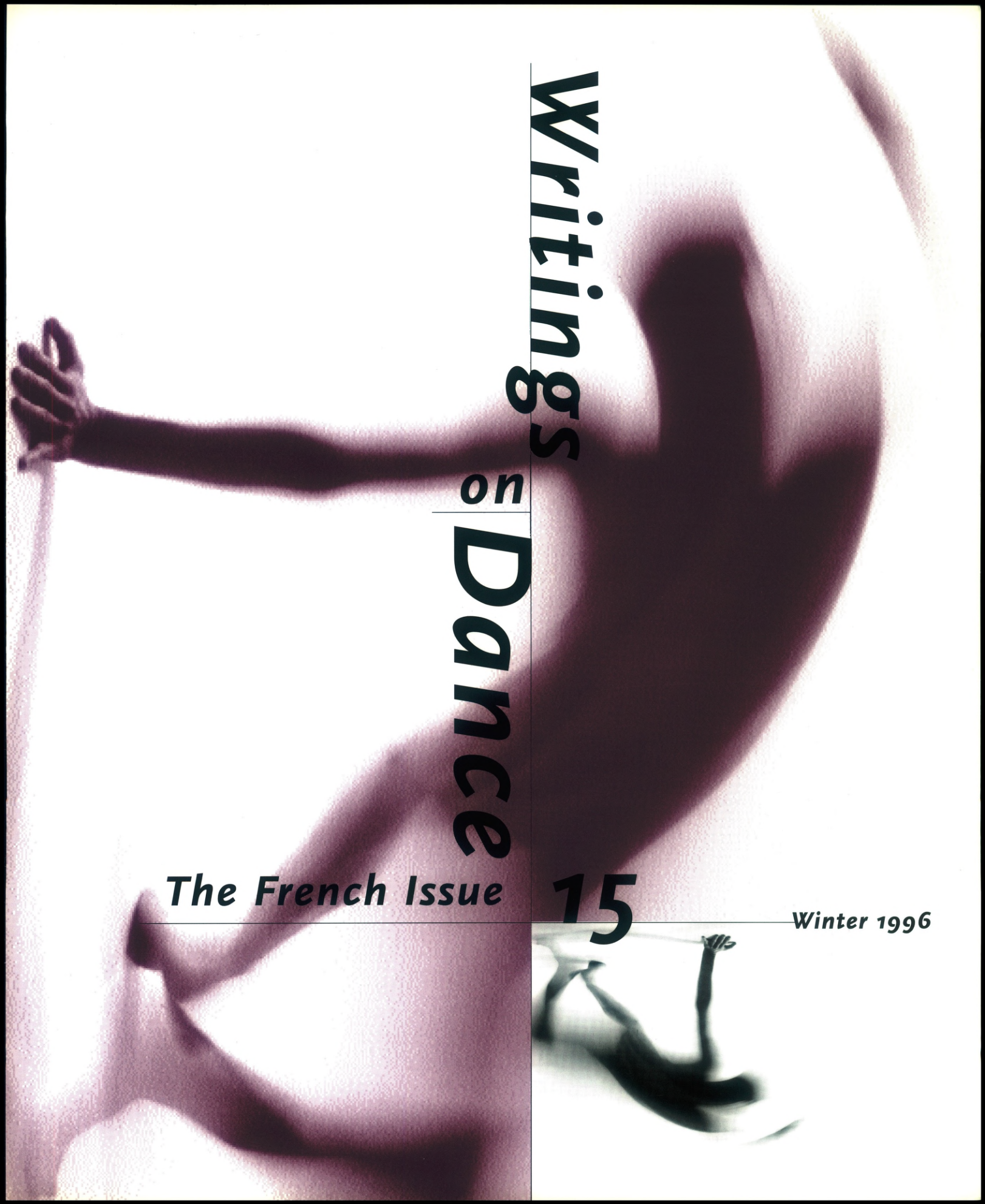
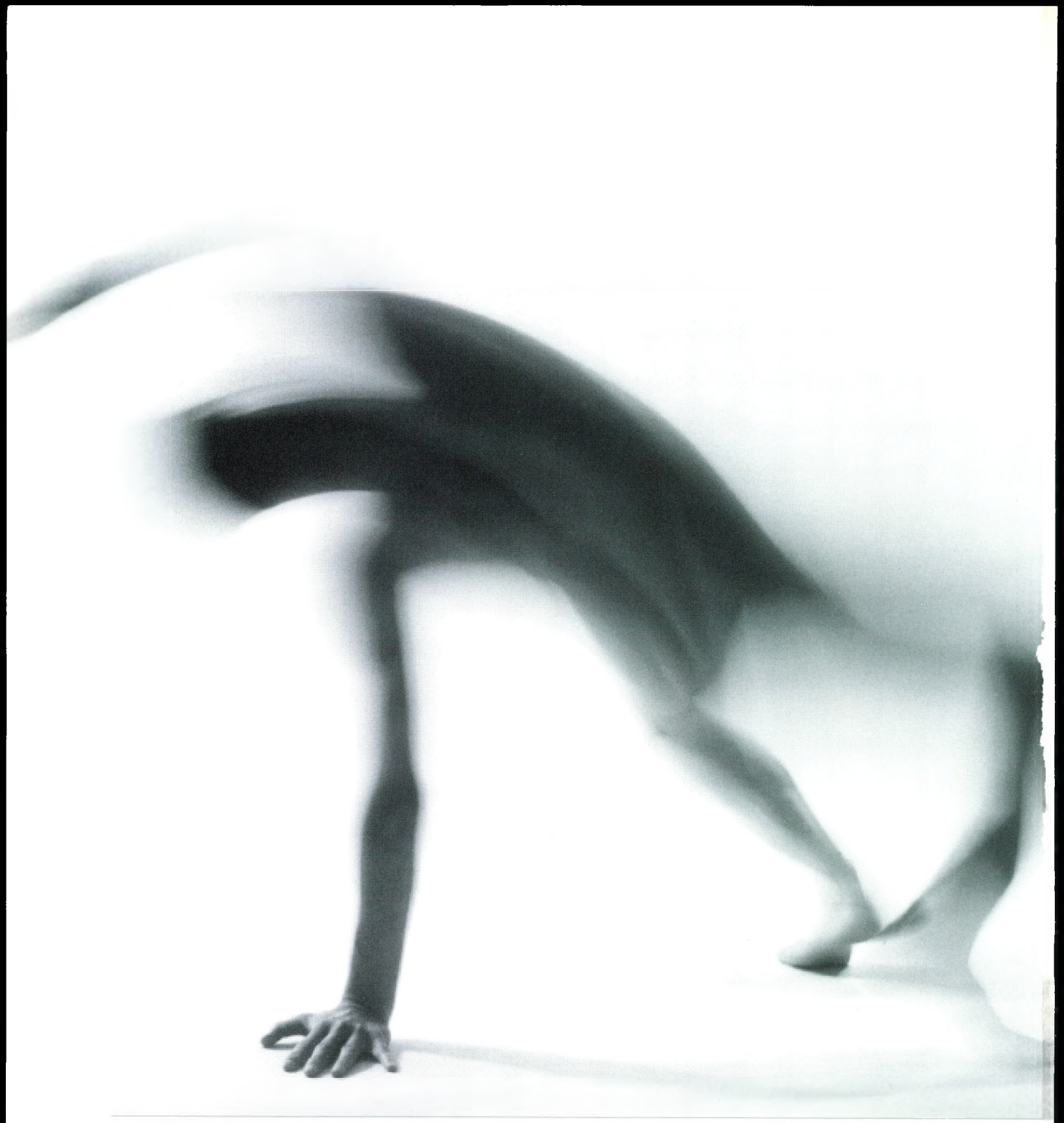
Writings on Dance

The French Issue

15

Winter 1996





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Writings on Dance 15

The French Issue

Les Bâtisseurs by Daniel Larrieu
Photograph by Geneviève Stephenson

Preface

by **David Williams**

The title of this edition of *Writings on Dance*, The French Issue, may evoke expectations of a collection of materials discussing contemporary French dance practices, French dance-theatre of the 1980s, for example. However, the practice of dance in France is not the direct concern of this volume. So why 'The French Issue'? What issues here from France? Primarily, the work of two writers and teachers based at the Université de Paris VIII in Saint-Denis: Laurence Louppe and Hubert Godard. Secondly, the writings of certain critical theorists and philosophers, as applied to a range of body practices and contexts – in particular, Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Levinas and Luce Irigaray.

In 'Hybrid Bodies', Laurence Louppe reflects critically on the 'eclectic bodies' of French dance-theatre in the 1980s; her essay provides a timely enquiry into the current rhetoric of 'hybridity', in the light of a resurgence of interest in some of the foundational body practices (and knowledges) of earlier generations of teachers and practitioners. In 'Corporeal Sources', Louppe offers an account of the work of one such teacher-practitioner, Trisha Brown, from her early 'equipment pieces' to her collaborations in France in the 1990s. In her continuing elaboration of a poetics of dance that explores and celebrates motility and/as instability, Louppe suggests, Trisha Brown endeavours to uncover the corporeal 'substrata' that in-form gesture – sensory and perceptual 'sources' generated through displacements from axial gravity, the site of an embodied imaginary.

Kinesiologist Hubert Godard develops Louppe's ideas through reference to a practice of kinesiology that draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis and phenomenology. His work offers an explicit critique of the positivism of disciplines such as biomechanics, through a recurrent concern for an apprehension of qualitative detail in individual gesture, and an articulation of a poetics of gesturality based on intensities and intentionalities. In the two interviews included here, Godard touches on a wide range of issues. Crucially, he describes the interplay of muscle tonicity and release central to the creation of any individual's gestural repertoire ('gestosphere') – in itself constitutive of a way of being in the world and of an 'entire history'. His account of the

application of kinesiology in work with cancer patients and their doctors is particularly engaging and moving. His resistance to reducing bodies to functionalities, and his determination to conceive of them as 'symbolic universes' always already in relation to an-other, suggest an ethical practice of great sensitivity and integrity.

Godard locates Contact Improvisation as a practice of 'deep communication' between gravitational systems, a 'tonic dialogue' that far exceeds touch. My own essay on Contact as a site for exploring an embodied ethics of alterity draws on the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's notion of the constitutive dialogue he calls the 'face-to-face': an ethical encounter with the radical difference of an-other. As Mary Douglas has shown, borders (of all bodies politic) are conventionally sites of risk, taboo and possible contamination. They must be policed to deflect outsiders, intruders, any potential attack on the autonomy of the 'State'. But Contact inhabits and rides borders, and can provoke them into becoming temporary thresholds. Maybe it's possible for the agonism of mutual exclusivity to give way (at least temporarily) to an economy of interdependence, responsibility and exchange; in other words, to ethical inter-related-ness.

In 'Spirit of gravity and maidens' feet', Sally Gardner interrogates the discourse of 'neutrality' prevalent in post-modern and new dance contexts (including Contact), in the light of Luce Irigaray's feminist conception of sexual difference. Focusing on Irigaray's recognition of the imbrication of bodies with-in language, and on Lacan's formulation of the Imaginary, Gardner explores the possibility of 'a logic of movement, not of image', of a space for moving inter-play which would resist recuperation into an economy of 'the same'. And her account of walking as a figure of autonomy-in-relation for women brings us back to ethics as dynamic negotiation and articulation of difference.

Finally, this edition of *Writings on Dance* revolves around issues of gravity. Almost all of the material here serves to remind us that we are gravitied beings, and that our processes of self-constitution are interwoven with our dynamic relations with experiences of gravity. My perspectives as co-editor have been ghosted by two gravity-related quotations. The first, by Paul Valéry: 'One should be light as a bird, not light as a feather'. The second, by Nietzsche, as cited here by Alphonso Lingis: 'Round every Here rolls the sphere There. The centre is everywhere'.

Les Bâtisseurs by Daniel Larrieu
Photograph by Geneviève Stephenson

Corporeal Sources

A journey through the work of **Trisha Brown**

by **Laurence Louppe**

[first published as 'Voyage dans l'oeuvre de Trisha Brown' in *Nouvelles de Danse* no.24, 1995]

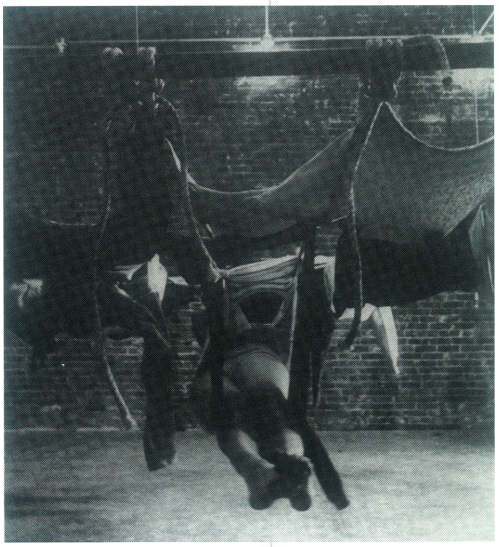
Trisha Brown
Photograph by Johann Elbers

Every one of Trisha Brown's dances is a beautiful and extraordinarily poetic 'opus'. Brown works patiently over a long and concentrated period in the studio to produce these works. Each one takes shape slowly out of what Michel Bernard[1] so aptly calls the sensory substratum, that ground of consciousness where urgent intensities arise.

But the importance of Trisha Brown's practice lies less in the well-established value of her finished works than in her ability, through these works, to raise questions that go to the heart of some of our deepest concerns regarding the body, the nature of being, and of action.

In the course of time these questions have given rise to different approaches. Bodies have changed, forms have evolved. But the same concerns have animated and given rise to each new phase. Through a series of 'epochs', which she herself refers to as 'cycles', Brown has steadfastly pursued her path towards that place which we might think of as the hidden, sensory origin of all movement, a place of which her works indicate the enigmatic presence.

I want, briefly, to retrace this journey through her work, marking each phase by the name she gives it, as if each represented a transformation or displacement of the same point of extreme sensitivity.



Trisha Brown *Floor of the Forest* (1969)
Photograph by Babette Mangolte

Equipment pieces

In the years 1968-70, the first period of her work, Brown established the ground of her future research. The works of that period owe their name to the equipment – harnesses, pulleys, ropes etc, – that was necessary to launch the dancer into dimensions of space and time unfamiliar to the body's established patterns. At that time it was not so much a question of choreography as of situations generated by the doctrine of 'non-dance' of the Judson Dance Theatre. This was an historic moment when 'corporeal experience and unadulterated physical gesture' took drastic precedence over any need for meaning, development of vocabulary or decoration in movement. This was, of course, a tendency not confined to dance alone. A reductivist project (removing from art its formal surface in order to reveal the bare ontological basis of the artistic gesture) was central to all art practices of the period, from Minimalism to the Cageian post-dadaism of the group Fluxus. In the wake of Anna Halprin the dancers at Judson, more than other artists, made extensive use of self-imposed restraints and impositions, the better to bypass the intervention of the 'mental' in order to discover the corporeal source of the poetic gesture.

Already, in Brown's celebrated *Walking down the side of a building* we find the elements which were to become increasingly important in the later work: a decentring of the body's weight in relation to gravity, bringing about an alteration in the perceptions of the dancer as well as in those of the spectator – thus, a role both heuristic and poetic given to the weight of the body, here deliberately unsettled from its habitual distribution; a reconsideration of all 'scenography', whether urban, human or symbolic; and a preference for neutral, floating spaces, unexpected interruptions, reversals and vertigos.

Accumulations

How, asks Trisha Brown herself, after the radical years of the Judson Church could one begin to create again, but according to new principles, a movement language that would have its own development in space and time? The term 'accumulations' signifies that in fact there was to be (at this point) no 'composition' as such but instead a simple compendium of movements one after another – or rather of gestures, in the sense that each move employed a single body part. In 1971 the Accumulations were first danced standing up, then lying down, solo or with several dancers as in the Group Accumulations, with the supine position freeing the lower body from its supporting function, as Brown recalls in Sally Banes' *Terpsichore in Sneakers*.[2]

Of course, these works can be related to the work of minimalist sculptors like Carl André and Donald Judd. They share the same processes of sequencing, repetition and through repetition, of the neutralising of 'tension' and theatricality. But there are other ways of reading Brown's work that are perhaps more in keeping with the singularity of her art. For example, in Brown's case, equalising the distribution of her body weight in lying down seems to give the action of gravity at any one place a special quality, more diffuse, freer, and softer. This relates to Brown's refusal of any expressivity dependent upon a hierarchy of body parts and their forces. It prefigures the development of Brown's miraculous 'abandon' – an abandon that has led Hubert Godard to describe Brown as 'disarmed to the point of disappearance (*évanouissement*)'[3].

The Accumulations could be seen to be made up of apparently disconnected movements or gestures. They work, however, through a network of profound connections linking the upper and lower body and its different sides and anticipating the Brownian body[4] as one that exists in continuous movement.

Unstable Molecular Structure

This title has been given by North American art critic and writer, Klaus Kertess, to Brown's work from about 1976. It designates a dance of perpetual motion, where the body lets itself go without pulling back, where equilibrium consists in a total commitment and surrender to falling. Now Brown's body emanates, in its serene turbulence, a subtle artistry, a chaotic and convulsive airiness that can never be fixed or held. As an articulate compositional project, her dance draws its eloquence from an apparent chaos – what Sally Banes calls so well an 'exquisite disorder'.

Trisha Brown *Newark* (1987)
Photograph by Geneviève Stephenson

Trisha Brown in *Watermotor* (1978)
Photograph by Johann Elbers

Trisha Brown *Astral Converted* (1990)
Photograph by Geneviève Stephenson

Lineup (1975)

This is a hybrid work, a kind of inventory of older and new materials which form a complex combination where (as is often the case in Brown's work) improvised material, everyday movements and non-dance situations are mixed and interspersed with choreographic structures (like the famous retrograde sequences of *Solo Olos*). After several major works such as *Opal Loop*, this period ends with its most remarkable piece, *Set and Reset* (1983). Here, Brown continues, this time through the use of counter-balance, to create and perform a choreography of the untoward. But she also sets out to create a complete theatrical interaction – including set, costume and music. This is something that up until now she had only barely addressed and not without a certain wariness. As a pivotal philosophic, compositional and political position, Brown had maintained a mistrust of 'the scenic space' because of its power to engulf and excessively centralise. Hence her marvellous 'poetics of the edges', where she can capture the magnetic swarm of her dancers at the very point where they seem about to exit or disappear.

Brown began to work with other artists from 1978. It seemed necessary for her to do so from the moment when it became a question of broaching the institution of the theatre – from which the 'Brownian body' had only ever been a rebel. As Klaus Kertess has written, it was necessary to make of the western theatre something other than a sanctuary for the mimetic reproduction of old forms. Each collaborator was chosen according to the project of a specific work: Rauschenberg for his incessant diffraction of polarities, for an ambience of things effacing themselves (*Set and Reset*); and with Donald Judd, for *Newark*, there was to be duration and weight even in colour and sound.

Valiant Period

Between each phase of Trisha Brown's work there is a transitional piece, one which assures the transfer of elements that have already been interrogated into new and as yet unidentified territory. *Lateral Pass* (1985) is such a bridging piece, effecting a transition from movement that seems to recharge itself without intervention to a new quality of 'intention' and a

new sense of weight. The company by this time has changed. Men now have a growing importance in it. Trisha takes up the question of their masculinity. This questioning is not at the level of a crude gender politics: masculine and feminine belong here not in terms of superficial attributes but of modes of being – of being as substance, presence. In order to decipher the weight of 'man' Trisha spent hours pushing furniture in her apartment.

Lateral Pass was followed by *Newark* (1987) with its tilts and arrested falls; and *Astral Converted* (1989) where, amongst the illuminated 'combines' of Robert Rauschenberg, movement seems bent towards the horizontal, inverted by a strange fluid weightiness.

Return To Zero, or Unconscious Knowledge

Beginning with *Astral Converted* and more still in *Foray–Forêt* (1990) something more mysterious emerges from the movement itself. It begins to slow down as if another current began to suspend the body in a space and time that were more open. If, in the previous phases, the flux of movement had originated in accidents of speed both within and between the dancers' bodies, from now on this 'precipitation' takes place without the help of acceleration. The movement impulse is freer, more poetic than ever, closer to vertigo, or to a state of dreaming.

In *One Story as in Falling*, made in 1992 with the Compagnie Bagouet, Brown employs a fantasmatic 'character' who is integrated into the enigmatic meanderings of the collective movement. It was necessary to leave more open still the impulse – its source too deep to be under conscious control – able to set in train a movement that would flow by slow, lingering suspensions, to the body's very extremities. Thus, with a kind of logic, *Another Story* opens onto an improvisational process, an attention to the inner rhythm. Back to zero...now Brown, provisionally, brings us back to the very roots of contemporary practice and invention – to that place where the rational has less and less access. A new, oneiric vision of the theatre and of musical accompaniment ushers this state of abandon towards a space-time of ecstasy.

Always to let go, to renounce mastery, to be subject to no limits... thus unfolds the tranquil revolution of Trisha Brown, in resonance with the most profound project of contemporary dance.

[Trans. Sally Gardner]

Notes

[1] Michel Bernard is professor of theatre and dance aesthetics at the University of Paris VIII.

[2] 'My choice to be on the floor had to do with not wanting to have to deal with the fact that the legs are generally in the role of having to support the upper half of the body...If I'm lying down, I've freed my legs and they can function like all the rest of the parts.' p.83

[3] See 'Singular, Moving Geographies' pp. 12–22 in this issue.

[4] The author makes reference here to what is known in physics as Brownian motion, also called Brownian movement, i.e. 'any of various physical phenomena in which some quantity is constantly undergoing small, random fluctuations. It was first named for the Scottish botanist Robert Brown, the first to study such fluctuations (1827). Brown was investigating the fertilization process in *Clarkia pulchella*, a newly discovered species of flower, when he noticed a 'rapid oscillatory motion' of the pollen grains suspended in water under the microscope. By the 1860s theoretical physicists had become interested in Brownian motion and were searching for a consistent explanation of its various characteristics: a given particle appeared equally likely to move in any direction, further motion seemed totally unrelated to past motion, and the motion never stopped.' From *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* 15th Edition, 1994. [Ed. note]

Singular, Moving Geographies

Trisha Brown *Newark* (1987)
Photograph by Geneviève Stephenson

an interview with Hubert Godard *by* Laurence Louppe

[Originally published as 'Le déséquilibre fondateur' in *Artpress* Spécial hors Série nº 13, October 1992]

We attribute the dance of the 1980s with the merit of having brought to light imaginaries that were singular, new, powerful, capable of communicating their particular emotive impulses with an unparalleled intensity. None of it could have occurred without the vast field of resources fostered by contemporary dance over a long period of time. Above all, within fairly narrowly circumscribed historical limits, there is, in filigree detail, a wide range of body work which still remains to be considered, and re-considered again and again: today more so than ever.

Dancers' words on the body remain virtually unknown, and virtually unheard, for they rarely correspond with the different discourses of which the body is the object. Hubert Godard is developing another way of thinking: dance brings into play a body-vector which does not define itself in terms of its structure, but in terms of the ways in which it organises intensity and intentionality. — Laurence Louppe

What's unsettling in psychoanalysis, as in any practice of the moment – art, poetry, or the simple event of meeting – is that the structure is provided in the energy of an actuality that is always precisely new.

— Claude Rabant[1]

A certain disarray in the face of the rise of a consensual formalism is provoking one whole wing of dance to search in philosophies of the body for the reasons for what it does, reasons of which the dancer sometimes feels dispossessed. It was in the light of this that the colloquium *Autres pas (autres corps, autres lieux, autres danses)*[2] aimed to respond to the large number of latent calls for help. Although they don't always make it into the glare of media attention, these calls reverberate in the world of contemporary choreography in a very significant and irrepressible way.

It is in this context, moreover, that Trisha Brown's trip to France, to work within La Compagnie Bagouet,[3] acquires its potency, as both example and symbol. Firstly, in the fact that a choreographer and a team, distinguished for the demands and the artistic quality of their work,

should endeavour to bring their own research into play in order to try out other revelatory body states. And this at the very moment when Trisha Brown is engaged in a journey to the sources, not only of her own itinerary since the 1960s, but of the actual generation and production of contemporary dance. A search which is continually renewed by those underlying strata in which the body's imaginary is elaborated, and to which the Judson Church had already (re)turned. A search for movement as initial impetus, without conscious will trying to control successive precipitations. A 'back to zero' in which, in a suspended temporality, Brown involves a few select French dancers, chosen to try out the experience; others still hope. There's a thirst for the essential. Just as there's an aspiration to escape from the purely conjectural field of creative work overdetermined by the ravages of historicist discourse. Besides, nothing here is really peculiar to dance; connections with other practices, other artistic philosophies are implicated. The originality of the dancer here is in finding what is essential, not through references of stable value, but on the contrary through a fundamental, and foundational, imbalance.

Such factors, which constitute the very fabric of modernity in the domain of dance, are still difficult to convey in discourse. Firstly, because the problematic of dance brings into play a body of continuous functionality; the dancer can only work from a body-vector, which does not define itself in terms of its structure, but in terms of the ways in which it organises intensity and, as we'll see, intentionality. Before all else, the dancing body is a multi-directional geography of relations with oneself, and with the world. It's a matter of keeping it living, open, sensitive. [...]

It is impossible to approach, let alone resolve, the problematic of the body through a univocal discourse. All we can do here is propose a perspective that is particular to dance and to the questions it asks itself currently, at the heart of its practice, using one of its most pertinent discourses today. Kinesiology is appropriate for this practice. It is concerned with a study of movement based on the actual givens of dance. Although it requires a considerable sum of diverse knowledges, kinesiolgy can only be approached by a dancer. Which means it avoids pasting onto the dancing body cognitive grids and frames that are foreign to its project. Hubert Godard, who teaches kinesiology at the University of Paris VIII, agreed to the following interview.

Laurence Louppe: The different discourses of which the body is the object can be evoked by elimination. The conception of an absolute, transcendental body doesn't interest us. We are much more sensitive to the idea, developed by Michel Bernard, of a 'corporeity'; essentially this means body as experience and not as topology.

Hubert Godard: I agree absolutely. Michel Bernard has pretty much contested the idea of a positivist body that one could ever entirely encapsulate, even using a number of different approaches and grids.[4] One can only take up position in the area of phenomenology, and talk of corporeal moments. In numerous discourses which, as you have said, extend from avant-garde plastic arts to laboratory contexts, the term 'the body' is used, which suggests a definable whole. I would opt for an 'accumulation of corporeities'.

Let's turn to the Lacanian vision of a body which can only exist in terms of the language that enunciates it. This is one of the most difficult areas, but nevertheless much more interesting.

If I had to point out to you a way of getting to a particular place in the city, I would have two options; I could either situate it with the help of a map and spatial orientations, or I could indicate a route to you: turn right, then after the post office turn left, and so on. The second option necessitates language, and you can't reverse two propositions without getting lost (chronology). This kind of orientation – by means of directions, routes – is that of the theatre writer, as well as of the historian and the psychoanalyst, all of whom are looking to reconnect a thread of events.

On the other hand, a dancer operates more like a geographer, accumulating maps, intra-corporeal dispositions, geographical situations which subsequently produce a history. Given that language (the route) is not the primary necessity, a quality of wandering is created, a nomadism which perhaps partly escapes the history's determinism. The effect is particularly striking in the work of Pina Bausch: narratives of intense personal experience are in fact held at a distance as they unfold, for the dancer is moved and determined first of all by spatial configurations.

Undoubtedly dancers are the only ones to consciously weave permanent connections between body and imaginary, and to inhabit these connections; consequently they lay themselves open to being called organicists.

In the example of the child's access to autonomy, it's often described how there are successive stages of reaction to the mirror (at four months, six months, a year), which symbolically construct the emergence of an identity and of an autonomy. Now each one of these stages is in fact preceded by marked evolutions in the gravitational system, a system which is equally responsible for organising the future character of this autonomy (sitting, walking on all fours, standing up). The way in which the child is carried (in spatial terms) will have as much influence as the child's relation to the carrier. In the United States, J. Kestenburg has made successful interventions into certain serious early childhood disorders through modifications in maternal holding, taken in the direction of dance (contact, supported dance). Certain gravitational variations can modify the course of a history, just as they never stop modifying the history of dance.

So is the thought that the body can develop its own imaginary impossible?

Without getting into the sphere of phylogenetics, one can talk of a plastic corporeal memory, a 'geography' that is shaped by everything that is lived. This memory is not inscribed by neural circuits, it's in the plastic modelling of the tissues that generate the tensional organisation of our bodies. Obviously I'm thinking of the role of the *fascia*, the muscle sheaths rich in collagenic fibres (and not innervated), and which produce memory. The play of our own verticality will be entirely memorised by the plasticity of these tissues. Could one call the bodily *habitus* 'innocent' when confronted with the unconscious?

One of the most weighty interdictions on this discourse emanates from the positivist tradition.

One must situate it on two levels. Firstly, contemporary dance is based on an idea of quality, and not at all on what could be quantifiable, or directly identifiable in spatial or morphological terms. Secondly, and perhaps coming out of this, to the present day it remains almost impossible to name, and therefore to describe, what is peculiar to dancers. There's a semantic 'void' there, an empty space that provokes the elaboration of the dance.

And on the other hand there's the authority of bio-mechanical discourse; this is based on what's measurable, which is extremely highly developed today – thanks in particular to electromyography, which enables us to locate and quantify the movement of electrical impulses in the body. Moreover this discourse is so inflated that any articulation of the essential realities of movement, of what moves us (and what's moving to us) is impossible. In what is largely a very grounded book about walking,[5] Michel Bernard locates what's operative in walking uniquely at the level of the legs and the pelvic bowl; the arms are relegated to an exclusively balancing role. All of this is accompanied by violent denials with regard to the claims that 'starters' essential for walking are located in the upper body in relation to the thorax. Now, data from electromyographic experiments cited in support of the non-intervention of the arms even went so far as to disregard the shoulder-blades. When one knows that the quality of movement, its poetic, is a function of the way in which scapular attachment is fixed and lived, this omission seems hallucinatory in itself. Often these experiments are conducted in laboratories, where everything's askew because patches are stuck on subjects who are told to 'walk three paces'. Which obviously produces a way of walking devoid of finality, emotion, projection, and which necessarily will always be limited to the legs.

So the dancer is caught between two discourses: one of them denying the existence of the body, the other (let's call it medical discourse) denying the imaginary within it.

Not all of the medical milieu reacts in this way. For my own part, I'm currently involved in a very rich experience at the National Centre for Cancer Research in Italy. My responsibility there is to research a protocol of corporeal reading which would enable the development of more effective rehabilitation, in terms of the gravitational support peculiar to each subject in movement. The point of view, the

doctor's gaze towards the other, is often limited by his/her own functional organisation; therefore our starting point was to analyse the organisation connected with each doctor during movement sessions and in the therapeutic act.

Having undergone an ablation of the minor pectoral, and after classical rehabilitation, according to conventional tests a patient will recover their strength and full articulation. However, a very detailed movement analysis allows us to notice a qualitative modification in the way the body is managed. What was surprising was to discover subsequently that in general this impairment was already present before surgical intervention. What produces this instability in the 'body image': the illness working on the corporeal structure, or the fact of knowing oneself to be ill? What do we know of the relation between immune system and body image? With questions like this, bio-mechanical knowledge sheds little light on what moves/is moving. In actual fact, it's this fault, this gap in knowledge of bodily organisation that contemporary dance incessantly opened up: not in search of a model, but of a profoundly original gesture, breaking with the previous cognitive order and semantics.

Recently you helped produce a film about the operative elements of movement,[6] the 'starters' – perhaps connected to what Cunningham calls 'pre-gestures'.

One inevitably goes back to the mystery of what happens before the movement: what body image (connected to what plasticity)? what geography? what history? and above all, what intentionality? The pre-movement is an empty zone, with no displacement, no segmentary activity. And yet everything is already played out there, the entire poetic charge, the tonal colouring of the action. A brief passage, a low pressure trough corresponding to this wholly founding moment: the gestural anacrusis.

Isn't anacrusis an essential figure in both rhythm and thought?

Because of the notorious difficulty of 'naming', there is no way of foretelling the gesture which could found dance as a science. In spite of the extreme richness of methods of learning and of contemporary implementations, the dancer's knowledge remains of a technical order, in other words a transmitted know-how. But, when one considers the preliminary phases, there's a blossoming of words and references; one sees that José Limon invites movement in the upper-body, the thoracic cage and the arms. Whereas with Cunningham, on the other hand, everything is played out in relation to the floor, with the supporting leg as generator of a philosophy of displacement.

How do you explain the difficulty of moving outside medical, bio-mechanical discourse, without getting oneself accused of mythologising, or even of mysticism. For a lot of non-dancers, the organic (paradoxically) becomes assimilated with the fusional, the religious. And, doubtless through a rebound effect, a certain mysticality can serve as theory for choreography.

Well, quite simply that's what happens when one wants to economise on the lengthy period of work necessary in the maturation of an expressive form. With all of those who made something very strong emerge – Cunningham, Trisha Brown,

a few French choreographers – they all have in common this immensely long period of work with the dancers: a daily working regime by means of which the philosophy of the dance gradually infiltrates the symbolic circuits, and passes into the deep strata of the non-verbal. Failing which the choreographer's or teacher's only resource consists of multiplying the metaphors: either to try to invent a movement starting from a projection (reliving an event, etc.), or to effect a 'frame drift' by working from a privileged corporeal component (skin, gland, etc.). It's utterly illusory to think that this can produce a unity of style. What's most serious is the absence of triangulation, which will always be missing from subjective support frames: the third term, aesthetic thought, a common philosophy of the body, to which one can refer and within which one can understand one another. Without this, choreographic work can only be based on an act of faith.

An act of faith is a rather fragile base for the authenticity of the work, and a very threatening one for the autonomy of the dancer. In fact once again that takes us back to a denial, or a reduction, of the poetic mystery of the body in movement, by tying it to a transcendence outside of itself.

It's often tied to an unacknowledged anatomistic vision. Connecting the birth or the quality of a movement to an internal organ, to a zone of the body, goes back to a privileging of the structural at the expense of the functional. There is no central point, because properly speaking there is no centre. You could always dissect a body, but you won't find its centre of gravity. (*Laughter*). The centres of movement are not structural centres. The entire body is organised around certain points, which can vary from one individual to another ...

And from one culture to another ...

Of course. However I prefer to refer to the idea of gravitational line. When one starts to move, the centre of gravity organises itself in an open network in relation to supports or losses of support. The interest of considering movement with gravity as the starting point is of thinking the body around and with the movement itself. In addition, that's where true memory is elaborated, the subject's most ancient memory: the memory of what I have managed and organised through my postural balances. The tonic muscles, which specialise in gravitational responses, are the very first memory, and perhaps the first language: what has been called the 'tonic dialogue'. That of the child with the mother – its range of spasms and contractions are already an exchange. An emotional language, like any language probably – a source of growth, comprising imperceptible emotional channels loaded with essential information.

For a dancer, everything is played out around these muscular and emotive zones that produce memory. The essential task of the tonic muscles is to inhibit falling, to maintain one's verticality. In order to make a movement, these muscles have to release. And it's in this release that the poetic quality of the movement is generated. The movement will be invested with authority in a way that is more or less moving, depending on the greater or lesser degree of tonic inhibition.

Trisha Brown, who remains faithful in this regard to the deepest thinking in contemporary dance, has consistently worked on this way out of inhibition through release.

In Trisha Brown's work, the dancer moves freely in a continual flux around their own gravitational axis. Movement is never made against or in spite of gravity, but always with it. In her work one sees an extraordinary quality of undulation, what I call 'motility', a way of authorising movement without restriction, or at least without initial recourse to the 'tensors'. This kind of dance is bewildering because it is located at a point of extreme radicality which eliminates all tension and all force. It's also a point beyond which one can't go; Trisha Brown knows this and takes it into account.

A total renunciation of tonicity can indeed lead to an impasse. We saw this at the time of the Judson Church theatre in the 1960s and 1970s, when certain dancers, like Simone Forti, wanted to rediscover a body of pure flow, of pure molecular circulation, with no supports – like the body of a new-born child, not yet constituted in gravitational terms, and as a result willingly assigned to the vegetative.

On the other hand, the tonic muscles which hold me upright, constitute an awful threat. If I didn't release, they would prevent me from making any movement, they could force me into a state of vertical catatonia. On one side, there is Charcot's hysteric, paralysed in a state of mortal tension. And on the other, there is the subsidence and collapse of the tensors, concerted or otherwise, which would disallow the elaboration of the gravitational axis. We only live because we are able to move freely between these two poles. And this permanent interplay is our entire history. That is why what I'm looking for is a value which can only be one of *hesitation*, a certain suspension of being, body and thought.

Is this like what Doris Humphrey has said before, that we only realise and fulfil ourselves in unsteadiness and uncertainty?

Yes, and again it's the anacrusis which is receptive to this state of hesitation.

It's not necessarily a matter of individual decision or bias. Locating oneself on the scale of tonicity is also constituting oneself as a body in history.

Evidently. On the one hand, one has what Daniel Dobbels calls the 'armed body'. And on the other, there is Trisha Brown's profoundly 'disarmed' body. Disarmed to the point of fading away. Undoubtedly it is a utopian body in its refusal of violence. I'm not saying that that's what she is trying to give rise to; although she does bring this to light.

It seems to me that, since her penultimate 'cycle' as she calls them, the one from 1986 to 1990, she has found ways of bringing rocking, and then stopping points, to bear in her work.

In her recent pieces, she's really inhabiting a different place. Apparently she felt herself compelled to *affirm*. Suddenly, but without any violent motivation, someone for whom the word 'cut' did not exist (and what a difference there is here from Cunningham, who never stops cutting, directions in particular!), suddenly she discovers the urgency of affirming positions.

You have often spoken, with regard to the beginning of this century, of a disappearance of tactility and empathy. You often cite Freud's decision no longer to implicate himself in the therapeutic act, or you refer to what you call the emergence of the chemical body, treatable at a distance by an ever-expanding pharmacopeia. Is it possible that the continuous movement of contemporary dance, and the rupture-free space it proposes, could be a way of compensating for these tearings in the tactile network?

Yes, undoubtedly. In contrast, moreover, with what one often sees in classical dance: a universe of lines and forms accompanied by a desertion and desolation of the relational. In opposition to this, modernity has suggested approaches that are close to those of Trisha Brown in fact, historically as well as in other ways: contact improvisation, for example, as well as the range of modifications this technique brings, even outside its own field, in terms of the organisation of deep communication between kinespheres. 'Contact' here goes far beyond touch, for one works with the weight of the other, and thus one enters their gravitational system. In this way one 'touches' much more than the skin; one touches the much-discussed tonic musculature of the other, and thus what constitutes their being. It's important to clarify that this is nothing to do with proxemics, which is very entrenched at the moment. Here we're immersed in the infinite quality of corporeal organisation – of singular and moving geographies, comprised of and in flux.

Isn't it precisely in the relations between flows that the poetics of the dance is elaborated?

Why are we moved when someone dances, when they put so much at stake in terms of their stability, when they begin to work on the gravitational axis? Because these activities refer to the history that is wholly inscribed in our bodies, in the very muscles that hold us upright. This history is what has been recorded of the 'tonic dialogue'. It's the eternal history of our relations with the first object of love. And it's this same history which reverberates within us each time that an authentic act of dance proposes drifts and wanderings in terms of balance, falls, recoveries; they create echoes with the deep traces we retain of our earliest contractions. The power of the dance lies in its reaching these sensitive layers which are at the very heart of our imaginaries and our memories, strata that the cognitive material conveyed by verbal language often has difficulty connecting with.

So are we to understand that it is this poetic charge conveyed in the body's states that is of interest in dance, rather than the forms?

Can it be a question of forms when what is at stake can be summarised in the these terms: 'How can I articulate the ways in which I organise myself in my trajectory towards the object of love'? People like Cunningham, Hawkins, Trisha Brown touch us because they have been able to develop decisive perspectives from within this organisation, which always make sense, and always manage to awaken in us this essential reference. Which creates this feeling, connected to the perception the dance provides, of intimacy, mystery and at the same time, of self-evidence. An appreciation which has nothing to do with a universal

arbitration, or with a collective opinion, although it may well implicate a community of sensibilities. For it's always a matter of a unique dancer in relation to a unique spectator. Hence the extreme difficulty of choreographic, pedagogic and critical work on dance, since we're dealing with a symbolic field from which all neutrality has been drained.

[Trans. David Williams]

Notes

1 Claude Rabant, *Inventer le Réel*, Paris: Edition Denoël, 1992.

2 'Other steps (other bodies, other places, other dances)'. The conference was organised by the 'Institut de pédagogie musicale et choréographique (Cité de la musique – La Villette)', as part of the *Danse à Aix* Festival, 11-17 July 1992. Its starting point was a consideration of the 'trans-culturality' of body states.

3 Trisha Brown's *One Story as in Falling* was performed as part of the Compagnie Bagouet's 1992 Festival d'Automne programme at the Opéra Garnier, Paris, (24–28 November).

4 Michel Bernard (amongst others), in *L'expressivité du corps: recherche sur les fondements de la théâtralité*, Chiron: Association Dance Sorbonne, 1985.

5 *La marche humaine* (collectively authored work), Paris: Edition Masson, 1992.

6 This experimental film, produced on an INSEP programme, was made with the assistance of the Institut de formation en musique et en danse, and the Institut de pédagogie musicale et chorégraphique.

Working

Photograph: J. C. Hotchkiss
Choreography: Paula Josa-Jones

(In) the In-Between

by David Williams *[for Anne Kilcoyne]*

With reference to an ethics of alterity as elaborated by Emmanuel Levinas, this essay will explore Contact Improvisation as a site for a playful and tactical negotiation of inter-subjectivity. As social praxis, Contact Improvisation can embody and inhabit *the spaces between* a range of conventionally hierarchical binaries, most of which constellate around the pairing 'self/other', perhaps the core opposition of Western onto-theological philosophy.[1] The boundaries between these supposedly discreet terms can be destabilised in Contact, allowing what are often conceived as oppositional borderlines to become dynamic and porous thresholds in an ethical economy of exchange and flow. And it is from Hélène Cixous's rather breathless articulation of such an economy at work in *écriture féminine* that I borrow my title:

' ... working (in) the in-between,
examining the process of the same and the other without which nothing lives, undoing the work of death, is first of all wanting two and both, one and the other together, not frozen in sequences of struggle and expulsion or other forms of killing, but made infinitely dynamic by a ceaseless exchanging between one and the other different subject, getting acquainted and beginning only from the living border of the other: a many-sided and inexhaustible course with thousands of meetings and transformations of the same in the other and in the in-between ...' [2]

Con()Tact: 'co-operationBecomes The Subject'

> ***The open horizon of my body. A living,moving border. Changed through contact with your body.***
>
> — Luce Irigaray [3]

Contact improvisation has its roots in the pedestrian (task-oriented) practices of American post-modern dance in the 60's, social dance, release techniques, martial arts (particularly Aikido) and sports.[4] Its initiator in the early 1970s, dancer and choreographer Steve Paxton, conceived of it as an 'art-sport'. Contact is a non-hierarchical duet movement practice in which improvising partners share an attitude and an ideal of 'active, reflexive, harmonic, spontaneous and mutual forms'.[5] The vocabulary of these forms is flexible, inviting the moment-to-moment specifics of relatedness, leverage, speed, (dis)orientation and so on to be re-invented with each partnership on each occasion. As Paxton suggests, if both parties' intent is minimal, and their sensing of intent maximal, then '*cooperation becomes the subject* – an "it" defined by the balancing of inertias, momentums, psychologies, spirits of the partners'.[6]

By working around and through the vectors of an ever-changing point of contact between their bodies, each person gives and receives weight, passes and receives information through touch, accepts or provokes imbalance and regains (an always already temporary) extra-daily balance.[7] This nomadic and hybrid point of contact, which I will call con()tact, generates momentum and movement(s), as the partners endeavour to discover and work along 'the easiest pathways available to their mutually moving masses'.[8]

In Contact – in life – no two bodies, no two qualities of energy are alike, or even consistent. As Mark Minchinton suggests:

> ***Of course, the giving and receiving of weight are not neutral things. Not all people give weight in the same way, even if they share the same physique. There are differences in the intensities of weight and support. People can be said to have intensive or extensive, flowing or blocked, centred or peripheral energy. Their physiques, experience and individual psychologies will go some way to determining the manner in which they use and are used by their bodies.***[9]

Indeed no *one* body is identical with-in itself, it is always ghosted by its others; intensive alternates or coexists *with* extensive, flowing *with* blocked, centred *with* peripheral. As soon as a body in relation *has* flow it is not *in* flow. What's more, each body-self will be further displaced and marked by contact with the unfixable alterity of the

other, as well as by the dynamics and intensities of the *third party* in the dance, the point of con()tact: that fugitive and always temporary centre and edge common to both yet outside both, a 'blind spot' through-in-with-around-for-and-by which the two bodies orient their play.

In his article 'On Ambiguity', David George describes the dynamic, relational space between the two terms in any binary that creates out of difference a third state of pure potentiality:

> ***All binaries need now investigating not for their deceptively reassuring ability to be collapsed into stable – and static – units, but the very opposite: that all binaries are 'really' hidden – and dynamic – triads. Because any two terms necessarily postulate the notion of 'relationship' as the necessary – third – factor which simultaneously separates and joins any two related forces or factors ... The crucial factor here is not how many ways two different units can relate to each other, but recognition that this 'third element' is not a unit but an axis, not an entity but a state of being, less a*** relationship ***than an*** act of relating.[10]

Writers from many different disciplines have attempted to articulate this third party in the self/other binary. For Michel de Certeau, for example, it constitutes a 'frontier region', 'the space created by an interaction'.[11] For Deleuzian psychoanalyst and artist Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, it is the 'metramorphic borderlink', 'the becoming-threshold of borderlines'.[12] For Luce Irigaray, it is the 'angel-as-intermediary' in an ethics of sexual difference.[13] Hélène Cixous describes it as a 'non-place', the possibility of a contestatory *écriture féminine*: 'the breach, the opening, the entrance ... the entire surface of the domain, [which] enervates the limits and the traces, blurs the localisations ... the migrant that can be found everywhere'.[14] For the radical semiotician Susan Melrose, it is the 'unseizable' of rationalist epistemologies (including conventional semiologies), a 'space of energetic investments ... not limited to or knowable in terms of any of its parameters'.[15] For the poet Octavio Paz, it is the paradoxical space of writing, the 'dizzying repose' of 'worlds in rotation' that temporarily converge.[16] Child psychologist D.W. Winnicott locates it as the 'potential space' of 'transitional phenomena' located between 'me' and 'not-me', a space of creative and constitutive inter-play.[17] For post-Jungian psychologist James Hillman, it is 'the place of soul' and 'soul-making' that dismantles and de-means the Cartesian *cogito*.[18] And in Japanese aesthetics, it is the 'filled emptiness' of *Ma*.[19]

In Contact Improvisation, the point of con()tact – the dynamic fulcrum of what some contacters call 'mutual weight dependence' – becomes an ambiguous but palpably 'real' third party in the duet: an-other axis that both joins and separates the two partners, a hyphenated space of pivotal torsion, 'a sort of rubbing together of spaces at the vanishing points of their frontier'.[20] Con()tact cannot be resolved in (homeo)stasis. As it shifts, it dances (the two partners) from and in the in-between:

This is a paradox of the frontier: created by contacts, the points of differentiation between two bodies are also their common points. Conjunction and disjunction are inseparable in them. Of two bodies in contact, which one possesses the frontier that distinguishes them? Neither. Does that amount to saying: no one? ... The frontier functions as a third element. It is an 'in-between', a 'space between', 'Zwischenraum' ... A middle place ... a sort of void, a narrative sym-bol of exchanges and encounters. [21]

As it dances, con()tact marks the flux of partners' proximity and distance by tracing spirals around the surfaces of their bodies; at the same time, partners employ skeletal supports and levers within their own and the other's bodies. Both bodies therefore need to be segmented and multi-directional in terms of impulse, action and attention. In addition, they can become open to a synaesthetic blurring in the sensorium, facilitated by their adrenalised status;[22] for here tactility can become an-other seeing and listening, peripheral vision an-other touch.

Contact is dependent upon and celebrates these surprising, risky and pleasurable detours of difference; the improvised 'saying' of what is 'said' is radically contextual, relational. And the literal and metaphorical *point* of con()tact, as in-between or go-between, is another space in which the 'I' is both implicated and (re-)conceived; it is the articulation of meeting-in-difference. For each of the partners, con()tact constitutes the possible coexistence of form and spontaneity, rules-of-the-game and dance, cause and effect, centre and margin, proximity and distance. It is the 'play' with-in the obdurate fixity of corporeal identities, its 'give', its supple-ment, its *différance*:[23] the unstable borderlands where an ethics of alterity occurs.

As a result, Contact can radically *dis*-orient one's constituted sense of self, as if 'self' it-self leaks, unravels or frays; it becomes impossible to locate intentionality, source of impulse and so on with any stability. As Trinh Minh-ha writes, here 'identity is *a product of articulation*. It lies at the intersection of dwelling and travelling and is a claim of continuity within discontinuity (and vice-versa)'.[24] Ultimately in Contact, identity as a concern can give way to a quality of inter-personal listening that is both active and passive, quiet but not quietist, an actively meditative[25] quality one might call *patient attention*: a *festina lente* consciousness of a self-in-process that is unmappable (*u-topian*) through any conventional cartography, and more-than-one,[26] endlessly (un)weaving itself through its acceptance of the pressing responsibility of relatedness. In this way, Contact can be a site of becoming, although it necessitates the deposition of a totalising ego, and a disposition that recognises the radical provocation and pleasure of moving elsew-here and other-wise.

con-

***prefix*, of Latin origin. The form assumed by the Latin proposition *com* (in classical L., as a separate word, *cum*) before all consonants except the labials ...**
The sense is 'together, together with, in combination or union', also 'altogether, completely', and hence *intensive*.[27]

Face-To-Face With Levinas

The irreducible and ultimate experience of relationship appears to me to be elsewhere: not in synthesis, but in the face-to-face of humans, in sociality, in its moral significance ...
First philosophy is an ethics

— Emmanuel Levinas [28]

In this discussion of Contact as an ethical practice, 'ethics' is taken in the French-Lithuanian-Judaic philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's sense of the word, as the exigency for a negotiation of an inter-subjective responsibility to re-cognise alterity. This responsibility, for Levinas, is inordinate, irreducible and infinite, a being-for-the-other *before* oneself. As Simon Critchley explains:

Ethics, for Levinas, is critique; it is the critical mise en question of the liberty, spontaneity and cognitive emprise of the ego that seeks to reduce all otherness to itself. The ethical is therefore the location of a point of alterity, or what Levinas also calls 'exteriority', that cannot be reduced to the Same.[29]

Levinas's critique of humanist essentialism inverts the hierarchy implicit in what he refers to as the 'egological': the ontic imperialism and ethnocentrism of the narcissistic self/other binary, within which the ego-self is demarcated psychologically and corporeally in terms of proper(ty), capital and ontology. Ethics destabilises the assumed self-sufficiency of *être pour-soi*, Cixous's 'Empire of the Selfsame'.[30]

In what Levinas names the 'face-to-face',[31] the unique encounter with an-other where ethics *occurs*, the 'ego-I' (homogeneous, self-contained and either deflective or

recuperative of difference) is dislodged from its centrist axis in a dance of contiguity with difference:

> ***The face is a demand ... a hand in search of recompense, an open hand ... It is going to ask you for something ... The face is not a force. It is an authority; authority is often without force.***[32]

In the 'awakening' of the face-to-face, the assimilationist ego-I is provoked off-balance by con()tact with an-other; this 'event of oneself' occurs only when the ego defects, and one gives oneself to the other, bears the other's weight.[33] In this way the self can be (re)made continuously in contextual and interlocutory proximity ('Saying') rather than in any constative and sedimental History ('Said').[34]

The face-to-face eschews synthesis (the Same, the 'final solution') in favour of the asymmetrical and dialogical (the play of difference). The tact-ical saying of the dance of ethics, 'the explosion of the human in being',[35] requires a stretching towards con()tact in the in-between. A folding into the diachronic time that is the (im)possibility of *both* proximity *and* distance, into that 'most passive passivity' that 'coincides with activity'.[36] Into the 'meanwhile' between the diastole and systole of a heartbeat that cannot be said, but can only be ef-faced by death:

> ***The interval between the I and Thou, the* Zwischen, *is the locus where being is being realised. The interval between the I and Thou cannot be conceived as a kind of stellar space existing independently of the two terms which it separates. For the dimension itself of the interval opens uniquely to the I and to the Thou which enter into each meeting.***[37]

Levinas interrogates and disrupts the tyranny of an egological either/or. His call to responsibility asks: What are the relations between my freedom, the freedom of the other(s) and justice? Does not my narcissistic and imperialistic claim to possess (to *have*) freedom deny the other's (and indeed my) possibility of being *in* freedom? Must my *proteophobic* [38] ego perpetuate the 'war' of mechanistic resistance and counter-resistance, all inter-personal con()tact reduced to the insistent click-click-click of Newton's chrome balls? How do I prevent the in-different murderousness of my ego's self-constituting drive either to deflect and exile the difference of what-is-not-I, or to ingest and erase it by recuperation? By persisting in being-for-myself, do I not kill?[39]

> ***The true problem for us Westerners is not so much to refuse violence as to question ourselves about a struggle against violence which, without blanching in non-resistance to evil, could avoid the institution of violence out of this very***

struggle. Does not the war perpetuate that which it is called to make disappear, and consecrate war and its virile virtues in good conscience? One has to reconsider the meaning of a certain human weakness, and no longer see in patience only the reverse side of the ontological finitude of the human. But for that one has to be patient oneself without asking patience of the others – and for that one has to admit a difference between oneself and the others.[40]

Significantly for this discussion of Contact, Levinas tells us that '*The whole human body is more or less face*'.[41] The face, like con()tact, is 'what one cannot kill, or at least it is that whose *meaning* consists in saying: "thou shalt not kill"'.[42] The face, like con()tact, is uncontainable and unsythesisable alterity; it 'leads one beyond',[43] outside the fortified parameters of a self constituted as integral, full(y present), a totality. It brings this self face-to-face with the vulnerability of other-ness, *both outside and with-in.* In this way, the face, like con()tact, comprises a 'wind of crisis ... [a] spirit – which blows and rends, despite the knots of History which retie themselves'.[44]

'I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible'

The expression 'in one's skin' refers to a recurrence in the dead time or the meanwhile which separates inspiration and respiration ... It is a restlessness and patience that support prior to action and passion. Here what is due goes beyond having, but makes giving possible. This recurrence is incarnation. In it the body which makes giving possible makes one other without alienating.

— Emmanuel Levinas [45]

In the face-to-face encounter, the other's alterity demands that I accept responsibility (response-ability), that I respond. To his/her call, 'Where are you?', my-self replies, 'Here I am'. *Me voici*,[46] 'here is me'. Here my-self is in the accusative (*me*); and subjectivity itself, in its claim to essential and autonomous 'totality', is under accusation. 'I' is *un sujet-en-procès* ('subject-in-process/-on-trial').

Levinas protests against totalisation by locating responsibility for the other (ethical inter-subjectivity) as the fundametal structure of subjectivity. Responsibility here means 'having-the-other-in-one's skin',[47] and 'I am I in the sole measure that I am responsible'.[48]

In order to sense the heteronomous singularity of self-as-process, and to let go of nostalgia for the totality of ego-as-essential-being, Levinas proposes:

> ***One must understand the subjectivity of the subject*** **beyond essence,** ***as on the basis of an escape from the concept, a forgetting of being and non-being. Not of an 'unregulated' forgetting ... but a forgetting that would be an ignorance in the sense that nobility*** **ignores** ***what is not noble.***[49]

In other words, individuation is an ethical (self-) forgetting, an actively chosen detour from egology that invites a continuous re-membering and re-making *in relation.* So in Levinasian ethics, I (re)orient my-self through con()tact with an-other; 'cooperation becomes the subject' (Paxton). In this context, Arthur Rimbaud's 'I is an other' (*Je es un autre*) can slide from a figure of alienation to a site of potentiality and multiplicity, towards Kristeva's 'polymorphic body, laughing and desiring';[50] and the threat and negation of Jean-Paul Sartre's aggressively objectifying 'Look' (*le Regard*) can give way to mutual and interactive *regard.*

However, as Simon Critchley points out, Levinas recognises that the ethical relation of the face-to-face cannot ever be self-sufficient, hermetically sealed within an apolitical private space removed from the public sphere. Levinas insists that ethics is always already social and political, for 'the third party (*le tiers*) looks at me in the eyes of the other'; and it is this third party who 'ensures that the ethical relation always takes place within a political context, within the public realm ... [T]herefore my ethical obligations to the other open onto wider questions of justice for others and for humanity as a whole'.[51] The inter-personal is political.

Like con()tact, the face-to-face does not endure; it must be recommenced perpetually:

> ***The*** **Zwischen** ***is reconstituted in each fresh meeting and is therefore always novel in the same sense as are the moments of Bergsonian duration.***[52]

'Freedom' here is finite, difficult, it stammers as it makes itself up-and-over; although paradoxically the call to justice in responsibility for the other, and the rupturing of the ego-I's assumed self-identity it entails, are contiguous with in-finite possible futures: 'At no time can I say: I have done all my duty'.[53]

tact

I.1.a. The sense of touch; touch.

b. *fig.* A keen faculty of perception or discrimination likened to the sense of touch.

2. Ready and delicate sense of what is fitting and proper in dealing with others, so as to avoid giving offence, or win good will; skill or judgement in negotiating difficult or delicate situations; the faculty of saying or doing the right thing at the right time.

3. The act of touching or handling. [54]

Touch as 'inter-face'

Where does it come from? From both. It flows between. Not held or held back by a source. The source already rises from the two caressing.

— Luce Irigaray [55]

It is clear that the enveloping epidermal surface of the body is particularly receptive to information from both inside and outside; skin constitutes a radically ambiguous limens between endogeny and exogeny with-in the world. And touch as contact sense is in a privileged position to entertain in coexistence both activity and passivity, mind and body, self and other. As Elizabeth Grosz suggests in *Volatile bodies*, in informational terms touch is impressionistic, successive and momentary (i.e. diachronic), its perception of qualities – shape, texture, heat, energy etc. – comparative and differential; it is 'a modality of difference'.[56]

Inter-personal touch is coincidence in non-coincidence, an irreducible inter-lacing; it is reflexive and potentially reversible, it folds back in on itself in asymmetrical exchange. For touching by definition entails being touched. Both self and other participate and are implicated at the point of con()tact; both toucher and touched experience the dialogics of being both toucher and touched. It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty locates touch as the *locus classicus* of what he calls the 'double sensation':

This is the twisting of the Möbius strip, the torsion or pivot around which the subject is generated. The double sensation creates a kind of* interface *of the inside and the outside, the pivotal point at which inside will become separated from outside and active will be converted into passive.[57]

Touch and balance are the two key senses in the practice of Contact Improvisation. Partners touch each other, the floor and 'themselves, internally',[58] and employ the informationally dense tactility of con()tact to orient themselves in relation to (im)balance and gravity:

> ***The point of contact is focused on ... because a lot of the training is to do with allowing your partner to sense your leverage potential through touch. What you can do, what you can support, how you might move – potential that exists in position; and at the same time vice versa, you are sensing your partner's level of potential, he*** [sic] ***is sensing your's, so you are moving ... mutually sensing by touch what is available to you through that medium.***[59]

In addition, the practice of Contact encourages a very particular form of visual perception that one might describe as 'tactile': non-possessive and open, in which peripherality, a receptive 'softening' of vision, has primacy over focus:

> ***For many people vision is a kind of tool which reaches out and grabs things ... It's a probing instrument. For other people, it's a receptive instrument ... Peripheral vision training is partly to allow the world to enter, because it is softer, not so much a tool as focus is. Peripheral vision is more apt to allow you to hear and feel.***[60]

So the practice of Contact actively blurs and interrogates the conflation 'eye/I' of a totalising scopic epistemology and economy.[61]

Levinas also privileges the tactile over the visual, locating the primordial proximity of the touch or 'caress' as one exemplary manifestation of ethical inter-subjectivity. For the caress actualises a con()tact with an-other that can neither overwhelm nor fuse with alterity, but can reveal the diffusion and vulnerability of the self-in-relation. For touch, the first sense to develop in the human foetus, is 'an expression of love that cannot tell it':[62]

> ***The caress is a mode of the subject's being, where the subject who is in contact with another goes beyond this contact ... The seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This 'not knowing', this fundamental disorder, is the essential. It is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become our's or us, but with something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come (à venir).***[63]

Never completed, never exhausted, always to come. As Zygmunt Bauman has suggested, the future (*l'avenir*) – like alterity, like con()tact – cannot be grasped; one's illusory hold on it can never tighten into a grip.[64] Both given and hidden, its virtual outline can only be touched or brushed in a way that can neither possess nor 'know', but can still make (a) difference.

Photograph: J. C. Hotchkiss
Choreography: Paula Josa-Jones

Notes

[1] At the risk of reinstating them by speaking them, these binaries include: subject/object, identity/difference, fusion/fission, closed/open, active/passive, leader/led, demand/response, cause/effect, full/empty, momentum/inertia, stable/unstable, balance/imbalance, gravity/lightness, art/sport, knowledge/pleasure, mind/body, sight/touch, power/desire, proximity/distance, inside/outside, private/public, centre/margin, here/there.

[2] Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', cited in Trinh. T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 142.

[3] Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions* (trans. Joanne Collie and Judith Still), London: Routledge, 1992, p. 51.

[4] For a detailed account of the sources of Contact Improvisation, see Cynthia J. Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990. For a comparison of Aikido and Contact, see Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *Theatre Papers: The Fourth Series, 1981-2* no. 5, Dartington: Dartington College of Arts, 1982, pp. 4–5, 9.

[5] Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *The Drama Review* 19:1, p. 40.

[6] Ibid, 41.

[7] For a discussion of 'extra-daily balance', see 'Balance', in Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds), *The Secret Art of the Performer: a Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 34–53.

[8] Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *The Drama Review*, op. cit., p. 41.

[9] Mark Minchinton, 'Notes towards Improvisation as a Body without Organs', in *Writings on Dance* 10 ('Knowledges/Practices'), 1994, p. 48.

[10] David George, 'On Ambiguity: Towards a Post-modern Performance Theory', *Theatre Research International* 14:1, 1988, pp. 79–80.

[11] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (trans. Steven Rendall), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p. 126.

[12] Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, 'The Becoming Threshold of Matrixial Borderlines', in George Robertson, Melinda Mash et al. (eds), *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 44. *Metramorphosis* 'deals with transformations in emergence, creation and fading-away, of *I(s)* and *non-I(s)*, and with transformations of the borderlines and transgressions of the links between them ... *Metramorphosis* has no focus, it is a discernibility which cannot fix its "gaze", and if it has a momentary centre, then it always slides away towards the peripheries. In such an awareness of margins, perceived boundaries dissolve in favour of new boundaries; borderlines are surpassed and transformed to become thresholds ... *Metramorphosis* accounts for transformations of in-between moments'; ibid, pp. 44–5. Italics in original.

[13] Luce Irigaray, 'Sexual Difference' (trans. Seán Hand), in Toril Moi (ed.), *French Feminist Thought: a Reader*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987, pp. 126–7. See also Elizabeth Grosz, 'The angel as intermediary', in *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989, p. 161–2; and Margaret Whitford, 'The *between* and the *angel*', in *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 163-4.

[14] Hélène Cixous, in *Un k. incompréhensible: Pierre Goldman*, Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1976, p. 33; quoted in Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, p. 49–50.

[15] Susan Melrose, *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, pp. 13-4. Elsewhere Melrose articulates this 'space between' as the space of the 'play of subjectivity' (pp. 254–5).

[16] Octavio Paz, *The Monkey Grammarian* (trans. Helen Lane), New York: Arcade, 1990, pp. 153–9.

[17] See D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and reality*, London: Tavistock, 1971, in particular 'The location of cultural experience' and 'The place where we live', pp. 95–110; see also Winnicott's seminal 1951 essay 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena', in his *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*, New York: Basic Books, 1975, pp. 229–42.

[18] See James Hillman in Thomas Moore (ed.), *A Blue Fire: the essential James Hillman*, London: Routledge, 1989, p. 121.

[19] '*Ma*, a cultural paradigm, is the empty space in a tea bowl, what is left unsaid in a *haiku* poem, the sound/silence ration in music, the foreground/background distance in an inkwash painting, the moments of repose in a Noh drama'; Vicki Sanders, 'Dancing and the Dark Soul of Japan: an Aesthetic Analysis of Butoh', in *Asian Theatre Journal* 5:2, Fall 1988, p. 161.

[20] Michel de Certeau, 'Spatial Practices', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, op. cit., p. 113.

[21] Ibid, p. 127.

[22] For a discussion of the implications of the endocrine system in Contact, and in particular the dilation of time, see Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *The Drama Review*, op. cit., p. 41; and 'Contact Improvisation', *Theatre Papers*, op. cit., p. 12 *passim*.

[23] '*Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other'; Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (trans. Alan Bass), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 27. Italics in original.

[24] Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Other than Myself/My Other Self', in George Robertson, Melinda Mash et al. (eds), *Travellers' Tales:*

Narratives of Home and Displacement, op. cit., p. 14. My italics.

[25] Cf. Buddhist meditation master Sogyal Rinpoche, quoting Jamyang Khyentse: '"Look, it's like this: when the past thought has ceased, and the future thought has not yet risen, isn't there a gap? [...] Well, prolong it: that is meditation"'. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, London: Random House, 1992, p. 75.

[26] Cf. The 'nighttime consciousness' that James Joyce celebrates in *Finnegan's Wake*, a consciousness that inhabits the space 'between twosome twiminds', and enables 'two thinks at a time'. Quoted in Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Ideas of Creativity in Western Culture*, London: Hutchinson, 1988, p. 368. Cf. also Octavio Paz: 'Our most intimate reality lies outside ourselves and is not our's, and it is not one but many, plural and transitory, we are this plurality that is continually dissolving, the self is perhaps real, but the self is not *I* or *you* or *he*, the self is neither mine nor your's, it is a state, a blink of the eye, it is a perception of a sensation that is vanishing, but who or what perceives, who senses? ... the self that perceives something that is vanishing also vanishes in this perception; it is only the perception of that self's own extinction, we come and go ...': *The Monkey Grammarian*, op. cit., p. 55. Italics in original.

[27] *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

[28] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (trans. Richard A. Cohen), Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1985, p. 77.

[29] Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992, pp. 4-5.

[30] See, for example, Cixous's 'Sorties', in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (trans. Betsy Wing), Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986, p. 78 *passim*.

[31] See, for example, 'Ethics and the Face' in Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (trans. Alfonso Lingis), Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1969. For a useful summary of the 'face' and its place in Levinasian ethics, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., pp. 85-92.

[32] Levinas in Tamara Wright, Peter Hughes and Alison Ainley, 'The Paradox of Morality: an interview with Emmanuel Levinas', in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds), *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 169.

[33] 'The defection of the ego, or already the defeat of the identity of the ego ... can finally be said to be the event of the oneself'; Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 122. Levinas returns again and again to metaphors of weight-bearing, to describe ethical responsibility; e.g.: 'The self is a *sub-jectum*; it is under the weight of the universe, responsible for everything ... supporting the weight of the non-ego ... Impassively undergoing the weight of the other, thereby called to uniqueness, subjectivity no longer belongs to the order where the alternative of activity and passivity retains its meaning'; ibid, pp. 105-6.

[34] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 42. Simon Critchley defines the 'Saying' as 'my exposure - corporeal, sensible - to the other, my inability to refuse the other's approach. It is the performative stating, proposing, or expressive position of myself facing the other ... It is a performative *doing* that cannot be reduced to a constative description [the Said] ... The Saying is the sheer radicality of ... the event of being in relation with an other': *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, op. cit., p. 7. Italics in original.

[35] Ibid, p. 121.

[36] Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., pp. 104-5.

[37] Ibid, p. 65.

[38] I am borrowing this neologism from Zygmunt Bauman, who coins it to refer to 'the confused, ambivalent sentiments aroused by the presence of strangers ... the apprehension aroused by the presence of multiform, allotropic phenomena which stubbornly defy clarity-addicted knowledge, elide assignment and sap the familiar classificatory grids ... Proteophobia refers therefore to the dislike of situations in which one feels lost, confused, disempowered. Obviously, such situations are the productive waste of cognitive spacing: we *do not know* how to go on in certain situations because the rules of conduct which define for us the meaning of "*knowing* how to go on" do not cover them': Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p. 164. Italics in original. The apprehension familiar to many people in the practice of Contact relates at least in part to Contact's 'delinquent' provocation to 'knowing how to go on'.

[39] In an essay called 'Ethics as First Philosophy', Levinas foregrounds the political implications of his ethical interrogation of one's right to be-for-oneself: 'My being-in-the-world, or my "place in the sun", my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man [*sic*] whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing?'; Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 82. Cf. Simon Critchley: 'For Levinas, I would claim, ethics is the disruption of totalising politics ... The philosophy of Levinas, like that of Adorno, is commanded by the new categorical imperative imposed by Hitler: namely "that Auschwitz not repeat itself" ... Levinasian ethics is a reduction of war'; *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, op. cit., p. 221.

[40] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (trans. Alphonso Lingis), The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981, p. 177. Quoted by Richard A. Cohen in his introduction to Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 14.

[41] Ibid, p. 97. My italics.

[42] Ibid, p. 87. Italics in original.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid, p. 118.

[45] Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 98. Italics in original.

[46] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 100.

[47] Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 6.

[48] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 100.

[49] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, op. cit., p. 177. Quoted by Richard A. Cohen in his introduction to Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 15. Emphasis in original.

[50] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (trans. Anita Barrows), London: Marion Boyars, 1977, p. 19. Quoted in Alison Ainley, 'Amorous Discourses: 'The Phenomenology of Eros, and Love Stories', in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds), *The Provocation of Levinas*, op. cit., p. 72.

[51] Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, op. cit., pp. 225–6

[52] Levinas in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 65.

[53] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 105.

[54] *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991

[55] Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, op. cit. p. 15.

[56] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994, pp. 98-9. Emmanuel Levinas described his friend Maurice Blanchot's literary writing as providing 'above all a new sensation ... a new tingling in the skin as it brushes against things'; Levinas in Seán Hand, *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 153. Cf. Cixous's repeated recourse to metaphors of tactility in her accounts of Clarice Lispector's writings - a 'tact-ful' naming that keeps the other 'alive': 'How to bring forth claricely: going, approaching, brushing, dwelling, touching; allowing-entrance, -presence, -giving, -taking' (Hélène Cixous, *'Coming to Writing', and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992, p. 64). Cixous champions Lispector's ability to be 'in touch with the instant', and asks: 'But how do we obtain this lightness, this active passivity ... this submission to the process?' (ibid., p. 113).

[57] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, op. cit., p. 36. Emphasis in original.

[58] Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *The Drama Review*, op. cit., p. 40.

[59] Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', *Theatre Papers*, op. cit., pp. 7–8.

[60] Ibid, p. 17, 7.

[61] For a detailed analysis of ocularcentric discourse and some of its critical dissidents, including Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

[62] Noreen O'Connor, 'The Personal is Political: Discursive Practice of the Face-to-Face', in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds), *The Provocation of Levinas*, op. cit., p. 67. For an interesting critical reading of Levinas's notion of the 'caress', see Luce Irigaray, 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: on the Divinity of Love', in Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (eds), *Re-reading Levinas*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991. Irigaray locates Levinas's caress as subsuming sexual difference within ethical difference.

[63] Levinas, 'Time and the Other', in Seán Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, op. cit., p. 51. According to Edith Wyschograd, Levinasian touch is not 'really' a sense at all: 'it is in fact a metaphor for the impingement of the world as a whole upon subjectivity ... To touch is to comport oneself not in opposition to the given but in proximity with it': Edith Wyschogrod, 'Doing before Hearing: on the Primacy of Touch', in François Laruelle (ed.), *Textes pour Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1980, p. 199. Although I accept Wyschogrod's reading, in **con()tact** the implications of 'real' touch are no less 'real' for their saturated metaphoricity; there cannot 'really' be any clear-cut separation.

[64] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, op. cit., p. 92. Cf. Chantal Mouffe on democracy as unfinishable becoming: 'The experience of modern democracy is based on the realisation that ... there is no point of equilibrium where final harmony could be attained. It is only in this precarious "in-between" that we can experience pluralism, that is to say, that this democracy will always be "to come", to use Derrida's expression, which emphasises not only the unrealised possibilities but also the radical impossibility of final completion'. From 'For a Politics of Nomadic Identity', in George Robertson, Melinda Mash et al. (eds), *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, op. cit., p. 112.

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The Missing Gesture

an interview with Hubert Godard

by Daniel Dobbels and Claude Rabant

June 1994

Barry Laing. Photograph by Brian Rapsey

DD Could you start by defining, in broad terms, the object of your work?

HG The work revolves around the analysis of movement. It takes place in three different contexts: firstly, in the Department of Dance at the University of Paris VIII; secondly, kinesiology training, within the framework of the Ministry of Culture; and thirdly, at the National Centre for Cancer Research in Milan, Italy, where I've worked for seven years. The latter comprises research that is more technical, concerning functional anatomy in relation to certain corporeal impairments, and at the same time more fundamental, dealing with the gestures of doctors during practice.

DD Could you specify what you mean?

Initially in Milan I was invited to work in a very classical way on the physical approach of doctors in relation to their patients, a large part of which is connected with touch. It was in a department focusing on post-operative problems and on grief. The project was to ameliorate the relationship between doctors and their patients in terms of their therapeutic practice, using a different quality of skill, something closer to dance. With this as a starting point, the field was wide open.

You often find that departments of 'psychology', 'functional rehabilitation' and 'trauma' are separated off. But in this case the professor, Gemma Martino, and the outstanding team she had been able to bring together, had no desire to continue with purely sectional research; they wanted to connect the different medical fields systematically. So gradually, in conjunction with a team, I was required to attempt a close study of the gestures of both patients and doctors.

From a practical point of view, I worked in particular on breast cancer and the subsequent functional impairment of the shoulder. We noticed that, quite often, despite muscular, tonic, articular recuperation, something was still not working. Something that was of the order of movement and gesture, and which was not visible in the usual tests. The patient recovers all of her strength, an articular amplitude, and yet certain gestures are missing, absent ... Existing equipment for the analysis of gesture also proved inadequate for measuring this absence.

CR Is it possible to give some idea of this 'missing gesture'?

Our first approach consisted of watching the patient in movement, which in itself was already unusual. We asked them to walk, to stroll up and down, to grasp objects; and we realised that there's a functional impairment which cannot be defined through deficits – nervous, muscular or any other. For example, when the person walks up and down, the impaired arm no longer moves with the same coordination.

DD Did you have to be there in order for the doctor to perceive this?

It's not obvious, watching someone walk up and down and realising that one shoulder no longer has the same pendular balance as the other, that it's less precise. The difficulty is in grasping what's actually happening here – given that when you ask a person to move, to walk up and down making spontaneous pendulum movements with her arms, she can do it immediately. So the question is this: is this uniquely an impairment of what in broad terms one might call the body image? or is it something more physiological that has been overlooked by traditional analysis?

DD But do the patients experience this other kind of 'disability' themselves? Do they feel this missing gesture?

No, rarely. This lack is not articulated much at all. Perception of it corresponds with a great deal of work I've done on *the sphere of gesture*. When I say 'gesture', I'm not thinking exclusively of movement, but of all of its signifying, symbolic implications. By asking the patient to shake hands, to grasp an object, to indicate points in space, one brings to light a debility of gesture, which is not functional; and it enables us to posit that a certain investment in the relation of this arm or this shoulder to the world has been withdrawn.

In order to further develop this research in a more scientific manner, we had to take on control groups and systematise observation; and we became aware that this impairment of gesture was often present before surgical intervention. So we made studies before and after surgery, and in this way we realised that, fairly often, there was already an impairment anticipating the illness. So the problem was to understand whether the oncological impairment had any connection with the organisation of the gestural sphere.

CR What sort of connection?

One must be humble in relation to this type of problem. One could think that there's some sort of connection between the impairment of the immune system in a spatial, corporeal localisation; one might imagine that something is being performed metaphorically, analogically, in relation to the gestural universe of the person; but this is of such extreme dimensions, that one must exercise an equally extreme prudence.

CR Without proposing any hypothesis on the causal link, does this mean that a point of debility in the gestural sphere would coincide with the oncological impairment itself?

Yes.

DD Isn't the notion of gestural sphere problematic, in so far as it assumes a sort of plenitude?

Yes, absolutely. The idea refers to the *kinesphere*, as described by Laban and Bartenieff, and also to the *dynamosphere*: what is the dynamic organisation of a person? I can't develop this idea more thoroughly here, but in the first instance one might think of a cinematic vision. I measure a person's movements geographically. So, for example, there is a flexion of the arm and then an extension of the shoulder in the carriage of arms; this indicates spatial movements, but not the dynamic of the forces brought into play to create the gesture. Hence the second concept, developed by Laban, of the dynamosphere: in other words, the qualities of movements which enable recognition of the construction of this cinematic gesture.

Then I propose the notion of *gestosphere* to designate the idea that we are constituted by what one could call 'founding gestures'. At a certain moment, these gestures are given, they develop more or less according to the person; in such a way that every one of us develops a way of being in the world, with a sphere of possible gestures in relation to each of these gestures in a particular situation. Very simple things – like the gesture of pushing away in a child, when it uses this physiological functionality for the first time – immediately have a charge in relation to the situation at that moment. How does the child categorise this gesture of 'pushing away'? What impact do the surroundings have? From a technical point of view, one perceives that certain muscles play a pivotal role (such as the trapezius), allowing this gesture of pushing away to be made, a gesture which appears in the child at the same moment as the fact of denying, of saying no. So there's a very strong interconnection between the capacity to say no and the constitution, from the point of view of the gestural sphere, of my shoulder.

In some people, the gesture of pointing is reduced, or almost non-existent; in others, the gesture of pushing away doesn't exist, or if it does exist, it's the person herself who, in certain spatial directions, pushes herself away. To speak technically, either it's the *pectoralis major* which effects the push away, or it's the trapezius; and this produces two diametrically opposed qualities of gesture, each constituting an appropriate way in its own context. It's

quite clear that a situation is categorised as gesture through the intermediary of the surroundings; it is through exteroceptive return that the unification of the body occurs, that the body image is constituted – or the exteroceptive self, as discussed by Lacan. One could say that what is of the order of physiology, the bodily schema, is constituted through proprioception, through the development of the interior; but that at a certain point, I will unify myself through the gestures that I make.

So one can no longer talk of the body, but of *corporeity*, as Michel Bernard does, or of gestosphere, with its symbolic implications. The founding gestures – such as the movements for going towards, pushing away, designating – are not cinematic gestures, but gestures whose implications are significant in relation to the surroundings. Recently I read an article about autistic children, in which the author[1] talked of the impossibility of designating. For such children, the gesture of designation is totally interwoven with the gesture of taking: in other words, there is no capacity to share a spatial projection, to triangulate. An autistic child designates an object in order to take it, but for example she would not be able to show someone near her a direction in space, an object – that which subsequently brings children to name the object. The gesture of designation is completely foundational ...

DD Might one not think that there are also more abstract modes of designation, in which there is neither object nor concretely designated zone, but which would nevertheless designate something?

Yes, but this more abstract gesture you mention is necessarily constructed, originally, in relation to an object. It's a gesture which has an efficacity in relation to the grasping of an object, the designating of an object that the mother will be able to provide. It is always operative. The abstraction consists in being able to separate off this gesture which was constituted at the level of the effective bodily schema, 'real' in terms of its power to grasp or designate, and to differentiate its capacity to be inscribed with another meaning, another direction.

DD So you don't think the child or infant can have gestures that are not operative, but – to borrow a term of Kandinsky's – that are a 'gestural treasure', devoid of initial reference?

We need to refer to another concept: that of tonic function, tonic dialogue. It is true that the child has gestures which are affective, inscribed in a relation to the other, therefore in an object relation.

CR Is the triangulation you mentioned a little while ago effected at the level of tonic function?

Yes. In order to talk about this, I will extend Wallon's concept by suggesting that the tonic function is tonic-expressive and tonic-affective. It emerges, at least in part, from something that is measurable; it's the gravitational organisation, the gravitational tonus which will enable the child to achieve autonomy. It's the moment at which she will be able to turn over on her own, manage gravity on her own, whereas at the beginning her mother did it for her. This tonic function immediately becomes an object of dialogue. There is a close relationship between this tonic managemenent, the relation to gravity and the relation to the mother. Because I can constitute myself in terms of gravitational musculature, through the separation from the mother, I will be able to broach a distance which will be the tensor of the inscription of my own language ...

CR Is it at that moment that the triangulation occurs?

One can make an analogy between triangulation in the Freudian sense and gravitational triangulation. It's not the motor sphere that's in play, but the perceptual sphere. One can consider perception as gesture and talk of a perceptual *habitus*, perceptual conections or networks. There's no such thing as a tautological look. When I look at a body, it is already inscribed with a reading grid which revolves around tonic function, as it's inscribed in the gravitational muscles. Tonic function is immediately coloured when it is in relation, and then gravitational autonomy is attained through separation from the object of love. It's this separation that makes me autonomous. From this moment on, one can talk of a spatial triangulation as much as of an affective triangulation. A third character emerges at the Oedipal level, whereas at the level of the constitution of gravitational musculature, a new direction emerges. Ponderality, and thus embodied existence, is immediately accompanied by a spatial direction, a directed attention. These two vectors – the ponderal vector and directed attention – constitute a gravitational axis, an axis coloured straightaway by the dialogue established with the object of love. And one rediscovers this tonic function behind all gestures.

For example, it's only recently that we have known that if I raise an arm in front of me when standing, the first muscle to move is the calf muscle. Traditionally we thought: if I make a gesture, it unbalances me and my gravitational musculature reacts. We have just realised that in fact it's the inverse; the restoration of gravitational balance and verticality anticipates the gesture. This means that any gesture is literally born from the gravitational function, rooted within the tonic function. It's the tonic state of the moment that will produce the quality of the gesture. Now, this tonic state is connected with the peculiar constitution of the particular history that made me gravitationally independent.

DD When you talk about the possibility of indicating a direction, you always hold out your arm, towards a space that is quite distant. Might one not imagine gestures which, on the contrary, are intimately or infinitesimally connected to the organism, to the interiority of the body?

Indeed it is a space particular to the individual, but nevertheless, at a given moment, this space is constituted in an object relation.

DD However, a certain representation of space – in the background – presides over this constitution. Bataille talks of an 'aberrant space' ('espace voyou'); he says that there's as much space in a crocodile that swallows a man as in the distribution of stars in the sky. How do you conceive of the notion of space?

Lacan expressed the incredible idea that proprioceptive space is fragmented. This space does not exist, I don't exist, as long as there is no return through the exterior. One can compare this idea with the phenomenological idea that suggests I am constituted, not through corporeal structure, but through events which inscribe me. And it's the gestures that constitute me, those primary gestures: throwing, pointing, pushing away, going towards, stopping. This is not simply theoretical, it has an entirely practical dimension.

Let me refer you to a test: you ask someone to put on glasses with curved prism lenses, and to grasp an object. Obviously this person then places their hand beside the object; but it only takes ten seconds for them to readjust and grasp the object correctly. So they have

reorganised space in order to make the grasp. But if you ask them to throw the object into a bucket, once again the same error will occur, and in order to make the gesture of throwing they will have to reorganise space yet again. They will have to reconstruct the space for each of the gestures that I call 'founding' or 'foundational'. So one is dealing with something very real here. There are *Gestalt* for different gestures, and one perceives that a gesture is not only the functional accumulation of capabilities, like flexion of the elbow or the wrist. It is the mirror stage which enables the constitution of a unity, and this unity is only gestural.

CR What I find decisive in what you're bringing to bear is the fact that each gesture requires and comprises its own real.

With dancers, for example, sometimes there are gestures which are difficult. For many of them, throwing is pushing, throwing doesn't exist. There's no neural or muscular accident, it's simply the sphere of 'throwing' (*jeter*) which has not constituted itself. And if this throw doesn't exist, all the steps that follow – like the *jeté* in ballet, what's called the *saut-jeté* (lit. 'jump-throw') – will be difficult.

DD The gesture you've just made contained as much throwing as jumping, and they're not at all the same thing.

Indeed, they are not the same thing. That's why the *jeté* ('throw') with the feet is a push, a jump, and the throwing of a ball or a javelin is a throw. These are totally different universes. There's the famous example where you get someone to write "the sky is blue" on a piece of paper: first of all with the right hand, then with a straight arm to which a pencil has been attached, then with the left hand, then with the mouth, finally with the foot. On each occasion, one recognises the writing, which remains identical to itself. It's connected both to the phrase "the sky is blue" and to the person's gestosphere. Instead of thinking of the body as a functionality, I think of it as a symbolic universe of gestures. And it's this symbolic universe which will explain and in-form the anatomy, not the other way around.

DD What you're saying might lead one to think of contemporary dance as also being a search for the missing gesture; and that choreographic work consists of bringing back into play what one is given initially,

far left: 'Queen Elizabeth in mid-air assisted by the Earl of Leicester'
left: Ballet Nationale du Nancy et de Lorraine
Photograph by Geneviève Stephenson

contesting and even opposing this primary sphere, putting it to the test. Could one also interpret or perceive a choreographic work from this starting point?

It's always difficult to respond to such a question. I'm going to over-simplify somewhat. If I take the movement of reaching towards, or of pushing away, they are not only connected to the hand, but also to the foot. If I compare the work of Trisha Brown with that of Merce Cunningham, the latter is concerned with pushing away from the floor, whereas Trisha's is about going towards the floor. So the qualities are radically different at the level of the constitution of gesture. In Trisha's work, this 'going towards' reflects the continuity of flow and, at the same time, reversibility; she is dealing with reversible gesture. Cunningham's dancers push away, they are dealing with the spatial inscription of irreversible gestures, with cutting: I cut space. There is an affirmation, a creation of direction, whereas with Trisha, things aren't played out on this level; rather her work is concerned with sensation. Which tallies with the choreographer's will; Cunningham pushes away the spectator, in order for the dancer to remain Other.

DD Yes, but what also immediately becomes apparent with Cunningham is an effect of resistance to external forces which could be reductive or oppressive. He maintains a distance so that it cannot be destroyed, whereas with Trisha Brown one doesn't get this sensation – as if, in her work, there wasn't any resistance to something other ... These are two different aesthetics and ethics.

Yes, absolutely. In Cunningham, the gesture is in *bound flow*, whereas in Trisha Brown, it's in *free flow*.[2] This is most marked, in terms of the connection to the gestosphere, through the particular relationship to the floor. Cunningham has repeatedly said that it is not the dancer one watches, but the trace of the dancer's gesture. Consequently, at no moment am I able to 'go into' the sphere of the dancer; whereas with Trisha, I literally enter this sphere. In her work there is a kinesthetic empathy, whereas Cunningham compels abstraction, obliges the spectator to cut the umbilical cord of kinesthetic empathy, in order to look at something else, his discourse.

DD This exteriority can be every bit as perilous as it is beneficial ...

What I find fantastic in Cunningham's work is precisely this admittance to abstraction, and the happiness of being able to perform in a space free of all affective ties at the moment of performance. He does not encourage kinesthetic empathy, and I am sure that one could measure, with electromyographic equipment, the difference of flow in the nervous systems in a Cunningham spectator and a Trisha Brown spectator. In Trisha's work, the spectator remakes the dancer's gesture but without sufficient intensity to realise it; whereas Cunningham forbids, cuts, prevents any rapport of this kind. Cunningham never provides any indications as to the proprioceptive origin of the movement; it's that, or it's not that; whereas with Trisha Brown, all of the research on the skeleton, the Alexander work, entails a journey into an interior geography, which in turn provokes the spectator. In her work, movement is reversible. But the danger of a reversible movement would be of inscribing nothing at all ...

DD That's not absolutely true; in Trisha's work, there are also points of inscription ...

Of course, but I warned you that I was over-simplifying. What we really need to do is to develop Wallon's thinking, and show the extent of its modernity, at the level of tonic function; it has not been adequately cultivated.[3]

CR To return to the question of oncological impairments, what means of reading them are provided by tonic function?

We ask the patient to carry out gestures, and a way forward at the therapeutic level is indicated by reading these gestures. We will reconsider the object relation, rather than rebuilding the muscles in one part of the body that is purportedly failing. For example, instead of giving a banal massage to one limited part of the body, we massage it while the patient makes a gesture, and we examine the situation of this gesture. So, I have an object in my hand, and they will work on my shoulder while I move this object. By modifying the relation to the object, I modify the tonic function. For example, if the patient grasps the object without recognising it, she will be in *bound flow*; in other words, the antagonistic muscles of the movement will tighten in order to have control; if I manage to get a movement made in *free flow*, then the situation is modified.

To give a very simple example, instead of saying to the patient: 'Grab the bottle or the weight that's over there', which she will do with a particular tonic state, I tell her: 'That object is going to grab your hand, the object is attracting your hand'. If the proprioceptive and exteroceptive relation is modified, immediately the tonic function of the organisation of the gestures is changed. What organises the gesture is the function of the tonic muscles which carry the trace and the memory of the entire dialogue and the entire ontology of my object relation – but also, from a very physiological point of view, of my entire history of coordination. Certain specific muscles in the back coordinate the gesture (such as the rhomboid muscles), and the fact of modifying the body state in terms of tonic function will modify the gesture completely.

DD That makes me think of an Etienne Decroux exercise, which consists of taking a glass with the awareness of a gesture that "will not hurt the space".

It's exactly that. When the (hi)story that's in the process of unfolding in relation to the object is modified, it's staggering to see the immediate modification of the body state.

Take the situation of a doctor who touches a patient; I can see if the doctor is distanced from their internal geography, in such a way as to enable them to create a positive no man's land between them and the patient, or if, on the contrary, they are literally bound – in other words, if their tonic function is knotted. So they are obliged to have a distant gesture, something one often sees with masseurs as they feel the patient's body. If my own democracy, my internal administration of territories does not enable this distance from the other, I will not be able to receive and welcome the other. Consequently, the work on the capacity to establish a distance that is possible will enable one to touch the other, to exchange in triangulated relations; there will be a space of listening, expression and reception. Whereas if I have a *bound flow*, I will grab the patient as I would grab the glass; in terms of the Decroux expression you have just evoked, I would hurt the space. My movement would be completely controlled, but it would be caught in a dyad, which would not open out into a triangulated space.

DD From this perspective, are there good and bad gestures, or are they of another dimension: gestures

that are just or unjust, right or not right?

Since it's the gesture that makes the body at every instant, there are no good or bad bodies, there are only gestures that are adapted, suitable. In the context of functional reeducation, I am compelled to think that it is the gesture that is failing; I cannot abstract what surrounds it – work the muscle with the physiotherapist and the gesture with the psychoanalyst.

CR If I understand you fully, the 'positive no man's land' you referred to must be located not only between the person making the movement and the other, but also between the different spheres or categories of gestures, in order for them to be able to play together.

Absolutely. The idea would be to open up the territory. If I only ever touch the other in *bound flow*, the space is completely contracted and restricted. So how could the other move freely? On the other hand if I can move freely, if I can dance in relation to my own corporeity, I can open up a field within which the other can emerge, a space that will grant them access to an-other gesture. Tonic function is contagious. The body state within which I stand is contagious. I believe the supreme contagion to be that of the body state. From this perspective, all trance phenomena are body states. It is for that reason, nonetheless, that dance represents a particular point. There is no greater inductor of empathy than making the gesture of an-other; at that moment, one is immediately in a mini-trance. It's something that is produced every day with a teacher or a choreographer who shows a gesture that the dancer takes up literally.

DD Trance, transport: does that signify alienation?

It could do, since it is contagious. When one observes two people talking together, the exchanges they make, one can see reciprocal modifications of body states, as a function of what occurs between them. Certain words can constitute a limitation of the opening to the other.

CR It seems to me that, starting from there, one could reflect on the different qualities of transference in analytic experience. In fact there's a whole range of modes and qualities of transference which come from the analyst, in so far as the transference in care is sustained by one particular analyst. (There can be lots of variations in the manner in which the same analyst sustains the transference throughout his or her practice). And undoubtedly one could read these qualities and modes, at least in part, in the light of the proposals you're putting forward. Moreover this is why it seems to me to be of such importance, and increasingly so, for analysts to be practiced with their own bodies. In actual fact, there are qualities of transference which close or delimit, and others which are the inverse, opening up this positive intermediary space – which is not unrelated to Winnicott's transitional field. So what should the quality of the analyst's 'gesture' be?

In his last book, Winnicott has a wonderful passage on gravity.[4] Etymologically, transference relates to transport. So transference designates a movement of gravitational administration and organisation, and consequently of tonic function. The foundation of transference, its essence, is a modification in the body state. The notion of transference is necessarily supported by tonic function.

DD Nevertheless, this interplay can produce effects of fascination, even in truth of 'fascisation'; or, on the contrary, of opening, of democracy.

That's why I used the term democracy just now. Sharing a territory with several others already entails sharing one's own internal territory. One of the problems of our era is that of

promiscuity and how to manage it. Dance speaks only of this: the question of territory, the difficulty of managing a space with several dancers each in resonance with one's own internal territory.

DD I don't yet feel that this question is at the centre of contemporary choreographers' preoccupations ...

It's not articulated in an explicit way; and analysis or criticism in dance tends to stick to the choreography, the choreographers' words, the scenography, rather than the gestures of the dancers; the semantic shortcomings of the critical language prevent us from becoming aware of these gestures. It is not easy to describe the hedonistic delights in the gestures of the other, and thus to know of the effects of dance. That's what makes Laban's endeavour so enormously important, he opened up this area of enquiry. It was also one of the great hopes of Marcel Mauss: to succeed one day in looking at the gestures of cultures – not the bodies, nor the functionalities, but the infinite spaces of gesture ...

[Trans. David Williams]

Notes

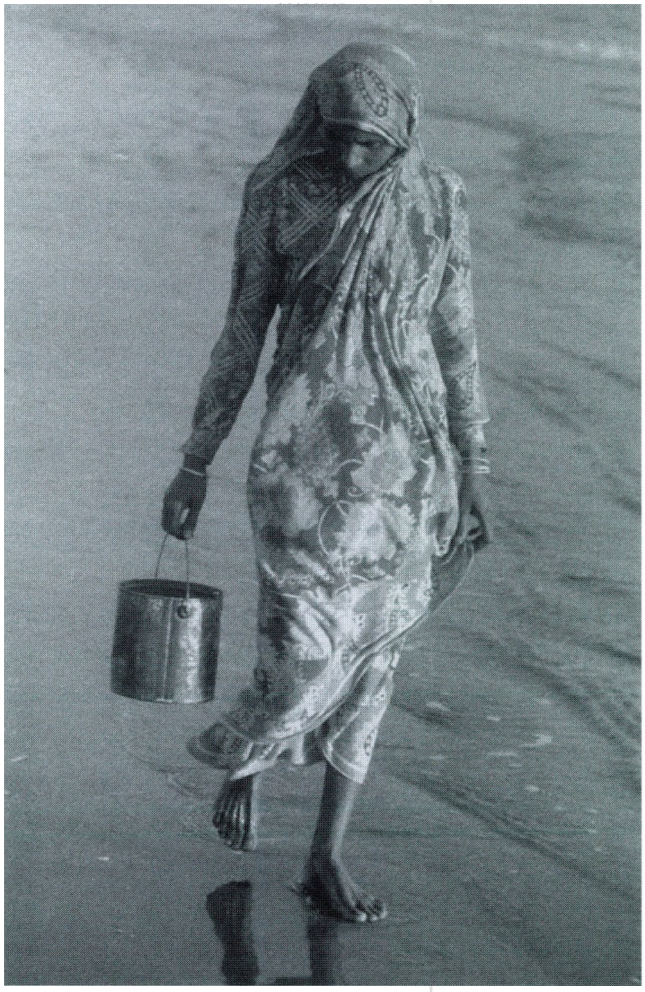
1 Uta Frith, in *Pour la science*, no. 190, August 1993.

2 'Bound flow' and 'free flow': Laban's terms are in English in the original text.

3 For further details on the work of psychologist and phenomenologist Henri Wallon see Gilbert Voyat (ed.), *The World of Henri Wallon*, N.Y., J. Aaronsen, 1984.

4 D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, London: Tavistock, 1971.

far left: Design by Daniel Rabel for the "Danseurs de Sarabande" in *La Douairère de Billebahaut*
Collection: George Chaffee: Harvard
left: Trisha Brown *Foray–Forêt* (1990)
Photograph by Geneviève Stephenson



Walking woman, frontispiece from the book, *The community of those who have nothing in common*, Alphonso Lingis, Indiana University Press, 1994

Spirit of Gravity and maidens' feet

by Sally Gardner

Prologue: walking

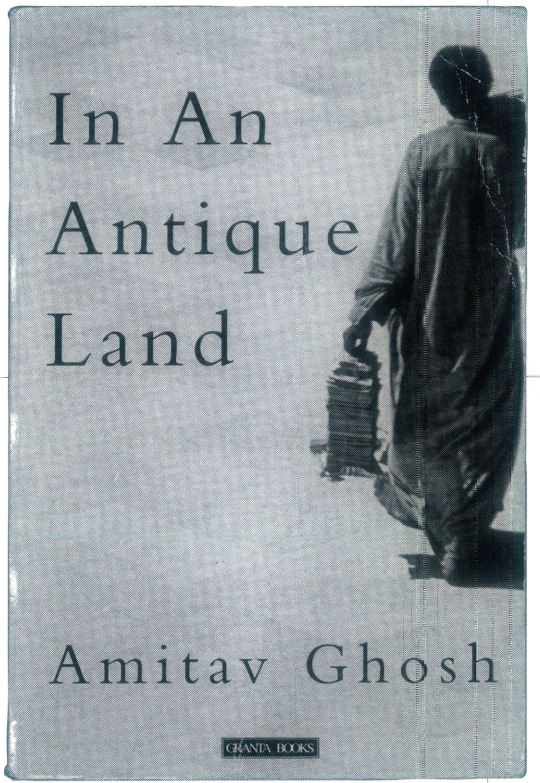
I noticed that two books that I had recently acquired had very similar cover designs. Both employed photographs of a person walking. On the one cover it is a woman, Indian, Pakistani perhaps or Sri Lankan, since she is wearing a sari. She is walking towards the camera

but looking down, slightly to one side, to where she is carrying a tin of water (?) lightly in her right hand. Her head is covered by the sari and her feet are bare. She is walking along the sand at a water's edge.

On the other cover it is a man walking. He is walking away from the camera, a little in the distance. He is wearing an ankle length robe or *djellabeh* and is barefoot. In his left hand he is carrying a stack of papers or books tied together. With his right hand he also rests several more books on his shoulder. He is walking on a pavement.

From both these images I have the sense that, for those pictured, walking is a familiar, necessary, easy and graceful mode of locomotion.

The two books, *The Community of those who have nothing in common*, by Alphonso Lingis[2] and *In an Antique Land* by Amitav Ghosh[3] both deal in their own ways with questions of difference. There is a pleasurable symmetry in the similarity of their cover designs. There are, however, obvious and revealing differences in these two images – or should I say a complementarity. The woman, head covered and down-turned carries water, probably for drinking or washing. She is coming towards the camera but does not return its 'look'. The man walks away from the camera, into the distance, looking straight ahead, carrying his books or notes. Despite these 'differences' which indicate immediately the traditional roles of women and men in relation to the tasks of production and of reproduction, the sense of a more fundamental similarity still persists. It's the easy verticality of these two bodies and what is suggested in the images of their two-legged walking gait. Don't they have a certain relationship to gravity in common? – a relationship they share with each other but with no other species?



Walking man, cover of the book *In an Antique Land*, Amitav Ghosh, Granta Editions, 1992

Introduction: dancing

I have worked for many years as a dancer. I have been drawn to the kinds of dancing and dance contexts in which stereotyped gender distinctions such as can be found in classical and modern ballet and in neo-

expressionist modern dance have been avoided. The kind of dance in which I have been involved has been informed by a democratic or egalitarian politics consistent with its historical roots in the social movements and milieu of the 1960s. In the 'bodywork' practices and discourses which inform the kind of dancing that I do rarely if ever is there or has there been reference to sexual difference or specificity.[4] It is expected that one take presumed 'neutral' anatomical information, for example, shapes of bones, the way they articulate with other bones, imaginary lines of action moving between one part of the skeleton and another – and uses it in one's own individual body as a way of 'de-inscribing', of achieving a kind of neutral body, neuro-muscularly speaking.[5] This work has also involved 'hands-on' experiences with a partner. The discourse of 'neutrality', and of caring and sensitivity in relation to touch has usually constituted an ambience in which the issue of whether one's partner was male or female, of his or her sexual specificity, is effectively irrelevant.

It is with this background that I read the two book covers as reflecting a fundamental similarity or rather commonality in the mode of walking upright, a mode that I have learned to represent to myself and to experience in 'physical' (i.e. neutral) terms as a continuous play of balancing and falling between gravity and counterthrust where both these 'forces' are taken as 'givens' of the natural world.

Dance practices constitute modes of embodiment, ways of knowing one's body and of knowing through or with one's body. Spectators of dance performance might regard the dances that they see as so many ways of representing the body and in more conventional contexts where dance is the support or vehicle for an explicit 'scenario' this can be so. And it's true, also, that a superficial engagement with a specific dance practice will lead to a dancer presenting a style, rather than embodying a 'knowledge' more deeply. In the usual case, however, serious performers undertake a long term engagement with ways of understanding and practising the body so that these come to constitute specific modes of bodily knowledge. In the kinds of practices referred to above it is acknowledged that a body comes already inscribed in very powerful ways. In order for a genuinely new, that is, as yet unimagined inscription to take place (concretely manifested in a performance), it is thought that a kind of bodily 'de-construction'[6], must first occur. Often, for the dancer, it is about undoing a musculature that was established in previous dance training. And to the extent that traditional, conventional practices reflect and create body/subjects compatible with patriarchal representation this bodily 'de-construction' contains the possibility of intervening to change embodied gender 'formations'[7]. This is not to suggest that a *state* of 'de-construction' is thought ever to be actually achieved – only that the process becomes incorporated into the practice: that the ongoing commitment is towards *a body available for re-inscription* in 'other' ways.

The question that I want to raise here is, 'Is there a discourse of truth or universality at the heart of the discourse of the so-called neutral body?' Within this discourse and this set of practices how are the (sexual) differences between bodies figured, obscured, ordered? Is there really an imagined masculine body behind the supposedly 'de-constructed' one? After all, the kinds of discourses and images used include those of classical anatomy – a scientific discourse and therefore one committed to an idea of a singular truth (about the body). Is there a supposedly 'natural' body, that is, a *feminised* one, embedded in these practices or is there, possibly, the body of a woman?

In this essay I want to examine this discourse of neutrality in the context of Luce Irigaray's feminism of 'sexual difference'[8] in order to try to draw out the problems, possible deceptions, desires and 're-visions'[9] which might underlie these practices and the way they have influenced my response to the two images mentioned above. These movement practices are based on the premise that at a bodily level it is possible to 'undo habit, undo preconceived ideas of body and mind'[10]; but it might also be the case that the space of the kinds of practices referred to here has been constituted as one in which the body might somehow (mistakenly) be protected

from the ongoing operations of language – a kind of private space amongst bodies[11]. Irigaray's feminism of sexual difference provides a means of critically examining both of these possibilities.

Aesthetics and politics

As indicated above, the discourse of the neutrality of the body had its roots not in an isolated aesthetic domain but in progressive social movements – albeit, largely, liberal humanist ones. To put this another way, the aesthetics of the experimental dance practices of the 1960s, particularly in the United States, were driven by 'grass roots' democratic social and political ideals. The nature of the body in performance was investigated in relation to its conventional aesthetic and social modes and representations. Both the conventionally beautiful and the (economically) productive body were subverted. This project of re-inscribing and representing bodies in alternative ways was supported by and was part of a much broader social movement and climate.[12]

In terms of their history the dance practices to which I have briefly referred partake of a (self-conscious) politics of the body, but not a politics defined in sexual terms. They involve a redefinition and re-inscription of the body as animate and 'thinking' in its own right in a context where most processes of bodily re-inscription, such as in sport and in traditional forms of dance training based on classical ballet, are 'disciplinary' in the sense that Foucault uses the term. Alternative movement practices tend to subvert the disciplinary production of docile, productive bodies and of processes that reinforce dichotomous definitions of mind and body. They also tend not to create an alternative 'aesthetic' but rather to promote a proliferation of kinds of bodily knowledge and bodily representations. The question that Irigaray's work raises in this context is how far do such projects go in challenging the patriarchal economy of representation? Do body *practices* which play down any sexual specificity, or which do not appear to directly address the sexual economy, side-step the question of the representation that is created *on stage* as well as the question of one's dancing on stage *as a woman*? For Irigaray there is always a cost in representation – there is always a remainder, or excess, an unrepresentable, produced by the very work of representation itself. Traditionally women's work on stage has been (used) to support masculine self-representations: indeed Irigaray would say that the stage itself, by definition, has been a support, a ground for the patriarchal Imaginary[13].

In the dance practices to which I have been referring, despite the central role that women played, a feminist discourse was almost never employed. Yvonne Rainer, for example, has since become a well-known feminist film-maker but at the time as a member of the Judson Dance Theatre and founder of The Grand Union her discourse, including her often quoted 'manifesto'[14], was about performance and aesthetics, not about the role or representation of women on stage. In fact, in order to make overtly feminist statements Rainer deliberately turned away from the live female body. Artist Mary Kelly's words echo her position: 'To use the body of the woman, her image or person is not impossible but problematic for feminism' (1985: xvii). Kelly goes on to explain: 'In my work I have tried to cut across the predominant representation of woman as the object of the look in order to question the notion of femininity as a pre-given entity and to foreground instead its social construction as a representation of sexual difference within specific discourses. For me, this is not a new form of iconoclasm but a shared aspiration...to 'picture' the woman as subject of her own desire.'(1985: xvii-xviii) Many feminist artists have been (rightly) wary of basing any new politics/poetics on the heavily codified, objectified, fetishised female body.

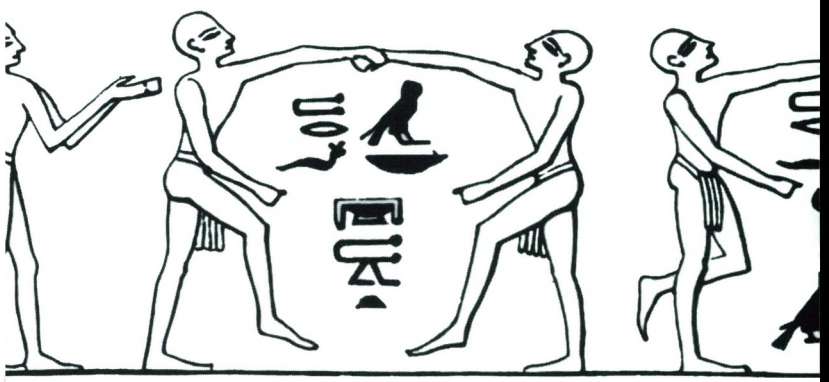
I think that in Irigaray's work we can find both an articulation of the reasons behind this reticence to employ the female body, itself, in a feminist art practice, *and*

support for encouraging women to manifest their desire through their bodies, in public. If subjectivity and desire are grounded in the body, women have to enact these physically not just textually – despite the problems and risks that this entails. I hope to show why this is so by looking at the relation Irigaray draws between the body and language, or in Lacanian terms, between the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

For someone whose concern has been primarily with bodies constituted in the arena described above the feminism of Luce Irigaray suggests the urgency of coming to understand how bodies are constituted *sexually*. This means that the question of aesthetics and politics as far as dance is concerned has to be reformulated in terms of the politics of a sexually specific bodily pleasure – a politics which is at the heart of Irigaray's feminism of sexual difference.

Irigaray, language and the body

Irigaray is controversial within feminism because of the crucial role she seems to be giving to physical differences between men's and women's bodies. More generally, Irigaray does have a particular way giving a central place to bodies – of extricating them from a state of (essential) self-evidentness without handing them over to a place of pure discursive effect. In both of these cases, where the body is either a fixed essence or is socially constructed, the body would remain figured as inert, passive. This question of the animacy or inanimacy of bodies is crucial both for Irigaray and for those dancers who do not regard or practice their bodies simply as a kind of theatrical 'prop'. Dancers working in the kinds of practices I have mentioned above understand and experience their bodies as animate, alive in their own right – not simply as instruments that the mind or the will

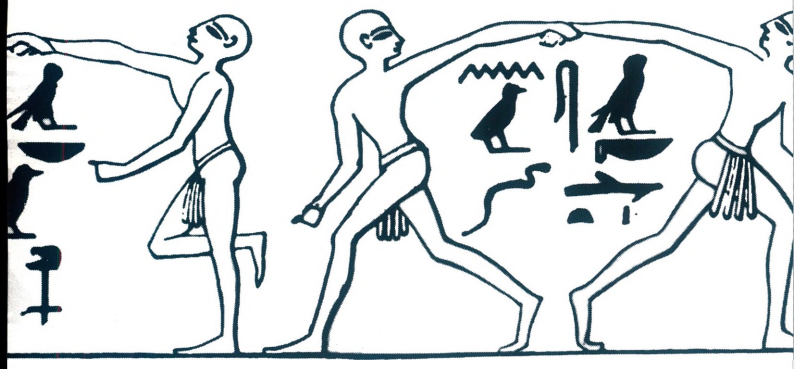


directs towards certain purposes. Both Irigaray and these dancers want to destabilise the conventional dichotomy between mind and body. For Irigaray, however, this project is, explicitly, inseparable from the need to renegotiate relations between the sexes.

If the animate body insists and resists through its materiality, she argues, the female body might do so in its own way, as distinct from the male body. This is not to say that one kind of body or another can be known somehow outside of culture. It is only through the inscription of the body (in one way) that we can become aware that there is something excessive or unrepresentable to that inscription. Irigaray's feminism turns on the question of bodies *and language* where both are inextricably interlaced. If woman is unrepresentable historically,[15] she is not unrepresentable by nature. Irigaray's argument rests on turning the unrepresentable of woman back on to language: it is language which does not 'know all'. The absence or negative, she insists, is in patriarchal discourses (most graphically, perhaps, in psychoanalysis),[16] not in women's bodies.

Irigaray has frequently been accused of an essentialism, of saying that sexual difference (a social category) is grounded in biological difference (a so-called natural category). I want to examine the way in which Irigaray precisely avoids a kind of biological determinism for femininity while, at the same time, insisting on the crucial place of a corporeal specificity.

Irigaray provides a way of seeing bodies as socially produced, as inextricably caught up in the organisation of culture and society without that being the last word on



(the) matter. For Irigaray, the body is not passive or inert. It insists and resists in some way by virtue of its specific materiality. This is not simply a theoretical position for her but one that is based in her clinical experience as a psychoanalyst: 'Don't some of those who are unable to express themselves in their own language have recourse to another language in order to articulate themselves? (1989: 130) To use Lacan's words, something 'does not work' when women's bodies are inscribed in the masculine – hence the bodily symptoms, 'the feeling of deformation or transformation of organs'.

Hence, while Irigaray seems to accept that there is 'no reality outside of discourse' she does seem to base her conception of sexual difference in the existence of a material real(ity). For her there are empirical givens of difference – but at issue is the logic or law governing their perception and symbolisation. Irigaray's conception of sexual difference is based in the body – but only if it is understood that 'difference' is not an alternative identity or set of desirable characteristics for women (Irigaray does not say what women/woman are) – but the future of a different law. Irigaray insists that reality and discourse are historical and contingent – and that other realities, and bodies, might be spoken in a different language. There is an 'elsewhere', but it has to be brought into existence through a (different) process of inscription.

Irigaray's most radical claim is that language is not neutral, but sexed – that it has a far reaching and sexually specific bodily component: historically, it gives man, not woman, 'the power to promote his own forms' (1985a: 135).[17] In the patriarchal economy, she argues, the bodily basis of discourse is suppressed and the body itself is denigrated. Truth and universality are supposedly disembodied but they are in fact subtended by a masculine body: patriarchal discourse speaks with a disavowed masculine body at the same time as it represses the feminine.[18] The feminine body is spoken in a logic that is 'isomorphic' with the masculine, not according to a logic of its own.[19] Language is thus the ultimate masculine self-representation. At the same time, in patriarchal discourse the feminine is embodied, but only where embodiment has the ontological status of 'object'. The feminine is the material surface for reflection, projection, inscription of masculine self-representations. She does not reflect, project, or inscribe herself.

Whereas Lacan states that every subject must take up a position in language as man or woman (irrespective of biological sex), Irigaray goes further to claim that the supposed universal 'I' of language, the speaking position, does not serve both sides of this division but only one: historically, only one kind of body subtends and is subtended by language. For Irigaray, we simply cannot place bodies at a distance and speak *about* them, for we already speak as or with a (masculine) body – this fact is the very basis of what she calls 'women's exile'.

The Imaginary

Irigaray's reading of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage pursues the patriarchal investments in psychoanalytic discourse even as this discourse attempts to formulate a stage or structure that is pre-linguistic. The Imaginary is this structure. It is a kind of reconstructed 'era' of the (maternal) pre-symbolic. The importance of this idea for feminism is to establish that the body (matter) is central to the construction of a self (subject): in psychoanalytic terms the Imaginary is the nexus of bodily

self-representation, of an ideal of identification, and of auto-eroticism. Concerned as she is with the place of the specificity of sexed bodies Irigaray asks, what kind of body is involved here?

Through the idea of the Imaginary the existence of a pre-discursive realm or stage of experience is instituted. However, it is still the case that this experience can only be made sense of via language, can only exist in symbolic form. It is the symbolisation of the Imaginary in Lacan (and others) that Irigaray wants to question, wants to sexualise. That symbolisation is as follows: in Lacan, the Imaginary relates to the image on the axes both of identification(the self) and desire(the love object). Developmentally, a child has to come to be able to visualise itself as though from the outside, or as though from the position of an observer. In establishing a 'self' it cannot continue to confuse its body with those of others – as it did in the neonatal months. In Lacan, the mirror-stage signals the institution of the psychic structure through which the child can now identify, point to itself (from a distance) – can say 'that's me' to the mirror image. In addition, the child should be enamoured of this image – in the sense that love of the self is the basis or model upon which love of others is possible.

Lacan's very formulation of the imaginary is based on the idea that the body-self can be placed at a distance – that entry into language depends on this. In his description of the 'scene' of the mirror stage Lacan graphically opposes the amorphousness, unco-ordination and dependency of the infant's actual body to the joyously affirmed, cohesive, unified, anticipated body-as-image: there is in this description an implied denigration of the one (the felt body) and a celebration of the other (the image given by the mirror). In fact, what is jubilantly anticipated here is a time when the mother('s support) will no longer be necessary and can be relegated, forgotten. For Irigaray Lacan's body-as-image is the very figure of the *self-creating* subject of philosophy, the subject of reason.

Irigaray makes clear the patriarchal investments in this formulation whereby, as its pre-condition, the patriarchal symbolic seems to require a clean break both between bodies (in particular it involves a 'barring' of the mother's body) and between itself (the law) and the body. But this is only a deception. For Irigaray, the nature of the identificatory body-as-image and the language used to describe it are one and the same thing. Both language and this body-as-image are mutually self-creating. For Irigaray 'all Western discourse presents a certain isomorphism with the masculine sex: the privilege of unity, form of the self, of the visible, of the specularisable, of the erection.'(1985b: 64) This isomorphism with the masculine is historical, not universal: what Irigaray wants to do is to invoke, evoke another kind of identificatory image[20] and therefore a different language – one in which the form of a woman's body will be positively inscribed – both, of necessity, in the image and in language.[21]

To summarise, Irigaray argues that women are subjectivised within a language that has, historically, been unable to represent them in their own terms, that forces them to live, often painfully, in a situation in which, as themselves, they do not figure. She shows that even the Imaginary – our deepest relation to body, to fantasy and imagination – is not something that we can have access to directly, but only symbolically: and the only Symbolic that we have is the Law of the Father, not also a different, parallel, maternal law. For Irigaray however, the idea of the Imaginary does nevertheless contain the idea of imagining otherwise because what is repressed at the advent of the symbolic can return, erupt symptomatically as what is excessive, or as 'remainder', 'the unrepresentable'. Feminine sexuality, for Irigaray is precisely this arena of excess, of the unrepresentable and even patriarchal discourse acknowledges it as such.[22] The Symbolic inscribes women's bodies as absence or lack but the Symbolic and the Imaginary go together. Imagining another positive body and its possible pleasures touches on both real bodies and on language.

Part II

Certain modern tendencies, certain feminists of our time make strident demands for sex to be neutralised. This neutralisation, if it were possible, would mean the end of the human species...It is vital that a culture of the sexual, as yet non-existent, be elaborated, with each sex being respected. (1990: 12)

In this brief discussion, I've tried to outline some of the ways in which Irigaray formulates the problem of sexual difference. I want now to return to a discussion of those dance practices in which differences between the sexes are not explicitly figured (to the point of suggesting a neutrality of the body) to ask the question of how difference might be *implicitly* conceived, ordered, understood. What actually is meant by neutrality, here? My intention is not to construct an identity for a set of practices where there is none. Although certain bodywork processes and practices have names and distinct discourses[23] they are not employed by dance artists I have in mind as universalising methods, or techniques. They are always employed along with all sorts of other ideas, discourses and practices and they are employed in relation to an acknowledged individual and specific body. Indeed what the history of modern dance itself can show is that any process of codification, generalisation, universalization is a process of recuperation into an economy of the same where physical knowledges simply become the unacknowledged support of conventional modes of embodiment and representation[24].

Earlier, I suggested that the idea of 'neutrality' in certain dance practices might also be formulated in terms of their aiming to make the body available for re-inscription in 'other' ways. These practices require a certain ambience or environment – a space and time in which purposes and activities are strategically suspended, perhaps to enable the dance to move 'in a space emptied of things and thus of the order of things' as Alphonso Lingis suggests[25] – space for a wilful hesitation during which a gap might be opened for the creation of a different kind of bodily order.[26]

Unlike patriarchal discourse, the body itself, a live body on stage, for example, can scarcely conceal its sex. The perception of this difficult-to-obscure-sexedness of the body is ordered within the patriarchal economy such that the female body will tend to be read as 'object', while the embodiedness of the male will tend to be ignored so that the male performer might be read as 'subject'. These are the limits that Rainer and Kelly came up against and why they turned away from the body as a possible site for re-presenting femininity. But isn't this palpable sexual specificity of bodies a sign that language is 'not all' – that materiality cannot be suppressed – even if it is ordered according to a singular logic? This logic: 'the privilege of unity, form of the self, of the visible, of the specularisable, of the erection' is the logic of the image as it is of representation in language. If dancers refuse to 'shape' their bodies through developing a kind of muscular armature, if they generate uncodifiable, indefinable movements out of these sexed bodies, might they not be gesturing towards a different body logic – a logic of movement, not of the image?

As is well documented, dancers of the '60s and '70s refused to continue to practice dance as an instrument or support for representation as such. They were concerned to foreground kinesthesia and the body, in its own terms, attempting to create an autonomous space different from that of narrative, expressive, or pictorial economies and refusing to subordinate dance to any of them. This led to the celebrated or reviled abstractness of their dances, their so-called formalism, or matter-of-fact (that is, non-theatrical in the conventional sense) quality.

Importantly, these dancers did not conceive of the body as natural – and this was part of their break with earlier conceptions of the body in modern dance – but took as a given its thoroughly codified and culturally inscribed status. The readily apparent sexedness and cultural coding of bodies was taken as a fact, not to be covered over or wilfully ignored – that is, these dancers did not believe that there was some kind of outside to the sexual economy – but nor were the processes of re-

inscription that they undertook pursued so as to create, or fix another representational economy. Their dancing was critical and subversive in its own way. By placing necessarily coded bodies in non-representational or in 'other' contexts they contributed to a displacement or unsettling of conventional readings of the body.

There are, therefore, various reasons why the idea of neutrality, as Irigaray encourages us to understand it, is used problematically within these contexts and practices. On the one hand, Irigaray would have us see that spaces, bodies, time, energies, forces are always sexed and perhaps always inherently sexual; and on the other, the strategic refusal to buy into any explicit sexual representational economy has its rationale – but if this strategy inadvertently works to abet the suppression of the sexual itself we are back at the same place – where the specific sexual investments of all aspects of culture are denied:[27]

> **Our centuries old sexual economy is so often cut off from all aesthetic, speculative and truly ethical elaboration, that the idea of a sexed culture is astonishing to most people.** (1990: 15)

The alternative of naming these practices, their aesthetics, as feminine, however, is not what is being suggested here. The 'difference' that Irigaray imagines and proposes is not the difference of another identity since that would simply be another version of the same economy. If visible, integral shape or form is the stuff of the patriarchal imaginary as in Lacan and Irigaray instead invokes, for example, the fluid[28] it is not to represent the fluid as an alternative set of fixed characteristics but to show its unrepresentability in, its excessiveness to, masculine terms. Practitioners of 'new dance' have usually eschewed any formulation in terms of identity. Perhaps there is an understanding that certain practices involve a different symbolic logic – a logic of movement that the patriarchal symbolic cannot translate. I propose that there is something about movement that is unintelligible to the language that we have. The inscription of the body as object is the inscription of the body as essentially static, frozen, even dead; whereas the inscription of the body as irreducibly *in movement* would be the inscription of the body as creative and desiring subject and agent.

Walking II

> **What they need is to stand centred about their own axis, an axis which passes microcosmically from their feet to the top of their head, macrocosmically from the centre of the earth to the centre of the sky. This axis is present in the iconographic traces left by traditions in which women are visible. It is on this axis that women find the condition of their territory, of the autonomy of their body and their flesh, and the possibility of an expanding jouissance. Their jouissance does not require that they part with an arm or a hand to control the other, they keep all their limbs, their whole body, moving and in particular their legs.**(1989: 134)

In 'Any theory of the "Subject" has always been appropriated by the "Masculine"'[29] Irigaray imagines what the status of the subject (and therefore of the object) might be if there were a specifically feminine Imaginary: 'Once imagine that woman imagines and the object loses its fixed, obsessional character'. The fixed relation between subject and object would change if there were two, not one, Imaginaries, two desiring subjects who could each become object for the other.

As it is, man only ever sees himself in woman because she is unable to say what she represents. Woman can 'turn within herself' but, excluded from the symbolic, she does not know how to 'seek outside for identity within the other'. (1985a: 134) Being confined to the status of object she cannot return the look as genuinely other (subject) and man cannot see her as such if he only looks for a confirmation of himself. Being matter/mirror herself woman has no ground 'on which to

plant (her) foot in order to spring...'(1985a: 134) She is only the matter used for the imprint of forms. (1985a: 141) Which brings us back to the subject of walking.

Our verticality, our walking is much taken for granted. As children, once we have pulled ourselves up onto two feet, the neo-natal months of being held, the months of rolling and crawling that prepared us to balance on two legs quickly recede. Women, too, like men, take walking for granted, although they are often depicted in recline and are encouraged to wear or forced into footwear that makes walking difficult. [30]

In the two images mentioned in my prologue the woman walks along the sand. No doubt the weight of her body, the outline of the sole of her foot will be registered there briefly before the water washes over. The man will leave the imprint of his form even though he walks on pavement.

Walking is not a natural activity but a social and sexual one. Man walks upon a supporting surface; woman can stride as man does, but as herself she is cut off from any relation to such a 'ground'.[31]

That women do have a different relation to walking and to gravity may be grasped by considering the idea of the 'footprint'. Footprints are a sign of someone *having been there* – of a subject who has left his mark of proprietorship or of knowledge. How, then to imagine the footprint of a woman? The footprint, an apparently neutral idea is, in the dominant imaginary really a masculine thing: it can conjure the animal or the native but never the feminine. The idea of the sole of a woman's foot leaving its imprint, making tracks that someone might follow, seems to create something of an anathema that reveals how deeply the (my) imagination is itself imprinted in the masculine. The footprint is a kind of sign of authorship of one's own body, and in being a 'print' it renders invisible the matter/(maternal) body that is its condition of possibility.

But what if women set about de-constructing the mode of walking, as they often do using body disciplines in which it is, above all, gravity around which both the momentary situatedness and the history of bodies are seen to turn. What if they didn't take walking, verticality, support, a relation to the 'environment' of gravity for granted? What if they find in walking a bodily relation to self, as well as to their purposes in the outside? In walking, the weight that one allows to fall through one's body and the sole of one's foot into the ground is returned as an upwardly flowing self-referential energy in a kind of cycle. At the same time in walking one can be propelled in a direction away from where one was. I imagine that when women have a relation of their own in walking, to gravity, to earth, to themselves, they are finding 'the possibility of an expanding jouissance'. There are moments of suspension, of disequilibrium in walking that are not representable in terms of (gravitational) up/down or of (a numerical) one step after another; and the dancer, since she does not aspire to an image that will stabilise her, has to know where her weight is, where and how she is supported (by the ground). There are also pleasures that cannot be thought of in terms of zones mapped onto a kind of pictorial representation of the body: pleasures are itinerant, they exist in the medium of movement.

In the masculine, gravity is indeed figured as a force in the direction of up/down; a force that holds one back, keeps one (negatively) 'earthbound', or a force that can be (positively) overcome in the erection of machines and edifices. There is a relation between this figuring of gravity and vision. The perspective one gains through transcendence of the force of gravity – getting up into the air – is a perspective of mastery, of the map, plan or grid: 'Man moves away in order to preserve his stake in the value of his representations.' (1985A: 134) Whereas *moving* in interplay with the gravitational field is a dance.

Conclusion

In reading Irigaray I've come to understand that the idea of the 'neutral' belongs to a language, a scene of representation, a sexual economy, that operates

according a logic in which women can never represent themselves however much a term might masquerade as having no prior commitments on one sexual side or the other. I've begun to examine the idea of neutral in context of early post-modern and new dance practices in which explicit representation of the sexual has been refused or avoided. I've found that, for these practices the language of the neutral really does not (seem to) work because the logic of movement is different from the logic of language and discourse: because an economy of movement already displaces the implicit masculine body of language from the 'scene'. In terms of psychoanalysis and the image I'm claiming now that particular practices of dance gesture towards a different symbolic law or logic – one whose pre-condition is an Imaginary of/in movement.

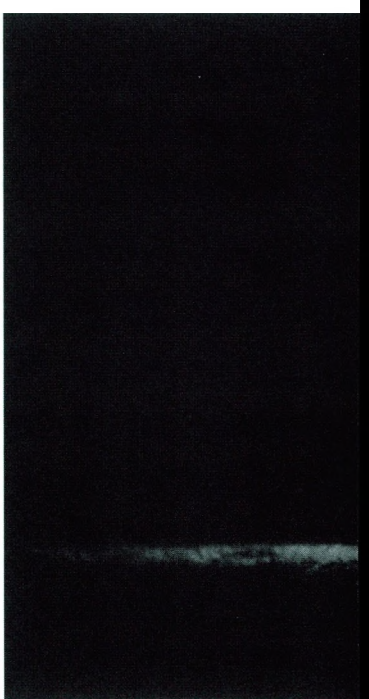
Really, the 'dancer' has never been 'neutral', but has always been on the side of the feminine (other of masculinity). There is, however, within the broad field of 'dance', a constellation of practices, of projects of the body in which the feminine of the dancer is being redefined according to her own logic of movement – a movement that can scarcely be repressed, contained, asphyxiated by available economies of representation. Through these practices the dancing feminine becomes, perhaps, more a woman or, *differently*, a man who dances.

Through Irigaray, I've come to understand how the image, like the word, always involves a repression, and that in patriarchy what is repressed is always 'woman' (and women): movement *as* movement is on the side of women. Movement of the live body is not simply a consecutive sequence of fixed forms – however photography, for example, might represent it as such. Movement as movement has nothing whatever to do with the image despite the claims of those who want to 'capture' it there.

Perhaps the woman dancer can't help but try to read movement back into frozen images. Looking at the two book covers in my prologue I imagined that both figures, woman and man, took pleasure in the *movement* of their walking. In doing so I risked aestheticising, projecting a western middle class Imaginary onto these, clearly, oriental others. The woman of course would be particularly vulnerable since her experience of walking (as 'beast of burden'?) might very well be the palpable experience and expression of her oppression.

But her body, and the man's, are subject to, held fixed by, the subordinating patriarchal economy of representation, of which the economy of the image is but an arm or part. To try to read a different logic into the image (and into language), that is, the movement that it excludes or cannot represent is not to ignore the circumstances of specific oppression but perhaps to see that things could be different.

In reading the two images I felt that both figures had their locomotion in common, that in walking they shared something fundamental. For Irigaray, the possibility of a genuine relation or meeting between the sexes would rest on the capacity of each sex to define itself in its own terms and to have that recognised. I've tried, by invoking the dance, to imagine women defining themselves. I've



Etienne Jules Marey, 'Chronophotograph of a standing jump', circa 1882.

tried to suggest walking – a truly mobile, 'immeasurable' walking – as a kind of figure of autonomy, involving a relation to the outside and a relation to self. I also suggested walking as a figure of a relation to the mother where the quality of an actual relation to the ground or support suggests the quality of relation to the maternal body. Perhaps there's a sense in which certain practices of *movement* are attempts at exhuming the mother's body, the woman's body, from its burial in language, its burial underfoot.

Dancing, you work to bring your relationship to the ground, to gravity, into question; you try to make the support that the ground gives you visible. In performance the audience is brought close to you by perceiving you kinaesthetically. The audience does not observe, but is unsettled. By dancing you ask, 'What is your relation to the ground that supports you? What is your relation to me? And if in your relation to me you come to see (or sense) that you too have an always shifting relation to the ground, we might come to glimpse the possibility that we are both the same, but different.

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Notes

1 Nietzsche "The Dance Song" from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, New York: Random House, 1937, p119.

2 Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994

3 UK: Penguin, 1993

4 I am bringing together what could be thought of as two somewhat overlapping 'strands' of (largely) American modern dance: work of members of Judson Dance Theatre and others, which has come to be called 'post-modern' dance (documented in Sally Banes' *Terpsichore in Sneakers*), and what Elizabeth Dempster has called 'new dance' – the work of artists informed specifically by ideokinesis, release work, Alexander technique and other body researches, which is often improvisational in some way.

5 The notion of 'neutrality' functions at various levels: for example, the (human) body is understood in terms of anatomy, physiology, mechanics as in the following description of the 'constructive rest' position:
'The constructive rest position – lying on the back, knees bent up to an angle of 90 degrees, feet flat on the floor – is a rest position which requires minimal muscular effort to maintain. The effect of gravity and a relative positioning of body parts which encourages mechanical balance throughout the skeleton, act together to assist release of excessive muscle tension. Interference from habitual patterns of inefficient alignment and movement is thus reduced, enhancing the ability of the body to receive new information.' E. Dempster (1985) 'Image-based movement education' in *Writings on Dance*, Vol. 1 p14;
and the body in performance is also 'neutralised': 'Contact improvisation, which posits as its central technique the physical encounter between two bodies considered as weight and mass, ususally conveys sensuality. But its construction of the body as not gendered enables perception of interactions as not sexual.' (The author goes on to say that the interpretation of an observer might be a sexual one). Cynthia Novak (1990) *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, p163.

6 'The development of what might be termed the post-modern body is in some senses a deconstructive process, involving a period of de-training of the dancer's habitual structures and patterns of movement'. E. Dempster (1988) 'Women Writing the Body', *Writings on Dance*, Vol 3.

7 Dancer and theorist Marianne Goldberg writes: 'The various forms of movement re-education, such as Alexander Technique or Kinetic awareness, address issues of repression and censorship at the cellular level... The performer can become aware of ways in which her most primary patterns of breath, muscular contraction, or body image have been habitually patterned in identification with cultural images. Release techniqes can allow the performer to reconnect to intense physiological needs and drives that may regenerate the body.' Marianne Goldberg, *Writings on Dance*, Vol. 14. It is important to point out that Goldberg's discussion of Alexander technique and Kinetic awareness is in terms of her work with specific teachers – in this case Eva Karczag and Elaine Summers.

8 See Rachel Fensham (1993) 'Dancing in and out of language: A feminist dilemma' in *Writings on Dance*, Vol 9 for another discussion of 'new dance' and Irigaray's sexual difference.

9 See Elizabeth Dempster (1993) 'Re-visioning the body: ideokinesis, feminism and the new dance' *Writings on Dance*, Vol.9 for an examination of the way in which the ordering of the senses in western culture is challenged and reconfigured in 'new dance' practices.

10 Eva Karczag (1992), *Writings on Dance*, Vol.14,

11 See Rachel Fensham (1993) op. cit.

12 See, for example, Cynthia Novack (1990) op. cit.

13 See 'The Stage Set-up' in Irigaray (1985) *Speculum of the other woman*, New York: Cornell University Press.

14 'NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.' Quoted in Banes op. cit. p43

15 Almost Irigaray's entire work consists of a reading of western discourses – philosophy, psychology, science, anthropology, economics, linguistics – in order to show that their very condition of possibility is the repression of 'woman' and women.

16 Put bluntly, in Freud the woman is a castrated man. Arguments that Freud was only describing how we become women and men within patriarchy fall short of Irigaray's analysis which is that psychoanalysis cannot imagine another scenario where the woman would be a positivity in her own right.

17 See pp. 52–53 under 'The Imaginary' for a specific instance of Irigaray's working through of this claim.

18 For instance, numerical logic fails to represent feminine 'morphology'. In this logic unity is primary and parts are subordinate to a whole. For Irigaray however, feminine 'morphology is multiple within itself – 'two lips' of the mouth or of the female genitals are neither one nor two. The lips are irreducibly two, one not subordinate to the other. They touch but nevertheless create an opening.

19 Another logic is not another identity: 'What the female sex enjoys is not having its own form'. Ownership, or the proper, is a key term for Irigaray since it forecloses any relation in which difference is respected.

20 Note that it would be a different kind of image, not just a different image. Irigaray invokes the speculum or curved mirror as the metaphor for this different kind of image. She also suggests a reflecting surface that is fluid, not still.

21 Irigaray also raises the question of the conditions of possibility for the (mirror) image. One of those conditions is a (reflecting) surface – the mother's face, her body. And even in the concrete scenario of the child before the mirror, surely it is more often the mother than some contraption, as Lacan suggests, who holds the child steady?

22 The classic example is Freud's 'dark continent' of feminine sexuality.

23 Such as Todd Alignment, Ideokinesis, Release technique, Developmental

Movement, Body-Mind Centring, Alexander technique, Feldenkrais.

[24] In one sense Modern Dance is the history of individual movement discovery; but in another it is the history of the way in which individual expressive movement 'languages' become codified, universalised into training 'techniques'.

[25] Lingis (1995) 'Intervention' to *...and yet*, Performance/Installation dir. Russell Dumas: Artspace, Sydney.

[26] How might we imagine this body? In *L'oubli de l'air* Irigaray creates the idea of the 'clearing' (clairière). The clearing is the unacknowledged matter, space, or pre-condition of the 'there is', of being and of 'la pensée' or metaphysical thought. The clearing arises from Irigaray's reading of Heidegger and what she perceives as his suppression of air (in favour of solid earth). The clearing is a space, not of emptiness or abyss (sans-fond), nor is it contained by a solid perimeter (un cercle bouclé). Life-giving, breathable (not rarified) air is a presence of another kind, not representable in the dichotomy of solid-presence/abyss-absence. For Irigaray philosophy is a kind of asphyxiation because it is cut off from the air necessary to material life. Perhaps the space-time-body of the 'new dance' is a kind of clearing – a palpable breathing – where movement is neither fixed nor frozen in consecutive images, nor completely immaterial, insubstantial.

[27] See Dempster (1994) 'Post modern dance: between mastery and pleasure' in *Writings on Dance*, Vol. 11/12 for a suggested redefinition of what has been called 'an aesthetics of denial' in post-modern dance in terms of pleasure.

[28] See 'Fluid Mechanics' in *This Sex which is not One*. For Irigaray the fluid is on the side of the feminine, not because feminine sexuality is fluid but because both are unrepresentable in their own terms. Fluids, she argues can only be 'thought' as fluid-in-container.

[29] In *Speculum of the other woman*.

[30] As Ginger Rogers is reported to have said regarding her (unequal partnership with Fred Astaire, 'I did everything that he did only in high heels and backwards.' Alexander Carter, 'High Heels and Backwards: Feminist Methodologies and the Study of Dance History', in papers of the International Academic Conference on Dance, KIDE '95, Seoul, Korea.

[31] Irigaray's figure for this lack of such a relation is the unrepresentability in psychoanalysis of the relation between mother and daughter.

Les Bâtisseurs by Daniel Larrieu
Photograph by Geneviève Stephenson

Hybrid Bodies

by **Laurence Louppe**

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What is the difference between a piece of choreography by a 'great master' such as Merce Cunningham or Trisha Brown and most contemporary productions, particularly in France? The work of a Cunningham or Brown involves not only a permanent aesthetic, but also the construction of a specific 'body', given structure by the artist's principles. In contrast, the training received by today's dancers involves a multiplicity of approaches while the projects they work on are intermittent and devoid of constitutive references for the body. True the same can be said of other art forms, but there is a particular danger here for the dancer who is engaged as the actual subject of the practice.

Some time ago there was much talk of mixing [*métissage*][1]: mixing cultural sources, the interpenetration of artistic forms and genres and so on. Dance seemed to participate in this phenomenon with its admixtures of theatre and recycling of older or non-European aesthetics. Certainly, there's nothing particularly worrying about any of this, provided the mixing goes no further than references: for example, a show might combine movements inherited from Cunningham, martial arts practices and imagery from Kantor (this was the case with a current initiated by François Verret). It hardly matters if the aesthetic informing such projects, which are mostly one-offs, is one of 'impurity'. However, such mixings operate only on the surface, and affect only the process of marquetry (or marketing) whereby a spectacular performance is put together – its system of production, you could say. They are bound to remain illusory as long as the dancer's body is not affected. It is clear that the fact of borrowing a gesture from Indian or Baroque dance, or of combining neoclassical corporeality with Limon-style destabilization (in the work of Forsythe, for instance) does not make a choreographic discourse a hybrid. A choreographic language is more than the formal enunciation of a gestural vocabulary: it reflects a philosophy of the body, a specific approach to posture and tonus. For a true mixture to occur, one needs to work on the qualitative aspect of dance, the dancer's relation to the world. This may take a lifetime or even several generations. Witness the way jazz dancers combine the vertical pulsation and Baroque syncopation of the west with the lateralized power of African movement. The result is a new culture expressed in new 'modes', not just the enactment of juxtaposed motive figures. But if this manipulation of the dancing body in accordance with variable references and criteria occurs simply as a response to circumstances, or as part of a career, the results can be worrrying, and go well beyond the aesthetic innocuousness of simple code-mixing. Either the dance remains mimetic and the movements are no more

than uninteresting self-figuration, or one goes beyond this purely formal dimension and explores the underlying principles of the movement, in which case the subject's consciousness becomes fragmented and the references structuring the practice of the body become dispersed. The effect is not so much mixing as hybridization.

The idea of hybridization is much more disturbing than that of mixing. The mixing of blood or races engenders mixed subjects whose structure remains unchanged but who are enriched by the accumulation of different cultural or genetic heritages. Moreover, mixing evokes an idea of universality that is in harmony with the kind of cultural openness favoured by one-world schools of thought with their ideas about alterity, group identity and inter-group dialogue. In contrast, the hybrid stands outside this Babel of inter-community, inter-minority exchange, this movement between races and sexes. The hybrid is nowhere, is nothing. Often, it is totally isolated and atypical, the result of a unique and accidental combination. Hybridization partakes of an economy of loss. Hybridization acts even on the nucleation of genes by subverting and dislocating them. It can create a relation not between races but between incompatible 'species', give rise to aberrant creatures, strays on the outskirts of living communities. One thinks of the polymorphous figures imagined by Philippe Decouflé which are part mineral, part vegetable, part animal and part machine, or 100% imaginary. The advent of these composite morphologies can perhaps tell us something about the world of dance in general. In today's dance, both the demands made by choreography and the structure of dancers' training inscribe hybridization in the destiny of the body. As a result, it is virtually impossible to develop recognizable zones of corporeal experience, to construct the subject through a given corporeal practice.

The Meaning of Hybridization

The historical origins of this situation can be traced back to the early 1980s, when there was a break in the tradition of dance in which the creation of corporeal conditions had been constantly linked to the aesthetic and philosophical orientations of the great creators (creators of choreographies but also 'of bodies'). This had been the case for all the great exponents of modernity, from Mary Wigman to Merce Cunningham, via Humphrey, Limon and others. Within this tradition, dancers could develop their practice coherently and without dispersion by referring to a vision and an artistic practice that articulated the symbolic values expressed by their body. The 1980s witnessed the emergence of what the writer and dancer Dena Davida termed the 'eclectic body'[2]. This was a hybrid body engendered by the mixing of teachings, shaped by disparate or even contradictory elements but ill-equipped to make sense of its diversity. Davida sees a connection between the emergence of this 'eclectic body' and the loss of the ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (she cites Wagner), which was predicated on the coherence of the assembled elements, including the constitution of the body. She sees this loss as a consequence of the emergence of 'auteur' dance, in which diverse elements are brought together at the fiat of personal fantasy, dispensing with the need to consciously identify the materials involved or for the actors articulating them to achieve a corporeal, sensible and ideological unity.

Auteur Dance

Inspired by auteur theory in film, the idea of 'auteur dance' was promoted by a good number of contemporary critics, notably Leonetta Bentivoglio. It is a seductive concept and seems to match the versatility (if not the liberty) of the new European dance. So why worry about this loss of lineage, this dispersion of the major currents that defined corporeal modernity? Do we not live in a different era, one in which the multiplicity of isolated propositions is such that we are no longer united by a shared corporeality? An era in which dancers are no longer formed by a constitutive technique, one that gives them what writer Louis Calaferte (an expert on bodily matters) called our 'visible part of eternity'[3], but are happy to glean whatever operational *savoir faire* they need to produce the aesthetic flavour of the month? Matthieu Doze, who worked with the late Dominique Bagouet, has described how technique and training have been replaced by a new 'choreographic culture' of which the lush stigmata are manifest on the body but leave its imaginary substance untouched.[4] Is this the 'eclectic body'? Yes, assuming that prevailing circumstances are conducive, and that dancers are able to choose between different options and flit from one to another. But if this may just about be possible as a mental exercise (without incurring what Bernard Noël calls 'mental castration',[5] that is, the inability to structure one's identity in thought), it is even harder for the body, whose way of being is shaped by a much more complex set of mediations, and which acquires its symbolic tools by a slow, intricate process of impregnation, over a long apprenticeship. The whole point about exploration in dance is that it casts light on these mediations, liberating and developing their poetic and philosophical potential. In fact, the eclectic body does not choose, it is chosen. What has developed is a system that strips dancers of their constitutive choices, confiscating their practices and techniques (especially those inherited from modernism), leaving them defenseless against the laws of the market that presided over the merger of art and spectacle in the 1980s.

Heterogeneous Bodies

This system has been particularly dominant in France. First came what Jean Pomarès very aptly calls the 'negation of the heritage',[6] when, again in the early 1980s, neglect of the achievements of modernity apparently combined with the failure of its usual channels of transmission, facilitated the dream of a dance utterly unconnected to the modern body's deep and hard-won victories over ideology and history – a dance without origins. French dancers, and their shows, felt joyfully free of a heritage they now considered a burden. In the first instance, this meant liberation from the local heritage, covering over the roots of modernity in France. As in classic Freudian theory, the toppling of the old totem (and taboos) was accompanied by the search for a new one (Cunningham, say), but without any real commitment to their deeper orientations or experiences (it goes without saying that Cunningham's radical breaks, his rigor and transgressions, his risky discovery of a singular, continuous/discontinuous body, all that belongs to another era, to another scale of values). As Pomarès points out, this systematic omission of the sources and references of modernity triggered its own process of compensation. Substitutes were found for tools that had been lost – or rather, accumulated without understanding their underlying idea of

corporeality. Hence the direct borrowings from theatrical or narrative figures chosen purely for their picturesque appearance, and sometimes for morphological reasons, in keeping with an ideology of pure appearance, as if the body was not in itself a system of vision and thought through which the subject gradually establishes modes of relations with others. In her interesting book on contemporary dance and theatre,[7] Michèle Febvre points out that, 'Many choreographers seem increasingly interested in using unusual morphologies and in drawing on the infra-theatricality inherent in the corporeality of each of their dancers'. She then evokes the idea of 'heterogeneous bodies' and quotes Julia Kristeva's analysis of the 'chora, a non-expressive totality constituted by these drives and stases, its mobility as animated as it is regulated'. By becoming a kind of semiotic system the hybrid body, together with all the aesthetic choices it represents, avoids the question of the body's own action on itself. As producer of meaning and symbols, the 'self' eludes the authority of corporeal models by resorting to a pre-established syntax.

The Promise of Uncertainty

My purpose is not to bewail the loss of references to the modern tradition of dance but to point out what is going on in this mismatching (or perhaps over-matching) of bodies. The beginning of the 1990s has in fact seen a very strong reaction to this dislocation of the dancer's physical being which, as we have seen, is anything but insignificant. Daniel Larrieu and Laurent Barré at the national choreography centre in Tours have published highly relevant texts about the lives of errant young dancers whose mobility represents an attempt to find a place, or refuge, where they can 'feel embodied'.[8] Some of the more sensitive artists, including Larrieu, have tried to find the basis for a shared but also personal practice.

This explains the emblematic function of the thought and choreography of Dominique Bagouet, who died at the age of 41 in 1992 and who, in the '80s set up one of the only centres in France where gestural coherence was founded on the creation of a specific interiority. His work often refused the prevailing criteria of aesthetic production. When young dancers today revive his creations, they do so having learnt not only the choreographic 'text' but also the sensible and corporeal practices in which it is grounded. This example is linked to a more general renewal of interest in the 'great' teachers, a return to the founding practices of the contemporary body and the attempt to involve older figures who lived through those formative stages either in the development of programming or in the work done at training centres such as Le Creuset, set up by an association of dancers in Lyon a few months ago. Its objectives are in some respects similar to those of the older Movement Research group in New York, though the latter is more political in its insistence that dancers should have a kind of corporeal autonomy that makes them independent of current modes of representation and the commercial laws of the spectacle.

Another, perhaps more interesting, reaction to this hybridization consists in taking up the promise of uncertainty, in enacting the wounds of a body that is forced to constitute itself without a continuous self-awareness, in accepting history – or rather, that a-historical place where the body is not inscribed – in the hope of going beyond the plurality

of formal frameworks and finding the few floating deposits of substance caught in the filter of the chimerical body. This cross-over between different bodily states has produced not so much polysemia as a strange sliding movement between incompatible corporeities. One example of this is the fine work of Pascale Houbin, who has worked with the deaf and integrated their gestural language into her choreography. This invokes a mesh of multiple references, not least the silence which is at the root of gesture: 'Does dance silence the essence of a cry?' wrote Rilke. But there are other, more obscure referents, like the origin of the sign language itself, which was developed by the 18th century humanist and philanthropist, the Abbé de l'Epée from the gestural codes of Baroque rhetoric. By their simple, yet immemorial power, these elementary gestures contrast with the spiralling treatment of the dancer's axis, with the expressivity with which contemporary dance endows the torso itself, before, and almost against, the fine, rapid work of the extremities. It is as if the modernity of the body were unable to signify by itself, as if another system of body signs, their semiotic antithesis (articulated on the verbal) were needed to both betray and repair a gesture that can recognize itself only through such a detour. This troubling and extremely subtle dance reveals, without uselessly overstating, the strangeness and the almost irreconcilable diversity of the birth of movement, in a choreographic world unfamiliar with or estranged from its sources.

It would be pointless to establish a hierarchy between these two trends: the search for the theoretical and practical foundations of a newly aware and coherent body, and a kind of poetics of ambivalence in which the body comes close to its own ruin through the use of multiple techniques whose lack of references blunts and almost dissolves its presence and movements. The time has perhaps come, not to banish these fragilities, but to think them through, to decipher their hidden meaning.

[Trans. C. Penwarden]

Notes

[1] Métissage has been used, in particular in post-colonial and performance theory, to describe a syncretic 'braiding' rather than a synthetic fusion; according to Joseph Roach, 'not a melting pot, but a tactful weaving together of separate strands'. In Janelle G. Reinelt and Jospeh R. Roach (eds) *Critical Theory and Performance*, Ann Arbor; University of Michigan Press, 1992, p.13 [Editor's note]

[2] Dena Davida, 'Le corps éclectique,' *Les Vendredis du Corps* (Montreal: Jeux, 1993)

[3] Louis Calaferte, *Septentrinn* (Paris: Denoël, 1984)

[4] Matthieu Doze in *L'Oeil Dansant*, published by the Centre national chorégraphique de Tours, no. 2

[5] Bernard Noël, *La Castration mentale* (Ulysse fin-de-siècle, 1992)

[6] Jean Pomarès, 'De la formation à la création,' *Positions*, cahiers de la DRAC PACA, 1995.

[7] Michèle Febvre, *Danse contemporaine et théâtralité* (Chiron, 1995). The Kristeva quote comes from *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

[8] *L'Oeil dansant*, idem.

Hands detach themselves...

by Alphonso Lingis

Hands detach themselves from the body and reach out for things; they clasp and grip, clench and grab. Tools are solid things detached from the environment and handled. Hands make themselves instruments for taking hold and taking back; hands comprehend. Hands poke, probe, push. They are weapons, arms. Hands drop and toss, arms heave and hurl. They make things projectiles and are themselves ballistic.

The feet understand. They orient the axes of torso, they drive the upraised hands. They understand the predator instincts of the hands.

Hands run over contours and hollows, stroke fur and fungus, rub at gum and gooseflesh, wade and wave through water and wine. They explore, uncover, discover, behold. They wonder, ponder, and weigh. They are sense organs.

The feet raise and bend and do not hold back. They understand the tenderness of the hands circumnavigating the shapes and stroking and nuzzling the pulp of things.

The feet especially feel rocks and other toes. The joints of the toes, the ankle, the knee, the thigh are organs to feel space. Rhythms begin in them and keep them on trails and on open roads. Feet that keep moving always find spaces free of paths and destinations. They stand on terra firma, rise into the sky, fold in the water.

The feet understand the dangers – the bruises, the lacerations, the burns that the hands, the torso, the tongue may feel. They understand decline and fall, death and decomposition.

Hands apprehend, are apprehensive. They touch the solid in order to detect the void.

The hand extended to the dying one communicates no information and brings no relief and knows no hope, is there only to accompany the other in her or his dying, to suffer and to die with him or her. A hand extends to the starved child in Ethiopia and Calcutta, a hand extends to the butterfly dying in the sun.

Science and philosophy see the flux of sensation and the chaos of events and seek or put an abiding and a nascent order in, above, or behind things great and small. But bodies know that the universe is a dance floor. In fact exploratory and teleological movements arise out of the dance movements of all animal life.

The dance frees the hands from exploratory and efficient movements, the legs from hunt and flight. The dance moves in a space emptied of things and thus of the order of things, full of light and of darkness, full too of warmth and cold, full of damp and dryness. The bodies are not afloat in the emptiness, but stand, bend, roll, and lie, endlessly mobile drawing upon the bottomless source of repose which is the ground.

The abdomen has no muscles to do anything but hold itself together. It pulses with restless fluids, blood, biles, sludges, milks. The bared abdomen does not conceal the heart but becomes heart throughout.

Hands move without results or ends in view. They turn back upon themselves, fold, coil, spiral. Movements draw designs which diagram movements as they move into nothingness. The empty space dilates and contracts, throbs and engulfs.

One hand gyrates around the other, around the hands of another. Hands tease, ignite eddies of pleasure and torment in other hands, in flanks, bellies, breasts, and lips.

The hands are now not understood as mechanisms but felt as flesh, substance dense with ardour and sensuality. The legs now extend the warmth, the pulse, the insistence of the heart.

The arms express sublimity more readily than amusement. They turn upward, drift, float upward. The purposive movement of the legs is only a transitory modification of the rhythm they generate for the body.

To bare the hands, torso, and legs, covered with down, is to uncover animality. The dance disengages the bodies from tools, weapons, and paths to move them in the empty space, free of taboos and given over to the violence of sacred and demonic animals. The faces have ceased to be places where astonishment, attention, surprise, abashment materialise in focused eyes, raised brows, lips pulled; they are animal faces.

' "O Zarathustra", the animals said, "to those who think as we do, all things themselves are dancing: they come and offer their hands and laugh and flee – come back. Everything goes, everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of being. Everything dies, everything blossoms again; eternally runs the year of being. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally the same house of being is built. Everything parts, everything greets every other thing again; eternally the ring of being remains faithful to itself. In every Now, being begins; round every Here rolls the sphere There. The center is everywhere. Bent is the path of eternity".'

Trisha Brown in *If you couldn't see me*
Photograph by Geneviève Stephenson

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