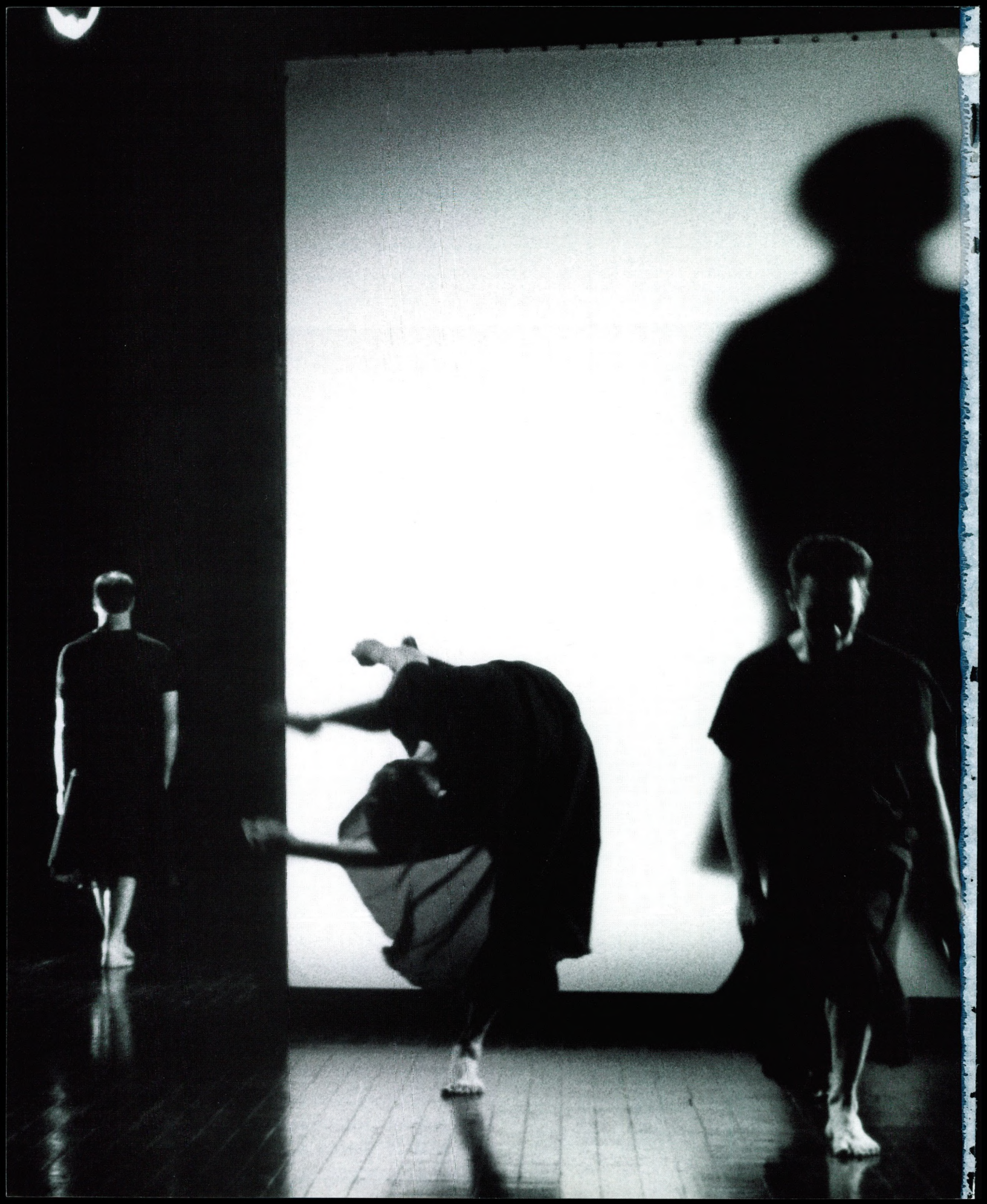


SUMMER 1994/95

Writings
on Dance
THINKING BODIES
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THINKING BODIES

EDITORS / PUBLISHERS Elizabeth Dempster Sally Gardner
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR Philipa Rothfield

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P r e f a c e

PHILIPA ROTHFIELD

This issue of *Writings on Dance* is both a partial and an extended documentation of a conference entitled, 'Thinking Bodies', which was held in Melbourne in October 1993. One of the aims of the conference was to stimulate an exchange around the bodily character of human being between those who work in academia and those who work in spheres of corporeal and artistic practice. Historically, the humanities has tended to emphasise thought as the main feature of what it is to be a human being, leaving the study of the body to science and medicine. Dancers, and other performing artists, in virtue of working more closely with their bodies and the bodies of others, are in a position to avoid making this mind-centred distortion. Speech and performance were two prevalent modes of exchange at the conference, although some work was presented visually (via slide projection), and through demonstration. In this issue, most of the spoken pieces are (re)presented in the form of writing, another mode again.

The question of performance arises not merely as a form of presentation but also as a mode and means of identity. Ros Diprose discusses the sense in which the self is given through bodily performance, the idea that identity is formed through our bodily actions. The suggestion is made that the very notion of identity, of a fixed and stable self, is a fiction, a myth made by culture, demanded by the law, and lived by us. The alternative being that what we are in virtue of our actions is a shifting, unfolding performance. The contrast between identity as fixity and stability on the one hand, and fluidity and change on the other is a remarkable one.

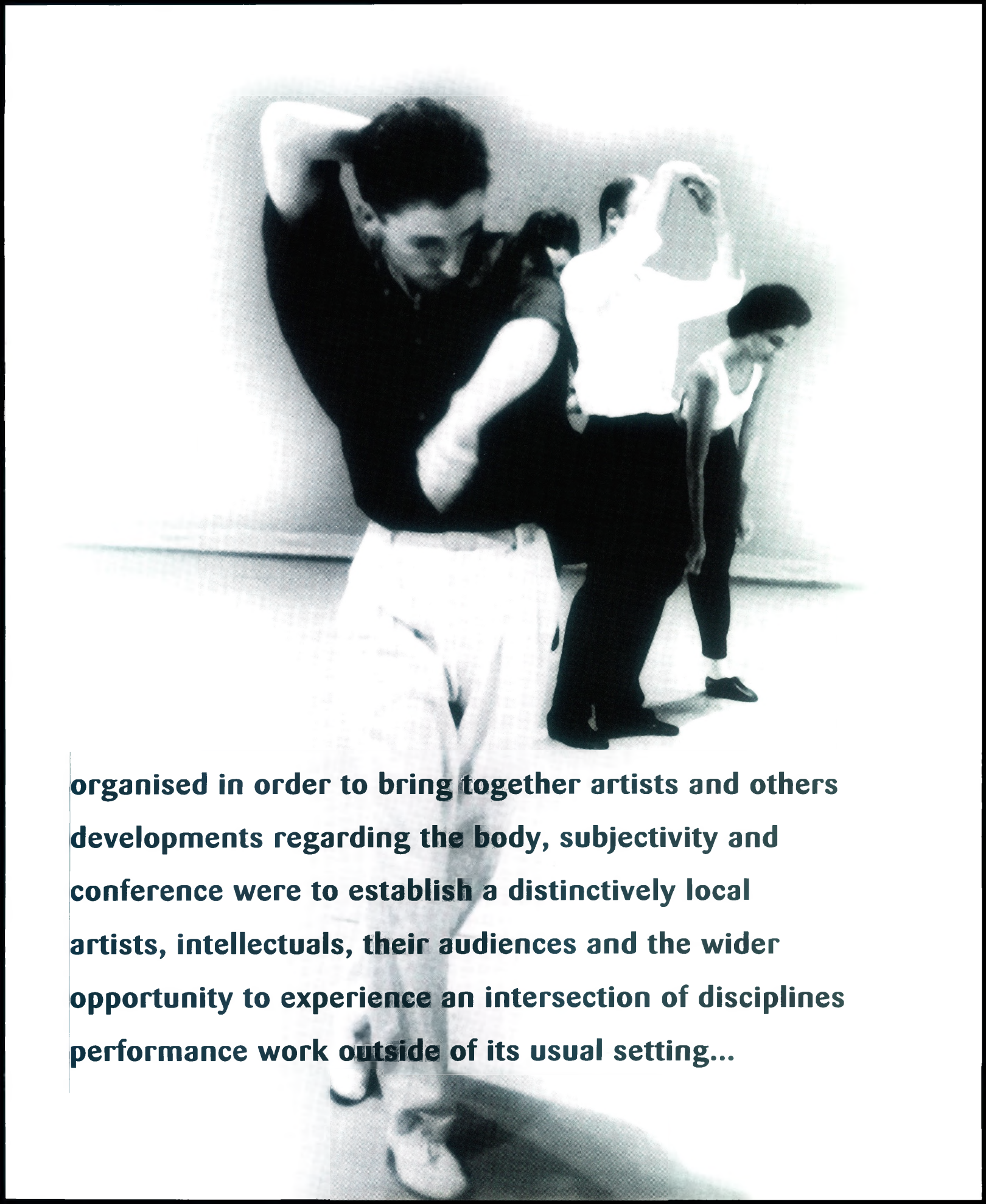
If the self is made through a bodily performance, what might we say about that performance? How are our bodily activities constrained by tradition, habit, technique or genre? What might we say about the action of dance? How does performance interact with bodily action? Zsuzanna Soboslay writes of 'the strength of muscle memory', its weight, not merely as a force of habit but as a material trace written over time upon the body's flesh. Those who have trained in a particular technique will know that it is not a simple thing to walk away from years of working and moving in certain ways. One does not dissolve a bodily history merely by willing it away. So, if we were to accept that identity is made through practice and performance, one would not necessarily say the ensuing performance is able to be absolutely anything at all. Anna Gibbs writes about the identity of performance as somewhere between spectator and work. The movement from

activated spectator to the work, and the mutual transformation which arises, calls into question the usual boundaries of art object and observer.

What place does history play in the determination of being? Sally Gardner writes of history, in this instance, the history of different genres of dance – Expressionist and Postmodern – and the kinds of subjectivity they each make possible. Here again, there is a sense of connexion between bodies and subjectivity made possible through the embodied practice of performance. Yet an identity is created which is also a division, an articulate differentiation of meaning, expression, dance and self. Even where an identity is posited (as in Cunningham’s notion that dancing is dancing), the very movement of dance takes it somewhere else.

The articulation of writing bodies is different from the practice and performance of moving bodies, and is different from photographic representation and verbal commentary. Yet these different modes also intersect and interact. In this present issue we have reproduced some of the written perspectives upon bodies and dance which were offered in one form or another at the ‘Thinking Bodies’ conference; we have transcribed a discussion session of one of the performance segments, and have reproduced some photographic material of the performance work. These contributions speak from a number of different places – philosophy, Labananalysis, prose, poetry, photography, and performance. But they also speak through and to one another in provocative ways. •

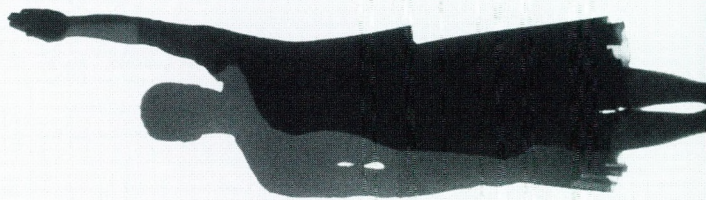
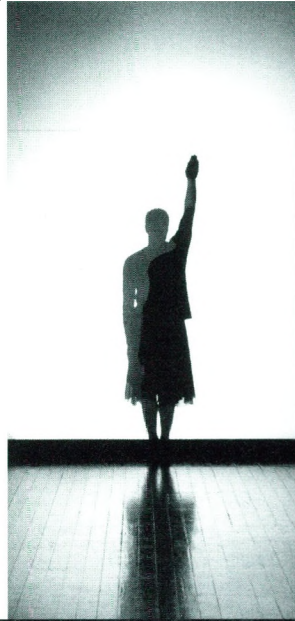
The ‘Thinking Bodies’ conference was interested in recent theoretical debates and representation. The objectives of the debate on the question of the body between community; and to give participants the and, thereby, to view dance and



**organised in order to bring together artists and others
developments regarding the body, subjectivity and
conference were to establish a distinctively local
artists, intellectuals, their audiences and the wider
opportunity to experience an intersection of disciplines
performance work outside of its usual setting...**

PRECEDING PAGE AND BELOW:
KEITH MARCH IN 'EUOTRASH'
DANCE EXCHANGE 1992
PHOTOGRAPH by LESLIE SOLAR

Performing



ROSALYN DIPROSE

This paper was first presented at the
Thinking Bodies conference and in deference to
the subtheme of the conference, 'thinking dancing bodies',
I began my paper with a passage from Nietzsche's
Thus Spake Zarathustra entitled 'The Other's Dancing Song':

Body - Identity

**Into your eyes I looked recently, O life; I saw gold blinking in your night-eye; my heart
stopped in delight; a golden boat I saw blinking on nocturnal waters, a golden rocking-boat,
sinking, drinking, and winking again. At my foot, frantic to dance, you cast a glance, a
laughing, questioning, melting rocking-glance; ... and my foot was already rocking with
dancing frenzy. / My heels twitched, then my toes hearkened to understand you, and rose;
for the dancer has his ear in his toes. / I leaped toward you, but you fled back from my
leap, and the tongue of your fleeting, flying hair licked me in its sweep. / Away from you I
leaped, and from your serpents' ire; and already you stood there, half turned, your eyes full
of desire. / With crooked glances you teach me – crooked ways; on crooked ways my foot
learns treachery. / I fear you near, I love you far; your flight lures me, your seeking cures
me: I suffer, but what would I not gladly suffer for you. ... / I dance after you, I follow
wherever your traces linger. Where are you? Give me your hand. Or only one finger ... /
I am weary of always being your sheepish shepherd. You witch, if I have so far sung to you,
now you shall cry. / Keeping time with my whip, you shall dance and cry! Or have I
forgotten the whip? Not I. (Z III 15 PP.224–6)**

As I am here to enhance rather than depart my limited knowledge of dance, this will be the last detailed reference I'll make to dance. But the quote opens the way for me to make some general comments about performance in a wider sense. My interest is in the performance of identity, the ability to transform the self through action, or the concept of having your ear in your toes, as Nietzsche would have it. But I am also interested in the limitations to this ability to perform yourself. The quote from Nietzsche not only suggests that the self is transformed and transported through the toes or the body. It also raises the question of the role of the other in the performance of self. Why, for example, are Nietzsche's (or Zarathustra's) toes hearkened to understand the other, why does the other cause him to dance? And why does he need to whip the other into submission in order to complete the dance? Before addressing these questions I need to say what I mean by performing body-identity, why I think the idea is important and hence why the performance artist may have something to say to the sociality which lies beyond the stage.

By performing body-identity I mean that the self does not have an identity except through action. The deed, act or performance is the self actualized. And as action implicates the body, then the self's identity is performed through the body. Self-identity is equivalent to body performance. The idea that the self is constituted in the act is at least as old as Hegel. But it is an idea which hasn't received much good press in the democracies of modernity. And this is because our morality and politics depends on another idea: that the self's identity is located in consciousness and this self-identical consciousness comes before, causes, and remains unchanged within the act. The idea that the

thinking self or the will causes the body to act in this way or that, makes the self responsible for the act. That you can be held accountable for your acts is the rock upon which morality and the law is built. The idea that the thinking self is given before, and remains unchanged through, the act and indeed through sequential actions, is the rock upon which the social contract is built. If it cannot be said that the self remains unchanged through a series of actions then promises cannot be made, contracts cannot be signed, no one could be taken at their word and, according to this view of things, social relations would have no basis. So, to claim that the self's identity is performed and reconstituted within the act is no trivial claim – it challenges the very foundation of the moral, social and political relations of modernity. But why would we want to?

To those who make this claim, to those who claim that the self is constituted in the act not before it, this other self is a fiction. A handy fiction which makes us equally responsible, accountable, calculable and consistent through time. In short boring. Human beings suffer from 'gravity', as Nietzsche puts it (GS 380). Under the weight of this view of the self, we are drawn back to who we think we are, we cling to our vocations and take ourselves too seriously. To illustrate what he thinks is our fate under the burden of this gravity, Nietzsche uses the parable of the tightrope walker who falls to his death when a jester jumps over him (Z Prologue 6–8) – the tightrope walker dies of his vocation in the wake of the fool who surpasses him. If we don't lighten up, remain open to change, become flexible, we will perish. For Nietzsche at least, the model of the self which makes us accountable for past acts and consistent over time

is itself responsible for the nihilism of modernity.

Clearly we haven't perished, nor has the moral, social and political system supported by this model of self-identity. However, much injustice has been done in its name. For it not only legislates against change in one self over time but also against difference between selves or, rather, against transgression of borders of identity and difference. It supports homophobia, sexism, racism, ageism, and a variety of other kinds of isms and phobias. How so? The law, moral and secular, is universal in treating us as if we are or should be the same. Or rather, in maintaining our institutional structures, the law divides people into different categories and regulates behaviour according to that expected for your proper place. It treats you well if you have the same identity as that privileged within these structures. The law operates with the model of self-identity just outlined: it assumes that the self is behind and the cause of actions and, on this basis, the body which acts is reduced to a passive material object which we push or cart around. The body is thought to signify or represent the self which is behind the action. Now if you cannot live up to the law or if you have a body which is different to that assumed by the law then you will be punished or disadvantaged on one of two grounds: on the grounds that the self has been taken over by the body and is no longer in control of and the cause of its actions or on the basis that the self is still the author of its actions but is itself faulty. So to live up to the law, or to reap the benefits of the self privileged under the law, you have two options: either change your mind or change your body.

We used to think that to get a better deal under the law, all we had to do was change our minds – change

our attitudes, desires and beliefs, our psychic identities, to match that desired under the law. But to pass you must have the proper body, the body which signifies the identity desired by the law. If you are poor don't steal, if you are black you would do better to pass as white; if a woman you would do better to pass as a man (forget the kids, put on your suit and whatever you do don't cry); if you have a few wrinkles get rid of them and if you're in a wheelchair then get up and walk.

That you have to change your body to live up to the law suggests, contrary to that other model of self-identity, that identity has something to do with body performance. That is, self-identity is not behind and the cause of the body's actions but an effect of the body's performance. Identity is an effect of body performance in two senses: we attribute an identity, personality or set of thoughts and attitudes to the other on the basis of their actions. And second, insofar as a body acts consistently over time and according to a category or identity proper to this body, this is an effect not of the doer behind the deed but of disciplinary production by the law. Let me expand this second point. According to Nietzsche, Foucault, Butler and others, body-identity is constituted through a repetition of acts, through habit formation. Under the guidance of the law and its regulatory moral and disciplinary mechanisms, bodies are trained to repeat what are considered good acts and to discard the undesirable. The law is an artist in naturalizing its categories of identity, in performing them through bodies.

One effect of this disciplinary production of identity is as I said, consistent performance. As Nietzsche puts it: people 'confound themselves with their role;

they become victims of their own good performance; they themselves have forgotten how much accidents, moods, and caprice disposed of them when the question of their "vocation" was decided – and how many other roles they might perhaps have been *able* to play; for now it is too late. Considered more deeply the role has actually become character; and art [has become] nature' (GS 356). Besides consistency, the other effect of the law's performance of body identity is the artifice of difference. We are trained to perform different body-identities according to that required by the place we occupy within the social structure.

As Judith Butler suggests, insofar as men are privileged in our culture and the family is central to the reproduction of our social institutions, then the disciplinary production of gender difference takes centre stage in the law's performance of body-identity. Our vocation in this respect is decided on the basis of our genitals or perhaps a strand of DNA. Around a fold of the skin is built a mask of habits, desires and gestures considered proper to that body. Insofar as disciplinary mechanisms are successful in reproducing female body identity, this will manifest in a woman's desire for men and motherhood and in the way she talks, walks, stands and even in how she throws. Femininity is a performance which, while a cultural production, takes on the appearance of nature through both the habit of it all and the fiction that this performance is caused by a self, soul or psyche said to lie behind it.

Besides inconsistency one thing the law cannot tolerate is ambiguity in identity and transgression of its categories. Transgression occurs when the body performance does not match the identity expected of or assigned to that body. Because it performs femininity across a male body, male to female transvestism is

such a transgression and transsexualism more so (female to male transvestism and transsexualism is not so transgressive for reasons we could discuss). Also transgressive is same sex desire, the hermaphrodite, the muscle bound East German woman athlete and Madonna dressed as a man gyrating over a submissive Asian woman. The law spares no money, time or energy in its effort to eliminate these ambiguities and transgressions. The Anglican Archbishop of Adelaide insists that Madonna's concert be banned and the Women's Weekly is outraged. The International Olympic Committee wheels out its chromosome tests. While these are obvious arms of the law, even the most politically correct of us are equally guilty of policing identity. Because the law performs identity through us, through our bodies, it does not need to show its hand. It needs only these bodies for its work to be done. So the sign goes up outside a lesbian bar: 'Women only; Lesbians only; Women-born woman only; genetic female dykes only; no boys over the age of 12'. Or, in 'The Crying Game' Fergus, despite his best intentions, his love and his pacifism, throws up when Lil is naked. And even I am shocked at Madonna's dance: not because dressed as a man she seduces another woman, but because the other woman is Asian.

We keep body-identity in its place not just because the categories of difference uphold our social institutions but because, and in virtue of these, any ambiguity in the other's difference threatens the security of our own identity. It is the other's laughter, the other's questioning which causes Zarathustra to dance. And only if the other is brought to heel, made to cry, and forced to keep time with the whip, can Zarathustra rest in peace. Ambiguity and transgres-

sion of categories of body identity is threatening because it exposes that identity is art not nature. If you cannot be sure of the other's performance, if identity is not natural, than you cannot be sure of your own. Here I can offer a diagnosis of my response to Madonna's performance: my discomfort at watching the oriental other submit to the time of the whip, reveals that my preference for the untouchable exotic is equally reductive of the other's identity and no less a foundation for my own (western) self-image. We avert our eyes or efface that which confounds the assumption that identity and difference are natural and that everything, including ourselves, is in its proper place. And not only does the law work through us to keep the other in place we also work on ourselves. The surgeon does not force the transsexual to match her genitals with her body performance. The transsexual presents herself willingly to the surgeon's knife.

Perhaps none of this would matter if everything ended happily in its proper place. But as Nietzsche suggests, we confound ourselves with our 'good performance'. There is no more of a secure place for the transsexual after the operation than there was before. Or, taking Foucault's case of Herculine Barbin the 19th century French hermaphrodite. Here, ambiguity is removed not by matching genitals with performance but by matching performance with what science determines is the sex of the genitals. Despite the ambiguity of Barbin's genitals it was decided shortly after birth that Barbin was more a girl than a boy. She was raised as a girl, was educated in a convent school for girls and performed her femininity as well as any of us could. However, at the age of twenty (in what amounted to a serious failure of performance) she took a woman lover . After confessing this to her

doctor and priest, it was decided on legal and moral grounds, that Barbin was in fact a man. With this she was required by law to dress as a man and to exercise the political rights and economic privileges enjoyed by men at the time. After a period of living in anger, misery and isolation, Barbin killed herself. Of course there are many more far less dramatic instances of the misery the policing of identity causes. We may not die of boredom but we will confound ourselves and suffer from our performance. For, to a certain extent none of us can live up to the law.

So how do we deal with the law's performance of body-identity and the marginalization of difference and ambiguity it effects? By the same means – performance. But, some would say, a certain kind of performance. A flexible, self-affirming, lighthearted performance. To quote Nietzsche again: 'Precisely because we are at bottom grave and serious human beings – really, more weights than human beings – nothing does us as much good as a fool's cap; we need it in relation to ourselves – we need all exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish and blissful art lest we lose the freedom above things that our ideal demands' (GS 107) To turn nature back into art we need to give ourselves style against the law. Or, as Foucault puts it, we need to create ourselves as works of art without reference to the disciplinary moral code. Rather than securing our own identity by saying no to the other's ambiguity we must practice an aesthetics of existence on ourselves.

The importance of the idea that identity is a body performance, and that this is how the law is naturalized, cannot be overstated. However, I question the extent of the creativity implied in an aesthetics of existence, of our ability to re-perform identity against

the law. The limits to our creativity are determined by where we think the ability to dance comes from. If we think that identity is performed through the body without conscious intervention, if it is a material production, then we cannot recreate ourselves by changing our mind. Neither Nietzsche or Foucault can take this path given that for them there is no consciousness separate from and the cause of the body's actions. While Foucault's aesthetics of existence may not depend on a pre-social mind, it does depend, as Butler points out, upon the existence of a multiplicity of bodily pleasures which have somehow escaped the law's determinations. It is on the basis of using these pleasures that, according to Foucault, one can build up a stylistic performance. But he provides no account of how this bodily multiplicity managed to escape social production in the first place. In fact the very idea runs against his earlier work on disciplinary power which implies that no body escapes the work of the law.

Butler provides her own account of the origin and possibility of stylistic performance. She suggests that we can subvert strict categories of identity and so add style to our existence, because the production of identity by the law is itself unstable. Using gender identity as her focus she argues that because identity is actualized as it is performed, rather than being caused by an inner essence, identity is open to disruption. It is open to disruption because it is constituted through a repetition of acts: a repetition of the acts of others and a repetition of these imitations by ourselves over time. Identity is parody or imitation without an authentic original. And she suggests there is always difference in repetition. That is, the repeated act is always slightly different to the prior instance of its

performance because of the different social context in which it is performed. This disjunction between the meaning of repeated acts means that one's identity is always open to change. To quote Butler: 'Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts* ... The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction' (pp.140-1). Butler instances drag as a kind of parody which exposes gender identity as a tenuous construction. But she also thinks the mundane can be disruptive. For her, style or political resistance to the policing of correct identity, comes from the disjunctions inherent in body performance, not, as Foucault would seem to have it, from a multiplicity of body pleasures which have somehow escaped the normalizing social code.

While I think Butler's is an exceptional thesis which overcomes some of the problems of a Nietzschean aesthetics, it has itself suffered from parody. Under the weight of American individualism and identity politics her critical intervention into disciplinary production of body-identity has tended to be reduced to a superficial pluralism. Jacquelyn Zita, for example, in her essay on 'Male Lesbians and the Postmodernist Body' chastises Butler for trivialising identity politics by advocating replacing two sexed identities with many ways of inhabiting a body. In the light of Butler's thesis, says Zita, the self-titled 'male lesbian', who is ostracized by the lesbian community

for obvious reasons, would no longer have to claim that his male body signifies a female or rather lesbian identity: 'he could become a "lesbian-identified-non-lesbian-hating-male" who loves his own body and acknowledges his heterosexual privilege' (p.123). Or to avoid the hostility a female lesbian could attract because she has sex with a man to conceive a child, she could claim her identity as a female-lesbian-gay-male-loving-mother. While I think this is a serious misreading of Butler's analysis of performing gender, it does lend itself to such reductions. The reason is that, for the most part, there are only two terms in her account: the performing body and the law. And as the performing body in its singularity disrupts its own identity through repetition, then it can be said to be open to becoming anything at all. With this, there are as many identities as there are bodies and each identity is only limited by the acts it can invent. However, that performance could be so free is itself suspect and there is nothing to stop another sign going up on the door: only female-lesbian-gay-male-loving-mothers allowed. And there is nothing to stop the law from tearing it down. Body performance is no more open to ambiguity and therefore no less oppressive in this proliferation of the law's categories from two groups to many single bodies.

There is a third term forgotten in this haste to liberate ourselves from the law. Identity is ambiguous because body performance is never singular. And body performance is never singular because between the body and the law is the other. I have already suggested that it is the other who causes the dance. I want to also argue that, as we dance with the other, identity is not only ambiguous and open to change but limited in its potential.

For Merleau-Ponty, for example, your body-identity is never individual: it is fundamentally intersubjective and limited by your social and familial situation. Further, it is because the body is constituted in relation to others, that it is ambiguous and can act at all. Insofar as any body claims absolute self-identity, by building a partition between their body and the body of the other, this ambiguity is suppressed in favour of rigid identity. In 'The Child's Relations with Others', he argues that the self does not carry, in isolation from others, a distinction between the inside and outside of itself, between external perceptions (the extroceptive/objective body as it is seen and touched by others) and introspective perceptions (the phenomenal body as it is lived, feels, sees and touches). The distinction between self and other, and hence consciousness, is based on a difference between the experience of one's own body and the body of the other. This occurs through recognizing that one's body is an object for another and therefore distinct from the other. However, the distinction from the other cannot be absolute. Through objectification of one's body by another, a system of indistinction is established between my own body as it feels to me, its visual or objectified image and the body of the other. Insofar as the child identifies with its image of the other's image of itself, it cannot easily distinguish between what it lives, what the other lives and what it perceives the other is doing. This tripartite system is one of 'syncretic sociability': the transfer of movements and gestures between dispersed bodies.

So, the emergence of a body we can call our own, while based on objectification by and therefore a distinction from others, occurs through the organization of the body in reciprocal relation to others. And

this constitution of the body-subject through the other occurs, not by conscious intervention, but by mimesis and 'transitivism': by identification with others and by the imitation and projection of gestures. While this indistinction between self and other is reduced by saying 'I', by taking up one point of view as the subject of language, the structure of language is such that each person, while being an 'I' for themselves, is also a 'you' for others. As the self, as a lived body remains caught between subject and object, syncretic sociability structures an adult's embodied existence even with a lived distance between self and other. Hence we cry at the movies even though we sit apart from the action. And we turn into our partners, and even our dogs, just through dwelling with them.

There are two points to be made in the light of this account of performing body-identity. The first is that I only have an identity because my body is given to, and takes place in, the world of the other's body as they live from and with me. I act because, as Nietzsche put it, 'my toes hearkened to understand you' and my toes hearkened to understand you because it is through you that my body-identity is constituted. As my body is always already opened onto the world and the other, then the relation between my body, the other and the world is ambiguous and open to possibilities. In keeping with the structure of syncretic sociability established in childhood, this movement towards the other and the world has two sides. I structure the situation by the (non-conscious) projection of my body onto the world. Through movement I incorporate objects and others within the situation and resolve its ambiguity according to the project at hand. I drive a car in this way. Not by consciously calculating the distance between my body, the car and the gate-

way. But by projecting my body (the gestures of which have been built up through mimesis and repetition) onto the world and making it part of my body space. By incorporating the car and breathing in I might make it through. The other side of the story is that my body-identity is reconstituted through the performance. The performance polarizes and gathers together the body, its senses and extremities are unified and certain aspects privileged depending on the task being carried out.

Method actors will be familiar with this re-constitution of the body through the other. By the imitation and repetition of the gestures of a character, you almost become that character in the way you walk, talk and stand. And depending on the commitment to the performance and the duration of the play or the filming, it can take some time to undo the changes that performance has effected. Robert De Niro's performance in 'Awakenings' is exemplary of this phenomenon. De Niro had to play Leonard, a patient suffering from a catatonic form of Parkinsonism. His performance carried so much depth and detail that Oliver Sacks, the neurophysiologist who supervised the filming, was concerned he would contract the disease. Sacks noted later: 'I knew how deeply he might identify with the characters he portrayed, but I had to wonder now how *neurologically* deep he might go – whether he might actually, in his acting, *become* Parkinsonian, or at least somehow duplicate the neurological state of the patient. Does acting like this, I wondered, actually alter the nervous system' (p.383). A question worth taking seriously.

To summarise the first point: as bodies are constituted and live as an interworld of potentiality opened onto others, we have no means of 'knowing' or

becoming a body other than through a familiar dwelling-with-others in the world. In claiming a singular body-identity I effectively steal from the other, cut off my potentialities for existence and efface the ambiguity of the other's difference. For, as Irigaray puts it, 'one does not move without the other'.

The second point to be made about this account of body performance is that what you can become is limited by the social history of your body. The lived body, which is the self, is socially constituted: it is built from the invasion of the self by the gestures of others who, by referring to other others, are already social beings. The conducts which constitute the body subject and, hence, its potential projects and modes of being will vary depending on with whom it associates and under what rules. The law works through the other with whom you dwell. So our 'freedom' (which is never absolute) is not limited by others taking over control of our body, but by 'the lessening of the tolerance allowed by the bodily and institutional data of our lives'. (*Phenomenology of Perception* p.454) Our tolerance to embodied projects, and hence what we are, is limited by the style of our embodied existence, a style subject to 'sedimentation' according to the institutional setting in which it is constituted (p.441). While no body engaged in a project simply repeats identity, no body is free to create itself and its world anew. To claim otherwise, to claim you can become whatever you want in your singularity, is to return to the moralism of liberal individualism which makes you fully accountable for your acts, for what you are, on the grounds that you could have acted otherwise. If you could have acted otherwise then you could have lived up to the identity assigned you under the law. Implying the possibility of freedom in a

singular identity further entrenches the law, the law that cannot tolerate the dance.

'Keeping time with my whip, you shall dance and cry! Or have I forgotten the whip? Not I!'

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Contemplating the Shape

It is in the nature of our molecules to dance:
why then at times can't we?

*THINKING WHAT I MOVE, MOVING WHAT I DON'T YET THINK, SPEAK-
ING THE BODY THAT I DONT YET KNOW..., FEARING MOVEMENT, MOV-
ING FEAR, SHAKING AWAKE, WAKING TO SCREAM,....TWIXT CUP AND
LIP I SLIP CAN'T MOVE LET SLIP WHAT'S NOT BEEN SEEN*

SPEAK, THINKING BODY [AN OXYMORON?]

.....

I:

It's a delicate and interesting situation for Sener (to re-stage works by Louis Falco), complicated by his own ventures as a choreographer. The strength of muscle memory makes it hard to shake off characteristic movement responses that become instinctive over a long creative association, in his case, going back to 1978.

[Jill Sykes, 'The arc of Falco's covenant', *SMH* Friday April 22, 1994; p.24]

.....

1978: in training to be a high-school graduate, to be a graduate certified in speaking other people's voices and painting intellectually astute canvasses, I remember the distinct feeling, as the canvas burnt orange under my finishing brush, a feeling of incredible loss. I burnt the portrait of Einstein that for godsake I submitted for assessment in my final year.

of an Egg

by ZSUZSANNA SOBOSLAY

I carried on writing essays and abandoning artwork for many many years: in both practices [one of continuity, one discontinuous], the memory of those other voices, of all that training and shaping dared, were present – no matter how aware I was, how strong the rebellion, how deep the pain of loss – as a prophylaxis that, despite the accident or intention that initially severed its muscle from my bone, the nerves knew the connection and were willed to it, against any will of my own.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN the master betrays you yet you still find the master in your bones?

And even after another dozen years, my love and I, conscious of who distinctly we are, are yet drawn into roles we never believed in, always loathed, swore never to replicate. Suddenly, rising from the bed, or the kitchen, or the garden where we'd been throwing pumpkins at each other as vegetable ammunition for our fury (our vegetable love), we'd think, how did this happen? This..*automation*, that a part of each of us, tho' totally rejecting, also somehow believed in enough for it to give shape to action?

WE ASSUME, when we don't really think about it, that we are unified subjects, but even on this level of muscle memory, of masters we know well enough to rebel against, we simply cannot be. Rather, we must be levels and striations of acceptance and rejection; a composite at any one time, foregrounding into one pattern, or another (depending on how we are looking)..

This is not about nostalgia. Nostalgia is myopic.

Nor is it about desire:

for, whether it is in the *singular*—missing the needs in your lover's body because of one's own need for love—

or in the *collective* – interpreting, in spite of its remains, the ancient Maya as *peaceable* *1)

[*because* of the Zeitgeist, because it is 1923 and the rest of the world's at war and the archaeologist's psyche needs, amongst the rubble tumbled cool and distant (as against the waste rubble still burning patriotic ire), a break from the wild fluctuations of human relationship, to find a predecessor who practised peace],

Desire kills perception.

As for **Nostalgia**, it creates

An impossible past held still in time:

— lace kept in the gas lamplight

— a father's memory kept from passing over into death

— a poet in exile from a brutal regime, fixated on the lost ground *2)

[— 'tho the Order's matrix is only made solid, *authoritative* by force of repetition, *its smell* becomes enough to silence you...]

We are intersections of the timeless with time.....a lifting of the possible through the probable*3);

but desire keeps us from the possible. Eats first, morals after, says Brecht: hungers, fears, impede; we try to trace new resonance, but instead *keep dumb* the parts held still.

THE POSSIBLE is *not* best seen by simply tracking history.

Not best – unless one is also trained *to sense* differently.

To make new dance,

The striations along which we are and are not yet, but could be woven need be

(firstly) recognised, then

chosen, recombined..

..questioning *Rule*..

.....

.....

II: CITIZEN CANED

IN Greek tragedy we are taught the Personal is an aberration (a disordering hunger, jealousy, need, lust, revenge), something which of its nature is disruptive to the state, and hence to be vacuumed out under the laws of hubris in order to return to the State its *equilibrium* –

- never, that the Way of Things creates the discrepancy that causes the eruption in the first place:
- as if Jason were a bit naughty, fucking whom he wanted,
but not that his betrayal were as great as the betrayal of any army
- as if Oedipus had an issue that was only his small pathology,
but not that the state always anyway somehow fucked its mother

What is this, *State*, but an ordering, arbitrary but to the political power of exchange and ordering relations

*whilst the wolf howls on the mountainside,
knowing a different food...*

CONSTRUCTION INVITES ITS SHADOWS.....

So unnerving, the baby's wriggle in the board-meeting; the cry relegated to the powder-room...

The Crown of the citadel is the (a)spire
[(a)spirant: the (silent) thing to which we reach], the
Overseer, place of authority...

[as is the mansion on the hill]

[as is the manor of the factory owner]

..[a pyre....]

– Why is it then you dream the city burns?

* * *

.....

Culturally, the shadow is the alogical, the circular, the circuitous, the feminine sexual, the angry animus...Some of these aspects are perfectly acceptable within an art form. At times, even stringently codified, such as the terrifying *Hanya* [jealous woman] in Japanese Kabuki.

In other contexts, accepted not at all, but turned into a Scapegoat *4). [Which all means...some can produce the darkness in their art, but won't tolerate it in their in-laws...]

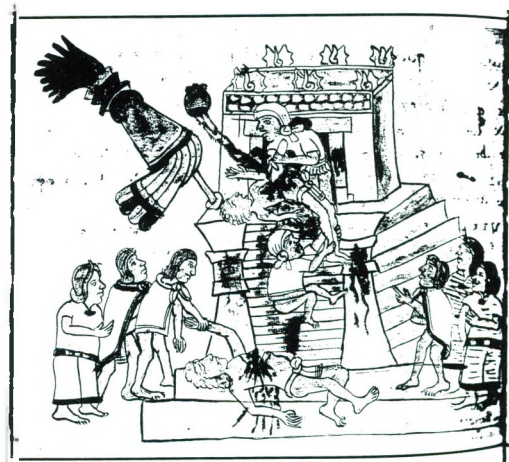
.....

A city is not held in perpetual midday..
A city which does not *plan* for twilight becomes.....
cavernous, sleazy, discarded....at night, when the
shadows are longest

the parts in shade, not
reflected amongst the high-rise (sand-pit, mud-pool, den)
invite destruction—waiting to erupt from 'neath the bitumen...

You are a CITIZEN to order; your order is valued; but what you may *chance* across, *un/earth, un/till,*

is that which does not
belong to the order of the hill.....



III: **INERTIA, IMMOBILITY, INVISIBILITY.....**

or, how the fairies sometimes stop dancing on the edge of the pin....

A DISRUPTIVE ARCHAEOLOGY...

How do I negotiate with silent parts?

How do I collaborate with myself and my own relational differences, and preclude other experiences by my habits of knowing “how” to move

value

“work”

articulateness

why housepainting is valuable rehearsal time...

In theatre, there is a hell of a lot of talk of negotiating with your director, choreographer, wardrobe master; scenic artist, co-performer, dramaturg; what of the other parts of you not called on before?

the howl, the wind, the thunderstorm in the beef, acid in the cream.

dwarf tap-dancing at the foot of the spine, nightmare in the mountain,

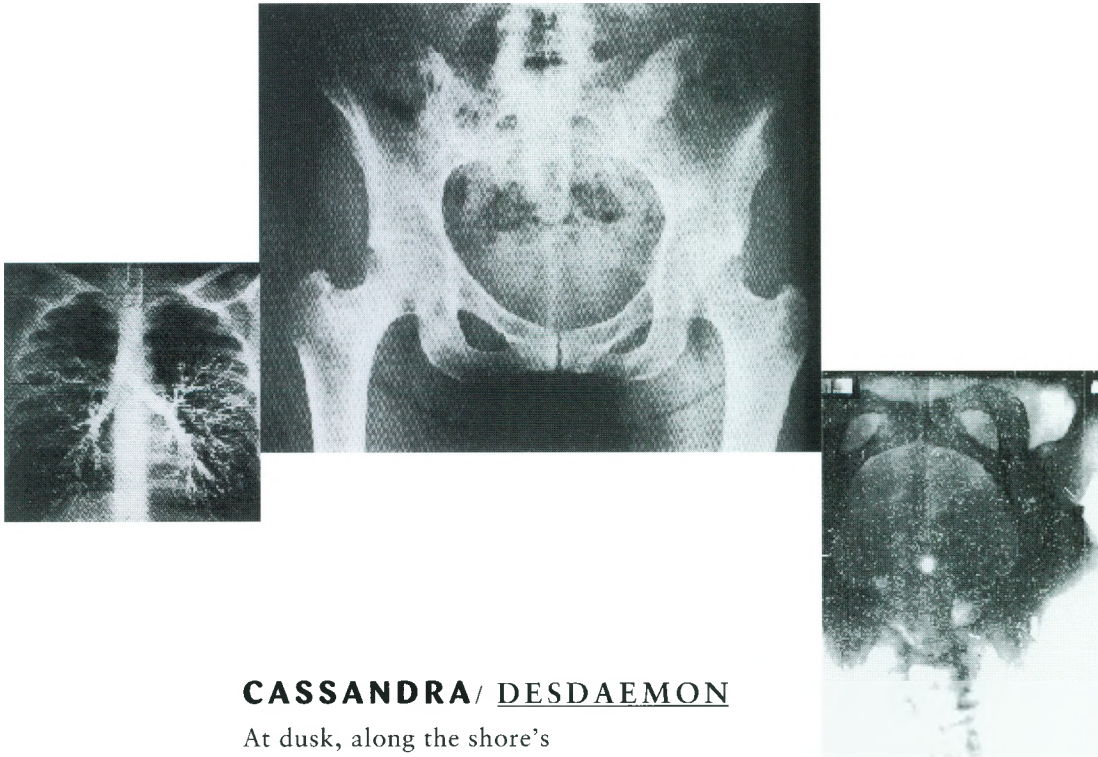
the vague troubled flutterings beneath your eyelids in a dream;

the parts in grief which cried forty nights, wet the streets forty days, as the only way they knew how to begin to speak— your DNA shaken out and howling to the world...

*What then? Can these new molecules dance? How do you ask them to? Can they fit in with your training, with the way your muscles already move? Do they belong to the circle, of the hand reaching behind to grasp the other hand, or do they belong to the already-known story of the line? Have you ever asked, how far the line goes on, waited to see what might happen once the action’s finished, begun to talk with the snicker or ache as you walk off the stage, the parts of you not persuaded by the performance.*5*

Can you return to the same body. And if you can't, how do you tickle that different body into motion; and how do you describe what you see, without giving them second place, the positives in the x-ray dancing,?

(in the chasm, identity confronts itself as somewhere having agreed to its own crippling...)



CASSANDRA / DESDAEMON

At dusk, along the shore's
roar, she walks, pegging out her
visions/knowledge of the future and her
history,
mouthing
it, but knowing the
 cord around the throat/
Seeing, but re-
 membering the gouging of her eyes

and can only
croak

On the
bed, at the point of
betrayal, she sees the way she
'blush'd at herself' spoke within
door asked Lieutenants to
ameliorate told Emilia to
make her bed and disappear and re-
members what she
failed to feel: wolf in her
blood,
dogs beneath her skin..

Oh who hath done this deed?

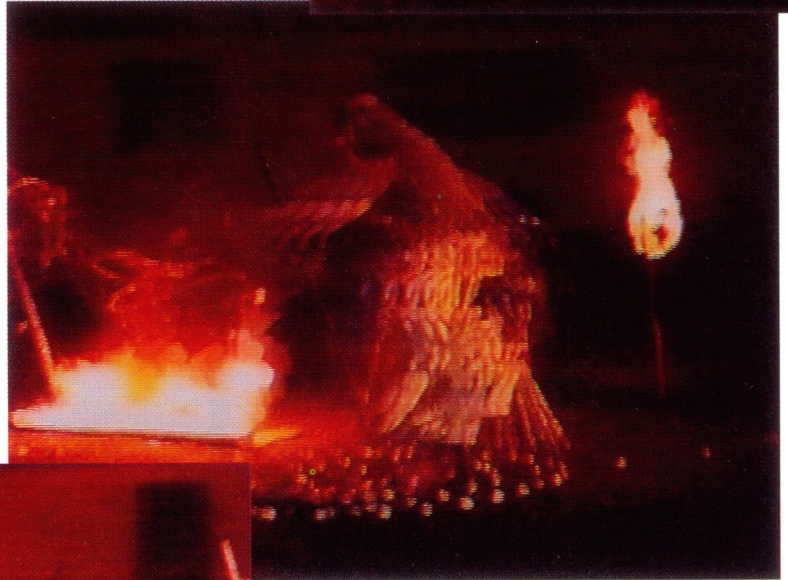
*

At the point of
transparency, when the willow
neglects its stretching promise and her
skin falls in, she

knows:

'I myself'

the wrapped anatomy
the silencing of prediction
the being bought by role
the border where one faints to the knowledge of
complicity in beauty, duty and silence....



Desdaemon

Performed at Sidetrack Theatre's
Contemporary Performance Week
October 1993



IV: MOUTHWASH AND DAUGHTERS

In *King Lear*, the barter at the play's opening— the division of land, with a gold coin in exchange for words – demands value for exchange value as a means of securing homage. As if homage *can* be secure as it slips along that fearful member, the tongue, through that fearful orifice, the mouth!

– And a daughter's mouth, so terrible! What is a daughter at the age of her dowry? When her body truly shapes itself, asserts itself as Other, what with the rounding of its breasts and breaking of its waters, flooding the banks of filial obligation, laying the streambed for another, many others, an opening that perhaps for the first time hints towards other penetrations, negotiations; this...crisis of re-negotiation, now that the daughter can speak other allegiances.

...therefore beseech you
To avert your liking a more **worthier** way,
Than on a wretch whom Nature is **asham'd**
Almost to acknowledge hers.
(Lear, *King Lear*., I.i.)

– *For whom should she speak?* The body out of which her tongue so shockingly protrudes, knowing (or even if perhaps only yet guessing) its *multiple filiations*?

V: PELVIS AFLAME.

'This is Nature,' he says. 'Like a rock, the sea.' [The workshop Teacher was once the Great Man's left-hand man.>(*6) She understands: she's a kindly person, knows her countryside, and besides has been doing Butoh for quite some time and has *heard the shoreline sing*..

But this is Nature bought by a very *particular* God. Within two days she has completely lost track of her pelvis and feet, her head starts to swarm ; she in fact has to withdraw because of an unknown long-standing uterine infection that becomes urgent because the energies of this work go so completely against her needs.

The training draws to a Roman Catholic god of the upper and outer realm, as understood within a patriarchal Middle European tradition. The exercises involve prolonged and consistent upward and forward thrusting movements of the pelvis*7), coupled with a pushing upward of the chest to its utmost convexity (as if the heart, yearning for heaven, is pulled by a string), heightened in one exercise which involves the yoga cobra position until you reach what the teacher calls 'the Impossible'.

The Impossible, the aspiration, the *authority* of the work has distinct co-ordinates. This work does not touch god or goddess of the labyrinth, the underworld. If one creates dance by dancing with the 'other'*8) then the Other can be trapped to its symbiotic relation in a grid that remains within *known* oppositions. God mediates the Universal body. She has learnt not to be complacent about ideals.

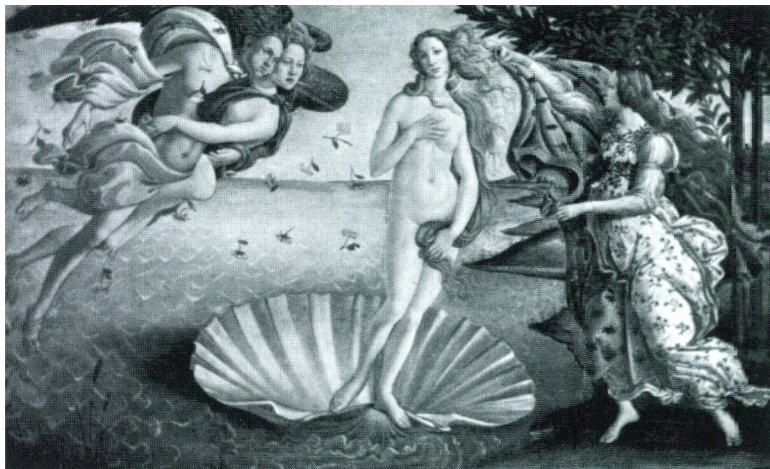
I dream:

of a family of women passing down anorexia – who is told and who left uninformed, who protected from the knowledge of cervical cancer, who told of who's love affairs but to whom it is kept secret; in short, what hungers and knowledges are neglected so that the flint in each woman's belly is kept away from the flare

And in the dream, I no longer agree to the symptom—the detachment of telling about the hunger but neglecting to feel it where it can know itself and blast away the veil and turn...

[And to cap it off, he asks, "What theatre *company* do you belong to?"]

.....



VI: 'PRESENCE'

Analytic language is good at questioning *actual* bodies, defining the *limits* of capacity, dealing with where we and the concepts we use have always already been bought by a codification that is marked temporally, culturally, physiologically, spiritually, politically.

But training is an examination of *possible* bodies: teachers speak of preparing a readiness *9) to open to the lapse, the leap, the non-ordinary, *the surprise* that constantly is the experience of working theatre.

[So, the actor enters the stage, a heightened signifier, presenting to our senses....

What?

– the tool (presence); the established (text; score); the becoming (all that is risked/incomplete)...]

Contemporary theory, so sceptical of performance 'givens' such as 'centre', 'self' and 'authenticity' argue against a barbaric authority*10); but this is not the vulnerable authority that a performer draws on in performance.

One can be authentic, but only to what is passing. In the continuum of time, if an event has already happened/is about to happen, according to where you are standing in the curve of land or space then what is dead is still alive; what is future is already present(if your senses can tune far enough....)

In every (re)presentation, there is distinction, and similarity: distinction from the last moment, from yesterday's body; similarity, because the matrix on which risk is hung keeps its trace.

It is the complex intermingling of these dimensions, the aspect of choice amongst inevitability, that is what makes performance so very different from the barbaric authority against which theory depends and riles.

As in Balinese music, where every sound about to be played is sounded in the opening note of the gong, so, in training as a performer, you are training that *quality*, so that the moment you are on stage, *all possible notes are sounded..*

If you collapse the Other into you, both fields change: both the I and the thou are not definable or even sensible in the terms preceding the collapse.

Perhaps we make use of the Other to pass through to this other state that is always larger than either opposition.

VII: TERRAIN

But what languages keep track of this? Because of the shifting of our molecules, the co-ordinates of articulation intersecting sensation must shift as well...

When the text (linguistic or mobile) we use to inspire, describe, perceive, *above all* tries to keep its co-ordinates, its jewels, maintain its sphere, *it cannot keep up with what happens in performance [house swept by fire]*. Above all it cannot show the way to *sense* the inverse, obverse, new smell.

Deconstruction in particular shares a propensity with psychoanalysis in that, whilst more than adequate in dealing with the failures of language, the failures of civilisation (disjuncture between word and thing, authority of one order above others), it never deals sufficiently *with commitment, focus, embodiment, the meeting...*

We need to search out new quadrants of the Impossible...by another path, another language. Not the one you already know – *and not the opposite you already know, either*. We have to ask differently. Touch differently. Sense more. Be on the lookout to debunk hierarchies of sensation, pride in our language, prejudice in our practice.

[If we end the tyrannies of legitimacy, what can open to us?]

Questioning, shaping, ideology, training, habits of seeing (and the languages seeking to articulate these), like maps of meridians for acupuncture, organs for endocrinology, and of the jaw for the dentist, each have their use, but are limited by the *sensibilities* which imagined them. Like conceiving of only one word for snow *because of the limits of our landscape*, the limits of our looking.

NO LANGUAGE, MAP OR DIAGRAM EXISTS which can contain the possible realm; and because of this, what we are obliged to do is journey through as many different languages, seek out different maps, accompanied by a continuous awakening to the sensibilities that are cues to the world *as it fluctuates* in order to do justice to the thinking body.

As science discovered long ago, the ability to conceive of, *dream* of more is the most important faculty in the recognition and bringing to shape of new form.

– *what is not awake yet?*

When the landscape collapses, *Fall in.*
because, at the other
end of this chasm, you will find:

- a body
- a landscape
- something which will support you *11)
- beyond earthquake, flood, or landslide



29. *K'an / The Abysmal (Water)*



AND BE PATIENT WITH EGGS

*There is an
extern intern edge
there is a relationship between the three, and, always, the possible shape of what will
happen when the egg breaks*

What is the answer? asks Gertrude Stein on her deathbed. Alice Toklas can't reply.
Then what is the question?

before she is made into a souffle

*There is an apple in one palm and pear in the other
(and know that the third hand is also clapping) --*

EXPAND YOUR DIMENSION.

Expand your horizon to the girth of the globe.

NOTES

- *1) SBS documentary, Archaeology programme, March 1994 cf. *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan where the daughter lets her own blood for the soup to save her dying mother. [Cf. also Marion Woodman's *Addiction to Perfection* on contemporary anorexic women, who meld the analogue between 'real' and symbolic representations into literal enactment of and identification with their mythological role.]
- *2) The exile from a land –torn from the ground; a mandrake root howling 'Macbeth' – loses contact with the shifting ground in a way that those still left in the old country do not (*soil-memory*: the knowledge of the feet is slowest to fade). This is why an exile often deals in absolutes. (see also *9) below)
- *3) [*Aufhebung*: 'a relation between two terms where the second at once annuls the first and lifts it into a higher sphere of existence' (Derrida after Hegel, in *Writing and Difference*)], *At each instant, the shifting paradigm pulls a different field of meaning through the syntagm* leaving a trace of the momentary intersection of the timeless with time.
- *4) Sylvia Brinton Perera, *The Meaning of the Scapegoat Archetype*, p.103.]
- *5) 'we confound ourselves with our good performance' Nietzsche, via Ros Diprose, *Thinking Bodies* Conference, Melbourne, October 1993
- *6) Zigmunc Molik workshop at Sidetrack, Marrickville, October 1993. Molik was one of the original founder-members of Jerzy Grotowski's Polish Theatre Laboratorium.
- *7) The Great Man's company was notably an all-male troupe, founded in the nineteen-sixties in Central Europe..
- *8) Ros Diprose, *Thinking Bodies* Conference,
- *9) cf. Grotowski, setting out to 'eradicate resistances' [*Towards a Poor Theatre*]; Cecily Berry to eliminate that which interferes or impedes [Peter Brook's introduction to her *Voice and the Actor*]
- *10) (cf *2) above) Barbarism usurps consideration of the shifting differences of others—a still point in a stagnant world—forgetting that its authority is at the expense of a thousand fluctuating needs. Controlling the shape of experience, flattening the sphere. Freezes all but its own nature, to keep in check, remain invulnerable, Ironically, the stillness it induces is *the most volatile*: crushing what else might hover, hushing a roaring world.
(Cf. T.S.Eliot's 'still point in a *turning* world', where authority is housed within a sphere: 'Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts, / Not that only, but the co-existence' where 'the end and the beginning were always there / ... / And all is always now'. ['Burnt Norton'; *Four Quartets*].)
- *11) Forward and backward, abyss on abyss. In danger like this, pause at first and wait. Otherwise you will fall into a pit in the abyss. 'Could there be a more uncomfortable position intellectually than that of floating in the thin air of unproved possibilities, not knowing whether what one sees is truth or illusion?' [C.G.Jung, Preface, *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (the Richard Wilhelm translation, rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes); (London: Arkana, 1989; 3rd Edition); p.xxxv.

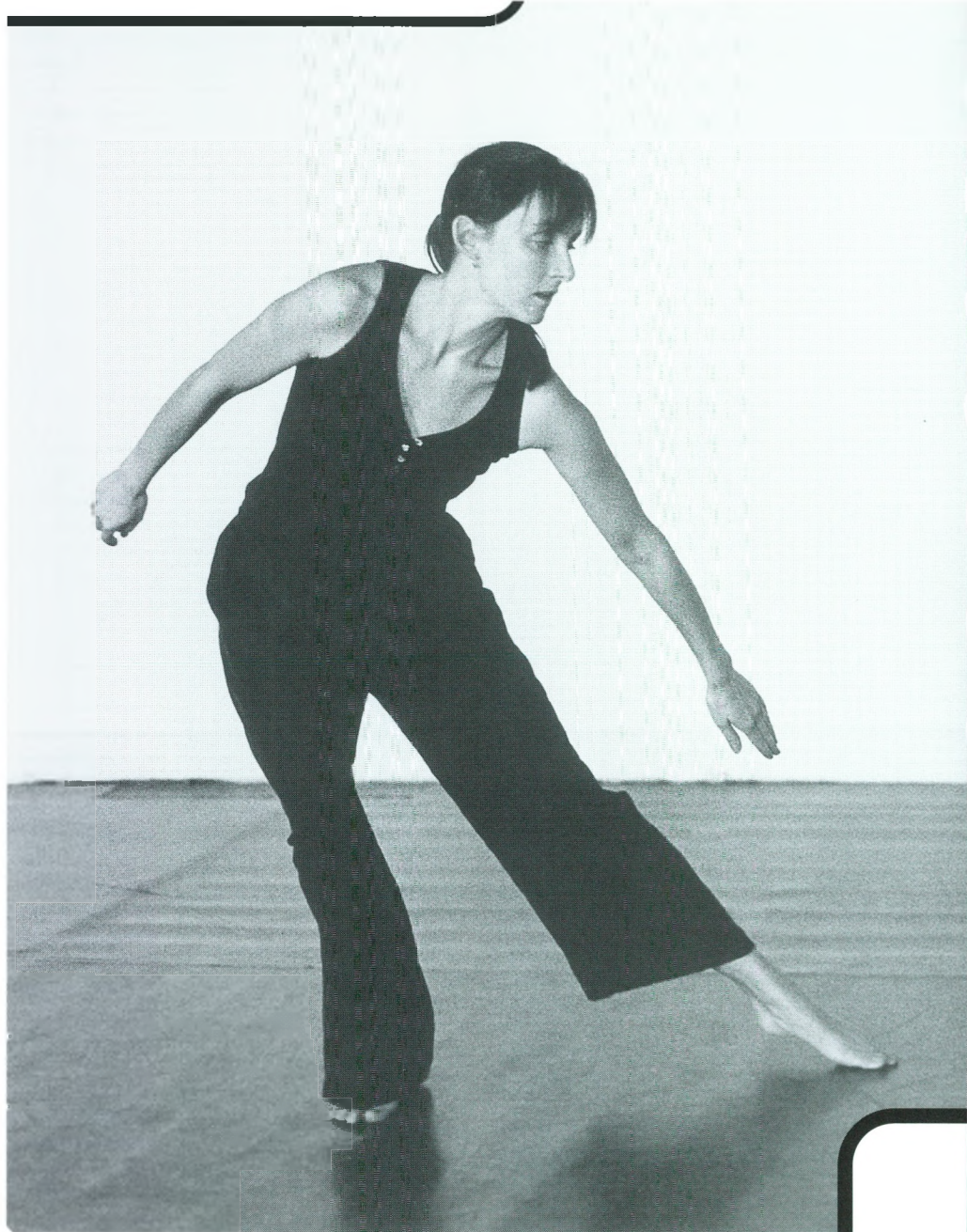
Desdaemon was performed outdoors at the Addison Road Community Center, Marrickville, during Sidetrack Theatre Contemporary Performance Week on Wednesday October 27 1993 at 8 pm. The performance acknowledges the performance site as an old Koori (Australian Aboriginal) burial ground.

Assistance with installation: Don Francis
 Assistance with sound-track: Neil Johnson; thanks to Tom Fryer.
 Performed, devised and designed by Zsuzsanna Soboslay
 Thanks to Sidetrack Theatre Company, Bruce McKendry and Don Mamouney.
 Video Stills: Don Francis. Ink drawings by Zsuzsanna Soboslay.



PERFORMANCE SESSION

Sandra Parker
'Showing Solo' 1992
Photograph by Hellen Sky



One of the primary interests and purposes in the programming of works for inclusion in the performance sessions of the Thinking Bodies Conference was to bring attention to the diversity of images and experiences of embodiment entailed in contemporary dance practices. The performance sessions highlighted contrasting aesthetic traditions within the broad spectrum of modern dance and brought focus to the question: What kinds of subjectivity are entailed, practised, and made possible through these dance traditions? 'Articulating the Pedestrian Body', the opening performance session of the conference, featured three works – a reconstruction of Steve Paxton's 'walking dance' for thirty seven performers, Satisfyin Lover (1967) – material from Surround (1993), a recent work by Russell Dumas (Dance Exchange) performed by Nick Sabel and Keith March – and Sandra Parker's Showing Solo (1992). These works, in their concern with the body and its motility as primary resources for dance-making and performance and in their adherence to what might be termed an aesthetics of function, can be seen to be part of an enduring modernist tradition in contemporary dance practice. Some of the crucial differences between a (post) modernist and an expressive or expressionist dance aesthetic – represented in the second performance session of the conference – are elaborated in Sally Gardner's paper 'Expressive Positions'. In the following pages are reproduced documentation from Satisfyin Lover and Showing Solo. The performances were followed by a discussion introduced by two artists and teachers, Anne Thompson and Alison Richards, who had been invited to provide 'off-the-cuff' commentaries or responses to the performance. A transcript of their 'Notes on Performance' follows.

Articulating the Pedestrian Body

'SATISFYIN LOVER' SCORE by STEVE PAXTON, 1967

Reprinted from 'Terpsichore in Sneakers' by Sally Banes

GROUP A

- 1 walk 2/5. 10 second stop. exit
- 2 cue 10 steps.
walk across
- 3 cue 20 steps.
walk across.
- 4 cue #1 pauses.
walk across.
- 5 cue #1 pauses.
walk 1/5. stop 20 seconds. exit.
- 6, 7, 8 cue 5 steps.
enter together. 6 falling
gradually behind
(at exit be 15 steps behind).
- 7 & 8 walk across.

GROUP B

- 9 walk across.
- 10 cue 20 steps.
walk to 4/5. pause 1 minute.
exit.
- 11 cue #10 passes halfway.
walk to 1/2. stop 5 seconds.
exit.
- 12 cue #10 passes halfway.
walk to 2/3. stop 20 seconds.
exit.
- 13 cue #10 pauses.
walk to chair 3. sit 30 seconds.
exit.

GROUP C

- 14 walk across.
- 15 cue 15 steps.
walk to 5 feet of exit. stop 30
seconds. exit.
- 16 cue 10 steps.
walk across.
- 17 cue 3 steps.
walk across passing #16. exit.
- 18 cue 10 steps.
walk across.
- 19 cue 5 steps.
walk 1/3. stop 15 seconds.
walk to chair 1. sit 30 seconds.
exit.
- 20 cue #19 stops.
walk across.

NOTES TO DIRECTOR

● Intervals between groups is to be determined in each performance space according to your judgment. ● (I begin with thirty-second intervals). A time-keeper cues the first person in each group, and is the last person to start across the stage. The last person in each group keeps the group card during rehearsals and is responsible for notifying the director of absences, for instructing the other members, et cetera. ● At no time in the piece should the performance space remain empty for long, and the pause between groups should not be noticeable as such. ● Costuming is casual clothes with some exceptions as is convenient for the performers. ● The walking occurs in an imaginary track ten feet wide, the length of which is considered performance space. ● The track goes from entrance to exit, all performers entering on one side and exiting on the other. ● In about the center of the space a little in front of the track, three chairs are very casually arranged, oriented to face front, several feet apart. Performers leave the track to sit, return to it to continue walking, do not pass in front of chairs they will not sit on. ● This dance was made for forty people in a space 200 feet long. The number of people can vary from thirty to eighty-four, and the space can be as little as sixty-five feet or horizon to horizon for stationary audience.

NOTES TO PERFORMERS

● The pace is an easy walk, but not slow. Performance manner is serene and collected. ● This dance is about walking, standing, and sitting. Try to keep these elements clear and pure. ● The gaze is to be directed forward relative to the body, but should not be especially fixed. The mind should be at rest. ● Cues for the first person in each group come from the timer. Subsequently cue from the person ahead of you, unless otherwise directed in the score.

GROUP D

21 walk across.

22 cue 20 steps.

walk to 1/2. pause 5 seconds.

walk 4/5. pause 15 seconds.

exit.

23 cue #22 stops.

walk across.

24,25,26,27 cue #23 passes 3/5.

walk across casually changing
relative positions.

28,29 cue 20 steps.

walk across together.

GROUP E

30 walk across

31 cue 15 steps.

walk to 1/5. stop and face
audience. 45 seconds. exit.

32 cue 10 steps.

walk to chair 3. sit for 15
seconds. walk to 4/5. stop 20
seconds. exit.

33 cue #32 sits.

walk across.

34 cue 20 steps.

walk across.

35 cue 10 steps.

walk to 3/5. stop 15 seconds.
return to chair 1. sit until final
person (timekeeper) passes. exit.

36 cue 5 steps.

walk to 1/2. stop 15 seconds.
walk to 2/3. stop 15 seconds.
exit.

37 cue #36 stops.

walk to 1/8. stop 20 seconds.
exit.

GROUP F

38 walk across

39 cue #38 passes 4/5

walk across.

40 cue 15 steps.

walk to 7/8. stop 5 seconds.

exit.

41 cue #40 stops.

walk across.

42 cue 15 steps.

walk across.

Notes on Performances

ANNE THOMPSON In relation to *Satisfyin Lover*, the first thing that struck me was that people were finally trespassing on the space. I had become very conscious of the fact that there had been an island out there with the carpet, a real sense that there was some kind of terrain or sea that was not to be crossed unless you did something very particular, which was to take your shoes off; unless you conformed some way to a rule. It was a great relief for me, initially, just to see people walking across the space and it was of course on a diagonal. The thing that struck me most of all about that was that that is a very particular angle from which to look at people. I felt very aware initially of people's self-consciousness as they walked

across the space; and for me, why I would use that term, was just to do with the different ways of holding the body and different little dances going on within the body, like eye-dancing and shoulder-dancing, but extremely subtle small dances going on in the body, and I read that as self-consciousness. Maybe, though, it wasn't. I felt, though, that this walking on the diagonal gave them a lot of room not to have to look directly at us. So, to some extent, there was room to try and work out how to inhabit this space, how to walk across it *and be seen*.. So there was some kind of length of time because of the





travelling required where that person could maybe think about and organise, either not like or like, or have a range of different feelings about being out there and being viewed. I felt the... I don't know whether I felt vulnerable or I felt the vulnerability of the performers; I don't know how to express that – Who was the subject of that feeling? I enjoyed it, it made me smile – a movement response that I had. I was very conscious of the moment of entering and the moment of exiting the space. It had different events in it, if you like, for me. There was definitely a kind of pre-entry, where people were one thing and then there was a kind of stepping into the arena where something else happens, some other organisation, and then there was a great sense of something else definitely happening over in the corner. And people dealt with that in really different ways, those three different events. Then there was the thing of actually standing in the space or sitting in the space and I liked the settling that occurred in those ones; I experienced it as a kind of settling, yes, a more comfortable feeling, not so much dis-ease. So the overall feeling was of spillage, of spilling into the space because of that slight sense of reverence that had been built up. And a real sense of who: who is this person? And how are they who they are? That question, in my mind, was very much to do with a reading that was to do with body organisation, how they were holding



themselves together and organising how to walk, and facial expression – all those kinds of things. I also really liked the false entry at the end when the little girl came up the stairs and decided not to continue, or was told not to, or whatever.

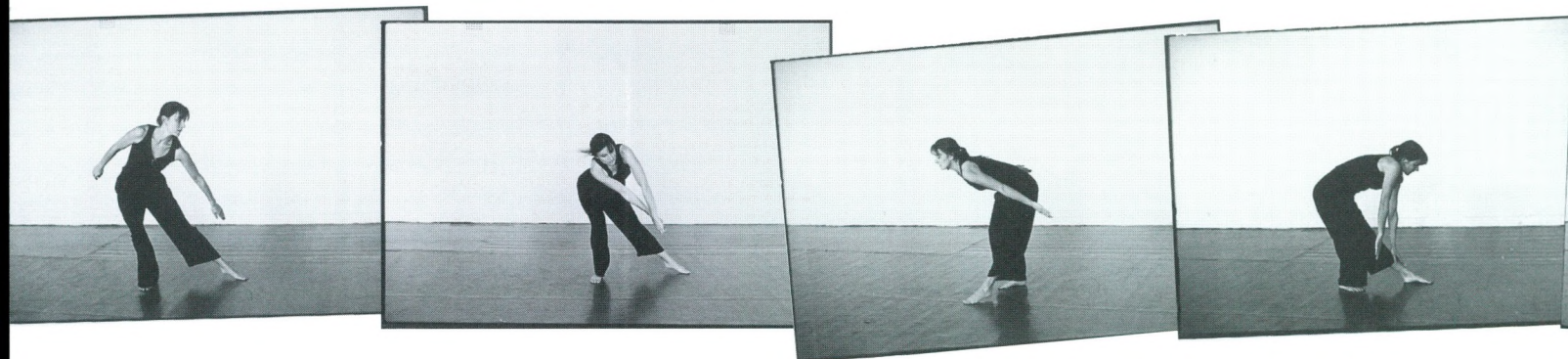
Okay, so *Surround*. I was really conscious initially of a kind of rolling in the walking – ‘rollicking’ – that word came to mind. So that took me right into ‘sensing’ as a primary mode of experiencing the dancing, which suggests, in Laban* terms that it was to do with weight. There were all different kinds of weight things going on for me. There was body weight in relation to gravity and to some extent the whole dance for me became like a rising and sinking in relation to gravity as the two dancers, the two men travelled across the floor.

I was very conscious of the torso and the legs and initially of the arms just hanging, loose, but a lot of the dancing going on in the torso and the legs and a low centre of organising or support in the body or in the torso. And yet it was a very extended torso, there was a lot of length in the torso, and from experience and from watching this dancing, that was the body organising for both the strength to work very powerfully, but also for lightness – to be able to be lifted. So there was a sense of a way of organising weight that meant that they could deal with big weight, but they could also kind of extend their weight through their bodies so that they could be lifted and that could be managed. And the body was ready for either at any stage; there was a sense of something like that.

I was very conscious of a sense of a kind of ease or a rhythm, like a walking rhythm, in the piece overall: there were no surprises for the dancers, it felt very known in their bodies and they felt very known to each other on a body level. I noticed that in relating they didn’t use eye contact so much but they actually encountered each other through touch; that really struck me. So there was a sense of ease in that – a kind of knowingness, or ease, or assurance – but there were surprises for me in the audience. In the way the whole thing had been constructed there was surprise. They’d come together when I would think they were doing their own thing and all of a sudden there would be a unison moment and I’d realise that it was more understood than I’d thought. Or the way they fell out of something would be a surprise. So the actual traversing of this kind of rising, sinking,

*Referring to the system
of human movement analysis
originally developed by
Rudolf Laban

travelling was full of surprises for me. It was not predictable in terms of my own ways of moving I guess. I'll bring gender in. They were two men and I sensed that there was a little bit of energy of games between men, and an ease, a physical ease, that I associate with men mucking around together. There was something like that; it was not played out in that overt way, but there was a sense of playfulness somehow there underneath it that I found pleasurable. There was also a sense of testing the body in relation to itself – that kind of shooting out or extension, some kinds of games like that in relation to yourself. Little rhythmic things would happen, little rhythmic rushes with the stepping and they were not so much coming from (an idea): 'I will now do a rhythm thing here'. It was much more to do with just the play of shifting weight producing little rhythmic flows. In Laban terms there is an association between using weight and strength as being somehow expressive of assertion or strong intention. That was misty for me in this work; it wasn't like (an emphatic) 'yes!'; it wasn't assertion in that sense but I had a strong sense of them very much commanding the space, being there very solidly present in some way. There was some clear physical assertion going on, not in a conventional sense but in another way. *Showing Solo*. Initially there was a very strong sense for me of articulating the body. Then I began to be interested in how that was happening and I became very conscious that often there was a stable point and then something was being mobilised around that. So maybe the torso would be stable and then the limbs would move or an arm would be still and then the torso would move; so that there was a sort of fixing of a part of the body and then a playing or some kind of dance with another part in relation to that fixed point and that fixed point kept shifting. I began also to see this through the previous dance – where that was much more torso-led, this one was more limb orientated for me; a much stronger sense of arm, arm then leg then torso. Even though the torso was doing a lot a work there was something about the way the arms were being used that struck me and had an energy I was aware of. I'm starting to use reference points from the other piece because often I find it easier to talk in relation to something else because a word has meaning in relation to other words I'm trying to make clear to you.



**'SHOWING SOLO' 1992 CHOREOGRAPHED
AND PERFORMED by SANDRA PARKER
PHOTOGRAPHS by HELLEN SKY**

This piece was more urgent, in the sense of time. There was a sense of a kind of 'ch,ch,ch,ch,ch' rhythm, whereas the piece before had a more undulating rhythm. This had more of a held breath quality, that kind of rhythm in the body. There were moments when I felt that Sandra began to organise more in space. This was not so much just using her own body as a reference point – I associated that with maybe a familiar dance vocabulary territory – but it was a real release into space and she travelled out into space in those moments. So something else happened in the room, not so much a kind of standing on the spot organising in relation to self or own body. It began to have a feeling of busy-ness, like a lot was going on. It was complex and then there were needs for rest and recuperation. So when Sandra went down to the floor I didn't so much feel it as a weight release but more as a space in time, a time release, a chance to catch your breath literally or just a pause from this slightly driven quality in the dancing. And something about the structure of the piece had that quality for me too; it had repeats and going back to the beginning and starting again, a sense of reaching towards something or trying to find something – searching. Whereas the other piece had a strong quality of sensing, that had more thinking, intuiting, if you like.



Watching the Dancing Body

the thinking non-dancer's view

ALISON RICHARDS I suppose in these post-modern times the position of the audience is one of the few from which one is allowed to construct narratives, so I was sitting there happily constructing narratives while I was watching. The first narrative that occurred to me was how interestingly the choice of pieces marked moments in the aesthetic of contemporary dance. I was reminded of the first time I encountered post-modern dance which was with Russell Dumas and Dance Exchange in a draughty old hall up near RMIT – getting on uncomfortably for twenty years ago. What struck me then was also what was interesting me just now while I was watching. The demands on the audience for a fineness of perception, but also the ongoing puzzle about meaning and constructing meaning. How as an audience member does one relate to the ways in which movement as dance is constructed, in terms of one's own vocabulary? And where is one as an audience in that? This afternoon, because I'd had a bit of prior warning, I looked up Steve Paxton's instructions for *Satisfyin Lover* and of course they're very bare – Group A, # 1, cue walk two-fifths, stop. #2, twenty steps, wait, pause, walk. Whereas when you watch it you suddenly

become aware of the variety of movement. As Anne was saying, the dance is presented in such a way that the performers are relieved of the necessity to contact the audience. This made the one or two performers who had to turn, or the little girl who was so aware of being watched, and excited by it, stand out as moments of characterisation where as an audience member you are tempted to insert narrative or construct explanations. All of those things are left wide open. I was reminded again of Steve Paxton's description of his own aesthetic – his interest in democracy, in the democracy of the dance. To take walking as something that one can construct a dance of. I was wondering very much whether it was still the same watching it in 1993 as it was watching it in 1967. I don't know because what I was finding myself thinking about a lot was all the different movement styles. Just as Anne said, you really start to become aware of things like – were they trying to or weren't they? what have they done and what were they thinking about today? what's that head like that for? All those questions you ask which are possibly more about one's own need to create story, narrative. So I don't know that it was about being ordinary anymore. I don't know that that piece for me was about ordinary movement, because in contrasting it with the other two pieces in which the movement vocabulary was extremely ordered and in which a level of virtuosity was very much foregrounded, I was reminded to ask myself whether or not there can be any such thing as an existentialist approach to movement. And I think that originally there was that romanticisation in the piece – that walking is natural, walking is universal, this is the borderline of dance, walking is in a way a basic vocabulary. Now why should we be more interested in watching forty-two people walk and stop and sit than in a group of forty-two classical dancers going through first to fifth position? I don't know. I know I would be more interested; I mean personally I am much more interested in watching forty-two people walk and sit and stand, but probably because there is so much more opening for curiosity in that. In comparing all those forty-two movers with the other movers I began again to want to construct narratives about vocabulary and questions about vocabulary in dance. And I could see – I started to make connections in Russell's piece for example – out of my

curiosity about the movements that you can't keep from making. I was reminded of Steve Paxton and I kept thinking about Contact Improvisation and wondering how much Russell was thinking about that when he was making the piece; and knowing and recognising particular phrases and moments of vocabulary which are very Russell and which I thought... 'mm, yes, he does like that doesn't he ...is that Russell or is that the dancer'? And then with Sandra's... I agree with Anne in that it seemed to me that the mind of the dancer seemed so much more concerned with her own extensions, her limbs and fingers, than in the duo where the bodies were moving and taking weight, feeling and responding. But again, many of those suppositions are me and the stories that I like to make, having been reminded by watching this group of dances about this tradition of dance. I guess that interested me. Even though the dates were around the other way – we have 1967 and then we have 1993 and then we have 1992 – what we were seeing was clearly a tradition, a tradition of questioning what movement might be. That this tradition very possibly makes different stories for the performers than it does for us watching is one of the things that continues to engage our curiosity. At least it does mine. ●

The title of this presentation *Postmodern dance, between mastery and pleasure*, is not meant to suggest that postmodern dance exists strung between two terms, that it exists in an interstitial space. Rather, it is meant to suggest that postmodern dance has evolved and continues to evolve as a conversation and a debate, in which the meanings of mastery and pleasure in moving, in dancing, in sensuous experience, are renegotiated, turned over and around.

By way of introduction to some of the interests and themes of my talk today I'd like to begin with an extended quotation from an interview with Steve Paxton, conducted by Peter Hulton at Dartington College of Arts, England in 1977¹.

Steve Paxton's work has become emblematic of that phase and style of postmodern dance which dance historian Sally Banes, amongst others, has named analytic, reductionist, or minimalist postmodernism. Paxton is a dancer and choreographer whose area of specialisation is improvisatory performance. He has developed an improvisatory duet form of dance called Contact Improvisation. Here he is talking about 'Standing Still', one of the preparatory or training exercises used in Contact work. He begins by describing where it came from in his own dancing life:

Opposite
Ros Warby and
Kerry Woodward
'A Tree in Any Direction'
Dance Exchange 1994
Photography by Leslie Solar

Post modern Dance

Between

by ELIZABETH DEMPSTER

In my own life it started when I stopped doing regular dance technique. In 1965 I had stopped with Cunningham. I continued to do classes for about a year and then I stopped that. All that was left of what I had been doing was standing, walking and sitting – three pedestrian activities. Standing I found more and more unpedestrian. It's very rarely done in a kind of pure state; walking and sitting are



Mastery and Pleasure

much more common. I realised that in fact standing still was the most opening experience to the dance when I knew that it wasn't pedestrian, that it was that close and available. I began to see that there were all these things very close to the surface that we maintain to get through the day and that were in fact profound experiences – standing still for a long time was one of them.

We call it standing still because everybody knows what that means and then you point out that in the midst of standing still something else is occurring and the name for that is the Small Dance and that is the skeletal muscles that are holding you upright after you have relaxed all the voluntary muscles. You do stand upright without much conscious effort and you can relax. The words I use are relax. I go through the body from top to bottom; just relax various areas around the eyes and ears, mouth, throat, neck muscles, the scalp. Then after a while, I say, 'Feel the small dance.' The skeletal muscles are holding you upright and there is a point where you can balance inside the small dance, where everything equalises out. It's a place of balance where the skeletal muscles don't seem to know what to do exactly, or don't need to do anything. So the forces of your body are equalised. It's such a delicate moment that if you even think 'Ah it's happened' it pushes you out of it. So you have to suspend your thinking, you have to become habituated to it. And then, it's an amazing feeling because one is used to strains and stresses and pulls and movements in the body – it's part of one's habitual awareness – and suddenly there's no discernible muscular activity, in that state of balance. It's a brief thing but it's like when suddenly all sound stops after your ears are used to being impinged upon by sound. Suddenly there's nothing and you hear this much larger acoustical space. So it is with this. You are used to feeling things and suddenly you stop feeling things, the usual stuff, and that's a very marvellous moment and it seems to adrenalise you in the same way that a fall does or a near accident does.

I will return to this material a little later. At this point however I would like to note one of the paradoxical effects of this seemingly reductionist enterprise. In her essay 'The Aesthetics of Silence' Susan Sontag, writing of the reductive impulse of much modern art, observes that,

there is no abolishing a minimal transaction, a minimal exchange of gifts – just as there is no talented and rigorous asceticism that, whatever its intention, doesn't produce a gain (rather than a loss) in the capacity for pleasure.²

In 'Standing Still' the renunciation, the constraint and denial of the body's desire for movement and activity produces not a paucity but an *excess* of sensation and an enormously expanded capacity for kinaesthetic pleasure. In this state of stillness and silence the focus of one's attention is not a neutral(ized) but a libidinized body with all the complexity and fluidity of relations between perception, action and desire which such a notion implies.

As I noted above, early, or first stage postmodernist dance has often been characterised by dance historians and critics as a dance of opposition, a non-dance if you will. Today, with the emergence of an eclectic postmodernist style which once again embraces spectacle and physical virtuosity as primary values, the work of postmodern dancers during the early to mid sixties, most notable among them the artists associated with

the Judson Dance Theater, is commonly represented as being somewhat stern and austere, pedantic and polemical, certainly purist and formal. The dance of artists such as Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, Simone Forti was a dance that refused virtuosic display, the display of mastery in which dance performance traditions had been grounded. In doing so it refused, withheld or denied traditional audience pleasures. But this representation of early postmodern dance as a kind of intellectualised *unpleasure*, a dance constituted in its refusal of mastery and refusal of visual pleasure, misses or indeed refuses the point that these artists were engaged in a radical reassessment and reworking of the codes of bodily pleasure, bodily mastery, skill and risk. They were proposing other desires, other pleasures, other 'masteries' and other politics. The strategies and devices employed by dancers and choreographers which produced radical reformulations of the fundamental conditions and parameters of dance performance – the dancer's body, the dance lexicon and audience-performer relations – had important political dimensions which are often elided or subsumed into generalized and familiar narratives of aesthetic innovation and stylistic fashion. The social and historical specificity and the political nature of their interventions have become obscured by the imperatives of a culture industry which possesses a voracious appetite for 'the New.' Marcia Siegel writes of this phenomenon:

The labels for what's new quickly get obsolete, but the reasons for change slip away even faster. Anything discovered in dance percolates into the existing lexicon, and five minutes later no one remembers how it got there. For instance, blank-faced neutrality was chosen as a performing style by Yvonne Rainer for political reasons. Rainer didn't want to seduce her audience with conventional charms... This impassivity immediately caught on, and was very well suited to the spare structural dances of the early '70s. You could not see a downtown dancer peep at the audience or crack a smile for years afterwards, until Senta Driver added laughing, crying, and other affects to the pool of technical skills.³

Siegel goes on to note that ten years later, when 'dance got emotional again' dancers maintained that impassive performing style, remaining 'alienated, disengaged, dissociated from the charged... events that they set in motion.' She concludes that 'we could read this message politically, but it means something very different from Rainer's revolutionary withholding of passion.'

The early postmodernist rejection of existing dance representations, in particular Martha Graham's expressionism, has been described by dance theorist and historian Susan Foster as a deconstructive process, a breaking of the prison of message and meaning; a breaking or dissolution of the fixity of relationship between signifiers and signifieds, and an insistence upon the 'meaningfulness' of movement in or of itself, of kinaesthetic and kinetic experience. But I also perceive in this turning away from Graham and her representation of the dancer as tragic heroine, a turning away from a kind of tragic or at least troubled relation to the fact of embodiment. Postmodern dance, arising out of the late modernist, 'pure movement' aesthetic of the sixties and seventies, rejected as an anachronistic fiction the psychically driven, radically split subject of expressionist modern dance. Cynthia Novack in her discussion of the development of Contact Improvisation puts it this way:

As one of the experimental dancers of the '60s, Paxton tried to shed the concept of a psychological domination of the body by the inner soul expressing itself through movement. Along with others, he posited the body as a sign in itself, replacing the image of the body dominated by an expressive inner self with the responsive body – mindful, feeling-filled, and physical.⁴

As Sally Gardner has observed in her paper 'Hermeneutics and Dancing'⁵, the practice and perception of dance in the West '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 mind, but not mind itself.' She notes a reluctance on the part of dancers and viewers alike to explore the ideas (and I would add, the multifarious *pleasures*) that are generated in the moving body itself. Graham, spoke of the body as an instrument, a medium for the expression of emotional truths, and so maintained a division, if not an hierarchical relation, between body and mind/psyche. Postmodern dance represents a turning away from this instrumentalist view, from this master-slave relation and also from the tyranny of interpretation, that attitude where the moving body's surface is surveyed for signs and symptoms, traces or representations of an unspoken and unspeakable interiority.

THE TEACHER'S BODY

THE TEACHER'S VOICE

I was teaching a course in modern dance at Dominican College in San Rafael. The first day I met the girls I talked to them about kinaesthetic awareness. I told them that as they watched me talk they could tell a lot about what was going on in me. They could do this simply by watching how I held myself, and at exactly what instant I shifted my weight. They could sense these rhythms and tensions, they could sense how what they saw, felt... The kinaesthetic sense has to do with sensing movement in your own body, sensing your body's changing dynamic configurations. But it's more than that. I can remember just waking from dreams and still having a sense of the dream landscape not only in my memory but in my limbs as well. SIMONE FORTI ⁶

I would like now to return to the quotation from Steve Paxton with which I opened this talk, and to the issue of alternative body disciplines or trainings which have been utilised and developed in postmodern dance. In this brief discussion of these new approaches to working in dance and to training bodies I'll focus on those things which mark postmodernist methods as distinctively different from the dance traditions and training practices which preceded them.

The practice of Standing Still is one of many processes through which we may learn to listen differently, to read otherwise, with and through our bodies. This practice begins in a kind of negativity, a not-doing and an undoing, a state of apparent inaction. This invitation to be inactive contrasts markedly with the powerful discourses of action, efficiency, authority and mastery which surround and propel mainstream dance training practices.

In their development of alternative approaches to dance training, postmodern dancers have drawn upon and adapted the practices and insights of techniques such as Ideokinesis/Todd alignment, Feldenkrais and Alexander. In contrast to the traditional pedagogical setting for dance, of studio with mirrors, of teacher demonstrating in front of the class, the primary medium of instruction in these 'alternative' practices (sometimes termed postmodern dance techniques) is not visual but rather, aural and tactile. Students may be asked to attend closely, to listen to, to watch, and to touch another's body. Nevertheless they are not principally engaged in a process of imitation. The plane of instruction is the horizontal, the liminal plane, plane of vulnerability, rest, laziness, sex; that is to say, a significant portion of a class may be spent lying down, supported by the floor, working with eyes closed. The student's body in this context becomes defined by touch. Directed away from concern with mastering and perfecting her visual image, she is not a picture but more of a skin-map. Knowledge of the body is also refined by a process of verbal instruction and suggestion: the teacher's voice guides the student's awareness, moving her attention through, around and in a body which is understood to be responsive, intelligent, thinking. The sociality and solidarity (or is it competition?) of standing one amongst others is replaced by a practice which is, in its initial stages at least, much more solitary, even solipsistic.

What is entailed here is a temporary setting aside of the plane of social interaction and an entering into a pre-social, or pre-Symbolic space, or to use a Kristevan term, a 'semiotic' space. And in this space the medium of instruction is the teacher's voice, the teacher's touch. The student is directed, lulled, cajoled, enveloped, held and perhaps captivated by the teacher's voice. In a Contact duet, it is the teacher who dances the student body; skin teaches skin.

There is an erotic charge or potential in this exchange which I think it is both important and helpful to acknowledge. It is an intimate, libidinated space, maternally connoted, a space set aside, outside of, or prior to representation. There is a clear problem here, a logical and practical difficulty which has not, perhaps *cannot* be resolved. Are these practices constrained by their history, by their dual identification with therapeutic, nurturant disciplines and with an outdated modernist aesthetic? Can they only ever function as opposition, as negation? Long accepted as useful adjuncts in the training process of a dancer what is their value/life/ presence as performance, as representation?

These approaches to the body and training have been codified and harnessed to some degree within mainstream dance. Ideokineseology, for example, has proved itself to be a powerful and effective technique in developing and enhancing efficient alignment and usage of the body: it has been utilized in the teaching of mainstream dance where it participates in a discourse of efficiency, economy and self control. In contributing to the development of greater efficiency and safety of bodily use, 'postmodernist' techniques have enabled greater risk taking in performance, giving support and strength to some of the most extended, spectacular and display-oriented dance performance today. Processes which might equally provoke and give flesh to a 'Theatre of Difference' have been absorbed into the maintenance of the 'Theatre of the Same.'

The distinctive modes of embodiment, the profound deconstructions and reconstructions of 'self' which are engendered by immersion in postmodern/alternative dance practices too often remain private or privatised, that

is, contained within the relatively closed arena of the workshop, the classroom, the studio. Where performative expression is absent these practices occupy a traditionally feminine role within dance culture, contributing to, supporting and giving strength to the dominant dance tradition. It seems to me that the process of development and elaboration of an alternative performance practice, of differently-bodied representations, which was begun so vigorously in the 1960s still holds great potential, but remains largely unrealized. The *difference* of postmodern dance is yet to be perceived and valued.

Dancing in the Western tradition has been about, and one might say, is still dominated by, the representation of mastery, the display of authority and command over a unified, muscular body subject. To refuse this mastery, to deny its pleasures as the early postmodern dancers have done is to risk invisibility and speechlessness. The early postmodern dancers took this risk: their work was repeatedly framed, pestered by the interrogation 'But is this dance?' The political importance of their work, its legacy, lies in its insistence that it is possible to learn to desire differently. As I have suggested above, that project is (perhaps necessarily and inevitably) incomplete.

I'll finish with another quotation, this time from Fredric Jameson's essay, 'Pleasure: A Political Issue'.⁷ Jameson's reflections upon the work of Roland Barthes might fruitfully extend our brief discussion of the work of postmodern dance:

He taught us to read with our bodies – and often to write with them as well. Whence, if one likes, the unavoidable sense of self-indulgence and corruption which Barthes' work can project when viewed from certain limited angles. The libidinal body, as a field and instrument of perception all at once, cannot but be self-indulgent in that sense. To discipline it, to give it proper tasks and ask it to repress its other random impulses, is at once to limit its effectiveness, or even worse to damage it irretrievably. Lazy, shot through with fits of boredom or enthusiasm, reading the world and its texts with nausea or *jouissance*, listening for the fainter vibrations of a sensorium largely numbed by civilisation and rationalisation, sensitive to the messages of throbs too immediate, too recognisable as pain or pleasure – maybe all this is not to be described as self-indulgence after all. Maybe it requires a discipline and a responsiveness of a rare yet different sort.

NOTES

- 1 Steve Paxton, interviewed by Peter Hulton "In the Midst of Standing Still Something Else is Occuring and the Name For That is the Small Dance." *Theatre Papers Series 1*, 1977, Dartington College of the Arts.
- 2 Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence" in *Styles of Radical Will*, 19 p 8
- 3 Marcia Siegel "Is it Still Postmodern? Do We Care?" *The Drama Review* 36, no1 (T133) Spring 1992 p49
- 4 Cynthia Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, 1990, The University of Wisconsin Press p188
- 5 Sally Gardner "Hermeneutics and Dancing" *Writings on Dance 10*, Autumn 1994 p34-43
- 6 Simone Forti *Handbook in Motion*, 1984 Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax and New York University Press, New York
- 7 Fredric Jameson, 'Pleasure: A Political Issue' in *Formations of Pleasure*, 1983, London, Routledge&Kegan Paul p9-14



**Keith March
and Nick Sabel in 'Eurotrash'
Dance Exchange 1992
Photography by Leslie Solar**

What fascinates me in the practice of interactive installation is something to do with performance: specifically, the way an audience transforms itself from a putatively passive spectatorial body into manifestly active receivers of a work. This active reception acts on the situation composed by the installation in such a way as to bring it to life, hence to transform it, and it is actually this work (or play) of transformation that then becomes the work – which is not reducible to the arrangement of objects in space or to the technological processes (radar, infra-red, or other ‘surveillance’ technologies) that potentially animate it.

So I’m concerned here with a certain performance, with what happens in the ‘potential space’ (to borrow a term from DW Winnicott, who used it to describe the area of interplay between mother and child, a space that belongs properly to neither and to both) constructed by the installation.

This is not *only* a physical space. Like Winnicott’s space, this space of potential interaction belongs neither to artist nor to audience, but arises between them, in the terms supplied in the first instance by the artist. (In fact, one of the problems plaguing most computer-generated interactive installation is, from my point of view, the narrow repertoire of pre-determined choices offered to the viewer – who then simply becomes the operator of the installation, rather than the true collaborator.) Audiences may be disobedient, ignoring or refusing the cues offered to them, they may be blind or deaf to these same cues, or they may be extremely inventive.

On

being moved

The interactive installation constitutes an invitation, a solicitation – even a seduction of the subject – to movement. You, the so-called spectator, feels (if the invitation is sufficiently compelling) moved to move – towards or away from an object, into an empty armchair or a pair of dangling headphones, to respond to the imperious ring of a telephone, the accusations of a voice... And in this movement, by virtue of it, you become a part of the installation and a performer in it. Your participation – absorbed or desultory – becomes a performance for those watching you, who may in turn be moved – by curiosity, by a compulsion to repeat, by a desire to

by ANNA GIBBS

conform – to participate, and hence to perform, themselves. Or to perform themselves. As in a sense they already are, even before taking the first step, for their watching of your performance is in turn witnessed by other spectators, who may themselves be being watched. Hence the simple act of witnessing is also revealed as a performance of a kind: there are many ways to watch, many postures, attitudes, gestures, rigidities or tensions involved in the act of looking... In 'The Heart of the Matter', Nola Farman and I trained

a security camera on an empty armchair and relayed the image to a monitor outside the closed room where queues of spectators obeying the WAIT/ENTER sign controlling the numbers of people in the room could observe at least one of the actions of a participant inside the room.

Interactive installation provides a stage and a set of possibilities for what Glen A. Mazis, in an attempt to turn the work of Merleau-Ponty to an understanding of emotions, has termed 'e-motion'. As I understand it, e-motion involves a movement that may be imperceptible: in Deleuzian terms, a journey in intensities. It takes place within and between the body and the world, a movement of both, 'reversing itself and turning back on itself within a circular movement.' E-motion entails...

moving and

both the motion away from a person to his or her world, and away from the world to the person.

In the etymologies of words used as synonyms for the emotions, one finds terms indicating literally a movement 'into the subject' and 'away from the subject'... the motion of e-motion undercuts any division into 'subject' and 'object', 'active' and 'passive'. There is an indeterminacy in e-motion, which is really an inter-connectedness that is a mutually enriching circularity: an expression of the subject and an impression of the object, or actually rather, a circulation of meaning within the circuit of both.

(Glen A. Mazis, *Emotion and Embodiment: Fragile Ontology*,
cited in Sue L. Cataldi, *Emotion, Depth and Flesh: a study of sensitive space*,
Albany: SUNY, 1993)

E-motion, then, involves a double movement that installation aims to provoke. It doubles, on an imperceptible level, another movement, one that also complicates relations of object and subject, active and passive, as it draws the viewer into participation and collaboration.

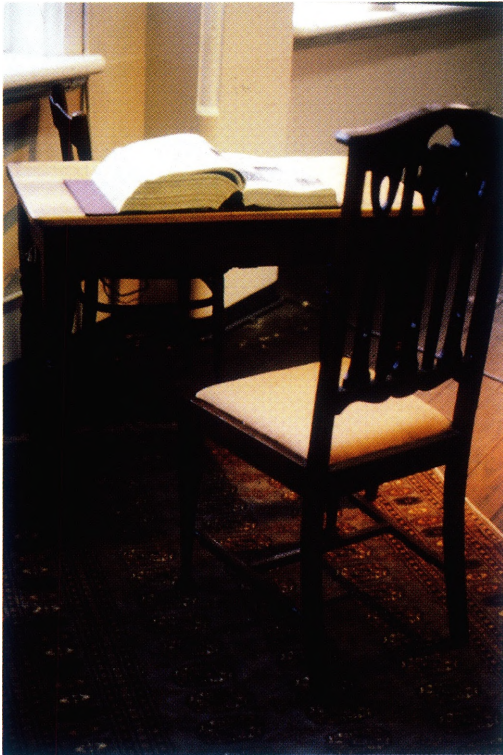
**THE HEART
OF THE MATTER**



THE HEART OF THE MATTER
Interactive sound installation by Nola Farman and Anna Gibbs

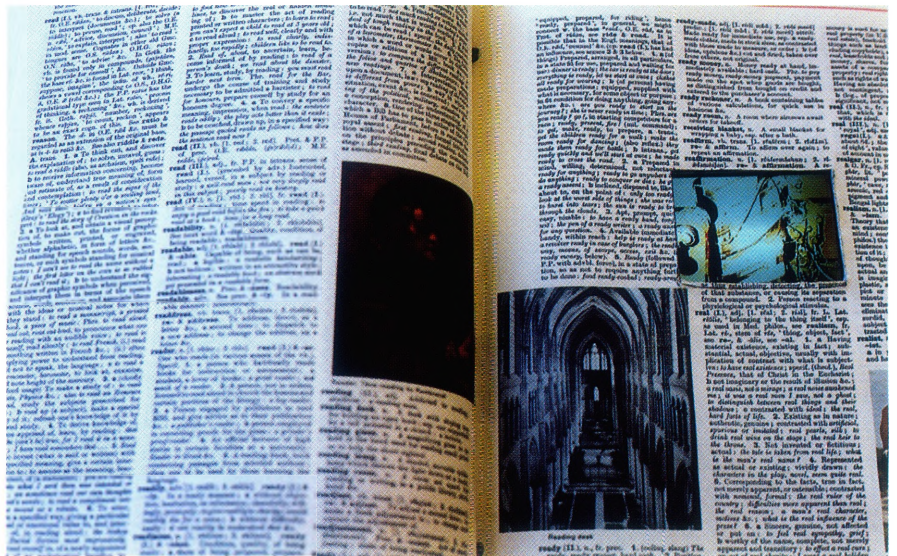
This work uses ultra-sonic radar triggered by movement. Two armchairs face each other on an island of carpet in an enclosed space, lit only by a standard lamp. In the chair next to the lamp sits a pulsing red thermoform plastic love heart, like a piece of an artificial body, a kind of corny reduction. The other chair is empty, as if waiting for someone to arrive. Beside it is a telephone. The image of this empty chair and the silent telephone is relayed via a small infra red security camera to a tv monitor that sits outside the closed door of the room. This image of waiting (from inside the room) is what is first seen, on the monitor outside it. The empty chair is at the centre of the pulsing light from the heart (this is especially clear if we use an analogue monitor), but the image refuses to reveal the source of the light. When someone enters the room and begins to move towards the heart – positioned so it's the first thing you see when you open the door – it begins to pulse faster the closer they move to it. (Panic or excitement?) If someone sits in the empty chair the heart's pulse subsides to normal and the telephone rings, activated by a pressure pad under the cushion. A voice on an endless loop plays out different scenarios involving the strange paradox of simultaneous presence and absence that the telephone produces. Many people have commented on the illusion that it is the heart that speaks on the phone...

ATTACHED BY ONE'S OWN ACTION



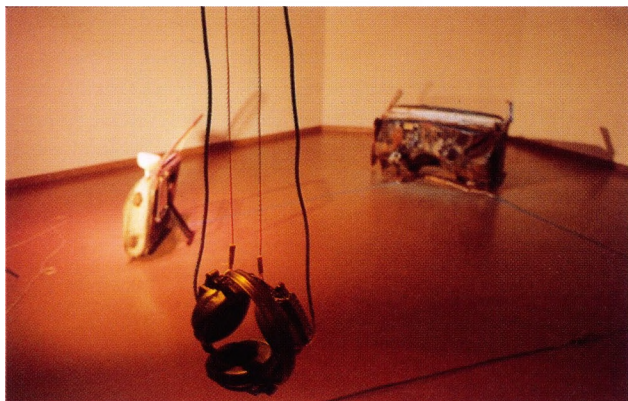
'Attached By One's Own Action' consists of a tiny tv monitor embedded in the pages of a Webster's Universal Illustrated Dictionary so that the image seen on the screen looks like a moving illustration. (We cut together images of book production from old black and white footage of hand binding and stitching, through images from the '50s in which the whole human body becomes part of the production machinery – like the guillotine – to the '80s, in which the body disappears and production takes place mostly inside scaled units, set to work by a finger on a button. The sound track is a kind of voice poem dealing with the way in which readers stitch themselves together through the performance of certain textual operations.) The dictionary is open at the page on 'reading', and the facing page carries definitions of 'realism'

and 'reality'. In order for the image on the liquid crystal display to be in focus, you have to be standing or sitting directly above it, so the initial illegibility of the image in the open book constitutes an invitation to sit and read/watch, just as the headphones invite listening. The easiest way to take up these offers is to sit on the chair provided at the desk – hence the body of the viewer is restricted in this installation. People can watch the participant, but her activities remain inscrutable without access to sound and vision. When we showed this work at the Linden Gallery in Melbourne, we filled a drawer in the desk we used on that occasion with alphabet noodles – and viewers would run their hands through these while listening/watching, sometimes even using them to doodle messages to unknown readers...



ATTACHED BY ONE'S OWN ACTION
Interactive sound installation
by Nola Farman and Anna Gibbs

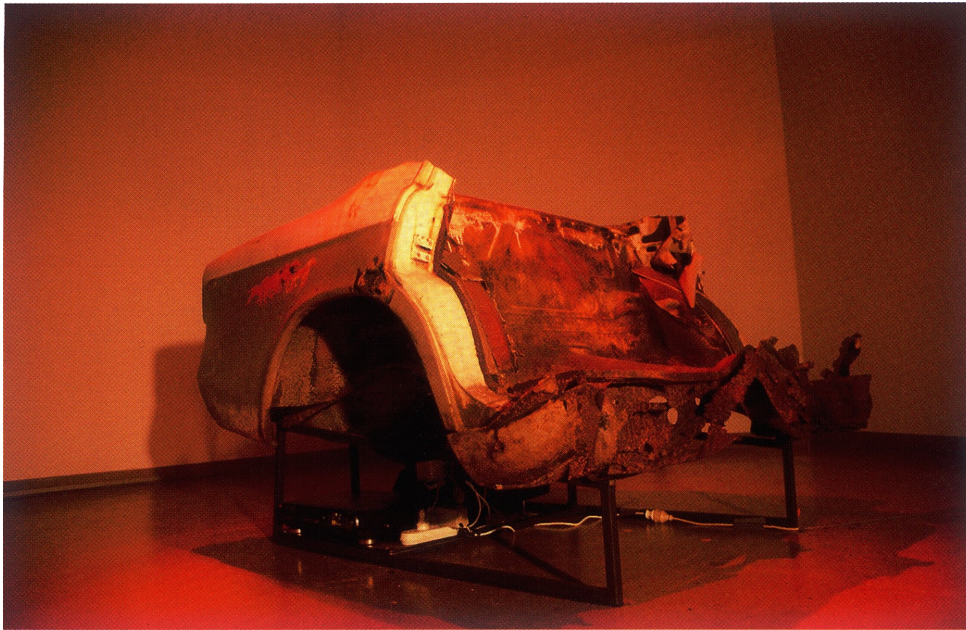
CARSICK



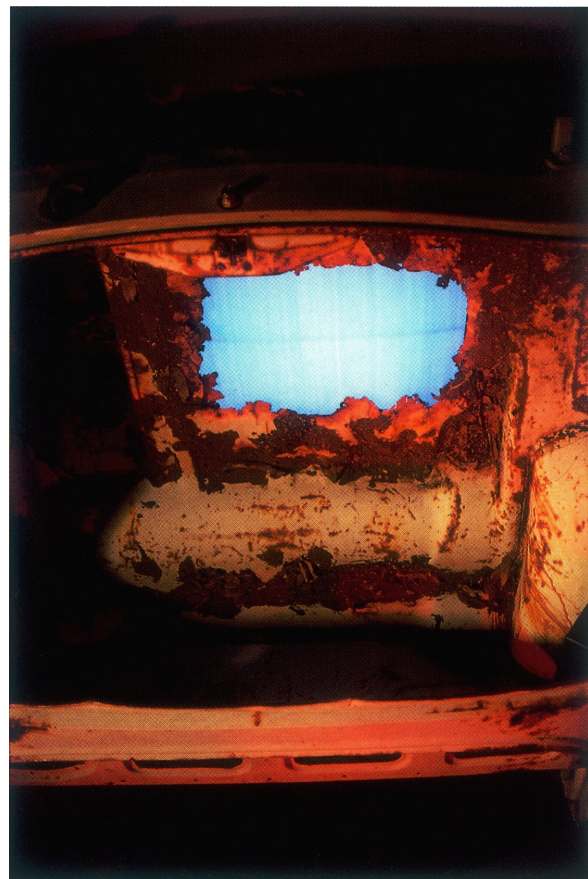
Bits of rusted car body have been hauled out of the bush and electronically activated on the gallery floor. The body parts have been worked with rust and stencilled images. A fender is wired so that occasionally, as someone walks in front of it, the sound of a car speeding towards the pedestrian from the far end of the gallery is triggered. When it seems to reach the fender there is a screech of brakes and the sound of an on-going collision. A tiny television has been installed in the side mirror on a car door. The screen shows images of a receding past: alphabet



CARSICK Interactive sound installation
by Nola Farman in collaboration with Helen Britton
Brad Clinch and Anna Gibbs



noodles washed away by waves, Lassie running endlessly up to the car, the disappearing track of a monorail. In the old dashboard of another piece a radio struggles to tune itself, veering from frequency to frequency through bursts of static, as if searching through memory for something lost and unrecoverable. Snatches of songs, bits of dialogue can be heard, now clearly, now less distinctly. A huge back section of a car sits like a hunk of meat on the gallery floor. In the boot is a huge screen, embedded in rust, on which one can see the road endlessly passing underneath the car. A person's presence triggers a soundtrack like a kind of viewer-activated assault on the quiet of the gallery: the sounds of urban mayhem – sirens, gunshots, fires, glass breaking, vehicles colliding, human screaming, manic bits of dialogue – all cut together from B-grade movies. A pair of dangling headphones solicits your attention to Ros Bandt's recording of a car slowly disintegrating in the bush.



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who is it, or what
speaks when we
stage?

by MARK MINCHINTON

Scene: I am playing Claudius in a production of *Hamlet* at the Victorian Arts Centre. Despite weeks of preparation and some ten or twelve performances I don't know what I have to do or say. Off-stage reading the words does not help, they are simply a stream of incomprehensible characters on the page, nonsensical sounds in my head, the movements are a blur.

I have no idea who will talk to me or what I will say in response. I have to be prompted to get on the stage because I do not know when it's my scene. Once on-stage I speak words and do things that feel outside my control. I am surprised when people appear on the stage and talk to me.

In everyday life I am physically and emotionally disoriented. I hallucinate that rooms are contracting and expanding around me. This is a feeling as much as a visual hallucination. My peripheral vision expands so that I am no longer focussing on any distinct points but on everything. This everyday hallucination carries over onto the stage. I hallucinate that I enclose the entire theatre within me, that my body is as deep and full as the building itself, that it contains the audience and all the machinery.

is it, that
speak on-

**I have witnessed not once but hundreds of times
how human shapes were set down for a short time
by divine miracles only to be dissolved and vanish.**

— DANIEL PAUL SCHREBER

**When you lose your mind, its great to have
a body to fall back on.**

— SHARI (CALVIN KLEIN ADVERTISEMENT)

Yet I am completely present on the stage, I am not thinking about other things, or what comes next, I just do it. I know that I will always say what should be said, do what should be done. I come off-stage with little idea of what I have said or done, and have to check with others that I said and did what I should have. Invariably, I have said and done what I should.

After performances, at home, I sit for hours in a daze, the walls pulsing in and out around me, unable to take in what is going on around me even as I take in everything. Foreground and background phenomena are intermixed. My body beats with energy even as I feel empty. This emptiness is not an existential condition – neither despair nor angst, it is sometimes pleasant – just an emptiness, as though I have evacuated myself and there is nothing to produce, nothing from which to organise a response to the world. The world has become nonsense.

* * * * *

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

– DELEUZE & GUATTARI

This experience was extreme but only quantitatively, not qualitatively, different from my other experiences of performing. It included other ‘symptoms’ that I won’t talk about here but most performers will recognise some or all of what I have described. Stephen Aaron writes that these feelings and hallucinations are common to actors, and identifies them with stage-fright.

Aaron cites actors’ repetitive nightmares that ‘portray ... loss of rehearsed function, loss of control, spatial disorientation, depersonalisation ... and blocking’, refers to a famous actor’s overwhelming ‘fatigue’ on-stage, another’s functional deafness, and Olivier’s dizziness when the audience seemed to revolve anti-clockwise around him (1986, 82–3).

Aaron would pounce on my metaphor of ‘evacuation’ to support his argument that actors are in a ‘regressive context’ (1986, 44) when they perform. He argues that stage-fright is a state of ‘primal anxiety’ and

ultimately a fear of psychic annihilation. Triggered by the abandonment of the director, who has come to represent the actor’s observing ego ... [it] anticipates the dissolution of the personal self into its performing counterpart. This conflict is displaced onto the audience, whom the actor hopes will acknowledge his [sic] presence and become a holding environment for his personal self while the actor can give free reign to his performing self (1986, 126).

Aaron’s argument is ingenious and illuminating but unsatisfactory.

- 1) He draws his conclusions from the performance of written plays but these sensations/hallucinations are common to many forms of performance: in drama-improvisation there is a strong sense of flow and immediacy, terror and pleasure in speaking and doing without thinking, and an experience of encompassing the entire space in which one performs; in contact-improvisation individual subjectivity is undermined through the apparent dissolution of body boundaries as you inhabit an eroticised space where it is difficult to tell where you begin and end, and difficult to distinguish between your own and your partners’ movements or impulses.²
- 2) He assumes a passive and dependent actor but the dependent relationships between actors and directors that characterise mainstream psychological play-making are neither typical nor desirable models of the production of performed work. Drama or contact-improvisers rehearsing without a director or choreographer can experience the same kind of bodily hallucination where there is no parental figure to abandon them.³
- 3) He implies that stage-fright peaks just before going on-stage on opening night, however, I felt anxiety but no hallucinations on the opening night of *Hamlet* and these ‘symptoms’ developed well into the season. The experience of a

radical disruption and reorganisation of spatial and emotional boundaries is common to many performers' rehearsal or workshop experiences without an audience.

- 4) Most importantly, he presumes a stable and isolable 'personal self'. I am not so confident of my stability, or of any 'personal self'. I am sympathetic to Gilbert Voyat's conjecture that actors have a 'psychotic core to their character structure' (Voyat in Aaron 1982, 128) and to Winnicott's speculation that stage-fright and its symptoms points to the 'fear of a lack of anxiety at regression to an unintegrated state' (Winnicott in Aaron 1982, 129). I would extend these insights to argue that performance is the staging of an always already fragmented self – a staging that simultaneously presents and represents a coherent self as it deconstructs that self, the hallucinations not symptoms of fear of regression, or fear of lack of anxiety at regression, but the 'regression' itself.

So what was happening to me? I agree I was anxious. Did my anxiety produce my hallucinations, forgetfulness, and disorientation? Or was I so disoriented, re-oriented, that I forgot my self and my habitual ways of seeing, being, and feeling? Was I possessed? In a liminal state of 'Mark, but not-Mark' had some other subjectivity surfaced?⁴ If I was possessed, by what? I was not Claudius. I never thought I was Claudius. I was de-centred, or rather, re-centred by words and actions not mine but mine.

I want to look at one of the processes underlying my work on Claudius as a way of interrogating this state.

* * * * *

Since the mid-fifties in English speaking countries two major approaches to voice training for actors have developed around the figures of Kristin Linklater in America and Cicely Berry in England. Parts of these approaches are known to most actors. It is these techniques, but especially the Berry technique, that I used when working on Claudius.

While there are significant differences between them, essentially concerning techniques of producing sound which I have not space to explore here, both techniques seek to reanimate words and speaker through relating the breathing body of the actor to the body of words that are the text; both want breath, word, and thought connected so that words are (re-)linked with somatic impulses.⁵

Both support a step-by-step approach to words, where the performer is 'impregnated' by the text.⁶ Berry refers to the tendency to ignore, or be unaware of words'

Each word is a drama ...

— VALÈRE NOVARINA

Thought is produced in the mouth

— TRISTAN TZARA

physical nature, [to] think of them mainly in terms of expressing reasons and ideas and of colouring them with feelings, and not in terms of our physical self being expressed through them and involved in them (1987, 19).

Berry, particularly, aims to reclaim the corporeality of both actor and words through exercises that emphasise releasing the actor through releasing the dynamics of language. She aims to make speech fabulous for both performer and auditor by undermining the literal sense of the text and inscribing it onto the body of the performer as a physical event.⁷

Berry counsels against reading or acting based solely on making sense of words and text. She prefers what Deleuze and Guattari would call a ‘close-range’⁸ approach to words and deplores any emphasis on sense learnt from the printed page – a ‘long-range’ approach that disembodies both words and their speaker(s), **because we see lines on the printed page first ... [o]ur eyes take in a grammatical set of words – a sense clump – and we make a judgement on them from a cultural and a sense point of view, so that our initial response to them is a ‘read’ one and not an intuitive one ... this puts a subtle pressure on us to make ‘good sense’ and not to say it ‘wrong’ ... it makes it difficult for us to live through the words as they happen, because we begin to feel out of control of the sense** (1987, 22; **my emphasis**).⁹

Berry recommends the actor ‘resist’ sense so as to ‘feel the energy and texture of each word complete and fulfilled’ [1987, 158], to commit to sound and ‘release the subversive anarchy of the language’ (1987, 113).¹⁰ She understands, in Novarina’s words, that ‘to make theatrical speech is to prepare a course where one will dance’ and that ‘the text is nothing but footprints on the ground left by a dancer who has disappeared’ (1993a (1974), 101 & 102).

Berry’s ‘close-range’ technique takes the actor away from sense to concentrate on the materiality of words and text, what she calls their ‘substance’ – which is found through exploration in impulsive large-scale movement, dance, of the length and number of the vowels, consonants, and syllables in a text. (see 1987 ch’s 4 & 6).¹¹ Berry offers no objective scale of substance, but these exercises allow the actor to construct a relational scale of the substantial, kinaesthetic, differences between words. The small-scale, and largely hidden, movements of diaphragm, throat, vocal folds, jaw, tongue, teeth and lips are translated into large-scale visible movements. These movements in turn affect the actor’s response to and production of the sounds.

The body’s a-rational impulses, flood the performer with associations – physical, aural, verbal, and personal – that subvert the rational sense of the words.

Exploring ‘substance’ through responding impulsively in large-scale movement to the sounds of the word the actor ties the sound, rhythm, metre – ‘the pure expression of the body in language’ (Weiss 1989, xi) – of the text to his/her breath and body.¹² The actor’s body/breath is re-organised around the sound, rhythm, metre of the text. This occurs before the sense of the words is dealt with, indeed, the meaning of the words may not be considered at all. It is ‘work to do with hearing what is happening in the language ... apart from its grammatical sense’ (1987, 148; my emphasis) so that the actor’s body becomes the body of the words.

Before ‘To be, or not to be’ is a metaphysical question, it is a somatic event involving the tip of the tongue striking the back of the upper teeth to form the ‘t’, the lips coming together and moving apart plosively to form the ‘b’, the tongue rolling back to form the ‘rr’ of ‘or’ (if you pronounce the ‘r’, as Shakespeare would have), the tongue moving forward and up to the front of the mouth for the ‘n’, and so on. The cadence of ‘tībñ(rr)ñññtīb’, with the repetition of the ‘tīb’, is dictated by an economy of pleasure and rhythm that has nothing to do with sense. There is pleasure in these movements, in this repetition. There is anarchy in this pleasure.¹³ An anarchy and pleasure that underlies all speaking.

Instead of thinking “‘To be, or not to be, that is the question’” means “What I, or we as a humans, have to consider here is should I or we live, or should I or we not live given the circumstances?” and trying to represent these thoughts; or attempting to relate this phrase to, and recapture the emotion of, his own ‘dark night of the soul’ (assuming it’s a male playing Hamlet), the actor through physical investigation of the words, through feeling the corporeal reality of the words as he speaks them, loses himself in the delirious pleasure of the event of speaking them.

* * * * *

Berry’s insight into the seductive power of seeing and reading words, a seduction that draws speakers into the illusion that they know and control the sense of what they say and who they are when they say it (‘I say what I mean and mean what I say’ says Humpty Dumpty), aligns her with a tradition of language that stretches from the Stoics through Artaud to Deleuze and Novarina. She asks that actors experience the delirium of language, jump from the singular path of sense¹⁴ and embrace the multiple (non)sense released through physical investment in the word.

Linguist Jean-Jacques Lecercle following Deleuze, too, points to language’s dual materiality, the literal materiality of the words pointing to their origin in the body of the speaker, an origin that links them to instinctual drives, an origin given expression in the delirious opera of Artaud and Novarina.¹⁵

**menendi anenbi
embenda
tarch intemptle
o marchti rombi
tarch paiolt
a tinemptle
orch pendui
o patendi
a merchit
orch torpch
ta urchpt orchpt
ta tro taurch
campli
ko ti aunch
a ti aunch
aungbli**

— ANTONIN ARTAUD

**Nonsense ... is the sense
of all senses**

— PAUL HOUSMAN

In Artaud's work language as scream, 'sheer existence' (Lecerle 1985, 37) distorts and defies rational organisation. Not a controlled, organised flow from brain and tongue, but violent, uncontrolled sounds erupting from an orifice that allows a glimpse of the barely contained interior of the body. Words are no longer *effect* but *affect* (1985, 41).

Compare Artaud with –

OO EE AW o OO EE a i e r e er
e er i O er i er I OO u er
r i a a O o OW AI er OR U

— or in another formulation —

t b r n t b th t s th KW s tn
WH th r t s n blr n th m nd t s f r
th sl ngs nd rr s f tr g s f rt n

from *Hamlet* III i 56–8

These sounds are glossolalia – 'the manifestation of language in the realm of its pure materiality' (Weiss 1989, 118), 'the reduction of speech to the pure voice, of language to the body' (1990, 88) – to which we listen for their musication, where 'the sonorous quality of the words takes precedence over their meaning' (Weiss 1989, 127). To embrace this realm is to embrace nonsense. Embracing nonsense, or glossolalia, is to risk the dissolution of identity. We are all familiar with the sight at charismatic religious rites of disoriented celebrants rising from the floor reborn and seeing the world in a new way – this is the place I entered as Claudius.

Discussing the linguistics of nonsense Lecerle proposes six stages of an imaginary solution to what he calls the real contradiction of language, namely, that 'when the subject speaks, it is always also, or always already, language that speaks' (1990, 103).¹⁶ Briefly, these stages are:

- 1) 'language speaks': the speaker is not in control of language, meaning comes from the play of language;¹⁷
- 2) 'language speaks through me': words possess the speaker, the sounds come from the speaker but 'somebody else ... or language' is speaking;¹⁸
- 3) 'language speaks to me': the speaker still speaks from a position imposed by language but it is the speaker, speaking from a particular place, who speaks – certain things are expected of the speaker;¹⁹
- 4) 'mine is an empty speech': there is now a subject, but a subject who raves in endless exhilaration, 'not the best but the longest poems they know' (Lecerle 1985, 78);
- 5) 'I speak about language': to avoid being possessed by language the subject speaks about speaking, reflecting and commenting on it in a metadiscourse;²⁰

- 6) 'I speak language': language is used like a tool or an instrument, subjects master what they speak ('say what they mean and mean what they say' in Humpty Dumpty's words).

Lecerle's enumeration of these stages leads him to distinguish between surface and deep nonsense, or *délire*. Lewis Carroll's writing is surface nonsense – sense is put at risk only to recuperate and affirm it. Carroll always starts at the 'common sense' stage ('I speak language') and works through the preceding stages knowing he will return to the final position – that stable and controlling subject, the logician Dodgson, is never far away. Carroll's risks with language are not real but taken only to validate the sense of language and the inviolability of the subject.

But if, as Artaud does, the speaker or writer takes real risks with language there can be a shift into deep nonsense, or *délire*. Deleuze cites Artaud's translation of Carroll's 'Jabberwocky' beside the accepted French translation to illustrate the difference (1979, 278 n.3), one line from Artaud will have to be enough here: Carroll's 'All mimsy were the borogroves' translated in the standard French version as 'Tout flivoreux allaient les borogoves' for Artaud becomes 'Jusque là où la roughe est à rouarghe à rangmbde et rangmbde a rouarghambde'. But if one stays with these nonsensical but pleasurable associations there is a danger of getting stuck as the schizophrenic does.²¹ Deleuze describes the schizophrenic experience of the body as the breakdown of the surface, 'the entire body is nothing but depth ... interior and exterior, container and content no longer have precise limits: they plunge into universal depth' (1979, 286–7). This sounds similar to my Claudius experience.

Following Lecerle in delirious fashion I want to take the metaphor of stages literally and suggest that they are useful for understanding actors' work with language and character.

When the actor speaks it is always also, or always already the text that speaks.

- 1) as their 'personal selves', actors experience control over language, they say what they mean and mean what they say, there is no question of who they are, the subject is stable; the actor is in control and the world is outside;
- 2) the playtext considered *qua* text speaks – as the text exists on the page there are no real referents for the pronouns in the text, the subject of 'To be, or not to be' lies in the text. For sure there is that fictional entity called Hamlet, but Hamlet is just an arrangement of words; and for sure there is that historical entity called William Shakespeare, but William Shakespeare, too, is just an arrangement of words. All that we know about Hamlet and most of what we know about William Shakespeare is expressed in words:²² Hamlet and Shakespeare do not speak these words, these words speak Hamlet and

William Shakespeare, as they speak the actor (there is already a paradox here, how do the same words speak two different subjects?).

Thus, the stable subject of the actor speaks language and the language of the text speaks a subject that is unknown and unstable (who is Hamlet?). When actor and text are brought together we have a familiar situation – the actor speaks the text and the text speaks the actor.

Aligning this insight with Lecercle’s argument above we can say that when actors speak a text they can be positioned on any of the six stages elaborated in the following table

ONE	The text speaks: meaning is an effect of the free play of language.	The actor gives over to the corporeality of words finding their connection with the actor’s body (Berry); words have their own bodies and play between themselves (‘menendi anenbi/embenda/tarch intemple’, ‘OO EE AW o OO EE a i er e er’ and ‘They told me you had been to her, / And mentioned me to him’ or ‘To be or not to be, that is the question’).
TWO	The text speaks through the actor: the actor is possessed by words.	The actor sounds the text, its noises come out of the actor’s mouth, but somebody else is speaking, God, the author, the playtext, language.
THREE	The text speaks to the actor: it is the actor who speaks.	The text interpellates the actor as a subject (character?), the actor speaks from a place imposed by the text but now it is the actor/character who speaks.
FOUR	The actor’s speech is an empty speech: the actor is not in full control and the utterances never end.	The actor is exhilarated by the words, but cannot control them, and speaks them ‘emptily’, without meaning (in love with the sound of the voice).
FIVE	The actor speaks about the text: the actor avoids being possessed by the text by reflecting on it.	The actor reflects on the text, finds its laws, comments on it, explains it, imposes meaning on it, forces it to imitate (a) reality.
SIX	The actor speaks (through) the text: the actor uses the text like an instrument.	The actor knows what, why, and how to speak the text, it is an expression of an intention.

I stress that in reality the actor occupies all of these stages at once but this schema suggests both an explanation of, and a methodology for, actors' processes. Actors can approach the text in a number of ways:

- 1) through speaking about the text, creating a metatext that interprets and imposes meaning it, for example, "To be, or not to be, that is the question" means "What I, or we as humans, have to consider is: should I or we live, or should I or we not live given the circumstances?"
- 2) and more fruitfully, through inscribing the corporeal reality of the language on their own bodies, finding the unique materiality of the language that speaks the subject, that is, through descending to *délire*. 'To be or not to be' is a series of corporeal events that if fully entered and explored as nonsense will yield their own sense and subject.²³

Returning to Berry's work: by giving over to the corporeality of words, finding their connection with their bodies, actors 'learn', are inscribed with, words that have their own bodies. Stages **One**, **Two** and **Three** (the text speaks/speaks through/speaks to the actor) mark the process of inscription by which 'character' emerges as a surface effect of the operations of *délire* within the actor.

Commonly actors work from **Six** through **Five** (the actor speaks about the text/speaks the text) and there is the danger they remain in control of their performances, imposing a global meaning on the text, never surrendering to the pleasure lurking beneath the surface of the playtext; they remain in control of the words, are never possessed by them, and never transform their subjectivity.²⁴ Working this way actors may get through to stage **Four** (the actor speaks an empty speech) where an exhilaration with the words may take over and the actor is in thrall to the sound of his or her voice.

If actors are to transform their subjectivity they must be prepared to entertain the text at the level of the free play of the text, namely, in the case of a playtext, by giving over to the corporeality of the words, by treating them as glossolalia and opening themselves to the radical re-organisation of their body/selves that this entails.

I was possessed, not by Claudius, but by the text – first (but only in terms of setting it out now on paper), by the playtext by that fictional entity William Shakespeare, and second, by the performance-text constructed by those psychotics, my fellow actors and the director.²⁵ Ultimately, I was possessed by language, or rather, by *délire*,

the experience of the body within language, of the destruction and painful reconstruction of the speaking subject, not through the illusory mastery of language and consciousness, but through possession by language. The subject understands that he [sic] does not speak language, he is spoken by it (1985, 40).

My experience as Claudius was *délire*. It is not my anxiety that I will not be able to speak and do what is wanted that leads me to these extraordinary sensations, but surrendering my controlling, interpretive self to speaking and doing at 'close-range'. Berry asks, like Artaud, like

Lecerle, that the actor be destroyed and rebuilt through possession by language not through rational mastery of it, and allow the text to speak him or her, not the reverse (Lecerle 1985, 140).

EPIGRAPHS

Page one: Schreber 1955, 42 n.1; the Calvin Klein advertisement is cited in Weiss 1989, 145.

Page two: Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 257

Page three: Novarina 1990, 73; Tzara is cited in Judovitz 1990, 80.

Page six: Artaud 1988, 528n9; Housman cited in Judovitz 1990, 80.

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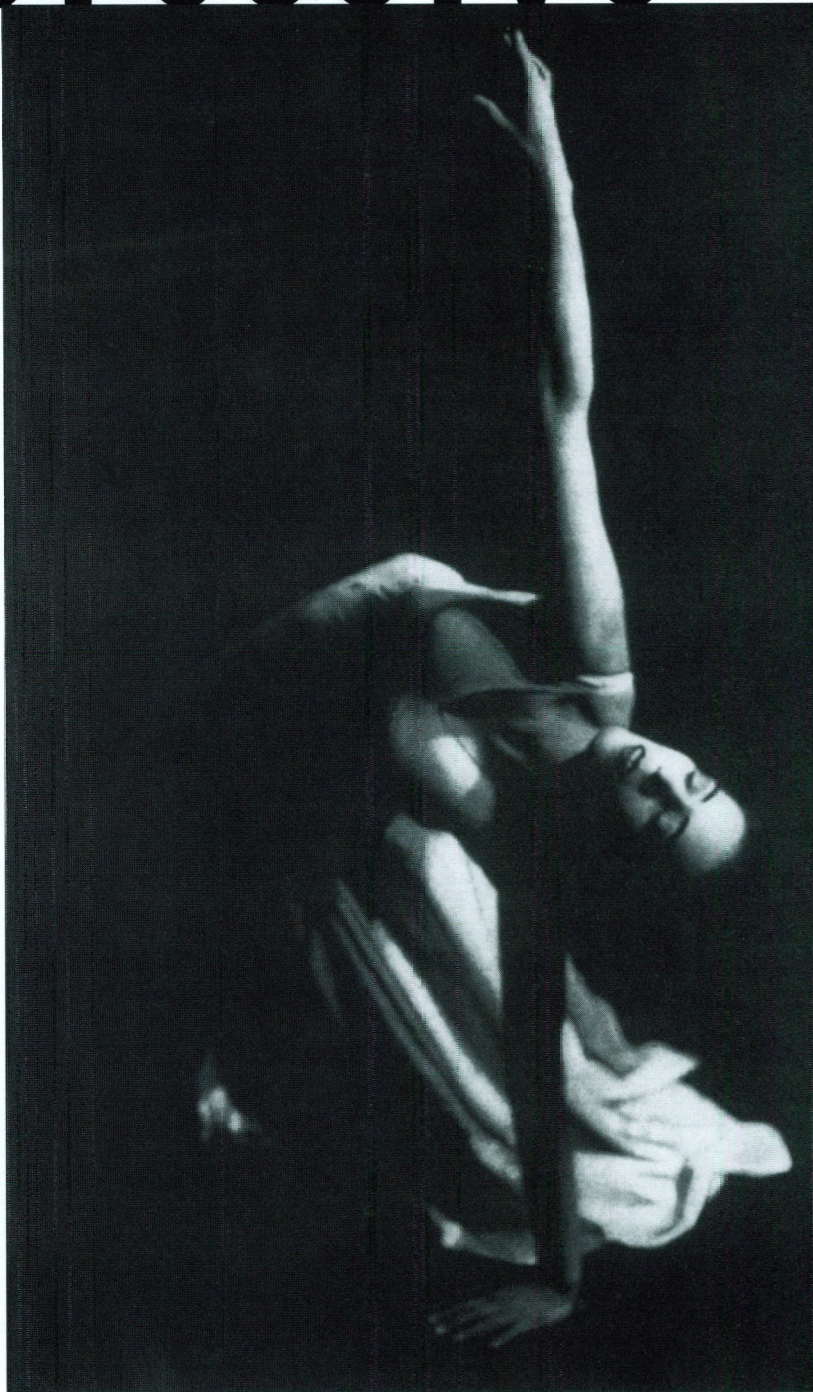
NOTES

- 1 The first part of this title is taken from the diary of Vaslav Nijinsky cited in Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 77.
- 2 To be fair Aaron gives good reasons for limiting his discussion to the stage actor (1986, ix–xiii), but I want to argue that there are similar mechanisms underlying the moment of ‘speaking’ in many different forms. For a discussion of the space of eroticism see Jan Kott’s ‘A short treatise on eroticism’ (1992, 71–5).
- 3 They are their own parents, dependent on no lineage, divine issue – what the mad judge Daniel Paul Schreber called *flüchtig hingemachte Männer*, (fleeting-improvised-men), ‘souls put down temporarily in human form directly by divine miracle’ (Schreber 1903 (1955), 4 n.1 & [357]).
- 4 See Schechner 1986 & 1988 and Turnbull 1990 for discussions of liminality.
- 5 Compare Linklater, ‘every change of thought has a change of breath ... only when the breath is involved deep in the body is the thought organic’ (1976, 139), with Berry, ‘how we breath is how we think ... in acting terms, how the character breathes is how the character thinks ... [when] we have made the thought our own physically through the breath ... we do not have to press out our emotional and intellectual intentions on top of the text’ (1987, 26).
- 6 ‘... let the text impregnate you so that sensory, emotional, imaginative, physical and vocal discoveries are the foundation on which the intellect can build’ (Linklater 1976, 191).
- 7 ‘We release the thought, itself a physical activity, through the physical energy of the word. The words are the means by which we articulate thought, words are movement, and we have to find the precise energy for that movement’ (Berry 1987, 28).
- 8 Discussing the concept of smooth and striated space – smooth space being associated with haptic space – Deleuze and Guattari say that the ‘passages between the striated and the smooth are at once necessary and uncertain, and all the more disruptive. The law of the painting is that it can be done at close range, even if it is viewed from relatively far away ... 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)
- 9 Linklater, too, has spoken against the power of print technology and the way it conditions us to read for sense. She says, ‘the spoken word is oscillating, transitory and free to move on the waves of sound. Sound waves actively affect the body that generates them and varying parts of the body that receives them. The printed word is static, permanent, trapped in time and space by the letters of the alphabet’ (1976, 187). Linklater argues for the re-establishment of the ‘visceral connection of words to the body’ (1976, 174), noting that ‘the problem for us is that words seem attached to ideas and detached from instinct ... to belong not in the body but in the head ... we have to take the risk of indulging in the sensual experience that words can give us when returned to their rightful home in the body. Our risk is that the vibrations of sound will produce sensations of extreme pleasure ...’ (1976, 172). Linklater shifts the paradigm for the production of ‘good’ sound from the aural to the haptic (Deleuze and Guattari explicitly associate the haptic with close-range vision (1987, Ch.14 ‘1440: The smooth and the striated’)). She talks about developing the performer’s sense of the ‘touch’ of sound – the ‘feeling of vibrations in the body’ (1976, 35) – to counter the censoring mechanisms of the intellect which are allowed to ‘view’ the aural production outside the body. Work on text proceeds through visualisation of appropriate images to animate the feelings, then moves onto connecting these feelings with words and finally to the text, which should be heard and felt rather than read so as to ‘let the text impregnate you so that sensory, emotional, imaginative, physical and vocal discoveries are the foundation on which the intellect can build’ (1976, 191).

- 10 Jacqueline Martin comments that Berry's exercises allow the actor to 'be' and to 'present' at the same time (1991, 173) since they work against psychological conceptions of character at the same time as allowing character to be experienced – they encourage a distance from psychology and emotion that is nearly Brechtian. There is a very conscious approach to the structures of the text and language – indeed her work, like much twentieth century voice work, is part of an overall structuralist approach to language, text and voice (see Martin 1991, 33ff41; and throughout) – that precludes over-identification in any clichéd Stanislavskian way.
- 11 Berry distinguishes between substance of the word and substance of the text. The substance of the word is 'the energy of the word in relation to its meaning' (1987, 95) – The substance of a text is, as it were, the sum of the substances of the words that make it up. Berry devotes two chapters of her book, *The actor and his text*, to the standard literary ideas of metre, rhythm, antithesis, argument, and word games. Her technique here resembles the Renaissance art of *sententia*, the understanding of 'grammar, punctuation, and phrasing' (1991, 7 & 172) (what Heywood described in *An apology for actors* in 1612 as the ability to 'fit his phrases to his action and his action to his phrases and his pronunciation to them both' (quoted in Martin 1991, 7); the resemblance to Shakespeare's words of 1605 in Act three, scene two of *Hamlet* – 'Suit the action to the word, the word to the action' – is obvious). These differences are part of the basis of poetry in particular. The attraction of homonyms and puns depends on such substantial judgments, as does the choice between synonyms. The homonymic pair 'Isle/aisle' have the same substance, where 'isle/island' are substantially different.
- 12 For example, by dividing the group into two and singing vowels from person to person, and imagining that the vowel is a ball being thrown from person to person, underlining this through adding arm movements for each vowel, 'it makes the vowels spread physically through [the] body ... makes you give them full value' (1987, 147). This exercise with vowels can then be applied to the vowels of the playtext, 'To be, or not to be' becomes 'OO–EE–AW–o–OO–EE' (I am following Berry's convention for representing vowels, 1987, 96–9) with corresponding arm movements for each vowel, for example,
- OO – raising arms to the sky;
 - EE – overarm swing towards front;
 - AW – pushing arms forward, as if pushing something away;
 - o – short arm jab.
- (I have found it useful to extend this exercise by associating a Laban effort with each vowel and movement and playing with variations of these)
- 13 Lest it seem I am simply describing the difference between poetry and prose, or Shakespeare and a lesser writer, note that the vowels 'OO–EE–AW–o–OO–EE' that go together to make up these famous words are different from, and have a different affect on the body of the actor than the vowels OO – AI – AW – EE – i – AW – OO – AI – AW – EE – o – i in 'should I or we live, or should I or we not live'. But if actors were to treat these admittedly less sonorous words with similar attention to their substance and materiality they, too, would begin to generate their own pleasure, their own nonsense. And it is the actor's task to be aware of the difference between different arrangements of vowels.
- 14 Lecercle: "'de-lira", leaving the furrow' (1990c, 56).
- 15 For Novarina 'language is not a tool ... [but] is always our very body which is there to be traversed again' and 'the word ... does not express me ... [but] arises, from within us, from what is outside of us' (1990, 74 & 75) and the actor must 'remake speech by dying in the body ... decompos[e] the civil body usually kept in order' (1993a (1974), 102–3).
- 16 Lecercle develops these stages from an examination of the evidence at the Knave of Hearts trial in Lewis Carroll's *through the looking glass*. Compare Novarina's, 'we are not expressive subjects, but spoken animals, animated beings to whom the word speaks' (1990, 75), with Lecercle's proposed contradiction.

- 17 And the subject of the text is *langue*. In the Knave of Hearts' trial meaning comes from the 'independent logic of the signifier' (Lecerclé 1985, 76)
- 18 The evidence is imposed on the Knave of Hearts and read by the White Rabbit
- 19 Lecerclé's metaphor for this stage is 'interpellation', demands made of speakers (with the additional sense of a pun on 'interpolate' – to falsify) which they must answer, dialogue is reported, and truth is mentioned); a subject emerges through this process of 'interpellation' or 'hailing' (as in Althusser's 1970 article on 'State ideological apparatuses' (in Easthope & McGowan 1992)). The poem read by the White Rabbit gives biographical detail to the empty shifters 'they said I could not swim'
- 20 The King of Hearts avoids possession by the Knave of Heart's evidence – or is it the White Rabbit's? or just 'evidence'? – by commenting on it, interpreting it, imposing a meaning on it
- 21 Louis Wolfson gets stuck at the fifth stage and can never shift beyond his concern with the mother tongue, he spends his days possessed by it even as he tries to escape it.
- 22 Is Shakespeare the subject of the famous portrait in the First Folio – or does the portrait 'speak' Shakespeare as it speaks Droeshout who engraved it?
- 23 It is in this process that the subject emerges or is inscribed on the actor – and what is the etymology of 'character' but 'inscription' (Aston & Savona 1991, 34)?
- 24 This way of working can be compared with Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the paranoid construction of desire in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983), where there is an insistence on 'interpretation, signs, verisimilitude and legal rights' (Lecerclé 1985, 170). It lends itself naturally to hierarchies and the notion of the controlling director even as it is tacitly controlled by *délire*. This is the paranoid-actor.
- 25 In 'Deleuzoguattarian' terms I was a vehicle for 'free indirect discourse' coming from the collective assemblage formed by 'Shakespeare', the rehearsal process, and the network of forces surrounding the production.

Expressive



Mary Wigman
performing 'Pastoral' from
'Shifting Landscape 1929'

Positions

by SALLY GARDNER

I am going to perform a dance called 'Pastoral' from *Shifting Landscape* by Mary Wigman. The dance was choreographed in 1929 in Germany. Mary Wigman was one of the early pioneers of modern dance in Europe. Dance of this period is often referred to as *expressionist*.

My interest in learning and performing this dance is not strictly speaking historical although I am interested in the question of tradition in regard to the sub-culture of modern dance. My main interest is in how different kinds of dancing create or implicate different kinds of dancing subjects. Dancing is not simply a question of doing one kind of step or another but of embodying meanings in a much more significant and complex way which cannot be taken for granted. Susan Foster, Elizabeth Dempster, Russell Dumas have all, in different ways, argued that the choreographic institutions of dance training, rehearsal and performance all work together to create one kind of dancer or another.

And just as important as the question of how different kinds of dancing create different kinds of dancing subjects is its corollary: how different ways of thinking about subjectivity can change the way dance is practised.

When I first performed this dance I followed it with a long improvisation. My purpose was to reflect upon two kinds of subjectivity - an expressionist, humanistic subjectivity and a post-modern and contingent one. I tried to perform a bridge between them. I saw that the Wigman dance placed me in a highly codified, conventional relation to my body and to the audience. The question I asked was can I work my way out of this position into another less determined place as a performer - without seeming simply to reject or even claim that I could reject, the one kind of position for the other?

The delicious passivity of the sunswept beach.

**I was lying on the beach lost in a feeling of relaxation,
Doing nothing, thinking of nothing, beholden to nothing,
Completely abandoned to the moment.**

The sky above was blue.

**The slightly raised arm swung to and fro in the air
Without resistance,**

**The fingers moved playful in the rhythm of wave and tide,
Everything was so soft and warm,**

So pleasantly weightless,

Everything had the freshness of a dawning day about it.

– MARY WIGMAN

I thought about these questions in relation to the idea of expression. Early modern dance has been called expressionist and presupposes a kind of histrionic, emotionally charged, feminised body: by contrast, later forms of modern dance – often called post-modern – as we saw last night, make their departure from a pedestrian, ‘factual’ body. Although it has often been said that this second kind of dance lacks feeling, I have never found this to be the case. On the contrary, for me, it seems to provoke, in the dancing, unlimited associations and emotionally inflected memories and thoughts. Only in this case there is the possibility of their becoming part of the way the dance signifies in unpredictable and unconventional ways.

This session is called expressive positions, and I am going to offer a very broad distinction between these two kinds of modern dance based around the idea of expression. I think the distinction is useful because it is a way of articulating differences between the different historical forms of modern dance. However, different movement practices will undoubtedly subvert this distinction and call for its refinement. I’m setting up the distinction in order ultimately to be able to see where different movement practices actually move across it.

Broadly speaking I would use the word expressive to distinguish those kinds of movement practices where there is an intention to link specific movements with specific meanings. In these kinds of practices a relationship of analogy is either constructed or is assumed inherently to exist between a bodily movement on the one hand and an idea, feeling or scene, on the other. In the relationship of analogy there is considered to be a likeness between two things – in this case it would be a likeness between a particular way of moving and, let’s say, a particular feeling.

At the bottom of this idea of expression, therefore, there lies a division – a difference between one thing and another so that the two can then be construed as being like one another. Now I am all for divisions, but I want to take a moment to look more closely at this idea of expression.

The word ‘express’ itself embodies a division, being made up of *ex* – out of, and *press* – to press or to push – which gives ‘to push out of’. As well as the sense of division, in this definition there is the suggestion that in expressing something some work has to be done. So we might say that a dance that is intended to be expressive in the sense that I’m talking about, is made to do something: it is put to work in some way. A dance, however, exists primarily as an embodied event so we could go a step further and say that it is through the dancer that the dance sets about its work of expressing something.

But why not implicate the dancer even more deeply in this process: why not say that in an expressive dance the dancer has to do some work, that she is involved in a kind of ‘labour’? – to use a metaphor from economics. The purpose of this labour is to bind together the movement and its intended meaning so that the two seem to go naturally together. The dancer’s labour creates



Below:

Sally Gardner 'History' 1992

Photographs by Hellen Sky



the illusion that an identity exists. The dancer is employed in making something seem like a unity when it is really a division. This dancer doesn't create meanings of her own – she is rather the necessary condition for the illusion that is the basis upon which meanings are produced – by others.

To continue with the economic metaphor we could say that at a certain point in the history of modern dance a lot of energy was liberated because many dancers stopped putting themselves at the service of identity and started to be concerned with difference and division. The energy that had been bound up in the labour of binding together movements and ideas, bodies and meanings, was released and was used in other ways.

The historical moment I am referring to is generally associated with the influence, initially, of dancer and choreographer, Merce Cunningham. Rather than being based on a division, Cunningham's work is based upon the principle of an identity. This identity could be represented by the phrase *dancing is dancing* (where dancing is a provocative, intelligent, important thing to do). According to this principle the work of dancing does not create an identity between bodily movement and something else but rather takes off from an already existing identity of movement with itself. In terms of my economic metaphor, the dancer's labour, previously the work of binding, becomes able to be dispersed along the lines of division within the dance. Absolved of the singular task of binding together specific bodily movements and specific meanings the dancer is free to observe the looseness and the non-essentialness of the bonds between movements and their possible significations.

Furthermore she is free to take up a number of positions in relation to this division so that her work can become simultaneously the work of attending to, of noticing, of reflecting upon, of feeling, and so on. It might be more correct to say that the dance also enjoins that freedom upon the dancer. She dances, as it were, 'along the several staves of a score'. Similarly, the performed dance cannot be thought of as unfolding along a single and carefully judged line but, rather, as dividing and proliferating in a number of directions simultaneously.

As I said before, I have tried not to make the distinction outlined above an opposition. My aim is to find ways of articulating differences and to suggest continuities between different kinds of dance. I have also been concerned, in placing the 'work' of the dancer at the centre of my 'theory', not to make an opposition between theory and practice.

To finish I would just like to leave you with a statement of my own (expressive) position, which is this, that, thinking and practising in the field of modern dance has led me to a point where, now, I can say that, in dancing, sometimes I am where I dance and sometimes I am not. But I tend more towards the perception that when I am not where I am dancing I am even more... ●



Points of Contact

THE CONCEPT OF PHILOSOPHY

There is a subject of discussion in philosophy, what they call a thought experiment, in which it was supposed that we might all be brains in a vat. Brains, a tank of water, a few strategically placed silicon chips, feeding into a nervous system, and that's it. The question was, could we still be us?

There used to be this joke circulating the Monash philosophy department about an Oxford philosopher who was completely preoccupied with ideas quite to the exclusion of his personal life. During a conversation he was asked a question about fun, to which he replied, 'Oh, do you mean the concept of fun?'

Philosophy has worked almost exclusively in the field of concepts for some time now. In a similar vein, the notion of an intellectual is one who works with ideas, who lives the life of the mind. This is all very well when we mean the life of the mind but what about the life of the body? Living the life of the body. The concept of the body doesn't seem to work as well as the concept of the mind. This is partly because of the way we think about thought, and the way we think about the body. Bodies are lived. The mind thinks. But what if we wanted to think about the body? How might we do that? What if we wanted to think through

by **PHILIPA ROTHFIELD**

Philosophies of Movement

OPPOSITE: ROS WARBY AND KEITH MARCH
'A TREE IN ANY DIRECTION' DANCE EXCHANGE 1994
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LESLIE SOLAR

the body, or with the body, how might we do that? Would it make a difference if we thought the body at the desk or computer, or thought the body through movement, in movement? And if we did think the body through moving, how would we then write about that? As some of you know already, writing about movement is not the same as doing it. For writing, like moving, is a form of practice, a medium in itself with its own densities, histories and specificities.

Each trajectory arising from either mind or body, into thought, into writing, into philosophy, into practice, into performance, into therapy, yields different kinds of emphasis. It makes a great difference what stimulates what, what feeds what, what provides the means of understanding, of representation, of comprehension. Setting or context makes a difference.

In this piece tonight, in a setting which we've attempted to consist of movement, performance and ideas, I propose to map a terrain of thought on the body, on bodies. I'm going to take as my stimulus, a couple of fields of philosophy of the body, and then look at some of those ideas in relation to a few thoughts I've had through movement. Now, it could have gone the other way around, from movement to philosophy, for example, or from performance to writing. There's no one way to do this, no privileged mode, medium or sphere which provides an authoritative base. Each emphasis has its own characteristic preoccupations, predispositions and therefore distortions. Which is why this conference attempts a variety of emphasis and presentation, in the hope that one kind of density will inform or stimulate another.

INTELLECTUAL ROOTS FROM LANGUAGE TO THE BODY

If you could say, which I think you can, that the 50's through to the 70's manifested an intellectual preoccupation with language, you could equally say that today there is a widespread intellectual preoccupation with the body. From language to the body. How did that happen?

- The interest in language came from structuralism, and post-structuralism where a certain kind of model of language was adapted and applied to all manner of things. Lots of things were regarded as linguistic, and were consequently analysed as texts. For example, cultural images, television, cinema, fashion, art, and dance. To look at something as a text is to see it as having a kind of linguistic meaning, as setting up certain relations of meaning. The emphasis here is not only on meaning, but is also on society and culture and its contribution to meaning. So the text is seen in social and cultural terms.
- Social, cultural, textual, now add political. After all, so people thought, there are all kinds of power relations inherent in the production of social images. For example, look at advertising and its presentation of the nuclear family, its presumption of heterosexuality, its images of certain ethnic groups, white, young, able, beautiful people. These values are part and parcel of social and political values which predominate in society. The images we live within, and the social meanings which circulate have a big influence on us.

- Now, on the question of influence, let me say something about the person in relation to these forms of thought and language because it is to do with being a person that the body comes up. One of the features of structuralist and post-structuralist thought is the idea that social, cultural and linguistic forms have a big influence on what we are. This is the opposite to the idea that we have a big influence on everything else, that we as individuals are primary. For anyone who's interested, this is called anti-humanism. It is the view that we are the products of language, culture and society. That our sense of self, our ideas, and our values derive from outside of ourselves. That the world influences us. This goes against the grain of individualism, our sense of ourselves as singular entities who go and do things in the world, who make choices, who act, and who move as individuals.

Now initially, the way in which society, language and culture was said to affect us was via our minds. Terms like ideology and social conditioning, were both taken to signify social processes which were thought to operate upon our consciousness, upon our thinking. But this has shifted, and therein enters the body. Because of the work of writers such as Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, and closer to home, Elizabeth Grosz, people have begun to turn to the body and not merely the mind as the place where social and cultural influence really takes hold.

What does this mean? Well, firstly that people from the humanities and the social sciences, and not just medicine, biology and physiotherapy, have become interested in the human body. And secondly, that the body is now seen in much more social and cultural terms than before. In this sense, the kind of body posited is a little different:

Firstly, the body is seen as a cultural product rather than as a biological entity.

This is extremely significant. It has to do with where we look for an understanding of the body in movement. I'm using the term, biology, to signify an understanding of the body as a kind of object of nature, which can be studied and known objectively by science, and which can be separated from culture. Most bio-medical approaches take this line. Menopause, for example, according to medicine is a physiological and hormonal condition which women suffer. It is not seen to be a range of experiences which are very much influenced by say our culture's prevailing notions of femininity, reproduction, and aging. Nor is medical understanding itself seen to be a product of a certain cultural setting. Science prides itself in its ability to transcend culture. But if the body is cultural, so is our understanding of it. This is the view that knowledge and its object are not that separate from each other.

As well as a cultural understanding of the body, the influx of social and cultural theory into the domain of the body has led to an emphasis on bodily practice, an emphasis many of you probably make as a matter of course. Of course, you could say, it's obvious that how you move, how bodies are organised within various activities, within work, in public spaces, at home, at school, makes a huge difference to the sort of people we are. Well, the academic train of thought which I have traced which moves from mind through language to body has finally also arrived at this position.

The view is that the ways in which bodies are socially regulated, the ways in which they are known, the social spaces in which they live is a crucial factor in producing the kinds of beings we are. Working in a factory, going to school, driving a car, taking public transport, living in a house with a garden, in a flat, wearing runners, walking in a tight skirt, dancing en masse to reggae music, these are all social and cultural ways of life which are embodied by us. Doing yoga, massage, meditation, aerobics, going to the doctor, taking drugs. It is our bodies which live out these possibilities and act within these settings, and our selves which are ultimately influenced by them.

So much for the general picture. Now, just to summarise where we are:

I began by saying that philosophy has been very mind-centred over the years, that intellectual thought itself is seen as an activity of the mind. I also said that there are contemporary forms of thought which have surged towards the body with the consequence that the body itself is now being shaped in different ways. Of course, bodies can be shaped in multiple ways. You know that. Whether through movement awareness, dance therapy, particular dance forms and techniques, food, exercise, health lifestyles, sexual embrace, or sensual contact. It seems to be the case now that many of us recognise that there is no one path towards the body, no one position that one must take, no ultimate truth. But there are numerous possibilities, some admittedly more plausible than others.

In the following, I want to map out a couple of bodily possibilities both of which originate in a French philosophy called phenomenology. Phenomenology emphasises our subjectivity, the inner, feeling, thinking aspect of our experience. A phenomenology of bodies looks to the ways bodies feel in movement. Not only what muscles and bones are being utilised to move or to dance, but what that feels like. It represents a kind of kinaesthetic sensitivity. If I had time, I would have elaborated another approach which I've already mentioned above as background to academic work on the body – that is, post-structuralism – which looks at the body via culture, representation, knowledge and society. Post-structuralism is largely what's led to the recent interest in the body. Post-structuralism plus feminist theory in its concern to explain sexual difference – male and female bodies – in terms that are cultural and not merely biological.

The thing about phenomenology is that its emphasis is on experience, on what's called the lived body. For those of you who pay attention to how bodies are lived and experienced, this approach will come fairly easily. Post-structuralism is different because it's not centred upon the individual or the qualities of individual experience, because it highlights social and cultural forces with regards to the body. Post-structuralism is also different because it's counter-intuitive; it questions our experience and claims that what we think and feel is the result of social forces not the product of our own understanding.

PHENOMENOLOGY

Ironically, phenomenology's first base is consciousness, not the body at all. The phenomenological tradition takes its cue from German idealism, an approach which emphasises the role of the mind for all understanding. Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir's existentialism has its roots in phenomenology. And remember the crucial role consciousness plays for all existential action. It's not just what you do that counts, your behaviour, it's what you thought you were doing, how you understood it, what sense of responsibility you took with respect to what you do, what excuses you made for your choices. Existentialism tends to be rather mind-centred at the expense of the body. In fact, the body was an all-round drag for Sartre, and for de Beauvoir, the female body a bit of an oozing pain. Too much angst, Galloises and black coffees.

Now, phenomenology of the body is an extension of the phenomenological emphasis upon consciousness. It is not an abandonment of the mind but the recognition that we are never simply minds. We could never just be brains in a vat because we are always embodied, living, perceiving beings. The person who effected this shift in phenomenology from mind to embodied mind is Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For most of his life, he tried to acknowledge and incorporate certain aspects of human being: the fact that we are mindful, that we are embodied, that we experience the world, and that the world experiences us. He did this in different ways at different moments in his writing. I'm going to speak of two stages in Merleau-Ponty's work. One, rather early on, where he makes a distinction between the subjective body and the objective body, and one later on where he writes of something he calls the flesh.

Let's start with the subjective and objective body.

It's possible to look at the body from different perspectives, that is, in different respects. Merleau-Ponty calls the subjective aspect of the bodily self, the phenomenal body, and the objective aspect of the bodily self, the objective body. Although they are not entirely unrelated (you could still say we only have one body) the two aspects represent important distinctions one might want to make. Let's spend a little time on these two notions.

If we take the perspective of our own bodily self, our selves in movement, this is the phenomenal body.

In a way, the phenomenal body is an extension of the mind because it's really the mindful body or the thinking body. It's whatever our bodies feel like to us, and according to Merleau-Ponty, it's this body we use whenever we move. So, if you tried to work out what your legs feel like, thighs, calves, feet, that would be an experience within the phenomenal body. The phenomenal body is our own. It's the one we feel; as if from the inside. The phenomenal body might not even reflect bodily reality. When I get anaesthetic injections at the dentist, sometimes my tongue feels like a giant Wettex, my lips like whale blubber. That's not to say this is how my mouth actually is, and when I check it out in the mirror, I can see that's not the case. The way my mouth feels is its phenomenal aspect. The way it is is its objective aspect.

If we take the perspective of the body as if from the outside, from an external, third person point of view, that's the objective body. Most of medical knowledge is about the objective body in that it is framed from a perspective outside the person. The object of examination, of dissection, of diagnosis is always another person. To that extent, medicine is largely objective in its construction and orientation. If, on the other hand, a doctor wanted to know how the person felt, that would be a phenomenal concern.

Even though we all use our phenomenal bodies, in fact we have no choice, some dance styles emphasise the phenomenal aspect of movement, and some a more external perspective. Although we always look at objective bodies, that is from the outside, the kinds of work and focus in a particular movement field can influence the feel (even the look) of movement. Take ballet for starters. Ballet is a spectacular form of movement. It is codified around certain moves which are geared towards display. Ballet is about a certain look, and range of moves which are created to be seen. It is about visibility. Even turn out is an attempt to turn the inside out, for show. Lots of jazz ballet is also about show. You can tell a piece that's been choreographed in front of the mirror. People's bodies swivel around what is basically a forward orientation. Moves are created for effect, their whole logic being one of visibility, and in the case of jazz ballet, throbbing sexuality. Now, both these dance forms, whilst requiring the dancer to be phenomenally conversant with his/her body, do not emphasise any inner focus. Furthermore, the work itself tends to be about how to create a certain look. Attitude, arabesque, pas de chat. Each move is delineated according to appearance. If the focus of a technique is exclusively around how something looks, then the person training in that area will also spend most of their time gearing themselves around external appearance. This tends towards a sense of objective rather than phenomenal being.

Whereas, other dance forms may begin from a much more internal place. Take image work for example. Nanette Hassell gave a class years ago on the pelvis. Lying down, imagining my own pelvis, as a curved bowl, filled with water. To the extent that the image can be felt, these are

phenomenal imaginings. Then rocking that bowl, rolling, standing, walking, running with that bowl of water which is at the same time my pelvis or what I feel to be my pelvis. This is a more phenomenal orientation, whether I'm focusing inwardly on my pelvis, or am imagining it as a bowl of water. Any work which requires some thought about the internal feel of the body takes a phenomenal perspective. Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen's work has I think a phenomenal aspect – where it involves focusing in on one's organs or what we feel to be our organs. It's one thing to know one has bones, flesh, organs, it's another to work upon and with that feeling. I did a class some time ago with LyndEn Nicholls, who brought a book along which had heaps of what she called meat pictures, flesh. We looked at the pictures for a while then tried to take those images inside our bodies, moving with a sense of some of those fleshy organs. These are examples of taking an objective form of knowledge, anatomy for instance, and transposing that external form into an internally oriented experience. I 'know' I've got a pelvis and that my leg nestles into it, femur into a ball socket, but I need to work both physically and internally to feel that, to sense my leg move around my hip socket. Movements and exercises are often designed so as to assist the subjective understanding of objective bodily principles. This is subtle. There can be quite a gap between an intellectual, objective understanding of one's body, and a felt, sensed understanding. It's even possible to mistake an objective understanding for a phenomenal feeling, and vice-versa. I might feel like I'm making a horizontal line with my back but it may be in fact, dipping down or tilting up. At that point, it could be useful to use a mirror as a check so that I can work out the right feeling for the right position.

It's possible to work completely internally for a while, focusing on what we feel like inside. People often close their eyes to do this as if once we stop looking out, we can allow ourselves to feel within. They sometimes also lie on the floor. Being still gives one a moment to gather oneself. And then one might play between looking out and looking in. Try to take that phenomenal focus into a more outwardly oriented setting. It's one thing to be phenomenally sensitive whilst lying on the floor, another to make specific movements and to maintain a phenomenal sensitivity. For each movement will have its own feel, its own fluidity, its own varieties and variations.

There's nothing to say that a ballet dancer won't be phenomenally conversant with his/her body. It's just that ballet technique has a more external focus in virtue of being a spectacular art form. Timing also has a bit to do with the kind of bodily focus one might take. Aerobics, for example, in order to maintain its disco beat and pounding heartbeat, doesn't give time to allow the person to investigate what they feel like, how they are moving. If they do have a moment to reflect, then there's all those mirrors to look at. People on exercise bikes read to pass the time. Turning off, or dreaming away doesn't develop the phenomenal aspect of bodily being. But then it depends upon whether you want to look good, lose weight or what.

I think for all of us, there is a continual play between phenomenal, objective, internal, external and visual dimensions of the body.

I just wanted to make the point that dance forms have differing emphases. An externally oriented display, technique and practice is bound to engender certain kinds of dancer. Phenomenally oriented work leads to other kinds of movement. Then of course it's up to the movers themselves to determine their own play and focus within their own work. There's a certain point to working phenomenally but performance has an objective dimension.¹ So does the achievement of particular moves. It's not enough to feel like one's achieving an upper back arch, continuing the line of the neck with that of the rest of the back, lengthening the torso without sticking any ribs out, if it's not actually happening.

That's something I find rather underemphasised within philosophical work on the body, that is, the relation between the objective and phenomenal body. For someone who wants to move precisely, it is absolutely crucial to know and sense where and how one's body is in space and time. Philosophers don't seem to realise how complex subjective (felt) bodily knowledge is. As Alexander once noted:

The fact is that people walk without any clear understanding of the guiding and controlling orders which command the satisfactory coordination and adjustment of the psycho-physical mechanism in the act of walking. (Alexander, 1967: 21)

In other words, most people can walk. They just have no idea how they do it. In order to find out, one needs to construct a moving dialogue between phenomenal and objective being. And since bodies are on the move all the time there are myriad changes occurring both objectively and phenomenally. My body in the morning is vastly different from how I am at night. Think of the variables which have influence here: recent and not so recent movements, diet, sleep, drugs, alcohol, emotions, thought patterns...

And yet, as well as variation, we also experience certain bodily fixities. Although I won't spend much time on this, there's a great deal which is created via habit and sedimented over time. Many injuries and unconscious habits or limitations are the result of repeated movements and/or embodied tendencies. Thus, an internal understanding of what one does in movement can be a great help in shifting patterns as well as injuries. Understanding in this context requires both objective

1. Performance has, I think, a felt dimension, a kinaesthetic element which the audience can sense.

and subjective fluency, and an ability to move between the two. It's my sense that this is the focus of both Alexander and Feldenkrais techniques, that each approach tries to engender an appreciation of both phenomenal and objective being, that is, what a body is and what a body feels, in order to extend its spheres of possibility.

THE FLESH

I want to turn now to another phase in Merleau-Ponty's work, an entirely different approach to bodies which he develops in a paper called 'The Intertwining – the Chiasm'. The difference is that he begins neither from the point of view of the bodily subject – me, my body – nor from that of the bodily object – the body. This is because he refuses the usual boundaries and starting positions. Usually, one begins with the subject, myself, my mind my body, moving from there. In this idea of flesh, however, we're not centred in the usual way in the individual self. Merleau-Ponty's idea is to write of the flesh of the world. It's almost the world as body. Now instead of explaining Merleau-Ponty's sense of the flesh in his terms, I thought we might proceed in another way, through some examples taken from movement. This is because one way I've found of understanding his ideas is through some of my experiences in movement and improvisation. The basic point is to question or think otherwise the usual bodily boundaries that exist between us, and others and the world. I'd like to try and make that point through a sense of contact.

Take us and the world for a minute. Take the way in which our feet feel the floor or ground. You know how it's possible to stand and move with the feet in tension, gripping the floor in a sort of gratuitous crawl position. But you may also know what it is to let that tension go and feel the floor in real contact with the feet. This requires letting one's weight go into the floor, allowing gravity to move through the body into the ground rather than to hold it off. It means not only releasing tension, but allowing the weight to go into the floor. When you do this, it also becomes possible to use that weight into the ground to push off the ground. So where are the boundaries between foot and floor? You could draw them in conventional terms but you could also do something else. Shifting the boundaries between the self and the world through varieties of contact, release or investment in that world.

The same thing could be said of weight relations between bodies. Contact improvisation involves a shifting play of boundaries and input. When people work together, using weight, ie, leaning, rolling, leaping on people, in unpredetermined ways, it's important to be flexible. That is, you may go into a moment of improvisation with a certain agenda but you have to be able to give that up and go with what's happening. And when it's working well, it's not always clear who is initiating moves and who complies with the movement. Or whether anyone is doing any initiating or complying. Movement happens. It's unplanned, between bodies, and continually open. So how many bodies are there here? How many minds? What bodily boundaries exist and where do they exist?

Or another example, in Wendy Houston's workshop which a number of people here did recently, we spent some time leaning into each other and into the ground and moving along, trying to keep that three-way contact. The ground, the self and the other person. And you could really feel when it worked. The weight somehow carried through into the other person, and pushing into the floor operated the keep that weight pouring into the other person. When it didn't work, you would have to take the pressure in your own body, probably into the lumbar region. At that point of 'failure', the boundaries of this moving entity collapsed inwards, so that one becomes a contained self again. Or, and I'm not very good at this, but holding arms in any kind of mutual weight bearing move. When it works, somehow strength pours or flows between people, and when it doesn't, it accumulates in the single bodily subject. The fact that we have individual "control" doesn't mean we have to maintain individual boundaries. When we push into the floor, if we allow that weight to really flow into it, maybe that creates a different boundary compared to when we skate over it. My own experience of Tai-Chi is of a melting into the earth. That's a new sense of boundary because it's a new sense of connexion.

Merleau-Ponty plays with these ideas in terms of reversability – the idea that whenever I touch or look at someone or something, there is a possibility that it could touch me back, that I could be looked at by the object. His discussion turns on an active/passive distinction that I don't think is necessary to maintain. Am I actually allowing my weight to fall into the floor, or am I passively letting go? Maybe I'm actively letting go. Maybe gravity's the active one. It's not clear to me, nor need it be. What's radical about Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh is that the usual distinctions between me and everything else collapse under a more transitive and penetrating notion of flesh, one where my flesh is intrinsically related to the flesh of others and that of the world.

So just to summarise this last section, I've introduced two sets of ideas which come from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology: the distinction between the phenomenal and objective body, and the notion of flesh as that which transgresses the classical boundaries of the body. Both are distinguished by a certain emphasis on our bodily experience, an emphasis which is less marked within post-structuralist approaches to the body which place more weight on images, meanings, knowledges and representations. In what follows, we're going to see some other interchanges of bodies and movement.

If I had a final message to leave you with, it's at this point that I'd give it to you. I don't. I think I don't because I'm not trying to argue a particular truth of the body. What I wanted to do was give a sense of some possibilities which arise from a certain interchange between philosophy and movement.

**OPPOSITE:
NICK SABEL AND KEITH MARCH
'A TREE IN ANY DIRECTION' 1994
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LESLIE SOLAR**



Contributors

ZSUZSANNA SOBOSLAY has applied her BODY KNOWLEDGE process (source and meridian energies; textu(r)al and rhythmic shaping) to teaching, performance making, directing and choreography, and in private practice in Eastern Australia since 1986. She is currently completing a Doctorate through Wollongong University.

PHILIPA ROTHFIELD is a lecturer in Philosophy at La Trobe University. She has also participated in a small number of dance performances over the last twelve years. She has published on the body, feminist theory, postmodernism and social theory. She is an editor of the journal *Thesis Eleven* and is currently writing a book on the moving body.

ROSALYN DIPROSE lectures in Philosophy at the University of New South Wales. She is co-editor, with Robyn Ferrell, of *Cartographies: Poststructuralism and the mapping of bodies and spaces* (Allen and Unwin 1991) and author of *The bodies of women: ethics, embodiment and sexual difference* (Routledge 1994).

MARK MINCHINTON has been a performer for seventeen years in a wide variety of forms and venues. He is a lecturer in Performance Studies at Victoria University of Technology.

SALLY GARDNER is a co-editor of *Writings on Dance*. She has been involved in dance making and performance for many years and is currently studying for a Masters Degree in Critical Theory and Monash University.

LIBBY DEMPSTER currently lectures in dance at Victoria University of Technology. She is the founding editor of *Writings on Dance* and a founding member of the Dance Exchange company. Her choreographic works have been presented throughout Australia and abroad. She is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Performance Studies at Monash University.

ANNA GIBBS is a Sydney-based artist working in the area of installation. She is a lecturer at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean.

ANNE THOMPSON has worked as a lecturer, performer, choreographer, community artist, director and movement coach. She is currently Head of Movement at the Victorian College of Arts, Drama School and is enrolled in M.A. (Drama) at Flinders University.

ALISON RICHARDS is a performer, creator and theatre theorist. She currently lectures in Performing Arts at Deakin University.

LESLIE SOLAR is a Sydney-based photographer who has been exhibiting and publishing her work for the past twenty years. Her most recent exhibition has been *Exchanging Glances* (1994) at Stills Gallery, Paddington.

Contributors to the Thinking Bodies Conference also included

Tara Rajkumar, Denis Altmann, Sally Lowe, Keith March, Nick Sabel, Sandra Parker, Joanne Smith, Shannon Parker, Penny Jelly, Peter Green, Cecil Desouza, Leah Dobrecjer, Elia Lom, Graziella Lom, Danielle Cresp, Lina, Felicity McDonald, Paul Falzon, Simon Lloyd, Victoria Baldwin, Justine Warner, Ruth Komesaroff, Shirrah Komesaroff, Harry Komesaroff, Jacob Benjamin, Kylie Hedrick, Trevor Patrick, Andrew Bayliss, Roger Stumvoll, Simone Marsden, Josie Dawes, Kate Kennedy, Eleanor McDonald and Erin, Hadassah Breninger, Karen Souter, Elizabeth Mars, Bryana Burns, Julie Fam, Tim McBeath, Kate Hall, Joanne Hughes, Monday McGill, Paul Hampton, Liz McLaughlin, Salvina Conti, Kirrily Weber, Debbie Male.

Technical and production co-ordination: Bryan Smith.



