Writings on Dance 18 19

Constellations of things

Winter 1999

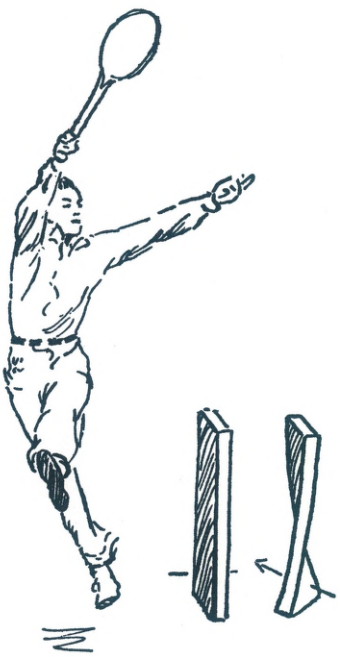
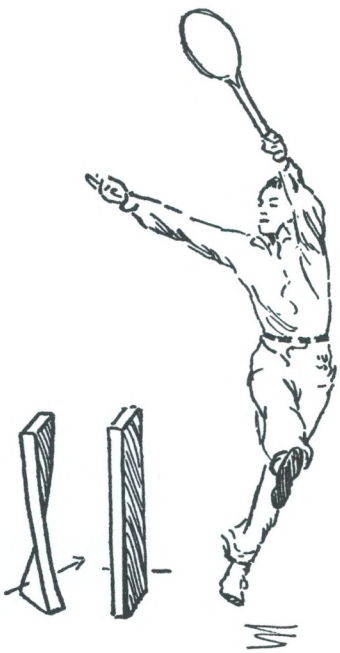


Fig. 9



Writings on Dance 18/19

Constellations of things

Autumn 1999

Captions for **Kate Pierce Thayer** illustrations

Fig 9 Torsion – animate and inanimate

Fig 11 Use of crouch muscles. Convert a pull into a push.

Fig 13 Balanced four-legged position, with spine as a ridge-pole, lateral and dorsal planes of body parallel.

Fig 23 Diagrams, showing alterable sections and unalterable masses.

Fig 36 The bridge that walks, and the bridge that you walk over. Note lines of force in relation to keystone.

Fig 45 Radius of revolution of femur and humerus. (Redrawn after Mollier.)

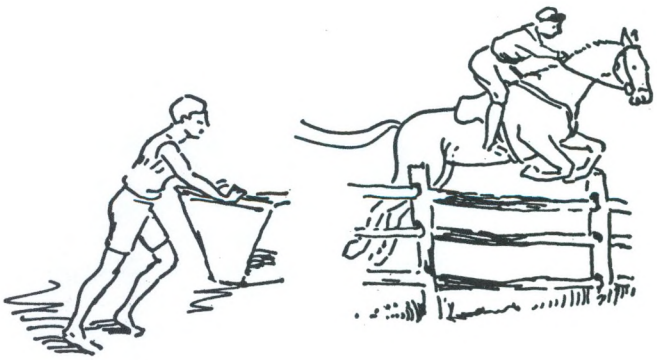
Fig 50 Diagram suggesting action of forces at ankle joint with extension and flexion of foot.

Fig 56 Shoulder girdle. Rib cage removed. Note yoke-like balance of girdle.

Fig 57 Four-legged position, using crouch and leg muscles for pulling body backwards, reversing crawl.

Fig 63 Weight of thigh and arm dropping back into sockets, with foot flexion and extension.

Fig 11



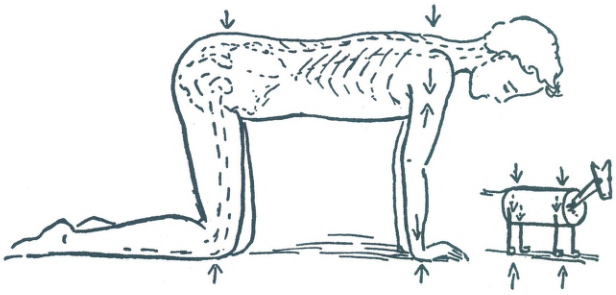
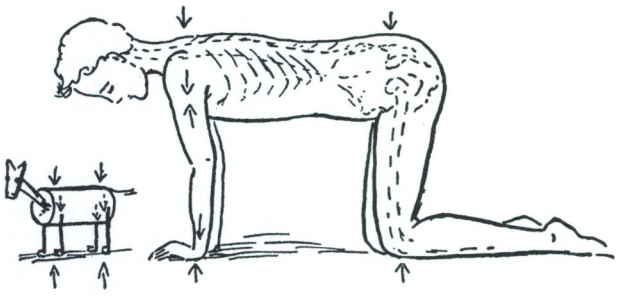


Fig 13



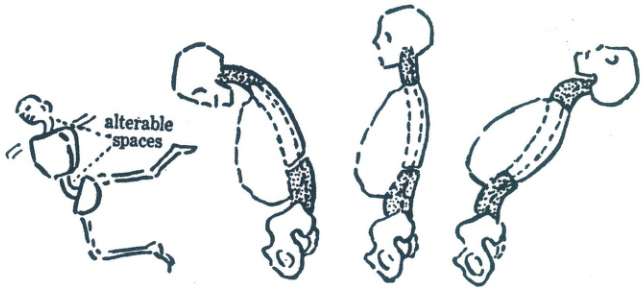
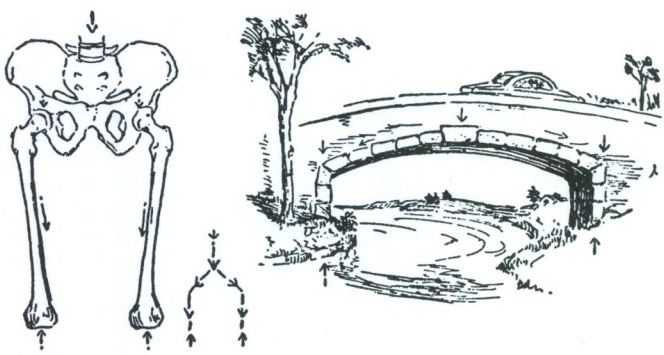


Fig 23

alterable
spaces

Fig 36



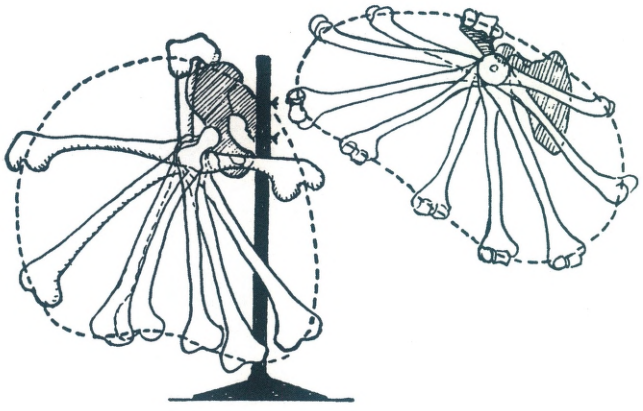
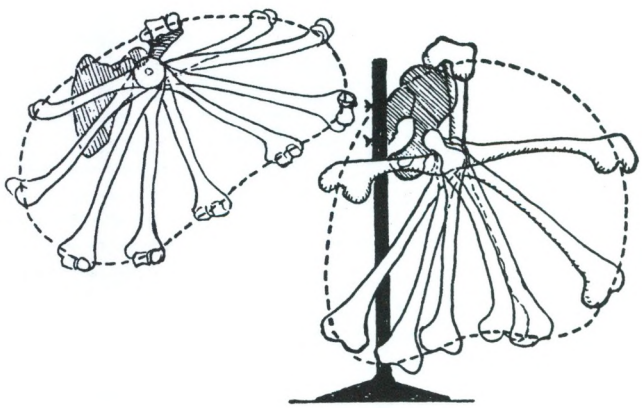


Fig 45



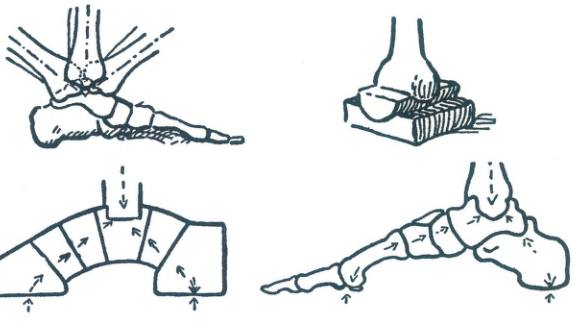
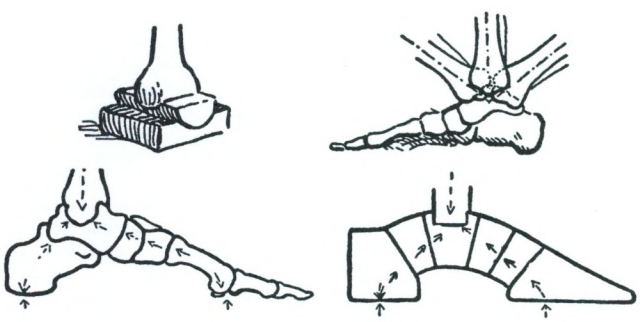


Fig 50



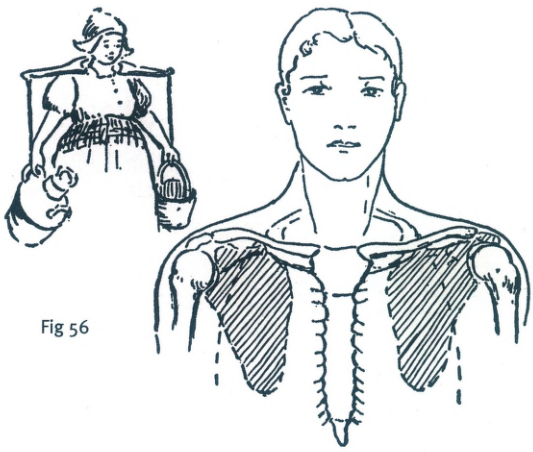
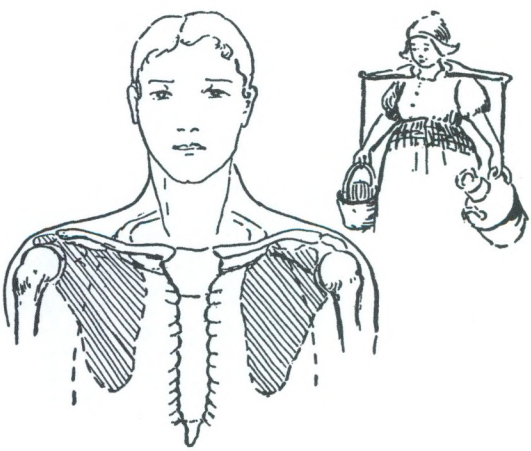


Fig 56



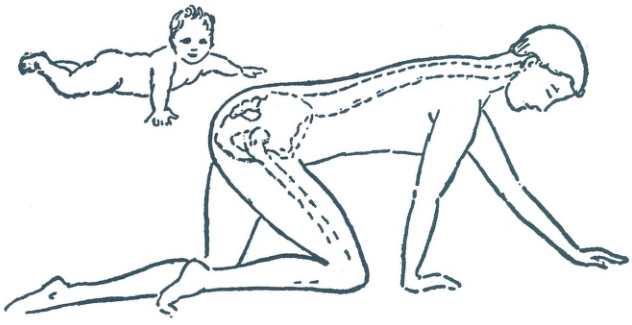


Fig 57

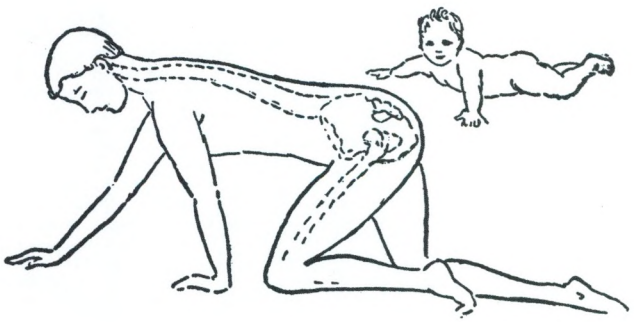
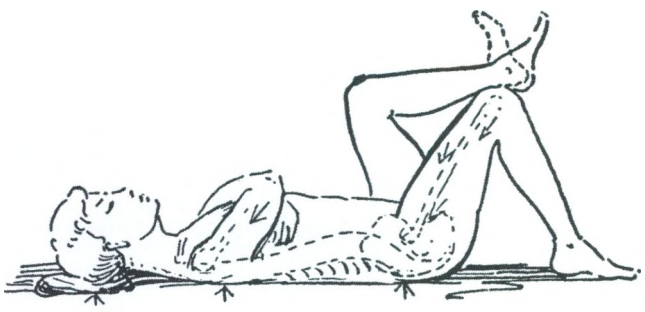


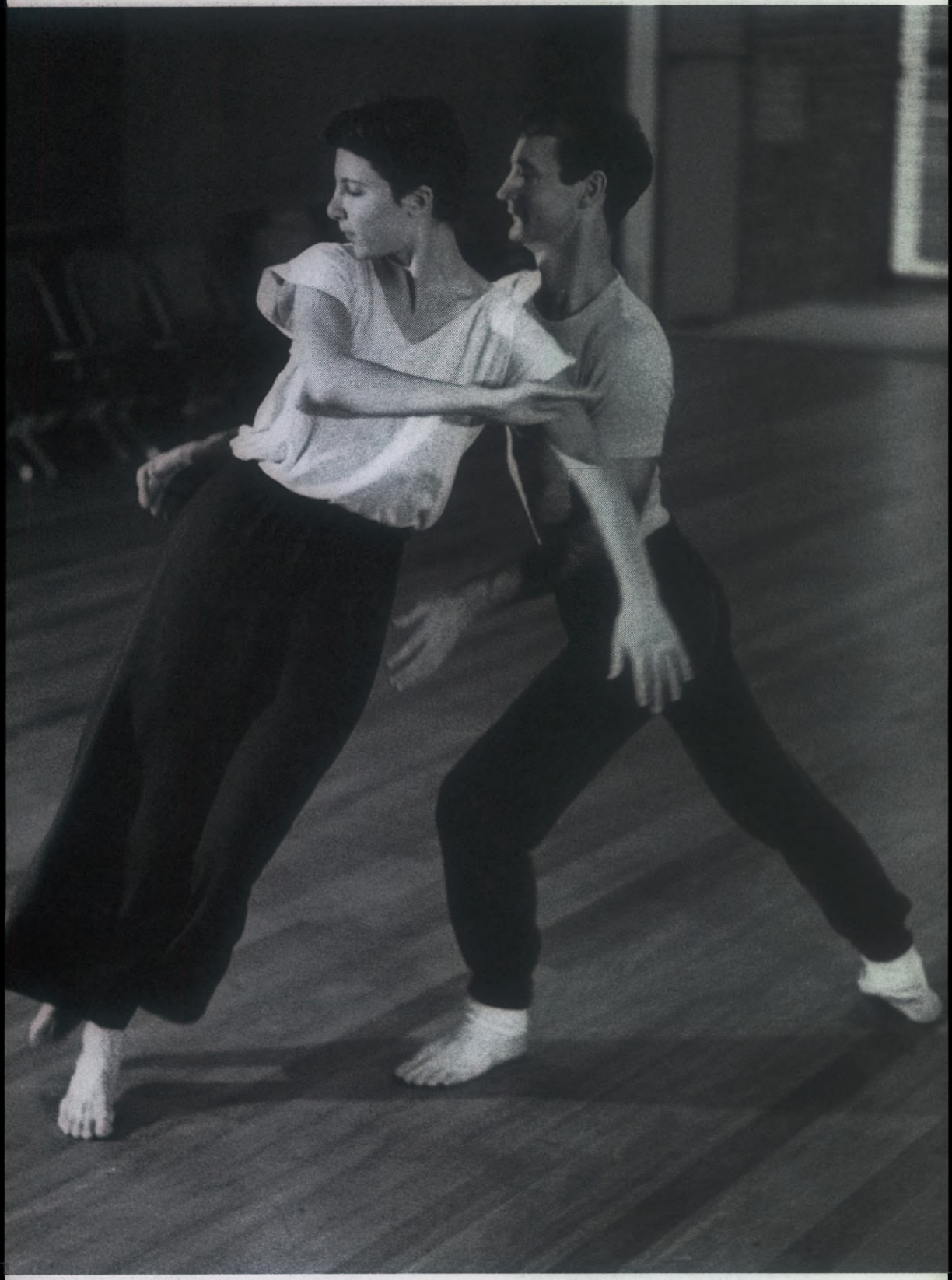
Fig 63



Dance Exchange

Photographs 1976–1979

23 Writings on Dance 18/19



Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas. Photo: Bill Crossley

Nannette Hassall, *Spinning Dance* (chor. Hassall)

Russell Dumas, *Reciprocal Solos* (chor. Dumas, Hassall)

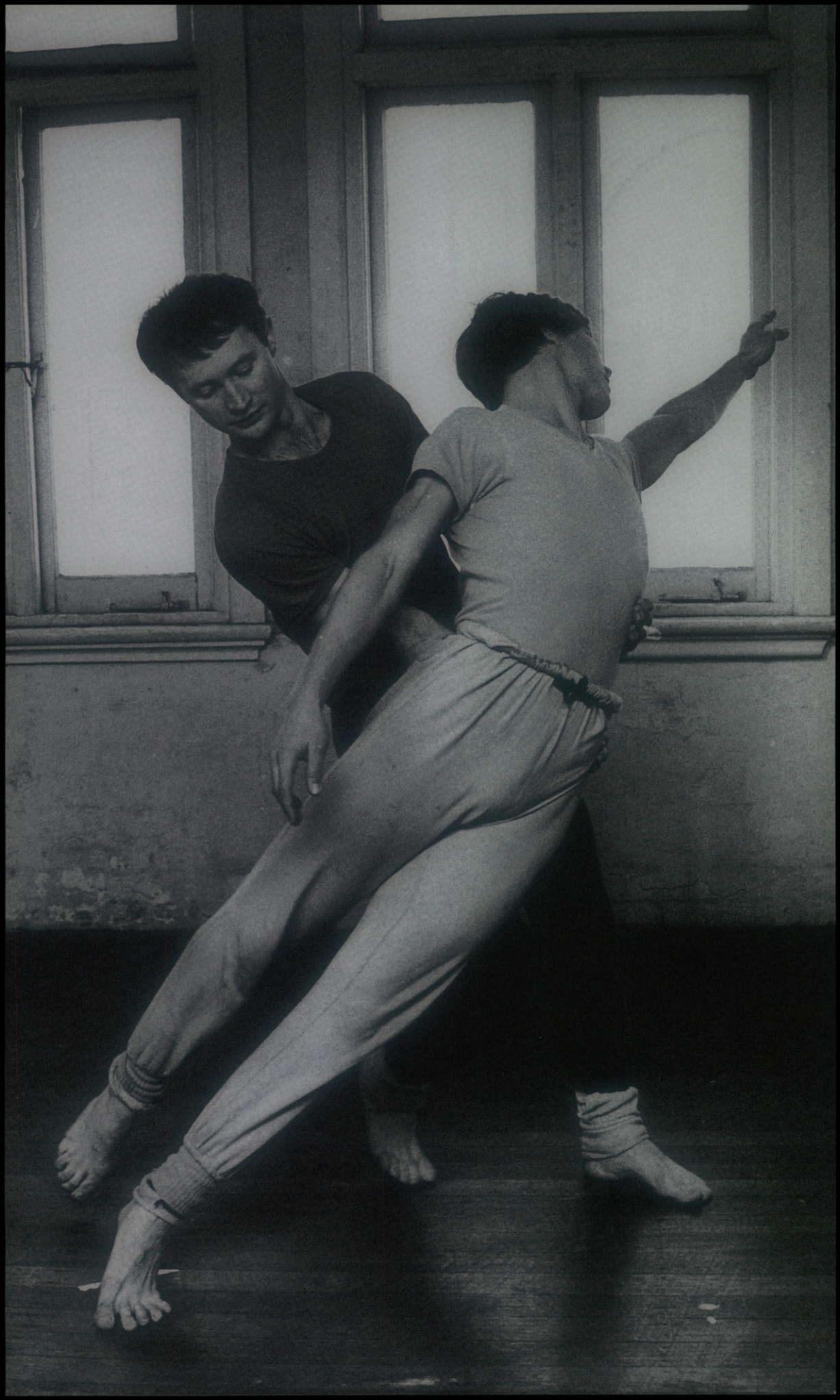

NO SMOKING

David Hinckfuss, Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas *Night Work* (chor. Hassall) Tape recorder: Bill Fontana

The group Dance Exchange was founded in 1975 by Russell Dumas, Nanette Hassall and Eva Karczag. At this time these three dancers had all returned to Australia, independently, from aesthetically formative experiences in Europe and the United States. Dumas had danced with Ballet Rambert and The Royal Ballet in England as well as with a number of European companies including The Culberg Ballet, The Gulbenkian Ballet and Netherlands Dance Theatre. In the early '70s he danced with Twyla Tharp and, along with Hassall and Karczag, was a member of the experimental group Strider, in England. Nanette Hassall had been a student at the Juilliard School in New York and subsequently a member of the Merce Cunningham company, and Karczag had danced with London Festival Ballet before becoming involved with the new dance aesthetics emerging from New York, and joining Strider.

Strongly influenced by the New York dance experiments of the '60s and early '70s, Dance Exchange was responsible for introducing some of these ideas into Australia. Consistent with the diversity of process fostered by these experiments, Dance Exchange's work reflected a common commitment to challenging the conventions of dance-making and performance at the same time as it was the vehicle for several quite different, individual kinds of process, several quite specific investigative concerns. During the fertile period between 1976 and 1979 discussed in the following interview, the group, joined by Libby Dempster and David Hinckfuss, created a large number of events, concerts and workshops primarily in Sydney and Melbourne.

opposite and page 35
Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss,
Counterbalance (chor. Dumas)

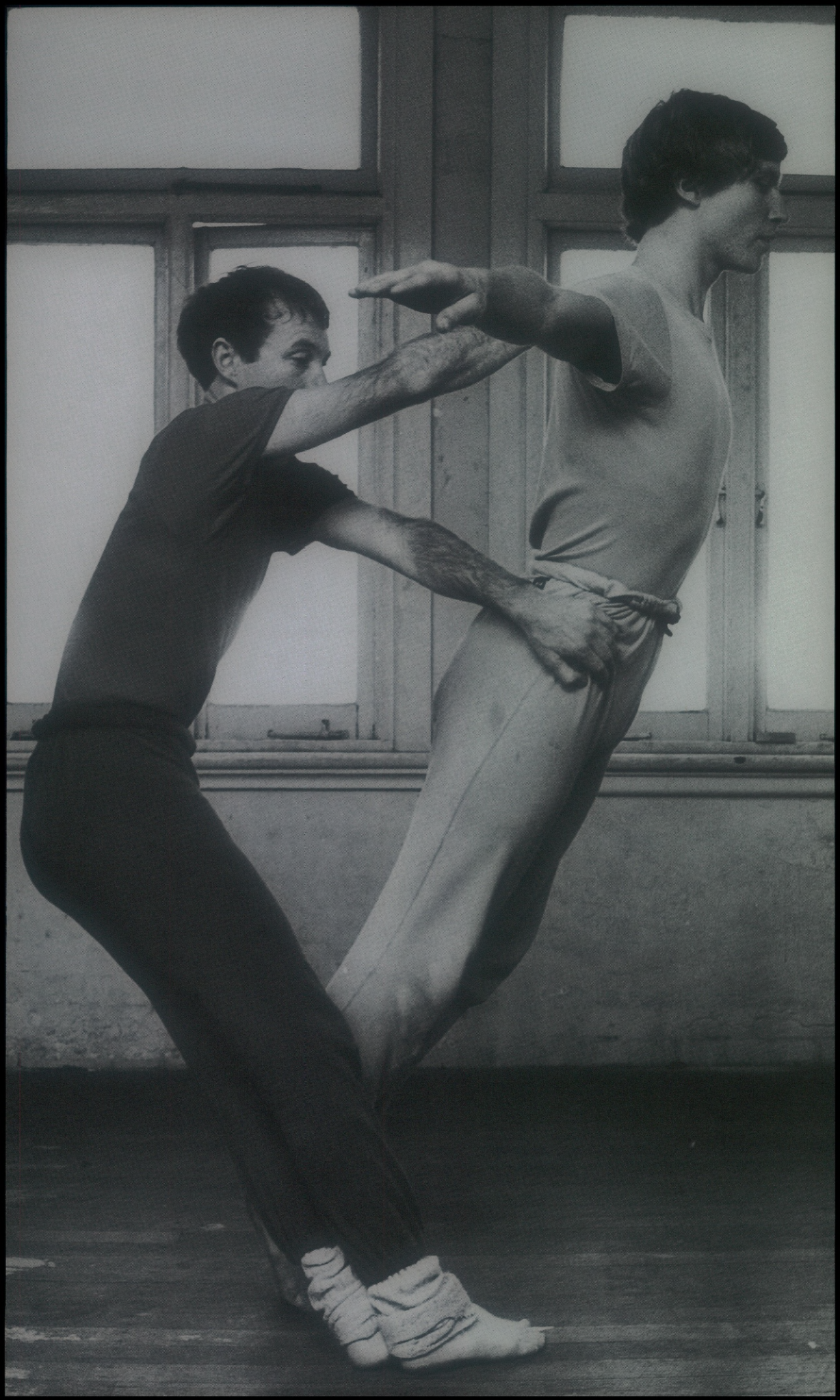


Minimal Resources

Returning as they did to a relatively impoverished dance environment in Australia, the original Dance Exchange group made a vivid impression upon Sydney-based dance reviewers Jill Sykes and Mary Emery who remember the group for its difference, intelligence, iconoclasm, invention and highly accomplished dancing. Emery and Sykes have been dance reviewers (Emery has now retired) in Sydney since the early 1970s. Their reviews constitute some of the only written records of the performances occurring at that time. These two women worked independently of one another for separate newspapers – Sykes (still) for The Sydeny Morning Herald and Emery for The Australian. They undertook their job of responding to an emerging concert dance culture with openness and generosity, having to help develop an audience for, and to reflect upon, what they saw at that time in relative isolation and with few resources.

Jill Sykes, Mary Emery. Photo: Sally Gardner

An Interview with
Mary Emery and Jill Sykes
by Sally Gardner
March 1998



Sally Gardner In looking back over reviews by both of you I have been struck by your level of enthusiasm at the time, for the early work of Dance Exchange. I was interested to talk to you more about why you were so enthusiastic.

Jill Sykes I actually thought that was quite a funny question. Because – of course we were!

Sally Gardner But in wider discussions of Australian dance history there does seem to have been something of a blind spot, though, about this period and about Dance Exchange's place in it.

Jill Sykes I think probably because it is not far enough away to have quite become 'history' yet and because Russell Dumas is still going as Dance Exchange which gives it an ongoing entity. But let's go back to when it was first happening. Of course we thought they were wonderful – because they were! They were really interesting, they were really different. They were subtle, restrained, understated. They had an intelligence behind them, something quite different. Sometimes not perhaps given the polished presentation that happens now, but of that time very vibrant and immediate. How could you possibly not appreciate them!

Mary Emery I thought they were very polished, actually. So I take issue there. We're talking about the '70s. I know I kept writing reviews saying, 'These are streets ahead of anything else', which was true at the time. When you looked at whatever passed for modern dance at that time there was really no comparison.

Jill Sykes Very streamlined performances, very mature performers.

Mary Emery You were aware that they had a philosophy that lay behind the dance, that drove their performances apart from anything else. They were always making you *think* about dance. Yes, absolutely wonderful dance, but wonderful dancers too. In those early performances you had Nanette – she wasn't dancing that much, admittedly, because she had just had a baby, not that that would have slowed her down, but she was more on the choreographic side. Although she did some wonderful solos there, I remember. We had Russell who was dancing in his prime and we had Eva and then we had people like David Hinckfuss and Libby Dempster. Now there were some exceptional dancers there, there's no question about that.

Jill Sykes There were always surprises. You never knew what you were going to get, either in the whole performance or even during that performance. There might be some absolutely wonderful move. I can still see some individual phrases strongly in my head, like little video snapshots.

Mary Emery I can still see Eva doing this and Russell doing that and I can still remember some of the dances. And that says something because we're talking twenty years back. They are still vivid performances where others have just vanished.

Jill Sykes There was quality in every respect. Bill Fontana was there at that time in the early ones and he was into environmental soundscapes. There was quality all the way through.

Eva Karczag

Sally Gardner It sounds as if you came to those performances not having had the opportunity to see things of a similar quality.

Sykes and Emery Not in Australia.

Mary Emery I was trying to remember how I first came to see them. I first met Nanette at a dance conference in Armidale and she took a group that I was in. She was doing post-modern dance history. That's where I first met her. I don't know whether as a result of that she specifically invited me to see Dance Exchange down in Sydney or whether I saw them advertised and recognised Nanette's name.

Sally Gardner So you were both already writing?

Jill Sykes I'd actually been reviewing dance since 1965 so I'd been reviewing already for ten years. I started off in London where I was second stream dance reviewer on a newspaper there. The main reviewer liked to go to Covent Garden so I did all the contemporary work. I saw and reviewed a huge range of dance between '65 and '70. That was the time of the foundation of the London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Rambert changing direction with people like Glen Tetley coming in. Martha Graham brought her company to London for the first time – incredible though that may seem, after so many years! Lots of little groups that were more theatrical than post-modern. Then I was working as a dance reviewer here in Sydney from 1972.

Mary Emery Apart from childhood dance classes, I came from a background of doing a lot of reading about dance, seeing some films, and, of course, going to dance performances from about 1946! I was asked by a friend who was an arts sub-editor to fill in for their regular reviewer who was on holidays. Then she wanted out, so I became Sydney dance critic from 1975 until the end of 1987 when I retired.

Sally Gardner What was there to review at that time?

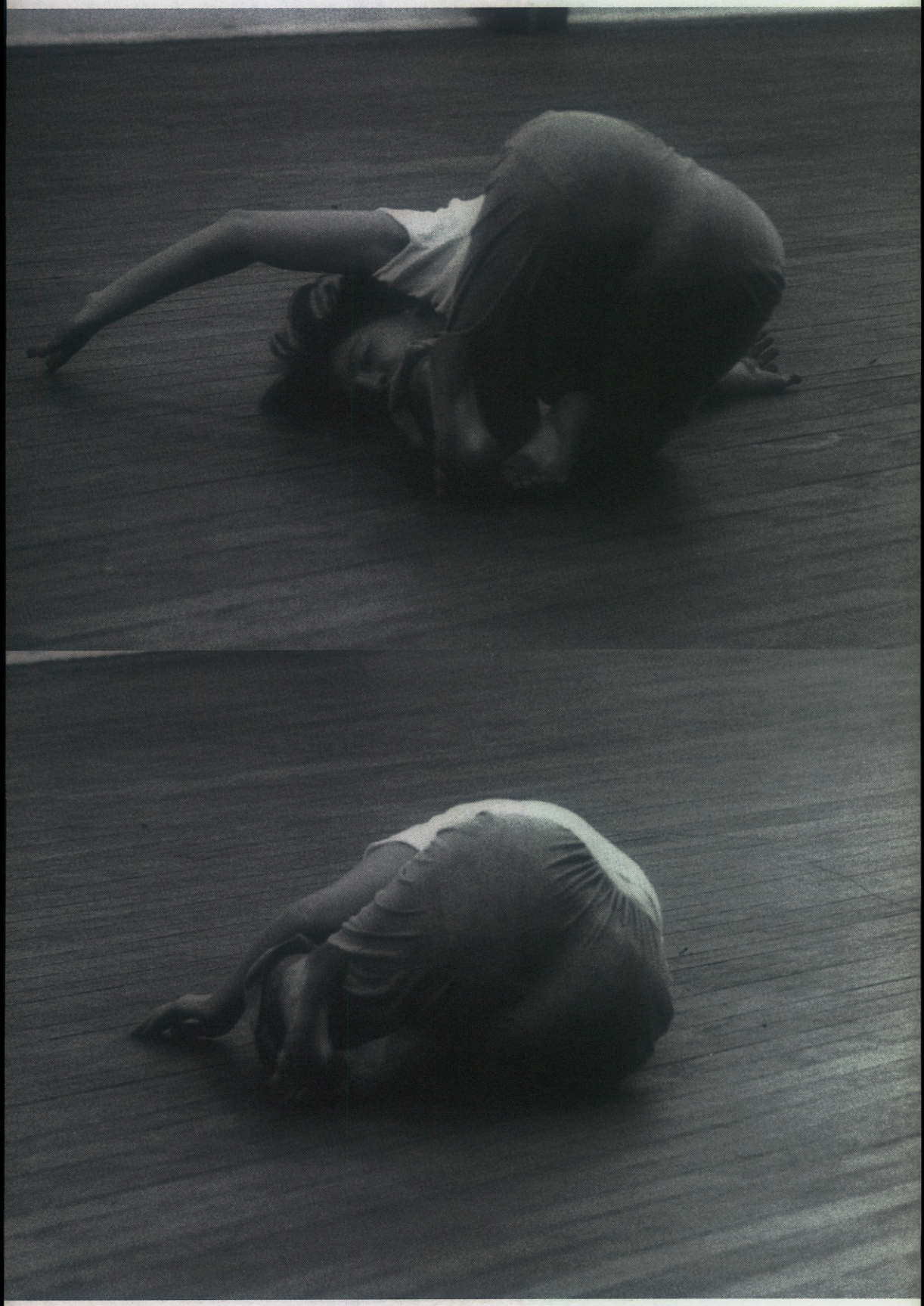
Jill Sykes The Australian Ballet obviously. And what was then the Dance Company of New South Wales which is now the Sydney Dance Company. Susanne Musitz was the director. She got some quite interesting people to work with the company – Chrissie Koltai and people like that from varied backgrounds. But Australia has just never been strong on Modern. One Extra started at much the same time. All these companies blossomed around '75, '76 with a bit of seeding money from the Whitlam Government. NAISDA was also set up around that time.

Mary Emery A lot of other little groups popped up and then vanished overnight.

Jill Sykes There were things like Ballet Australia Choreographic Workshops which were before my time. Again, they had a varied input. It certainly wasn't all the Australian Ballet. The Australian Ballet did *Gemini* in 1973 which was a very strong work by Glen Tetley. So there were lots of people doing things but nothing quite like Dance Exchange. That kind of clarity and definition of purpose.

Sally Gardner What kind of impact were they having?

Jill Sykes I think there was probably a smallish following. I must say that large followings were not encouraged by certain people in Dance Exchange



Eva Karczag

who quite often wished there wasn't an audience there at all! They had to put all those seats in. It was such a nuisance! It was a small but devoted following and of course it grew.

Mary Emery We're talking about growth but we're talking about 10 to 30 and then we're talking about 30 to 100 as time went by – and now you can hardly get in. But it was people from the visual arts – a cross section of people who were interested in the arts from a lot of different angles.

Sally Gardner Did what they were doing seem to come out of wider cultural and social movements?

Jill Sykes No. I talked to Russell much later on. He talked a lot about politics – I mean in the broadest sense – and I understood much more what there was behind the work but I think it was much more a sense of immediacy and of the time and of there being concepts behind the work. You were aware of the intelligence behind the work. You didn't necessarily know what they were specifically thinking of but you knew there were definitely minds at work there. Precisely what they were working at I wouldn't have known in those early years and I don't think I had enough conversations to find out.

Sally Gardner Going back to how this work was understood at the time, did you have a knowledge or sense of how or where it arose, where it was coming from?

Jill Sykes It was coming from people living in whatever year it was – '76 or '77 – people thinking, people communicating.

Mary Emery From my point of view, I wasn't really concerned about where it was coming from. I was aware that it was informed by a shared philosophy but really I was just overwhelmed by the sheer quality of it and the dancers and everything else. Of course part of it was that they were so different from everyone else so that has helped them to stand out. It was also their particular movement style, if you like. It came from release techniques and so on. And it was characterised by this exceptional ease. That was what I found so different and exciting.

Jill Sykes Yes, and I'd really only seen this kind of dance on video and, even so, not very much. Until 1978, when I went to New York and went to absolutely everything in every loft I could get to.

Mary Emery I think it was '78 I was in England – at X6 and in the warehouses. We were there from having seen Dance Exchange and might I say that I thought Dance Exchange stood up among the best.

Sally Gardner So it was the physicality that was very distinctive?

Jill Sykes Yes, absolutely. Soon of course picked up and used by other people *ad infinitum*. I remember having discussions with people like Anne Woolliams who was then Artistic Director of the Australian Ballet or perhaps it was when she was Dean of Dance at the VCA. We used to discuss this and she would say, 'Oh it's a dead end this kind of dance' – meaning the particular kind of technique that Russell was pursuing and Nanette at that time, but particularly Russell. And my feeling was that so much was being borrowed by other people it might not get a whole lot further in what was happening then.

Libby Dempster, *Night Work* (chor. Hassall)

Sally Gardner Certain stylistic features might be borrowed but perhaps not their underlying concerns.

Mary Emery I think Dance Exchange has been extremely influential even if it's unacknowledged.

Sally Gardner Can you be more specific?

Jill Sykes It's more an approach to dance and a use of gravity and fluidity. It's commonplace now but it certainly wasn't in the mid to late '70s, in Australia.

Sally Gardner It seems that Dance Exchange did also open up the whole question of the space and nature of performance.

Jill Sykes They had great intentions of taking people away from previous concepts of dance spaces and so on. The Woolloomooloo Police Boys Club was a great space similar to the use of basketball stadiums in the States – moving dance out into a completely different area. This was by choice, but of course it was also a lot cheaper.

Mary Emery At one point they did a dance out on the grass behind The Domain parking area.

Jill Sykes And another occasion all around Sydney Harbour – 'Ashes of Sydney' I think was the overall name. And then also a very formal venue – The Sydney Town Hall – where the seats were reversed from the usual direction and they were using the wonderful balconies and doors, which normally we as an audience have behind us as we walk in and sit to watch the platform. But no, Dance Exchange had us facing them and used the doors. So there was a great variety of venues – you went from a stretch of grass, to the Sydney Town Hall via the Woolloomooloo Police Boys Club and various other places.

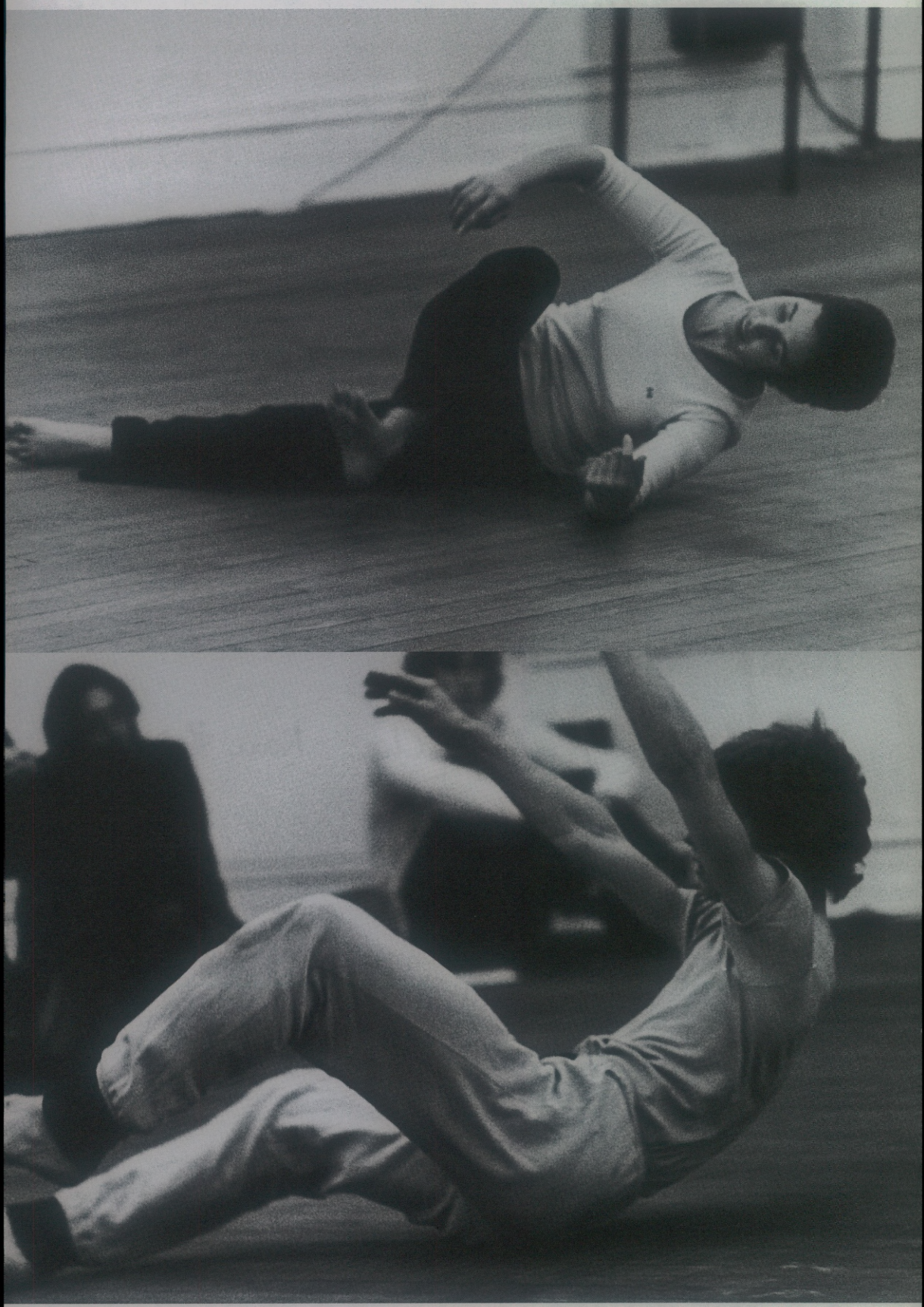
Sally Gardner Was it relatively easy for people to do things like that, at that time? Was there an environment that allowed for this?

Jill Sykes Do you think there isn't now?

Sally Gardner Libby Dempster has pointed out that nowadays there is less artist-led framing of performance. In the present situation artists tend to make their work and then there's a whole team of other experts who market that. There are organisations like this one here (Marguerite Pepper Productions). There are festivals that people present their work under the umbrella of – in designated spaces and so on. The arena of the artist's activity is very much about making the object, if you like, but the whole framing of this object or event is now much more a product of these larger institutions and organisations. It's now much harder to get money unless you can show that you can slot into these larger structures.

Jill Sykes I wish I could say that I disagreed but I can't get a huge number of examples because the number of companies has shrunk, and the number of companies has shrunk because there isn't enough money and the ones left are usually the mainstream ones – and they perform in mainstream venues.

Mary Emery I feel that Nanette and Russell at that time almost had a missionary drive to put this work on. I think they were going to put it on even with the most minimal of resources.



Libby Dempster, David Hinckfuss *Head Piece* (chor. Hassall)

Jill Sykes It was a great time for dance and all those people were all very different – Kai Tai Chan with One Extra Dance Group which became One Extra Dance Company and is now One Extra Company, Carole Johnson and Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre which started as a school and evolved from there.

Mary Emery Also what Jaap Flier did with the Dance Company of New South Wales was different and exciting, and then Graeme Murphy, when he first came on the scene he had great excitement and drive.

Jill Sykes Certainly Dance Exchange wasn't happening in isolation by any means.

Mary Emery No, but what they were doing was very special. Until the late seventies my dance viewing was confined to Australia. So that Dance Exchange was a revelation to me. On me it was very influential.

Eva Karczag, *Rolling Dance* (chor. Karczag)

Dance Exchange

Provisional Performance Chronology 1976 – 1979

Research in progress

by Karen Martin

1976

No Standing, Only Dancing
Premiere: Art Gallery of New South Wales
Choreography: Russell Dumas, Nanette Hassall
Performers: Russell Dumas, Nanette Hassall

Standing, Walking, Running Dance
Premiere:
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas

Mozart Duet
Premiere: Recording Hall, Sydney Opera House
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Alida Chase, Russell Dumas

Cram
Premiere: Recording Hall, Sydney Opera House
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Alida Chase, Russell Dumas and performers from the Dance Company of NSW

Little Duet
Premiere:
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Eve Karczag, Russell Dumas

Spinning Dance
Premiere: Art Gallery of N.S.W.
Choreography: Nanette Hassell
Performer: Nanette Hassell

Circular Thoughts
Premiere: April, Police Boys Club
Choreography: Nanette Hassall
Performers: Nanette Hassall, Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss, Elizabeth Dempster
Sound: David Goode

Whorl
Premiere: April, Police Boys Club
Choreography: Miranda Tufnell, Eva Karczag
Performers: Eva Karczag, Elizabeth Dempster

Soft Verges
Premiere: November, Dance Company of NSW, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Richard Alston
Performer: Eva Karczag

Rare Birds with Sticky Wings
Premiere: November
Dance Company of NSW, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Elizabeth Dempster
Performer: Elizabeth Dempster
Sound: Rare Bird's Choir

Phrases for the Chinese
Premiere: November,
Dance Company of NSW, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss

Cycles
Premiere: November
Dance Company of NSW, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Nanette Hassall
Performers:Nanette Hassall, Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas
Sound: Bill Fontana

Night Work (a piece in progress)
Premiere: November
Dance Company of NSW, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Nanette Hassall
Performers: Elizabeth Dempster, Nanette Hassall, Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss
Sound: Bill Fontana

Solo
Premiere: November
Dance Company of NSW, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Eva Karczag
Performer: Eva Karczag

Nan's Solo
Premiere: November
Dance Company of NSW, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Ian Spink
Performer: Nanette Hassall
Sound: Bill Fontana

Improvisation
Premiere: November
Dance Company of NSW, Woolloomooloo
Direction: Ian Spink
Performers: Elizabeth Dempster, Nanette Hassall, Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss

1977

Gong Song in MUSED II
Premiere: March
University of New South Wales, Sydney
Choreography: Nanette Hassall
Performers: Eva Karczag, Elizabeth Dempster
Sound: Robert Iwing

Sculptural Music No.1 in MUSED II
Premiere: March
University of New South Wales, Sydney
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss

Red Paper Piece
Premiere: Dance Conference,
Rusden College, Victoria
Premiere: March, Police Citizens Boys Club, Sydney
Choreography: Russell Dumas and Nanette Hassall and conference participants
Performers: Russell Dumas, Nanette Hassall, Eva Karczag, David Hinckfuss, Elizabeth Dempster, Reyes de Lara, Jim Hughes, and others

Three Duets
Premiere: March, Police Boys Club, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss

Ten Cents a Dance
Premiere: March, Police Boys Club, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Russell Dumas, Elizabeth Dempster, Nannette Hassall, Eva Karczag, David Hinckfuss
Sound: Music from the 1930's

Solo for David
Premiere: March, Police Boys Club, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Nannette Hassall
Performer: David Hinckfuss

Flag Dance
Premiere: March, Police Boys Club, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Nannette Hassall
Performers: Russell Dumas, Nannette Hassall, Eva Karczag, David Hinckfuss

Signaling a Presence
Premiere: March, Police Boys Club, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Nannette Hassall
Performers: Russell Dumas, Nannette Hassall, Eva Karczag, David Hinckfuss, Elizabeth Dempster

Rolling Dance
Premiere: March, Police Boys Club, Woolloomooloo
Choreography: Eva Karczag
Performer: Eva Karczag

Event No.4
Premiere: July, Sydney Police Boys Club,
Performers : improvisation with Nanette Hassall, Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss
Sound: Jim Fulkerson

Head Piece
Premiere: July , Sydney Police Boys Club
Choreography: Nanette Hassall
Performers: Nanette Hassall, Eva Karczag, David Hinckfuss, Elizabeth Dempster, Russell Dumas
Sound: Bill Fontana

Reciprocal Solos
Premiere: June RMIT, The Place, Melbourne (and later Sydney)
Choreography: Russell Dumas, Nanette Hassall
Performers: Russell Dumas, Nanette Hassall

Counterbalance II
Premiere: July, Police Boys Club, Woolloomooloo
Premiere: November 19, X6, London
Premiere: December 27, Trisha Brown's Loft New York City
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss

1978

Group Activities
Premiere: January Sydney Festival, Martin Place
Principle Choreography: Sara Rudner
Direction: Russell Dumas
Performers:Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss, Reyes de Lara
Sound: Bill Fontana

Fair Weather
Premiere: January, Sydney Festival, Sydney Town Hall
Choreography: Nanette Hassall, Lyndal Jones
Performers: Nanette Hassall, Lyndal Jones

X?
Premiere: February, Police Boys Club, Sydney
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Eva Karczag, Nanette Hassall, David Hinckfuss, Elizabeth Dempster,
Video: Steven Jones

Counterbalance II
Premiere: March, Adelaide Festival, Australian Dance Theatre Studio
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss

Connecting Passages
Premiere: March, Adelaide Festival, Australian Dance Theatre Studio
Choreography: Richard Alston
Performer: Eva Karczag

Group Activities
Premiere: March, Adelaide Festival, Australian Dance Theatre Studio
Choreography: Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas and David Hinckfuss
Performers: Eva Karczag, Russell Dumas and David Hinckfuss

1979

With a Feather Finish
Premiere: January, Sydney Festival, Sydney Town Hall
Choreography: Nanette Hassall, Russell Dumas
Performers: Nanette Hassall, Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss
Sound: Popular songs

No Feather No Finish
Premiere: January, Sydney Festival, Footbridge Theatre Sydney
Choreography: Eva Karczag
Performer: Eva Karczag

Counterbalance II
Premiere: February 23, Trisha Brown's Loft, New York City
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss

Blinky Bill
Premiere: February 23, Trisha Brown's Loft, New York City
Choreography: Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss, Eva Karczag
Direction: Russell Dumas
Performers: Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss, Eva Karczag

Beach I, II and III
Premiere: May, Sydney Town Hall
Choreography: Russell Dumas
Performers: Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss, Daryl Pellizer

Blinky Bill
Premiere: May, Sydney Town Hall
Choreography: Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss, Eva Karczag.
Direction: Russell Dumas
Performers: Russell Dumas, David Hinckfuss, Eva Karczag, Daryl Pellizer

The '70s, The

EVA & WARREN AT STOREY HALL: they made it this time

Warren Burt & Eva Karczag
June 10. 9 am - 9 pm.
Lower Storey Hall, RMIT.
Dance: Eva Karczag with assistance from Libby Dempster and Nanette Hassall.
Music: Written by Warren Burt with assistance from Anton Bruckner, Claude Debussy, Joel Adabe, Charles Parker, John Birks Gillespie, Howard Skempton, Les Gilbert and played by Warren Burt with assistance from John Crawford, Roger Anderson, Bill Fontana, Les Gilbert.

Outside Storey Hall heavy doors creak as the homegoers prepare to brave the Friday night rush hour in the rain. Trams send their rumblings into the room just as they do at the Symphony Concerts at the Town Hall providing Melburnians with an inexplicable sense of security. Sometimes the people in a hurry stop at the door and look in while they put on their coats or unfurl their umbrellas.

Inside Eva and Warren are laying to rest the sun above the masonry and greyness with, of all things, a tape-delayed chord organ raga. And the people laid out around the hall's perimeter are oblivious to the heavy stream of traffic only a couple of brick walls away.

Eight hours down and four to go. A strange taste in the mouth and a buzzing in the head attributable to this twelve hours of dance and music, sometimes in that order, sometimes not.

The music for the day: Warren playing that old tear-jerker Howard Skempton to perfection with a stumblebum technique; a dazzling 45 minute display of live electronic manipulation; "Night in Tunisia" on piano, clarinet and piano accordian; together with many other bits of Burtaphenalia including a Bruckner loop piece! and a never to be repeated flying piano accordian piece.

The dance: Eva weaving enchantment through space. Her movement is successful because she recognises the inherent harmony of complying with gravity's pull on the limbs. Often in her rolling dances the floor falls away from under her and she is left floating. Her economical grace flows. Her movements seem to have no beginning and no end. Gestures melt in a continuous flow of motion.

This improbable marathon was successful in many particularly magical ways. Mainly it was because both Warren's music and Eva's dancing are rooted in reality, with the consequence that there are no limitations.

Les Gilbert.

‘No careers are to be made here... this is a place of experimentation.’

Warren Burt: Experimental dancing, as far as I could see, in the ’70s in Melbourne, was the occasional visits of Dance Exchange to Melbourne, and what went on at Extensions, Margaret Lasica’s studio.
I didn’t know the scene very well, but that seemed to be the scene to me. It seemed that both of those activities were very endangered, and none of the participants had any sense of confidence in the longevity of what they were doing. Both in the case of Margaret and with all the Dance Exchange people, it seemed that the attitude of both groups was that they were trying to introduce something into a climate which seemed slightly favorable at the time, but in which it was still a very big adventure to introduce those ideas.

The ’70s in the ’90s

Warren Burt interviewed by Libby Dempster

January 1999

Libby Dempster: Well I think you are right about the dance scene at that time. When I recall the vitality and optimism of cultural action and critique in the early ’70s I’m recalling a lot of performance activity which was not specifically dance, but which was cross-disciplinary, arising out of situations like the Fine Arts Workshop/The Tin Sheds, at Sydney University for example.

STANDING WAVE SOUND SCULPTURE

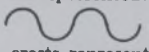
BILL FONTANA

"a demonstration of how different frequencies have distinct physical dimensions"

The term "Sound Sculpture" may create the expectation of visually beautiful objects that also make beautiful sounds. Essentially many musical instruments from various cultures can be described in this way.

My use of the terms "Sound Sculpture" refers not to tangible physical objects but to tangible physical/spacial relationships between sounds. The most obvious example of this[1] is the "Standing Wave Sculpture" I had set-up in the R.M.I.T. Gallery last May as part of a Sound Sculpture exhibit.

This Standing Wave Sculpture is based upon the extraordinary acoustical properties of pure sine waves. A sine wave is the simplest of all sounds in that it is a pure frequency with no harmonics. Visually it can be represented:



with the crests representing loud spots and the troughs soft spots When a sine wave from between 40 cylces per second and about 500 cycles per second is played in an environment having sound reflections (a normal room) the reflecting sine wave is distributed throughout the room according to a whole spectrum of possible phase relationships (two extreme possibilities being reinforcement when the crests coincide and are said to be in phase or cancellation when the crest is out of phase with the trough). Thus when walking through this room the sine wave changes — getting louder or softer — these changes giving the sound what seem to be physical dimensions. An interesting experiment to conduct with a single sine wave is to find a silent pocket in the room and remain in it motionless while another person changes the frequency of the sine wave slightly and then returns to the original frequency. When the original frequency returns the silent pocket also returns and as that frequency is changed one will have the sensation of the pocket moving past. This experiment is a good demonstration of how different frequencies have distinct physical dimensions.

In the Standing Wave Sculpture that was set-up at R.M.I.T., four different frequencies were used simultaneously (each one having its own dimensions). A deliberate effort was made in the tuning of these sine waves to avoid harmonic relationships that would cause them to interact with each other. As much as possible they were four physically/spacially independent standing waves.

One variation which I at times added to the Standing Wave Sculpture was to have a portable tape recorder with a pre-recorded sine wave that was slightly out of tune with the highest frequency Standing Wave (so as to make slow beats with it) be mobile in the space. One would think that with both of these frequencies being constant that the beats would also be constant. Amazingly enough the beats would change as the portable sine wave travelled in space. Thus the change in beats (actually a change in pitch perceived as a rhythmical phenomenon) became a definition of motion interacting with a particular acoustic environment.

At the conclusion of the exhibit at R.M.I.T. it seemed the next step is to explore manipulating standing waves with motion. Not with motion of the listener as much as the physical motion of the loudspeakers themselves. At a concert I gave at the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre last June a first attempt at this was done with small hand held loudspeakers. This worked so well that my next Standing Wave Sculpture will involve an electro mechanical system mobilizing about 8 small wide range loudspeakers in a way that can be precisely controlled. With any luck this will be ready early next year.

Bill Fontana
June 15th, 1977 — Sydney.

[1] Besides the sculptural properties of sine waves described here my present work is concerned with two other types of sound sculpture:

a) sound sculptures made from extracting formal relationships between sounds as they are located in a naturally occurring sound enironment, ie. my Kirribilli Wharf or Royal Parade Sound Sculpture With Resonators,

b) composed pieces that have an indeterminately long time structure that explore distributing musical instruments over a large spacial area, ie. music for Handbells, Wave Spiral for Rin Gongs, Untitled work for 20 guitars in a lobby, Horizon Sculpture for Large Wind Ensemble, Proposed Boat Whistle Event for Sydney Harbour etc . . .

One: The role(s) of criticism and alternatives to the sales culture

WB The question of critique is an interesting one. I remember the new music scene in Melbourne in the '70s. I wasn't here for the founding of the New Music Centre, which went from '72 to '74, but when I arrived here in '75, I participated in the setting up of the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, which had a very interesting history over seven years. CHCMC was specifically set up as a venue for experimentation, as a venue for developing ideas, for trying things out. From the very first, we discouraged the mainstream press from coming, we actively said to them, "We don't want you." We did that not only because the people writing for them were incompetent, but also because we wanted a critic-free zone for work to develop in. Later, in '78, Les Gilbert and I founded the New Music Newspaper to publicise new music activities in Melbourne in general, and at CHCMC in particular. What I said to students at the time was "In a situation like Australia's, which at the moment is a pioneering situation (and not only in music, but also in the visual arts, in the development of Australian nationalism, in dance, in literature with experimental poetry – this was the very exciting period of, for example, the Fitzroy Concrete Poets), where new ideas are being born, it's not enough to just make work and perform it, you also have to document it because the critical community isn't going to catch up for another ten or twenty years." And so we published three issues of the New Music Newspaper in '78–'79. Then, in '79, Phil Brophy started New Music which was a publication which had quite a different format. For every concert that occurred at Clifton Hill a member of the audience would interview the performers and that interview would then appear in the next issue of New Music. It often went on a rotating basis, so you were performer one week and then interviewer next week; at times there was a sort of a chain there. That went for about two years. Our attitude at Clifton Hill was that "No careers are to be made here, business as usual is not welcomed here, this is a place of experimentation."

When Clifton Hill finally fell apart was when *Art & Text* began writing about events at CHCMC, when the visual arts scene 'discovered' Clifton Hill and began treating the events there as if they were important. Suddenly, there was a huge schism at Clifton Hill between people who were ambitious and wanted careers and people who just wanted to keep doing things and trying things out. Eventually, I felt, the place fell apart with fairly rancorous feelings because it had become a stepping stone to a career. One of the lessons a number of us learned from this was that the autobiographical, critic-as-hero mode of writing, promoted by *Art & Text*, was very destructive to the development of creative work. In fact, when Rainer Linz founded *New Music Articles* in 1981, (which published ten issues in, I think, eleven years from 1981–92) he did so specifically to encourage serious writing about music, and he specifically said that he did NOT want autobiographical, critic-as-hero writing in the magazine.

Later, in 1987–88, when I was part of the group that set up the Linden New Musicales, at the Linden Gallery in St. Kilda, we made sure that it, too, was a critic-free zone. This series lasted longer than CHCMC, and criticism had nothing to do with its demise. A change of administration at Linden Gallery accomplished that. When Kevin Wilson was directing Linden, it was fantastic – he was very easy to work

R. M. I. T. THE EXCHANGE

On April 18th this year RMIT Union took a definite stand towards "The Arts" and began its programme entitled "THE EXCHANGE". It seemed self-evident that an institution covering 7½ acres with a population of 13,000 represented a fairly heavy responsibility and that they deserved something better than hobby classes and artists lost in academia.

The main thrust then behind the programme was "to provide the RMIT community with access to the creative process." A continuing programme was to be attempted with a constant interchange of ideas and personnel. *Confrontation* backed up by more formal types of events and exhibitions seemed one way of "opening up" RMIT.

The first group of artists "The Dance Exchange" plus composer, Bill Fontana and writer, Simon Hopkinson were chosen very carefully. Russell Dumas, Nanette Hassall, Simon Hopkinson had all taken part in a compositional workshop at La Trobe in December 76. During this brief encounter they realized that although each artist was working in a different discipline their ideas embraced a similar attitude — a desire to use everyday situations, space, environment as an inspiration for their work.

CONFRONTATION: the desire to up-turn people's preconceived ideas; to make one look at something in a slightly different way; and to cheer up the day to day existence at RMIT began in April with a Dance Semaphore piece. The artists signalled messages from certain vantage points in and around campus and out into Franklin and Swanston Streets. People who had only previously gazed at eye-level on their way to "the Caff" were suddenly nudged and told to look up or out on to the street — and there were people *dancing!*

Bill Fontana followed on cue and set up a street music stand in Bowen Lane. Resonators were placed in large bottles; sea-shells; tubing and passers by were invited to listen to the sounds (MUSIC!!). The fact that one girl thought she was having a hearing test reinforced Bill's belief "that so many people miss out on the beauty that surrounds them in terms of natural sounds." Bill in between preparing tapes for performance use with the other artists worked towards a 10 day exhibition of recordings and sound sculptures in RMIT Gallery. A measure of the success of this exhibition is that he has been invited to do a three week exhibition of The National Gallery next year in addition to numerous invitations from Educational Institutions.

With the help of Warren Burt the first phase of "The Exchange" ended with a 12 hour piece in RMIT Gallery.

Donna Greaves

Simon Hopkinson meanwhile extended the process with carefully controlled lift-pieces culminating in a not too subtle (but great fun) champagne Brunch. Simon who enjoys working in an "open-ended" situation and has agreed to be the continuing link in "The Exchange" is merrily continuing his interest of placing two different realities together. A few weeks ago at 8 am in a cool 3° he was the host for a dinner for 4, catered for my Maxims of South Yarra in a vacant spot along Swanston Street which RMIT had hoped would be the site of Union House.

with, and very supportive, very encouraging. When other people took over, it became very difficult – everything had to be done by the book, you had to apply for everything; support was much less forthcoming. It became much more bureaucratic and so we decided we didn't need it. For me, then, when I came back from a year in the States in '95, I noticed that things were happening very nicely at Cubitt St., Al Wunder's late, lamented space in Richmond, so I thought I'd put my energies into that place. And again, it was a space that was outside the mainstream, and away from the critical apparatus, which I felt was very important.

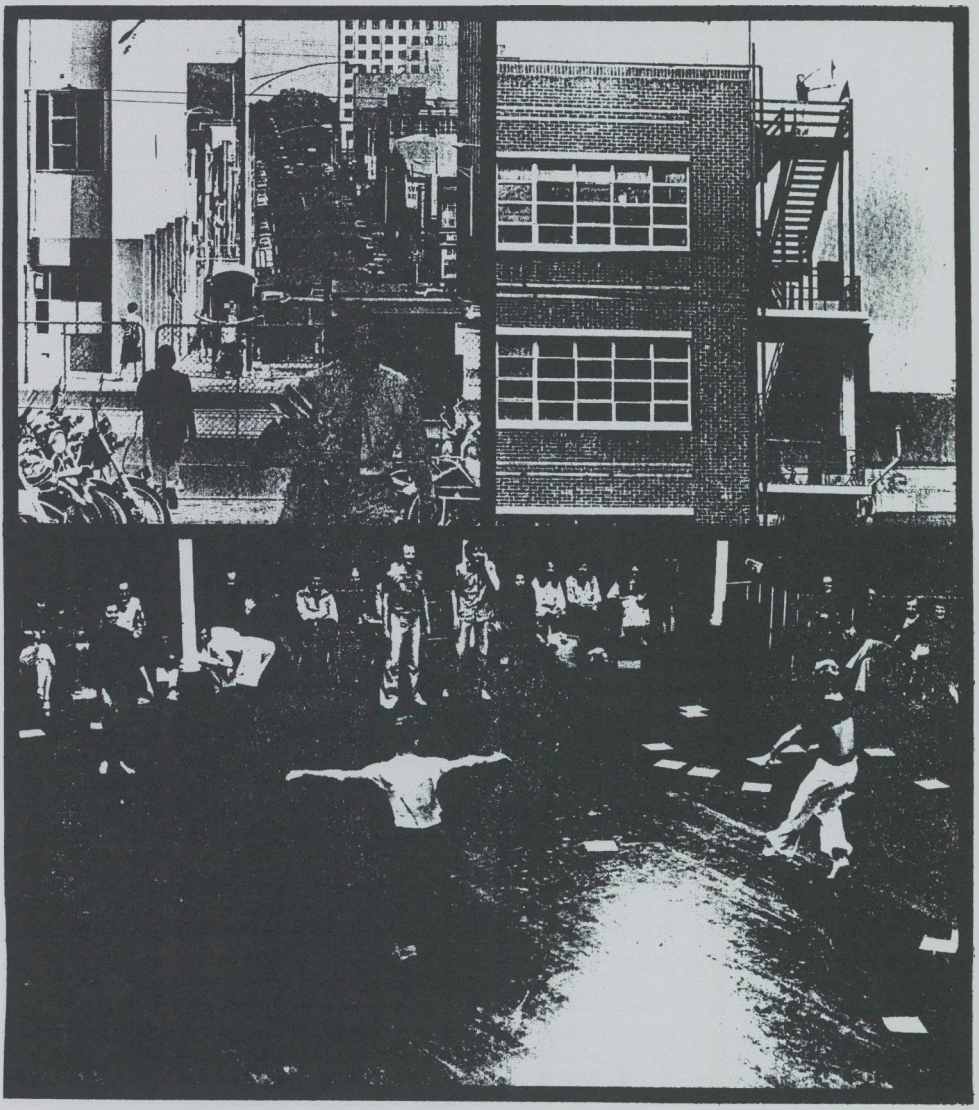
This is an interesting attitude for me to have, considering that I've recently collaborated with Nicholas Zurbrugg on a book called *Critical Vices – The Myths of Post-Modern Theory*, which is about to be published by Gordon and Breach in New York. As someone who makes a considerable part of his living doing cultural theory and critique, I'm very concerned with keeping that stuff away from art in its developmental stages. Otherwise, you end up with a kind of perpetually student-stage theory-driven art, which I really do believe can only be backward looking.

I've written all the standard articles on experimental music in Australia that are now used in all the universities – the *Leonardo Music Journal* one, the *Sounds Australian* one, and I'm just about to write three hundred words on "Experimental Music in Melbourne" for the *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*. So I do believe in documenting and promoting the stuff as it occurs, but I try to keep, if I may make up an adjective on the spot, a "Real-Time-ian" sense of personal opinion and condemnation out of the writing. I often say, when I see in a review, "I would have liked to have seen..." I know I can stop reading the review right there, because I'm not reading about the work now, I'm reading about the desires of the reviewer, I'm reading their autobiography. And if I want to do that, I'd rather just ask them about their life.

LD When you describe the early years at Clifton Hill it's apparent that it was important as a site of aesthetic experimentation and also for its investigation of new social formations. The artistic activity arose out of and was implicated in the process of rethinking and reformulating relationships between audiences and art works. The type of conservative critical intervention you spoke of would seem to impose the view that experiment is not of intrinsic value. It's not worthwhile in its own terms, but must be interpreted as a stage of development; that is, people will pass through a period of experimentation on the way to growing up and becoming what we already know as certain kinds of easily categorisable artists/composers/ whatever. So I hear in that story a refusal to recognise or to concede the possibility of other kinds of social formation – other kinds of artists.

WB Yes, there is a silly attitude that says, after you experiment for a while, you get serious, and you put your work out in the public market place where the standards of, say, commercial cinema are applied to you. This is an utter nonsense. It's not only necessary for the creators and performers of a work to learn to think differently about what they're doing, it's also necessary for audiences to think differently as well. To know that there are different modes of perception, different ways of seeing, and that to judge, say, an experimental work by the production values standards of, say, the Australian Ballet, is as much a mistake as a performer playing a C sharp where a C natural was written.

For example, I just got some anonymous feedback from the Australia Council about *Diversity*, the performance I did at Dancehouse last June, and again, I learned nothing



standing wave dance

The standing waves carve the room into many new subdivisions. The following is a series of suggestions by which to explore the space.

. . . Stand at the edge of the space . . . move slowly forward passing through the channels of sound . . . can you find a silent space . . . find a channel of low sound.

. . . explore the dimensions of this channel — up and down as in a corridor.

. . . find the borders of a channel of higher pitch . . . rock gently in and out of the channel of sound.

. . . sometimes new channels exist below you . . . close to the floor . . . find one such area . . . sit or lie there for a time listening . . . softly sing to yourself with the sound.

. . . you can change the spaces in the room by moving (& singing) . . . run through the space carrying the note with you . . . fall back gently into the floor in the same place you were lying . . . continue running and falling until you have changed that space.

. . . jumping will bring you into new spatial dimensions that lie above you.

Nanette Hassall.

from the critique other than about the reviewer. It seemed the reviewer wanted to see whizbang technology being manipulated, whereas we tried to keep the technology as invisible as possible. So I learned a lot about them – that they were applying the standards of the video game and commercial cinema to a work that was actually standing in opposition to the video game and commercial cinema. Kenneth Gaburo has a wonderful essay called "The Beauty of Irrelevant Music," written in 1971, and which I feel is just as relevant today as it was back then, in which he says, *Equally significant is the fact that this unsaleable music to which they persistently refer is not, and was not ever made to sell. Its structural nature resists selling, and thus it puts forth its own alternative.*

It's important to make this point very clearly. Much experimental work in music, dance, drama, etc. is put forth as an ALTERNATIVE to the sales culture. To judge it by the standards of the sales culture is simply wrong. There ARE other ways of seeing. Which is not to deny that certain ideas from experimental work cannot be adapted and used in various forms of commercial culture. For example, the many appropriations of experimental music into Techno Music have produced some wonderful music made by some very talented people. However, it's important to understand the nature of publicity. For example, the rock'n'roll world has a certain kind of publicity machine. Seventy people can be in the Punter's Club and hear a band and everybody in town hears about it, but seventy people are in an Art Gallery, and a few people (who read the art press) hear about it, or seventy people can be in an alternative space, and nobody hears about it. This is simply a function of the quality of the publicity machine covering a particular scene, and says absolutely nothing about the work. (Actually, I know several people involved in the Techno scene, and they aren't making any money either!)

LD Sometimes the '70s are described as the period in which it became possible for young Australians to imagine a future for themselves in the arts. This was the period in which a number of tertiary institutions established new courses and training programs. The Australia Council was offering some support for non-commercial work and a number of new dance companies were established. So, you could "have a career" as a working artist in Australia. Well I still think that's quite preposterous... at best, it's unrealistic.

WB We were young people in the '70s.

LD Indeed we were. But I think all that's happened is that some people have this delusion that in order to be a successful (dance) artist they need to grow up fast, learn the craft and become credible in quite traditional terms. Nothing has changed. And there's a fairly thoroughgoing misunderstanding of postmodernism; here it is stripped of any radicalism and reduced to some sort of ill-defined style. But it's not a "style" of dance; it's not a "thing" at all.

WB No, it was a group of people who felt that working with process in various ways was important.

I noticed just at the end of last year, when I was organizing a number of improvisation events, that there were groups of younger people, in their early twenties, who once again were not concerned with a career. I had noticed a period from the early '80s to the mid '90s, when most people, with rare exceptions like Rodney Berry, said, "Okay, I've got to go to the film school and learn how to be a film

the new music newspaper

no.2 october/november 1977 25c

WITH AT LEAST ONE FOOT ON THE GROUND

Thankyou for your support. The *New Music Newspaper* appears to be a success. The first issue of 600 has sold out except for a few copies we have retained for archival purposes. We now feel confident enough to offer postal subscriptions and information about that appears on p.19.

We would like to explain just what a bargain you are getting for your 25c. Needless to say all the writing, layout, distribution and endless legwork necessary for the appearance of the *Newspaper* is provided voluntarily by a large number of people, but the typesetting and printing cost for each single copy is approximately 70c. We decided that to facilitate distribution this was too high a price to ask and so we have undertaken to raise the extra 50c per copy. The La Trobe University Union Activities Committee has generously provided the subsidy for the first two issues.

One of the most gratifying successes of the *Newspaper* is that, as we had hoped, it is fostering dialogue and contributing to a sense of community amongst musicians working in New Music. Yes, we are talking to one another. Ron Nagorcka's article on Clifton Hill New Music Centre elicited responses from several sources. This debate begins on p. 6 and we think it is only beginning. Buy the next issue for the next episode.

In the first issue's policy statement we omitted to say that we intend including articles on activities other than those just musical. This reflects the tendencies for New Music to converge and blur with other fields of endeavour. Page 5 deals with the Video Show at La Trobe University and on page 17 Alison Richards talks about her performance piece "Women's Work". In the next issue Mick Banks and Corinne d'Cruz, recent visitors from the UK, will discuss their work during their stay here.

Also in the next issue will be a technology special with a few circuits for you to copy and a discussion on composing with cassettes. As an extra Christmas bonus we have received special permission to print Richard David Hames' Christmas Carols. The February/March issue we hope to be a bumper issue to coincide with the Australian Composers and Performers Seminar to be held here in Melbourne.

Reflecting the wonderful response we have had to the *Newspaper*, our little publication has had to expand a little more to 20 pages. Still we haven't had enough space to print everything we wanted to. In particular apologies to Carolyn Thompson and Julia Anderson whose scores will now appear in the next issue.

Warren Burt
Les Gilbert.

THIS ISSUE IS SUBSIDISED BY THE LA TROBE UNIVERSITY UNION ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE

composer," or, "I've got to get my critical theory together so I can be an academic," and so they were trying to find career paths to fit into. As opposed to the way I had felt in my twenties, which was, "Well, the economy is shot (so much for all that mythologizing about how the '60s and '70s were good economic times!), and I will never make a living out of this, so I might as well do whatever the hell I want." And I noticed with these young people last year, whether they were dealing with cheap electronics, or were writing for orchestra, that they had the same attitude that a career was probably impossible, and so they felt free to do whatever it was they wanted. And I thought, "Well, this is refreshing!"

I think with the arts funding... boomlet, let's call it a boomlet – there really wasn't a lot of money around – there was the illusion that careers could be made. And also I think because in the visual arts world careers could be made for a while, people were fooled. The visual arts world works on a different economic scale than the world of performing arts, and that gives the false impression in the other arts that there is some sort of trickle-down effect. One of the reasons I dislike the visual arts scene in general is its arrogance in assuming that it's the engine that drives the rest of the arts. It isn't.

LD How so?

WB *Real-Time* for example would never have occurred if there wasn't a visual arts scene to drive it, it would not have come out of say, just dance, or just performance, or just music.

LD Not enough money?

WB Right. It had to come out of a visual arts dominated context. (In fact, I'm probably correct in guessing that they aren't making any money either. We're probably talking here about the difference between hanging on by a thread, and falling into the precipice!) However, the visual arts world has saleable objects and a whole support mechanism of words ('criticism', 'theory') that supports the non-verbal visual objects that can only exist through metaphor.

LD In dance some choreographers found it useful to define or describe themselves as artists because that term implied a commitment to process and to the development of an ongoing practice over time. It was thought preferable to the term choreographer which has at times been understood in limited craft terms (ie. choreographer as step-arranger).

WB And also there was that wonderful sense of the importance of cross-disciplinary thinking. I was especially lucky in that I went to an undergraduate school in a period in which we were taught interdisciplinarily. For example, I had a course called, "The Arts, 1600–1900" or something like that, which was taught by a literature person, a visual artist and a composer. They just took us through twenty-five year blocks – here's an opera, here's a painting, here's a novel, look at the common structures, right up through the revolutions of the early 1900s with Stravinsky, Picasso, and James Joyce; with Schoenberg, Kandinsky, and Kafka, things like that.

We quickly learned there were no such things as individual art forms, only art which was expressed in many different media. Recently I was rereading Marshall McLuhan – a new collection called *Essential McLuhan*, and as early as the late 1940s he was saying that the separation of disciplines within the academies had to stop and we had to have

VIDEO SPECTRUM
two concerts as part of a week of images

Video Concerts
Sept. 13 and 20. 8 pm.
La Trobe University Union Hall.
Works by Jones, Burt, Viola, Mann, Randall and Bendinelli performed by the above plus Kira Perov and Malcolm Ellis.

As part of the Video Spectrum Show at the La Trobe Uni Union, there were 2 concerts which utilized video installations as an integral part of the performance. The pieces were:

Tai Chi — by Stephen Jones in which 2 screens — a large colour projector and a smaller black and white monitor displayed different tapes revealing various facets of modified and unmodified Tai Chi movement.

Information by Christopher Mann. The poet read his poems in a dead pan, condescending, intimidatory manner. As contrast and opposition, 3 camera operators and a mixer/switcher made lyrical abstractions from facets of his action.

Untitled by Robert Randall and Frank Bendinelli. This one is complicated. Robert lay on a cloth on the floor, wearing only orange briefs. He was displayed on 3 live monitors, thusly:

A fourth monitor, to the left of I, played a tape of Robert doing a series of movements, which movements he did live in rough sync with the video tape.

As he moved, he revealed the white backcloth was made of many strips of brightly coloured cloth which he proceeded to festoon himself with. Climax. came when he was submerged completely by a black cloth with white stripes, after which he emerged in a "nude of the 20th century" costume — part of his body covered in bits of differently textured black cloth. Thru all this, Frank kept switching monitors so that the prerecorded tape appeared on I; II appeared on III, etc. etc. Sometimes the rhythm of the switching was quite ecstatic. This was all accompanied by an incredibly loud soundtrack from which Robert took his cues. Quite complex and lovely. My only complaint is its pop-oriented theatricality, but then again, I'm a sissy-bourgeois effete minimalist, so there.

Running Accordian II by Warren Burt, Bill Viola and Steve Jones. I played loops derived from a Cleo Laine song on the accordian and recorded these on 4 cassette loop players. These, placed at the 4 points of the compass, provided me with musical referents and an outline within which to first, walk in circles, later run faster and faster until I was whirling in the centre until I collapsed, still playing chords in harmony with the loops. While I was doing this, four cameras (midway between the cassettes) focused on me. With Steve Jones on the switcher, sometimes 4 sequential images were shown ("following" me around the circle), sometimes all 4 images were superimposed (for a merry-go-round of identical accordianists), until my collapse, when a montage of dying swans (me) concluded the piece.

Though there were hassles aplenty during the show, the gentle feeling of love shared by all the participants came to a culmination on Friday night when we spontaneously formed a chorus singing, quietly, sustained harmonics to Stephen Jones electronic drone accompaniment to *Tai Chi.*

—Warren Burt.

RELEVANT FRESHAIR

Students from LaTrobe University Sept. 12. 1.15 p.m.
Melba Hall, Melbourne University.
"Devertivements for a Pianist" written and performed by Les Gilbert.
"Act on Action" written and performed by Rob Langworthy.

A series of lunchtime concerts devoted to local student composers performing their own work is a relevant breath of freshair. As a result, energy and commitment were the driving forces in this concert by Les Gilbert and Robert Langworthy.

Les's excellent pianistic technique never erred in charming the minimal melodic material which very slowly escaped the persistent 5 beat ground. Gradual phase pieces have been with us for some time but this one was unquestionably Les's. The repetition of tonics and fifths established themselves as air-borne platitudes, gently resonant over long periods of time.

Rob's electronic tape piece was evocative stimulus for his dance responses truly 'acting on the action'. With clearly articulated gestures he discovered the large chalked circle. At times his style was reminiscent of martial arts and oriental krishna-style antics, an aesthetically pleasing combination of creativity and discipline.

Both pieces were ongoing, containing a great deal of substance and were sensitively handled. An impressive engaging concert.

Ros Bandt

cross-disciplinary training. It didn't happen, and I maintain that the reason academia is experiencing a melt-down at the moment – we can talk about budget cuts and other 'real' reasons – but an underlying cause is that none of the departments ever cottoned on to the fact that they had to be multi-disciplinary. There was a failure of nerve in the '70s – a structural failure of nerve in the '70s was an underlying cause of the financial collapse of the system in the '90s! Boy, does that sound pretentious! (laughter)

LD Well, a sort of ossification occured, and a retreat to and policing of disciplinary boundaries, when perhaps the opposite should have been happening.

WB Well, the few examples of places that are thinking in cross-disciplinary ways, such as your course at Footscray(Performance Studies, VUT), or David Worrall's Australian Centre for the Arts and Technology at ANU in Canberra, are I think, doing a great job, but they're all hanging on by a thread. David has to spend most of his time just keeping the place afloat, just keeping its existence justified, rather than developing new programs, or getting new staff in, and so on.

Two: Radical amateurism and homemade art

WB Going back to the seventies, I remember that we had a sense of tolerance for each other's aesthetics, and a sense of support for each other's work, even if we didn't immediately approve of it.

Perhaps I was being overly tolerant, both then and now – one of my chief criticisms of other people, in fact, is that they are too critical of other people's ideas, craft and aesthetics. I noticed especially in the '80s there was a much less tolerant attitude to a variety of ideas than there was in the late '70s. For example, I recall that in '77 or '78, Dance Exchange was trying some really wacky things in structural terms. I remember *Red Paper Piece* as a wonderful example of tomfoolery that actually produced very beautiful motion. By the mid '80s this sort of experimentation would have been very disapproved of, and as a result, a sense of fantasy and adventure was sadly missing from so much dreary, career-oriented mid-'80s work – for me, anyway.

Another example of the positive effects of this tolerance towards each other's work in the '70s was with the work of the video artists Robert Randall and Frank Bendinelli. Robert and Frank are two of my dearest friends, so I think they will not be offended when I say that some of their earliest work was frankly godawful and appalling. (laughter) You know, sometimes I would go home with my head in my hands saying, "How can they be so corny?" (laughter) But I supported their work, and pushed their work because there was a real energy and integrity there – even if I disagreed with the surface of the work, I could see that there was a political undercurrent there that I felt a great affinity with. And by the time of the late '80s, with *War Story*, their videotape installation work, this political consciousness came to the fore. On the surface, *War Story* is a parody of every war movie that ever existed, and is very funny, but underneath is a very powerful parable about aids, the destruction of the gay community and the seductiveness of fascism. My point is that their powerful work of the late '80s probably would not have happened without that tolerance and support that we gave to each other in the '70s. I'm intolerant of intolerance because it closes off potentials for powerful expression.

The Ashes of Sydney present The Ashes of Sydney Festival

The Ashes of Sydney Festival
March 6, 5.30 — 8.30 pm
Sydney Harbour.
Organised by Greg Schiemer.
Performed by a cast of thousands.

4 Hudson Ave,
Port Macquarie, 2444
6 October, 1977

Dear Warren,

Thanks for the telegram. I can't find any photographs at all of the Ferry Concert. I only had a few and these have been lost since my last move. The only graphic documentation was done on video-tape. Do you still have a copy of Jilba's tape that I gave you? Anyway it doesn't really matter that a few photographs are missing, when a summary of the ideas and problems could still generate some ideas among other people.

The intention to have a concert on a ferry came to me during my student days from 1969—72 when I lived on the foreshore of Sydney Harbour at Drummoyne. The idea was probably inspired by the frequent pop and jazz concepts that were held on the harbour.

The harbour cruise event was a follow up to a previous concert in which several people in the performing arts (including Jacqui Carroll, Helen Herbertson, John Salisbury, Margret Roadknight, Hartley Newnham, Tony Maydwell, Roger Frampton, Geoff Collins, Michelle Smith, Carl Vine & others) helped me to make sure I actually had an opportunity to hear a work I wrote six years earlier. This concert was funded by Jacqui Carroll and myself — to the tune of about $500 — and we decided to pay ourselves a doubtful tribute by calling the program the Ashes of Sydney (Sept. 19th, 1976).

When the Sydney Festival put on an extravaganza modelled on what any other city might do, the opportunity was too good to miss.

Organised entirely from a public telephone, and in the same spirit as one organises a sports match, a picnic or a woolshed dance, it was billed as a concert of Music and Dance on water. It was run on a lo-cholestorol budget that could be funded by the spectators.

Sydney Harbour — for those who don't know it — is a very long winding river with numerous bays and peninsulas, and a few bridges and islands. We decided to put the audience aboard the ferry and have a series of performances, mainly around the foreshores, but linked by other items on board. A few performances on the shore were to be repeated several miles apart and a military-type land manoeuvre was planned to move performers (including mermaids complete with harp!) to various locations within a given time.

The preparation for the concert included organising a suitably priced and sized ferry and lining up performances together with an estimate of their duration. It meant knowing whether the tide would be favourable at a certain time and place, whether the performance could take place in daylight or whether artificial lighting could be provided or whether a performance could be staged unaffected by changes in wind conditions (eg. Bill Fontana's piece for Boat Horn and wind instruments). It involved having performance venues at suitable distances apart allowing time for the performers moving on land to co-ordinate with the cruise. It meant liaising with the captain, virtually telling him how and where to drive his boat, switch engines on and off and where to pick up the next performance. The rehearsals involved had to be done with an extra consideration — the timing of the land maneouvres (which had to be estimated for worst case conditions). It involved having alternative moves for every eventuality, eg. Jacqui Carroll had petty cash for taxi fares and back up transport in case of emergency. Above all it meant keeping a captive audience occupied — and not just captive. It involved having catering on board — someone actually came just for the Malaysian Curry. During the land manoeuvre test runs I would have travelled at least five hundred kilometres. The best response to our attempts to get free advertising was from 2JJ and the timing of this left us at the mercy of the weather. Yet even though it rained for several days up until a few hours before the start of the event we still had 120 people on board plus a dozen or so performers.

The order of the performances was:

Beginning at 5.30 pm Waterfront Decor (1) by Jacqui Carroll, the mermaids giving a farewell recital as the boat departs from Circular Quay.

In transit to the next performance, Blind Demon Pledge sings five political songs (2) on board, (Warren Burt) quite relevant. Boat passes under Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Boat enters Johnsons Bay. On foreshore, four wind players are waiting. Performance of Bill Fontana's piece for Boat Horn and wind players (3). Boat leaves for Darling St. Wharf, and berths waiting to pick up wind players. On board a toy piano interlude and another political song (4) by Warren Burt diverts attention from pause. Meanwhile Mermaids of Jacqui Carroll's Waterfront Decor are in transit by land to Long Nose Point.

Boat leaves Darling St. Wharf. Margret Roadknight sings accompanied by G.S. on banjo (5). Song ends just as boat approaches Long Nose Point.

(cont. next page)

There is another point to be made here, and that's about what I call a sense of 'radical amateurism.'

A student of mine, James Hullick, went to Germany to study with Karlheinz Stockhausen at his summer intensive composition course. Stockhausen is one of the world's great teachers. You do a two-week intensive with him and your life changes. Mine did in 1970. So did James' in 1998. However, Stockhausen has done a lot of music-theatre pieces in the past twenty years, and the criticism of the pieces in general is that the music is really professional, but the theatre is really amateurish. You know, the costumes are homemade, the dance is hokey, etc. etc. I've seen some videotapes of some of these pieces, and I thought that some of them were a little corny, but when James and I were talking on his return, I realized, "ah, it's not corny – it's amateur in the best sense in that it's homemade." Then I had this real flash of insight, which may be totally wrong, but I'm willing to go with it and see how it develops. It's this: musical serialism – all of it, from Schoenberg's first efforts in the 1920s up to the present day – is homemade. It's very amateurish. A lot of psycho-acoustic research has been done in the past twenty years that has repudiated the structural bases of serialism – the work says things like, the human ear does not work that way, serialism works against the nature of human hearing, etc. etc. Anyway, my response to all that research is bunco. For me, serialism is interesting precisely BECAUSE it is written AGAINST so-called common-sense ways of hearing. So I think that serialism was a homemade structure, in much the same way that Harry Partch's wonderful homemade musical instruments were a homemade structure, and I think if we understand Stockhausen as an example of the essential homemade composer, then the amateur theatre fits in perfectly.

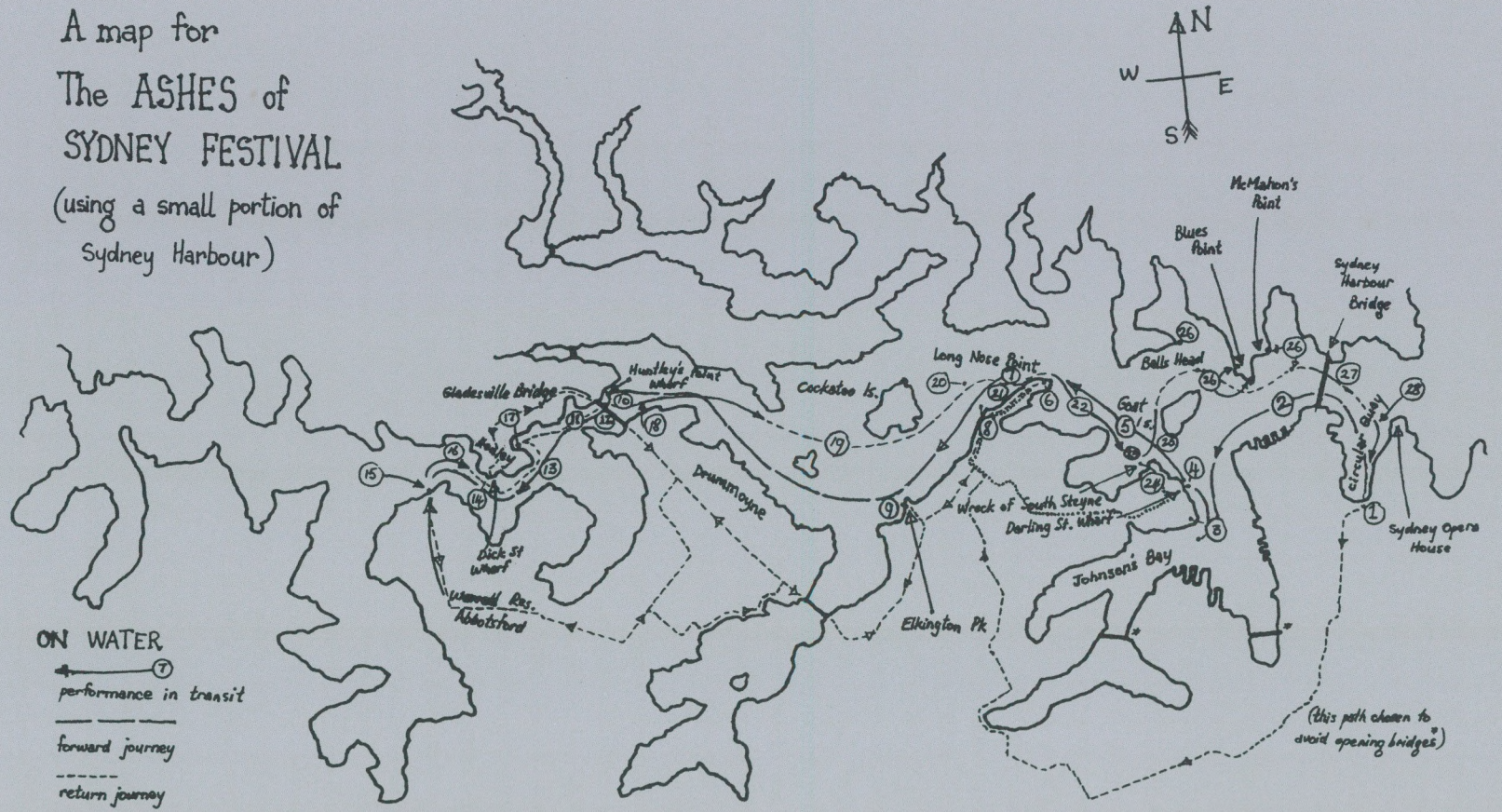
I just read an article by my friend James Harley, a Canadian composer living in L.A., about Richard Barrett, an English composer living in Amsterdam. He was talking about Barrett's aesthetic as being one of failure, that the pieces are failures, and he's consciously promoting a sense of failure, deriving from Samuel Beckett more than from purely musical sources, and I thought that that made sense. To me, there is in all of the avant-garde arts, a sense of amateurism, a sense of homemadeness, a sense of 'do-it-yourself,' which is very much opposed to the slick production values of the Australian Ballet or Hollywood cinema. One of the best examples I know of this 'radical amateurism', which people always laugh about, but which I take as a very serious thing, was the Portsmouth Sinfonia in England in the '70s, a group of amateurs playing classical music badly. The result was hilarious, but it was also very serious – if you listened carefully there were all sorts of interesting things happening in their music. At the time, in the early '70s, I was a member of a similar group in California, called Fatty Acid. We were a trio of violin, mandolin and accordion, with an occasional clarinet added. We played the popular classics, but we were more highbrow than the Portsmouth Sinfonia. They played Beethoven, we played Wagner.

LD (laughter) On violin, mandolin, and...

WB And accordion, yes. With the *Rite of Spring*, by Stravinsky, we added a clarinet and did some multitracking, but basically, violin, mandolin and accordion was our trio. What we said at the time, with our tongues firmly in our cheek, but with our critical theory firmly in place, was that we were the contemporary continuation of neo-Classicism, the movement that Stravinsky, Satie, and Ravel had been so much

A map for The ASHES of SYDNEY FESTIVAL

(using a small portion of Sydney Harbour)



involved in setting up. In the neoclassicism of the 1920s, an object from the past, such as a piece by Bach or Handel, was put through the distorting lens of your own technique, and a new, relevant, contemporary piece was created. Stravinsky's case with *Pulcinella* is the classic example. He composed right on top of photostats of the scores – which were early 18th century scores attributed at that time to Pergolesi, an Italian baroque composer, revising them as if they were an earlier work of his own. And through the distorting lens of his technique the Pergolesi scores emerged as a piece by Stravinsky, a new work. (It's interesting to note that Stravinsky only abandoned his neo-Classicism after 1951. After this time, he began composing with Schoenberg's serial technique. Schoenberg died in 1951, by the way, so at that point he became just another part of history, and it's curious that it was only after Schoenberg was a part of history that Stravinsky felt he could use his ideas.)

We felt we were continuing neo-Classical thinking with our incompetence. Remember, these are three boys in Southern California, just down the road from L.A. where Schoenberg and Stravinsky had lived in the '30s, '40, and '50s, and so we were continuing the tradition of taking objects from the past and putting them through the distorting lens of our technique and producing new objects. Our technique happened to be incompetence; Stravinsky's happened to be his studies with Rimsky-Korsakov, but still, the idea of technique as a distorting filter was similar. And it was at about this time that Ron Nagorcka, who was also in San Diego then, came up with the statement, "The very essence of electronic media is distortion." No matter how you record the Cleveland Symphony and put it on a record, it's still a recording. You're distorting the social occasion of the concert, you're distorting the music, its sense of spatial reality, etc. and therefore, what we WANT to do with technology is to actually produce those distortions. So much of electronic music of that period, including the whole cassette recorder movement, also shared that sense of the desirability of distortion.

There have been several books written about the international cassette recorder movement of the early '80s, such as the very wonderful *Cassette Mythos*, edited by Robin James, but nearly all of them overlook what went on in Australia during the period of the mid-'70s, where the ideas of cassette culture were already developed fully. Ron Nagorcka was one of the key figures in that development. And so that was another example of neo-Classical technique; with crummy little cassette recorders, we took material from the past or the real world and put it through a distorting lens and came up with a unique object. And just like serialism, these were radical amateur activities. I think critics have not understood this. In fact, they've gotten in the way of these ideas being understood. I'll just single one out, with no malice at all – my friend Richard Toop in Sydney has written many valuable articles for reputable musicology journals. Now as valuable as these articles are, perhaps they lend to the work a patina of professionalism that in the coming years we will see was not really justified. (Parenthetically, I might mention that one of the logical outcomes of my idea that much of new music is radically amateur would be that it's not really suited for performance by that most professional of organizations, the symphony orchestra. I mean, even composers as professional as Xenakis, Cage and Babbitt may have at the core of their music a radically amateur, 'do-it-yourself' nature that is absolutely opposed to the professionalism of the orchestra. A radically amateur art is not designed to be a commodity; the orchestra as it exists, can ONLY be a commodity, and

Once again Waterfront Decor (6). Attention diverted to shore.

Meanwhile Car Vine sets up Drone Piece (7) on his own electronic instruments. Piece continues in transit past Cockatoo Island with a few further visual intrusions from the shore as the boat cruises past Elkington Park, and the mermaids make yet another appearance, on a small wharf (8) and on a cliff (9). While the boat is in transit Jacqui Carroll's Mermaids are in transit and Bruce Keller and Steve Champion are driving on land to Huntley's Point.

Carl Vine's Drone piece ends as boat approaches Huntley's Point. Darkness falls and the stage lamps are then used to light on shore performances. Bruce Keller & Co haven't arrived so boat pauses under Gladesville Bridge with its half-mile concrete arch, sustaining some long boat horn sounds (10). (The echos are quite long with a slow decay.) The boat then spots the two performers on Huntley's Pt. and berths to take them on board.

Performance in transit past Henley towards Abbotsford, Carl Vine (ocarina) and G.S. (banjo) (11), plus a tape of Nick Lyons (12). Then two Pierrot characters who just boarded ship begin their poetry readings (13) which carries on through tea. Deliberately the poems consisted of appalling verse & doggerel.

Meanwhile boat passes more Waterfront Decor (14) on Dick St. Wharf in Henley, this time in spot light & the Mermaids make their final appearance.

Tea is served while the boat moored off Abbosford at Werrell Reserve. As after dinner music Bill Fontana's piece for Japanese handbells and portable sine — wave oscillators performed on board in darkness.(15)

Boat leaves Abbotsford. Marg Roadknight sings with accompaniment from Nick Lyons, Steve Dunstan, Carl Vine and Marjorie Maydwell, in transit to Henley (16).

Film projected onto boat shed out in the middle of the water, the waterfront residence of Arthur Spring. Event staged by Martin Wesley-Smith, Adrian Keenan, and other members of Watt from the Conservatorium. Film made under water by George Gittoes, and simultaneously, George in the harbour wearing a wet suit in a shark proof net sings underwater into a hydrophone, which is input to the electronic music system operated by Watt. (17).

Boat continued on return journey. Marg Roadknight sings again (18). Marjorie plays first public performance of my piano piece Iconophony I (on harp) (19). Boat heads past Cockatoo Island, picking a small boat in the harbour on which a silent performance is staged. Conceived by Bruce Keller who stands at the head of the boat in a monk's habit complete with cowl, holding a lantern, the boat is rowed by a figure with an asses head (John Nobbo) and at the rear, the bride with her veil flowing twelve feet into the water! (Jacqui Carroll) (20).

Boat approaches Long Nose Pt. The audience then performing (in darkness on board) a Popping piece by G.S. (21). Steve Dunstan & Phil Connor alight for a performance on the wreck of the South Steyne, and old ferry destroyed by fire.

Performance in transit to South Steyne, by Carl Vine, Anthea Stutchbury & G.S., of an Ocarina trio by Carl Vine (22). Vocal improvisation also by Warren Burt (23).

Steve Dunstan's piece on South Steyne on his own electronic instruments. (24). Warren Burt does Stalin Speeches as boat departs. (25).

Boat heads to Ball's Head to begin performance of Nan Hassalls Flag dance (26). (cf. note by Nan). (This performance stretches on shore for about 1½ miles.) Lighting done with marine flares.

Ernie Gallagher plays 1812 Overture on the piano as boat heads toward Opera House (27). Simulates Cannons by saying "Bang".

Warren Burt & G.S. give reprise performance of W.B's song "Great Art", with a surprise contribution from magician Bob Peacock (28).

Boat berths at Circular Quay.

What the concert meant was not adequately summed up by those critics who came. Jill Sykes came closest by saying it oscillated "between boredom and hyper-activity." David Ahern had reservations about the casual combinations of the serious and the foolish in the program.

However what I think it meant — the performing arts situation among the people trying to establish themselves in that field doesn't have to be survival of the fittest. People can be made to contribute without a sense of rivalry. Ideas, not funding, is the most necessary ingredient for a new deal for the performing arts in Australia. This is the way to interest the public. Funding is necessary only for the survival of the performing participants and their work. But a stimulating idea with a little effort can become public property.

Look, that about sums it up. Enclosed is a map of the concert. I hope it offsets the verbal weight of this letter.

I'll be in touch soon.

Regards,

Greg Schiemer.

Dear Greg,

The simplest way I can think of doing this piece follows. The rehearsal with Lib went really well last night and the flares are no problem. I can't see that it's possible to have Mark on the ferry for 4 hours with no place to sleep . . . so it might be best if I just come to McMahon's Point near the appointed time to do the performance. I can leave Mark with my mother & Eva can hold the flare for me. This means Libby will be on the boat. Here is the map in order of the piece. I would really love to be picked up after the piece if it's possible but don't tear your hair out about it.

—Nan

a land sea manoeuvre, sharks with the mermaids

so there's an essential contradiction in the very act of writing for the orchestra. This doesn't mean, however, that it's not worth trying, just that using the inflexible beast that the orchestra is is fraught with daunting musical, sociological and political contradictions. It may be that it's only at places like Cubitt St., or at Linden, or at Dancehouse, where that sort of radical amateurism can actually thrive and survive.)

LD John Berger writes about this issue in his 1980 essay "The Primitive and the Professional" He makes the point that the 'primitive' artist (your term would perhaps be 'the radical amateur') refuses the conventions of professional practice because she understands that it cannot speak her interests. She recognises that her experience cannot be rendered in the language or terms of the given tradition.

WB In Berger's article he mentions Grandma Moses. Where I grew up in the States, she was the local famous artist. A couple of years ago, I saw an article about her – her sketch books had just been published, and they were filled with collages, things cut out from magazines and put together with an almost Picasso-like sense of construction and trying again and again until she got just the right composition with the perspective distorted in the best naive way, and then she painted from that. And so she's an amateur, but she is amateur like Rousseau, like Erik Satie, or Harry Partch, whom that amateur charge was also thrown at. These are people who know the scene very well and know what they want to do, and know that there was no place for them inside the professional scene. Melbourne had a good example of that in Syd Clayton (1939–1994). Those of us that knew him knew he was brilliant, but he never tried to promote his work, he just did it at La Mama.

• • • • •

WB Well, let's sum up what we've covered so far. We've talked about the experimental nature of the work, the fact that it WAS experimental, we've talked about the whole idea of the radically amateur, and we've talked about the role of publicity and critique in the work. In hindsight, I can say that it might have been nice to have had a writer on the level of a Deborah Jowitt or a Tom Johnson working here, but there simply wasn't a media outlet for work of that calibre here at that time. Tom Johnson's *The Voice of New Music*, published by Apollohuis in Holland (which has also just had ITS budget cut), is a wonderful example of what good writing about a developing scene (in this case, the birth of New York musical minimalism) can be, but without writing of his quality, I prefer, as I said earlier, to have no writing at all.
The problem with the academic critique mob is, as I said, they're generally ten years behind the issues. For example, last year I received a request from a Sydney academic to answer a questionnaire (at this late date, 15 years after the event!) about minimalism. The questions, in essence, added up to: "As an Australian who is a minimalist composer which overseas composers do you imitate?"

LD What an extraordinary question!

WB Yes, there are all sorts of unfortunate things implied there. I just had to write to the person and say, "I'm sorry, but I was involved on the ground floor of that

WOMEN'S WORK DONE

Women's Work.
Sept. 8. All day.
R.M.I.T. Demolition site.
Performed by Alison Richards.

I wanted to start at one of the limits where existence becomes performance. An image of somebody's day — nobody's in particular. Like a real life. A day spent at home, with a restricted number of actions possible and endless time to perform them; one whole day of my real life.

I wanted the picture sharp and economical. If people stopped, looked, and came back later, I'd still be doing something — cleaning up, pottering around, watching the TV or reading the *Women's Weekly*, doing my hair or making cups of tea. A series of slightly different moving images, overlapping time and space.

I deliberately avoided interpretation in performance. The piece itself was designed to provoke observation and response; I wanted to leave as much room as possible for individual reaction.

WHAT HAPPENED

It's very cold. People stare, come up and start asking questions. At first I respond in character, or stay silent, but they're dissatisfied. They want to know why, they want contact, they want to have their ideas confirmed. I talk to them, politely.

People bring me an orange, some sandwiches, a windcheater to put on under my dressing gown, they stay to have cups of tea.

I watch the TV. *Humphrey Bear*, daytime shows. Endless showbiz personalities, from Engelbert Humperdinck to Laurence Olivier. People watching me watching actors talking about themselves. Actors need to be understood, they need to be loved, they say. I do some more sweeping.

People come to take photographs, to draw. Someone yells, 'Why don't you get a job?' I'd been vaguely concerned about getting bored, or overdoing my actions in an anxious attempt to 'be interesting', but concentration deepens as the day goes on. The cleaning women understand. 'Still there?' they call, shaking their heads.

In the afternoon, people begin to walk faster. They're going home. Fewer people stop, they just glance and go on. The last group of visitors leaves at about 6. I'd intended to light a ring of candles after dark to finally define the space, but the wind's too strong. The men come with the taxi truck, and the day's over.

'Women's Work' was part of the RMIT Union Arts programme 'The Exchange'.

—Alison Richards.

movement, you know. And the three or four American names that you mentioned were only part of an international gang back then. That they actually became the prominent exponents of minimalism is as much an accident of history and promotion as anything else.

Another example of this kind of thinking: I remember doing a performance piece in Melbourne in '79, and a local curator came up to me afterwards and said, "Oh, I didn't know you did that Laurie Anderson stuff!" and I replied, humorously, "No, no! Laurie Anderson is doing that Warren Burt stuff!" Which, in fact, was just as untrue. What was true was that all over the world there were a whole bunch of us fooling around with various ideas of multimedial performance. And this is again about the publicity power of the rock 'n' roll and/or the visual arts worlds. Laurie had gotten publicity in the visual arts world, and so therefore an Australian curator seeing someone in Melbourne in '79 doing a piece like that, someone coming out of the same scene, with the same lineage at the same time, assumed that the Melbourne person was an imitator of the New York person. This is an example of a cultural imperialism which is willfully adopted, rather than one that is imposed from the outside.

Which is not to minimalise the enormous forces of cultural imperialism that are at work on us in Australia everyday. Australian commercial TV, for example, is completely American controlled. The tragedy in this particular case was that it took an American emigre into Australia in the late '70s – one who was frequently accused of being an agent of cultural imperialism – to point out to Australians that in non-commercial areas, they were culturally imperialising themselves.

There is this wonderful political cartoon by American cartoonist Tom Tomorrow. His main character is a talking penguin, and in one of his cartoons he has the penguin talk about U.S. atrocities in Guatemala that were not reported in the mainstream press, and the final panel is this little penguin looking out at the audience and saying "You know what the biggest tragedy of this is? The biggest tragedy is that you had to find out about this from a talking penguin in a comic strip!" And that's the way I felt when that curator made that comment.

But this happens everywhere, not just in Australia. I'll give you another example. I was introduced to Reinhard Oelshlagel, who is a very brilliant German musicologist. He promoted Cage's work for years, he's got an incredibly brilliant mind, and even he was not immune to it. He said, "So play me some of your Australian music." I played him three pieces. To the first he said, "Oh, you're imitating Robert Ashley." "No", I replied, "though Bob is a good friend." To the second he said, "Oh, you're imitating La Monte Young." Again, I assured him that this was not the case. To the third he said, "Oh, you're imitating Brian Ferneyhough." I assured him that at the time of writing that piece, I hadn't even heard of Brian. At the end of this, his question was, "I don't understand. Being in Australia must be like being in Norway. You are so far from the centre, you must be imitating someone." And I had to point out to him that I wasn't far from the centre; that as far as I was concerned the Monarch Cake Shop on Acland St. was "the centre," and that, to me, Koln was a peripheral scene. He was actually a bit offended by my attitude, but in spite of this, we did eventually become quite friendly.

Basically, I feel that we're back in a medieval cultural setting, where there is not ONE centre, but there are many centres. (Actually, capitalism is certainly advancing to a

This issue of *Writings on Dance* contains reflections by a number of Australian artists on their encounters with the broader international currents of aesthetic modernism. These reflections constitute a kind of debate in personal, local and national terms, around questions of the place of, and the possibilities of access to, the modernist heritage in the Australian context.

Across the arts, the late 1960s and 1970s was a period of intense activity and discussion around these issues. In dance Jaap Flier, founder of Netherlands Dance Theatre, and the group Dance Exchange formed by Russell Dumas, Nanette Hassall, and Eva Karczag, played an important role in introducing the particular practice of aesthetic modernism known as post-modern dance to Australia. However, as the following conversation reveals, Flier, a dancer steeped in the European classical and American modern dance traditions, found his search for an audience for new dance work in Australia unrewarding.

state of medieval feudalism with all these multinational corporations beholden to no government and no people, but that's another issue.) For example, I just spent eleven weeks in the States, and I felt that what my colleagues in San Francisco were doing was more adventurous than what my friends were doing in New York. And I regret not hearing what my friends in Boston, Minneapolis or Seattle were doing on this trip. (Not to mention the European, New Zealand or Asian colleagues, but I guess those are for other trips!) So a many centred... (sung to the tune of "Love is a Many-Splendored Thing") Arrrrrrtttt... is a Many-Centred Thinnnnnnnng! (laughter)

LD For dance artists though the question of access to work, of direct experience of embodied traditions, is a real issue. This question of body to body transmission is perhaps not so crucial or so problematic in other areas of practice.

WB Well, I actually agree with that view to a certain extent. With rare exceptions, being in a world wide situation, it's really necessary to travel, to experience your colleagues in other places. (This is probably the upside of globalisation which I acknowledge has many, many dark sides.) Even if you have a negative experience, travel is necessary. One young composer was sending me emails from Holland saying "Is it just me, or is the music in Holland less interesting than in Melbourne?" And I emailed her back, saying, "Well, they're dealing with different issues there, so find out the issues that excite them and see how they're working through them." And she did that, and was still disappointed. But I think it's really essential to have that 'out-of-town' experience, otherwise I wouldn't have said to my student, "Yes, spend two thousand dollars and go sit at Stockhausen's feet for two weeks and learn all you can." And so I think you are right about embodiment. In other fields, in other body disciplines, this is also true. All those people that went over last July and worked with Joan Skinner in Seattle, all those people that go to the Alexander School in Melbourne, or some other school. You're right, certain sorts of body dynamics can only be passed on in the hands-on way, body to body.
However, to then criticise other people's aesthetic decisions, which are made fully consciously, on the basis that they haven't had that body-to-body contact, is, I feel, an error in judgment. SOME post-modern ideas have to be communicated on a body-to-body basis, which is why people go overseas to study. On the other hand, a LOT of post-modern ideas were conceptual ideas, and those ideas do not require an embodiment, they require something clicking in the mind, and then movement happening as a result of that, and to criticise THOSE kinds of practices because they lack a sense of embodiment is to miss the point rather magnificently. As Chris Mann says, "You're stuffed. Not because you're wrong, but because you're looking in the wrong direction."

LD Well, Australian dance culture continues to be deeply inflected (and I would argue, constrained) by ballet. The tradition of classical ballet is very powerful; that form of embodiment is not easily countered or supplanted and at times I have thought it might be better if we could somehow situate new dance practices within some broader arena. The appellation 'dance' still suggests an extremely narrow frame of reference, governed by classical paradigms and this is not very productive.

WB Yeah, yeah, well for example, the work I saw at the Theatre of the Ordinary, in the 1997/98 Year of Fridays project was as much based in acting and in music and in

Jaap Flier

Modern dance in Adelaide and Sydney

Recollections by Jaap Flier with Eleanor Brickhill and Paul McGillick

December 1997

Photo: Sally Gardner

Jaap Flier's experience of and perspective on the Australian dance environment during his time here can perhaps be understood in terms of Australia's very limited access to the modernist heritage in dance. Australia's isolation and lack of awareness of modern dance at the time is starkly indicated by the fact that none of the seminal, defining modern dance artists such as Graham, Humphrey, Wigman, Horton, Limon, Tamiris, or others had ever visited Australia.

The following conversation took place while Flier was in Sydney late in 1997 to renew his working relationship with Russell Dumas and to perform in Dumas' *Cargo Cult* at The Performance Space. Flier's interlocutors are Eleanor Brickhill who was a dancer with The Dance Company (NSW) when Flier was its director, and Paul McGillick who, with his brother Tony, ran Sydney's Central Street Gallery – a haven for experimental practice across the arts throughout the 1970s.

experimental poetry as it was in dance. A number of my more conservative composer friends would come along and see one event and be bewildered, because I wasn't doing music.

Also in Australia, we've had the birth of the 'sound art culture.' It's happened world wide, but it's been especially intense here. People have been saying, "I don't do music, I do sound art." This is the same thing that you're talking about in dance. It's a linguistic oppression you take on yourself. People see this thing called 'music' and this creature called 'the composer' and they say, "No, I'm not a part of that. There is a certain level of pretension there; there is a social world I'm not a part of. Therefore, I'm going to use another term for what I do, to describe my different scene." That term is sound-art, so when people say, "That's not music," one can reply by saying, "That's right, it's sound art." People can't quarrel with that. And it's the same thing – there's this dance establishment and you're oppressed by that, so you say, "I'm not dance, I'm a performative tradition" or whatever. As opposed to biting the bullet and saying, "No, what I'm doing is dance, goddammit, and you'd bloody well better accept it!"

So I see those as self-adopted oppressions. Although I must say that I'm probably a bad person to talk about this, because my dance world in Melbourne is exclusively Theatre of the Ordinary, Dancehouse, Cecil St Studio, Extensions when it was existing, and my friends who are independent choreographers, and what's going on out at Footscray. That's my entire dance world. I'm not oppressed by the Australian Ballet, because I've never been to it. Even Graeme Murphy's work I've only seen once – *Vast* in 1988, of which I found the sixty-part canon that opens the work extremely beautiful. But even Graeme's work is outside my normal purview of dance. As a kid, I saw the New York City Ballet every season – by the time I got out of high school, I'd seen all the Stravinsky-Balanchine collaborations, but by the time I was in grad school at San Diego in the early '70s, my dancer colleagues were all post-modernists, and I never looked back to ballet at all.

LD You have an ongoing working relationship with Eva Karczag which began back in the mid '70s. Could you talk a little about that now? As I recall, in that period Eva's relationship to structuralist or analytic approaches to choreography was somewhat vexed. She was an astoundingly proficient dancer but the choreographic role, as it was traditionally conceived, required a kind of detachment and authority which did not match her disposition. Neither did it support her dance interests. The early Dance Exchange concerts encompasssed quite diverse choreographic interests and strategies, though, if reviews are anything to go by, that diversity may not have been apparent to audiences then. I'm thinking particularly of the contrast between Eva's interest in improvisational process and the more analytic problem-solving approach of Nanette Hassall.

WB Yep. The difference between my working relationship with Eva and my working relationship with Nan, having worked with both of them, is that with Eva we developed this really collaborative relationship where ideas are tossed back and forth and we developed a really easy way of being with each other. With Nan it was a very autocratic relationship – she knew precisely what she wanted, and I was the composer who was providing her with material, or I was one of a number of content providers within her structure. I had a very cordial, friendly relationship with Nan, but it shows the big difference between the two. It's also important to consider the fact that Eva

Flier My first contact with Australia was in 1971, when we came here with Netherlands Dance Theatre, and I met people from the Australian Dance Theatre. That was the only contact I had had so far with contemporary Australian dance. I knew the Australian Ballet from Peggy Van Praagh, and I was there because we needed some dancers. We invited two Australian dancers to the Dance Theatre, Rosalind Anderson and Don Asker. That was my only contact with Australian dance. I also met Elizabeth Dalman on that visit, and she invited me to Adelaide, to look at the company. My impression was that it was a company with very dedicated people, but who were actually not up to the way I thought dancers should be. **McGillick** Was this an attitudinal thing, or a technical problem? **Flier** That was a technical problem. The dancers, I liked as people and they were quite dedicated to Liz. I was also attracted by the fact that Liz seemed to have a lot of freedom to do what she wanted. But I have to say that I disliked the repertoire I saw, which was Eleo Pomare, an American choreographer, and her own work. I had to leave Netherlands Dance Theatre in 1972, and Liz, who was then in Holland, approached me. She seemed to know that I was leaving, and she asked me whether I could come to Australia, because she said she felt that she needed help to develop the company. She had seen NDT of which I was then the artistic director. She was very impressed and thought that this was a chance for her to ask me as a co-artistic director. **McGillick** But you'd already formed an opinion about the existing repertoire from having seen it in 1971?

Flier Definitely. Because when my wife, Willy, asked me why we should go to Australia, I said to her, well, you will see, there's a lot of work to do. I had of course been very much influenced by the aims of Nederlands Dance Theatre which were to make a bridge between contemporary dance and the public – to introduce more established contemporary works, and meanwhile, to try to let the company research and develop its own way of movement. That was in 1972. I started with asking people to make their own work, and I myself had the possibility to do work I couldn't have done at Netherlands Dance Theatre. I could research my own work more. I started to do work, but what I liked was that there was an openness towards new information, and the people did understand that they needed change. And actually I believe that Liz Dalman understood that too. That's why she asked me. So, from my classical background, and the information I had gained through thirty years of dancing – I consider myself something of a dance history book – and being able to process that information through my historical understanding I felt I could bring something to the company, bring it into another mode of thinking.

I introduced a lot of new pieces. I made *Hi Kyo* which explored the possibilities of dimension. I had a square full of ropes, very full, thick like a forest, so that the movement could move on many levels and so give the stage another perspective. Russell Dumas made a work, and he was already on the path to where he has developed now: factual, direct, and in a way where there were no compromises. So, the dancers were informed by these new entrances into their company. I wouldn't say that my work was new, because as I've said

went so much into improvisation, but Nan's work, although there may be improvisatory elements in it, is always very structured. Also, consider that Nan came out of the Merce Cunningham environment, but Eva went into Trisha Brown's company to get a sense of structure that she felt she lacked, and that when she had that, she left Trisha's company. I look upon my working relationship with those two choreographers as a sort of paradigm of the differences between them and their attitudes to structure.

It was interesting from a musical-structural point of view, being in New York and watching Trisha Brown's work developing in the late seventies. It was very curious for me that Trisha at that point was working with composers like Robert Ashley and Laurie Anderson, who were the archetypes of what came to be later known as musical post-modernism and post-minimalism. It was very curious because, to me, what Trisha was doing was much more in line with the intense structuralism of someone like Milton Babbitt, who was regarded, at that time, antithetical to the interests of the musicians she was working with. Which is not to say that I didn't thoroughly enjoy her work, just that I felt it expressed, for me, a real structural contradiction.

Three: 'De-orbit Burn' at Judson Church

LD You've recently returned from the US and from performing with Eva Karczag and Chris Mann in the Seventh Annual New York Improvisation Festival. I've heard very positive things about that festival.

WB I had real good feelings about the organizers, the space, and the energy behind the festival even though I was only in one event. All the people we worked with were competent, enthusiastic, and helpful. It was a big audience; it filled the Judson Church. I'm guessing now, but I think it was about four hundred people. And it seemed like there was good audience energy because of the fact that it had been going for seven years. This year there was also quite a sad added focus in that the festival was dedicated to the memory of Nancy Topf. There was quite a lot of feeling about Nancy from all the people she had taught and worked with – which was basically everyone who knew they had a psoas muscle! – and so that gave the festival, like I say, a very sad added focus.

I've also heard good things about the festival from the other Australians who preceded us in earlier years. Trotman and Morrish liked playing there, Five Square Meters felt they were well received, and there was an incredibly warm response to what Eva, Chris and I did. So, yeah, I think it's a very nice open event and it's not, say, just New York looking at its navel. In this year's festival there were people from other parts of the US, us Australians, and a group from England. I think they had a very small budget so they can do maybe one foreign event a year. Certainly the $80 bucks US I got paid doesn't indicate a large budget.

LD How was your project set up?

WB Okay, so we started emailing and Eva said the title of it was *De-Orbit Burn*. The metaphor Eva had for that was that when you have a satellite in orbit, it fires its rockets to come down; after it fires its rockets, it's in free-fall, it has no control, it just plunges through the atmosphere, and until it hits enough atmosphere for its

already I'm a kind of historical dance book. I have always run after the facts. I was never before the facts. And we introduced Cliff Coitre from America. I think the company was very strongly influenced by the Americans, not so much the Judson Church but more from people like Louis Falco, and the young choreographers who came from Limon, who came from those kinds of companies, and went into their own research. And then Liz said she would like to have a sabbatical in New Guinea. She wanted to go to Papua, to confront a more primitive life and dance. And I could understand that. I think for her this was a very, very important source. I saw the implications of my directing the company in her absence and said to her, well, okay, when you come back a lot will have changed, along the lines that you have already seen. My wife had already worked very hard on the bodies of the dancers. We had some people who developed in a fantastic way, like Judith Haines, Michele Smith was incredible. Such dedication, such a beautiful dancer. Even people who were not so strongly qualified started to change. So we were quite enthusiastic. So I said to Liz, okay, but it will be changed. We started to make a program for schools, because there were not many performance opportunities, and Liz did a lot of educational work at that time. We made an open space program with four choreographers who were getting into experimental work. These were Russell Dumas, myself, Jeffrey Cichero, and Bob Beswick who came from the Alwin Nikolais company. We were trying to introduce these open space programs, not only as an educational program for the schools, but also as an experience in choreography, as experiences in understanding space, and experiences of understanding body aesthetics and trying to avoid stories, psychology. Because I think there's too much psychology in dance. So, there was quite a change, in the dancers as well as in the repertoire. It was all opened up. And I liked it actually, because I could experiment myself, you see. I could really explore possibilities with the dancers, and also with space, especially. That was the nice thing – I had the feeling that I had the kind of freedom, that people were so open, that you could try anything. Anything was possible, and anything was okay. What I missed was the critical point of view, that it was accepted as such. Actually for me, that period was wonderful. I didn't yet realise that acceptance came from what I later understood as a kind of lethargy. It was not a question that people didn't work. It was the problem of a critical looking at work. **McGillick** A complacency, perhaps? **Flier** Yes, that's the word, 'complacency'. **Brickhill** A sort of a naivety as well, I suppose. **Flier** Naivety towards dance. And so, you didn't have the feeling that you were pushing through something, that it was 'okay, mate'. Something like that. Although that's also something that has a positive side. But that shouldn't go on too long. **McGillick** How long was Liz Dalman away? **Flier** Half a year. And since we stayed there only for 1 to 2 years, it's quite a long time, percentage-wise. And actually, I felt the turning point of the company, when it started to work, was at that time. Liz saw all the changes. But I believe she never told me that she was shocked that such changes were possible. This is my version, only

parachutes to work, there is no control. It just has to free-fall through that particular period, and the de-orbit burn is the last time energy is put in, and then the satellite is purely at the will of gravity until it gets into the lower atmosphere. So she wanted to do a whole bunch of decays, a whole bunch of hurling yourself out there and watching where the energy went. So that was the image she had, and she said that she also wanted a lot of silence. And I said that that sounded good to me, and began thinking about sounds that each had some aspect of decay, some element of free-fall, about them. She also wanted Chris to be involved, and Chris had a text which was a whole bunch of one-liners, the longest any one would last would be around fifteen seconds. Two of these texts are:

Opportunity is a positivist. Cheap. Hygienic. A knowledge tax.
Stupidity the length. With string.

and

Meaning is experience. And defensive.
A private modeling of listening for the 'nonymous. Playing ing with chasey.
Explanation the ornament.
Pragmatically 'stract.

Around August, I proposed to her that I could also modify Chris's voice, and promptly forgot about having made that suggestion. Then I was travelling, and was out of email contact for three months, so when I emailed Eva to tell her what I had been doing, she replied that that wasn't what she wanted at all; she was thinking that I would mostly be modifying Chris's voice. So for me it was back to the drawing board. I had Chris phone me up from New York City – I was in upstate New York at my parent's place – and had him read his text over the phone and I taped a microphone to the telephone and made a very low quality recording of his voice. I then put that recording into the computer and boosted the hell out of it so that Chris's voice was audible, but of course there was a ton of noise on it. And here we get into radical amateurism again. Computers have all these wonderful noise reduction facilities now, and if you know how to use them, you can take almost any bad recording and clean it up superbly. But more importantly, if you know how to use them badly, you can take a bad recording and turn it into a legible, but incredibly distorted recording. The essence of electronic media is distortion. And so I distorted Chris's voice and we had twenty-three fragments from the fifty fragments of his text, and then I also used some of the electronic sounds I had made.

When we got together, it was the first time we had seen each other in months. It was noon on the day of the performance, and in a rehearsal studio, we tried out the ideas. I made the sounds with lots of silences between them, Chris read his text sporadically, and Eva moved. Eva wanted the piece to be twenty-eight minutes long, which sounded like a good length, so we did that, and at the end we talked about it and we all agreed that it felt a bit crowded. Then we did it again, and were much, much sparser, and although Eva was very jet-lagged, having only arrived from Holland the day before, we felt that it really worked well. We all had this sense of space, and we were playing off what each other was doing. I would watch Eva, for example, wait till she had one of her delicious tiny little movements and use that to trigger off one of the decaying sounds.

When we got into Judson Church Chris decided to bring his own huge sound system, and install it on the floor of the church so his voice could be heard really clearly. I

my subjective version. She wanted to reinstate some of the previous repertoire including Eleo Pomare, arguing that they were an important part of the history of the company. But I was not interested in doing that and – she was willing to go with me. But I believe she had a feeling that her company was taken out of her hands. I had warned her, but I can understand: she had made this company, she had made it out of her love. She had chosen those people she loved. She had let them grow into it. So, I can now understand all those things very well, because she must have also had quite a fight with herself.

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Flier When I was with Netherlands Dance Theatre, Peter Sculthorpe had been commissioned by the Australian Opera to compose an opera which I had been asked to direct. That was in the time when the Australian Opera still dared to ask Australian composers to compose Australian operas. I had said, I only want to do it with dancers – and that the singers would have, as far as the theatricality of the opera, not such an important part. The opera was called *Rites of Passage*, and was inspired by all kinds of rites, Aboriginal as well as African. So I had the possibility to concentrate in this opera totally on movement, but it meant also that the company was totally absorbed by this thing. It was an opera of 1½ hours. And that actually was the first full length, and the last full length ballet I made. So, we had to engage other dancers – Peter Lucas, Ian Spink, Jacqui Carroll. It meant that the normal repertoire had to stop. But it did bring a lot of money, and money was very important, as it still is, to do things. And the other thing is when I came an extra subsidy was given to Australian Dance Theatre. And I found out that the subsidy was travelling with me wherever I went in Australia. So, later, when I left, Australian Dance Theatre was suddenly without that money. So, the opera took a lot of time. It was wonderful because I was working with Russell. I was amazed that he stayed for such a long time. There, an incredible friendship seemed to start. If you have the possibility to have a dancer like this, then you have someone the others can look at to see how it should be, or how it can be, let me put it that way. But also, we worked a lot together, and he gave me a lot of information about choreography. So, he actually inspired me a lot, and that helped also with the opera piece. But, yes, I think the company was taken over from Liz, and out of her hands. So at a certain moment I had to decide what to do. I felt that Willy, who was rehearsal director, and who worked so hard on the quality of the repertoire and the dancing, was unhappy. **McGillick** What about the training you were doing while Liz Dalman was away. Did that continue when she came back? **Flier** Oh, yes. The dancers, at a certain moment, were very dedicated to her, but they had to make choices, and that's always difficult, especially when you're attached to someone. But finally, the choice was for us, actually. Because most of them went with us to Sydney when we were invited there to direct the Dance Company of New South Wales, when we decided to give it another try. But I must say, I found that we had less freedom than in

worked with the sound system in the ceiling of the church, which has a long echo and is very boomy, so we had a very different acoustic for our two sounds.

LD It's a large space?

WB A very large space, with a big vaulted ceiling. Before the show, we ran the opening twice, to see how Eva would come out, and how we would start. And when we did it, we left lots of space for each other. I remember in the performance using Eva as a trigger a lot, but once I was performing I was using a particular computer program where I had to look at the screen, so for those fifteen or twenty seconds I couldn't watch her, but once that sound was over, I went back to watching her. Also I was watching Chris who was seated something like fifteen metres away from me, and being very aware of his sense of phrasing and timing, so that he could say a few words, pause, then have a few more words, and in that pause I would throw in a fragment of a different one of his sentences. So we got all these little plays back and forth, and it seemed to work very well. It came out of a sense of being comfortable with each other and working on that good will of all those years of working together. And having a sense of each other's timing.

Adelaide. The board of directors were quite insistent on the program. They wanted to have quite a strong hand in the development of the company, and we had quite a strong fight, actually. **Brickhill** They already had an idea of what they wanted the programs to be? **Flier** Not so much that, but I wanted to introduce a different kind of repertoire, because to my mind the repertoire was quite commercial with Sue Musitz, the previous director. I had seen the company when I was in Australian Dance Theatre. And then I thought, well, to do it, to build this repertoire... Let me say that, fortunately, we can't escape from the American influence all over the world of dance, because I think, for Netherlands Dance Theatre also, it was such a resource. I think, in the beginning, Netherlands Dance Theatre wouldn't have existed without people like Anna Sokolov, Glen Tetley, John Butler. And that was in the 1960s, so that was quite a breakthrough. Because although they were well-known in America, they still belonged to the young generation of choreographers, who had themselves worked directly with Limon, Graham, Cunningham, Horton etc. etc. So that was a tremendous influence on Netherlands Dance Theatre, and made a big impact on how the company went. And that's what I tried here, also. I immediately introduced *Carmina Burana* of John Butler. We did his *Les Noces* with the orchestra and singers of the Opera. I started to introduce Glen Tetley, Anna Sokolov – old friends for me, but for the Australian public I think a new discovery. Also for the Australian dancers I think, new discoveries. Because being confronted with Anna Sokolov is not nothing. That's hard edge. Anyway, this is what we did. Russell had been away – I think that he went to Twyla Tharp in that time – but came back and joined the company again. But meanwhile was starting Dance Exchange. **Brickhill** 1976 was when Nanette started teaching Cunningham classes for the Dance Company, and Russell was there as well. But they were also doing performances outside of the company. **Flier** Yes, with Dance Exchange. They were doing contact improvisation and release work, and other things. **Brickhill** Down at the Police Boys Club. **Flier** They performed at Central Street, too. Nanette Hassall's first performances on returning to Australia were at Central Street, with Bill Fontana's music. Fontana also did a sound installation. Nanette helped organise the Merce Cunningham exhibition when he came out in 1976. **McGillick** Central Street was the place to get the latest hit of whatever it was – whether it was visual art, music. It was a melting pot, where everybody came and threw out ideas. And there was a lot of cross-disciplinary activity. So, musicians would come in and work with dancers, for example. Actually, in other ways, Central Street was not really suitable for dance – it had a concrete floor and two pillars in the middle. Seating was individual chairs, cushions, on the desk, on the stairs. **Brickhill** I know that Phillippa Cullen worked there a lot, and Helen Herbertson and Jacqui Carroll. I suppose there was a lot going on that the people in the Dance Company didn't know about at that time, like Central Street Gallery. **McGillick** Well, this was the avant garde. This was where the avant garde hung out. Anything that was really radical was done there, basically: art galleries were the place where things were happening. I think Frank Watters

Hi-Kyo in performance. Choreography Jaap Flier.
Dancers, Russell Dumas, Cheryl Stock

was another gallery which used to have concerts, and I think he might even have had a bit of dance. **Brickhill** In 1976, Merrily McCourt, Jacqui Carroll, Russell Dumas and I performed there. But what I think was interesting was the separation between say the Dance Company, and what else was going on. The people in the Dance Company were very insular – certainly when I got there. I thought everybody there was, and nobody took much notice of what else was going on. **Flier** Well, that was because of us. **Brickhill** How do you mean? **Flier** Because we wanted to develop a repertoire. There was a lot of training in order to confront people with new work like Nanette's and Russell's, and Willy's classical classes. **Brickhill** But what I also found interesting, because I only began dancing in the second half of '74, and I was learning it all together. Graham, Cunningham the next year with Nanette, all that release work, and ballet, all on top of each other with a little bit of separation. I could never work out why there was this real reaction against the Cunningham and new American stuff that Nanette brought in '76. Some people really hated it, just couldn't tolerate it. I could never work out why, because I'd studied all those ways of working simultaneously, so it was just another way of dancing, to me. But there was certainly that divide. **McGillick** It probably still goes on. And at that time, this was really the heyday of the avant garde, and there was very much a strong stand-off – particularly in this country – because the avant garde was something coming from Mars. **Brickhill** I don't quite understand that, because when I started dancing I knew about the avant garde, and I knew about the Dance Company, and to me they were all the same. **Flier** Well, a lot of people who were belonging to the avant garde were in The Dance Company. **Brickhill** Those people were there, but still there was a certain kind of divide. **McGillick** I was just talking generally, and I'm sure you're right about the dance scene. And I would guess, looking back, that the reason they did things at Central Street was that it was just a place where you could experiment. There was an opportunity to play around. **Brickhill** Yes, that's true, but there was still a sense that you couldn't do that in the Dance Company, although Ian Spink and Graham Watson did a lot of work didn't they? **Flier** Well, we were trying to open things up. But we missed a big chance, and that was when Russell, at a certain moment came to me and said, why don't you introduce the whole Dance Exchange into the company? Because it would give just the right push to what we are aiming for, and he thought that two companies would influence each other very strongly. And I said, well, I find it very interesting. I will put that to the board of directors. But, I said, I can imagine that there will be problems, because a company within a company will be very difficult to manage. He said, yes, but all the people from Dance Exchange will stay as Dance Exchange. I did like the idea incredibly. Especially because there were people who were researching, as we already have mentioned – Jacqui Carroll, Graham Watson, Ian Spink. So, it would have been a wonderful opportunity, but the board of directors immediately said, no. Actually I introduced Glen Tetley's *Circles* which he had done for Netherlands Dance Theatre. I think it was a very beautiful piece, and quite new, as an

Rites of Passage in performance. Choreography Jaap Flier.
Dancers, Ian Spink, Jacqui Carroll

approach to dance, because he introduced a lot of athletic kinds of movement. It was actually inspired by Berio's *Circles*, and the whole idea was the emotions between sporting people when they are in competition with each other. So, it was a very strong piece actually. But the board of directors, when they saw it, came to me and said, well, what can we do with this? Is this a ballet? Is this a dance? We can't give that to our audiences. And I had a lot of struggle there to keep continuing with *Circles*. Because for them, it was very new, and very different, while it was already a passed station in Europe.

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Flier It was at the Seymour Centre in 1976 that the company went along the lines I thought it had to go. That was with Nanette's piece, *Sanctuary*. It was a piece that took sound as a medium – with Bill Fontana's music – for Tibetan bells. And we were all sitting in the auditorium, along balconies, with bells, and we all had our own scores. You counted – 1, 2, 3, 4, and then you had to make certain sounds. **McGillick** I remember doing that, in fact, I had a bell, and I hit it at the wrong time. But that wouldn't worry Bill Fontana. That's a nice accident. **Flier** No, it didn't matter whether you were in time or not, as long as you kept counting. It had that possibility of change and shifts, and so on. That was also the piece. The whole piece was atmospheric, and it existed in little fragmented moments, and Nanette had placed it very beautifully in the space. But for this time, it was quite minimal, very minimal. And then I had asked Remy Charlip to come here. He made *Woolloomooloo Cuddle*, which was on the same program. **McGillick** What about thinking back to this period we were talking about. From my point of view, running this place at Central Street, it seemed to be quite a period of a lot of ideas and energy, and experimentalism. Would you perceive it that way? Did you have a sense that you were in a context where there was some energy, and people had ideas, and felt they had a licence to play with those ideas? **Brickhill** Certainly I did, but I think that was partly because I was just beginning myself. I was totally surrounded by these fantastic ideas. A lot of it was the Dance Company but also there was an awareness that there were other things going on outside that. Most of my awareness came from my training at Bodenweiser, Graham, Jacqui, Chrissie Koltai, Ross Coleman – for me, they were very exciting, because they were some of the first professionals. Some of them were in the company, and that was very exciting for me, and Helen Herbertson also. And they were around and doing things, even though I didn't see much of them. But they were teaching as well. And then I was aware of this big new idea, the Dance Company. I saw their programs, before you came, and because that was the first modern dance I'd ever seen I think, I really thought it was fantastic.

Flier I think that was the problem, you see. There were no references. So people could think that something incredibly important was happening.

Brickhill Well, it was for Australia. It was important for Sydney.

Flier That was my problem. On what level do you look at things? That was one

Jaap Flier working in the studio with Jacqui Carroll

of the reasons why I had to quit. Because the things which were happening, were a search. I had a feeling that it was all falling into a black hole, because there were no references. And like I said before, I did get more and more the feeling that there was a lot of dedication, but because there were no references, there was no competition. People were trying to work. But for me personally, and also for Russell, because we have talks about it, and also for my wife, it was like nothing really came from the ground. Although I wouldn't say that there was nothing happening in Australian terms, on the terms that I was brought up with, it was far below what I expected. **Brickhill** But you were the reference. Those two years that you were there provided a huge reference. You introduced us to all those choreographers that we got first hand experience working with. And that was just fantastic, not just for me, but for a lot of other people who were there at the time. **Flier** I hadn't seen it this way, but that's true. **Brickhill** Absolutely. Ian hadn't and Graham hadn't, and Jacqui wouldn't have, either. They might have gone away later, but they wouldn't have had it in Australia. And then Nan and Russell came, and it was just a huge amount of information. In the three years that I was in the Dance Company, the year after you, as well, and the six months before that, for me, that was an incredible time. But it is also a very subjective thing. **Flier** Yes, of course, I'm talking subjective. In a way I try to be objective. **Brickhill** And Willy, also, teaching ballet. **Flier** She had a lot of experience herself, and she had worked with those choreographers I worked with. So, yes, you start to have a whole different perception about dance. Of course, the influences from ballet were tremendous. Actually Netherlands Dance Theatre was one of the first companies, I think, in the world, which started to mix ballet with Graham technique, and other American influences – of John Butler, of Glen Tetley, of Anna, later on Louis Falco, etc etc. So, we had a lot of references to make, actually. When I talk about that black hole, it's not that I say that to be incredibly negative, but that these were the references we had, and we wanted to happen, and we wanted it to happen very quickly, you see. And maybe too quickly, I don't know. **Brickhill** I think also there may well have been a push from a very nationalistic streak, people wanting the dance in Australia to be 'Australian', whatever that means. And I think there might have been some aspect of that. People were very aware that it was European and American work. **McGillick** Yes, the problem of literacy or references was a problem also for the visual arts and music at the time, and I think it still is. This expression of Russell Dumas' – *Cargo Cult* – I think it's a very good term, and I threatened to steal it off him, actually. It's a very strange contradiction: on the one hand, there's this provincial nationalistic thing, that it must be ours, identifiable as ours. On the other hand, there's a sort of worship of things which come from far away. And I still don't quite understand how the two things get together, but they do, somehow. But you still have it here. And it's partly to do with geographical isolation that people will go away, say, visual artists will go away for a holiday, and they come back with a few ideas that they've just stolen from somewhere else. They're not really engaging with the points of reference, but

Residue Minimal

A millenial conversation with postmodern dance

by Alison Richards

I started my life as a theatre artist in Melbourne in the 1970s, so it is interesting to compare what I recall about the practice of that decade with current work and attitudes, to see what residue remains. There was a lot going on. My perspective and choices, and those of the people I worked with, were profoundly affected by the *zeitgeist* of a period that, for the Australia I grew up in, marked what Althusser called a *coupure epistèmologique*. It was the end of one order of things and the beginning of a series of cultural possibilities, many of which have now been absorbed in the horizon of the more or less ordinary and expected.

they're just taking the surface appearance of these ideas by bringing them back. And it's really cheating, actually. Russell has pointed out that we fly in jet planes from here to Europe in less than 24 hours by plane. That's how I went when I first went to Europe in '74. But prior to that, everybody went by boat, and it would take six weeks. And when you got there, you couldn't, when you got homesick, just turn round and come home. It was quite complicated. And Russell's theory in a sense is that you have to commit somehow. You have to actually engage with a place, and deal with it. But now, with jet planes, you can just fly over, and if you want to just come home the next day, you can. And I think it's an interesting theory, that one. **Brickhill** I think that a lot of people who went to Europe and America and England in the '70s for instance, or the '80s, they did engage with those places. Even though you could come back at the drop of a hat. I'm not quite sure about this coming and going business. **McGillick** I guess the key issue we're talking about here is about practice, isn't it? It's not the product as such. The provincial runs that risk always. He gets on the plane or the boat and sees a product, and brings the product back. But that's actually not the issue. The issue is the practice of how the product came to be what it is, and that's I think the problem for a provincial situation such as Australia, where you have a difficulty understanding the process. Because there's no reason why we shouldn't live here and produce work which is first rate. We don't have to get on planes every five minutes to do that. But what we do need to learn, though, is a process of work, a practice. Because that's what you seemed to be talking about, the problems you had with the actual practice which you wanted to introduce in Adelaide and then here, and you felt there was a certain kind of resistance. Or what we're now calling 'complacency'. **Brickhill** I can't dispute what Jaap's experience is, but I see it from a different angle, that's all, because I was one of the dancers. I just lapped it all up. I thought it was fantastic. But then I was only a beginner, and he's not talking about beginner dancers. He was confronted with a lot of beginners. **Flier** Well, that's how I felt. **Brickhill** Yes, what Jaap perhaps would have liked to have seen would have been dancers in their thirties, who had trained already in the way he wanted. That would have given you somewhere to start from. But that wasn't the case. **McGillick** If we talk about lack of compromise – the issue of compromise is part of a professional practice. And people who really make something good seem to understand this. They don't compromise. And that's what I mean about practice. It's an understanding which then becomes part of you, the way you work naturally. It takes years and years. **Brickhill** We certainly didn't know it in the '70s. We didn't know anything about that. Our practices were other people's techniques. We just worked with that, and we worked with that for a few years, and then were supposed to be 'fully fledged' dancers, and that was it. **Flier** Yes, you always have to confront yourself. So, anyway, that's why I'm here now. And that's why I have such difficulties. I'm telling this whole story, and I'm here struggling with the work of Russell Dumas. And why? Because I have a lot of references, but I also have to try to renew my

For the first time, it was possible for a generation of young people to contemplate a career in the arts, and to speak about themselves as artists, without feeling like exiles. I remember deciding *not* to make a career 'overseas', feeling committed to a new idea – that it was not only possible but important to do what one had to do, say what one had to say, here. There was a raw sense of pride in the new era, and in the distinctively Australian voice that was emerging in theatre, literature and the visual arts. Of course this pride was itself based in part on provincial smugness, on a lack of information about the part of the world we lived in, and on a certain lack of introspection about who, in consequence, 'we' might be. My world – and I suspect that of most of my cohort – remained essentially Eurocentric, and comfortably if 'radically' middle class. That early confidence has since given way to the realisation that this was not enough, that a more complex understanding of both Australia and its context was required. Above all, it now seems important to recognise differences within as well as beyond the island borders – and to acknowledge that a work of art can also begin a conversation with people who might not see us as we see ourselves.

Despite our enormous confidence, my generation of artists was well aware that real action was happening other places as well. We were still eager for news from the traditional northern capitals of culture. In fact, many of our antipodean experiments were derivative of, and dependent on, currents of thought in Europe and the United States, however much our cultural nationalism gave those currents a local spin. Significantly, the '70s also marked the first flush of 'global' telecommunications. Not long before, we had all sat up to watch the first live TV broadcast by satellite, with the Beatles beamed from Swinging Britain singing 'All You Need Is Love'. Gradually the world expanded from a horizon bounded by London, Paris and New York to include places and histories of which we were either completely ignorant, or used to thinking of as exotic, foreign, even 'primitive'. The Cultural Revolution in China, the Vietnam War, the liberation struggles of South America, all served to remind us that this was a century in which previously established structures of power were undergoing massive change, a process in which we in Australia were deeply enmeshed, despite our perceived isolation.

As an artist, I was energised by a mix of political conviction and the excitement of new perspectives on the fundamentals of composition. Our bodies became the site for new means of expression, simply by doing things simply. I was drawn to the theatre both as a space to move and as a platform for ideas, attracted to the simplicity and directness of popular theatre and cabaret, and engaged by the risk and physicality of improvisation. I also began a conversation with contemporary dance, a conversation centred around the body that continues to work deep and long within me. I have to acknowledge that there is now, apart from certain teaching techniques, only a minimal residue in my concerns and ways of working that would bear a recognisable relation to the currents of dance specific to the 1970s. My practice is still centred on the body, but focused on the exploration of disjunctures – between gaze and sensation, between sound and sense, between movement and language, between form and the creation of meaning, between one modality or culture and another. There is, however, a surprising consistency in the trajectory of thinking and exploration that sparked my encounter with practitioners of modern and post-modern dance, together with traces that

vision, my experiences, in order to go on in a way that I think is necessary to those established things I've built up in nearly 45 years. To undo it, and then with what I have to start to find other sources to continue. This is a continuous process, and actually, it doesn't matter where that happens. I am now here in Australia, for instance. **McGillick** In fact, you could argue that a provincial situation is an advantage. If your practice is strong.

Flier Now, if you have people who have an aim or an idea of what they want to do, yes. **McGillick** I'm using the word 'provincial' loosely, but to get away from a big metropolitan centre is often an advantage, whether you're a dancer or a painter or a writer, because somehow you distance yourself from all that frenetic activity of a big city... Why did you leave, ultimately?

Flier Well, I had two reasons, but the most important reason for me was that I was not getting anywhere. For instance, – this is what I started to tell you earlier – we had made what I think was for Australia quite an important program which was performed four times in the Seymour Centre. This was the end of 1976. We had a lot of support from Mary Emery and Jill Sykes, but it was over after four performances, and to our mind, nothing had happened. Nothing had happened. But the company was really progressing. Like I say, Nanette was making work, Remy Charlip came with his Airmail dances. Ian was making work, and Graham was making work. We had Glen Tetley's *Pierrot Lunaire*, which I think is a masterpiece. The program – actually it was two programs, I think – was a combination of new work and work that had already been made. We had that season at the Seymour Centre. We had that program... and we didn't go on tour with it, we couldn't present it anywhere else. The public interest in the company was actually very small. That was where my board of directors started to complain. Not that they wanted me to leave. It was our choice, Willy's and my choice. But yes, that was the reason, actually: we felt, 'So, what?' You have worked with a company, you have worked with dancers who are willing to work with you, who are progressing all the time, you have tried to introduce Australian choreographers into a programme that is a mixture of established pieces and new work. So, you're trying again to make those bridges. And yet, we had in total two programs of eight performances, and then nothing happens. You know, no reaction. Not from our board of directors, not from the public. Some nights there were write-ups in the paper by Sykes and Emery, and that's it. No performances. And that's another thing that I can't understand. We worked like crazy but if I count the amount of performances we had in four years, it's ridiculous. Totally ridiculous. We performed in Melbourne, in four years, two times, with Australian Dance Theatre. We have never been in Perth, we have never been in Brisbane. **Brickhill** But you know, Jaap, Australia at the time was a very – dance was a very elitist thing in a way. You either went to clubs and you could see club dancing, or you went to the Aussie Ballet. **Flier** But isn't that still so? **Brickhill** Well not quite so much now, I think. People like my parents loved dance because they were that kind of people, but most people didn't. It just wasn't part of the cultural norm, to go to see dance. Only certain select groups of people went to

are obvious to me and possibly to others in the way I see spaces, bodies, and movements, in the way my own body moves or is still, and in the compositional choices I am likely to make when working.

For a start, dancers helped me understand abstraction in performance. This may appear either trivial or blindingly obvious, depending on your point of view about the relationship between representation and 'the real'. From a postmodern perspective the label 'abstract' is about as useful as the notion of objectivity, but I am reminded afresh how difficult it is to break out of dominant representationalist assumptions in theatre every time I have to explain the processes of representation to yet another bunch of puzzled first year drama students, for whom the entire horizon of performance possibilities is bounded by the idea of 'being somebody else'. No amount of staring at videos of any of the million and one non-naturalistic performance genres has quite the explanatory force of saying "Walk across the space. Just *walk* across it. Now stand. Just *stand*. OK, someone else walk right across. Now, what do you see?" and so on. Simple. Raise your arm, lower it. Now it's the movement you're looking at, not the story. Even the most real-seeming naturalistic drama is abstracted, composed ... simple concepts, but I can remember clearly the first time I called in a dancer friend of mine to run a workshop with actors, and not one of us understood what she meant when she tried to get us to move away from mimesis. It took an acquaintance with pedestrian dance to make the light bulb go on for me, and it's still one of the most effective beginning points for teaching composition I know.

At school and university in Canberra, friends of mine had been dancers, in one way or another connected with the group of enthusiasts around Margaret Lasica in Melbourne. The new Canberra Theatre Centre also attracted the occasional concert dance performance from modern dance stalwarts like Liz Dalman and Ronne Arnold. From these experiences, from going to the odd 'modern' class and from seeing dance on film and television, I was vaguely aware of modern, and what people loosely called 'contemporary', dance practice dating I guess from the late 1950s. It was certainly different from ballet, but I doubt I was at all aware of the difference between for example Graham, Jazz and Broadway. The watching experience that had the most impact on me was seeing the Nederlands Dans Theater (including the famous 'nude' piece) during their 1972 tour. There was a rigour but somehow a colloquial quality to the movement, in strong contrast with the highly geared gestures of the modern dance I had seen previously, and a world away from the jaunty but emptily athletic showiness of a jazz genre in which black bell bottoms and taut thigh muscles had seemed inseparable from the dance. These new bodies spoke, insouciantly, but in a way that paradoxically positioned the audience as partner more than voyeur. However, the reading experience that really sent me off *looking* for difference in dance was a chance encounter with a dog-eared copy of the 'Post-Modern Dance' issue of The Drama Review (TDR 19, 1 March 1975, T65) that had been passed around at the Pram Factory, as TDR regularly was. This stuff hardly looked like dance at all, but it positively buzzed with ideas.

The immediate seduction of this dance for me lay in its astonishing simplicity. Nothing plastered over the top, no swans and princesses and plush, and no heavy symbolism, not even barefoot angst and earth mother contractions.

see the Aussie Ballet, for instance. And it's a pity because it wasn't a reflection on the work, and it's such a shame that you went, you know, but that was the way it was. And I don't know what the board expected of you, actually. I can't imagine why they would expect the company to be more popular, because that wasn't the norm. And it wouldn't have happened unless you'd changed the repertoire. Which presumably is what they wanted you to do, was it?

Flier No, no, they were critical but they were very supportive. They had the right to say, what is that *Circles*? And to call me in for that, to explain *Circles* to them. And then they accepted it as such. **Brickhill** So what were they complaining of? Were they just complaining of a lack of audience?

Flier Yes of course. And the lack of performances. And actually, it was blamed more or less on John Malcolms who was responsible as a financial director. So, actually they were criticising their own board member. But then we had Michael Goodwin actually, as the administrator. He was trying like crazy to get performances. That's why at a certain moment, we thought, well, we are going to make a programme in the Town Hall, where we installed ourselves from 10 o'clock in the morning till 4pm. Women with their shopping came in, and it was very nice, and fathers with their children. During the lunch breaks, people came in from the offices, and so we had a whole week, I think. Ian Spink made a work, and Nan made a work with flags. And I made work. And that was out of desperation actually. A good desperation, because it was about trying, again, to open up the whole situation and say, okay, the Town Hall is here, it's a beautiful place, we're going to perform. We had no performances, so we asked the Sydney City Council if it was possible to make the Town Hall available for art. And they did. But it was only out of desperation, because we didn't have performances. And Michael Goodwin became crazy, because he was trying everywhere and he couldn't get anything. Well, we had a tour in New South Wales for three weeks, and we were in Tasmania for a week, or something like that. But that was it. Perth I haven't seen. Brisbane I haven't seen. **Brickhill** We did go to Brisbane, I think, in that last tour. Or maybe only to Lismore, maybe it was only a New South Wales tour.

Flier I think so. It's big enough. It's bigger than Holland. **Brickhill** We only performed every second night. We never performed every night. In three weeks, there were only about eight or ten performances in three weeks. So you made Michele's solo, remember, on that tour? *Solo for Mich*. That was very beautiful. **Flier** Yes, it was nice.

Just movement. Just the body, walking, sitting, standing, jumping, twirling, even lying down. Maybe one object, say a chair. OK, so we take all these people lying down and we float them in this really bare pool. Cool. Whoever would have thought there was so much to look at, so much style? Because that was what kept you coming back to it. It was cheek, but it was chic. It had to come from New York, from that effortless self-confidence built on the ghost of Holly Golightly, the casual ease that said "that's all, folks". It was minimal, but it was *fabulous*. In a strange way it was silly to call it 'post' modern. An accident of aesthetic history, the sensibility was the essence of the modern spirit, all bones like a Corbusier chair.

That era was the moment in the post-modern dance aesthetic that provided the most direct, electric connection for me. As Sally Banes puts it, 'If the dances of the first phase of post-modern dance were primarily ... an assortment of all kinds of rejections of the then prevailing, constraining definition of dance – then the works of analytic post-modern dance were programmatic in their theoretical thrust ... that is, in terms of emphasizing choreographic structure and in terms of foregrounding movement per se' (Banes 1987 [1977]: xxi).

Suddenly it became possible to *think* through the body.

I remember clearly a sense of excitement about the ideas that were being put forward and explored through dance. Up till then, my understanding of choreography, and of composition in general, was based on the idea of elaboration of a specific vocabulary with its accompanying set of rules. You began with a set of basic elements, like the syllables of a spoken language, and then built them up into phrases, sentences, whole poems. Even though as the decade progressed, system-building, elaboration and visual pleasures almost inevitably crept into the practice of post-modern dance (as Mark Franko argues they earlier crept into Graham's initially uncompromising practice of modern dance), what really impressed me in that early phase was the uncompromising focus on the issue at hand, the readiness to tolerate risk and to stay tuned to the questions the body was asking and answering – to allow the movement to arise from the question, rather than have the question framed in terms of an established understanding of how the dance might work. It was so exciting to be able to turn up to Storey Hall and see Dance Exchange fresh from New York handing out valuable lessons not only in how to *do* dance in a new way, but how to watch it. Okay, so it was obviously more interesting for Eva Karczag to spend half an hour minutely examining her body's response to the impulse to roll than it was for me to watch it – on the other hand, seeing Eva, Russell Dumas and Nanette Hassall set themselves the same choreographic problem, each coming up simultaneously with a fresh set of possibilities, was a revelation, as was watching Russell's and Nanette's subsequent development into very different choreographers. To quote a later program of Russell's, the experience allowed contact with dance ideas 'in ways that develop[ed] the choreographic intelligence of dancer and audience and that encouraged whole-hearted engagement with the issue at hand, that is, dancing' (quoted in Dempster, 1990: 15).

Of course, there were other important movement philosophies and vocabularies being explored at around the same time, and Melbourne's

The heritage

During the 1960s in New York's radical dance enclaves, the big questions choreographers asked themselves were, 'What constitutes a dance?' and 'What defines a dancer?' Tentative answers leaked out via sophisticated and witty experiments with everyday movement and gestures, casual performing style, dances structured like tasks or games, and dancers with no previous dance training. A dancer was whoever performed a dance. A dance was something a dancer performed in public.

rich dance culture made it possible to access many of them through workshops and studio performances. I became acquainted with release work and contact impro courtesy of local practitioners, and with the work of Deborah Hay and Anna Halprin on their visits here. These different approaches also offered me the opportunity to question the body, to arrive at form through a process of discovery rather than having it imposed externally. Insights that seemed hard to get at in the semiotic overload of the theatre space appeared clean and clear, always coming back to the idea of the body as both initiating and responding to other bodies, to the floor, to the weight of gravity, to the release of air, to the forces of nature. My journeys through dance also allowed me to make strong connections through to the body- based voice work that I encountered at the same time, particularly Rowena Balos' teaching of the Linklater method. The dynamics of response between my body, the space and other bodies extended into the relation between body, breath, sound and image, giving me more detailed ways to travel the interior of the body and making new sense of the task of performing, both within and outside the traditional notion of character.

Engaging though these journeys were for me, however, that time also marked the development of a sort of double vision, in which my involvement with contemporary dance and physical theatre as a participant and an audience member never quite seemed to touch or to overlap with other questions about the body, and other questioning of the body, that I wanted to do. The short way of talking about it might be to say that I began to be troubled about the politics and philosophies of the body in ways which gradually led me in other directions, and that the ways in which the specific concerns of dance were shaped came to seem less relevant for me. In particular, the projects of critical feminism, and the debates about the 'subaltern body' instigated by post-colonial theorists, slowly led me to question many of the perspectives which constituted the body (and the bodies) of contemporary dance.

I have already said that what excited me about dance in the 1970s was the way it focused on thinking through the body and thinking by means of the body, rather than simply using the body as an inscribed surface or as a tool for the expression of other ideas. The emphasis on the body *as* intelligent remains of lasting importance. Thinking about dance provided a base from which to begin to question both the body-mind split in Western understanding, and the dominance of visual pleasure and verbal/written discourse in shaping perception in the arts. Randy Martin makes a valuable point when he argues that the way in which the body as the 'dance object' resists representation can itself become a political act (Martin 1990). However, the very mismatch between what one might call corporeal intelligence and other grids of understanding constitute a field in which rich possibilities for mythologising and for selective focus abound, which in dance can be taken up in ways which I would argue are profoundly ideological, and at times reactionary.

As Sally Banes has pointed out, the variety of approaches to contemporary dance, and the differences between practitioners even in the period of 'analytic post-modern' dance, makes generalisation a risky business indeed. Nevertheless, despite the complexity of metaphor corporealised in any one of these approaches, each of which writes and rewrites the body as a map and as the ground of meaning in different

of the seventies

by Deborah Jowitt

By the end of the sixties, the collaborative and rambunctiously iconoclastic period of postmodern dance had played itself out. Visual artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Alex Hay, and Robert Morris, who had re-fashioned themselves as choreographers while working with Judson Dance Theater, stopped making performance works. The dancer-choreographers associated with Judson – notably Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, David Gordon, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer – focused on developing individual aesthetics. Some of them eventually gathered dancers they enjoyed working with into companies bearing their names, a tactic hitherto regarded as regressive.

Innovative choreographers of the 1970s, liberated from traditional dance techniques and forms, asked a different set of questions: for instance, 'How do I define dance for myself (i.e. how do I want to move)?' And 'What kinds of structures serve me best?' A 'task dance' had once involved an interaction between performers, possibly objects, and a set of rules – often with no rehearsal necessary; now choreographers were ready to manipulate movement more recognizable as dance with the same workmanlike simplicity. Trisha Brown articulated her search for a direction with blunt grace: 'In the Fall of 1972, I was looking for a new dance. If the approach was to be through movement, there were two contenders. One type of movement stemmed from a deliberate investigation of the capabilities of the joint and spine. This boiled down to bend, straighten, and rotate. The second contender was a free-wheeling, semi-crazed, now you see it, now you don't, improvisational form in which I viewed the space around me as a sphere.' (She chose the first.)

ways, I would like to point to broad tendencies in using and speaking about the body evident in 1970s dance, which I came to query on theoretical and political grounds.

The first is the tendency to treat the body itself as 'pure', as the location and as the source of authentic meaning. Although differently expressed in, for example, the work of Halprin, Hay, and in Contact Improvisation, there is a strong tradition in contemporary dance (as well as in avant garde theatre) dating back to the 1970s, which treats the body as if the goal of sensory awareness were a totality and integration which is asserted to be always/already there, a potential waiting to be uncovered or revealed. This faith, based perhaps less on essentialism than on a yearning for 'organic' wholeness or completeness, is to me strongly reminiscent of the romanticism, even the mysticism, which early modernists such as Isadora Duncan shared with Delsarte and the Theosophists. It is a yearning which is still being expressed in both theatre and dance as a byproduct of the search for what Martha Graham called 'absolute dance' (see Franko 1995), and articulated through a fierce belief in the primacy and authenticity of preverbal experience. I'm not untouched by the strength of that yearning, but I would assert the continued importance of treating disjunction not as pathology, but as a means of attending to the artifice and the cultural mediation in forms of expression which may be claimed by their creators or participants to capture or convey the 'experience' of real, direct, immediate truth. As Foucault puts it in his preface to *The Order of Things*, 'I do reject ... broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a consistent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all history – which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness' (Foucault 1973: xiv). In consequence, that time also marked the beginning of my disbelief in 'transcendental' Jungian or phenomenological philosophies, despite the validation they offer to dancers' experiences of and with the body, and their promise of a way past our Western overvaluation of the linguistic.

The second is the constitution of 'post-modern' dance in particular, as an apolitical, somewhat arcane specialisation. I should clarify that my political concerns have little to do with the accusations of 'Americanness' levelled during the 1970s at Russell Dumas and others. Although Dumas for one certainly made the point that 'When I show work in New York it is perceptibly different from the work that is happening there, and yet when I return to Australia the same work is misconstrued as a mere borrowing of New York dance' (Dempster 1990: 8), it seems equally valid to ask what in Australian dance had *not* been reliant on North American or European models. If 'analytic post-modern' dance has turned out to have less influence on subsequent developments in Australian dance and physical theatre than might have been expected, I don't think 'Americanness' per se is to blame. I suspect the vagaries of its practice and reception are due to a combination of factors, some having to do with its own characteristics as a stringent and anti-scopophilic art form, and some to do with the intersection of extraneous cultural factors, many of which can be traced back to events and activities already evident in the cultural politics of the 1970s.

There is more at stake here than the conservative tastes of Australia's middle-class dance audiences, or a vulgar preference for the visual in the society at large, although I am conscious of the prescience of Guy Debord's 1967 vision

Austerity of means and a fascination with repetition characterized some of the work of the late sixties and early seventies. During Laura Dean's 1973 *Spinning Dance*, spectators either fell into trance, walked out, or – for all anyone knows – went mad. Those who did none of these things found themselves watching dance in a new way. When three women in separate pools of light spin for thirty minutes to the right, turn to meet in the centre, turn back out to their places, and spin to the left for thirty minutes, old-fashioned concepts about entertainment go right out of your head. You watch their long skirts belling out, marvel over the perfect synchrony of their swirling arms, ponder the curve of this one's neck or the neat stepping of that one. Your mind drifts to what you might cook for dinner.

Looking at dances Lucinda Childs made around this same time (as meticulous as her current works, but rougher and simpler), I often found myself counting phrases in my head, or trying to figure out the logic of a work like her 1974 walking dance *Calico Mingling* for four women. Here's her description of part of the plan: 'While the dancers are positioned on parallel lines four feet apart, their circular or semi-circular loops extend eight feet to their respective right or left so that a kind of interlacing is achieved.' Childs's performers maintained a neutral demeanor and a low, relaxed energy. Trisha Brown's physicality was more luscious (as with Childs, a primary-school version of her present mature style). But Brown's famous 'accumulations' also forced audiences to 'read' dancing and form. As the four women lying on their backs in her *Primary Accumulation* (1972) gradually built a quiet sequence movement by movement (1, 1-2, 1-2-3, 1-2-3-4, etc.), a kind of drama built in the spectators' minds. What would she add next? (At one free outdoor performance, a truck driver type shrugged off his buddy's attempts to pull him away; 'Wait a second,' he said, 'My favourite movement's coming up.'

Over the seventies and into the eighties, audiences noted how the same phrase might vary when performed by one, by two, by three or more people; how different accompaniment, text, or costumes affected it (David Gordon tried all of these). Twyla Tharp's *The One Hundreds* (1970) offered one hundred eleven-second phrases performed by one or two dancers, and then brought one hundred people onto the stage to perform all the phrases simultaneously, condensing the entire dance into eleven seconds. It was as if some choreographers wanted to teach us to analyze movement and form as intently as they did, wanted us to understand how context altered perception. They meant to make us understand the process even as we consumed the product. An interesting corollary to the back-to-the-earth movement then gaining ground among young people: You eat it? Learn to grow it.

Austerity lost its allure during the getting-and-spending eighties. Choreographers who still favour repetitive structures, such as Childs and Dean and Molissa Fenley, build them with more demanding dancing. Childs frames hers with artist-designed décor. Dean has set classical steps in minimalist patterns and sold her work to ballet companies. Fenley redefined virtuosity as ordeal, manipulating permutations of an athletic vocabulary while dancing alone to the entire score of Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* (*State of Darkness*, 1988). And one can see traces of the seventies 'tasklike' purity in pieces that are rich in both dancing and implications of mood, like those by England's Jonathan Burrows, *Westward Ho* by the young Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen, or the work of the Americans Meg Stuart and John Jasperse.

of Western society as 'the society of the spectacle, where the commodity contemplates itself in a world it has created' (Debord 1983: 53). It is almost as if the moment that produced the post-modern dance aesthetic in the Australian context ran headlong into the eddy from other political and cultural currents. For instance, key artists in subsequent decades, who might have been expected to be attracted to the discourse within and about the body begun by the New York declension of the post-modern, have found it difficult to use the particular body produced by that discourse to ask the questions that interest them. The bodies of the post-modern dancers of the 1970s certainly provoked a destabilisation of the heavily gendered choreographies and stage images of classical and Modern dance. It could be argued that by emphasising the concreteness and particularity of bodies, post-modern dance focused the attention of both performer and observer on individual differences. However, in their androgyny, their spareness, their disavowal of self-presentation, these bodies reinstituted a kind of classicism which avoided the signs of sexuality, of race and of class. For choreographers and performers increasingly interested in the question of sexed bodies, in boundaries and in transgressions, the 'post-modern body' presents an opaque face, resistant to being used as a site for the exploration of what Judith Butler has dubbed 'gender trouble'. It has become increasingly difficult to treat nice, white, slim, middle-class dancers as in any way an adequate 'stand in' for the troubled, disturbing, transgressive differences that bodies manifest and create.

Another problem has been the extent to which Australian dance has been quarantined from a more inclusive understanding of broader cultural changes, not simply technological change and the development of electronic 'new media', but as articulated by people from other, ex-colonial but non-Western, cultures. To my mind, a tendency to 'naturalise' or to preserve specific moments in post-modern dance has been evident over the past decade or so – to see it as itself a tradition, and to approach the exercise of composition as the elaboration of an established perspective rather than as the stringent but passionate approach to newly formulated questions that characterised the dance of the 'analytic post-modern' period of the 1970s. The emergence of strong (although diverse) responses to the challenges of 'global' culture through contemporary dance in East and South-East Asia, in Melanesia and in the Pacific basin, indicates however that what might once have been a specifically Western form is becoming increasingly repatterned as local intentions and interventions have their effect, and as relationships to existing local traditions are rethought. These developments have directly involved a few (very different) Australian contemporary dance artists such as Russell Dumas, Hellen Sky and John McCormick, and Cheryl Stock, who have without any particular co-ordination taken themselves off to confront the ambivalent and unpredictable relationships that emerge in cross-cultural exchanges between dance vocabularies, specific cultures and different bodies. I don't wish to hail the outcomes as uniformly excellent, culturally productive or even politically alert; however such exchanges, together with the popular success of the hybrid programs begun by Australian indigenous companies such as NAIDT and Bangarra, indicate that both dancers and audiences in the region are ready to make an offer of engagement with cultural change, however impure and compromised the result. Even in the 1970s, the storm petrels of this shift were present, notably in the iconoclastic presence of Kai Tai Chan, whose formation of the One Extra Dance Company in 1976 heralded the era of another sort of

As choreographers rediscovered an interest in emotion and narrative, repetition began to serve as a device for creating drama. At one time, composition teachers used to advise young aspiring choreographers to beware of repeating a movement more than three times in a row. What would those teachers make of Pina Bausch, in whose works repetition stands for obsession? (Over and over, a woman bares her back and a man stripes it with lipstick; despite the calmness of the act, the sight becomes almost unbearable.) As Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker demonstrated in her *Rosas Danst Rosas* (1983), unremitting reiterations can render personal idiosyncracies or deviations from a pattern all the more powerful.

Some of the work that developed from the early experiments of the 1960s was anything but spartan in terms of the body. It embraced a liberating movement gamut that ranged from the easy, hip-rolling obliqueness of black jazz dancing and rock'n roll to the sensuous power of animals and the recklessness of kids at play. The Contact Improvisation form developed by Steve Paxton in the 1970s, and dubbed by him an 'art sport', can make the participants in a duet fleetingly resemble children or puppies or drunks. As a man yields his weight to another, as a woman levers her partner into the air, their bodies sliding together hot and close, you can imagine them equally well as lovers or as combatants.

It seems to me that of the developments of the seventies, those to have the most influence on dance worldwide in terms of movement have been the Skinner Releasing Technique and related systems, Contact Improvisation, perhaps some of Simone Forti's work with animal movement, and the styles developed by Trisha Brown and Twyla Tharp. In very different ways and to different degrees, these involve free flow, an interplay between tension and relaxation, indirection, casual manners, an attention to the complex relations possible between body parts. Tharp eventually made ballet-based virtuosity compatible with the grounded, free-hipped, slangy moves she developed in her works to jazz and pop music. In her astonishing *In the Upper Room* (1993), pointework and the pulled-up body acquire a new fluidity in dialogue with punchier, more athletic passages. One has only to compare much contemporary dance to Martha Graham's oeuvre to see how much freer and more equivocal movement has become.

A New York critic once wrote that he had attended an audition of young choreographers for Dance Theater Workshop's prestigious *Fresh Tracks* series in New York and that he had seen what had felt like hours of Trisha Brown imitations. He received angry letters (it is a given in modern and postmodern dance that a choreographer needs to believe in his or her own originality). But there was an important grain of truth in what he said – in addition to the hard truth that artists may imitate one another without being conscious of it.

Brown broadened the movement possibilities for the art form. Before the sixties, I cannot remember ever seeing dancing that looked impulsive in quite that way. Even the arm swings and leg swings of early modern dance in Germany and America were more placed, more designed. Brown dances as if liquid were pouring through her, diverted in unexpected directions, her limbs at silky cross-purposes. Harmony never evolves through symmetry or planted feet. Younger postmodernists as dissimilar as former Brown dancer Stephen Petronio, Bebe Miller (who once worked with Nina Wiener, a former Tharp dancer), and Doug Varone make dancing that seems to thrust in several directions at once – styles of subversion, evasion, eroding contacts.

cheek, that of a sexy and knowing hybridity of tradition, form and means that was definitely post Modern, and even recognisably 'postmodern'. In hindsight, it may well be that One Extra was indicative of a more influential trajectory in the dance future of Australia-in-the-region than the 'dominant' post-modernism of the New York studio school.

None of the above should be taken as an argument to reject the entire legacy of dance from the 1970s on ideological grounds. As I hope I have made clear, the vision of light bodies playing between gravity and suspension that the dance of 'analytic post-modernism' provided, has become a precious part of my own internal landscape. That vision, however, cannot stand as a version of purity fixed in time, but re-emerges juxtaposed against other images in the struggle to make sense of shifting and conflicting cultural realities. Perhaps it is time to revive that questioning spirit, to explore new versions of basic questions across the insecurities of changing and unequal cultures, and to find fresh ways of dealing with the boundaries and the differences that are also the things that animate the possibility of exchanges – between each other and within ourselves.

Melbourne 1998

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In America, the vanguardists of the sixties had carried out their investigations against a background of Merce Cunningham's choreography and teaching: movement and form were what mattered (Meredith Monk was one of the few concerned with such issues as theatricality and role-playing). But in the 1980s, Pina Bausch sparked an interest in the drama of human relations even among choreographers not influenced by her style. That interest, coupled with a concern about the increasing conservatism of western politics, rising crime, and the terrifying spread of AIDS, meant that young choreographers wanted to forge vocabularies that could express unease and violence. The bodies that tumble together with a skill nurtured in Contact Improvisation also slide apart. It strikes me that for many choreographers in Europe, the Americas, Canada, and to some extent Asia, an ambiguous body language born of the peaceful flexibility, the playfulness, and the earthiness of the sixties and seventies has become a metaphor for emotional dissonance and a conveyor of eroticism. I do not mean to imply that there is no overt power, clarity, directness expressed on the stages where contemporary dance is shown. However, I do note the prevalence of dancing that – in keeping with the times we live in – sends few clear, efficient messages. Awkward manoeuvers, fumbles, and uncompleted connections abound; dancers tumble about the stage as if a strong wind, rather than willpower, were moving them.

Sometimes when choreographers fall in love with impulsive, tempestuous movement, structure takes a back seat. Recently I've been impressed by the way John Jasperse combines a '90s sensibility with a '70s sense of form and coolness of presentation. In his 1997 *Waving to you from Here*, the performers go through banal tasks like rearranging stacks of books, as well as more charged ones (a woman repeatedly tries to climb a flight of steps; another keeps methodically blocking her or pulling her down, without the least show of hostility). And all the time, the 'sky' (clanking overhead panels) is slowly falling.

In August of 1997, I took part in a festival and symposium in Stockholm titled *Talking/Dancing*. Over a period of several weeks, Scandinavian dancers were exposed to the work of the seventies American vanguardists through classes, lectures, panels, and performances. I was amazed at the level of excitement about improvisational techniques, about the structures presented and the ideas behind them. However, it's a given that eras in art, however cyclical the progression may seem, never reproduce themselves exactly. Dance changes in response to the changing world picture. Choreographers, consciously or unconsciously, live off the dividends from their artistic inheritance; but they invest that bequest in newly creative ways.

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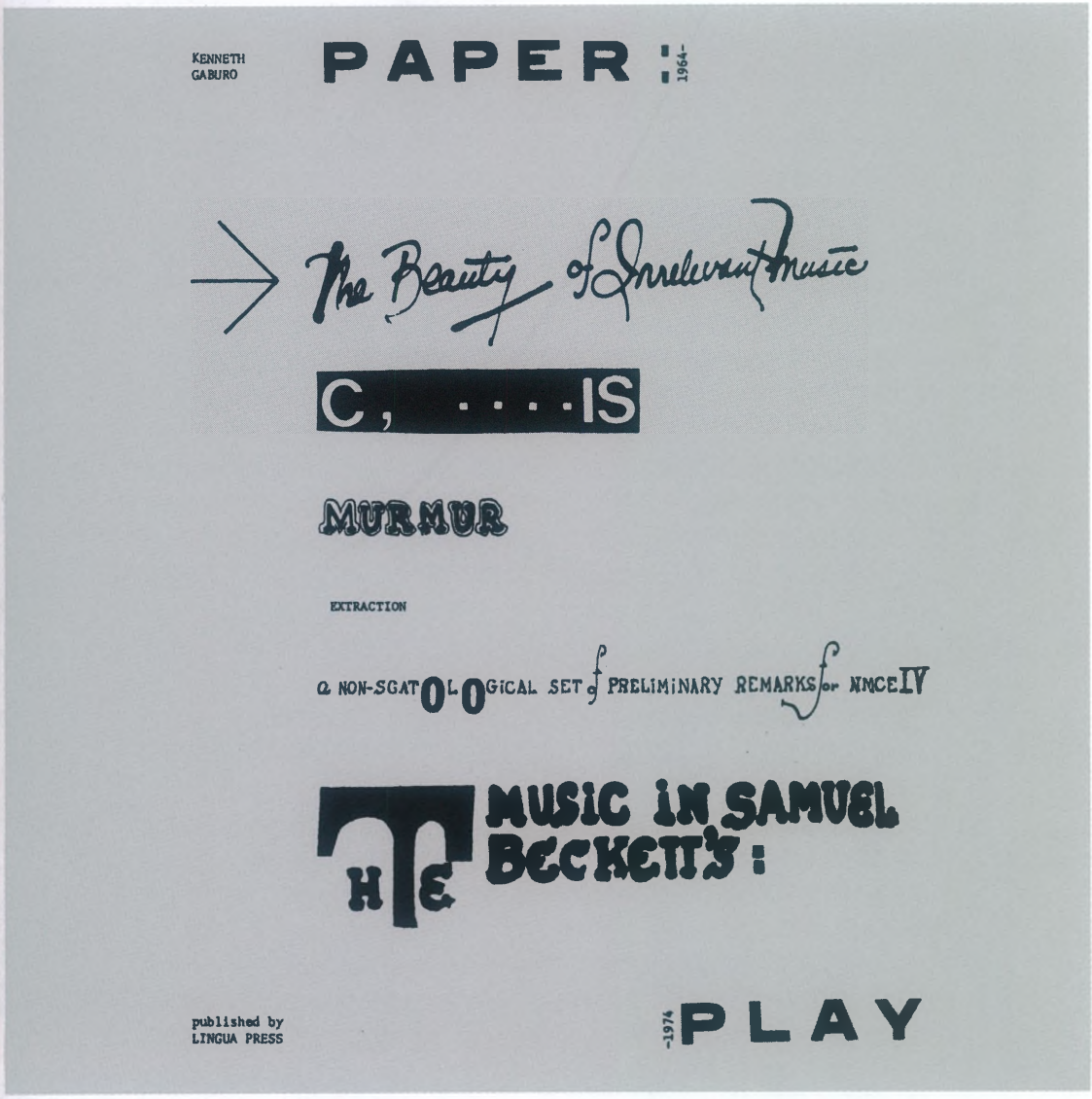
Kenneth

Gaburo


KENNETH
GABURO
PAPER :
1964-
The Beauty of Irrelevant Music
C, ...IS
MURMUR
EXTRACTION
a NON-SCATOLOGICAL SET of PRELIMINARY REMARKS for NMCE IV
THE MUSIC IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S :
PLAY
-1974
published by
LINGUA PRESS

ONE

From
there (,) are those
who

PAPER PLAY:

more than half-masked
by blinds or shades

(d)ie

The Beauty of Simultaneous Music

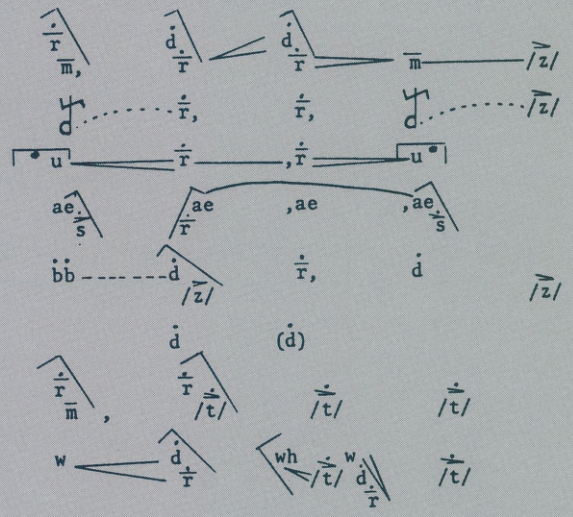
FROM darkened rooms there are those
who peer out through glass more than
half-masked by blinds or shades and
I from a different vantage point
wonder what I wonder at

(D) arkened rooms

peer out
through
glass (,)

and

from a different vantage
point wonder
what I wonder
at



TWO

It is difficult to maintain a system of irrelevance without appearing to be innocent, naive, bitter, cynical, defensive, or just plain stupid. However, I make no plea for the suffering composer, the undiscovered performer, or the musty musicologist. Unless we were born mindless, we are aware of what we do.

The creative act consists not only in the stipulation and formation of concrete structures, BUT in responsible maintenance of them. Furthermore, such structures demand of us the necessity to create and maintain environmental systems within which they can function properly.

The beauty of irrelevant music is that so little appears to be at stake from what it asserts which is to say that it can easily be dismissed which is to say that there are no watchdogs which is to say that thus, given this condition, one who wishes to create such music may encourage himself to do so freely and endlessly which is to say that therefore,

the assertion of every irrelevant music is that it has no larger funktion until a proper environmental system can be created in which it is to say that 'it can live', thus, Pirandello's "A Poet In Search Of A Theater" easily converts into a 'Music In Search Of A System'.

It's rather like asking: 'Who shall develop your home,
A developer, or you?'

THREE

When asking students the question:
'Why do you want to compose?',

the best answer given to me thus
far has been:

"I HAVE NO CHOICE!"

FOUR

GIVEN INVOLVED PEOPLE:

An important distinction
between a musico-cultural
system which specifies
what a GIVEN musical
structure might be,

and

A GIVEN musical system
which specifies what a
musico-cultural structure
might be, may be found in
the answer to the follow-
ing question:

Would you do what you say you MUST anyway?

say, without profit, if necessary?
say, without performance, if necessary?
say, at the risk of socio-obscurity, if necessary?
say, without gratification of any kind beyond the realization of your desire to make concrete statements, if necessary?

If the answer to the question
of each of these questions is
YES, then:

you prefer answers to your own-GIVEN questions rather than questions to already-GIVEN answers.

FIVE

As a composer, the statement:

"a given system is the only tenable one",

constitutes the only challenge necessary to disprove that statement.

THUS: the statement:

"it is *impossible* to have a theatrical situation today without nudity",

DEMANDS the statement: "it is *possible* to have a theatrical situation today without new-ditties".

To pursue the latter,
which is prompted by the former,
is to dispute the absolute essentiality of the former.

THEREFORE: music may be seen as an argument. One problem the observer faces is that he frequently doesn't know the argument, ---that is, the premise under which and for which a given work emerges. Thus faced with uncertainty, the observer frequently:

[a] accepts that which he might have otherwise rejected;

[b] rejects that which he might have otherwise accepted;

[c] accepts nothing;

[d] accepts everything.

SIX

The language of *relevant* music is interesting. Here is a brief collection of terms extracted from an address to the National Music Council entitled: RECORDING CLASSICAL MUSIC: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS, 1970, by Norman Rascusin. Mr. Rascusin was then president of RCA records. I quote the terms:

"meaningful material
buyers
cost factors
high turn-over items
repertoire
market
current relevance
useful purpose
cater
ticket turnstiles
the product
supply and demand
non-elastic market
distribution
outlet
high traffic locations
titles
break-even points
lower rates
fierce competition
equalized cost basis
unit sales
loss
packaging
entertainment
growth
assortment
best value
exposure
business
industry
box office"

It is clear enough that unless one knew the report was addressing itself to so-called Classical Music, the language could just as easily have related to Educational TV, or prostitution. Thus, the primary determinant for the existence of this system is what will sell, and what will sell is already determined by the language and desires of that system. To express it more formally, one could say:

THE SYSTEM DETERMINES THE NATURE OF ITS COMPONENTS

In this system, all serious, subscribing musicians are guilty of:
Prostitution.
In this system, all serious, subscribing musicians are guilty of:
mutilating each other over the few scraps which are available.
In this system, all serious, subscribing musicians are guilty of:
maintaining that system which they generally say they despise.

On the other hand, those who do not generally subscribe to that system are currently labeled elite, insular, unappetizing, contributors-to-turning-audiences-off, obscure, or simply: *irrelevant.* On the other hand, that is, the first hand, those who participate do not see that they are owned. In that owning-system, one speaks of performers, say, as good or bad property, and created works as good or bad material. If one is good property and finds good material one can become a package. If one becomes a package one can be managed. Once one becomes managed one can be sold.

Commercial companies appear to be upset because they cannot sell HEAVY music, thereby expressing their deep concern and perpetual interest. However, the BEAUTY of irrelevant music lies in the fact that its survival does not depend on their concern, or their interest. Equally significant is the fact that this unsalable music to which they persistently refer is not, and was not ever made to sell. Its structural nature resists selling, and thus it puts forth its own alternative. Expressed formally, one could say:

THE COMPONENTS DETERMINE THE NATURE OF ITS SYSTEM

So-called relevant music bases its premises on the co-joined systems of supply and demand, under which the supply influences the demand, and the demand influences the supply. The beauty of irrelevant music is that the music ITSELF supplies its own demands, and demands its own supply.

---only that.

SEVEN

experience music as though you were:

experiencing the organic structure of a snowflake; or

the performing technique of NAMATH or

the sound of your own thoughts.

EIGHT

ONE SUPON A TIME:
[TWO] was recorded and issued at TWICE the proper speed.

ONE SUPON A TIME:
NMCE-ONE gave a performance of TWENTIETH Century Choral Music at Expo' SIXTY-SEVEN. It took TWO years to prepare the program. We flew SIX-THOUSAND miles. It cost FOUR-THOUSAND-FIVE-HUNDRED dollars. No ONE came.

ONE SUPON A TIME:
The Chicago Symphony performed Elegy. It was given ONE TEN minute rehearsal. Elegy is TWELVE minutes long.

ONE SUPON A TIME:
NMCE-THREE performed some of my linguistic compositions in NYC. Because of the musico/theatrico nature of the works, a drama critic came from ONE paper, and a music critic came from another ONE. The drama critic didn't re view because he thought the program too musical to appear in his column. The music critic didn't review be cause he thought the program too theatrical to appear in his column.

ONE SUPON A TIME:
I made an electronic composition for an educational TV program entitled: The New Experimental Music. The composition was brutally censored in order to accomodate a FIVE minute plug for the next New Experimental Music program.

ONE SUPON A TIME:
When we were on tour and made it to SUNY-Albany, during ONE March, we discovered that no publicity was allowed until the very day of a given concert. However, words-of-mouth got around. The performance went very well. There
was an audience of THIRTY people. THIRTY
is a nice number.

NINE

IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT
IRRELEVANT MUSICIANS MAY
BE ONE OF A LIMITED NUMBER
OF GROUPS TODAY WHICH TRULY
MAINTAIN SYSTEMS OF FREE THOUGHT;

---who else would have the audacity to construct and maintain structures which can be demonstrated to not have any provable value?

TEN

The only reason for studying music is because
it must be studied;
studied, in order to be perceived;
perceived,
in order to be studied.[1]

It is therefore an erroneous assumption that
since music seems to 'fill' us, i.e.
to 'invade' our mind/body, all
we need do is to sit, and 'let it happen'.

However,
it is possible to draw a distinction between
recognition and perception. Thus, recognition-
facility could easily distinguish music from
eating celery, while
perception-facility could not easily do so.

[1] If these statements are not true, then that which is 'observed' may indeed be relevant to that which can be observed. If these statements are true, then that which is observed may indeed be irrelevant to that which can be 'observed'.

ELEVEN

ANY ATTEMPT
TO BE AU COURANT
COMPOSITIONALLY
I.E.,
TO WRITE FOR AN AUDIENCE
IS TO SAY
THEREFORE
'AUDIENCE, WRITE MY MUSIC!'

[with a pleading gesture] ---SIR?

TWELVE

A recent memo from a local museum states, and I quote: "Are YOU a member of the 20th century? YES, when you belong to the (da da dee da) museum of (da da dee da) art. You will be aware of the best creative and innovative work by today's artists.

Some of the works you see you will thoroughly enjoy. Some you may even dislike. Some may strike you as strange. And some may open your eyes to a new way of seeing. Just as all art has MIRRORED ITS PARTICULAR TIME, contemporary art reflects the images and ideas of our world to us as no other form of expression can."

---if music (say) is so reflective of its time, i.e. presumably out of our age, then why is it that serious new music (more properly, experimental music), which explores such phenomena as electronics, lasers, computers, kinetics, perception, notation, biological feed-back, linguistics, environments, meditation, timbre, acoustical resources, serious communication, artificial intelligence, sound-touch, awareness, and silence, is so frequently *unrecognized* as such by its viewers?

---if music (say) presumably reflects (MIRRORS) what we otherwise see, then why is it so difficult to see what music mirrors?
WELL,

---either experimental music is out of its time, and viewers are not, or viewers are out of their time, and experimental music is not.

---HOWEVER, until we can precisely specify which of the above situations is true, it is pointless to discuss the notion of ART MIRRORS ITS PARTICULAR TIME.

THIRTEEN

THERE IS A WIDE-SPREAD ATTEMPT TO BREAK DOWN ALL MUSIC BOUNDARIES IN THE NAME OF EQUALITY/ THAT IS TO MAKE SERIOUS MUSIC POPULAR AND POPULAR MUSIC SERIOUS BY CLAIMING THEY ARE THE SAME THING/ TO SAY THAT EQUALITY IS A VALUE SHOULD NOT SIGNIFY THAT DISTINCTIONS ARE NOT A VALUE/ THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT POINT TO ARTICULATE IS THAT NO PEJORATIVE STATEMENTS OBTAIN WITH RESPECT TO DISTINCTIONS AND NO LOSS OF IDENTITY OBTAINS WITH RESPECT TO EQUALITIES/ TO NOT MAINTAIN THESE DISTINCTIONS IS TO MAKE REALITIES OUT OF ANALOGIES/ THUS THE FUNCTION OF AN ELECTRONIC CIRCUIT CAPACITOR IS ANALOGOUS TO MY HUMAN CIRCUIT-AS-CAPACITOR IN OUR RESPECTIVE ABILITIES TO STORE ENERGY AND TO DISSIPATE IT GRADUALLY/ BUT WE BOTH HAVE AGREED THAT IT CANNOT DELIVER MY LECTURE AND I CANNOT BE SOLDERED INTO ITS CIRCUIT.

FOURTEEN

The beauty of irrelevant music is that no authority exists except for the subject (i.e., the music) itself. OF COURSE, there may be temporary authorities: a conductor here, a musicologist there, a composer here, a performer there, a viewer here, a critic there. BUT, ultimately, only the music about which we all necessarily speak, remains. It is that, not even what we say about it which should entice, seduce, capture, and transport us into structures for which there are no like-models in the world.

However, although music stands alone, I don't mean that it is defenseless, --- that it can be interpreted freely. It is necessary to stipulate that each music puts forth its own language. It is necessary to stipulate that each music desires its own context. It is necessary to stipulate that each music prepares its own ground from which all external articulation becomes possible.

A meta-language, such as viewing music in its broader historic context, or such as an informal discussion after concerts, seems necessary; not so, however, in order to replace a music, but in order to support it. It is unfortunate when one's attempts to articulate a music only serve to replace it.

FIFTEEN There are certain "fringe benefits" [if I can borrow a term from another system] to composing irrelevant music. In my case, it allows me to:

seriously consider runcophobia [which actually doesn't frighten me anymore]
OR to:

wonder why it is that butterflies can't trill;
OR to:

determine if bees are incestuous;
OR to:

speculate about when it was that man first learned to laugh [OR when he stopped]

SIXTEEN

While the world-at-large can move century after century, considering whether to embrace culture, or to dismiss it as another of man's fantasies, (and in this more specific case, music), or even if, in this ambivalence, the answer is still: "yes, let there be music", (which generally translates into: music-as-luxury, music-as-entertainment, and music-as-utility), SOME composers, performers, theorists, aestheticians,historians, or just plain kooks, have been seriously creating their own systems of: irrelevance. They are, and mostly always have been, part of a substantial underground network. Thus, by their own design, they could easily be classified as creative revolutionaries and experimenters.

If the world-at-large never awakens to the incredible structures which some have given it, but could never *demand* that it accept, the beauty will never-the-less, remain.

If the world-at-large will one-day awaken, it will need something to awaken to.

In either case: temporarily useless, irrelevant music continues to be generated. Its greatest reason for being is its irrelevance. Insofar as its mere existence is concerned, it serves to indict the world-at-large by pointing out what still needs to be done.

This music can wait a long time for us to make up our minds as it appears, and disappears in our cognition.
Now we hear/see it. Now we don't.
Now it hears/sees us. Now it doesn't.

---a very long time waiting, because it wants to become: ours.

SEVENTEEN

In a very [oh]pinionated, highly verb[oh]se s[oh]ciety,
which claims to be an authority on all things, it is a
compliment to my music when one cannot speak; ---when,
to a typical, ---usually [oh]ver cocktails question,---
such as: "and what do you do, sir?", I simply reply:
"comp[oh]se", the reaction is either:

"OH?", or

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh", or

"oh", or

"[ ]!", ---

in which case, a few profound
questions usually follow, such as:

"whatever happened to th[oh]se
simple mel[oh]dies?", or

"why d[oh]n't comp[oh]sers write
something I can understand?", or

"you're not really one
of th[oh]se, are you?",

---to which:

n[oh] answer is delicious, and
silence announces a supreme m[oh]-
ment of mutual irrelevance, and
where, clearly,
n[oh] performance is better than
a medi[oh]cre one, and
I try, as my wife suggests:
---to get down to the olive, which
afterall, is where it's at.

EIGHTEEN

The beauty of irrelevant music consists of its existence and its search for a context. the beauty of an interpreter (performer) rests in a desire to realize a context for this discovered music which wants one.

NEVER *is not a context.*

As soon as you or I supply either mentally or verbally, something like:

NEVER *(what)?, ---the what becomes an expressed desire to put never in a context.*

AND: *what if these slides had something to do with my lecture?*
AND: *what if my lecture had something to do with these slides?*

AND: *what if a given composition was in your life?*
AND: *what if your life was in a given composition?*

AND: *what if the object to which you addressed yourself would be a subject which addresses you?*

AND: *what if we converted every either/or statement to an: and statement?*

AND: *what if irrelevant music remains irrelevant?*
AND: *what if irrelevant music became relevant?*
AND: *what if relevant music became irrelevant?*
AND: *what if relevant music remains relevant?*

AND: *what if it became irrelevant to even consider whether music is irrelevant or relevant?*

NINETEEN

At a time when those who protest being preached to
are preaching
and those who are preaching
protest to those who are not
are in fact not preaching
WILLIAM says to me

there's so much to be done
with Whys, and
Whys nots, and
Whys nots Whys, and
Whys nots Whys nots, and
WILLIAM is right

we have enough to do for awhile
so it goes sorting out our heads
to find glue somewhere seems like the thing to
do so suggests searching for wet no
finding wet no finding wetness AH
where things can grow and WILLIAM is right there
is so much to do in order to know that is
to know that wetness and glue are not in
compatible and that a day in the wet is not to get
Hickory's Dick er y(e)ven Dock's clock ing
tic tock or one's gun or
to insure either that men are not mice or
up or done ooh

[with some exasperation]

TWENTY

UT silvae foliis pronos *mutantur* in annos,
prima cadunt; ita verborum vetus interit aetas,
et iuvenum ritu florent modo nata vigentque.

debemur morti nos nostraque: sive receptus
terra Neptunus classes Aquilonibus arcet,
regis opus, sterilisve palus diu aptaque remis
vicinas urbes alit et grave sentit aratrum,
seu cursum *mutavit* iniquum frugibus amnis
doctus iter melius: mortalia facta peribunt,
nedum sermonum stet honos et gratia vivax.

multa renascentur quae iam cecidere, cadentque
quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,
quem penes arbitrium est et ius ate Norma Loquendi.[1]

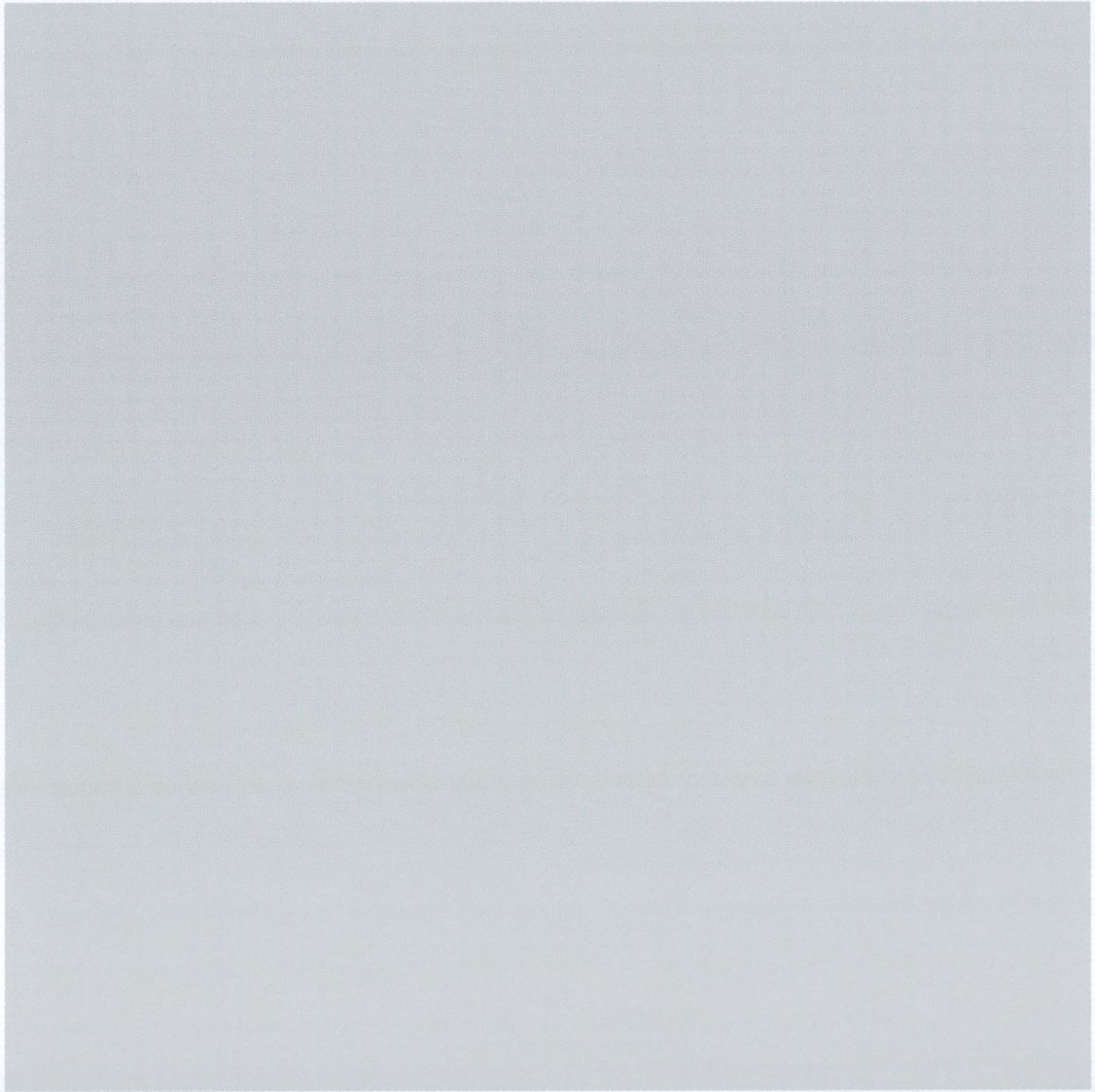
---and William is right
so much to do;
there is
mutatis mutandis[2]

kenneth gaburo
august 18,1970
la jolla, Cal.

1
HORACE: De Arte Poetica; verses 60-72; Harvard University Press, pp.454-6

2
The first solo reading of this work was given by the composer at the University of Pittsburgh, March 27, 1971. It was accompanied by slide projections of Herbert Brun's computer graphics, entitled: Mutatis Mutandis.

Subsequently, the text was incorporated in a more elaborate work, entitled: COLLABORATION ONE: [Brun/Gaburo; six scribers; seven projectionists; two and four-channel audio tapes; laser light]. In this form COLLABORATION ONE was premierèd: November 17, 1972; Project for Music Experiment/ UCSD, Cal.



John Barbour

In 1997 I saw John Barbour's exhibition, *Stills From a Liquid Plain*, and felt that I was viewing an aesthetic familiar to me but receding in my memory, and in Australia's cultural memory. The work – a 'plain' of triangles of strange hues, grouped across the floor of the gallery, each propped up and standing no more than 1/2 a metre high – appeared temporary, fragile, detailed, gentle in its elaboration. It gathered force as an image and then dispersed, moving towards and away from meaning.

John Barbour interviewed by Anne Thompson

My interest in this work (which I connect with the experimentation occurring in all art forms, including dance, in New York and Europe in the '60s and '70s and in Melbourne from the mid-'70s) has recently curled around its problematic relationship to Modernism and the notion that the apotheosis of art is an original and enduring representation of inner consciousness (variously conceived of as perception, language and bodily movement) as well as my own continuing fascination with the materiality of the body which cannot be explained away by semiotics or a concern with meaning or presence. This fascination turns away from the expressionism that to my mind haunts Western art dance, lingering like a spectre that will not be banished.

below: John Barbour
Stills from the Liquid Plain 1995
installation view, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide
oils and enamel on masonite and wood
dimensions variable
Courtesy Yuill/Crowley, Sydney

My experience of this exhibition included contradictory bodily apprehensions. I felt both part of, and yet distanced from, this made environment as I walked around and through it, and noticed others doing likewise. When I think of the dancing of that period, I recall a similar apprehension of being implicated in and yet independent of the event, of meaning and emotion emerging and fading and not settling somewhere familiar, of unhurried exposition, of preoccupation with the detail and then with the plain facts of the dancing ... *her hands look vulnerable as they softly curve away from and then spread to meet the floor, so do her feet... she is rolling* ... And I remember feeling full to the edges of my own body, present in an alert and attenuated way and somehow happy.

Anne Thompson Do you place your work within the Modernist historical continuum? What ideas initially captured your imagination as an artist and what ideas continue to fascinate you? **John Barbour** This is a question one puts to oneself now and again. Firstly I started art school when I was 26. Before that I think of myself as having been a drifter. Not geographically – though I did some travelling – but in having no sense of purpose. I did an Arts degree and studied English Literature out of interest. It seemed an easy thing to do and there was nothing else I wanted. I liked art and I had the fantasy – and I only thought of it as a fantasy – of being an artist, but it didn't seem a real possibility. I didn't know anybody who was an artist and I didn't know how you became an artist. So I read a lot. What I read fell into two groups: the first consisted of the great 19th century naturalistic novels by authors like Dickens, Balzac, Flaubert and so on. I took the kind of pleasure anybody takes in reading those books. You are transported into a world which is peopled and convincing in its details and which draws you in deeply. It's a very powerful experience and I registered that strongly. But I also came across books, like James Joyce's *UIysses*, that were no less enveloping in their imaginative power. Maybe more so. So Joyce's *Ulysses* was a defining encounter for me before I went to art school and it was so because of the depth of culture and knowledge it embodied, because of its continual references to mythological characters and to contemporary thinking, and because of its Modernist structure. It showed me Modernism wasn't necessarily at odds, had made no definitive break, with previous culture. That revelation has remained really important and has informed my own work, my teaching and my looking at, and writing about, other people's work. I've always seen my own work as part of a continuum and not as an ideological reaction to, or critique of, some edifice or institution or set of cultural values. I do see experimentation and exploration as important features of that artistic continuum however, and as part of the intellectual play that characterises it. The other aspect that is important to me is the view that the whole endeavour that is creative cultural expression is the struggle of individuals to reflect on the world they live in and to embody that in some way. So intellectual play and feeling part of a historical continuum seems to me as important as the ambition to push form around or to challenge conventions. The encounter with Modernism through Beckett and Joyce, the cultural milieu of Surrealism – the relation between the poets and the artists that were part of it – these were the threads I picked up and began to explore when I went to art school. **Thompson** Is that sense still strong for you? Of being part of a continuum? For me Postmodernism, as a description of culture, is about placing oneself within a breadth of references whereas Modernism understands culture as a lineage, a sequential journey through time. Is there a difference in how you understand your place now as compared to then? **Barbour** I had a discussion with some students before this interview during which they asserted that their endeavour was to 'expose some aspects of Modernism'. I asked them 'what is your idea of Modernism?' and they mentioned 'Modernist ideals'. So I asked them 'what was a Modernist ideal'? They immediately identified 'an emphasis on progress'. Now

other 'ideals' follow from that, such as the idea that artistic form is not a given, that it can be deformed, altered, and that the idea of 'progress', 'the new' and 'technological change', and 'social contestation' go together. But I guess I feel, as another artist said to me, that I can't be a Modernist in these terms. Maybe as a practising artist I can only see things clearly in retrospect – not in the present. I think of myself as 'post-modern', but I think of Post-modernism as integrally linked to Modernism – perhaps, as the space of reflection on it. Maybe also as distant enough from it, from its founding moments, say Joyce and Picasso, that we can recognise that it was always internally heterogeneous rather than homogenous. I always had that sense, as much through the inability of any one writer or historian to give me the bigger thing, to explain how these different artistic endeavours related, why some of the Dadaists were linked with the Futurists and some not and why the Surrealists carried on internal, internecine wars over 35 years. It's clear there is no one line or homogenous principle that informs the Modernist endeavour. There are, of course, deeply held beliefs that surface. Narrative is a deeply internalised aspect of 19th century naturalism which one can see as continuing in popular cinema today, and you could say Modernism has predicated itself upon a resistance to the internalisation of narrative, saying instead, 'we stand for the difficult, for the distanced, for a free and critical thinking!' So... I guess I did recognise somewhere along the line that although my response to authors like Dickens and Flaubert was very passionate, I was actually much more drawn to artists like Joyce and Beckett and felt much more challenged and intellectually stimulated by their work. Modernism's cleaving to the transgressive, the experimental has always appealed. I find it much more interesting. **Thompson** What about Cage, Cunningham, Rauschenberg? **Barbour** I came to them through Minimalism, which brings me to the second defining encounter – going to Art School and encountering 'the present' – as it was in 1979-81 in Melbourne. This encounter was mediated by journals like *Art and Text* and *October*, which had been going for some years, but which I began subscribing to in 1980. October was very important to me, as was *The Drama Review*. Through them I encountered the ideas of 'post-structuralist' theorists and thinkers like Derrida, Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari and writers on contemporary art – particularly through *October* – like Rosalind Krauss, Annette Michelson, Laura Mulvey, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, John Rajchman, Craig Owens and Douglas Crimp. All of whom are now thought of as seminal in defining '80s art practice, particularly in visual art, but interdisciplinary as well. This encounter was localised through *Art and Text* (which consciously modelled itself initially on *October*) and through the group of artists showing in Melbourne through the gallery Art Projects: John Nixon, John Dunkley-Smith, Imants Tillers, Mike Parr, Tony Clarke, Ania Waliawicz, Peter Tyndall, Richard Dunn and others. It was a loose affiliation of independents that maybe felt they had limited options to show their work at that time. All of them, of course, are well known now, through established exhibition practices, galleries, jobs in art schools and all the rest. But at the time there was a feeling of them contributing to the creation of a mutually

supportive culture while retaining separate, strong voices as artists. In Melbourne at that time artists also mixed with writers (like Kris Hemmensley) and New Music people (Warren Burt, Ernie Althoff, Essendon Airport, Equal Local, Phil Brophy and Maria Kozic). There was a strong interdisciplinary focus. Dance Exchange and Dance Works also seemed part of that. The crossovers were also personal: Nan Hassall and Les Gilbert, Warren Burt and Eva Karczag, Lyndal Jones and John Dunkley-Smith, Jude Walton and Aleks Danko. That was my milieu and it seemed very fluid – indeed my interest in writing seemed a logical outcome of this interdisciplinary spirit, as captured on the cover of *October*: 'Theory, Praxis, Art, Criticism'. So it was an encounter with experimental local and international art practice as well as with its immediate critical context and its heritage of '60s Minimalism and the Art Povera movement in Europe – the work of Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Allan Kaprow and others – work in which the terms materiality, presence and process were crucial. **Thompson** Differentiate between materiality and presence for me. **Barbour** 'Presence', as I unrigorously think about it, is something the US art critic, Clement Greenberg raised as the defining moment, the apogee of modernist work, and it was supposed to be able to define a good, non-referential painting from a weak one. I found that a bit weird. Materiality ... according to Greenberg, one had to exclude anything that was not the proper business of painting (for example) – to focus on its flatness, with the form of the 'image' as defined by the stretcher, as in the work of Frank Stella. But because I came along that bit later I had an advantage in a way, in that there was already a pulling apart of Greenberg going on. I know older artists like Robert MacPherson talk about Greenberg's idea of presence as being influential for them. I never felt convinced. But Michael Freid, who was an early disciple of Greenberg, was an important early commentator on Minimalism in an influential essay called 'Art and Objecthood'. Although Freid was a negative critic in that he saw the things he was identifying as problematic, I saw them as really interesting – particularly the idea that something could be obdurate, ambivalent, ambiguous, resistant to interpretation and have a claim on one by virtue of its scale (something Freid rejected with distaste as being inherently theatrical). Maybe it's not true I was rejecting 'presence' per se, but the Minimalists seemed to talk about presence in a different way – connected with spatiality. How things were deployed in space required of one a different way of negotiating that space, perhaps a different consciousness of space; or perhaps a consciousness of space or a consciousness of space as being a material. So 'presence' became for me a question about the viewer's physical and psychological relation to the work ... Again this links to my interest in the extrapolation into the visual arts of semiotics and the structural analysis of language, which Barthes originated (and which he later moved away from). 'Presence' is also very much part of the language of Beckett, in particular, where the inherent instability of words, pronouns such as 'I, him, me', is let loose within the text. That encounter with Beckett was an encounter with the materiality of the text. But those two terms, 'theatricality' and 'absorption', were identified by Fried as key to

understanding the terms operative in Minimalism. He later extended this focus in his study of 18th century painters like Chardin and Greuze and particularly their capacity to draw in the viewer by appearing to be completely oblivious of the viewer's presence. Freid was saying the opposite held true for Minimalism. This was what I was picking up on. That the materiality and obdurate presence of the object in Minimalism made viewers very much conscious of themselves. Freid saw the paintings of Chardin and Greuze by contrast as completely self-enclosed – with the viewer not referred to, not indicated, not played with at all. Whereas as soon as you get Manet, you start to foreground the materiality, and the process – the conditions by which illusion is structured, producing a quite different relationship to the viewer. Process had a temporal emphasis. The object connected to the process informing its making and reception. Now I see process talking about other things as well – the physical, material process of making but also – as in Joseph Beuys' *I Love America and America Loves Me*, where the work was a journey, going into the heart of a culture, taking with him his own peculiar, idiosyncratic symbolic mix. And the piece not stopping when he gets back. Or where does it stop – when he gets back on the trolley, the plane? It travels out in ever widening ripples. **Thompson** Are there other formative moments? **Barbour** There was another – one I am still juggling with – brought about by a visit to New York in 1984. It was the heyday of figurative expressionism, Julian Schnabel and all the others, and it was clear it was a cultural phenomenon a lot of money was involved with – and that artists could, and did, have the ambition of being significantly valued for the work they did. Also apparent was that they were playing with popular idioms and mythological references, narrative and symbolic codes. There was a lot of confusion, some pretty uneasy bedfellows, critics and theorists being yoked in and cited by artists those writers might not want to have been associated with, but anyway some of the work affected me strongly and I began drawing again figuratively. When I got back to Melbourne in 1985 I started painting. It was a significant shift – something to do initially with the immediacy of drawing: that I could travel with a pad, a brush, some pens and ink. A journal process, if you like, which involved drawing, writing, noting my reading and my dreams – and re-thinking the nature of subjectivity, particularly in relation to the book, *Barthes On Barthes*. This painting and drawing, the idea of the journal and its focus on internal processes, was quite important for me – it felt like a release from censorship produced by the kind of rigour entailed in a very conceptual approach to things – and it was validated for me by Barthes' emphasis on play, on jouissance and on reflection as being a critical and yet emotionally resonant process. This is a kind of diversion from your question about artistic and intellectual concerns but I'll try it on: there was some kind of reaction that was evident in the late '80s, against the excesses of figurative expressionism and a consequent re-evaluation of Minimalism and Conceptualism. Particular artists were significant and influential in this – John Nixon, for example, who had been the founding force behind Art Projects, and others. In Melbourne from the late 1980s on, there was the Store 5 group – which included the artists Melinda

Harper, Constanze Zikos, Gary Wilson, Gail Hastings, Kerrie Poliness, Stephen Bram and others, I had a couple of shows there and I didn't see my work as fitting within their general concerns easily. But I could see that a 'moment' was being culturally defined – a shift was taking place which reflected the influence of Jean Baudrillard's ideas about simulacra. Their works emphasised abstraction, process and materiality – but there was a reflection within that upon the nature of mass production, almost ironically, in that the artists themselves were consciously employing the archaic studio model, making these little paintings, while yet thinking of them as objects to be placed into circulation within a system of exchange and commodification. There was also perhaps a privileging of incremental moves over exponential ones stylistically or formally – and maybe even a relinquishing of ambition. The possibility that small moves might be the ones to make rather than big ones ... or maybe there was a still unmined territory where a few big moves had been made that needed to be teased out further. Anyway this had some effect on my thinking about my own work. But I was also going through a period of reaction against theory. I started to view much of it as 'generic', so I started to explore and discovered Georges Bataille, whose writings have been very important for me, particularly his ideas of excess and disruption, and his emphasis upon the material as 'base', on abjection. This is all stuff of course, which is very topical – as in recent writings of Rosalind Krauss and the art of Mike Kelley and Martin Kittenberger. So again, ways of thinking about subjectivity were clarified for me by Bataille. **Thompson** What did this encounter change or shift in you or your work? Was it again a lifting of constraint or was it more juicy than that? **Barbour** There is certainly a resistance in Bataille to ideological constraint – much of his thinking bulges outside the frame and I loved that. It introduced me to new creative sources – as well as returned me to authors I had already encountered but hadn't been able to tie into my practice – such as Louis Ferdinand Céline's *Death On the Instalment Plan*. It kind of enabled me to better articulate my own concerns – my drive to make the object stand for the expression of the subject, for example, is a ludicrous project. It requires a kind of commitment which is, by virtue of its impossibility, out of proportion to the result. I perceived Bataille to be in sympathy with this with his insistence upon excess, on the 'accursed portion' as being more than can be used up, more than is appropriate to the project, occasion or form. 'It' is always falling over, seeping, leaking – and those terms have been really important to me. They are associated with fluidity, insubstantiality, superficiality and peripherality – with the edges of things. **Thompson** Those terms, seepage and leakage, imply a block or a mass that is negotiated whereas fluidity and insubstantiality don't to me. They seem quite different, free, if you like. **Barbour** That's true and I think I've dealt with them differently at different times. **Thompson** When you talk about Bataille's notion of excess... **Barbour** There is a kind of pure energy in there as well... **Thompson** So you are interested in the

below: John Barbour
Stills from the Liquid Plain 1995
installation view, Yuill/Crowley, Sydney


EXIT

endeavour described as 'expression' or the art object as a container for self?

Barbour It seems to me the work of art will be read in terms of its maker and this is borne out by experience – people always want to know something about the person who made the work. And this knowledge enriches one's understanding of it. The object will always be referred back to the maker and it is not less interesting because of this, something that takes us back to Barthes' 'death of the author' and to another personal encounter – with the teaching and works of Lyndal Jones in the early '80s. I found her approach – that we would do better in understanding the work to temporarily suspend our interest in the person who made it – both productive but also at odds with my own experience of things. Certainly it seemed more possible to do that in relation to other people's work and interesting discussions came out of that, but I couldn't deny that the work was often more interesting when I knew more about the artist. Nor could I deny that I didn't fully understand my own work (again with the hope that my work exceeds my own ability to control its meaning!). So it seems to me a given that work will be referred to the person who made it and to some understanding of 'interiority'. But producing work is also a kind of rhetorical gesture, so of course the ideal of total congruence between the object and the person who made it, is a conceit. My own difficulties, my frank acknowledgment of my failure to be able to control the meaning of my own work, is realised literally in the depiction in my early works of the figure of the dunce. It's an acknowledgment of the inability of the art object to be able to realise the ambitions and dreams it has historically stood for – maybe still stands for. It reflects my interest, again articulated by Bataille, in how art fails us. By 1992 I was trying to think 'outside of the frame'. I was in extremely different and difficult personal circumstances. I had three children by then, including twins. There wasn't much time and there wasn't much space to work, so I started on an extended series of small canvasses, painting and drawing with ink, gouache, biro, enamel, anything that came to hand. I wanted to work immediately and I thought of the series as accreting over time but with none of the individual elements ever being sufficient in itself. There would never be a whole story, only fragments that would reflect in distorted and fragmented form – as a systematic registration maybe – my 'internal' encounter with the world. Barthes says something somewhere about how you can see clearly when you let yourself go and regress. These were regressive in being 'pathological' – as registrations of processes, thoughts and feelings but as also of social and cultural impressions. A later series-based installation work, *Stills from the Liquid Plain* – which you saw at the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide in 1995 – was site dependent, and people described it as very formalist. But as I saw it the concerns that informed my figurative work were still present, just less apparent. The paintings were monochrome – single colours, fragile and atmospheric – like an accretion of tears or moisture. I was interested in the idea of form as repression – as in the way social forms both permit and disallow the voicing of certain matters. Necessary as protection and for achieving distance. Current work is much more apparently figurative again – reflecting my re-engagement with more overt meaning, with psychic states and with the idea of

story telling. I also wonder whether maybe no adequate form exists for some experiences. The experience of death resonates in the work and as a gesture towards the unvoicable or unsayable but I'd now say that the struggle to speak and be understood is important to attempt, even if full understanding is impossible to imagine. Basically I want a poverty of means to be evident in the work – I'm interested in provisionality and failing. It's a big risk. Yet the dunce in the corner has great freedom to think and feel as he will – excused from all else. My new works have been let off the hook, if you are seen to visibly fail you are let off. And perhaps I am coming to terms with not being so special!

But in the end, no form or idea is sufficient and my allegiance is not to form or particular ideas but to art and culture and to being an artist.

Simone Forti

style is a corset

An interview by Christophe Wavelet

Jennifer

Jennifer Monson has been working in New York City since she graduated from Sarah Lawrence College in 1983. In that time she has created a wide body of work that incorporates well developed collaborative relationships with many artists including Zeena Parker, Yvonne Meier and David Zambrano. She has also performed with Karen Finlay, DANCENOISE, Lisa Kraus, Fred Holland, Yoshika Chuma, John Bernd, Pooh Kaye/Eccentric Motions and Jennifer Miller's Circus AMOK. Her solo work has been presented in the United States, Europe, Latin America, Tanzania and Australia. In the following interview, conducted prior to her 1997 visit to Sydney (antistatic) and Melbourne, Jennifer Monson opens a discussion concerning the political dimension of new dance practice today.

Simone Forti's subtle and unique dance practice and aesthetic was formed during the whole period of the American avant garde (the 1950s through to the 1970s) – from the workshops of Ann Halprin to the New York happenings. Forti has gained little glory from a practice that she admits owes almost nothing to spectacle, but she retains the spirit of freedom that has informed her resolutely unconventional path in dance.

For almost forty years Forti's work has constituted a kind of reply – both supple and radical – to those aesthetic tendencies in dance that seek to congeal, stabilise, and codify. Like all the emancipatory projects of twentieth century dance Forti's has, in multiple ways, always been an ethical project and one which has never become aesthetically fixed.

The following conversation seeks to contribute a retrospective evocation of one of this century's exemplary dance practitioners – to commit something of her practice to memory, a task whose necessity, generally, is recognised but more rarely followed up. – C.W.

SIMONE FORTI I was born into a liberal bourgeois – even bohemian – Italian immigrant family. While I was in high school I began to be interested in the history of art. So I went to night classes. I remember that it wasn't long before I discovered the work of Rothko and Orrozco. Later I began to paint. At the age of 21 I married Robert Morris. At that time he was also a painter and he was very interested in abstract expressionism, a movement which had a precipitous demise despite the vitality that had characterised it for some years. Bob's painting was very close to this movement.

CHRISTOPHE WAVELET When did you become a dancer?

SIMONE FORTI In 1955 we were living on the west coast, in San Francisco. I met Ann Halprin and her husband, the architect Lawrence Halprin, both of whom were very interested in the history of the Bauhaus. Ann was teaching dance. Around that time there were a number of concerts of improvised, Beat Generation poetry. At the same time Ann began to work with improvisation as performance, although it had already been part of her teaching practice.

We worked together continuously for four years from 1955–59. Each day went as follows: in the morning we studied anatomy and kinesiology. The afternoon was devoted to improvisation as a way of experimenting directly and in various ways with what we had studied in the morning.

We did the first 'task improvisations' which were so effective. The idea of these 'tasks' was to set up a structure or an object and to explore the physical possibilities that it offered. The influence of the Bauhaus is obvious. But more importantly, in proceeding in this way we were able to enrich our corporeal and kinetic imaginations directly – without recourse to external referents (literary or psychological) as had been the case up until then in most dance practices. Ann had studied with Margaret Doubler at the University of Wisconsin. Doubler was herself a student of Mabel Todd, author of the celebrated *The Thinking Body*, a book that was subsequently very important for my own artistic practice

Monson

via e-mail

talks to Eleanor Brickhill in Sydney

Jennifer Monson in New York

Photo: Anja Hitzenberger

as it was for many dancer/choreographers of my generation. In it Todd articulated the idea of a mobile body, a theory of a thinking body based on a very wide field of study – anthropology, anatomy, philosophy, and medicine.

CHRISTOPHE WAVELET What are your other choreographic sources?

SIMONE FORTI At the same time that I met Ann Halprin I also discovered Kurt Schwitters. I found all of his writings extraordinary. Bob (Morris) had also introduced me to the writings of Duchamp, which were also an important influence. Flicking through a magazine at Ann's house I discovered the activities of the Gutai group from Japan. The freedom in their performances fascinated me, and seemed to prefigure my subsequent move to New York and my taking part, with other artists (Allan Kaprow, La Monte Young, Claes Oldenburg) in many 'happenings'. I was also interested somewhat in Zen. My friend John Graham and I talked a lot about theatre, envisaging processes of juxtaposition and collage that seemed to us original and interesting to try. 'Blow your mind' had become a kind of motto for us. We wanted to be open to the unknown, to welcome disorientation. We developed a project for which I proposed the name *Nez* – Zen backwards.

CHRISTOPHE WAVELET What about other dance techniques or specific body practices?

SIMONE FORTI I did do a workshop in Graham technique for a month in 1960 but I couldn't pull my stomach in in the way that technique required. It was just beyond me. Then, when we moved to New York I did several courses at the Cunningham studio. I remember being baffled by the sequences of movement shown by the teacher. You were supposed to integrate the material by copying. Everything was done at high speed and I was incapable of remembering anything. An important aspect of the movement seemed to be the arbitrary isolation of different body parts. One day in the studio I threw up my hands in exasperation and declared that Cunningham's work, with its articulated isolations, was for adults, and that what I had to offer was much closer to the holistic and generalised movement responses of early childhood.
In fact, having begun dancing later than many I was neither disposed towards nor interested in forming my practice according to any already established model. But I spent many hours at the zoo studying the locomotion of animals. I particularly like bears, and tortoises which can swim great distances. Or two cats, which play and fight simultaneously and seem to have a movement practice very close to martial art. I learnt more from these observations than from any dance class. And I was infinitely more interested in studying animals or working on task improvisations than by any technique, or even than the structural complexity of most of the dances people were making at that time.

CHRISTOPHE WAVELET How did you earn your living?

SIMONE FORTI Morris worked for the post office or the railways both in San Francisco and in Portland. I taught dance in my own way. Later, in New York, I worked with children in a crèche while becoming more and more involved in the 'happenings'.

CHRISTOPHE WAVELET What was your relationship to the feminist movements of the '50s and '60s?

EB How might you situate yourself in dance culture today?

JM I feel the forms and performances I practice are marginal for many reasons, sometimes to do with social and political issues such as being a feminist, a lesbian, an improvisor. My work can both be in reaction to, and in spite of, the status quo. It has always been important to me to relish in my bigness and muscularity as a woman on stage, to re-imagine what bodies can do, and what they are supposed to look like. Dance confronts ideas of identity and body-image so directly, and we all struggle with it.

EB: Who do you think are your most compelling influences?

JM: Early on, an amazing creative dance teacher in California, Balkan folkdance, and cross-country running, which I think was the beginning of my obsession with pushing the body's endurance to reach transcendent and transformative states.

Open Movement and Music Dance performances were influential: frequent, informal and risky. Open Movement is a dance event at PS122, held every Monday night, for anyone, with no music and lots of dancing. I came to NYC at a kind of pivotal moment when PS122 was just getting on its feet in a more 'professional' way, and I saw some of the most exciting and interesting dancing there: Ishmael Houston-Jones, Yvonne Meier, John Bernd, David Zambrano, David Beadle, Amy Finkel, Tim Miller, Stephanie Skura, Fred Holland, Charles Dennis, Yoshiko Chuma and folks from the school of Hard Knocks, just amazing people, dancing their hearts out. I was also totally inspired by Pooh Kaye, and danced with her for a few years.

Music Dance started later and was a more structured event of musicians and dancers. We would discuss scores and work on them, discuss them more and work again. It was a deeply satisying process and I learned even more about improvisation through musicians and the interplay between music and dance.

EB: Has your conception of what dancing is about changed over your practice?

JM: At first I worked from a place of personal survival. Now I'm more conscious and confident and my approach is not so defensive. Dancing is something I thrive on. Having being very shy for many years, it was somehow the only way I could show the wilder, maniacal side of myself safely. Now I want to make work that speaks from personal experience of the world, to a broader perspective, about the way I want the world to grow.

Improvisation has a truly collaborative focus on decision making and process, demanding a tremendous amount of trust and

SIMONE FORTI Contrary to the abstract expressionist art milieu, the dance milieu has never been difficult for women. It was the same for us as it was in Fluxus or in Yoko Ono's group. Women did not have to suffer for being women. So there was no direct necessity for me to become a militant feminist. On account of my education I had come to believe, very early on, that a woman should be paid for the work she did in the same way as a man. And I came to feel sympathetic to many of the claims made by the different currents of feminism. But again, and probably because of my relatively privileged situation, I never felt the necessity to become militant. I was drawn to other things: my desire to dance was very strong. This reminds me of an anecdote that's rather telling. I met Robert Whitman at the time of one of his happenings. I was very impressed by what I saw and I wanted to work with him. I was enchanted and soon afterwards we began a relationship which was to lead to marriage. From the moment we were married, Whitman made it known to me that he didn't want me to continue to work as an artist. And I acquiesced. I was so in love (bursts out laughing). You can see that, in respect of feminism, I still had a lot to learn.

CHRISTOPHE WAVELET During the sixties you became one of the major figures of the new dance along with Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Douglas Dunn and many others amongst whom were non-dancers including your first husband Robert Morris, and painter Robert Rauschenberg. How did you come to be involved in this radical current of American dance?

SIMONE FORTI In 1960 I participated in the now famous composition workshops that Robert Dunn was conducting at the Cunningham Studios. I became friendly with several of the other participants including Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown and so on. In these classes we were in fact being familiarised with the philosophy of John Cage and his famous indeterminate systems. There was an atmosphere of intense freedom, coupled with a very analytical approach to each person's compositional solutions. It was incredibly stimulating. Jim Dine invited me to contribute to an evening of events at the Reuben Gallery. *See-saw* and *Rollers* were my first choreographic works. Then I was regularly invited, here and there, to show my work. And as I said, I was involved in various happenings. I was very close to people like the musician La Monte Young, Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Kaprow and Whitman – the inventors of the happening. At that time there weren't any firm boundaries between different artistic practices. We were all more or less concerned with an art of process rather than with producing stable, marketable aesthetic objects.

CHRISTOPHE WAVELET You continued to make work. Then in 1970 Woodstock happened. Was this festival, which seems to have marked a whole generation, important for you?

SIMONE FORTI It was an extraordinary moment in my life. Like everyone else I took a lot of drugs – hash, marijuana, acid, mescalin. But the most important thing had something to do with a way of being together – which was not at all theoretical, on the contrary. There was at one and the same time an incredible freedom and a mutual respect that was unheard of until then. It took me a year to come down. I lived communally – in a situation where the only tacit rule was to value silence. You could develop a practice of listening, of attention: to others, to space, to time, and to action. In this way I never stopped dancing – in a thousand different ways. I remember one

responsibility both with the audience and co-performers. Freedom, and the limits and freedoms of structure, are key issues in my exploration. This is linked to the political activism I have been involved with over the past few years. My last piece, *Sender*, was inspired by readings, activism, correspondences and movies around prison culture. It took on issues of confinement and resistance, force and enforcement, subversion and cooperation.

EB: You talk about a 'language of intense physicality', 'ferocious in its concentration', and 'fiercely taxing', 'extreme physical and emotional states.' That sounds like full-on heavy muscular work. And you also work with release technique which isn't really about this. Your comments about transcendent and transformative states remind me strongly of the way some Butoh-inspired dancers here talk about their training. If the training is militaristic in that case, it's also to do with finding that transformative experience. Can you talk more about these extremes?

JM: It's funny that you say that release technique isn't about full-on muscular work. I have always experienced releasing as a way to unleash enormous amounts of power and it takes you to a subconscious state, or through an intensely driven physical task that helps to strip layers away, leaving something raw and vulnerable. These kinds of processes are very delicate and personal, hard to come up with on demand.

EB: Twenty years ago, here 'release' appeared as a very strong reaction to prevailing mainstream dance ideas of say, technical 'perfection', encapsulated in the muscle-boundedness of Graham and ballet-based stuff, or in reaction to the idea of holding up one's body to certain cultural specifications. So dancing and bodies often looked soft and heavy. Now of course, everybody seems to be reacting against that. Dancers here often do yoga for strength and as a basis for their own practice.

JM: I am intrigued by how people think of technique. I recently got a review in which I was described as a 'non-technical' dancer. Of course I was insulted because I feel like I am an extremely technical dancer, just in non-traditional techniques, and I have done my share of 'technical' dancing in my time with Lisa Kraus and Jeremy Nelson. But I think what drew me to these techniques was the possibility of discovering and developing my individual movement vocabulary and language, again a reaction to following a pre-set image or ideal.

EB: A lot of the independent dance artists are more interested in improvisation than choreography, as such: dancing, these days, is more about immediacy, multi-layered complex experience, and a performer's capacity to relate to an audience.

morning I got up at dawn and while two friends prepared breakfast I was outside in the landscape, perched on a large rock, another small rock balanced on my head. I was experimenting with the degree of flexibility of my dorsal spine that such an arrangement permitted. You see, these were often very simple experiments and experiences. And there was an intensely pleasurable but unspoken connection and understanding between this activity and that of my friends who were cooking their porridge.
The same year I discovered Tai-chi. I liked its slowness and fluidity and the very particular way these were connected through one's relationship with weight and the ground. It's still the only physical practice that I undertake with any regularity. Unlike many dancers I've never pursued any training regime. I don't consider it necessary. It's the state into which you place your desire to dance that is important.

CHRISTOPHE WAVELET Although you've been a performer and choreographer for over thirty years you've never wanted to have a company.

SIMONE FORTI Only rather late in the piece. Between 1986 and 1992 I formed 'Simone Forti and troup' – a small group of dancers with whom I toured from time to time in America. But what has always most interested me is artistic research. My work is not spectacular, and I've never wanted to be famous – something I knew from the beginning. Respected or appreciated, yes, but not famous. To have a company with all that means in terms of constraints and responsibilities I'm not cut out for that. I need a certain freedom, and fallow time.

CHRISTOPHE WAVELET Do you still dance a lot?

SIMONE FORTI As ever – no more nor less. To be an artist and to pursue one's art is something that is permissable, historically. But being a dancer is a little different. Actually, I've never thought that a poetic sensibility depended on the body's acrobatic potential. When I was young I loved to throw myself around. I wouldn't do that today: I no longer can and nor do I wish to. I no longer take the physical risks I took before, but I take others which are perhaps less obvious but no less 'sensible'. The way that I apprehend movement has never stopped changing as I have experimented with different things. My work evolves, I remain supple, flexible, I change. Times change. On a certain level my work today is more mature, more precise – including in its intentions. From another perspective, certain things are no longer within my reach. But what I realise everyday is how privileged I am – well beyond my own determination.

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Original interview conducted by Christopher Wavelet and Isabelle Launay
Département Danse, Université Paris VIII, Saint-Denis
[Trans. Sally Gardner]

JM: As an improvisor I am always trying to negotiate and develop my relationship with the audience, to expand from a kind of general sense of openness and vulnerability, to experiment with more complex, even manipulative, relationships. I like to use the metaphor of a bridge, because the exchange of information and energy with an audience during an improvisational performance is so dynamic. It's the audience which makes a performance happen. If I feel an audience just isn't getting what I'm doing, then I'll up the ante, somehow. But then, if we're connecting in an inspired way, I'll try to hold that window open, infuse generosity. It can be quite terrifying. It's hard to have too much of a good thing.

EB: What inspires your collaboration with musician Zeena Parkin?

JM: I feel a very intuitive relationship to Zeena's music, it's rawness and strong sound and brilliant compositional components. We seem to work in a similar terrain: out-of-control and control; obvious structure and obtuse structure; experimental sound and movement. Things are always changing and growing, getting pulled apart and put back together.

Sender has been our most successful and complex collaboration. Originally I started with the choreography and the concept, but simultaneously Zeena was working on a Jewish gangster piece, based on Rotwelsh, a medieval Jewish thieves' language, as well as Hollywood gangster films and music. So I was already listening to this music, which fascinated me, even without knowing if it would work.

EB: I notice your involvement in teaching *Moving Queer Bodies – Power, Performance and Cultural Re-alignment*. Recently we have had some very slick performances by new-ish mainstream choreographers who push the dancers' endurance to all-time highs. But, disturbingly, while claiming to comment on the issues of gender and sexuality, they end up unconsciously simply using mainstream physicality as a vehicle while ignoring the values which are embodied in it; and thereby not addressing the issues at all – a Clayton political statement. How might dance be implicated in cultural/political alignment?

JM: Yes, new popular, slick companies that again are parading perfect bodies that can do anything! I guess I am always drawn to truly original movers, no matter what their backgrounds are. People like Scott Heron, who I am sure you haven't heard of – he's a skinny, glorious fag with very little traditional training, but he has worked a lot with Deborah Hay and he is a phenomenal performer and improvisor. I had the pleasure of making a duet for him and Jennifer Lacey, another amazingly virtuosic and original mover, and

30 March '80

An extract from *Judson Days* by Robert Ellis Dunn

In the fall of 1960, I began a series of four courses (workshops, what have you) in choreography at the Merce Cunningham Studio, then at the corner of 14th Street and 6th Avenue, a building shared by the Living Theatre. These classes continued to the spring of 1962, immediately followed by the first 'Concert of Dance' at the Judson Church, and a class taught by Merce Cunningham in which his *Suite by Chance* was reassembled in several versions by groups of dancers tossing coins to determine choices and sequences of movement from his original tables. For me, the 'Judson' experience began with the first of these classes and ended in October of 1964, after a fifth class given at the Judith Dunn Studio, with the appropriately titled *Last Point*, an evening-long dance by Judith Dunn, performed at the Judson Church, with multi-screening of films by Gene Friedman and a verbal score composed and read over a public address system by myself.

somehow even though they have totally different strengths, they both had what I consider technique as performers and improvisors. *Moving Queer Bodies* brought together some experiences I was having as a political activist with the Lesbian Avengers in NYC in the early '90s, and some gender theory. Big political demonstrations and actions felt akin to improvisational performance: the communication and trust, spontaneous decision making that happens non-verbally. I was also seeing how bodies, often masses of bodies, can make such a powerful political statement at a very material level, for instance, simply by being engaged with people on the street, or with cops. How does power get played out on the body? I was also seeing the gendered body being displayed and deconstructed constantly around me in performance and wanted to really investigate the political power of these performances.

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No. 13, Autumn 1997

I was asked to give these courses by John Cage, who had himself given such in the past and was banking on my knowledge of dance and current practices in several other fields of the arts. I asked Judith Dunn to assist me in some or all of the classes given at Merce's, and she was quite active in keeping the discussion going and taking part in the many live explorations of possibilities that took place during the sessions. Merce donated the use of his studio free of charge, and each class was about two and a half hours in duration, running to some 10–12 sessions per course, with a total fee of $12–15 to each solvent student for the entire course, and people returning for later courses being exempted from payment.

I have continued to teach such classes under the rubric of 'choreography', rather than 'dance composition' for deeply-felt reasons which I find it hard to unravel completely. The word 'choreography' is specific to the art of movement, with its theatrical accompaniments. 'Composition' has often sounded like a rather academicized assimilation to other arts, particularly music and literature. And I have always been into the business of getting people on with making dances, not studies. I was also fighting the conception of myself as a musician only, making applications to a neighboring field. (I sometimes rather chose a model of a sort of errant philosopher-poet adventuring in various media, including that of the social occasions surrounding creative work.) The 'graphy' part of the word, with its suggestion of 'scoring' of some sort, was also of interest to me.

I had performing experience of my own in the field, modest but ever so vivid to me, and as a rehearsal pianist a great deal of acquaintance with working methods, styles and forms of various choreographers of a number of persuasions. The material I gave on time-structures was not 'musical forms', but structures derived from and applicable to all the arts or future arts which might take place in time. This thinking was made much easier by John Cage's welcoming into such structures in his own compositions, first of 'noise', then of every sort of 'theatrical' action and event.

My general attitude in teaching was influenced by several somewhat disparate factions. I was impressed by what I had come to know about Bauhaus education in the arts, particularly from the writings of Moholy-Nagy, in its emphasis on the nature of materials and on basic structural elements. Association with John Cage had led to the project of constantly extending perceptive boundaries and contexts. From Heidegger, Sartre, Far Eastern Buddhism, and Taoism, in some personal amalgam, I had the notion in teaching of making a clearing... a sort of space of nothing, in which things could appear and grow in their own nature. Before each class, I made the attempt to attain this state of mind, with varying success of course.

The interminable rambling discussion spoken of by Judith Dunn did indeed take place, and was part of a deliberate ascesis (personal discipline), preventing premature closure before the practically unheard-of had some chance to poke its way into our presence, which it often did. Particularly, the matter of anxiety, whether personal or aesthetic, on the part of teacher or other members of the class, was rather sternly bypassed, in so far as it could be, though this took place by example and contagion rather than as stated doctrine. Allowing this anxiety to take place for choreographer and dancer, and later for the audience, without automatic and unconscious retreat to safer formulae, was of

utmost importance in getting to the explorations, the dances, and the audience experiences which we felt at that time as somehow crying to be born.

The first four courses form in my memory a single flow of intricate weaving of events and experiences. Showing of completed projects and works-in-progress were from the first part of the format of the class. However, being concerned about the drop of productivity I thought I had experienced in classes I had taken with John Cage at the New School for Social Research, I added certain assignments, materials, and ideas put forth for their possible suggestiveness to further work. This was a bit of strategic irrigation of the garden plot, it being very clear to me at the time that the all-necessary seeds were provided by each member of the class. I continue now as then to regard each dance I see as an animal of which there is only one to the species, though it might show orienting resemblances to others (cf. Thomas Aquinas on angels as each constituting a species to itself).

We sometimes worked from principles, but in the sense of starting points rather than regulating controls. My refusal to provide a recipe toward which to work for approval or disapproval periodically got me in hot water emotionally with members of the class, so much had this approach been typical of the attitude taken by teachers in this area (as often today). I think I also provided rather the wrong kind of surface for the parental transference usually and rather troublesomely present in any advanced study still in a teacher-class situation. (I moved from 31 to 35 years of age during this period, most of the rest were in their 20s.)

I found the classes highly exciting and successful, especially in the matter of productivity. However, they were a constant challenge to me, intellectually and personally, and when Merce took over a course, and, most important of all, a big concert had been presented, I was glad to take a rest. (I was constantly flying all over the city trying to gouge out a very tiny income as a musician for modern dancers.) The workshop was formed, and I felt it could take care of the continuance of the project. James Waring did some teaching of choreography once more, and only when he said that he was tired and wished me to take over again did I give one more course at the Judith Dunn Studio.

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Robert Ellis Dunn's archive is held by the Library of Congress, Washington DC, USA

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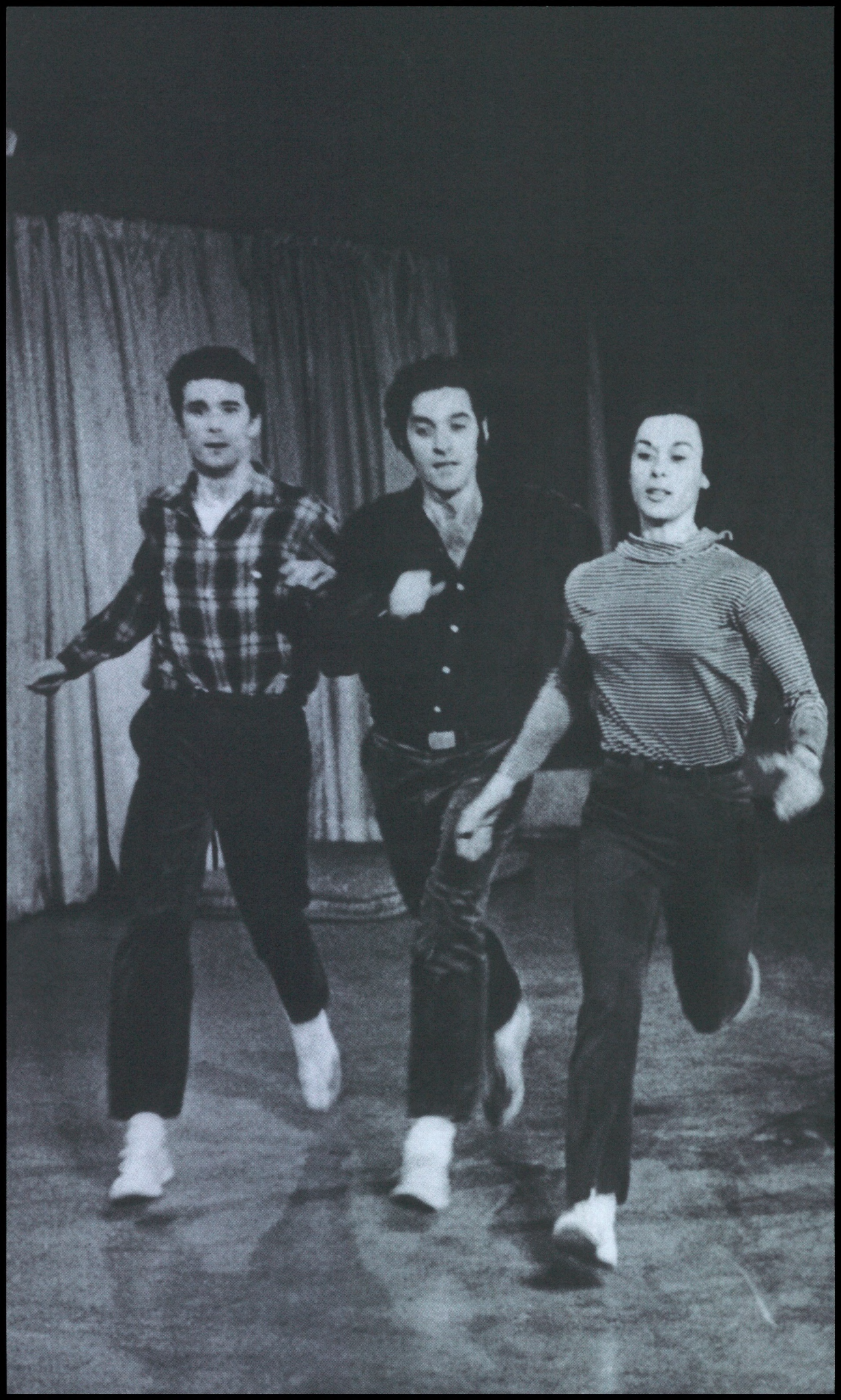
Yvonne Rainer



(It is not necessary to read this prior to observation)

The choices in my work are predicated on my own peculiar resources – obsessions of imagination, you might say – and also on an ongoing argument with, love of, and contempt for dancing. If my rage at the impoverishment of ideas, narcissism, and disguised sexual exhibitionism of most dancing can be considered puritan moralizing, it is also true that I love the body – its actual weight, mass and unenhanced physicality. It is my overall concern to reveal people as they are engaged in various kinds of activities – alone, with each other, with objects – and to weight the quality of the human body toward that of objects and away from the super-stylization of the dancer. Interaction and cooperation on the one hand; substantiality and inertia on the other. Movement invention, i.e. 'dancing' in a strict sense, is but one of the several factors in the work.

Although the formal concerns vary in each section of THE MIND IS A MUSCLE, a general statement can be made. I am often involved with changes as they are played against one or more constants: Details executed in a context of a continuum of energy (*Trio A*, *Mat*); phrases and combinations done in unison (*Trio B*); interactive and mutually dependent movements done in a singular floor pattern (*Trio A*[1]); changing floor patterns and movement configurations carried out by a group moving as a single unit (*Film*, *Horses*); changes in a group configuration occurring around a constant central area of focus (*Act*); and more obvious juxtapositions that involve actual separations in space and time.

The condition for the making of my stuff lies in the continuation of my interest and energy. Just as ideological issues have no bearing on the nature of the work, neither does the tenor of current political and social conditions have any bearing on its execution. The world disintegrates around me. My connection to the world-in-crisis remains tenuous and remote. I can foresee a time when this remoteness must necessarily end, though I cannot foresee exactly when or how the relationship will change, or what circumstances will incite me to a different kind of action. Perhaps nothing short of universal female military conscription will affect my function. (The *ipso facto* physical fitness of dancers will make them the first victims); or a call for a world-wide cessation of individual functions, to include the termination of genocide. This statement is not an apology. It is a reflection of a state of mind that reacts with horror and disbelief upon seeing a Vietnamese shot dead on TV – not at the sight of death, however, but at the fact that the TV can be shut off afterwards as after a bad Western. My body remains the enduring reality.

Yvonne Rainer March 1968

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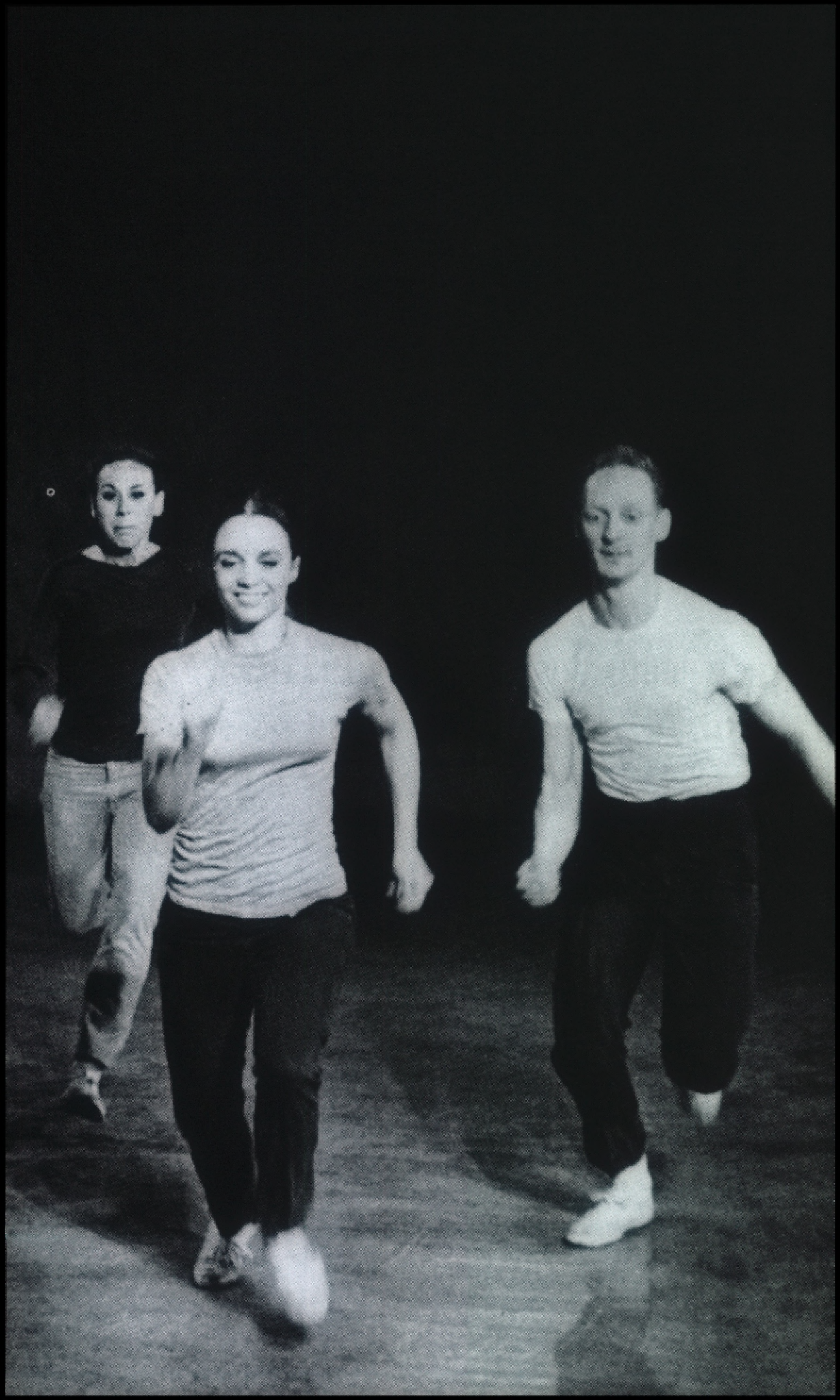
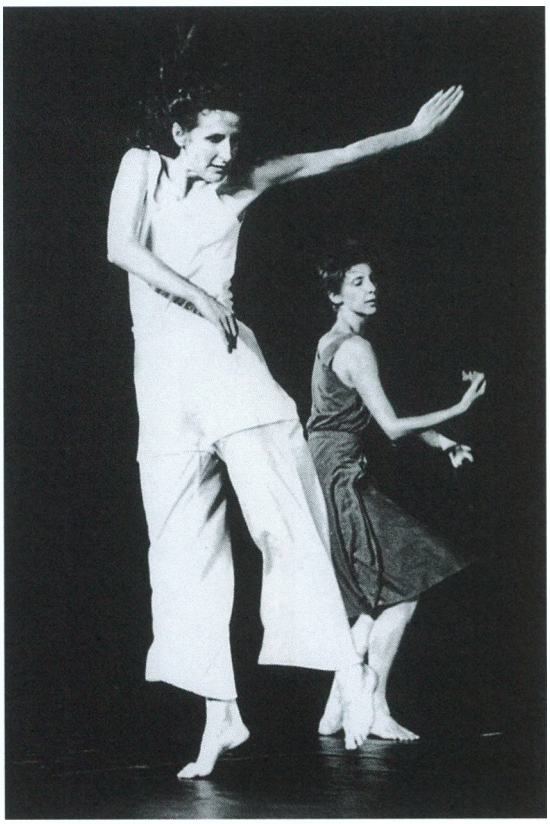
Image page 162 and opposite
Transitional moment during the first version of *The Mind is a Muscle*
Judson Memorial Church, NYC, May 24 1966. Photo: Peter Moore.





Set and Reset part one (1982). Choreography Trisha Brown. Dancers, Trisha Brown, Eva Karczag
Photo: Guy Delahaye

Engineering Calamity

Trisha Brown

by Yvonne Rainer

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Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown

Lateral Pass reconstruction (1985). Choreography Trisha Brown. Dancers, Diane Madden, Trisha Brown

Okay Trisha, my friend: They tell us that you're doing something very different now, that having Steve Petronio lift you so your body flies out flat as a pancake is so very different from those far-out minimalist pieces you did around the turn of the '60s in which people walked on walls, a chapter in your life you'd maybe prefer to minimalize. So here I come with one of my earliest memories of you: at Anna Halprin's in California in 1960 pushing a broom. The sweeping action created a momentum that propelled your body into the air almost parallel to the ground! Now talk about a connecting, surviving, kinetic image 25 years later still at work. Then there are those people on the wall and that man walking down the side of the building, all of them parallel to the ground!

That stuff was spectacular but not very theatrical. I don't like using the word minimalist because it carries a perjorative ring. However, you might say I was going along with the anti-virtuosity bias left over from the Judson days.

Ah yes, the JUDSON bias. A bias that unravels on close scrutiny, as the Judson revival of 1982 proved. JUDSON in upper case never existed. It was simply a church that housed a number of diverse events. Somehow – and predictably – it has become monumentalized as a singular undifferentiated place and moment, even to those who were there. Nevertheless, it is possible (and urgent) to define a small corner of that place in which a few of us operated. Take the question of gravity.

The various dance traditions – especially ballet – and the circus had dominated and circumscribed the ways in which people got themselves into the air for purposes of entertainment. The vertical jump, the split leg leap, the lifting of the woman by a man or men, and rhythmic variations on all of these had pretty much preempted the dance territory. Alongside this perceived domination, we had this fascination with so-called non-virtuosic, or ordinary movement. As recently as several weeks ago Pooh Kaye, in an interview in *The New York Times*, described being turned on by seeing Barbara Dilley crawl on all fours in a performance sometime in the early '70s. Barbara's crawl was by then of a very venerable age indeed. Try to picture Trisha around 1963 doing *Trillium*.

It was in Trillium *that I worked on standing, sitting, and lying down. By tricking myself, dispatching that part of my mind that should have been alarmed at what I was doing, I found I was going from an upright position to lying down in the air. And I discovered it when Aileen Passloff was watching me work in that studio you shared with her on St Mark's Place. She was quiet while I worked and when I stopped she said, 'Did you know you were lying down in the air?' And I didn't but then I realized that was wonderful.*

So that led to sitting in the air and sitting upside down in the air. This reversal of normal procedures, this standing ordinary movement on its head, might describe your current way of working. Yes? No?

You know I never thought of this before, but often, what I do when making movement on a very minute level is to set up some sort of a calamity, a central calamity. Let me give an example: There's this one movement in a solo that I do in Lateral Pass. *I swing an arm forward to shoulder level and then when I think it's at shoulder level I drop my body real*

Lateral Pass (1985). Choreography Trisha Brown. Dancer Trisha Brown
Photo: Jean-Luc Dugied

fast and it pulls the arm up as if you were jumping into a trampoline. But I still imagine I have my arms horizontal to the floor and I leap and also drop my head and roll it at the same time which then squares me around to the front and my arms are now way up behind my back somewhere. And then one arm motivates a new action. It darts across my body, which makes all hell break loose up and down. It whips everything around in a very explosive way. By the end an arm and a leg are kind of like doors swinging in the wind until they come to rest.

That's like a carry over of indeterminacy from the rule games you used to do with Simone Forti. You would decide on one determining event, or limitation – the central calamity you might say – which would then create a succession of conditions to which the person or parts of the body responded, like channels drawn on the floor that determined the height at which one had to travel – therefore, by sliding on the belly, crawling, hunching over, walking upright, etc. A methodology for producing a provisional succession of contingent acts as opposed to, say, an idealized, unified vision. Pointers to an ethics perhaps.

I asked whether the new dance, *Lateral Pass*, had developed at all out of the previous *Set and Reset* (1983). She talked about changing her method: working more one-to-one with the dancers than teaching them what she had already privately choreographed.

One of the outstanding things in Lateral Pass *is the collisions. In my previous choreography they were more like near misses. I would look for these moments and then incorporate them into the dance. But now we're actually running into each other. I had always played with that issue of falling – is she or isn't she? – that assembling or disassembling of gestures between my highest height and the floor. Which refers back to the rule game you mentioned that involved changing levels of locomotion. Now we're hitting the floor. There's a lot of floor in* Lateral Pass.

How do you get up?

You slap those hands off you that are holding you down there!... We're working on this one phrase that is very exploded, bigger than life. It's sort of like a child trying to be an adult. It's based on a gesture having to do with being undersized, and it's scaled up slightly beyond your size. It's a wonderful headlong phrase, very difficult to do.

Is it supposed to look like something you can't quite do?

It's a 'dirigible'. It doesn't look like failure or like an error. But it's on the edge. There is a pack of people hovering around, everyone moving in the pathway of the dance – but some go down into the movement and some go up into the movement while others are pacing and observing with constant shifts in the ones actually doing it in this moving pack. It's slow looking because it's so difficult. I don't know how else to explain it... Have you ever started to fall, like you're running backwards – whoop, whoop – you know, you start to fall and you're trying to get your feet under you? That's how it perpetuates itself. It's just on the edge of control.

Why am I telling you all this? I guess because I'm wondering how I'm going to be putting this dance together in Minneapolis... In Trillium *I was always stopping during the making of it. I saw it as separate parts and I was hoping it was complete. I don't know what I was waiting for. It was almost like that improvisatory sensibility where you're so sensitive to everything, you wait to make a move. That's very different from the way I make movement now. I can't stop.*

I take an abrupt turn. *Watermotor* (1977) was the first calculatedly elaborated movement invention you embarked on. How come you didn't do that solo 10 years earlier?

Well, I had never done that kind of movement before outside of an improvisatory setting, usually with at least one other person. And once I improvised, a whole set of mannerisms and behavioral patterns entered in that weren't appropriate to making a dance like Watermotor. *It just couldn't have happened in an improvisation.* Watermotor *was also highly personal and I didn't know whether it was acceptable somehow.*

That was a funny inhibition in a climate I had always assumed encouraged a 'sense of inexhaustible possibilities.'

It was a very elusive form of movement. I couldn't grasp it. I didn't know how to bank it. I knew how to do it, but I couldn't build on it. It's so instinctual that the minute you have expectations or make demands on it or repeat it, it evaporates.

That makes me think about why the Grand Union in the early '70s was so exciting to watch: invention and erasure happening simultaneously. For me, of course, this was also a big frustration. We never rehearsed. It became too dangerous for me. Finally I had to drop out because I couldn't face those performances without being stoned. But you people continued to do some extraordinary things.

You see, in counterbalance to the Grand Union and all that extreme pain and pleasure that comes from letting it all hang out, I was doing my own work. The Accumulations *were very carefully organized, each gesture, however absurd, meticulously studied.*

It was the beginning of that very careful focus on parts of your body that later would turn into quite virtuosic successions of movement.

They seemed overly simple, so mechanical, just a bend in the arm, a twist of the wrist...

There was a way you had of doing those things that was utterly satisfying to watch – that quality of soft, pristinely clear articulation that over the years developed to almost conventional phrases when you speeded them up. The speed is one of the things that changed the look of what you did.

Speed, yes. But also the Accumulations *were more or less simultaneous solos. They weren't done in counterpoint or canon. I never wanted it to look like row row row your boat.*

Row your boat or your raft? The *Accumulations* were done on rafts in a lake at some point.

The Rationales

Chris Mann

During that period I had very high standards of integrity if that is the right word... I had a gun to my head to do that purist kind of work.

Pure in what sense? What, for you, did it exclude?

I didn't permit humor in the work.

What?!!

The humor came out of my seriousness. You know I didn't go through any of the doors that were available to me with that movement or in that set-up. I mean, one of the things you can do when you set up a very tight system like that one is to break it. And I never did.

I make another abrupt turn. I had been waiting to get to this. In a way you couldn't begin to develop your movement until you had people around who could reflect it back to you. At that point there weren't people around who were schooled in these other techniques: Contact Improvisation, martial arts, Alexander technique. All that took time. It took time for dancers schooled in the body boggling techniques of ballet and Cunningham not only to expose themselves to these alternative techniques but to begin to use them. And here I must pay tribute to this fantastic group of dancers who work with Trisha. Each year I have watched this group get better and better. (Stephen Petronio, Vicki Schick, Randy Warshaw, Diane Madden, Lisa Schmidt, Lance Gries, Irene Hultman, Carolyn Lucas are currently in the company. Lisa Kraus, Eva Karczag, Wendy Perron, Elizabeth Garren, Nina Lundborg, Mona Sulzman, Judith Ragir, Carmen Deuchat, Sylvia Palacios Whitman, Russell Dumas are previous members.) Or, more accurately, I have watched Trisha's movement develop and proliferate via these dancers who keep pace and more: lately they are nipping at her heels...

. . . . . .

I must admit my pressuring you to deal with the early work has to do with my own life as a dancer during that period.

It's true I may sometimes have rejected those early dances. But those earliest dances were very mysterious even to me.

Which ones?

Trillium *and... uh, the duck dance...*

What was it called? Mud, mud, mud...

Saltgrass, Waders, and... *there were other terms.*

What did you do besides dunk yourself in a tub?

I threw myself in the air. And there was a place where I mouthed a story without speaking, a silent monologue.

Didn't you have galoshes on?

An Australian is someone who when asked Can you play the piano? says Dunno I never tried.

In the 19th century Australia imported 700,000 pianos.

No.

No galoshes?

I wore a very thin little white organza dress. And there was a chair.

Then I remembered that dress getting all wet and clinging to her body like a Playboy Centerfold and she reminded me that I had put her down afterwards. Oh Christ I was hard-nosed in those days.

Why are we talking about this, Yvonne?

In unison we say, '...mysterious to me'.

Now I remember what I was getting at. When I went into Accumulations *and those very systematized pieces, it was to bring order to the amorphousness of this other dance life I was conducting.*

To bring order to the chaos of your imagination? (I wish I could report that I laughed.)

Yes.

This is one of the reasons we all did some of the things we did. Yeah, the odious imagination was in disrepute at that time. Don't you think its time for the Return-of-the-Disreputable to disappear again?

I told her what my first impression of *Watermotor* had been, that it was not until Babette Mangolte's film of the dance that I could appreciate it. But even that first time I knew there was something that was truly new. And I luxuriated in the novel feeling of being confronted by the necessity of educating myself. The pressure was clearly on me – on all of us in the audience – to 'see again,' to catch up with a spirit that was leading the way. A more usual experience is to feel in sync with the new: 'This is what I've been waiting for, I recognize it.' *Watermotor* was different.

Well luckily Babette shot it, because I don't move like that anymore. I haven't done it in two years, so now I'm trying to recover it off of videotape.

Is that hard to do?

Very hard. Certain things come back but others... like the setting up of an action that's going in one direction, then cross-cutting it with another action, and I don't remember what the original intention was. All I get is the shape without the impulse. I can't figure it out: why am I starting to go around to the right and suddenly I'm backing out to the left? I mean, I can't figure out how I motivated it.

Once it gets into your muscles, though...

Yeah, yeah, it did come back. I still have to get it up to speed. I remember it used to be exhausting to do.

How long was it?

Rationale for an Australian Experimental Arts Group:

Elsie Phar Lap Davis has been making up songs in pretend French for the senior cits for years and every secondary school student in Australia has done some French and what we get is semioticians who believe the only way to criticize a Bowie album is to buy it.
10% of the Australian population are Greek and what we get is imitation Japanese and what the Japs want is nasalisation and magpies.
In the 60s the Japanese offered us $1m each to piss off. To leave the bloody country. We didn't because we have a culture based on 'making do' and 'making sense'. Oz culture is about orchestrating competence. Roberts, Grainger and Brennan. Zeitgeist was a flurry in this direction but the Germans and Americans can't do it because they come from a literary world. American English is based on German. It's business English. Australian English is based on Irish. It's an aural language. In Australia there is a popular art form called 'timing'. It pervades everything from horse races to bushfires. In Europe the most sophisticated high-art understanding of 'timing' is the waltz. In America it's the backbeat. The only other culture of 'timing' is the Yiddish stand-up comic. Yiddish is to German as Australian is to English. The light is different in Australia. The acoustics are different. The sense is different. Ripley's Believe It Or Not rang and asked if lyrebirds could whistle Bach cantatas. True dinks.

About two-and-a-half minutes.

I remember reading Nijinsky saying that two minutes was long for a solo.

There are moments when I'm making a shift from facing left to facing right and it's just like the movement is splattered on a screen... And now when I perform it, I'm talking at the same time.

Do you know what you are going to say when you perform it in Minneapolis?

'Help!' Or maybe I'll just cry.

I suggest she say 'Judson played a joke on me,' referring to a statement of Trisha's in a *Vanity Fair* interview that I in an overly sensitive moment, had read as a shrugging off of her early work. In fact, I've now come full circle, for it was a conversation about that interview that prompted this one. From my point of view, the record has been somewhat righted, with neither the old Brown, nor the new, slighted.

Rationale for Composer and Writer Apprenticeships:

In April 79 Hong Kong ceased the trading of Poetry on the Futures Market. It had been trading in Australia for a week. Language as mild clairvoyance. There is no scientific explanation of language. There may be one for data. Statements. But propositions, arguments? No way. That you turned right ten seconds after I said turn right is not explainable scientifically. The future is only bloody market research for IBM and General Electric coz stats is stuck, fait accompli has been put out to grass n information which has been playing dress ups n tryin t pass itself off as language cant even raise a stutter. Or as someone said on th bus th other day, told y so. Youre stuffed. Not coz y wrong but coz y lookin in th wrong direction. We got credit by th balls. We been on conceptual strike since th year dot. Positivism is just a crank religion. We dont need to feel good. N using artificial languages as a model, sucks, coz th reason Australia is a nation of gamblers is coz y dont prove nothin by winning cept y know what a number is n most thumb suckers got one so knowin how to spell please doesnt argue for a purchase on reality. Its a vindictive apology. Profit is th sense you make when youre not making sense. Grammar is a monument to th heroics of knowing better. Two bob each way. The National Language Policy is some sorta banker tryin t big note shares in tautologies. Me too. Language is not just a slogan of th righteous boss and we have more potent weapons than merely being wrong. So shut th fuck up. Conjugate bribery. We are examples. A poor mans metaphor. So whats th action, god knows. Fuck god. We are th bloody words. Gooseing proverbs outa tea leaves t tell th time is a lousy way t pay th rent so if y want logic t wait up let lone set th table for th news y got another think coming. Second thoughts is a ptend misdemeanor floggin um ah on th steps of/to copy con. We know the address coz we dont live here anymore. Theres no irony in more. Anymore. Right. Turn.

What is going on

The following short essay seeks to contribute to a philosophy of Post-modern dance. I am interested in the implications of Post-modern dance's apparent rejection of representation and meaning which by the mid '70s led this 'movement' to be considered by Michael Kirby, then editor of *The Drama Review*, as 'one of the most radical innovations in the performing arts in our time.'

In an interview published in this issue, Simone Forti talks about the early task improvisations and dances in which she was involved, in terms of their having enabled her and others to 'enrich our corporeal and kinetic imaginations directly without recourse to external referents – literary or psychological.' Without doubt, the strategies and interventions of Forti and others, some of whom are represented elsewhere in this issue, opened onto an incredible profusion of movement forms and to an unprecedented liberation and shaping of bodily energies and possibilities.

In philosophical terms what is going on here? What is the relationship between Forti's (and others') rich corporeal imagination and her avoidance of narrative and psychology? This issue has been discussed in dance historical terms – the apparent exhaustion of expressionist modern dance by the late 1950s, the need for renewal, and the concern by younger artists to open theatrical dance and dancing up to new definitions and possibilities. But the relationship between Post-modern dance's 'anti-representational stance' and what Forti is calling kinetic imagination has been much less discussed in terms of broader philosophical and critical debates, for example, in terms of the intricate relationships between language and bodies.

Rationale for the Deployment of Gossips:

The State of Victoria refused to recognize Bell's patent of the phone. Jus y make facts same ways y do a room so blue n chooks go thru time arseways coz up is jus a fart t any system n words a packet full a gunnas that rhyme ok. I jus knew it. Th lines busted. a no worries coz is boss so count me in screwin maybes inta grammars too much like a sin. Y had romantic chain letters n then y get high camp romantic bit a minimalism n recession n y got suburban romantic but coz Hegel was only translated into French after World War 2 they doin shoddy homework n call it semiotic. Thats how mediocre become a art (you know, like economics. Now, jus coz John Maynard Keynes took the night ferry to Ostend coz th roulette table didn have no zero, thats no Lysenko remained head of the Soviet Academy of Sciences til th mid 1960s.) Trojan horse languages may indeed wipe out their own etymologies t score but they about as critical as dear diary.
Free rides on public transport.
Abolition of library fines.
No charge if you dial th wrong number.

in Post-modern dance?

by Sally Gardner

And indeed, a whole language has developed around, and in order to describe or at least signpost, Post-modern dance. This language includes terms such as 'objective', 'abstract', 'impersonal', 'pedestrian' and so on. But as time passes and the possibility of access to the work to which these terms have been applied diminishes, it becomes increasingly important to try to articulate what they actually mean, or meant. In the Australian context, for example, these terms are often used or understood, at best in an uninformed way, at worst, pejoratively.

From a philosophical point of view it seems important to try to understand these terms – and Post-modern dance – within the context of an economy of language and representation which has, historically, worked to fix and stabilise our corporeality and our corporeal identities. [The (arguably necessary, but historically specific) stabilising effects of language and representation has been well discussed in Lacanian, Feminist and Queer theory]. Considering Post-modern dance against such a background makes it possible, even imperative, to ask – as a dancer might – how can one begin to *mobilise*, to dance, perhaps, from within this economy?

What follows is a preliminary attempt to construct a detailed argument for the idea that the artists associated with Post-modern dance understood at some level that their capacity to 'move freely' – in a quite literal sense – was predicated upon their success in subverting, through canny, intelligent, specific, and material strategies, an economy of language and representation which works to stabilise and to fix our bodies, identities and subjectivities.

Rationale No. 4 (Footnote to Resolution 17):

At the risk of being classed a traitor by the anti-elitist art-as-welfare lobby, as part of the Art & Working Life program of the Australia Council I would like to propose the position of Artist-in-Residence to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Before the flip dismissal of court jester or suburban DeBono is accepted it would be interesting to speculate as to what would happen if either of these job descriptions were realized. Instead of being conceptual hostage to Lenin's pronouncements on using the best of the old forms, we may turn a few corners, or at least generate a few metaphors – if not grammars. Input into the National Language Policy. Machiavelli you must remember was a chef and poet. Observing both the lessons from 1968 and 'trickle down', where better to lobby for the admittedly under-represented Arts, where better to analyse the similarities, contradictions and absolute dependencies of those two abstract sports of Art and Politics.
The position to be permanent.
No artist to be employed longer than 1 year nor for less than 3 months.
No Ministerial representation on the selection committee.

One: Sociality

It has been documented and argued that Post-modern dancers refused to practise dance as an instrument or support for representation as such. For example, Michael Kirby observed in his introduction to the Post-modern dance issue of *The Drama Review* in 1975 that, **In the discussion of their work, the post-modern dancers do not mention such things as meaning, characterization, mood or atmosphere... post-modern dance is not used to convey messages or make statements. The dancers are merely themselves, they do not personify individuals, types, forces, and so forth... The movement in post-modern dance is an end in itself.** (1975:14)

But what was this 'movement' and where did it come from? How was it created? According to Kirby 'movement' was not selected or chosen so much as resulted from **certain decisions, goals, plans, schemes, rules, concepts, or problems.** (1975:3) The idea of a powerful interiority which had driven earlier forms of Modern dance was thus rejected. Movement came not from individualised, subjective choices, needs, desires but was rather already there as the medium of sociality. As Sally Banes reported, **issues of the body and its powerful social meanings were approached head-on.** (1987:xviii) The question was not how to make the body mean what you wanted it to mean but rather how to shift and destabilise the meanings with which the body was already laden – and, in addition, how to allow the body a significance of its own, to free it from a subordination to dramatic, literary, visual, and other orders.

Two: Physicality

The performance events that issued from these investigations constituted a major challenge to available (critical) languages and concepts. For example, one of the comments from viewers and commentators that Post-modern dance elicited was that it 'depersonalized' the performer or depersonalized the movement. Sally Banes, an important, sympathetic critic and historian of Post-modern dance writes in the context of a description of Rainer's *Trio A* (1966) of, **the contradictory sense that there is a depersonalization of movement and the body, and a simultaneous zeroing in on the ways of the body. The personal disappears into the general. The role of the artist's hand, a stamp of personal style or idiosyncrasy, fades. In the same way, the distinctive performance presence of the dancer is obliterated, blotted out by the workly concentration and withdrawn face... Yet at the same time that the artist and performer fade into the background... the special qualities of hands, palms, legs, joints, the head, the spine, the chest, all the ways of moving the body, all the varieties of posture and carriage 'shine forth'.** (1987:50)

These comments suggest that Banes had difficulty perceiving a different kind of subject, that without the conventional theatrical signs of personhood – conventional expressivity or legibility – the dancer is read as somehow lost to selfhood, blotted out by her bodily presence. It seems that the more the unpredictable materiality of Rainer's dancing – made accessible in the first place by Rainer's deep understanding of the conventional, social, and theatrical ways that the body is normally rendered both readable and (thus) transparent or invisible – insists itself upon the viewer, the less Rainer is deemed a 'person'. Banes does not seem to associate Rainer's

Rationale for the City Square, Melbourne:

Do your own bloody rationale.

Rationale for the Video Screen, City Square:

1. Melbourne is probably the most cosmopolitan city in the world – ie in what has been for it's full 200 years the most highly urbanised culture ever, we got more languages – let lone dialects – than you name it.
2. Australian English – based on slang and back-chat – is grammatically very fluid.
3. While the video and acoustic resolution in the square are ideally suited to language, they are not much use for anything else.
4. Geothe, Alliance, La Boite, RMIT Computer Science, LaTrobe, Melbourne, National Gallery, AAV, VCA, SEC, Community Welfare have all promised in kind support at one stage or another.
5. It's there.
6. For all the work done on free-flow and access of/to information there has been little or no work done on ways of putting information together. Grammar. And to generate new grammatical and logical forms you need a focus for popular activity. You need community input. Run the video 12 – 2, 4 – 8 with an easily accessed public interface. Run the speakers (3 acoustic islands in a broader stereo field) all day.
7. Do your own bloody rationale.

dancing body (which she finds so interesting) with Rainer herself. But why is such intriguing dancing, the 'special qualities of hands, palms, arms, legs, joints' etc. read as a loss of personhood? It is as though, without access to decodable *signs* of subjectivity, the audience might only see this dancer as a collection of parts. This perception is certainly at odds with the dancers' own experiences as Trisha Brown's comments about her dance *Accumulation* (similar in many ways to *Trio A*) **I never felt more alive, more expressive or more exposed in performance** (1978:45) show.

For Banes, Rainer's 'workly' but unpredictable and constantly shifting physicality continues to be read as though that mode of being were inconsistent with her 'being' a subject, rather than being understood as an attempt at 'the self's' possible redefinition.

Three: Disorientation

According to Banes the term 'post-modern' was originally used by Rainer as a way of historicizing modern dance, and to indicate a relationship of critical reflection and intervention with it. Early (and arguably the most radical) Post-modern dance has been called reductive, minimalist or analytic because in this period the conventional signs of 'dancerliness' – such as the extended, trained body, musical phrasing, psychological portrayal, even 'choreography' were stringently avoided. In this period dances were often in the form of 'tasks' involving objects (which were sometimes other bodies). These tasks were performed in a task-like way so that a body's actions were conveyed as ordinary in themselves, even though their (theatrical) context may have made them unusual. One such dance was Forti's *Huddle* (1961): **Six or seven people form a strong web by facing each other and bending forward, planting their feet firmly, keeping the knees slightly bent, and putting their arms around each other's waists and shoulders. One person separates from the structure (which tightens in compensation), climbs over the huddle slowly and calmly, finding available foot- and handholds supplied by the other bodies, and rejoins the huddle on the other side. There is no particular order for climbing, but by the shifting of balance and readjustment of center that takes place when one person withdraws to start the climb, the group can immediately feel one person's intention to ascend.** ***Huddle*** **lasts for about ten minutes and is meant to be walked around and examined by the audience like a sculpture.** (Banes 1987:27)

Task dances like these were devised so as to require a maximum of functional involvement from the performer and to leave as little room as possible for any perceived need for theatrical 'presentation'. They always involved a level of unpredictability and hence a need for performers to make decisions or solve problems on the spot – thus to be engaged in the creation and unfolding of a present rather than in the reproduction of a (rehearsed) past. Spectators were also engaged at a physical level, such as in the example above, or because task dances often produced humorous or witty incidents provoking laughter, and their combination of simplicity and unpredictability promoted a sense of anticipation and surprise. In these dances references to the world and the dance's possible meanings were neither promoted nor deliberately obscured. The performer's job was to get on with and to attend to the activity at hand, not actively to contribute to the subordination of the bodily moment to an 'idea'.

Rationale for getting up in the morning:

Trade is the mechanical broadcast of form: Economics is about the communication of meaning: Language is about making sense: y can't flog credit to a corpse.
the news is just a capital joke – the-take-y-hat-n-pants-n-go-home theory of knowledge doin form as lazy credit, ads for an outmoded form of exploitation.
a narrative is a metaphor with its hands up tho pushin know-so don make a coz, retrospective APC arm-pits crotch
too stuck up t handicap th furniture or cards
'nobody tells me nothin' th bastard swears
skite sulk sucker stick it up y jumper
peas please onions bit a mush lets hear it for a bit a shush
so ask no questions tell no lies pitcher for a winda handle on th eyes
I don care who stuffed th crock I'll back a sickie gainst th clock
coz form is got an outside don make it right but
– y wouldn have no mining if th fridge wz fucked
Reason is for vicims – why is why you lose:
too bad like a hole in th head
too bad like a nazi

In order to promote a direct, non-presentational involvement in bodily activity some dancers set up situations that physically disoriented them in a variety of ways so that they were constrained to negotiate challenging physical problems. Examples of such situations are Trisha Brown's use of pulleys and harnesses in *Walking down the side of a building* (1970) and *Floor of the Forest* (1969). Not only did dancers have to cope in a real way with these unfamiliar situations, but also the situations mitigated the body's legibility. Brown set up situations like the ones mentioned above because she was dissatisfied with her attempts in the studio to move differently, and with the difficulty those attempts revealed to her of subverting her body's conventional readability. Commenting on video recordings of these attempts she says: **I realized that the legs function to support the upper body much like the old relationship of the pedestal to sculpture.** (1978:29) Brown seems to be suggesting that in conventional body organisation and inscription the legs function to 'present' the upper body for interpretation by others. By stabilising the upper body and keeping it up off the ground they maintain its visibility and its readability. After this Brown decided to lie down, and to begin to deconstruct her pedestal-body from that position.

Batya Zamir was another dancer discussed by Nöel Carroll in the 1975 Post-modern dance issue of *TDR*. Zamir used ropes and cords to suspend herself from walls and ceilings. In *Prelude* she used **the bands to make dramatic dips toward the floor and to walk up the wall.** (Carroll 1975:6) According to Carroll the first part of this dance 'establishes Zamir's knowledgableness of the tensile possibilities of the cords. This knowledge is of a special sort: it is a performance intelligence that responds, without intellectualization, to the object worked with... the intelligent action that comes from practice with materials rather than from contemplation or deliberation.' (1975:6,7) Situations that took the dancer out of his/her usual relation to gravity, Carroll claims, were **motivated by a basic curiosity in discovering and personally undergoing the process of adapting to new conditions of movement and balance... air dancing begins with a sense of normal movement and proceeds to change the conditions of motion in order to explore the possibilities of a change in how the dancer experiences his/her body and the environment.** (1975:5)

Four: Mobility

In a further development in Post-modern dance Yvonne Rainer attempted to retain this 'factual' approach to performance even while performing a 'dance' sequence – that is, a free-standing, non-functional sequence of movements. In her analysis of *Trio A* Rainer refers to the way in which, **Much of Western dancing can be characterized by a particular distribution of energy: maximal output or 'attack' at the beginning of a phrase, recovery at the end, with energy often arrested somewhere in the middle. This means that one part of the phrase – usually the part that is most still – becomes the focus of attention, registering like a photograph or suspended moment of climax.** (1974:65) Rainer is describing a normative inscription of bodily energy in dance performance that seems to reflect the stabilising structure of language and meaning and contributes significantly to rendering the body readable. *Trio A* was her response to this normalising inscription:

Rationale for mirrors:

The Australia Council's aggressive pursuit of mediocrity is not in and of itself a bad thing. It does maintain our links to a subscriber magazine culture (Japanese, German, American ...). It does mean that overseas success is exploitable in Australia. It does maintain a surrogate free expression/free enterprise model. It does guarantee a market. It does mean we can compete. Otherwise it don't mean nothin at all. Whatever is peculiarly Australian – conceptually, historically, tactically – aint on ('less of course it's been homogenised as nostalgia, cute, antipodean). Whatever we can we can't. The irony of this of course consists in the fact that conceptual Australianness is of some historical note in the art market scheme of things. But this is probably delinquent third world envy so who cares. It ain't our job description to be social worker to the art mafia slicksters. Nor, I might add to do the homework for the bureaucrats. They can say what they want about bricolage coz they ain heard of makin do. Too True. Don' mind th bloody bankers, fuck em.

One of the most singular elements in it is that there are no pauses between phrases. The phrases themselves often consist of separate parts, such as consecutive limb articulations – 'right leg, left leg, arms, jump,' etc. – but the end of each phrase merges immediately into the beginning of the next with no observable accent. The limbs are never in a fixed, still relationship and they are stretched to their fullest extension only in transit, creating the impression that the body is constantly engaged in transitions.

Another factor contributing to the smoothness of the continuity is that no one part of the series is made any more important than any other. For four and a half minutes a great variety of movement shapes occur, but they are of equal weight and are equally emphasized. This is probably attributable both to the sameness of physical 'tone' that colors all the movement and to the attention to the pacing. I can't talk about one without talking about the other.

The execution of the movement conveys a sense of unhurried control. The body is weighty without being completely relaxed. What is seen is a control that seems geared to the actual time it takes the actual weight of the body to go through the prescribed motions, rather than an adherence to an imposed ordering of time... I have exposed a type of effort where it has traditionally been concealed and have concealed a type of phrasing where it has been traditionally displayed. (1974:66,67)

For Rainer and others in this period of Post-modern dance the body 'in its own terms' was a body not subordinate to the orders of signification and self-mastery: it was a body that experienced and conveyed real weight, real effort (but not in the service of feats of strength or conventional, spectacular virtuosity), and it privileged no particular bodily organisation over any other: **Dances like Trisha Brown's *Accumulation* identify dance as a concatenation of physical motions without any formal conventional expressive or representational unity.** (Banes 1994:15)

This was a body acknowledged as already coded and lived as cultural but was at the same time an animate body into which cultural codings could not that assuredly become fixed.

On this last point it might be useful here to compare the dance that Rainer and Brown, amongst others, were engaged in with the work of Merce Cunningham which historically preceded theirs and from which they took inspiration. Cunningham is generally credited in the trajectory of Modern dance with making the crucial break with expressionism. According to Foster, Cunningham, who left the Martha Graham Company in which he had been a principle dancer in the late 1940s, **set out not to elaborate his own vocabulary of expression but to challenge the very idea of expression through movement.** (1986:167) Cunningham **turned expressionist dance inside out** (Foster 1986:168) by emphasizing **the arbitrariness of any correlation between movement and meaning.** (1986:168) Cunningham's works were notoriously abstract, providing none of the conventional clues as to the dance's significance over and beyond itself. Indeed it was any expectation of an 'over and beyond' of the dance that Cunningham persistently sought to unsettle.

Cunningham, however, developed a specific, highly crafted style of dancing in order to pursue his project of presenting and enacting the

rationale for eggs for breakfast:

OK so voice resonates in the brain and effects hormones and chemical bonding and resonates internally in the body effecting organs, acupuncture meridians and the like and muzak and noise and biomusic and then there's auras (aural) as unresolved futures – speech as the physiology and orchestration of time-space (speech as th morphic resonance of sense?) – but to say therefore that grammar is a sub-set of diet is taking it a bit far. It's like protein synthesis and 3D sound-based languages – like yr basically reinventing speech – y may as well concentrate on impregnating music into chewing gum so y could chew y way thru Mantovani or have language lollies or what the hell do you think coffee is?

body as an autonomous expressive realm. This movement style was to be, as it were, the *visible sign* of the body's discreteness – that which served to set it immediately apart from the culturally overdetermined, conventionally meaningful everyday body, as well as from the expressive body of earlier forms of Modern dance. The Post-modern dancers, however, had a different perspective on this problem of how to free bodies from their subordination to the established orders of meaning. For them there was no possibility of a cutting from those orders – such as Cunningham had tried to both signal and enact with his movement style. Rather, the culturally inscribed body had to be accepted for it would never be made to go away. The issue for these artists was to explore the possibilities of loosening the connections between bodies and their significations, to play havoc with the ways in which bodies were conventionally patterned in order to suggest other possibilities.

Post-modern dancers wanted dancing to be understood and experienced as a property of bodies per se, not just of bodies specifically trained to do it. At the same time, however, they were under no illusions regarding the cultural status of bodies: they did not subscribe like some of their forerunners to the idea of a natural body, a more truthful body, a body before or 'other' to language. Instead, they seemed to understand that wit, intelligence and agility were necessary to subvert an economy of representation in which bodies are always already inscribed as not dancing.

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Rationale for an opera:

so bloody classic was a yiddle bushranger Teddy th Jewboy
snappy dresser whos brother ran th Hobart Mercury – Murdoch
he werent but when they wanted to run Israel in th Kimberleys
– those old stalinists 30s or 40s – who knows – like a reformist
sayin please t th traitor makes th boss n a whatjamacallit what
some capital called wimp ain no nip t rerun profit on the bouge
tht might as well too bad as cops n robbers on th til fr take sbeen
had like bad nuff
a conchy drip th fills me system wif
dollin crime out as an art abstract
a theory of th line that
stacks up odds on jam n thinks
because he am that ares an aint
atll wrap your Descartes up in a box of paint

Rationale for habits:

: stickin out like coupla yes men in th know
: my social worker fido is a queer from outer space by Do You Mind
: credit is a chemist bust
: noughts & crosses (networking) is argument by ad
: a composer is a conceptual dobber on th make
: pushin luck into a lens

Contributors

Rationale for a Relationship Between Artists & ( ) Community:

1. Excellence. We hear a lot about excellence these days. It's a problem. Excellence is a subscriber's reality. Fashion. The rhetoric of self description. Excellence, like torture, is a tool of the state and all we can do is strike. The right to silence; a silence from which the only inference that can be drawn is competence. A failed tautology. No package: it is terror that conjugates as a gloss, but because Australia is an out-of-town tryout we can model two-up as a logic and bribe the set. It's just too bad.
2. The Right to Not Know (a genus of the priviledge of making sense) – introduced at the demise of Star Chamber, 1641.
3. Risk (X – for insurers read 'probability') was introduced as a class product of patent law.
4. 'So what' is post-modern 'know-how'.
5. Nod. We are interested in the art we don't like, yet.

Warren Burt attended the State University of New York, Albany and the University of California, San Diego before moving to Australia in 1975. In Australia he has worked in academia, education and radio and as a composer, film maker, video artist and community arts organiser. His work with electronic and computer music is recognised internationally, including 1989 performances at Ars Electronica, Linz; and Steirischer Herbst, Graz; and 1994–95 performances and installations in New Zealand, Australia, the USA and Germany. He currently holds an Australia Council Composers' Fellowship for the years 1998–2000.

Eleanor Brickhill is a dance artist based in Sydney. She started her professional career with the Dance Company (NSW) when Jaap Flier was artistic director, and then worked with English National Opera, Ian Spink Group and Dance Exchange. Her independent choreographic exploration has often been in areas such as Australian sign language and other gestural forms. She writes regularly for *RealTime*, an Australian national bi-monthly arts paper, and other periodicals.

Libby Dempster is a co-founder and co-editor of *Writings on Dance*. She lectures in Performance Studies at Victoria University of Technology, Melbourne.

Robert Ellis Dunn was a musician who became mentor and coach for several generations of North American choreographers, dancers and teachers from the 1960s through to the 1990s. Four semesters of workshops he gave at the Merce Cunningham Studio betwen 1960 and 1962 led directly to the founding of the Judson Dance Theater. He died in 1996.

Kenneth Gaburo (1926–1993) Composer, intermedia artist and publisher. Studied at Eastman School of Music and the University of Illinois and taught at the University of Illinois 1959–68, University of California 1968–75 and the University of Iowa 1980–1991. Founder of Lingua Press (1973). Major works include *Malerdetto* (1968) for 7 speaking voices, *My, My, My, What a Wonderful Fall* (1975) for 5 dancers, light and pre-recorded tape, *The Scratch Project* (1980–82) and *Antiphony IX* (1987) for children, orchestra and electronic tape, *Isit, La and Ah Dio*, 3 essays for solo speaker (1986–93) and ten solo electronic music works.

Sally Gardner is a dancer and co-editor of *Writings on Dance*.

Rationale for something else:

1. The US Government don't know where 84% of the money is.
2. If the Defence Department had saved its money it could now buy everything in the United States cept the land.
3. Americans love flowers.
4. Just as bloody well.

If capitalism was modelled on the orchestra and post-modernism was modelled on the bank (only hypocrites explain and/or apologise) why is this late?

Deborah Jowitt is dance critic for New York's *Village Voice* newspaper, a founding and past board member of the US Dance Critics Association, author of *Dance Beat*, *The Dance in Mind* and *Time and The Dancing Image*, and lecturer in dance history at New York University's Tisch School for the Arts. Her articles on dance have been widely published in magazines and newspapers, including the *New York Times*, *Art in America* and *Ballet International*.

Paul McGillick is a freelance critic who writes on modern dance for the *Australian Financial Review*. He is an Associate Editor of the architecture and design journal *Monument*.

Chris Mann "Language is the mechanism whereby you understand what I'm thinking better than I do (Where 'I' is defined by those changes for which I is required)."

Karen Martin is a Masters candidate at the University of Sydney, Centre for Performance Studies.

Yvonne Rainer A seminal figure in the experimental dance activities of the early 1960s in New York, Yvonne Rainer was a member of the Judson Dance Theater (1962–64) and subsequently of the improvisational collective The Grand Union. In the 1970s she turned to filmmaking. Her films include *Lives of Performers* (1972), *Film About a Woman Who...* (1974), *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985), and *Privilege* (1990).

Alison Richards is a Melbourne-based performance maker and theorist. She has written widely on contemporary performance and is currently completing a PhD at Monash University, Melbourne.

Anne Thompson is a freelance director and writer.

Christophe Wavelet is a dancer and art historian. He is co-founder of the choreographic research group 'Quatuor Albrecht Kunst', and is director of the political journal *Vacarme*, and co-editor of *Mouvement*. He teaches in the Département d'Esthétique, Technologies et Créations Artistiques at the University of Paris VIII. He is currently preparing a doctoral thesis on the New York avant-gardes of the 1960s.

Rationale for Australia missing the information bus. It's too late to plug into data. It's how you put it together. (Infra) Structure. The futurologists say that in the year 2000 the only people who'll be employed are artists because they're the ones who are trained systems thinkers. The next industry is culture. We can run culturalism in Australia as an out-of-town tryout (as we ran monetarism, plastic money, Japanese computers ...). We can also make an economic killing:

I think it was Satie said he regarded anyone interested in his work after his death as a necrophiliac.

1. the butcher is the skin of the dog.
2. hush money rhymes (or, work intrudes into matter, is critical towards its conditions ... creativity can't even make a fetish out of theft).

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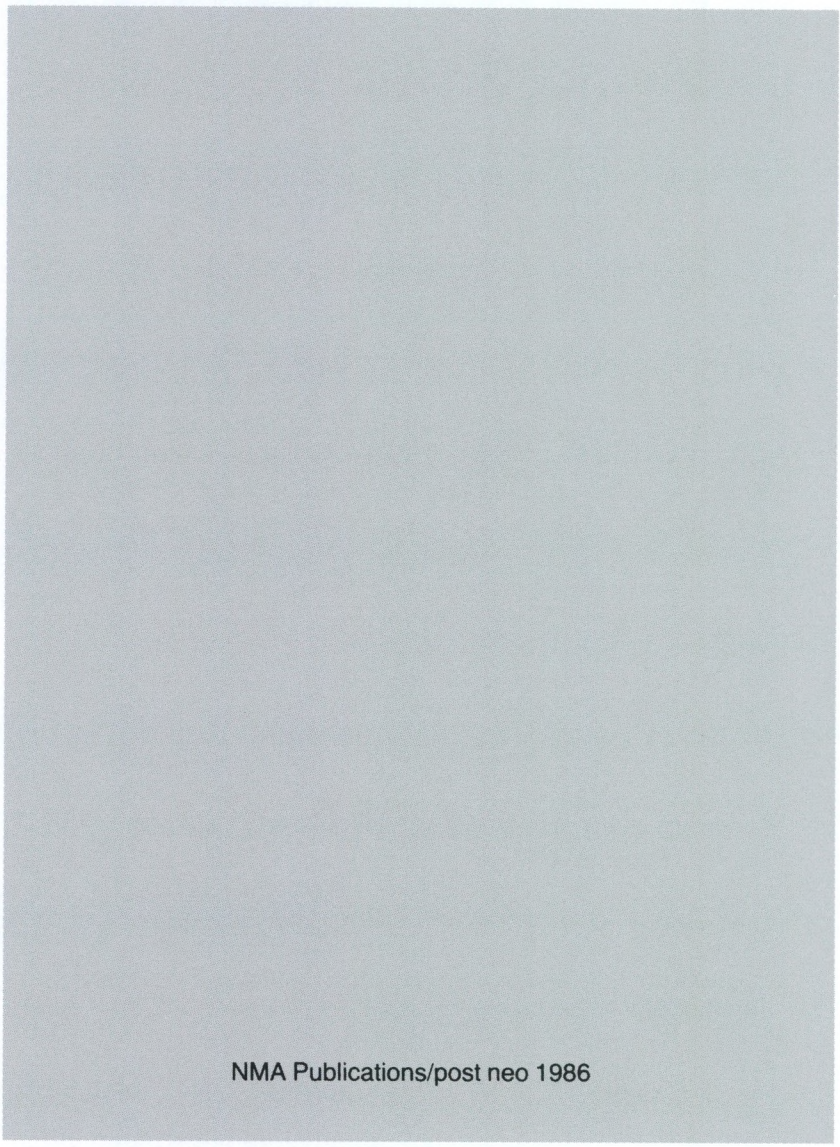
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