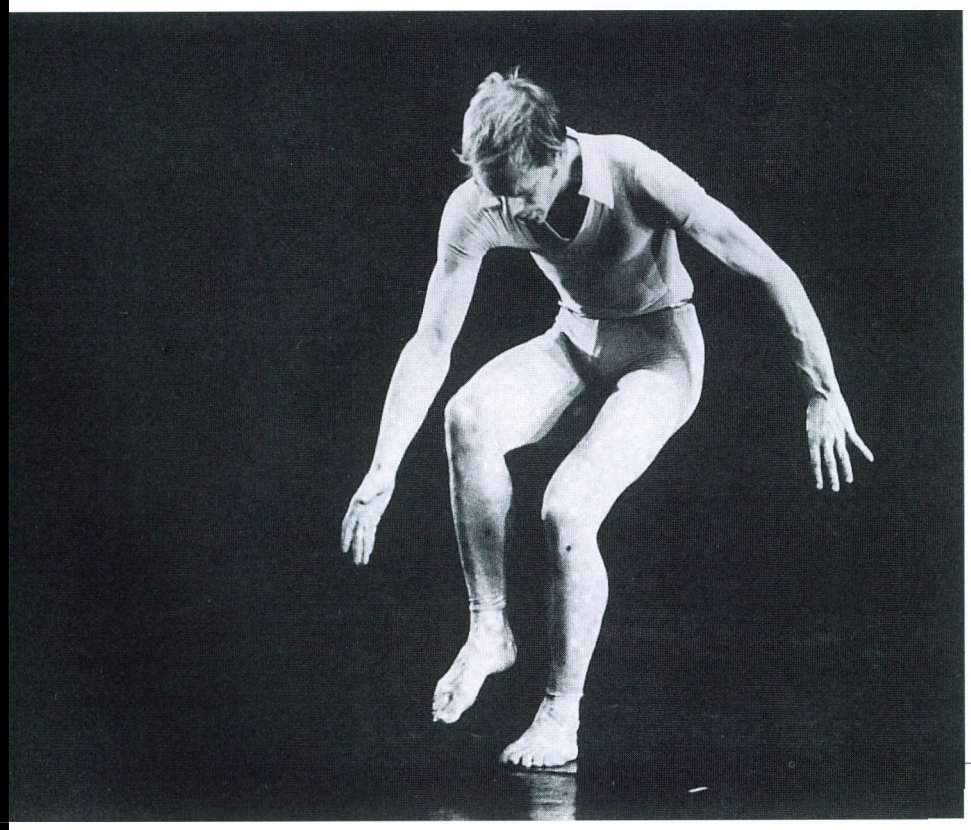

Douglas Dunn, 'Coquina', performance 1979 Photograph by Robert Alexander

Talk-ing Dance

New York choreographer and performer Douglas Dunn, was at the heart of that city's expansive, experimental dance scene of the 1960s and '70s. He began his career performing with Yvonne Rainer (1968 -70), the Merce Cunningham Company (1969 -73) and Grand Union (1970 -76), an improvisational collective which included artists Trisha Brown, David Gordon, Steve Paxton and Rainer. During this time he was also involved in the development of his own work, presenting solos, collaborative duets and group pieces. In 1977, his company, Douglas Dunn and Dancers, emerged from an eight month choreographic process and began touring repertory. Douglas Dunn and Dancers continues to perform Dunn's work throughout the United States and Europe. Dunn toured Australia in 1993, visiting Perth, where he choreographed a work at the West Australian Academy of Arts, and Melbourne. During his stay in Melbourne, he taught master classes and workshops, performed in the Retro season at Dancehouse and was the guest speaker at the Talking Dance Forum, held at Dancehouse in conjunction with the performance season. Douglas Dunn opened the forum with an informal talk focused around the topic of directions in dance in the post-Judson era.

WITH Douglas Dunn

DOUGLAS DUNN I think the easiest way to describe what's happening in New York and to some extent in the United States (but I'll mostly talk about New York since that's what I know best) is that everything that you ever heard of is happening now. First of all there's a strong emphasis on historical dance now; there are people doing what they say are Isadora Duncan's dances for example. One unprecedented occurence in modern dance was that when Jose Limon died his company continued under his name and now there's talk of that with other large companies, the Graham company for example. So it's becoming a little academic, modern dance, in a way. It's becoming historical and academic on the one hand; on the other hand you still do have young people coming in and behaving as if they want to do something completely new; they are not necessarily apprenticing themselves to companies, by trying to become members of the companies as much as people used to do. I think that's both a personal choice and also a financial necessity in a way. There are many more dancers than there are companies to dance in so people dance for a while, then they want to make work so they start, they just start. Whereas before there was a kind of continuity of people dancing with someone for a while and absorbing that and going off and doing some lineage variation or whatever. That in itself is rather interesting to me. When I first danced, the Graham heirs seemed so much more similar in their choreography than the Cunningham heirs and that made me wonder. What were those attitudes or those physical things that were being imparted? What was it that produced that difference? You know that's kind of interesting business. But that all seems irrelevant now. Things seem so broken up, the scene is so broken up, not only in its historical trajectory or lineages but the fact that it has become mixed in so much now with all these things that are happening in the culture – meaning, physical culture, health culture etc. The ballet and modern worlds are not so separate anymore. They *are* amongst some people but there are places where it mixes now. An example of that would be that there have been grants, lines of money, that have gone to ballet companies specifically to invite modern choreographers to work. And TV. There have been invitations from public television stations to make tapes for them, so that many, even younger choreographers have a chance to make video dances for television. And I mention that because we are leaving the concert dance tradition when we do that . You end up making something else. You think

about television when you make those video dances; you don't only think about dance, you end up thinking about television and television draws you into another sector of the culture. And this all stands out in strong relief for me since I joined dance to get out of culture, you might say. I went into dance to be a marginal person, a person doing a weird thing on the side and then all of a sudden it wasn't any longer that. I still wouldn't consider it a mainstream event. To the extent that it does become mainstream it becomes more merged with the other cultural forms, but it is definitely mixed up in the culture now. It's a big mix, a big crazy mix and it's very hard to draw lines now between things, or historically or anything like that. I guess the other issue going on right now is about how you work. There are people who have left the field because there is so little opportunity and money and there are people who have ceased having companies, or trying to have companies because it's so financially and administratively arduous. People end up doing solo work or they work on other formed groups. Like they might go into a situation where there is a group of dancers they can work with. And the money scene seems to be more and more based on what you could call a popularity; if someone can show that they can generate this much funding, then they get that much more funding. It kind of snowballs. There are a couple of companies that are really rolling and everyone else has sort of stopped being able to roll. There is also a growth of dance outside of New York, even though it's that much more difficult. And there is a tendency more and more for companies to demand of their communities that they support them. So they are not starting up as independent people who can't wait to get a NEA grant or something; you know, they are not out there in some sort of vacuum. People are more and more looking to their surrounding, immediate place to be the source of their support. The result of that is that they look for an audience there also. So there is a kind of a decentralization and a localizing going on which is socially very positive. I would say that socially speaking there is a very positive direction going on in the culture and in dance; more people are getting a chance. But aesthetically I would consider it an interruption, for the moment. There was a kind of interesting line of progress in modern dance that I saw and took part in, which really doesn't exist right now. There's no interest in it, very little interest in it right now. The interest seems to be in the diversity of ethnic background input plus a kind of snowballing "Wowism" on the scene. If you can make a scene around your work then it has some potency in the environment. But the kind of atmosphere in the sixties and seventies, of real, marginal but intense, interest in aesthetic progression is really hardly existing at all now. It's a completely different scene.

TIM PRESTON Are you aware of how this has dispersed out from America?

DUNN Out from America? Not particularly. I'll say what I know because I've spent time briefly in Europe. There was a tremendous appetite for New York dance in France growing through the sixties and definitely in the seventies which diminished rapidly in the eighties when a lot a French companies really got rolling. They really started to put their money into their own companies. There was a lot of money in France for dance and for culture in general. They finally established companies in all the different

cultural centres around France and they started pumping money into them and it decreased the interest in inviting American dance. They still invited key people and they did have a big American Festival in Lyons a few years ago but in general there aren't as many companies touring; they don't seem to have the same interest in our work. I think it's a combination of getting involved in their own work plus the fact that America has never shown any interest in the French work. They have made a number of attempts to make exchanges and come over and they come over and the critics really pan them and they don't feel much energy from the dance community and so they go home. Now they are rolling on their own they don't care. Well I don't know if they don't care, but you feel that they tried to do that and it didn't work. Then there was quite a diaspora of the Contact Improvisation work going on for a long time. I can remember Steve (Paxton) going to Dartington Hall in the early seventies, as far back as that, and Mary Fulkerson coming out with a comparable line. It's happened in England a lot and in Holland; I haven't been anywhere where I haven't found Contact practitioners which is really amazing, an amazing development. Many dancers who when they first encountered dance saw available only ballet or maybe some highly rigorous form of modern went toward that, and later as other less extended forms became more established or available went that path, loosened up in their dancing or their attitudes or both. Not that everyone did that, but many people did. But the people who came into dance via the less extended forms really were not those people. They are people who never would have been attracted to dance. Just as I would probably not have danced if I had not met Cunningham because he established a kind of permission for me, to not have to be a character. A lot of people were waiting for permission and they took it when they saw it. So that you never have to stand up (laughs!), as it were. Even the simplified kind of verticality that Cunningham wanted so that he could show a difference between that and something else. I mean you just look at Steve (Paxton); his work is not about 'vertical' in a way. It's almost about the way to the ground at the very beginning. So, that was interesting to me and a lot of the people that I know in America who have practised that (Contact) have been very uninterested in all the other forms of dance. But if that work hadn't existed they either would have invented it or they wouldn't have danced. I'm just reminded of something I left out in terms of describing what's happening. It seems like an extreme kind of development from the original Cunningham, from Graham to Judson, that whole de-heroization (or whatever you want to call it) of dance, to the more pedestrian physicality. There are now not only a few people, a few older people who dance, there are actually companies (I don't know if you have heard of them), there are actually companies in the United States now, companies made up of people who do not dance, how could you put it, non-dancers. There are whole companies of non-dancers. Yvonne Rainer was very interested in non-dancers, she made a big point out of that; she always used to like to have anybody come to class and to teach *Trio A* to people who either had other backgrounds or no physical activity background at all. But now there are actually companies who are preferentially (I'm trying not to be biased here), preferentially funded because of that.

There's a real desire in the administration and funding. The morale of the dance scene is about this now : "Let's make sure we fund these people who say they are not dancers". There's a real tendency and there are actually companies of handicapped people, of non-dancer people, of elderly people. There's a tremendous thing about elderly people moving now and this is all happening more or less in what you could still call the modern dance arena even though as I say that arena is no longer such a clearly defined space in the culture. But it is happening there. **AUDIENCE MEMBER** Could I ask a question on that point? You talked before about the lineage of the sixties and seventies through to the present day and I'm wondering at this point whether the National Endowment for the Arts and the avenues of television exposure for dance which now exist haven't defined another kind of aesthetic which is in some ways diminishing personal vision? Maybe dancers and choreographers are trying to find ways of fitting their creativity into the National Endowment system and they are not following their own vision and heart? **DUNN** I think it's been going on long enough for you to be able to say that. The National Endowment was established, if I have it correctly, somewhere round 1965 and it did make a huge difference even though the National Endowment does not fund the way, for example, the Ministry of Culture does in France. They never provide you with all your money. When I started out I made postcards and sent them to thirty people I knew and to people I wanted to come. That was the way I started for the first few years and I had no expectation or even inclination about getting reviewed or getting money from somewhere for this stuff. I was just, well, indulging my independence. Now, I know from some of these people that when they start out they are totally uptight. Their first concert is going to determine something about their career because someone's going to come and watch it and tell them they like it or whatever. It's a very hot-house environment because it's very competitive now, just in terms of the numbers of people working and the available money and available dancers. It's a very different thing. People are not just trying it out quite as much. As you say, the TV thing can be a little intimidating. So I think that it's had influence and I don't mean to blame people; I don't mean that they've sold out or something when I say that. It's a shifting environment and people coming to it with the same degree of unconsciousness that I came into it with are going to react accordingly. They may be less free in some grand historical arc of possibilities but they don't know that, so you can't blame them or say that they are less independent or less dancing from their heart. They are working within the limits of what they find, working within the context of what they discover when they work. So without blaming them, I say yes to your question. There has been a shift. It's a more self-conscious environment in every respect, in terms of money, in terms of response, competition. **SALLY GARDNER** I was interested to respond to the workshop. What I felt we were doing in the workshop this afternoon was being given structures that suggested a certain flexibility with relation to what we were doing, so that we weren't in a fixed relationship to material necessarily; there can be a kind of gap that opens up there in which there's room for unexpected things to happen, I guess. So, the experience seemed to be about suggesting and

promoting a kind of flexibility in one's relationship to material. Somehow for me it seems to link in with this question of how you see your work and what kind of knowledge of the whole field there is there. I mean, you work in an environment which really could not be more different to the environment here, in the sense that you are surrounded by and you do live in/within the tradition. You were saying that everything is available there, from Isadora to the latest craze, whatever that is. Whereas here, that is certainly not the case. So there is a fundamentally different presupposition and you are saying that it's a luxury in a way for you to kind of tiptoe round the influences and not want to see those in your work. At the risk of idealising some idea of tradition, I feel that here I need to do a lot of work to actually know what that field is to begin with, because I cannot presuppose, I cannot assume it. It is just not available, so there is actually a lot of work to be done if there is that interest in becoming aware of the field.

DUNN But why would you want to know that though? **GARDNER** Why?

DUNN Yes. Do you mean in terms of making work? **GARDNER** Making it and performing it. Because I don't think that work simply occurs as something new. I don't think that you just come out and do something that hasn't been done before. There are always influences and traditions and so on that will partly construct what you do and it seems to me it's better to be aware of those than not aware of them. I just don't believe that there's either lack of awareness or awareness. But also that, in performing, and this returns to the idea of flexibility, in performing and creating there is a need for a personal closeness and an understanding of the personal vision or whatever it is, but it seems to me that that can be balanced by a kind of distancing that comes from a knowledge of what has gone before or what others are doing and that that distancing is very freeing. The two things go together. Perhaps what's new comes from being able to perceive movement in different ways and to be able to take up different positions, as a subject towards it. And I think that's what the Cunningham experience did for people who danced around that milieu – they saw that you could be in different relations to what you were doing, you didn't just have one way of being in it. Each person went on to develop those insights in different ways. I did want to link that to the sort of flexibility that I felt in relation to the material that I was working within the workshop and the flexibility that you have through some sort of knowledge of what has gone before. You then have a *relationship* to work with, rather than an *object*, if you like, in your creating as well as in your performing. So you have both a close and a kind of distant relationship with what it is that you are doing and I think the distance comes from acknowledging that you are not in isolation, you are not the only one, starting something off. **DUNN** I certainly know what you're saying. I lived in Connecticut, rural Connecticut, and taught school before I became a professional dancer and I remember my feeling of having to get what was happening into my life. Now that I'm in New York I live the opposite. I try to keep it out, like it's too much, it overwhelms me if I let too much of it in. So, I understand that, but on the other hand there's this thing about your immediate context. I dance for my immediate context which is New York dance and I imagine, my fantasy is, that *you* dance for *your*

immediate context which is here. And then if something comes to Melbourne and it's exactly what you were doing, that could be upsetting. I understand that. You know what I'm saying?

GARDNER I think it's not good to try and make absolute symmetries between something like dance and other art forms but it just seems to me that if you are in painting or music or sculpture then really you will have access to, even if you don't want it, you will be subjected to a field of work through its presentation in all sorts of reproductions. You simply do not have that in dance to any real extent. Maybe I'm wrong about that. **DUNN** You have to work awfully hard to do it.

GARDNER So, you can't even really presuppose that kind of, even unwilled level of contact with a field of activity. **DUNN** What we are talking about here, maybe underneath, is where does dance come from? And that's a traditional issue in all the arts. Are we talking about art coming from art? (I'm simplifying here) You see a tradition and you get in the river and go with it, swim with it, or against it. Or, the more romantic image of the artist who just suddenly out of nowhere, with no connection with anything else creates something which is new and totally unprecedented. And of course it's neither of those things. It's a combination of those things. But, you mentioned the workshop and as you were talking I was thinking about that and thinking, Gosh, I have a pretty strong romantic notion going on underneath this stuff. In talking about his work Tim (Preston) used the words "personal and habitual" and I found that interesting, because that's part of the issue in the workshop. How can you use your own, if there is such a thing, the *real* self, the under, the unconscious, the unexplored part of yourself – which because of the way we live is probably the unexplored part of all of us – that can produce something new, maybe? But how to avoid, when you go to that place, just doing what you do by habit, doing what you already know. That's a very delicate question. That's what a lot of the workshop is about I think. How can you go to that place without just ending up doing what you already know, what's already there in you, already in the world? You have to fool yourself I think to do that. It's tricky. **AUDIENCE MEMBER** One thing that struck me as interesting in this conversation concerns that really strong twentieth century idea about the nature of communication, inasmuch as it has to be a mass or a shared thing in order to be a valuable aesthetic. What I'm wondering is whether it might be okay to be cut off and develop your own thing, in your own time, and respect the input that comes in but without necessarily trying to be part of a global, intercultural idea. I don't know whether that goes against the idea of development but I'm just wondering if it's okay to just be in Melbourne (laughter)! What I'm thinking of is in connection with your idea of new work coming from the unconscious aspects of individuals and also of how nice it is when you go to a performance and you are aware of the other people in the audience and somehow you share the experience with those people. It doesn't necessarily matter whether you're in a stadium with 20,000 people sharing that experience or in a much more intimate setting. Somehow it's important, the experience is important to a particular art form and when it becomes a mass culture thing it can become devalued somehow. Perhaps I'm not making sense.

DUNN Yes, it makes beautiful sense. I think it's the absolute issue of the moment, of the time, of the era, and I realize as you speak exactly where my bias is. I still have this completely romantic notion that nothing really good can come out of, what do you call it, that Uni-Culture, the Big Thing, except something very homogenized and very superficial and not very interesting. For me, it's got to be local and personal first if it's ever going to mean anything. And then it's going to get bought up. I mean if you take those things and they get bought up they become spread out and diluted as they become part of that other bigger thing you're talking about. I realize I have a strong bias about this; I feel it as you speak.

But there's a dynamic in between. If you just go off in your corner and no-one ever sees it then it's obviously of no value except to yourself. So if you want to share it, there has to be a little bit of spread. There has to be some conversation about it; but the number of people who respond to it does not determine whether it's valuable or not. I think we all agree that things that are most easily accepted by everybody are usually not very interesting. So, yes, it is okay to be in Melbourne (laughter)! But I still feel I'm doing the same thing in New York that you're doing in Melbourne. I'm just taking in my context and reacting. When I go out of New York I'm in big trouble. I may not be in trouble here in this room in Melbourne, but I'm in trouble if I go to Kansas City and do a show for someone who didn't know what they were buying when they bought me. You know, I'm completely out of the water; I can't even converse. My dance doesn't make any impression – really! Even across the Hudson River! And that's sometimes a bit hard for me to accept -you know, just the way you're speaking. My take on what dancing meant to me and the kinds of things that attracted me about dancing and dancers was that it was a bigger thing than that. I still do believe that. It has some value which is more common to people and has to do with not so much a social agenda, because I've never been involved in art on that level really, I've never been attracted to art when it's used for that, for social purposes you might say. Of course it's a social event and all that, but to me more it's been a matter of upward aspiration and a very personal thing. I don't expect that people who see the same thing will have the same kinds of reaction but if it's all in the realm of yearning or wondering then I feel I can share something about it. If it's hitting me over the head with what I should be thinking or knowing then I know that I could be with these people if I'm with this side and I won't be with those people. You know it divides people up by ideology or something.

PRESTON You were talking about going to Kansas and your ideas not being accepted there, how do you think ideas do move around within the dance world? Through mass media?

DUNN That's a great question. How do ideas move around in the dance world? I think part of the problem is that *ideas* move round in the dance world. You know what I mean? Instead of people having the courage in a more gut level way to approach the experience of seeing and doing dance. I think that's more true now than ever. The thing about dance is because there is so little history, so little continuity of history in dance – which I used to love, I used to think that that was the great thing about it , but it does come back and hit you on the back of the head once in a while and I think it's hitting us

very strongly now. Because whatever audience did get generated round that stuff that I was in love with in the sixties and the seventies, I don't know where they went but ... they were already small in number. Now there is a whole new audience and you have to start over. They like the simple things in dance. They like incredible show-off virtuosity; you can fill a house with that now. Because there is not a lot of money around if someone hires somebody they want to hire that thing that can fill the house. The whole thing has gotten simplified, it's like going back about fifty years or something. So the values in the dance world now are scewed towards the kinds of things that were slowly being eroded or worked away from in the sixties and seventies. The same things happened in (politics)... I mean we elected Reagan. There was a certain amount of moving to the left or moving towards some kind of idealism and newness in the world and then all the people who had been saying "oh that's weird. All these young kids ...", they finally realized that they had power and they moved right back in and they took it. I kept thinking about that as I watched the workshop today and thinking that that's what this work is about, how can you go to the opposite, the other side. In America you don't feel that. People are not working very hard to go to the other side. They are all living through on the side they know, holding on like crazy. It's a drag.

JOHN McCORMICK You spoke before about beginning on the margins and having to stay on the margins and of those aesthetic interests and choices, the things you were pursuing that have not been taken up, that people are not interested in anymore..I mean that could be seen as a measure of success to a degree. Perhaps there's success in setting up structures that can't be taken up by the mainstream very easily? **DUNN** That's a perverse question (laughs)! That is an issue I might address if I can't sleep at night. It is tricky and it's a very personal kind of thing where you're asking yourself... I mean, do you get proud about being not accepted? First your ego wants to go out and have everybody love what you do and then your ego can also get involved in making sure nobody loves it. They're, you know, very deep vectors. I must say, it has been upsetting, and I'm talking about audiences now, it is upsetting to see this kind of almost reactionary response. I'll just sketch what I mean in terms outside myself. I was in the Cunningham Company in the early seventies. He was still mostly getting all bad reviews and everybody would write complaining about John Cage's music and it wasn't always Cage's music, but all in that tradition. They would write half the article complaining about the music and they might say something about the dance, but they never really knew what to say about Merce's work; no-one ever found a way to write about it really. Then finally, who knows why or how exactly, there was some shift in the sensibilities and by 1975 he was on the cover of some magazine and by the eighties he began to be able to fill the City Centre in New York, for a week or whatever. And so he had a new audience, a coat and tie audience. Who are these people, how did they get there and what do they think? I don't know. I don't know them. Anyway, he became in modern dance terms, popular; he became very accepted. He began to get all kinds of awards and more money and the company expanded. It became a real cultural icon situation. On the one hand I was very happy about that

because I was always connected with Merce and felt behind him and his aesthetic and everything, but on the other hand I thought, I don't really know that this is really taking hold in terms of what it means. Not that I knew more than someone else but still I could feel something weird going on here. The critics are writing about it all the time but they are not really saying anything about his work and Merce doesn't talk about his work. He never says anything you would want to ask him about his work. So I thought it was such a strange, bizarre progression of acceptance. Then all of a sudden along come some younger choreographers who start dancing to music again in the traditional way, the old way, like Balanchine or early modern and using already known vocabulary, not of the Cunningham variety at all and the critics just swoon, they swoon. I felt this energy; they never really knew what Merce was about; they finally reluctantly took it on and then when this other opportunity came up they just ate it up and so did the public. There was this whole, almost a revolution, a whole new audience around this work which is a completely other lineage, completely outside this whole development. You can feel it now.

I had an experience of this myself. Someone in California told me this: that when John Cage died that there was a tremendous number of articles about him. I saw several articles myself which were very nice about him and his career, full of errors, but anyway. Apparently there were also a very large number of articles that were taking this opportunity to really put him down. It was like, Okay, he's dead now we can really say what we felt. That was the thing coming out in the press. I've always felt that was going on about Merce and John. I understand it in a way. Because there's something very, very strenuous about their attitudes; it's very, very hard to live with what they say. I think it is; it is for me. I'm not saying it's something that should be popular. Maybe there's your question. Maybe it can't be and maybe that's what great about it. I don't know. But underneath there's something very painful to me, personally, about what they made and I think it's because of what I intuit that it came from in them. So it doesn't surprise me that it's not popular. John Cage had a way of presenting his work so that he would just seduce you at the same time as he is presenting this absolutely unacceptable stuff. Merce was never that complicated about it. He didn't have that variety of personality to do that or he didn't want to. He's much more one dimensional. He's just this animal that wants to move and he wants to put out this kind of movement and he does it. He leaves all the rest to other people, including John. It is a very severe aesthetic.

LIBBY DEMPSTER I'm not familiar with your work, so this might be a completely inappropriate question, but it arises out of seeing your performance here last night. Earlier today you talked about a certain academicism in dance and the growing interest in historical modern dance. Is this piece your rejoinder to that development? I found it a very funny work; there seem to be all these dance historical references at play in it. Is it a response to that historicism and the interest in eclectism and quotation in some sectors of the contemporary dance scene? **DUNN** I'm really not very good at talking about my work but I've had that response before. I've worked several times in Portland, Oregon with university age people and on one occasion I performed a long solo that I'd been doing in the late

eighties for them. I've performed it many times and some parts have been laughed at, but they all laughed all the way through it! All of them, all the time, all the way through it! And I was really shocked, almost upset. Someone was saying last night I was milking the duet a little bit but usually if I start to get laughter I go the other way and try to just modify it so that it doesn't increase because I don't want it to become one dimensional, just be a joke or something. But with this group, I couldn't believe it, no matter how much I pulled back they just laughed more. I know some of these people quite well so after I talked to them and said So, what's going on here? And they said, Well, it's just that your dance makes fun of all other dance. I don't necessarily set out to do that, but it's true also that the piece that you mentioned – we made that piece in 1986, when I still wasn't very aware of what's now called multiculturalism in the United States. It has become something you read about in the paper every day, it's everywhere around you; it's on everyone's agenda to deal with in education, everywhere. Looking back on that piece and because of what some people said about it, I realized that I was unconsciously addressing those things. So, I'm not very conscious about it. I'm pretty slow about understanding that kind of thing. I'll just give you an example of how I relate to what we're doing here. It bears upon the way I've been teaching here this week, not the technique class, but the workshop. I'm preparing to make this piece in Perth. Now all I really understand is that I'm into willowy movement. I haven't done much willowy movement and it's really interesting to me to want to do that and also I feel as if I might be interested in some very, very, very slow images. Like ten people just standing there and doing that for a long time. But, I've never done that, had a movement choir image in my work but I'm getting very interested in that. Somehow something's happening that way. It may not turn out that way. My original impulse in work was to make as complicated a mess as I could and force the audience to choose to look where they had to, they couldn't see it all at once. **DEMPSTER** Well you start with an interest in willowy movement and willowy movement has all kinds of connotations. I think, precisely, of images of the early movement choirs; but your comments make a lot of sense of what I saw last night. There were different kinds of connections being made with the material and it didn't seem to me to be an exercise in eclecticism – that very self-conscious selection of movement material, taking some of this and some of that – that one sometimes sees. It didn't look like that was what was going on.

DUNN When you say that are you refering to this idea about post-modernism, that its eclectic? It's funny you know, again in terms of New York history, there is the generation that includes Cunningham, Nikolais, Ailey, Hawkins, Taylor, that was always considered a kind of middle generation of contemporary American choreographers. After that, it became more complicated, but the lineage I'd say became the Judson, but you have to understand that everything else went on, all the Graham heirs, everything else was going on, but it had a lot less press. Somehow the press gradually shifted. Well now it looks as if it shifted, it didn't really look that way then; but in the seventies it took hold of Judson and went on from there. That's how it happened. But the word postmodern finally got associated with the

Judson people later; by the seventies that word was starting to be used. And I never bothered because I wasn't paying attention to anything about criticism. But later I sort of got a little curious and I tryed to look up some definitions of postmodernism in other art forms and none of the stuff that they said about postmodernism in other art forms, like architecture and so on, made any sense to me – well it made a little bit of sense, but not very much – when I connected it with the people that I knew like Paxton, Dave Gordon and all those people. Actually I'm a little bit later generation, just slightly, half a generation. But anyway, so I didn't understand that. Especially, I thought it was bizarre that somebody would have a word for those people who to me were doing such different things, even though there is some common ground which I'm more aware of now in terms of reductiveness. But still, I thought that they were so different! But now there are younger people who consciously do what you are saying. I met a woman this summer. But she is about thirty, she is at least a generation after me. And she does this kind of thing. She says, yes, this is what I'm doing; I'm taking a little of this, a little of that, merging it in my body and that's my dance. It's not only that she's doing it; she's doing it consciously. So, I would say my version of that – I think I *do* do that, but I always used to try to make sure it wasn't visible. Because for me the choices were about four per second. I didn't want them visible. I wanted them subsumed in some other foregound material that was unknown to me too. That's like the workshop; that's like the incompletions that turn out to be something else and my intention is not registered in there I hope.

McCORMICK I think that one of my difficulties with last night's performance compared to the first night was that last night's left more room for projection from the audience onto the actual movement. It was as though the performance manner invited the audience to project images, or stories or to perceive frescoes. **DUNN** Really! You saw it twice, you saw it a second time? How was it different? **McCORMICK** What I am saying was that I was different too, but also that I felt more invited last night to project onto the piece. **DUNN** By us? **McCORMICK** I felt so, yes. **DUNN** Well that's fine, but I'm curious. You know, we just go out there and try and do the movement. We're not saying to one another: Tonight we'll make it funny! I wasn't going for anything like that. So, I'm curious. Perhaps it was because you had already seen it once.

McCORMICK It's quite possible. **DUNN** I think we were more relaxed last night. We were both letting down into the movement more, not so concerned about, Are we going to get through it, or something. I saw Tim's piece twice and I saw into it more, I saw it structurally more clearly. I felt that I took more imagery in with it ... I didn't laugh , though!

Grand Union improvisatory performance 1974
Steve Paxton, Douglass Dunn, David Gordon, Trisha Brown
Photograph by Robert Alexander

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