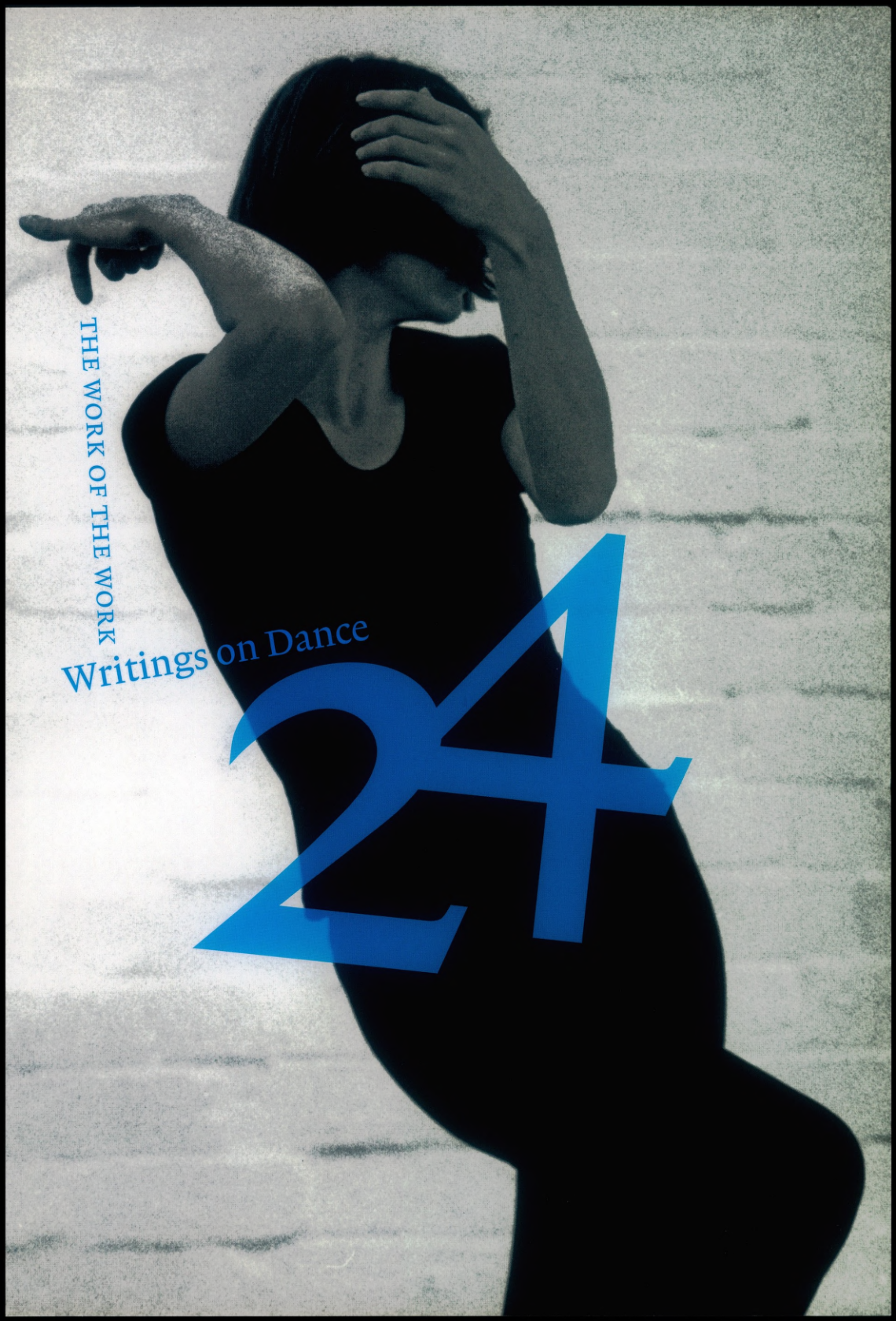
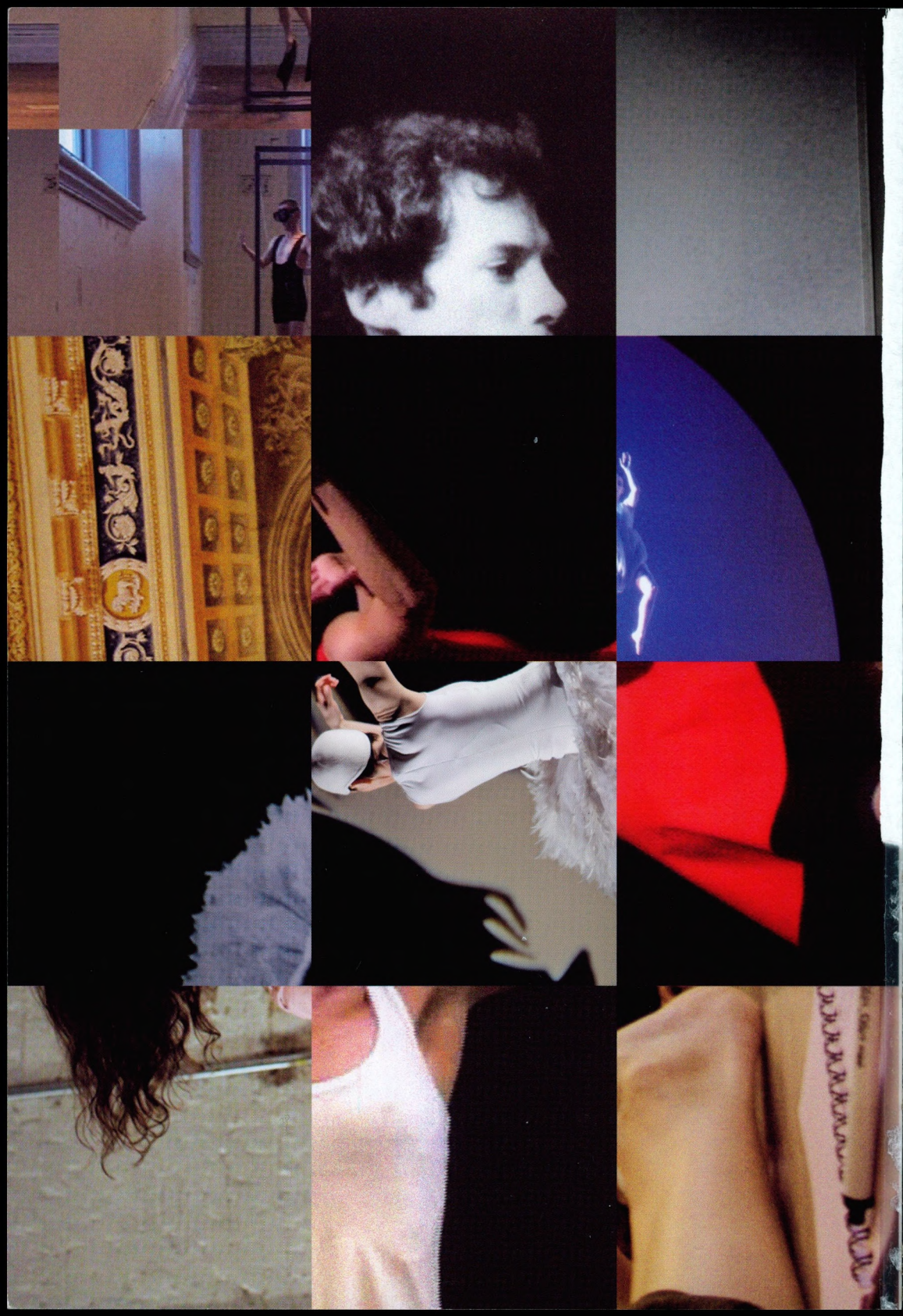

THE WORK OF THE WORK
Writings on Dance
24



Writings on Dance 24
The work of the work
Summer 2007/08

Preface: The work of the work

SALLY GARDNER

The idea of the masterpiece has long been discredited across the arts. The idea of a post-modern dance masterpiece is surely a contradiction in terms. Yet, the dances of several iconoclastic artists of the 1960s and '70s have more recently been performed by ballet companies and shown in opera houses; and Baryshnikov's White Oak company has created repertory out of seminal post-modern works. In her chapter 'Memory and Identity' from *Poétique de la Danse Contemporaine,* published here in English, Laurence Louppe argues that the conservation and re-staging of dances may be critical to the sense that dance can engender a body of enduring artistic 'works' which has by no means been fully accepted historically. The 'conservation' of dances can also entail loss however, as it is the texture of the dancing bodies – not some other 'textual' aspect of the dance – that is least accessible or amenable to preservation or 'translation' across eras or bodies. Such issues are brought to the fore in Burt Supree's 'Translating from a modern language' which was first written for the *Village Voice* in 1984 to mark the arrival of Cunningham's *Duets* into ABT repertory, and which we re-publish in this issue.

Louppe raises the issue of 'the work' in dance. In English, there is a suggestive ambiguity and polysemy in the term *work* as it can refer to both the activity of working on dance, its making, and to the product of such making, the 'work of art' – what in French would be termed the *oeuvre*. This ambiguity at work in *work* is helpful in coming to understand, amongst other things, the place of the dancer in choreography. As Tom Rawe and Jenny Way eloquently discuss ('Interview: An art of fine dancing') the work of the dancer is constitutive within the dance work even while it may be 'the dancer' as much as 'the dance' who is the site of the choreographer's work, for as Trisha Brown has famously commented, 'dancing is made of people'. For Elizabeth Dempster the emphasis on (the) people is fundamental. In 'Not dancing under modernism: Duncan and the postmoderns' Dempster argues that their turn to pedestrian movement was critical to blurring the distinction between what can be considered dance (and dancer) or not, and was thus a destabilising of the field of dance that has still not yet been fully appreciated. In light of Dempster's argument Louppe's insisting on the notion of oeuvre in dance being still 'too precious to be made the object of the slightest intellectual restriction' is particulary pointed and poignant.

This issue of *Writings on Dance* approaches the status of work and works in dance from perspectives offered by artists and dancers from several generations. Alys Longley captures the liveness of her first workshop encounter with Simone Forti from whom she is several generations and contexts of practice removed; Lisa Kraus, herself deeply formed by and in modern and post-modern work(s), acknowledges a need to be sustained and nourished by the presence and memory of significant works; Ros Warby, reflecting on changing ecologies of dance practice, finds herself attempting to create a bridge between the generation of her mentor Deborah Hay and the young students attending her workshop. In 'Small Dance Catastrophe' Trevor Patrick imagines, ironically and poetically, the whole dance enterprise as always on the verge of disaster ...

Small Dance Catastrophe – I could pretend the sky is water

TREVOR PATRICK

The fire brigade officer called out 'This is the fire brigade.
What the hell is going on in here?
Can anybody hear me?'

The words came back 'I can hear you.'
They were the first words we had.

It was the moment so many had prayed for but few believed was possible.

At one moment we are led to believe that it will only be a matter of moments.

At another moment we are given indications that it will be a matter of moments, a matter of minutes.

As it stands at the moment, four movements have been removed.
There are five other possibilities in the space which cannot be identified as being anything in particular and cannot be removed from the scene.
And there's an audience unaccounted for.

The search continues and more movement has been located and removed from the site.
More movements have been removed from the dance.
The long term survivor has been located but not removed.
He is still upright, in a horizontal predicament.

Prehistoric specialists are convinced that this is evidence of further ritual activity from the Bronze Age.

Well anyway, we can see his feet.
It does seem extraordinary but he has moved.
What a small rewarding moment and how difficult it must be to continue.

If unchecked can't those small movements develop quickly into a major dance phrase?

They can!

• • • • • •

Especially in events like this it's a big family, and the whole family is affected.

It's like a dance in a family.

Yes.... but I'm not giving up hope.
Everyone's different here.
Every individual is different,
so clearly the longer the dance goes on
the less chance of survival.

Can I be clear about this?
You are saying that the rescue team expressed concern to you at least two minutes ago that this performance might end in disaster?

That is correct!

• • • • • •

Reports are already coming in from an audience that is traumatised by how slow this is.

The movements that we now have in place,
under which he is carrying out this co-ordination,
were not in place at the time of the last disaster.

And the news remains pretty much the same as when we started.

The situation is that there is an achingly, painstakingly slow progress being made.
But we are getting closer.

At the moment he is working through two minutes of movement to get to an air pocket.
Do you have any idea whether he can get over and done with this part of the dance by this evening?

I do believe that the survivor was well prepared, yes.
He has obviously done a lot of wetland choreography in the past.

And we do have a multi-tiered system of disaster control.

When you watch him you can see that all of the bits and pieces are working absolutely together.

But it doesn't seem to make any difference.

My amateur understanding is that there are pieces of movement,
very large chunks of movement jammed together.
So it is not possible to quickly get the survivor out,
but of course they must do so in ways that protect him from further injury and avoid dislodging this extraordinary amount of material.

So he is in a system at the moment which is called choreography,
and all of his veins have gotten larger?

That is correct!

• • • • • •

Well, emergency services...

And trauma counsellors.

... have been keeping family and friends of the well hung dancer trapped in movement,
up to date with what is going on in here.
They are able to assist them as best they can.

And it does look like this particular erection is lined up with the sun rising between a slot and an exit sign on the horizon.

We have huge hopes that he is going to come through this.
In a situation that I was in, if somebody was in dire straits in the theatre industry,
if a performance was failing,
everybody rallied around to help,
and if somebody had gone missing during the show and I was required to be involved of course I would.

I think the support of family and friends and community help a great deal,
and of course counselling.

There are some wonderful people out there who are here to support dancers who have been through just this sort of choreography.

What sort of counselling will he need after this dreadful event comes to an end?
What will he require?

Well, the best thing for me was just the support of my family and friends.

Just love and support gives you the confidence to go on dancing?

At this stage clearly a whole range of options are being considered.
We are looking at every one of them, and every possibility.
We have to appreciate that the entire stage area beneath him is still at massive risk of movement.
Choreography is after all an unstable mass.

So we are looking at every feasible possibility here?

We are!

• • • • • •

But isn't the essence of it anger? I mean.....

Look, it's a difficult dance.

We've been saying that for over five minutes!

The long term survivor will struggle to deal with the difficulty and complexity of the choreography.

But his reaction is to be angry, surely, that things can't proceed quicker.

You would have heard today from his next-of-kin.

Yes, he is struggling to understand why they just can't get a crane in there and lift him out.

Well emergency services and trauma counsellors
have been keeping family and friends up to date with what is going on in here.
State of the art radar equipment has been especially brought in from Sweden.

But is there movement still missing?

There is!

• • • • • •

I have been involved in a lot of these performances and some of the movement ...

Well it does get you like that.
The difficulty of course is with the survivor himself.
The adrenaline is pumping and he is working under extremely difficult conditions.

Yes it must be difficult and very hard on the survivor.

That's why his welfare is paramount.
We've got to keep fresh teams in there all the time to get the absolute maximum of human performance out of him ... I guess.
Duty of care and all that.

But the performance of course continues.

There is a lot of activity going on in the confined space in front of us.

And at no time have we ever scaled down the search.

It is ongoing and in every interview I've given,
I've been saying that audiences never ever give up hope.

Nor emergency rescue workers.

We will not give up hope until the last piece of choreographic material has been performed in that confined space.
The strategies that we employ have proven to be correct.

It is a slow process.

Sure.
It is frustrating.
The area in front of us is highly unstable.

Yet there is the possibility of surprising and unexpected movement.

Once we get better access to the performer, one would give him a lot more attention because you could get to his arms.

Some fabulous news is that limbs are moving.

It means that we don't have to worry about spinal injuries
and we don't have to worry about damage from the routine.

If there is a routine.

I think we are all quietly getting excited about a little likely miracle about to happen.

If indeed he is about to do something interesting.
Did he describe what happened on the Wednesday night?

He did!

• • • • • •

Absolutely, I'm sure you will keep us posted, thank you very much again.
... and further news that has just come to hand,
A second movement was uncovered and has just been recovered from the choreography.
Plus another one which was pulled out five minutes ago.
That means now that three movements have been uncovered and then recovered,
another two pieces of choreography found but not recovered,
and thirteen audience still unaccounted for.

What did he say?

He said it was like a loud explosion.
He thought, actually the theatre was being bombed,
and within seconds the whole place erupted, and he was trapped by movement.
He got so confined in his confined space that he could neither dance nor escape.

Hopes of survival were desperately low.

With audience fears of the spread of disease hasn't the search now extended to music?
The composer is retrieving hundreds of musicians from a coastal resort.

They're spreading lime and disinfectant over absolutely everything.

It was then that he felt rushings of orchestral sound.
The place was flooded with music.
A number of times he could hear this rush of noise starting to build up behind him
and he just knew that he was going to get hit again.
The confined space that he was in – he only had about two inches or an inch or two above his nose,
and what he would do was lift his head, quite remarkably,
and put it against the slab of sound above,
and suck in the air until it had passed.

And the diamond edged chain saws were stopped,
if only briefly?

They were!

• • • • • •

There are still eight audience outstanding and you know who you are.

We have paused a couple of times tonight I believe, because of movement.
There's a hell of a lot of choreography here and you can see how steep the sides are.

All that is needed here is a lot of music,
and as far as I hear from my partners and staff
we need white bread sandwiches and helicopters and we need cars
and especially they say,
we need hot sweet tea and biscuits.

The Producer denies persistent reports that cholera has already broken out.

Is that true?

It is!

• • • • • •

The end

Desert Island from *The Grand Tour* (1986) CHOREOGRAPHY Lisa Kraus DANCER Lisa Kraus PHOTO Lois Greenfield

Confessions of a Picky Eater

LISA KRAUS

ART IS FOOD. You can't EAT it BUT it FEEDS you ...
– Bread & Puppet Theater [1]

From an early age, I've been nourished by watching great dances and dancers. I studied at the Martha Graham School in New York as a child and was taught by Yuriko, Robert Cohan, Bertram Ross – stellar performers all. I saw them onstage enacting scenes of incalculable fierceness and passion, watching perched on the edge of my seat and fed in a deep and sustaining way.

When I had "digested" Graham, when the work's high drama and near-religious fervor no longer stuck to my ribs, I went foraging elsewhere. By then my appetite for great art of all kinds had been kindled. That appetite has been a guiding force in my life ever since, making me as voracious as a pig diving in nose first after truffles. I've been repeatedly, deliriously sated as well as suffering long spells of feeling famished.

The greater the work, the fuller I'm filled. And a true masterpiece is something emblazoned as vividly in my memory as births, deaths and other rites of passage.

Rise and fall

Food can taste great or ho hum; art can enlighten or bore. Soufflés using identical ingredients can rise majestically, turning golden brown, or not. The difference between memorable success and literal flop depends on a constellation of factors. In the arts genius is foremost among them.

"What was unforgettable was that I felt like I wanted to say yes to everything she did," said Bessie Schonberg about her experience of working with Graham.[2]

I felt similarly working with Trisha Brown. Being in the studio was to be in a continual state of surprise. As dances were being made what was suggested or conceived of was leaps beyond what I might have imagined. Paraphrasing what Brown has said, she stands by each of her choices as if it were a life and death decision. And Masterpieces are built one decision at a time.

The works I most cherish have been made by people with a certain spark of brilliance who have been mining a given territory over a longer haul. They are gifted with auspicious coincidence in the form of collaborators, performers and/or locations. The historical context in which their work is created tends to lend it strength. And they may be held up on the shoulders of other geniuses.

Orfeo

It doesn't happen so often that, nestled in a velvet-covered chair in a darkened theater, I feel as if the most elemental truths of the universe are being expressed. When it does, my body – always the first responder – relaxes, then opens. There's a sense of a widening space where my heart is. It's akin to how I have felt witnessing someone die. There is no time. There is nothing more profound.

I was weeping within moments of the opening image of Trisha Brown's *Orfeo*, when Musica, suspended like a circus aerialist, spins in perfectly phrased cadences within a white orb to Monteverdi's shimmering score. S/he (it's an androgynous angel) illustrates the singer's text which pays homage to the glories of Music, and limns the opera's tale in miniature. As Musica flies in, then out, twirling upward and spinning furiously midair, the alchemical combination of sober stateliness and whimsy becomes achingly beautiful. This achievement, and the entire production, was created with the confluence of many favorable factors.

The Theatre Royal de la Monnaie, the Belgian Opera House, had commissioned this work and put its crew of capable stagehands at Brown's disposal to figure out how to combine the actions of "flying" a performer vertically and horizontally but also on carefully choreographed diagonals and curves in exact musical phrasings. It hadn't been done before to anyone's knowledge. Fortunately, there to work out the performer's role in increments was the daredevil dancer Diane Madden who had already logged nearly twenty years of performing and creating with Brown. Throughout the process, singers leaned into Brown's determination to have them truly dance, and worked tirelessly to meld movement and melody in a revolutionary way.

Without in any way diminishing this accomplishment, I like to think of this kind of production as a "piggyback" masterpiece. Its brilliance relies on the majesty of the original score. Like Ingmar Bergman's filmed *Magic Flute*, and most of Mark Morris' oeuvre, Brown's *Orfeo* is a work in dialogue with a brilliant, albeit deceased, collaborator – its composer.

LISA KRAUS: EXCERPT FROM THE BLOG *http://writingmydancinglife.blogspot.com*
A running account of performances seen, dance work in progress, teaching experiences and reflections on history

5.43 am Monday February 02, 2004

TRACING LINEAGE Peter Pleyer, a German choreographer who is one of the graduates of the European Dance Development Center where I taught for nearly a decade, mailed me with a couple of questions. He's working on a birthday performance in Berlin and wants to draw together many threads of his dancing life and make sense of history. He mentioned the lecture Barbara

For many years Brown's choreography was performed in silence, allowing the watcher to follow the body's rhythms and the dance's own phrasing. Having re-embraced the use of music, and having studied counterpoint for her work *M.O.* based on Bach's *Musical Offering*, she retained her detachment, maintaining her own line, while fully engaging musical genius.

Brown's compatriot, Steve Paxton, triangulated himself with Bach as interpreted by Glenn Gould. In *Goldberg Variations*, he danced to both of Gould's historic recordings of Bach's works in sequence: first, Gould's debut recording as a very young artist and the second, near the end of Gould's life (he died at 50). Paxton, nearing the age of fifty himself, and at the apex of his mature physicality found inimitable ways of surfing Bach's melodic and rhythmic lines and Gould's interpretive attack or whisper. Paxton's face, smeared in wet clay, dried and wrinkled as the piece progressed, another poignant but subtle reference to aging. This masterpiece harnessed all of Paxton's remarkable prior physical exploration and his improvisational chops.

Good Recipes

I've often thought that contemporary choreographers and performing artists have it especially rough. It's hard to make a masterpiece when there's the expectation that every aspect of a new production be original, with innovative movement language and dramaturgy, with new sound and adventurous staging. So much ground needs to be covered, it's hard to do it all well.

Contrast that with Bali where stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata are told and retold through dance. The musical forms are known, the steps largely so. Out of shared ground, a brand new dance will occasionally be devised, or a new scale, or a wild experiment. If the result is enjoyed by the public, what's best about it will find its way into the tradition. This is a gradual collective transformation, very far from the "auteur" convention we espouse.

Dilley gave while guest teaching at EDDC called "Tracing Lineage". Anyone who was present that evening will likely remember it for the rest of their lives. She spoke with tremendous appreciation about the unfolding of her long dancing life, telling about all the teachers she had learned from, choreographers and colleagues worked with (Cunningham, Paxton, Brown, Rainer, et al) and younger students and influences, filling a huge blackboard with names and the lines linking them to her and to each other. The sum effect was of a body of activity created by a large group feeding ideas and knowledge to each other, building on the collective wisdom passed to them by another group that had gone before. That perspective is at once humbling and empowering. The hubris of the 'auteur' and the loneliness of venturing into uncharted ground is subsumed by the knowledge that

Between these poles is another form of piggyback masterpiece, basing itself on cultural traditions. Bob Telson and Lee Breuer's *Gospel at Colonus*, combining Greek tragedy with ecstatic original gospel music, succeeds as rousing, deeply affecting theater.

Shen Wei's recent *Second Visit to the Empress* juxtaposes a traditional Peking Opera production with post-modern dance. During most of the production the two remained as distinct as oil and water, but one solo for Shen Wei is a small masterpiece, integrating the two disconnected styles and illustrating his personal mastery of both ways of moving and thinking.

Chef and Apprentice

It used to be mandatory for artists to apprentice under a 'master'. The traditional notion of masterpiece must have followed from this ("that which has been made by..."). The workshops of Fra Filippo Lippi were where Botticelli got his start, and in that case, student profoundly surpassed master. We now prefer to think of our artists as having sprung fully formed from the head of Zeus – a Jean-Michel Basquiat up from the streets.

But many contemporary artists do recognize their indebtedness to lineage. Rennie Harris is continually tipping his hat, and facilitating performing and teaching by the originators of hip-hop. Tapper Savion Glover has been so moved by the contributions of his mentor that on the grand piano while he performed sat a photo of Gregory Hines.

There are masterpieces with a capital M that belong in the Metropolitan Museum, and modest masterpieces that had no intention of broadcasting themselves. Recent attention on the quilts of Gee's Bend, a remote area of Alabama, highlights how culture can evolve collectively through clans over time, far from commercial influence. We might not tend to term a quilt a masterpiece but these collections of thousands of single stitches and hundreds of decisions regarding

one represents one intersection on this net, that ideas arise and are chewed on by groups of people simultaneously and that we all stand on the shoulders of those who've gone before.

Peter writes: "when i was in new york the last time i met yoshiko chuma and she asked me about what was so special about you, that you must have given your dancers (that were in your company then) something special that most of them are so successful now (sasha waltz, meg stuart, john jasperse...). do you have any idea what that might have been?"

In the '80s, dancers who were versed in the virtuosic style of moving that came out of a combination of release work and contact improvisation with more traditional technique had rather abstract forbears. There was something unusual then about being really rigorous in dancing,

which fabric belongs next to which are every bit as vital as any Mondriaan or Stella.

Humility figures centrally in the Japanese notion of Grace – an ineffable quality that suffuses and elevates certain artworks. Conditions that better allow its entrance include that artist not considering their own contribution to be something special; they are simply, repetitively, producing well-crafted forms that grace might enter. The work must intentionally contain a mark of imperfection, as only the divine creates perfect things.

Many artists have expressed their sense of being a "vessel," of having an art-work stream out as if dictated. Bach wrote in the margins of his manuscripts on beginning "help me Jesus" and on completion "to God the glory."

My feeling is that Masterpieces are aligned with the forces of the universe, they make use of or transmit deep understanding of the world and human experience.

Slow Cooker

A show of fifty paintings by De Chirico assembled by The Philadelphia Museum of Art were all of the same dreamlike town square – barren and strange, with the sleeping figure of Ariadne. They were done over the course of nearly fifty years. The view didn't change. But over the course of his painting life, de Chirico continued to need to understand something about this scene, or his relationship to it and each new version took on the shadings of his current interests about color or quality of line. The series reads as a distilled artistic biography.

Robert Rauschenberg said that he continues to work with an idea until he gets bored or he understands it, which may be the same thing. This pursuit, like a hunt to the heart of an idea, is crucial to Masterpiece.

Peter Schumann of Bread and Puppet Theater has filled a two-storey Vermont barn with the puppets and banners from his productions, many are multiples, many with recurring ideas and themes. Today his productions are as distilled, tasty and biting as the home-baked sourdough rye bread served along with them.

making demanding phrases and interrelationships and also having a theatrical bent. My work at that time had that combination. It was literal too – I used text, video and other visual imagery as a locator, giving audience a 'way in'. I also played with things that were funny – melodramatic, ridiculous, outrageous. I think it was just another small opening in the doorway toward including everything and anything. My work coincided with what others in my generation were researching (Stephen Petronio, Stephanie Skura, Yoshiko et al). Sasha and John and Meg were in their formative moment. It was an auspicious coincidence. They worked with me and other people as apprentices, getting deeper into craft. I can be critical of my work at that time but I know it provided a valuable gestating experience for those younger choreographers.

In fashioning the opening of *Orfeo*, Trisha Brown built on her explorations from the '70s – her equipment pieces, where fellow post-modern pioneers walked on the walls of the Whitney Museum and floated in the lake by the Walker Art Center. She has increasingly integrated this work using harnesses and altered relationships to gravity, allowing for an exploded movement range in combination with her signature "Brownian motion" – fluid responses to momentum and harnessing of physical forces to allow the body a multi-dimensional complexity and nuance.

I agree with the idea that most artists have found their main body of material by the time they are forty and then digest, reconfigure, re-context and revisit it. Often the extremes of a youthful stance gives way to a more inclusive and profound one; the work becomes more nuanced, more layered, and more of whatever it was meant to be in the first place. Masterpieces, unlike brave ground-breaking early works, are often part of the ripening process.

Having an insatiable arts appetite includes the pleasure of witnessing the arcs of many artists' development. I watched Tere O'Connor's *Rammed Earth* with Terry Fox who was long-time curator at the Danspace Project which debuted one of O'Connor's first New York performances over twenty years ago. In *Rammed Earth*, O'Connor's four highly individual dancers pass through continually shifting states with light-handed absorption, in an unspooling digest of moments that mirror what we ourselves might experience in the course of our day, or life. States of mind and body transform like weather, or like the switch of a TV channel.

On comparing notes after the show, we had both experienced, within moments of the piece's beginning, a sense of deep relaxation. I think it came of the recognition (and accompanying relief) that this artist would bring us something and somewhere worthwhile, that our attention would be rewarded with intelligent and unpredictable choices. We trusted him.

Hardly anything makes me crazier than when at the end of a concert of fast-food art that leaves me fuming, the rest of the audience stands as one and cheers.

Some of my strongest work has been solo. There, I've often worked with transmuting the energy and emotion of personal history into performance. The deeper and more complex the emotional score, the better. This got me into dance in the first place – dance's expressive nature. I couldn't remain in the Trisha Brown Company longer than I did because there was more gut and mess in me that wanted expressing than would fit in the cleanness and comparative dispassion of her forms of that time. So I made along with everything else, some pretty sloppy work – half-baked things, but appealingly risky. Watching me plunge in to that work as part of the performances probably offered Sasha, John and Meg as much or more than following our process and doing our 'steps'.

It happens in Philadelphia where any new ballet by Pennsylvania Ballet's Matthew Neenan brings everyone to their feet whether it merits it or not.

Masterpiece implies a vast field of not-masterpiece. But for the practicing artist, the designation is completely irrelevant. The work must simply continue. As O'Connor himself said, "Sometimes you have to make a few dogs." Questioning its ultimate place is only an impediment to making the best work one can.

Last Bites

This story is paraphrased from *Zen Flesh Zen Bones:* A wealthy patron visits a venerable brush painter and, over tea, commissions a painting of a goldfish. He is told to return in six months. When he does so, he is kept waiting, and growing more indignant by the moment, is ushered in once again for tea. As the brush painter and patron sit, ink and paper are brought to the painter who dispatches in a few swift strokes a magnificent rendering of a carp. Incensed, the patron demands to know why he was kept waiting so long for his painting. With a nod from the master, a servant slides open a door, and scores of seemingly identical paintings slide out.[4]

Masterpieces don't arise out of thin air. Their richness (or fulfilling spareness) is the effect of cumulative discovery over time, and mountains of practice.

Masterpieces inspire reverence. Understanding what it has taken to create them inspires devotion.

I bow to the artists who have labored in cold water flats, and danced after earning their keep in a myriad other ways, who continue despite lack of recognition. I bow to the people driven to find out what their next work will become, who regard it as a choiceless (and oft times joyful) quest despite little material reward.

I bow to those who have had to continually search for and cultivate patronage. Among all these are a very few who will shake the earth with the very rare masterwork. To get at it, they must labor long, like miners, finding their way to a mother lode.

I love to see what those three and countless other younger colleagues and former students are up to. One of the great pleasures in being a longer standing tree is seeing what the other trees look like when they become full sized and fully leafed out: spectacular, individual, related but not derivative. Going way beyond anything I might have imagined. We each have our point on the net...

Archives available at: *http://writingmydancinglife.blogspot.com*

Often what sustains artists in the midst of their effort is the nourishing work of their compatriots and forebears. In the "Cheap Art Manifesto," Bread and Puppet Theater also references J.S. Bach, the title of whose cantata *Wachet Auf* translates as "Sleepers Wake." Bread and Puppet rightfully states: "Art wakes up sleepers!" then concludes "... ART IS LIKE GOOD BREAD! HURRAH!"

Amen.

Notes

1. *Cheap Art Manifesto*, Bread and Puppet Theatre, 1984
2. *Bessie – A Portrait of Bessie Schonberg*, film produced by Pennebaker Hegedus films, 1998
3. Giorgio de Chirico and the Myth of Ariadne – Philadelphia Museum of Art, 3 November 2002 – 5 January 2003
4. *Zen Flesh Zen Bones*, compiled by Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki,Tuttle, 1998

Memory and Identity

LAURENCE LOUPPE

> *It is only the work that matters but, finally, the work is only there to lead us in search of it.* – Blanchot

In our era a double poetics of artistic creation has developed around the concept of the 'work' or *oeuvre*. If the study of structure in the field of semiology, for example, has allowed us to identify the idea of symbolic constructions as autonomous systems of organized elements, another tendency (whether complementary or opposed) has been to put the idea of the work of art into crisis. The prime motives of this crisis are perhaps of an ideological or even political order: the work or *oeuvre* is that which offers itself as an identifiable object for the manipulation of cultural strategies. It is at the same time a negotiable entity and, as the bearer of the legitimate rights of an artistic paternity, can be regarded as a kind of 'goods'. *The author is reputed the father and the owner of his work*, remarks Roland Barthes, after noting the implications and the historical and philosophical consequences of this engendering. *The work is caught up in a process of filiation. One can postulate: a* determination *of the work by the world (by race and then by History), a* consecution *of works amongst themselves, and a* conformity *of the work to the author*.[1]

Now, continues Barthes, if the notion of 'the work' locates creative activity in this determinist frame, it is also that which propels artistic material onto the market. The work, an object of consumption, returns in surplus a judgement of 'taste' which renders it all the more fragile in the confusion of evaluative criteria that are as impoverished and arbitrary as the ill-defined socio-economic context where the notion of the work functions. We know that Barthes opposes to the work as an object of consumption the 'text' and even the 'intertext', as an ongoing process of construction working on the very matter of art and consciousness, shattering the juridical terms of 'proper' filiations, which *decants the work (the work permitting) from its consumption and gathers it up as play, work, production, practice*.[2] (We will return to the very important ideas for contemporary dance of work [*travail*] and practice). In the meantime, these lines written in 1971 deserve our attention. By introducing the fertile notion of 'intertext',

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This article is an extract from the chapter 'Les oeuvres: mémoire et identité' in *Poétique de la Danse Contemporaine* by Laurence Louppe (Brussels: Contredanse, 1997). Louppe's book is forthcoming in English from Dance Books.

they contributed historically to the major task of desacralising the work of art as an object of the market and of (financial or ideo-logical) capitalization. This task has continued to make its impact throughout the century and contemporary dance, it can be seen, has been particularly touched by it.

Indeed, everything that we have just said applies even more to the choreographic work. In the preceding pages it will have been understood that, through the wealth and diversity of its processes, the choreographic work constitutes an ideal site to observe the changing state and identity of the work of art in our era. The contemporary dance work has neither a specific frame nor fixed references that must be respected. If, today, it sometimes appears limited or confined by its canonical models, this is because of the institutional modalities of distribution and the schemas that these impose on the creator as well as on audiences. It is thus essential to recall how close avant-garde choreographic currents were, historically, to dada or post-dada movements which pushed the critique of the work of art and even the creative gesture upon which it is founded so far: the media image replicated ad infinitum by pop art destroying any attempt to reconstitute the aura or market notions of an original. To these artistic practices which transform or destroy authorial authority (any 'authority' coming precisely from an 'author' or whatever in the dominant ideological structures substitutes for him), critical, epistemological and literary accounts have added in indiscriminate manner a further disturbance.

We know all the detours, the more or less elaborate strategies of, say, Borges or Pessoa to destabilise the work as unique event and to systematically mislead the reader by means of ambiguities and fictional cross-referencing (like the famous Borgesian *Don Quixote* written in the twentieth century by means of a simple game of co-incidence in the chance redistribution of words.) All this witty irreverence could simply end in sterile point scoring. But it has also opened up the reflections of Nelson Goodman on the languages of art, starting with the extreme cases where art contemplates its own elusive nature in inverted mirrors. And we know what dance owes to these reflections which have revealed the power of its own systems, when these are approached through their symbolisation (notation), and which have opened up to movement its most complex fundamentals; and, along with the philosophers of art, have made of the choreographic field one of the great paradoxes where intelligence has been able to forge new paths in the understanding of human creation.

From a parallel current, which tends to question associating the work of art with a traditional discipline, has emerged its 'mise en péril' as a perfected object, now determined not so much by its engendering as by its appearance, its definition, where it locates itself (which takes us back to an origin). The most interesting realisations of contemporary art (often immaterial objects) frequently exist only in terms of their slipperiness with respect to defined genre. This plurality and statutary liberty

of the work relates not only to its internal transformations, but, usefully recalling Barthes, to the heterogenous range of ways of looking at it. In the case of the literary work, for example, the renewal of criticism through developments in linguistics and in psychoanalytic literary criticism have unmoored the classical definitions attached to writing. In dance, we have the same or nearly the same situation: the different kinesiological or aesthetic approaches and dance's contiguity with avant-garde artistic process in visual arts or theatre have modified, oriented or disoriented approaches to the work and by extension the work itself. Here we return to the intertext, but as the shaping of art by the perceptions that it engages. Sensations, mirrors, resonances (in excess of explanation), are less the fact of an artistic decision than of a general becoming of symbolic horizons.

The choreographic work: fortunes and misfortunes

But contemporary dance is constrained, even today, to follow another altogether different route. In fact, the notion of a work (oeuvre) as an 'opus' bearing the marks of a singular imaginary has been contested (if not scorned) for too long in the tradition of this art. That is why, before reflecting upon the transformations and extraordinary developments of choreographic *oeuvre* which have been so fertile with multiple possibilities in the period of its modernity, we must first follow the narrow and somewhat painful path of the limitations that have been imposed upon it: namely, the notion of 'work' (oeuvre) as confused too readily with spectacle, dance's only market value and that on which cultural consumption (already denounced by Barthes) can 'speculate' and thus subdue and impoverish. Because 'the work' is directly assimilated to the reductive and shallow notion of spectacle (spectacle as an object of consumption not as a thinking of the 'event' which by definition would escape any appropriation), it happens that we tend, sometimes abusively, to privilege it as the only 'production' of the dancer. This 'work' offers a concrete object upon which the cultural system can fix its attention (and thus exercise its power – in particular its evaluative power) and to such an extent that, for numerous observers and participants in choreographic culture, the freedom, the breathing spaces and even a significant part of dance's inventiveness, exist in the margins of spectacle, before or behind the scenes, in an off-stage (of studio practices, workshops, and other occasions) which become the real field where the important issues and concerns are formulated.

During the 1980s in France, we witnessed an inflated use of the notion of *oeuvre* (in a meta-language that is ill-defined and difficult to circumscribe because it has founded neither references nor theory) linked to another equally nebulous idea – that of 'auteur'. And this, surprisingly, at the moment when the authorial activity of the choreographer was becoming reduced to putting together purely spectacular modalities as a substitute for the deep work that made the artist of the 'grande modernité' an inventor of a body, a technique and an aesthetic, and who organized

the ensemble of these factors in a coherent language. While everywhere else the notion of author had been complicated or contested, we witnessed choreography, on the contrary, take hold of this notion enthusiastically and make of it its banner. Was this a continuation of the interesting notion of choreauteur developed and asserted by Serge Lifar in his 'Manifesto of the Choreographer' (1933)? Probably not, since the contemporary French dancer draws her/his references very little from the history of dance. It is probably more likely to be an integration, several decades later, of the notion of 'auteur' developed in the cinema by André Bazin. This idea opposed 'what the director has to say to the world' to the crushing power of the commercial and industrial aspects of film.[3] Nevertheless it is uncertain whether the concept of 'auteur' carried over to choreography has freed the dance creator from the economic and ideological pressures of the modes of production (as auteur cinema was supposed to in relation to the cinematic industry). On the contrary, the notion of choreographic 'auteur' upholds a certain over-valuation of choreographic signature, and, even more, of a tag signaling (more than signing) the importance of a label: the name of the choreographer, then, and her/his presence justifying only to itself the functioning of a company. But from this comes, more seriously, the disarray, the wounds, the grieving and rupture in the continuity of the dancer's work when (as happens only too often) the choreographer is no more. It no longer seems possible, as in the important American companies, to pursue a 'work' which is tied to bodies and practices beyond any simply nominal identification. Although this assessment will need to be revisited.

The strength of the work of grieving in and through dance can make of loss a resource. Pain and loss, commitment and memory bind together projects and dreams, reconstituting communities of bodies beyond any anticipated frame or organization, and newly engaged in an eternal becoming. Companies like those of Régis Huvier (L'arrache-coeur) and even more so of Dominique Bagouet (les Carnets Bagouet) have been able to show in an inventive and unexpected way how much work (travail) survives the civil presence of the choreographer. How much the bodies marked by him were still at work in the space where his regard had held them in a poetic engagement that death could not dissipate. The dancer alone is the inventor of the mechanism which s/he herself puts in place as if transforming the order of disappearance into a rebirth of inspiration and desire. For the body of the choreographer, much more than her/his name as a label, is what has made the dancer, in the same way that the dancer has constructed the choreographic signature out of her/his own body. 'They've finally no more need of us, the early departed ones... But we, that have need of such mighty secrets, we for whom sorrow's so often source of blessedest progress, could we exist without them?'[4]

The misfortunes and the heavy responsibility that weigh on the activity of the dancer mean that the notion of oeuvre in dance is still too precious to be made the

object of the slightest intellectual restriction. It is too specific, in any case, to be able to confront with impunity the kinds of desacralisation staged by the art and thought of the century. We will see that it is only by his/her own account that the choreographer has been able to be considered a genuine creator and respected as such. Indeed the act of choreography, considered as a simple spectacle, has inherited a traditional foundation whose law and ideology we must examine. There is the archaic image of a 'maitre de ballet' who, in the nineteenth century, came to direct or oversee a show, that is, to put in place a mechanism that permitted the *danseurs* or rather the *danseuses* to be seen: a mechanism of exposability or 'exhibition value' to use Walter Benjamin's term. Now, this value of exhibition on the ballet stage preceeded (was it the anticipatory shadow?) the technical invention of apparatuses of reproduction (cinema, photography) which for Benjamin were vehicles for the exhibition value of art to the detriment of its ritual or 'cult' value.[5] And in the same way that any photograph of a human face reveals for Benjamin the fugitive and faded glint of a lost aura, at the same time, strangely, the dancing body remains the 'ultimate retrenchment' of a ritual that can no longer be performed.[6] This has for a long time prevented the dance work from being seen as the elaboration of an organic unity putting into play a complex symbolic system interconnecting several layers (movement, composition, writing).

Of course, the analysis of dance does not start with the oeuvre: the perception of the 'corporal signature' and of 'the style' acts before, or this side of, any articulation in a completed totality. Indeed the valorisation of the work responds initially perhaps to a more trenchant necessity which has to do with the painful dispute experienced in dance's past: that of making the choreographic work recognised as a fully fledged artistic act, which it was refused for a long time and is to a certain extent still today. That is why demystification of respect for the work as has occurred in all other artistic fields, its having been put into crisis by means of unsettling or playful processes of depersonalisation of the author, by pseudo authorings from those of Duchamp's *Rrose Selavy* to Borges' *Pierre Menard*, would only be a little amusing in dance and probably not very transgressive because it could just as well be confused with what is normal. On the other hand, the identification of the dance work as inalienable is most certainly one of the conquests of modernity as is, in historical or aesthetic research, the identification of an original choreographic text. Why? Because it goes against the perspectives maintained by tradition, and the presumption that the text is 'ephemeral' based on the fact that it depends uniquely upon a situation of spectacle (not so much on the immediate situation but on the economic and institutional modes of production) for its actualization.

We will see that what is involved is an amalgam of ideas, encountered in significant ideological ignorance and confusion, which have their most significant impact on the choreographic field and whose first victim is the dancer. The reasons for this are mysterious and very unclear and we will refrain from making any

hypothesis on the subject here. Let us simply recall the classification of the arts according to Nelson Goodman.[7] Thus: 'autographic' when their existence is bound up with the materiality of a unique item (what Gerard Genette calls 'immanent') and 'allographic' when the existence of the work ('transcendent' for Genette), exists outside of any materiality (as concept, proposition, process, or score).[8] In the category of allographic arts dance is the only one to be regarded as inconsistant and fragile which the other arts, linked to actualisation by the performance/expedient of a text or score (poetry, theatre, music), are not, at least not to the same degree.

The habit of confusing 'the work' (oeuvre) and 'spectacle' is far from negligible in relation to the loss of choreographic works – which is loss of artistic identity but also of memory. For one loss does not happen without the other, and it is this which makes the conservation of works so crucial: only such conservation bears witness to a singular artistic practice.

Many classical ballets of the nineteenth century, at least in France, are lost. Only their shadows remain (one romantic ballet, forgotten like all the others, deals with this theme of the shade or shadow...). Sometimes only the title remains. Usually the elements that endure are the libretto and the musical score. Sometimes a more or less precise and abundant iconography can evoke visual aspects, which can contribute in part to an imaginary of the body. But of course what is most important for us is what is destined to oblivion, the flesh of the work, its text, the danced movement whose substance tends to be the first to be forgotten. Which proves how little valued as a creative act choreography has been in a whole part of our tradition and even within the profession. At best, certain ballets (*Giselle*, *Coppélia*) have survived by conserving that which for us is most important – the text of the danced movement. Later, and in other historical circumstances the works of Petipa, for example, have been conserved simultaneously by notation and oral transmission. However they are all too rarely redone with faithfulness to their integrity. This disconnects their meaning from the architectural whole with which it is so closely bound up.

The fact that works have been lost, or even changed, is in itself not so serious. What is serious in terms of the respect that the identity of a work should inspire is that its name is retained across a series of unreflective and inauthentic (particularly from an aesthetic point of view) 'remakes'. In an artistic field other than dance where there has traditionally been respect for the author, the notion of remake can exercise a salutary irony. Its aim is precisely to destroy the authorial sacredness or the emphatic vision of the origin of a work that numerous discourses have put in question. In theoretically refined fields such as literature such ransacking is healthy, intelligent and necessarily provocative. But such is not the case for choreography with its absence of any theory bearing on the history of its works, and where the principle of the remake proceeds from a simple suspension of artistic consciousness or taste or from an unreflective search for the spectacular equal to that seen in

mainstream cinema – a desire to reinvigorate a cultural product by using a readymade prestigious title and theme. Of course such activities form part of what Gerard Genette calls, without any pejorative overtones, 'recastings'. For in the case of disciplines other than dance, far from indicating transgressions, they evoke the intertextual slidings through which the plurality of layers and functions of existence give to the text the range of all its possible modalities of actualisation. Such manipulations exist equally in the theatrical and lyrical domains. But there, long established texts constituting the standard of artistic existence maintain the integrity of the work which the 'ruptures' of a director of Shakespeare or Marlowe might authorise without significantly compromising the identity of the work. In dance, this absolute reference of the corpus of edited texts does not exist. And in the recastings the errant materiality of the dance work, more than in any other art, risks dissolving or losing its gestures. A revealing symptom is that, in the art of choreography, the notion of spectacle prevails over the notion of the work which remains indistinct and deprived of an identity which would circumscribe it within its own artistic prerogatives.

Happily, in classical ballet, we are today witnessing the development of a conscious and reflective current where the quest (historical or contemporary) for singular and intact works has become at once an objective of practice, research, conviction and thought. For Jean-Paul Gravier following in the wake, one could say, of the Joffrey Ballet in the United States but with a greater poetic sensibility, the quest for the work begins with the integration of body states, with work on the movement and its sense in the body of the dancer. There, in effect, the establishment of the 'text' begins and is pursued right throughout the whole choreographic construction. It is not so much a question of an archeological quest for authenticity but of a respect for an artistic act that can found a work, define it and make it figure as such amongst the creations of the human spirit. Amongst such artists the notion of work prevails over that of spectacle. Which makes the act of performance itself more credible, more stimulating, more moving and more beautiful.

Certain modern choreographers have been able to play on the notion of 'remake' by updating emblematic ballets of the past. This usually involves a self-conscious transformation where, starting from a theme already used in the ballet, the contemporary creator conceives a completely different work like the *Giselle* of Mats Ek, the *Lac des Cygnes* or *Bayadère* of Andy de Groat or else the *Coppélia* or *Les Noces* of Maguy Marin or Angelin Preljocaj. In both cases it is a question of extant ballets but upon which the 'remake' works in an indirect way, as though it were another danced interpretation. Ek and Marin retain the libretto and the musical score, whereas de Groat only keeps the ambience and the title which works in a diffuse way like an emblem of nostalgia. It will be noted, not without a certain bitterness, that what links the choreographic work to its identity is...the musical score: a strange substitution of identity in an artistic community that no longer even recognises the true site of

its accomplishments. But in spite of these reservations this (kind of) undertaking is interesting if its processes are informed and explicit and where the re-reading really works as such. Nevertheless it is important to note that these re-makes, even if modern in their processes, only work on the classical repertoire. It is strange that so-called contemporary choreographers only work on a repertoire that is not theirs – a way perhaps that they disavow or deny a history of the body within modernity. Unless they need this 'elsewhere' in order to change, appropriate, blaspheme without risking the fundamental values of their gesture. To begin with there is much that should be said: these works are not part of the choreographer's real history but of a sort of mythology, of a repertoire of forms which can be innocuously mined. This fund of references can also be treated in different ways: in a cheeky, off-hand way or as though paying homage to come archetype of choreographic memory. One looks in vain for contemporary versions of modern works – (such as) the *Moor's Pavane* or *Cave of the Heart*. A taboo, an absence of memory perhaps (which amounts to the same thing), prevents the moderns from touching their own roots. And besides, if today's choreographers would have the audacity (sacrilege?) to take this on, the rights-holders or companies maintaining the repertoire would oppose it. For here, the idea of the choreographic oeuvre can no longer be questioned. And thus authorial value in dance affirms itself as one of the great conquests of our epoch. At least as a re-conquest if one takes into account the concern over attributing authorship in the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Only extraordinary works, but ones abandoned to the very chaos that engendered them, like Mary Wigman's magnificent *Abshied und Danke*, can be redone based on film images. Like the fragments of memory that the Company La Ronde has gathered in the touching interpretation by Dominique Brunet. Wigman did not seek to transmit her works: they were so many 'shifting landscapes' to use the title of one of her series of solos which remain now only as film images. At the whim of these reflections of bodies, a contemporary dancer can glean states or gestures that can be ignited from across incredible disparities in the body. The enterprise is audacious. It has the pure quality of extreme transgressions, which adds beauty and emotion to the undertaking.

Equal in its fervour but different in its process is the project of Jean-Christophe Pare. His *Faune dévoilé* ('The faun unveiled') moves between the sketch, the text and his multiple readings that revisit parts of the celebrated 1913 solo, *Après-midi d'un Faune* of Nijinsky, another no less interesting figure in the 'institution of the text'. Here the question of repertoire (whether classical or not) cannot be posed: Nijinsky did not belong to any school. He was outside all reference points and invented a modernity with the (individual) decision to create his own language, but not – and in this he did not, either, belong to contemporary dance – a system of the body, were the one would legitimate the other. But the question posed by Jean-Christophe Pare arises in particular out of precise written sources – Nijinsky's notations and the joint

work of Anne Hutchison-Guest and Millicent Hodgson and the work of the Joffrey Ballet. In these reconstructions we can discern an intertextual character recognizable from the practice of contemporary dance: a field of layers and superimposed borrowings where authorial value fades before the resonances it inspires. For this 'Faun unveiled' plays with its own veils and stirs up ghostly matter. The poetry of the undertaking goes beyond the question of respect for and consciousness of the work. But it can only work from this profound and infinite consciousness of the work and the choreographic language.

'The work' as an intact identity is as evident in modern and contemporary choreography as it is in painting, the literary text and the musical score. Any alteration in the work alters the signature: that by which, since the Renaissance, both the original act of creation and the inalienable name of the author have always been identified. In addition, in modern art the signature has assumed a new importance, sometimes coming to substitute for the work itself. Beyond the simple regulation of artistic ownership, then, it is a question of the vision of a gesture and the oeuvre that it engenders. This politics of authorial legality may seem a little dogmatic, even tyrannical. But this authority is a timid one in the face of limiting powers that impose themselves both on the artistic act and on the body of the dancer. This authority only defends a small, fragile right to exist as an artist in a gigantic ideological machine where, at any moment, a gesture might see its mark erased and sometimes simply stolen – from its location in the human community and from the artistic project where it was born.

[TRANS. S. GARDNER]

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, 'From work to text' in *Image Music Text*. Translated by S. Heath. Fontana 1982, p. 160
2. Ibid. p. 162
3. Andre Bazin. *Qu'est-ce que le cinema?*. Paris: Cerf, 1956.
4. Rilke, R. 'The First Elegy' from *Duino Elegies* translated by J. Leishman and S. Spender. New York & London: Norton, 1967, pp.125–127.
5. Walter Benjamin. 'L'oeuvre d'art a l'epoque de sa reproductibilite mecanique' 1930 in *Ecrits Francais*, Presentation J. – M. Monoyer. Paris : Gallimard, 1991. In English as 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
6. Ibid. p.225.
7. Nelson Goodman. *Les langages de l'art*. 1968. Trad. Fr. Nimes: J. Chambon, 1991.
8. Gerard Genette. *L'oeuvre de l'art, immanence et transcendance*. Paris: Seuil, 1995.

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(Kevin McKenzie and Lisa de Ribere rehearsing Merce Cunningham's *Duets* PHOTO Lois Greenfield)

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way of moving. Extremely foreign. Well, actually, no . . . it's his approach to putting it all together that's so strange. Like the contrast between the rhythms and tempos being at once aggressive and free, yet conscientiously controlled and tight. He said that the other day.

"I think, basically—I'm not just speaking for myself—we all approached *Duets* initially like children, open and ready for anything. Then, as we learned bits and pieces of it, and saw each other work, and saw how it fit together, we developed some negative responses. The unfamiliarities and difficulties became negative forces for us. And we had to deal with that, and in a short time. Now, most of us are at the point where we have to break even farther

LOIS GREENFIELD

in McKenzie and Lisa de Ribere rehearsing Cunningham's *Duets*

ershot. The dancers started learning the fall, before going on tour in Octo- then again in December, when they off again. Each time, they practically to start from scratch. "Each duet is two or three minutes long," says Chris ar of the Cunningham company, who been rehearsing the dancers. "The ma- 's foreign to begin with, so over two ths, you forget it." "It's a piece," says 's Christine Spizzo, "that they fit into through to appreciate the difficulties of it. It feels unfamiliar and uncomfortable. And we have to make that a learning experience to enjoy."

"I don't think it's fair to the dancers," Cunningham remarks, "if there isn't enough time to work out something, if something is strange for them and they feel uncomfortable with it. What's the point to that?

"What happens mostly," he suggests along with that, doing movements fast and still keeping them big. A lot of that has to do with being used to having musical boundaries, which pretty much state how big your movement can be, or how small. You have this musical time that you do the movement *inside of*. Without that, the movement can be anything. So they have a tendency, when they want to do fast things, to rush through them, ba-boom, ba-boom, rather than making the time themselves."

"In the beginning, when we learned it," says Spizzo, "Cunningham was stressing more of the way he wanted the body shapes to work—like initiating movement from the base of the spine. Then we dropped it. We remember what he was talking about, but we didn't practice it enough, and lost the natural feeling for it. When we came back to the piece, he wasn't emphasizing that so much.

"Originally, we videotaped each couple after discussing the action of the lower back. And I really thought I was doing what he said. I consciously was applying it, trying to move from the base of the spine, and *you couldn't tell*. It was as if I hadn't tried at all. For me it was so depressing

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Translating from a modern language*

BURT SUPREE

Merce Cunningham's *Duets* has just slipped into American Ballet Theater's repertory. Almost incidentally, without much advance hoohah. Composed of six short, sequential duets, it's challenging in subtle ways. It's not opulent. It's fast, amusing, and goes zip, zap, zop.

ABT asked Cunningham for a work, but, like other choreographers busy with their own companies and obligations, Cunningham had neither the time nor the energy, nor, probably, the inclination to devise a new work for dancers unacquainted with his style. *Duets* was 'one of the pieces I thought might be possible', says Cunningham. 'It's the easiest in its shape and everything about it. Much easier to translate than one of my more complex numbers. And the music – for their audience, for whom the idea of music and dance being independent might be quite strange – is not that odd or confusing. I could easily have given them something that would just have been an odd experience, but that doesn't interest me very much. Then, of course you go through all the shenanigans about when we can rehearse and when they can rehearse. But finally we managed, except for the injuries. They must be using understudies of understudies this season'.

The rehearsal period has been long, but scattershot. The dancers started learning it in the fall, before going on tour in October, then again in December, when they went off again. Each time, they practically had to start from scratch. 'Each duet is only two or three minutes long', says Chris Komar of the Cunningham company, who has been rehearsing the dancers. 'The material's foreign to begin with, so over two months, you forget it.' 'It's a piece', says ABT's Christine Spizzo, 'that they fit into some slot that doesn't need to go for *Swan Lake* or a more involved production. So we haven't spent a lot of hours on the piece, enough to get close to it. We haven't come to the full appreciation of it. I don't feel I'm bringing any insight to it. I'm waiting for this blossoming experience.'

Most of the time in rehearsal, somebody's missing. Sick or hurt or left the company. For example, as Cunningham relates, 'originally the second duet was to be Martine van Hamel and Kevin McKenzie. We started to work with Martine – Kevin

*Reprinted from *The Village Voice*, 25 May 1982, p.83.

was injured or something. So we had somebody substitute for him. We rehearsed and then we went away, and suddenly Martine was injured and we'd never seen Kevin and at some point we rehearsed with Lisa de Ribere, who now does it, and Kevin was still not around. And there was a fellow named Larry Pech – is that right? – and he learned it. And then we'd go back and Chris would say, "well Kevin was there today". But I wasn't there so I still hadn't seen him. And the time I went last week, Kevin wasn't there, but Larry and de Ribere, and I asked, "Is this who's going to do it?" and they said, "oh, no," Kevin would be there tomorrow. So you're never sure who's going to be in the dance'.

'I've tried to devise ways of choreographing so if somebody isn't there I could still do the dances. And some dances we can do on tour even if someone is ill, without that person in it. Just like in a landscape if one of the trees were moved. And then you put it back. But some dances don't work that way, and you *have* to have people there to take the parts'.

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'Not only did I not see *Duets* when the Cunningham company was at City Center', says Spizzo, 'but I've never seen the company. I have no frame of reference for what we're doing. It's a totally unfamiliar way of moving. Extremely foreign. Well, actually, no...it's his approach to putting it all together that's so strange. Like the contrast between the rhythms and tempos being at once aggressive and free, yet conscientiously controlled and tight. He said that the other day.'

'I think, basically – I'm not just speaking for myself – we all approached *Duets* like children, open and ready for anything. Then, as we learned bits and pieces of it, and saw each other work, and saw how it fit together, we developed some negative responses. The unfamiliarities and difficulties became negative forces for us. And we had to deal with that, and in a short time. Now, most of us are at the point where we have to break even farther through to appreciate the difficulties of it. It feels unfamiliar and uncomfortable. And we have to make that a learning experience to enjoy.'

'I don't think it's fair to the dancers,' Cunningham remarks, 'if there isn't enough time to work out something, if something is strange for them and they feel uncomfortable with it. What's the point to that?'

'What happens mostly,' he suggests, 'is that accents are changed simply because the ABT people are trained to think another way. Things that my dancers do that aren't strongly accented are things that ballet dancers *know* how to do, so they automatically accent those things. And, I think, some dancers think that if they can't make something work for themselves immediately, that it's not right. They don't see the possibility of working at something and *then* it can become part of them.

'If dancers work at something – and most really do try to figure out what they're doing – they can make something grow on them. As they do it, they find more and more how to. Like when you have a new piece of clothing, you have to wear it a while before it fits. The ones who haven't had a chance to work at it enough feel slightly uncomfortable. They don't know where to place themselves because the steps don't seem that unfamiliar in one way, but they *are* because the rhythms are all different, and the accents. With the two or three couples who've been at this the longest with us, it strikes me that the dances begin to come out on them.

'I told them dancing's like walking a tightrope. One side is that you want to do the steps properly, clearly, or whatever they're supposed to be. The other side is a kind of abandon. You have to have both. So it isn't just doing a step properly. It's also that you *amplify* that. Small steps, even though they're small, you have to make them big. Large. So they come out. The step will remain small by its nature. But it you struggle to make it big, then it has more *energy*, more *life*.

Everyone agrees that the dancers have been pretty adaptable and venturesome. But, according to Komar, the hardest things have been 'dancing big. Taking space. Using all the space they have and, along with that, doing movements fast and still keeping them big. A lot of that has to do with being used to having musical boundaries, which pretty much state how big your movement can be, or how small. You have this musical time that you do the movement *inside of*. Without that, the movement can be anything. So they have a tendency, when they want to do fast things, to rush through them, ba-boom, ba-boom, rather than making the time themselves'.

'In the beginning when we learned it', says Spizzo, 'Cunningham was stressing more of the way he wanted the body shapes to work – like initiating movement from the base of the spine. Then we dropped it. We remember what he was talking about, but we didn't practice it enough, and lost the natural feeling for it. When we came back to the piece, he wasn't emphasizing that so much.

Originally we videotaped each couple after discussing the action of the lower back. And I really thought I was doing what he said. I consciously was applying it, trying to move from the base of the spine, and *you couldn't tell*. It was as if I hadn't tried at all. For me it was so depressing. Maybe that's why when he came back to us in April, he seemed to have let it go. We're just sort of adapting it to our own way of moving. And he doesn't seem unhappy about that.

We *could* absorb it eventually! But you can't just be taught to do it and *do* it. It's something internal. You have to find it. That's what happened with Paul Taylor's piece *Airs*. I was fighting it all the way because I hurt so bad and every time we'd do a rehearsal and repeat and repeat and the taut thighs would ache, and the kneecaps and the bare skin against the linoleum... you'd look like you just fell of your bike. The Cunningham's not like that. Anyway, it wasn't till I performed it that I began to

enjoy it, and after I'd done it 10 times I really enjoyed it. I learned how to pace it, how to control and expand it.

Actually I'm not sure why we're doing this. Nobody's making a big deal about it. It's sort of incidental. It's so odd. There must be a secret then. There must be a learning experience in it for us. Cunningham has thought about what he's doing for so many years, he must know something we don't know'.

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For the dancers, the most discomforting element is the lack of music in rehearsal. 'The absolutely most important aspect of our daily routine is *missing*', says Spizzo. 'We don't have set music to respond to, to suggest emotion, to suggest an energy level, to be a foundation for us. We've had to work in silence with each other as couples and learn a rhythmically, physical, give-and-take relationship. Although the steps are not that complex – it's more like running, jumping, skipping – to put them together in a co-ordinated way with another person with no musical framework, not even much reference as to where you should be on stage... it's so vague compared to how we're used to working. The music which will be used in performance, based on Irish jig rhythms, kind of cute, is on four tapes and they play them in random order. It's never the same. That randomness is something that never comes into our work. We know we can rely on the same things to happen all the time'.

'The section that I do', remarks Kevin McKenzie, 'really reflects what I remember of Merce's pieces, like when energy is interrupted. Like when you throw a ball and you expect it to go somewhere, and instead it goes... whsst... off! That's how his works strike me visually, like there's no gravity involved or too much'.

What's most interesting to McKenzie is that *Duets* goes from 'such quick to such sloow, such contrasting tempos. As I begin to see the ballet, each duet seems to be on a wider phase of stop-go, stop-go, stop-go, slow, slow, slow, fastfastfastfast, stop-go... and they're in different groupings of that. It looks hard to do but it's not once you get the rhythms going.'

'McKenzie's a very concentrated performer', remarks Komar. 'I taught it to him in half an hour. Martine had already learned it. And he immediately picked it up, did it, and the two of them together were like one. Generally, there's a lack of attention between partners. They don't look at each other. Even when they're doing difficult things they're looking in the mirror. And that winds up taking the focus away from what the audience is eventually looking at.'

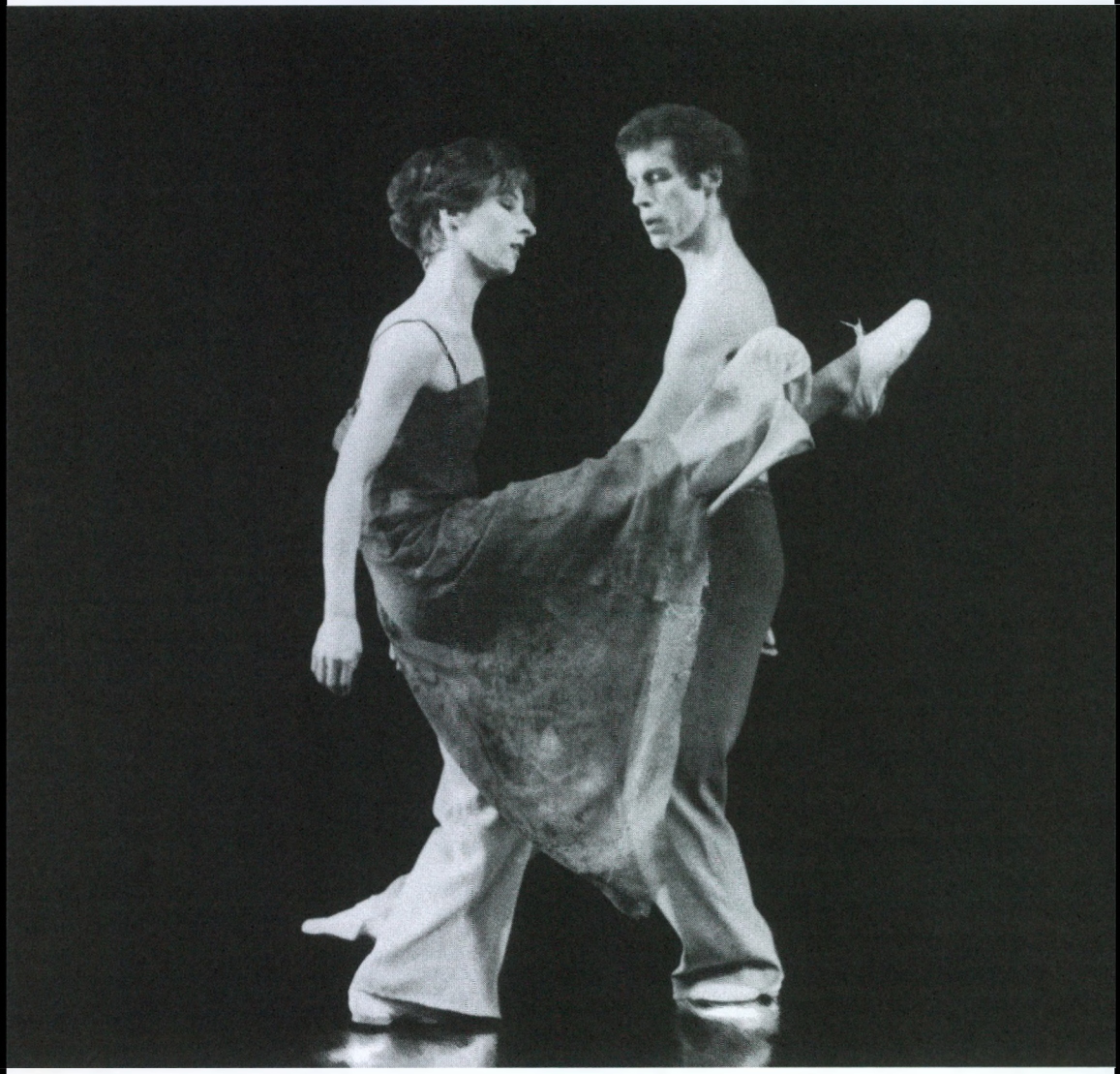
'Doing it in silence', says McKenzie, 'your first reaction is to put the steps into a rhythm or a breath, so the two of you can work together and change the rhythms in the same mode. Then, all of a sudden, it's to a percussion score that has nothing to do with what you're doing, and that score changes every time. Perhaps, during the time

you're doing something very still over a long breath, they may have picked the tape that has 55 guys out there banging on whatever they're banging on. It does affect how you approach the movement.'

'In working on something new like this', Spizzo says, 'you can't just give up a certain idea. At first we're like children, then we get defensive. It's hard to just trust the choreographer's intentions.

'You know I've done *Jardin aux Lilas* for years. Two different parts. Last year I learned a more significant girl, and I never learned the part well. There wasn't time to learn all the steps, much less the character motivation, who I was relating to, and why I was there. I went onstage and did it and did it and I was awful and I hated it every time. A few weeks ago Tudor rehearsed it. He spent a good deal of time, not so much cleaning up the steps and spacing, but to work on the psychology of the couples. He got us talking, and it wasn't just me the character talking, but me Chris Spizzo, talking to George Thompson, and we had this real, actual, physical, mental, everything relationship going on. And it was then, finally, that some life came into what I was doing. And I had to *trust* Tudor enough, instead of thinking "oh, this is stupid". I had to trust his reasons. And the steps seemed easier all of a sudden, and the ballet had meaning for me. He emphasized the coupling, which is why I mention it in relation to *Duets.* Because Merce has allowed us, as couples, to experience each other, each other's way of wanting to fall and travel and stop. And that's what it's about. The coupling. Not me getting out there with Robbie La Fosse and doing my interpretation of Cunningham. The coupling'.

The Rags Suite Duet from *The Raggedy Dances* (1975) CHOREOGRAPHY Twyla Tharp DANCERS Jenny Way, Tom Rawe



Tom Rawe and Jenny Way: an art of fine dancing

AN INTERVIEW BY SALLY GARDNER

Tom Rawe and Jenny Way danced with Twyla Tharp over a period of almost two decades in the 1970s and '80s. They were celebrated as amongst Tharp's finest interpreters and dancing collaborators and were integral to the development of Tharp's oeuvre in that period as well as contributing significantly to the maintenance and ongoing investigation of the Tharp repertoire. In this interview they discuss how important the development of an articulate and critical practice of dancing was to the creation and renown of Tharp's choreographic oeuvre.

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SALLY What was it about dancing with Twyla Tharp, as you did almost exclusively, that was so satisfying for your own intelligences as dancers?

JENNY That's a great question, actually. I think its – for me it would be initially the dynamic that I was intrigued with ...the persistent hard work but in the end ... looking effortlessly simple. Our first exposure to her was at a day-long residency at Ohio State (University) where she did a master class, a lecture demonstration, an informal performance, and a more formal performance all in one day. And it was overwhelming to me that they carried on this energy level for, what? ten hours it seemed.

TOM It wasn't straight but it was a lot of hours.

JENNY But for us as dancers, I think, joining when we did, Tom in '73 and me in '75, we experienced a range within Twyla's experience. We did the old repertory, the current repertory, we did movies, we did Broadway, we did television projects, and she was choreographing for ABT ('Push comes to Shove') and Joffrey which we all experienced either directly or indirectly. I think it was that variety that kept us stimulated. Her interest in finding out *what would happen if* we were put in this situation. So, for me, that was the reason for longevity. And there weren't too many other choreographers that I was interested in working with at that time.

TOM It's almost easier to comment on this looking back than approaching it from when I started and saying why it was satisfying. It was something I felt. I thought ...Viola Farber ... if I could get into her company that would be great. Looking back, I'm glad I didn't because this was much more fulfilling to me and the thing that I think was most interesting was the problem-solving aspect of

the work. She never told you to *do* movement. She would show you movement, but she would say, 'I don't want to see what *I* did, I want to see what *you* can make of this'. So there was always some element that you had to understand or some concept you were grasping within the steps. Not that the steps were wide open – they were set. But you could make something out of that – that was your job. To make this stuff work. And I thought that that's what I did, we did ... I thought that that's what we did best. That was our job: how to make a dance exciting, interesting, fulfilling. And if it was embarrassing that was my fault. I had to find a way to make it so it wouldn't be. So you could bring focus into it so it was genuine ... There was never a finished product. There was always a growing thing was what was interesting.

SALLY Can you give a memorable kind of example of the kinds of discoveries that were entailed in working in this way?

TOM I can give you an example of a piece that I did, we did, for a television project and we used an aspect of television called chromakey: which is if you put an image on a certain background, in this case it was a blue background, then you could superimpose other images on top of it. So I learned a piece that had many parts – seven parts, from beginning to end. Sometimes they came in later, sometimes they split off and became two individuals. So I had to learn all these parts and I had to dance them one at a time. All the movement came from the same music and the same parts in the music but sometimes it went in this direction, sometimes it went that direction and it became very frustrating 'cause I would get *in* the movement and I would forget where I was. Eventually I had to graph it all on paper – where I was to go so that I understood how it went from one to the other. It was very challenging. It was more than just dancing, it was the whole project that you had to be involved in. So it took me a while to understand what the problem was and then I had to solve the problem and make it work for television .. Unfortunately we never used that – they showed it once on Boston on WGBH. But, I thought it was great. It was a good piece. One version that came out of it that they used in repertory was the 'Bach Duet'. Ken (Rinker) and Rose (Marie Wright) did the 'Bach Duet'. That was part of the same project. Also, 'All about eggs' – we started this piece in Minneapolis, The Walker Arts Centre, early on. And then it was part of that...they took it to WGBH where I think they just filmed 'Bach Duet' and my solo, a multi-part solo.

But of course 'The Fugue', being a part dance of theme and variation, especially. Some of the changes of front and movement on top of movement, all the problems within that were not only mind-boggling but at the same time it was a performance piece. So you had to be very convincing about what you were doing and you had to internalize it and yet keep it alive and relate to one another and the challenges of doing internal rhythms. I worked on it for twenty years, fifteen

years I guess. And I still work on it occasionally. But that was a great challenge. Never got bored with it. Each time you learned something new in another dance you'd bring it to that and make it more rich.

SALLY You were saying, about 'The Fugue' ... it was the undoing of some people.

TOM We thought there was enough structure in that piece that you could develop a technique off that piece. I could take 'The Fugue' by itself and I could train dancers within that movement alone. And I think they would develop quite a technique and skill in dancing to be able to do other things. Not unlike a ballet technique. I'm not saying it's as full as that. But still there're enough elements in that. I think it's unusual that just a piece could create that kind of thing.

SALLY Your involvement with the work went well beyond what might be conventionally thought of as a dancer's role vis à vis the choreographer. Can you talk about your relationship as dancers with Twyla?

JENNY It varied from person to person. When we were first in the company it was very small. I mean she related to each person differently but there was a general consensus about how we worked. She would come into the studio. We would all follow her. She would present material, we'd learn phrases and then those phrases would get manipulated. She would sit back and 'programme'.

TOM She'd say: 'I like what so and so's doing'. And we'd try to do it that way. Or ...

JENNY And after material was built you'd sort of layer things and take bits and pieces of... I used to call them programmes. You know, she'd ... you'd have a bulk of material and each day you'd go in and you'd rearrange it in many different ways and she'd either accept what happened or you'd throw it out and start again.

TOM She was not afraid of throwing movement out. But that's unbelievable because a lot of people were very precious about the movement. They'd make a movement and they'd try to save it, no matter what. We'd do a whole dance and she'd throw everything out. The next day ...'Oh, I don't want to do that any more'.

JENNY As the company got larger ... I think she continued to work in a similar way. There wasn't as much time spent manipulating movement because she'd done that, you know she had really started from the ground up and sort of dealt with her processes and theme and variation and retrograde and inversion and all of that. And she sort of knew how to create that without having to go through the struggle of doing it. But she also started treating dancers differently: like with me or with Tom, she would give us material and she would work with us for half an hour and she would send us off..

TOM ... with a sketch.

JENNY To work on it. And we essentially would take this frame, this bare bones and then we'd develop something. And then another dancer who needed a lot more attention she would spend hours and hours

TOM ... and attention

JENNY ... in the studio privately directing every nuance. Exactly, giving them moral support. You know, all of that. So it ... as the company grew..it was different for each person. The general atmosphere was a work ethic. It was general, but she definitely had personalities to deal with. She had personalities to deal with in the beginning but it was more, I would say, communal in the beginning.

TOM But she was also a choreographer-dancer in the beginning. She was doing much more dancing. She would give herself – and consequently the rest of the company because they were working along with her – a lot more time to develop pieces. And then as the years went by there was a lot less time. Except when she was dancing and then there was a lot more time to develop pieces..for her solos. (laughs)

JENNY ... I mean we had to work our butts off to support ourselves, so you know ...

TOM The other thing about her, I thought, was that she was such a force to be reckoned with that in a way you tried your darndest to be recognized, to do something worthwhile because she demanded it and she could see well. If you could dance in front of her you could dance in front of anybody. When you think that the audience is not going to know what she knows – you really had to work hard. But at the same time you almost didn't want her attention because when you got it, then you were on the line. And it was hard. I remember once she gave me a correction. I came back from vacation. I'd do the piece and she'd go, 'Tom, you're dancing well today, how come?' It was like a comment your parents ... but it was a good comment, because...what can you learn from this? What are you bringing? It wasn't just praise that you could bask in the glory of it. It was none of that. It was, 'Now you're responsible, now you've shown that you can do it' ... you know, 'Keep that'.

SALLY You mentioned yesterday working with a Feldenkrais teacher who is very close to the source ... and its essence and apparent simplicity. And feeling that other people were maybe not recognizing what the fundamentals are. How were you in a place to connect with the work with Tharp at such a fundamental level? Was that something that you brought in or was that something that developed?

JENNY I think it was there to begin with. The time that we entered the company that was still very much the focus, that you – subconsciously it was understood that we all ... our goal was to understand the concept of the phrase. You know, we would learn something and five of us would be trying to do it exactly the same way. And other people watching a video tape could see the five of us dong the phrase and say they aren't doing the same thing at all. But we could watch it – the five of us could watch it and say, Yes, we're all doing exactly the same phrase. So there's an essence of that phrase that we all agreed upon and that we were all striving for ...

SALLY What was the language that you spoke then?

TOM It was physical.

JENNY Yeh, it was physical. It was assuming that we were going for weight, rhythm, quality, transition. All of that. Whatever the visual, physical image of that phrase was, it was a process of agreeing on, 'Yes, that in fact is what we're going for'.

TOM Twyla would come in and start some little movement and we would try and follow her. And then she'd turn around and watch us and then she'd say, 'Well, watch the right foot'. And we'd see some little thing with the foot and we'd try to figure that out. And then she goes, 'No, it's not that. Look at such and such'. And we'd try that. But basically we'd just keep going and then she'd go, 'That's it, look, look what Ken's doing. See what he's got there'. We'd be trying to do that, we'd come up with something. And we would be her memory. Cause she wouldn't remember it. But, she'd come in the next day and she'd say, 'Oh, it's not the same'. So it wasn't that the steps were different. It was something about the energy. And I think it had to do with something she used a lot later. She liked to see the struggle. Something about the way you were doing the movement ... up and over with the hip – that you had to work at or do something that would get attention, do something that interested her. The trouble with good dancers is they can make anything look easy. Well, 'I don't want to see them easy, I want to see them struggle'. So she was striving to make them work harder. I think that's part of the complexity of it. And you would watch a dance ... I used to watch the 'Bach Duet' a million times and Jen used to watch 'Sue's Leg' a million times before she was in it. It was always interesting. You'd see it over and over again. Each time you saw something more or something that kept drawing you into it. And I've never ... part of me now, to go to dance in general, it puts me to sleep. Maybe I'm not seeing what's there. It's possible but it doesn't draw me in.

JENNY Well I think because the task at hand was incredibly complex. I mean we never felt as if we solved the problems. We got the material eventually. The basics were there. We all agreed that the phrase moved this way, it had this rhythm, it had this dynamic, but ultimately we were going for that quality that might have existed at one particular time.

TOM Before a performance we used to go back and remind ourselves what the basic phrase was. We'd go over the tiny little parts. Of course when you got to perform it you got to do some of these things but if you didn't remember that you'd just wash it out.

JENNY We were always – hopefully – thinking about trying to solve the problem. And the problem was it was constantly there. It was never really solved. You know, that was your task.

TOM You didn't stop solving even within the performance. It was never like, 'Oh, look at me'. You didn't have time for that. You wouldn't have made it. It just wouldn't have happened.

SALLY Peggy Gould said today of your dancing in the *Sinatra Songs*, which you performed in Australia in 1988, that the dancing was so perfect, it was 'like a Raphael'. And I thought that was really so appropriate because there was a sort of exquisite perfection in the dancing but it wasn't 'slick'.

JENNY Well, that's interesting. That piece, when we first saw it, it was created when we were split into two half companies ... and one company would tour and the other company would stay home and work on new work. And we came home having toured a gruelling tour and saw the first half of the *Sinatra* ... And it was actually very embarrassing.

TOM It was like a soap opera. It was middle of the road ... tacky.

JENNY As Twyla can be with her so-called 'love', boy-girl duets. You know she can get sort of sappy and saccharin. Not too intelligent and not done well. A lot of us realized that this was not going to be an easy task to have some kind of integrity and I think everybody just knuckled under.

TOM Found ways to bring it to life.

JENNY And we actually coached each other a lot as I remember. Billy and I – she didn't work very long on our duet – but tried it to various pieces of music. You could feel Billy and me resisting. She would put on Nancy Sinatra, 'These boots are made for walking,' and you could just feel our energy cringe and you know both of us were not dancing to that. So therefore we would not make it work in any way ...and it didn't! So it was a strange process ... Twyla laid out an odd sketch that none of us I don't think really liked and everybody went off in their corner and did something with it ... which was pretty amazing.

TOM When you look back on the *Sinatra* and you realize how far as dancers you took it and it helped you to realize how important you were to the work. At the time it was taught to us it was just sappy and ... I think not very interesting. So...we made it come to life. And then if you look also later on some of the ..after the company broke up and she worked with other companies...my feeling was that the dancers were not ... how do I say it: not *reining Twyla in*. She would ask them to do this and that and they would do it but some of it was really stupid and silly. You almost kind of ... you wouldn't tell her directly, 'No I won't do that' – but you couldn't do that. But you'd do it in a way that made it work for you. It had to suit your aesthetic. You couldn't just allow it to happen. They basically allowed it to happen and it looked ... terrible. So I began to realize. When I was watching it I was thinking: I never would have done that. I would've done something else ... but not that. So there was something about our ... we had that power and we were given that power and like Twyla said,

'I don't want to see what I do, I want to see what *you* make of it'.

JENNY She was a real jazz musician. In the period... you could see that that was what she was focusing on. Fats Waller would have loved performing with her,

you know, she *contributed* ... But later it got too sort of ... she became a sort of caricature of herself later on I think because she was too conscious of ...

TOM ... 'I can still do it'.

SALLY Her work became more theatrical. But was that always there? I know there is a documentary of *Sue's Leg* where an explicit reference is made to the marathon dancing of the 1930s.

JENNY She did that with *The Catherine Wheel* also. There were a lot of after-the- fact references that developed. I mean maybe they were there subconsciously, maybe they were there consciously I don't know but they'd get put together after...but we didn't know any of it.

TOM I remember doing *Making Television Dance* [video] and we were out at East Hampton or something, dancing there and we'd been dancing for a while and doing it and it's a good little performance, kind of a lecture demonstration. Twyla talked afterward and she started talking about it. I don't remember any of what she said except that we were all listening ... like, 'Oh, *that's* what we were doing?' 'Oh, I didn't know we were doing *that*'. So I don't know if she made that up later or if she really had those ideas ahead of time. She never discussed them with us. We just worked and worked ...

JENNY ... on material, more abstractly.

TOM It *seemed* more abstractly, yeah. So what her motivation for all this stuff was ... I mean she always had the final word. There was never any question of that. It was not a democratic situation. But you really felt that what you did make a difference.

JENNY Well, I also felt you know, whether or not she had the ideas for her pieces, I think the abstraction in the studio was healthy. You know, had she given us the literal story it would have been disastrous. So possibly these ideas and these concepts for the piece were there ahead of time maybe not – maybe it's six of one and half a dozen of the other.

TOM Although *The Catherine Wheel* ... it was pretty hard to try to carry that dramatic idea within this piece.

JENNY I think in her mind, because she had been working abstractly for so long that that was still 'healthy'... even if it were a literal story line...to create something abstract. I felt that her best work was her abstract work – you know, it had the most emotion, the most story, whatever. But whenever she got literal with something ...

SALLY And you never felt constrained by that work or ...

TOM How do you mean?

JENNY I don't know that I felt constrained by the work as much as I felt constrained by 'the company'. Our schedule, our numbers – numbers of people ...

TOM The politics.

JENNY Certain politics.

TOM ... that we didn't get involved in so much but that involved us nevertheless. Another time we had to teach someone else a part because half the company was going to be in some country. We were always re-working pieces. So I guess that's normal but sometimes it seemed like it didn't have to be. It was like constantly teaching and re-teaching.

JENNY It became more of that. I think it was exactly what Twyla felt. You know, the schedule was no longer that she could go in from 12 to 6 and work in the studio. There were always interruptions: there were interviews, there were guests watching rehearsal or there were ... so it just became, you know it evolved into a larger more prominent ...with all the problems that go with it.

TOM On the other hand I thought there was an important aspect for both of us in that we became - the senior members became responsible for the work on the road. After a while ... it wasn't long after you (Jenny) got in that we started travelling without Twyla. So we would to places and we were the ones who got the rehearsals together and made sure the dancers were rehearsed properly and had to learn it and...new members and re-taught parts. So we were basically .... we took that on and I thought that was a real learning thing for us. How to make this stuff again. It was up to us. She didn't want to deal with it. She only wanted to make new pieces: 'Repertory – you guys do it'. She didn't say it quite that way but it was just kind of left to us to do it. That enhanced our understanding just because we had to focus on it, try to make this work with the new person.

JENNY I've no idea what it's like now. I mean I know that people are struggling to survive and I know that instead of, you know, having a stable of company dancers there seems to be this stable of dancers who visit many choreographers so there are these versatile, um ...

TOM Kind of like a repertory company but there's no repertory. Kind of like a repertory 'pool'.

JENNY There seems to be this pool of generic, multi-talented dancers. They can go from one thing to the next. Whether ... I mean I don't see enough of it to know whether they are at all successful in representing that choreographer's style. I doubt that they can be truly.

TOM They could learn do it to a certain level. It just isn't very deep. I think of the stuff that we did and I think the best example is 'The Fugue'. To teach that to somebody and have them do it inside of six weeks, which is usually something you'd get – a generous amount of time – I wouldn't expect much. I'm more interested in them having learned it, having them teach it to somebody, and then perform it again, and then teach it again or else do it again and relearn it a third time. And maybe the third time I might be more interested in how they are going to do this piece because it was *that* complex. It took me time to settle

in to it otherwise it was just too nerve-racking ...I think it just sometimes needs that kind of understanding. I can't see in a pool of dancers you can find walking round the streets is going to have that kind of ...When I go to see work I don't want to see someone move around on stage or ... what are they trying to present? I saw Ken Rinker once with his company and his company was very good but occasionally he would come on stage dancing, and even Merce ... and I would go, 'Ohhh, that's a whole different look at how this movement is', you know. But then Jenny went up and worked with Ken's company at Jacob's Pillow while he couldn't be there so she was with those dancers for a couple of weeks before ... it was the first time I'd seen ... I felt like I was seeing these dancers *present* something. They had defined it more than usual. And because she was there ... you know, 'What are you trying to do?' You know, she didn't even know what the movement was.

JENNY I didn't know the material.

SALLY What do you say? What were you doing?

JENNY I just asked questions. Is this supposed to be in unison? Is this an adagio phrase? I basically just follow my gut instinct as an audience member - as a dancer, you know: 'OK well ... ?'

TOM '... is that turned in, is that turned out? What are you showing me there? It's turned out? Well, I guess I'd better be clear about that'. Without being clear about it it's somewhere in the middle and then it doesn't come across as being very defined.

JENNY Or, 'This is well and good but it doesn't interest me in the least. You're going to have to show me what you're trying to present here. You're going to have to commit to it and ... try to make me interested in watching it essentially'. And it just makes them define what it is and what they are trying to do that much more.

SALLY When you talk about working on material with Twyla, it sounds like the fact that it was yourselves had really been quite sorted out. Because the problem for dancers is that they have to work with themselves and there are all sorts of problems about that.

JENNY We used to work with each other. Which was nice.

TOM Jenny helped me a lot with 'The Fugue'. After I'd done it many times. Sometimes you're pounding too much or just getting a sense of the openness of it and the clarity of it made it much ...I was after maybe the impact, she had me thinking about the geometry of it or the architecture of the movement so that less effort gave more impact. So that was something I hadn't understood.

JENNY But we all did that because we travelled without Twyla. We all had to coach each other. I mean, you know, so and so would sit in and watch a rehearsal of this piece and, you know, just to get us to rehearse was – nobody wanted to, you know: 'Do we have to do this again ... ?' So we'd come up with these tricks

and these games to get us in the studio. You know, 'Let's go in and work on one movement,' and that would lead to something else and that would lead to a great rehearsal ... and then you know we watched videotapes. I remember in 1988 – that was some of my best dancing – I would watch ... I was new to *In the Upper Room* I believe. I was not original to that piece so I was a guest in that piece and I didn't feel that I had learned it well. So I would watch a videotape after the technical rehearsal and before the performance to try to figure out what I needed to do to get it to a level that I could accept, from me. And, um, that was incredibly helpful. I was my best coach at that time. I could objectively say this is not good, this is lacking, this is fine, you know, whatever.

TOM People came in with different strengths. Jenny, Rose were very good at remembering the detail of steps and that was valuable for me. I would have just lost it. Like I'd done *Sue's Leg* a million times but I don't remember a step. I met Rose the other night and she got up and was doing all this stuff ... wow, I couldn't do that. I could watch a tape and it would come back to me rhythmically. I know what it is but ... I felt like one of my strengths was partnering and the structure of how people work together and that sort of thing, timing. So we all had things that we brought in to remind other people ... 'Hey, we've gotta make this clear'.

SALLY How did that ethos develop? Where did it come from?

JENNY You mean the dynamic of the group?

SALLY Well, the setting of such high standards.

TOM Oh, Twyla ...

JENNY That was pretty much always there.

TOM Twyla was pretty much the one who set ... in the beginning ... who set that standard. We picked up on it and even when I thought, we thought, her direction was ... she went in another direction, that became important to us.

JENNY The work ethic in the studio was always at an extremely high level. I mean it was a lot of fun and it was great but the work ethic was intense. And very serious and very well intended. It was very pure and very honest. You know it was about hard work. It was about mastering your craft, whatever that is. Trying to continue to work at whatever you're doing. And I think that's what got everybody through all the bullshit that goes with being a performer, being in a group, dealing with personalities. I mean essentially we all knew that we were doing valid work. Whether it was good or bad it was ... you were seriously pursuing it as a craft almost. You know, as a craftsman and I think that integrity alone gets through all of the other stuff and the fact that it had integrity.

TOM It's hard to put it into words sometimes but whatever it was I wanted to make it as defined or grand or intricate, whatever was important to it. There were little movements: there would be a hip circle on top of a head circle on top of

a shoulder thing that all happened in a sequence that seemed impossible and yet I had to be on one leg doing all of that and that's what I had to do ... and I might have had a *tour* after that and I wanted to make that a hip circle not just a huh, huh, huh, that wasn't enough. You know, the feel of that hip circle coming around while I was doing that head circle I could feel that part come and the shoulder circle and there was a *tour* after that and I wanted to land and I always landed a little off to the side but that was ... not enough. So that's what you prepared youself for. And you tried to find your balance and ... it came out of something before and I can't do a preparation because what's that? Preparing for something! What's going to happen next. Out of some movement that was happening before this thing came on so it almost looked spontaneous, but it never was. It was well crafted.

TOM Twyla did that, she committed to the dancer she liked to work with I think. A lot of times, even though it was a group, there was always somebody she was focused on.

SALLY You brought a high level of intelligence and skill in the first instance.

JENNY Yes, and no. It depended on the dancer. We were always presented with material and we always had to try to achieve the material. That's where it was you, could say, it was simply black and white: you get it or you're not there any more. With, say, Russell Dumas he really is about allowing you to develop and learn within his material in a sense and he will reconfigure it to help the person along. And also it can take him somewhere. He's always been curious about that – not only helping them, it's sort of leading him to other discoveries maybe. I don't know.

SALLY He has said that with Twyla it was the other dancers that he thought, that interested him. I mean he was interested in the choreography but it was the way the dancers worked that was so formative.

TOM It really did keep you going.

JENNY It was a great time, then. It was ... we were all in it together, I think. I think that was pretty universal in terms of Trisha or Merce. I think it was a very similar mindset at the time. As dancers who went through a system at a certain time, I somehow feel that ... we share a common work ethic and approach. And, you know, I feel something of that with some of the Cunningham dancers of that generation. You know, there was something going on then and it's funny because you're going to this lecture at Columbia (University) about the mentoring ... and I'm thinking it would be so perfect. I mean that's what we were all about. It was really a mentoring situation.

TOM I thought so, absolutely.

JENNY We were all studying our craft in a very diligent way. But it was a real study. There was no pretense in any way shape or form. We were studying all the time.

TOM We were passing on information to some new dancer. It wasn't that you were trying to bring them up to your level as much as you were learning at the same time.

JENNY I wish there were more mentoring programmes ...

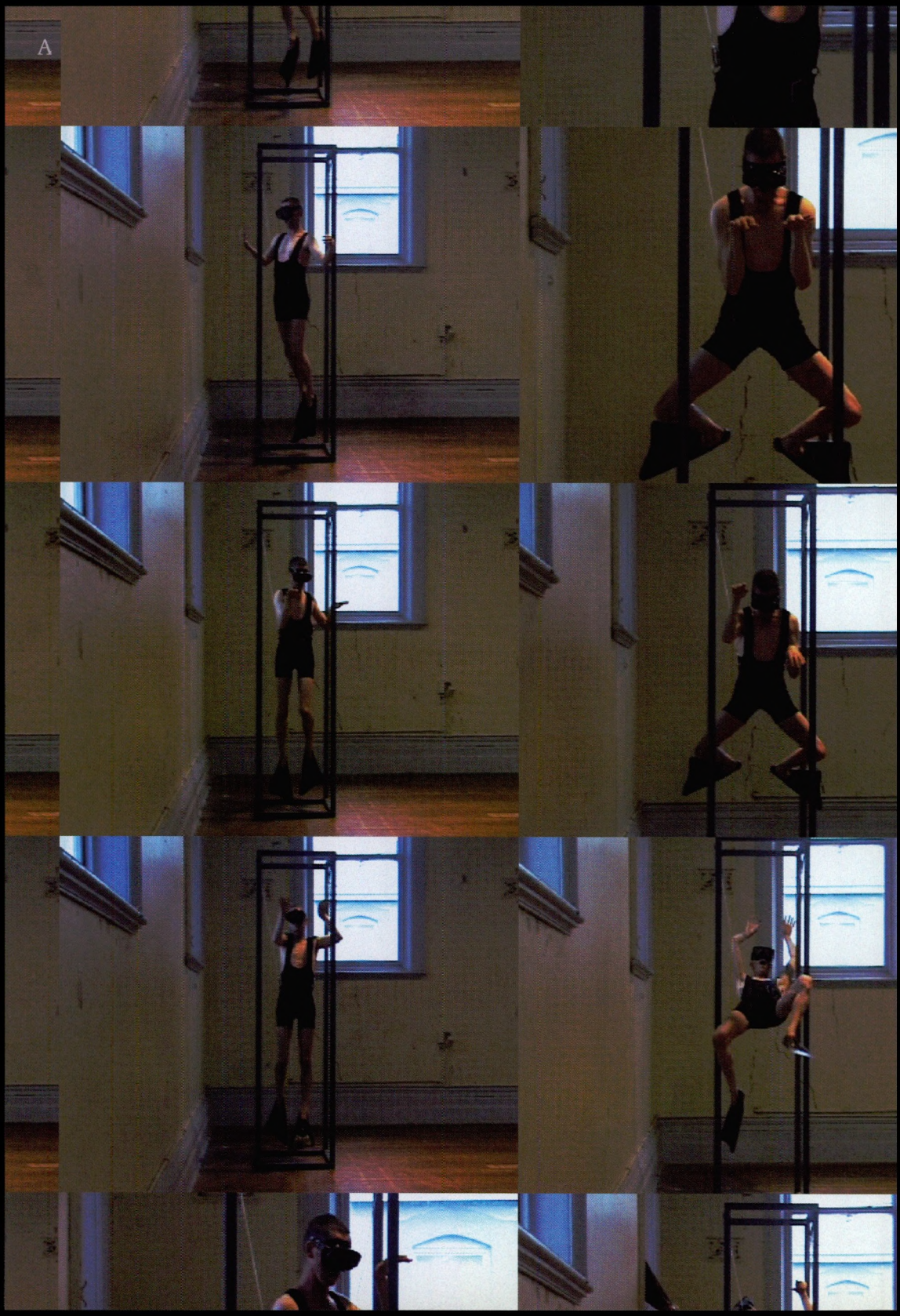
TOM I also wish there was more opportunity in modern dance to be able to afford coaches. You have coaches in ballet but nobody can really afford it. So it was the choreographer and the dancers and it sort of ends there... And it (coaching) could be in the way, too. Because certainly it could have been said that we have been in the way of the direction of the company, at times, because we were giving a workshop and we would focus on doing a good job ... But that got in the way sometimes when we would complain about studio spaces being taken for the new work that was being done. Or people were supposed to be in there teaching and they got pulled out and we had to get someone else in there and it felt like we were obviously second ...

JENNY Well, we were sort of the reminders of the past. Twyla was moving on, obviously ... Things were changing ... And we didn't necessarily change with them: we were fairly stoic and persistent about it, that this process should happen. If you're teaching it to students or if you're teaching new company members old repertory, it needs to happen this way. You can't just throw together some repertory piece without there being some history and some experience of going through some of the problem solving.

TOM I don't know about the history. You had to learn how to define things.

JENNY Yes, in a similar way. Or it just wasn't valid.

TOM In any way.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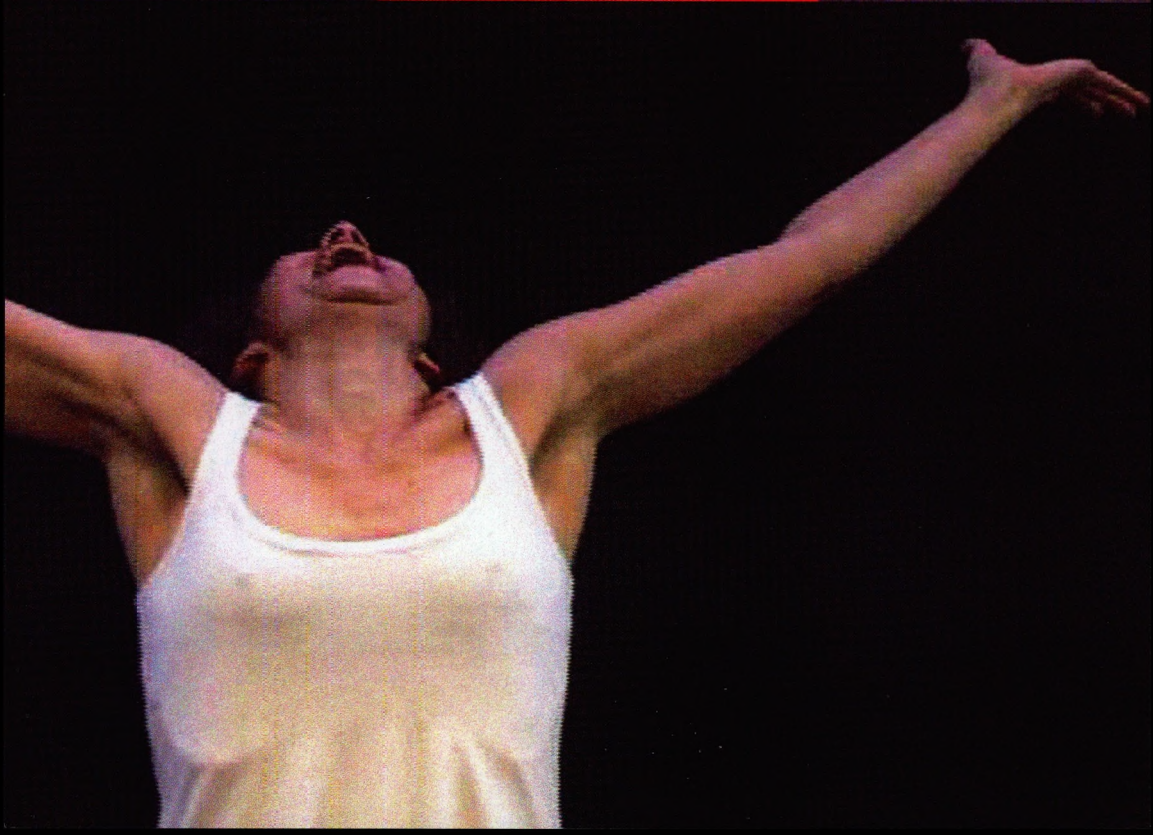

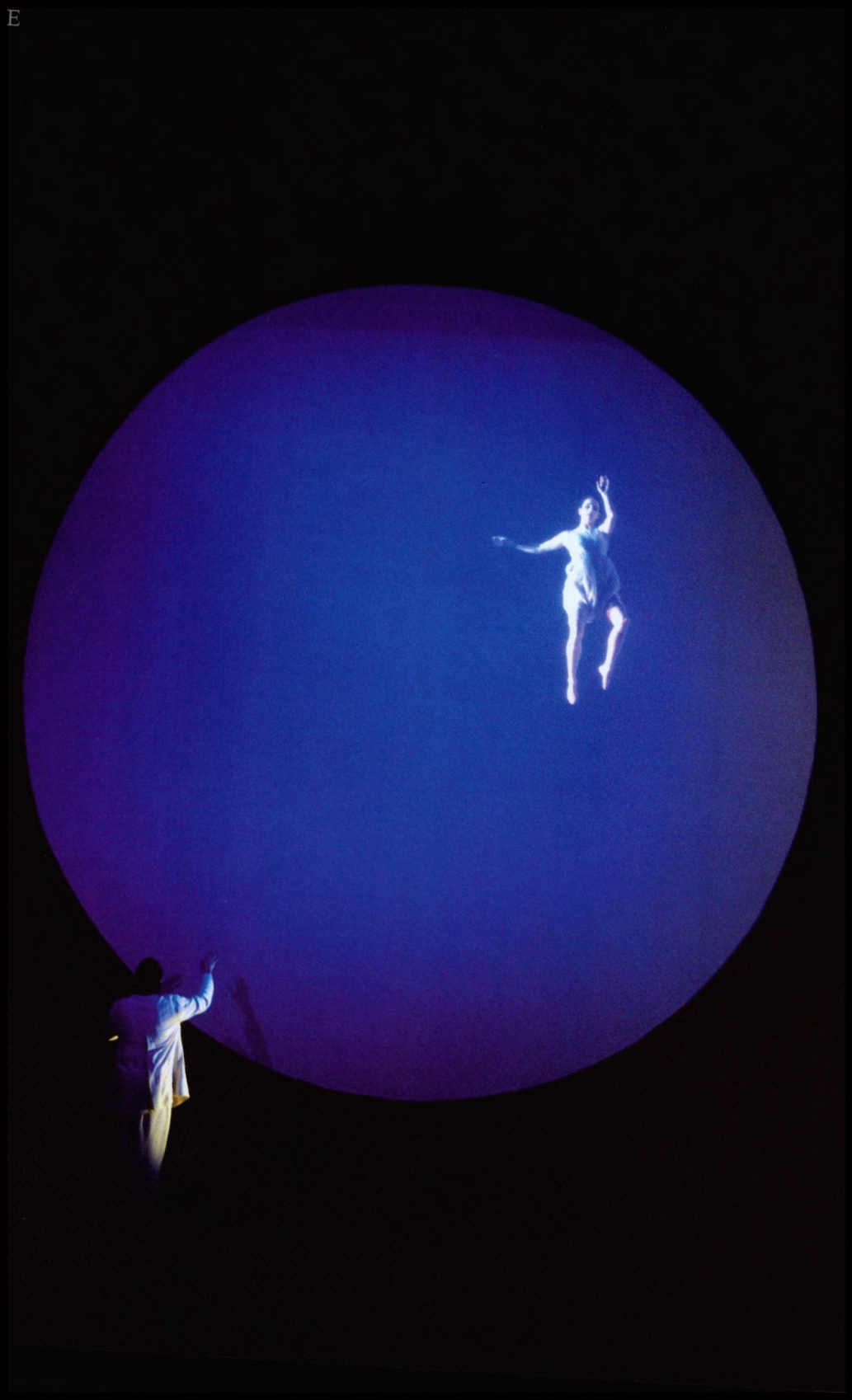

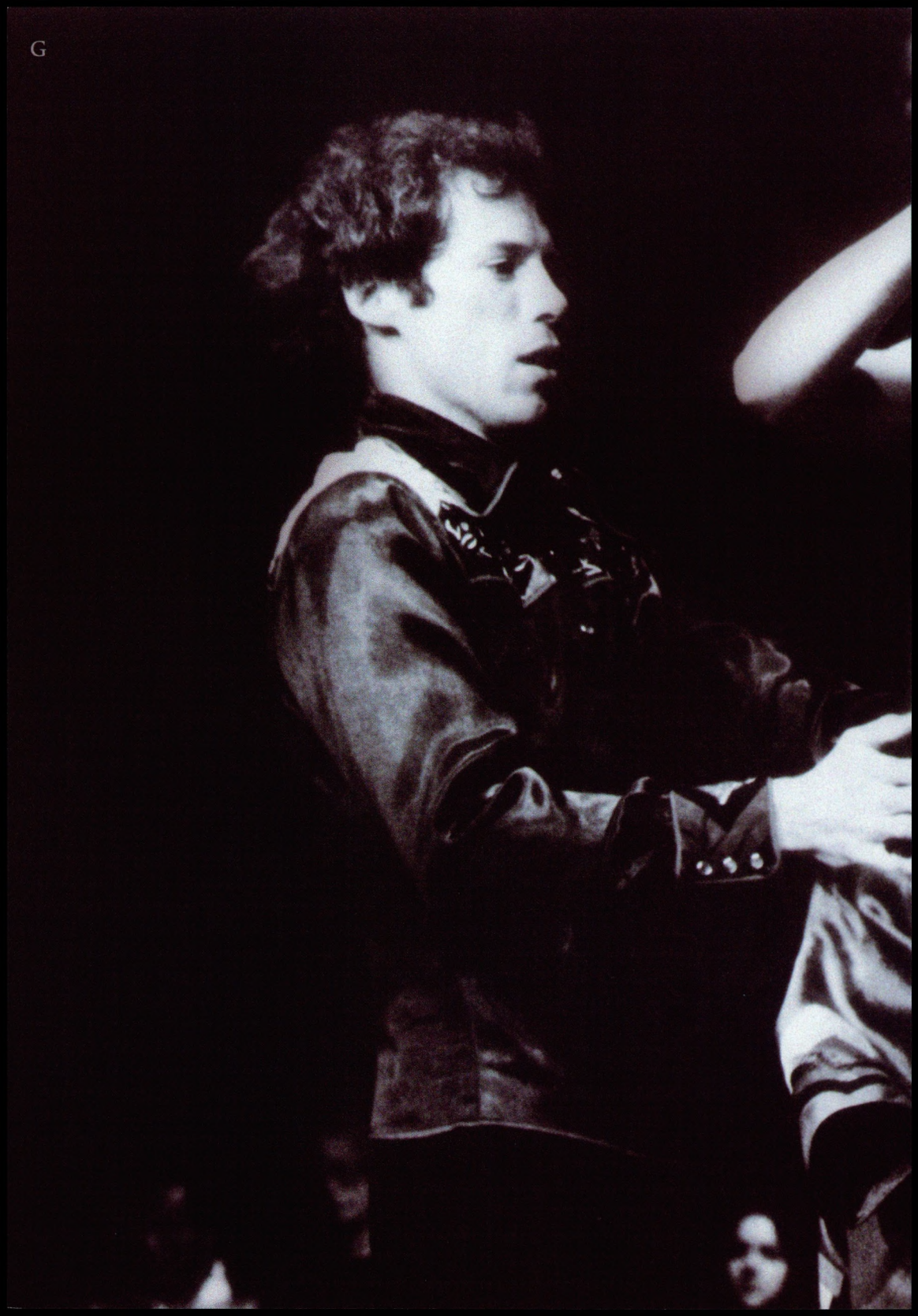

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Not dancing under modernism: Duncan and the postmoderns

ELIZABETH DEMPSTER

> I am not a dancer. I never danced a step in my life. I hate all dancing. All I see in what people call dancing is merely a useless agitation of the arms and legs. I don't like to look at stage dancing ... I am not a dancer. What I am interested in is finding and expressing a new form of life. (Duncan 1903/1981:118)

Given the importance ascribed to technique as the means by which a performer establishes authority and legitimacy in relation to a tradition, it is pertinent to reflect upon the wider significance of Isadora Duncan's refusal of the identity 'dancer'. Within the context of an idealist aesthetic tradition, the dancer is conceptualised as an instrument of an idea or transcendental value. In the daily business of making dances, the dancer is regarded as an instrument of the choreographer. Dance technique has often been conceived as a means whereby personal, subjective aspects of embodiment are transmuted and put to work in service of a 'higher' artistic purpose. Thus the function of dance technique in a discipline such as ballet, for example, is both positive, that is producing quantifiable skills and abilities, and also negative – reducing elements of 'personality' or idiosyncratic behaviour which might detract from or otherwise present an obstacle to realisation of the choreographic idea. In this environment technique has a sublimating function – the dancer's discipline and her performance of submission to tradition through training, grounds dance's claim upon the universal.

As Amy Koritz observes in her book *Gendering Bodies/Performing Art*, solo women artists of the early modern dance, such as Duncan and Maud Allen could not fully exploit the discourse of the transcendent universal which had become the legitimising tenet of modernist choreographic art. Performing their own choreographies, these female artists could not easily be seen to embody an impersonal and instrumentalist relationship to their own dancing bodies. The audacity of Duncan's disparagement of ballet technique and her assertion that her dance did not proceed from training ('I am not a dancer') has been somewhat ameliorated by dance historians who have looked for, and found, evidence of her participation in various forms of dance training. However, Duncan's disavowal of training had an important strategic function. A considered refusal of the academic tradition and of the schism already well entrenched in her lifetime as modernist doxa between (her) 'art' and

(her) 'life', Duncan's antipathetical stance created a space for a re-conceptualisation of the role and nature of dance training.

Criticisms of Duncan commonly focus upon her failure to pay proper attention to the medium in which she worked. Writing in the 1940s, Katherine Everett Gilbert in "Mind and Medium in Modern Dance" argues that Duncan was more concerned with 'mind', that is with the inspiration and origin of movement in a non-material source. 'Isadora's soul expressed itself fiercely without systematic submission to the conditions of a medium', writes Gilbert (1983:230). However, Gilbert is supportive of certain developments in modern dance if not of Duncan. She contrasts Duncan's lack of physical discipline with the systematic approach of Rudolf von Laban. Laban formulated a 'grammar of motion' that provided modern dancers with the means of disciplining and channelling 'dance libido' into objectified form. Laban introduced the principle of tension and opposition as the governing dynamic of the modern dance in contrast to Duncan who had emphasised the organic flow of movement. Dance critic Rayner Heppenstall's dismissal of Duncan's movement style also centred upon the quality of flow: 'There is no control. Everything is fluid, formless, natural, free, without style, melting away...' (1936/1983:279).

As I have noted above, some writers such as Jowitt (1988) and Daly (1995), sensitive to the critical neglect of Duncan during the latter part of the twentieth century and keen to integrate Duncan's innovations into the mainstream of dance modernism, have documented her discipline and craft, identifying the ways in which she drew upon given traditions of dance, as well as adapting extra-theatrical physical techniques. Contrary to Gilbert's negative evaluation, Daly's careful analysis demonstrates that Duncan's interest in 'flow' *was* supported by technique: 'Duncan's dancing body was trained to move in very particular ways' notes Daly (1995:77). Paradoxically, flow, perceived by some critics as evidence of Duncan's lack of discipline, was produced and perfected through a precise, sustained attention to the body.

Daly's elucidation of the technical underpinnings of Duncan's dance is supported by her adoption of an expanded definition of technique as 'a consistent manner in which physical movements are made' (77). In the context of her discussion of Duncan's training regime Daly cites Marcel Mauss's definition of body techniques as 'the ways in which, from society to society men (sic) know how to use their bodies' (Mauss 1992:455), suggesting that dance training engages and modifies everyday habitus. Daly also credits Duncan with the promotion of a changed conception of the role and function of technique: 'In modern dance, beginning with Duncan, technique serves as a functional support beneath style' (1995:70).

Duncan projected a vision of spontaneity and freedom from restraint. It was important for audiences to imagine that Duncan was free of technical training and that her dancing was independent of choreographic structure. The overt display

of technique, with its concomitant image of control and mastery of the body, was inimical to Duncan's aesthetic and she deliberately de-emphasised the role of technique in the generation and presentation of her choreography. Her appeal to the women in her audiences was related to her ability to project dancing as a possibility of every body.

Under modernism, the author function in dance has encompassed texts and bodies; the modernist choreographer not only makes dances but also makes or 'authors' bodies. Later moderns such as Graham, Wigman, and Humphrey established professional studios and schools, and founded and developed precise techniques of moving. Susan Manning has remarked that the modern dance gradually became codified in ways which conformed more closely to the formal values of ballet. The modern dance choreographer's vision was distilled, made explicit and impersonal and thus her technique could endure through time. In the light of these later developments in modern dance, Duncan's legacy has been judged to be an ambiguous one by Gilbert, Levinson and in a different register, Helen Thomas. Thomas acknowledges Duncan's social impact but judges her influence upon dance to be limited principally because Duncan did not establish an enduring technique. Through the formulation and codification of dance techniques the second generation of modern dancers established a basis for what Thomas terms 'cultural reproduction'. Jowitt's assessment of Duncan's legacy is rather more positive however. She writes:

> Duncan herself left something to choreographers of the next generation: the idea that the body itself, and not just the choreographic scenario, ought to reflect the creator's private response to the world, and could be altered to do so (1988:102).

Duncan's failure to formalise her methodology can be interpreted as yet another manifestation of her thoroughgoing critique of the reproductive and stabilising role of received traditions of body discipline and training. She rejected the division between the dancer and non-dancing others which such disciplines establish. Duncan's innovation founded modern dance as a field of inquiry into different forms of habitus. Dance technique may be a means of exercising control over the body through the stabilisation and unification of bodily dispositions; for modern dancers however it may also present opportunities to imagine and explore different fabrications of the self.

Subsequent postmodern dance has continued the process of rethinking the role of training and the relationship between training and performance production that was begun with the early moderns. The postmodern dance of the 1960s reiterated Duncan's refusal of the identity 'dancer' as dancers and choreographers rejected the authorising process of dance training and questioned the necessity of certain long established rituals like 'warming-up'. Steve Paxton has spoken of

periods in his performance career when his preparation or warm-up for a performance consisted of the walk to the theatre from the subway. The improvisation group the Grand Union always functioned in this way.

Deborah Jowitt (1999:102) has identified three practices which have most significantly altered art dance in the late twentieth century – Contact Improvisation, Skinner Releasing and associated Release techniques, and Simone Forti's animal studies. Contact began as a selecting and framing of certain kinds of raw, generic pedestrian movement.[1] Release-based techniques approach training as a process of undoing cultural inscription in order to learn how to move in a balanced, easeful way that is as applicable to daily life as to dance. Simone Forti has identified herself as part of a generation of dancers 'who started thinking of movement in a generic sense and turned away from technique' (1999:14). Feeling that the techniques available did not match the sense of her own body, Forti began to look for the roots of dance behaviour and moments of dancing in the movements of the everyday world; not only in the movements of people, but in movements of animals and things.

All these practices presume a breakdown of the category of the dancer as elite specialist and an opening to the quotidian. Ordered but not codified they have become important resources for performers wishing to extend and challenge their corporeal habit without engaging the stylistics of specific dance forms.

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Who dances? the pedestrian as performer

During a visit to Australia in 1993, American choreographer and dancer Douglas Dunn remarked upon the formation and changing constituency of the postmodern dance field during the 1960s and early 1970s in New York. Dunn was a member of the Cunningham Company between 1969 and 1973 and a performer with Yvonne Rainer and Grand Union. His own choreographic work is a wry, ironic commentary upon the modern and postmodern dance heritage pursued through a highly rigorous technical approach to dancing. In his presentation Dunn first described the impact of new, 'less extended', forms of dance upon established practice. As dancers of ballet and 'highly rigorous' forms of modern dance encountered emerging forms such as Contact Improvisation they 'loosened up their attitudes and their dancing' said Dunn. He then noted the fact that many people who had otherwise no connection to or prior interest in dance were drawn to these newly emerging performance practices:

> They were people who never would have been attracted to dance. Just as I would probably not have danced if I had not met Cunningham because he established a kind of permission for me, to not have to be a character. A lot of people were waiting for permission and they took it when they saw it. A lot of people who ... have practiced (Contact) have been very uninterested in all the other forms of dance.

> But if that work hadn't existed they either would have invented it or they wouldn't have danced (1994:55).

The new forms of movement-based performance emerging during the 1970s were built upon the aesthetic innovations of dancers associated with the Judson Dance Theater. In a chapter entitled "Everyday Bodies" in *Time and the Dancing Image*, Jowitt offers a detailed account of the broad ramifications of the anti-elitist ideals governing the avant garde dance of the early 1960s. The entry of the pedestrian in the form of undancerly dancers and everyday actions provoked a profound questioning of the forms and categories of received practice, both performative and discursive. Anti-elitism meant among other things that the image of the professional dancer was subject to intense scrutiny and reappraisal. Jowitt notes a widespread resistance to the inscriptive practices of modern dance and ballet. The image of the dancer as an elite specialist was antithetical to the broad-based communitarian politics of the Judson era. Performers did engage in dance training of various kinds but their purpose in pursuing technique was, according to Jowitt, to 'keep fit' not to 'become a dancer'. 'Whether trained or untrained ... the bodies tended to look like those you'd meet on the street', Jowitt observes (1988:308). The notion of the dancer as a matter of fact worker persisted even as dances became more complex compositionally and technically. Dancers 'wanted to retain vestiges of that rough-around-the-edges look, that lack of a high-powered manner, that affirmation of human vulnerability once considered so shocking' (337).

What is the ongoing significance of the everyday body in dance? Does it have any contemporary currency? In dance the entry of the pedestrian was an index to the radicalisation of modernist dance practice during the 1960s. Assimilationist accounts of the effects of this period of experimentation speak in terms of the expansion, diversification and renewal of art dance. But here I wish to investigate the possibility of formation of an other, non-assimilating, discourse. The effect of the entry of the pedestrian could be described as precipitating a destabilisation of the field of dance. In this construction, the term pedestrian does not signify merely the non-dancer, rather its function is to blur distinctions, in particular, the dancer/non-dancer, trained/untrained opposition upon which mainstream practice is founded. The presentation and theoretical elaboration of the concept of the pedestrian is however an unfinished project. By the 1980s the pedestrian as a critical category had been dispersed; if it exists at all today it might be found in various new /old genres of community dance, differently-abled dance, senior citizens dance, etcetera.[2]

To reiterate: we can either assume that the entry of the pedestrian is a variation upon already established practice – in which case it will be compared and contrasted to 'dance-as-we-know-it'. It is situated in terms of tradition and (usually) judged as deficient, that is, lacking in certain crucial attributes and qualities.[3] An alternative

approach might be to regard the entry of the pedestrian as a moment of rupture, in which the terms which have organised and regulated the discipline of dance are rendered null and void. Understood in this way the pedestrian cannot be assimilated; pedestrian actions are incommensurate with traditional dance values.

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The primitive and the pedestrian

John Berger writes about the phenomenon of the 'primitive', the non-professional and the non-sanctioned artist in his 1980 essay "The primitive and the professional." He makes the point that the 'primitive' artist 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 and terms of the available tradition. In a related essay,[4] Berger discusses the work of Millet, one of a number of socially and politically conscious artists of the nineteenth century, who attempted to introduce new subject matter and new social experience into the 'old' tradition of oil painting. Berger notes that despite the painter's skill he fails in his attempt to render in oil his chosen subject matter – the peasant's experience of and relation to land. He is defeated, Berger suggests, by the optics of the visual means he employs. That relation – of labour and 'close, hard, patient physicality' – is unrepresentable within the representational conventions Millet inherited. No iconographic formula existed for representing the peasant's experience of land and to invent one 'would mean destroying the traditional language for depicting scenic landscape' (77).

As Berger argues, the so-called naive or 'primitive' artist is not socially or politically naive. They recognise that there is power in art and also that the means of access to this power are foreclosed to them.

> The primitive begins alone; he inherits no practice. Because of this the term *primitive* may appear at first to be justified. He does not use the pictorial grammar of the tradition – hence he is ungrammatical. He has not learnt the technical skills which have evolved with the conventions – hence he is clumsy. When he discovers on his own a solution to a pictorial problem, he often uses it many times – hence he is naive. But then one has to ask: why does he refuse the tradition? And the answer is only partly that he was born far away from that tradition. The effort necessary to begin painting or sculpting, in the social context in which he finds himself, is so great that it could well include visiting the museums. But it never does, at least in the beginning. Why? Because he knows already that his own lived experience which is forcing him to make art has no place in that tradition (1980:68).

An analogy can be drawn between the 'primitive' in art and what I am terming the 'pedestrian' in dance. Although an anachronistic gesture – the term pedestrian is associated with postmodern dance and not the pre-modern – I would describe Duncan's dance as one which is predicated upon a 'pedestrian body' for the following reasons. The academic tradition of ballet is foreclosed to Duncan for reasons that have been well enumerated by dance historians. Duncan's 'primitivism', that is her naive relation to academic tradition, is over-determined by social class, nationality and gender. She worked with what was to hand. In her own reckoning, she was a non-professional; she was not a dancer. Duncan refused conventional solutions to choreographic and performative problems and sought to invent and refine her own. As John Martin writes '... it was her ideal to find for every dance key movements, as it were, from which other movements would flow as of their own accord in fulfilment of the initial impulse. Here was the discovery of the motor phrase, and the realisation of the power of movement to evolve its own forms'(1965:226). The pedestrian dancer performs her lived experience and a relation to (her) body which cannot be rendered in the language of the established dance tradition.

In 1967 Steve Paxton first presented *Satisfyin' Lover,* a work for thirty-seven odd performers, requiring little rehearsal, no warm up and no specialised skills. In this choreography the author/choreographer function is attenuated almost to the point of disappearance. In *Satisfyin' Lover,* the work (the score) produces 'the pedestrian' as an attentive mobilisation of the everyday actions of walking, sitting and standing. The score is silent on questions of the status or identity of performers; the dancer/non-dancer distinction is not activated; it is irrelevant to the realisation of the work.

Let us for a moment look at this distinction between dancers and non-dancers, trained and untrained. Firstly, we might note that the term non-actor, sounds so odd – amateur actor, or non-professional is the more familiar term and it has a particular value, a social value, in amateur repertory groups as well as in specialised artistic contexts. The non-professional actor as an index of the authentic is highly regarded in the field of experimental film, for example. The absence of similarly nuanced terms in the field of dance tells us something about the constitution of the identity 'dancer'.

The discourse of ballet is constituted by that which it excludes. The everyday is the excluded substrate upon which the discipline of ballet is founded. The everyday is the outside, the residuum. The ballet, a classical theatre, transcends everyday life and the everyday physicality of untrained bodies. The distinction between movement in everyday life and movement in dance is a foundational one. This distinction continues under modernism; art dance is the occasion for the refinement, purification and elevation of human movement. Insofar as pedestrian movement enters dance it must be altered, transformed, imbued with kinaesthetic value. Cunningham draws the distinction in this way:

> Certainly everyone can leap, sit down and get up again, but the dancer makes it apparent that the going into the air is what establishes the relationship to the air, the process of sitting down, not the position of being down, is what gives the moving quality to the dancing (1982:6).

Nineteen sixties postmodernism involved a strategic embrace of the residuum. All that is cut away and excluded in the formation of the theatre dance (by which I mean both ballet and modern dance) was taken up as the revalued ground of dancing. The everyday is the space of great complexity, contradiction and ambiguity; taken up as an aesthetic ideology, it unravels the modernist narrative of purity, distillation and clarity. It also unravels or destabilises the identity of the dancer.

Postmodern dance in this view is a dance grounded in 'ordinary bodies'; it embraces the concrete, the fallen and the contradictory. Discipline and control of the body may be exercised in postmodern dance but they are not central values as they are in ballet. Also, postmodern dance, however specialised an individual practitioner may be, is conceptualised as fundamentally connected to community, to shared forms of physical expression and embodiment. The dance's currency, that is, its contemporary relevance and its claims to accessibility, rest upon its connectedness to immediate circumstance. It is a local and situated practice, contingent upon variously fashioned pedestrian bodies. Jill Johnston's review of *Satisfyin' Lover* celebrates the diversity of ordinary bodies in this way:

> Thirty-two any old wonderful people ... walking one after the other across the gymnasium [at St Peter's Church on West Twentieth Street] in their any old clothes. The fat, the skinny, the medium, the slouched and slumped, the straight and tall, the bowlegged and knock-kneed, the awkward, the elegant, the coarse, the delicate, the pregnant, the virginal, the you name it, by implication every postural possibility in the postural spectrum, that's you and me in all our ordinary everyday who cares postural splendour. There is a way of looking at things that renders them performance (1971:137).

In watching *Satisfyin'Lover* I am not attending to a unified aesthetic object nor to a clarified re-presented identity but I am invited, in the aesthetised context/pretext of performance, to attend closely to behaviour and to the play of habitus, in all its detailed variety. It is evident, I think, in *Satisfyin' Lover,* that the pedestrian is not a 'natural' body, a body outside of discourse. On the contrary, the pedestrian is profoundly social; its connectedness to daily life is explicit.

This choreography of the pedestrian produces an intimate space. It is not distance but proximity, the space of the salon or the studio, which promotes the perception of otherness, of the deep strangeness of the other and of the alterity

within the everyday. To return to the distinction Edwin Denby made, back in 1965, between 'seeing daily life' and 'seeing art',

> For myself I make a distinction between seeing daily life and seeing art. Not that seeing is different. Seeing is the same. But seeing art is seeing an ordered and imaginary world, subjective, and concentrated (Denby 1965:21).

In her dance criticism, Jill Johnson identifies art not only or exclusively as an aesthetic object. She writes of 'a way of looking' that transforms its object; 'seeing' is productive, modified or charged by context. For Johnston the recognition of art lies with the spectator and the constitutive, active nature of their perception. Theatre may intensify the experience of being produced as an object and as a representation, but the figure of the pedestrian is a point of resistance to this process of object-ification. The choreography of the pedestrian thus makes an issue of the audience; the work is not, or not only, in the body of the performer; the work and its effects, be they perceptions of beauty, interest, aversion etc., are activated and produced between spectator and actor.

The significance of the entry of the pedestrian onto the dance stage, however that 'stage' might be conceived, means not only that (ordinary) actions are transformed and given value – this being the orthodox reading in the dance aesthetics of Selma Jean Cohen and others – but also that a possibility exists for a re-staging of the relation of dance to daily life.

Notes

1. See Stark Smith's description of the seminal pre-contact work, *Magnesium*, in *Writings on Dance* #21, 2001/2.
2. Dunn's somewhat jaundiced view of the expansion of non-dance movement practices in the 1980s and '90s reflects a concern with the ways in which non professional and community based forms of dance have taken up the outsider role, the other of mainstream dance. According to Dunn this development has had a negative impact upon ongoing tradition of avant-garde experimentation, especially in terms of available financial support. Ann Cooper Albright's *Choreographing Difference* (1997) suggests another, more positive response to the dispersal of the radical category of the pedestrian.
3. Sondra Fraleigh summary dismissal of postmodern dance as 'non-dance' which has a limited function as a challenge to and renewal of dance is relevant here, 'There are some things in dance (as in all arto) which can only be done once, after which they lose our interest.... "nondance" (a term used loosely before the postmodern label became prevalent) simply defined itself out of existence' (1987:130).
4. "Millet and The Peasant"in *About Looking*, Berger (1980)

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A family tree story*

SIMONE FORTI

I once saw a man in pajamas approach a tree and study it. And as he did, his body subtly shifted, twisted, tightened, lifted, taking on some of the qualities of the tree. We do that, hardly noticing, bring what is outside in, in for experiencing. I can imagine him telling about that tree, unknowingly dancing his tree dance once again.

But what if he changed text while he kept the dance? Saying something about a rodeo, or something about the softness of your lips? When I was working with Anna Halprin in California in the 1950s, in her Dancers' Workshop of Marin, one of the senior members of the group, John Graham, came from a theatre background. He brought some theatre exercises to the group. We had been improvising with movement and now we also had the use of words. It seemed we could put images right out in space. You could say "sky blue" and there would be this expanse of blue giving space to whatever movement you were doing, offering its own quality in juxtaposition to what was happening with the movement. We played these two elements against each other, trying for the most startling combinations. Of course often the movement and words complemented each other in a logical way. But this building of an image was just to better flip it with contextual incongruity. The overall picture was collage. Nonsense and sense, elements out of context, juxtaposed. The idea was to blow your mind a bit.

I started to call this work the Nez Plays. I knew it wasn't Zen, but it wasn't exactly not Zen either. It had roots in the theatre and it seemed to be of the family of Surrealist theatre of the teens of this century. I was reading about the work of Kurt Schwitters, and of one of his pieces wherein the performers remained entwined as part of the sets, background to lone sewing machines running furiously center stage. We started making pieces, recalling some of our improvisations and running them through again with spontaneous variations until a piece would evolve. Certain moods would emerge, even characters. I'm not very familiar with Ionesco but I was aware of him, and I think the work we were doing was also of the family of his work. But he was a playwright while we were dancers, basically improvisers. Our work was very physical. I think that the Grand Union performance group based in New York in the '70s was doing work belonging to that extended family, too.

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To shatter sense through nonsense creates gaps, space. It feels to me related to air. To laughter. When elements are sprung out of context, they engender new experience. The mind is delighted with the unforeseen, unlikely pairings, is a bit unhinged for a split second then rushes in to fill the vacuum with, " Umm, humm, of course. A steamship lodged in a rosebush. I see it." John Cage used chance devices to bypass improvisational choice and to achieve really fresh juxtapositions of elements. For in improvisation there is always the taste, the choice of the improviser. Always agenda, which relates to familiarity of some kind of logic, even if it's the logic of how to scramble.

Following is the transcript of a message Anna Halprin recently left on my answering machine:

> I remember a few [of the exercises that led to the Nez Play]. In one example we would take a word, could be 'strawberry,' and then we would explore that word in time, in space, and with force. And then we would also explore with ways that we would shape our mouth to organise the sound. And then we were generally working with no cause and effect so that we might make an arbitrary movement and do that while we were exploring with the sound. Or we might let the movement be an extension of the sound. In another exercise we would take sentences; it could be anything, like 'up above,' Uncle John says no,' or it could be something like 'over there.' We would say these sentences and we would have a task. Like throwing balls. So we would simply combine them and they would be delightful but meaningless according to cause and effect in a content way. And then we would take something like the word 'time.' And then we would just free associate with it. I remember A.A.[Leath] and John [Graham] doing an improvisation with the word 'time.' They were sitting on a bench. And as they were exploring and improvising with all their associations about the word 'time,' they would do arbitrary movement or they would do movements that were in response to the element of time, or they would suddenly shift into a fantasy role like becoming an animal and then do a quick shift back to being themselves. We did all kinds of exercises that were expanding all kinds of possibilities. A looking for perhaps unexpected content even. Looking for things that you couldn't preconceive. Actually I think that what we were doing and what I didn't realize we were doing at the time, we were really trying to get at the inherent mysteries which ... (end of message)

Following is a reconstruction from my notes of a subsequent brief phone conversation with Anna, in continuation:

> We were scrambling words, but from our unconscious or superconscious. So it was coming from the wisdom in the body. Forgotten memories. Experiences hidden in the body, that we didn't have words for. Words from seemingly unknown places;

> mysteries in the body. Now I'm working with words again, but in relation to drawings that come from dance experience. But still out of context so they don't immediately go into preconceived ideas. Words are symbols for experience we've already had. When we plug into the kinaesthetic, it gives off feelings and responses for which we don't have a ready-made vocabulary. So we reorganize ways we work with words we know. I use words in this way in working with people with life-threatening illnesses. First we dance, then we draw, then we put words on the drawings. Single words. From these can come poems. Or prayers. Things which couldn't have been put into words to start with. It breaks barriers of how words can be used. Breaks the predictable outcome. It's a tool for having people get past fears and look at their deepest content. To survive. To motivate to live. It can lead to powerful self knowledge.

I too have returned to working with movement and words. Not like the Nez Plays, but in a way that harks back to the pajama man, studying his tree, telling his tree story. The natural way that spoken language and body language slip out of us at once, contrasting and supplementing each other, helping us to get the feel of what we know, and to communicate it. I call this work Moving the Telling. The topic could be a landscape, the portrait of a sister, or an essay weaving three far-flung images. I often feel that movement is like paint and words like pencil, or vice versa, together on a canvas. They can contrast or follow each other, with a time lag or contrast of perspective, a detail against a broad indication. The references turn back around each other building a whole, quite spontaneously.

My return to improvising with moving and speaking came out of a need to process information coming to me from the outside, specifically, from the news media. I started dancing the news. Talking and dancing, becoming the ships, the land, the peoples, the strategies, the connections. It helped me recall the bits and broad strokes of information. And as I ran it all through my body I could see how it fell together in my mind, in my imagination, in my feeling. I called this News Animations. Later I started doing what I called a Gardening Journal. Drawing on the intimate experience that gardening is. Rolling heavy rocks and collapsing for a rest in the sun on the super gravity charged earth. Gouging and pulling the invading burdock, its deep tap-root giving way at dusk with a pungent artichoke smell. And maybe the thought that come through as they do, while gardening, of the free-fall of the dollar, radioactively tipped shells, and continental drifts.

The improvisational practice of Moving the Telling reminds me of the continuous timed writing practice set out by writer and teacher of writing workshops, Natalie Goldberg, and used extensively by Christine Svane in her "Moving Words" dance workshops. In the timed writing practice you must decide the length of your writing session ahead of time, maybe three, ten, maybe sixty minutes. And during that time you must keep your pen moving without stopping. What seems to happen

is that in those moments when one would usually pause to consider the next step of presentation, one is bound to continue. So one grabs at the stuff that's flitting through, with its own wild affiliation to the thoughts that came before. The title of one of Natalie Goldberg's books on writing is *Wild Mind*. She often refers to her Zen master, Katagiri Roshi. I am reminded of Gary Snyder's book *The Practice of the Wild*. My sense of his meaning of "wild" is that most of experience, and indeed of phenomena of which our life is woven, is undomesticated, out of the range of human plan or control. If the Nez Plays were about air, Moving the Telling is about earth. It can bring laughter too, but of a different kind. It tends to elude packaged agenda. It's the medium of the fool. In his pajamas.

Moving words: improvising with Simone Forti

ALYS LONGLEY

It is by now 10pm at Palazzo di Sette in the Italian town of Orvieto, where Simone Forti is about to perform a solo improvisation. We expected her to perform closer to 8pm, but the media conference in which she was guest of honor went overtime, as did the performances previous to hers. Time has gotten later and later. Simone is unfazed and relaxed, waits for the stage to clear, and then enters, without ceremony. Making a bird sound, a sound kind of like "fuuuuccck", she begins a performance monologue that seamlessly brings together stories of the pigeons living around the city and Simone's feelings about reading the political news in the day's paper. The movement leads her into new shapes of thought, new tangents of language.

In October 2006 Simone Forti was the guest of honor at the Zip Festival, a large international improvisation festival that is held regularly in Orvieto, Italy. She led an intensive week-long residential workshop of which I was one of the participants. Saturating our work was a pervading sense of history – Italy being the place of Simone's birth, Orvieto being a medieval fortress city, Simone teaching scores that originated throughout her life in performance; so that we were part of a body of work that began in the early 1960s and that continues all over the world.

Simone Forti has worked in the field of dance improvisation for almost fifty years. Her work turns away from the conventionally virtuosic and redefines virtuosity in terms of the ability to commit to being present, curious and open in performance, and to work with a compositional mind, opening space for the logic of ordinary thoughts to be articulated. Simone was part of the Judson Church group that brought artists, dancers, musicians and poets together to invent new forms and she was working with Steve Paxton as he originated Contact Improvisation. She also spent long periods working solo, developing methods of practice for performing solo improvisation scores, the invention of movement and its relationship to well ... everything else: the present moment as it becomes history, the relevance of the everyday and the (extraordinary) ordinary on the canvas of artistic expression. Simone is now in her seventies and continues teaching and performing internationally, writing new books, influencing new generations of improvisation practitioners.

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I want to present this article in two strands. When Simone performs, she moves fluidly between disparate ideas or worlds, slowly threading them together through compositional modes such as movement, tone, narrative and juxtaposition. In her workshops we focus on the being there, the seed of memory or thinking. I'm thinking of this writing as a series of hearts, elements of Simone's work that continue pumping ideas and methods of practice through the body of what international contemporary performance has been and is becoming.

The 'hearts' that this article moves between consist of a description of one intensive day of Simone's workshop in *logomotion* and excerpts from an interview with Simone, documentary film maker Andy Wood and myself.

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(Cut to an alcove set into the stone walls of a dance studio in an Italian Palazzo, where Alys and Simone are sitting, with Andy and his video camera facing them)

ANDY How did you get involved in improvisation in the first place?

SIMONE Well, okay, here's a story I've told many times but, okay, I was painting, and I was 21. It was the time of abstract expressionist painting or action painting. I was painting, action painting, making these huge canvases, sharing an attic in the Seaman's Union in San Francisco, and at that time we were making these enormous canvases. You couldn't afford real art paint, and so we'd get these buckets of house paint, and we had these huge brushes and would be jumping to reach the top and then moving all over the place and leaving our gestures on this canvas. I started accumulating these huge canvases that weren't terribly good. I didn't know what do with them.

Meanwhile I was taking one dance class a week for fun. I'd found this little dance school, that was probably sort of on the way to the studio from where I was living... and it was Graham-based, Martha Graham technique-based, which I wasn't very good at, but I enjoyed it. I didn't have a turn out and I wouldn't hold in my stomach ... and Anna Halprin had been part of that school, Anna Halprin and Welland LaThrop. I didn't know that it was just at the moment that Anna Halprin was breaking away from the school, breaking away from modern dance and completely focusing on improvisation. One day one of Anna Halprin's senior students taught the class and instead of technique he taught improvisation. And I realised that I could take the canvas away and just make all of those gestures, and like the physicality that I'd be using to make traces on the canvas, I could get rid of the canvas and the brushes and the paint and just do it in the air. All I had to do was just take off my shoes. So I went to see what Anna was

doing, and she was so excited, about starting, you know a new idea, a new path that answered to what she needed. And I just apprenticed with her for four years; and that's how I got started.

So I never did dance technique, never did ballet. I ended up later doing Martha Graham technique, but not as something that I would ever think of as a direction for myself.

ANDY It sounds like, I don't want to over romanticize it, but it sounds like that time and that place was very exciting, you know a real hotbed of ideas just generally in the arts.

SIMONE It was. And at the same time this was in San Francisco where I was working with Anna, and I wasn't aware of it, but she certainly was, the beat poets were reading with the jazz musicians. So it was a time maybe of looking at modernism kind of horizontally and not so much at your ancestors in the medium that you're working in. So that then later going to New York, finding a musician who was teaching classes with the dancers, introducing John Cage's concepts and having us essentially try to be aware of whatever we felt the need for and to use whatever means we could to make something that filled that need,

ANDY ... rather than being locked into any specific vocabulary

SIMONE Yes. It was a very exciting time, but the problems were smaller then, than they are now. What I feel very much now is that my civilization, the civilization, you know, that is in my every cell, is not sustainable on the planet, and I feel not that I have to address that (directly) but that what I do is within my whole context of awareness and that's part of my context. It's one of the vectors that brings me to do whatever, to make my choices, and I think it makes the choices more difficult, I think we're kind of scratching our heads...

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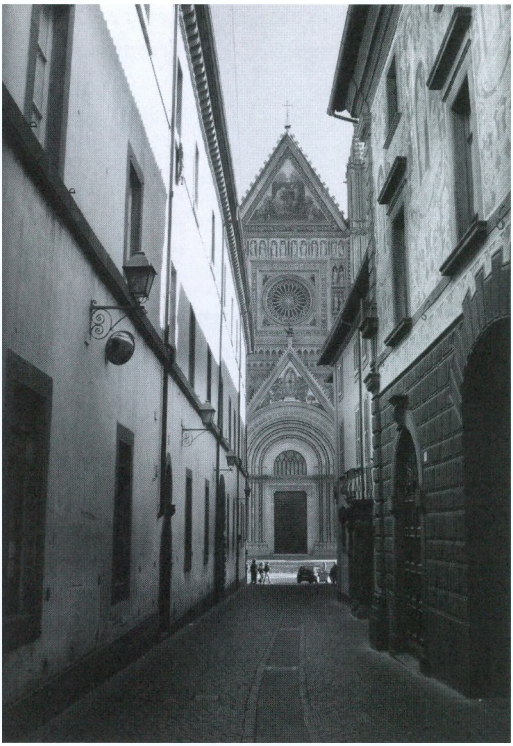
(Cut to Day Three of Simone's workshop intensive, Palazzo Caravajal)

Unraveling thoughts of the everyday

The heart of the workshop is developing ease between moving and speaking ... This pragmatic can lend itself to any area of subject matter, or range poetically through varied images, memories, or speculations. By speaking and moving at once, spontaneously following our impulses and responding to the resulting dynamics and images, we integrate various aspects of our knowing and give expression to a fuller spectrum of our world (Forti, cited in Zip 2006).

The following outline of a day of Simone's workshop reflects the way in which her work encourages students to articulate the issues they are asking in life within the improvisation process. As she writes of her process:



LEFT Palazzo Carajaval, Orvieto
RIGHT View of Orvieto

To me this work seems very natural. And yet it is subtle. It is not illustration. It is not mime. It is not even linear thinking. And in a way that is the key. A shift of frame of mind. I have found that we think differently when we are in motion. And that is the thinking I am trying to access (Forti 2003 p.63).

As the class begins we enter the space as usual, meeting in a circle, and Simone informs us that the plan for the day is begin out of the dance studio. Our task is to find a partner, and to walk. We are to work with the city, enter the city with perceptual senses open. Share what is on our minds with our partner. Our bodies are to absorb the impressions, qualities, stories, and shapes of the town. It is a simple task.

Transcript of Simone's walking instructions

You're going to go with a partner, twos and twos and we'll take an hour, to be outside, and as you walk, where you go, you can just follow what interests you, and just be very open, so maybe you see something, or you hear something, or you feel somehow or you see a situation between people, or you see a shadow – just whatever experiences come to you.

And also, you will talk together with your partner, and you can mention if you see something, you can say, 'Oh look, look how those forms are...' or, 'Look at that shadow.' You can communicate some of the things that you notice, but also talk about what you've been thinking about lately, maybe what you've been reading, or what you've been interested in ... it could be something about your family, it could be something about politics, or it could be ... it could be a joke you heard, it could be ... thoughts about love, about death, it could be, that you had to go to the dentist (laughter). We 're going to bring things from the world, from our life, from other parts of our life, from our awareness and interest, into the studio (translates into Italian).

When we're out there observing it's important not to try to grab things and go 'oh I can work with that, that's interesting.' You don't know what will come back in the moment, you might be very surprised, maybe you hardly notice that you saw a man with a strange hat – at the moment you didn't even notice – and then when you go to write that's what comes. So don't try to hold things. Just be open. You're just talking with your partner, you have an hour to wander around or to sit in one place; you can go in a shop, you can go in a café, you can go into the cathedral and look at a fresco. (translates into Italian) You can go into a souvenir shop

because what's important is your attitude of receiving impressions and information from the world. So don't go in there and say, 'oh I have to get for my Aunt Clara, I have to do this I have to...' When we come back we are going to write... don't take the book with you (in answer to questions. Sure, things will look different through the camera; you will see differently, but it's part of our work session today, so we go with that attitude of taking in impressions. Any other questions? Okay, now it's two o'clock, okay at three o'clock let's be back here, without our shoes, ready to write.

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We choose partners and disappear into the town of Orvieto for an hour. Most of us work with people we haven't worked with so far, so we are often working between languages and cultures.

It is a simple task that offers enormous information. After working with Simone for two days, we are entering the labyrinthine dance space of a living breathing, ancient city, walking its stone paths, listening to its stories, letting our skin drink its light, and buying treats and tasting them, really tasting them. And taking time to really talk to each other, to choose from the multitude of choices offered by a city and a friend.

Immediately after we get back to the studio we write for ten minutes. The writing offers a site to re-find our experience, to record and extend and clarify experience. Such a solitary act, each of us in our own little world, the sounds of pens and pencils scribing paper.

Remembering from that walk

The white sheets.
The walk up the hill and the view across the landscape to the Umbrian vineyards
Making a new friend, talking about things that were making us sad and then the simple wordless communication of touch. Touch and sunlight upon the skin.
How to begin to trust.
The leaf falling down past the city wall and the wind catching it and it blowing up, falling up, falling into gravity to let the gravitational dynamics of our environment take care of the landing.
the taste of ice-cream; (amarana, nocciola, pistachio)
the winding streets, the sense of being lost,
piazzas we hadn't found before; talking about our lives, we who come from two countries on opposite poles of the earth,
from opposite poles of the earth, teaching each other to see.

And then to warm up, first in our own spaces, and then as a group working through the Anna Halprin stretch Simone has been leading us through each of these days and a Tai Chi prayer circle, which leads into jogging. In the jogging exercise, we fall into our weight, a sense of our mass, and then, as we work in partners, a sense of our shared mass. Our bodies tune to gravity and momentum, opening to the space, to length, warmth, ease, listening, timing.

Simone
You are one mass together
Change partners many times
Feel your mass along the space
Feel the momentum move you
You are moved
You get half the ticket for free if
You can release into the space
and let momentum to do the work for you.

These are short experiments with space and momentum, working with a partner and sensing the dynamic of streaming through space and time as two, in this very simple form, and slowly allowing it to become more complex.

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(Cut to interview)

SIMONE When you're improvising performance hopefully there's a sense of urgency that kicks in that really gets the juices going, it gets the imagination going, it gets the perception going and hopefully your sense of composition; so that you're aware of the arc of the performance, but you're very in touch with your impulses. You make selections as you go and yet you're very aware of the process at the same time... sometimes those juices don't flow, it doesn't happen; then you use your craft. Sometimes its bad and you strike out. I have choreographed very little and when I do choreograph, I'll often have a set of bits of vocabulary that I improvise with.

ALYS I think the *Huddle* is some kind of choreography improvisation. You know it's a very clear stage image with an amazing quality of indeterminacy in terms of how the form will evolve.

SIMONE What I like in the *Huddle* is, yes it has a very simple score – you improvise how you are going to do the score, which is climbing over the mass of people

– but it's all you can do to just climb up and get over the top and down the other side. So there's not a lot of aesthetic choices, which leaves you free to just experience having to pull your weight, the shifting of the people under you that are organising themselves to hold the weight. Someone observing can really see the body moving. At about the time I did that piece, which was back in 1960, essentially I was looking at the photographs of Muybridge. He was just taking photographs of people, naked, like a man naked, chopping wood, just chopping wood! And then he was doing fancier things, like having a woman pick up a whole bucket of water and dump it on her head.

This was before movies. You could just see the lift of the weight of the axe and how the body adjusted, and then the going over to drop the axe and the bounce of the axe and how the body took that bounce in. It was more beautiful than any kind of beautiful thing, and that's what good about Contact Improvisation too – there's no time to be beautiful. It's not this kind of delicate form or 'I like this line'. You go for it and as you're watching you get to see reflexes in action.

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(Cut to dance workshop)

Simone

Find the person that you took a walk with and you are going to read to them what you wrote. And read it one time, and then you are going to look at your writing and underline two maybe three, not more than three, phrases or I could say ideas or images, things. Underline two things, maybe three, that stand out to you, um, and then read to your partner what you underlined.

From the longer writing we distill key ideas that might carry us into moving. On paring the writing down I think about how an image or word holds whole worlds of resonance. Choosing an extract means you have a very specific, layered starting point that is rich with all the subtext of the longer piece to begin the improvisation.

My dance partner and I went from being strangers to being close friends on this day. The travel from outside, to writing alone, to reading together, to performing together gave us to many spaces to understand each other's way of seeing and creating.

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(Cut to interview)

SIMONE In America movement improvisation wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for jazz – it takes on a completely different vocabulary, a different style. You build a vocabulary that you can use and that's constantly evolving. But it's the same for every artist. A painter works with a vocabulary and from canvas to canvas is evolving that vocabulary, and every once and a while you go agghhh! That vocabulary, you don't remember why you started with it, it's become by rote almost, then you have to go looking and find a new paradigm, and it's the ones who go out and find what's needed next...

ALYS How do you find what's needed next?

SIMONE Well it's a good question because, like, do you keep going or do you stop or... it comes up, I think it comes up for everybody and you can despair, you can start reading a lot of things, sometimes you look to a new medium, maybe, start reading up on agriculture or something, just to start fresh, or...

ALYS reignite your curiosity. I feel like, the curiosity of the performer, if they're really curious about what it is they're working on, I'm curious with them. So when you see an improviser who's really curious about how the concepts will evolve, it really catches you.

SIMONE Yes, and also the sensations of movement. If they're into their sensations you get into their sensations with them, you experience it through them; and also their curiosity about how the form will evolve, as you're saying, yeah. I have a hard time with choreographed work, and I'm sure ... I'm sure there's choreographed work that I really could respond to, but usually I want to see where the thought is going, I want the live moment of thought. So often when I can see a movement like that, and I can tell from the first instant, 'Oh, that's by rote', my interest just kind of sits back. And then I'll start finding a dancer who is very alive in the moment of attack, the moment of, you know, how to fade out of the movement, how to attack a movement, where they're very alive in the moment of the choreography. But that's hard, the choreography has to allow for that and a lot of choreography doesn't, and isn't really danceable. I don't know, I don't really know how to talk about set choreography.

ALYS I thought there was something really amazing that you were teaching us, and that was how to trust and not know what's going to come next. And I found when I was really enjoying the work that was happening in our workshop it was because we were being allowed into this. Maybe it's a universal thing of how human beings process ideas and it's so fascinating to be let in, to that, to how our ideas ignite and work off each other, because when people don't know what's going to come next and then it comes, I think especially with words, words really let you in to their thought processes or kinesthetic thought processes.

SIMONE and getting a group mind going... in class that was happening a lot, people recognise, like even in the Scramble people recognise, 'Oh its getting dense now,

okay', 'We'll work this out', 'How am I going to work with that? It's speeding up, now it's speeding up.' And also in the improvisations where you were working with a larger palette, people in the trio would recognize, 'Oh this is the game now' and be working with that.

ALYS Do you use the Tai Chi and the bodywork stretches, in the morning, to teach us to learn to wait and allow something to happen? I feel like there's an openness of the body, and through the warm-ups you teach patience and openness.

SIMONE Okay, yeah, and also kinaesthetic awareness; that you take time to sense your sensations and then, because that's a big part of what you're responding to, it becomes a loop, where you sense your sensations, you respond to them; you get different sensations, you respond to them; and also of course you're making choices.

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(Cut back to dance workshop)

Simone's instruction after we read our work was to perform four minute timed duets to the class. The duets had a strong base and a clear focus, a sense of being underpinned by the spaces of the city. In the experience of being listened to we find even more layers to the work – find that small moments we might have forgotten hold inestimable detail. We began the day with bringing the perceptual openness of improvising to the act of walking the city, and noticing its details, and we ended the day with dancing our stories of that walk, fleshing out the moments our words had begun to elucidate.

You can turn to those things, you have those things, sometimes it's good to start from there, but then if some other thing comes back to you, you go with what, with what inspires you. You go with what you remember and it's again a work of memory, but then you might have some new thoughts, from say, from the conversation you had maybe that continues; you don't have to only stay with what you already said, or what you already were thinking about, you bring new things. This time you're working together, and you're equal, you can put in, you can initiate things, you can support each other. We'll see what happens. We'll do, and then we'll see what we did. So, it's a work of listening to each other, not just with the ear, but kind of having a sense of what you're doing together. Again, it doesn't have to be 'Boom!' you right away have something; it can take awhile. You can just start moving together and then wait for some idea to come to one or to the other and then work with that.

C: So moving and speaking?
Simone: Yep

S: The phrases: I can use hers or I just stay with mine?
Simone: For one thing you pretty much had experiences together. And we don't have to stay with what we wrote, the writing helped us, it's kind of a warm-up, and also the underlining, helps us, but we don't have to stay with that. For instance, I heard what my partner wrote and the things he underlined and it made me remember 'Oh yes, that'. I remembered those moments, those experiences, and I'm sure when I underlined he remembered, 'Oh yes, that.' So we can go to these, but maybe then we'll remember something else.

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In discussion after the class

Does movement and speaking have to be a binary?

Do sound/words and movement begin from the same place and then express through different perceptual pathways?

Talking is acculturated as a particular way of being. This includes: conversation/ language/ text and the force of its colonisation of what an experience can be/ naming. Movement is acculturated as another way of being: that carries implications of codes/ art /developmental patterns/ 'normal' statures/ technique/ identity. What happens when we bring our moving into our speaking? Suddenly the use of a name draws upon layers expressed in movement, and the point of reference of a name might be interrupted, or re-examined in terms of the sound that it produces, and the intensity presented by that sound. In movement, names become physical entities that shift the body and its bounds. The movement being created is re-read, layered with the words that emerge with it, so the movement is understood anew.

In working through this practice, dance technique is strongly interrupted by the cadence of the everyday, of wondering and wandering. Although technique is still embedded in movement, it seems that habitual patterns are disrupted when brought into conversation with the language of talking and inventing vocabulary, of letting the body-mind graze on thoughts.

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(Cut to interview)

SIMONE Do I see my work as political? The political interests me. Ah, I'm almost embarrassed at how it just interests me. I get enthusiastic about it. Also, if I'm anxious and I can't sleep I'll get the newspaper that I bought that day, and just the softness of the paper, just reading these histories of evolving problems, they're so interesting ... Is then the work that I do political? I think also yes. I think that for instance in the workshops, we have an experience and we talk about it. And it's not just me. I think this is part of the culture of dance

improvisation, part of the culture of Contact Improvisation. Each person speaks their mind. Someone says, 'I really had a hard time with this;' someone else says, 'it worked for me.' 'I found this and that.' At one point people would have said, 'oh no, how can you think that it worked great? 'Now we listen to each other, we've learnt to listen to each other, and I'm part of that culture, and bringing that culture along, and I think that's political ... And now I'm going to perform this evening, and yes, we go out not knowing what we're going to do and trusting. I also demand of myself that there's a thread. So it's more, I think, it's more like the Beat Poets so yes, you're rolling with it, but you also have a thread of subject matter, and you expect an arc, of the event. So as preparation I write for twenty minutes and then I won't necessarily use this, but it gives me a sense of what's on my mind. Do you have time to hear this? Okay, so I wrote: 'Writ of habeas corpus tribunale', which I'm probably going to write on my hand because I forget 'tribunale' and I forget 'writ of habeas corpus'

ALYS Where do those words come from?

SIMONE The newspaper. Okay.

The pigeons, mist, sudden rain. Warm autumn, the birds take advantage of shower. Lift wing to wet wing placed like armpit fluff feathers. Beak, working between feathers, fluff, maybe fleas. The writ of habeas corpus. Why does that mean the right to see evidence against you or what does it mean? It means law. It means process of law, protection of law. Rain. I could see the drops. The justice department is completely different from the system of federal courts; it is more politicized. America, and the revolution from England. The words, I pledge my life, my fortune and sacred honor. But, but now what, a sense of history, to understand something of what came before, how the nation was made. Is it always a difficult birth? Certainly America's birth was catastrophic for the indigenous. I find myself wondering if pigeon families have generations of rights to certain roofs which catch more sun. They fly together in great swoops. Are they families? Colonies? I can almost feel the feathers, the steamy warmth of that one preening, fluffed up. It was worse when the Congress gave their blessings to the President's unconstitutional actions. For Christ's sake, are we so afraid? No we aren't afraid of death we prove that every day on the freeways. The congress folks are afraid for their careers. Halliburton. How is that how? Leave that thought, my feeling. I was frightened when the Senate agreed that the court system, even the Supreme Court couldn't do anything, couldn't touch the breaking down of the right of habeas corpus. Don't they trust the courts? Don't they fucking trust the courts? I understand Bush. He doesn't believe in the balance of the branches of government, but the Senate! The Congress! The People! It takes a long time for the people to realise. Hospitals are closing. People with jobs are sleeping in the street. The voting machines. This moment of US history, a sense of history, the sense of separation of powers, that's what gathers us as a nation. Like Tito gathered Yugoslavia, the constitution gathers the Americans from all over the world with languages, colors of skin, yes. I have not

really felt it in my skin, in my bones. I always forget about slavery. I forget. I forget. And yes, the constitution was written by men of wealth and power, still, a pax constitutional, the pax Americana is disintegrating. To be the one to force the pax. The pax constitutional in the US is breaking down.

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(Cut to Simone performing at 10pm, downstairs at Palazzo di Sette)

To begin her solo, Simone unfolds the newspapers she has under her arm and spreads them onto the floor. History and records are visibly beneath her feet; they are neither fact nor fiction in detailing movements of power.

Among all of the chaos of this day she is a quiet centre, listening, present, aware, allowing information to gather in her body. Many of us are moved to tears by Simone's performance, suddenly unable to be numbed to the human implications of a phrase like, "People with jobs are sleeping in the streets." She finishes and she suddenly interrupts our applause because she'd like to do a "Piccolo dance for Fabio," an old friend from the sixties who showed up that afternoon – a small dance to recognise the past. She allows us to enter a small bank of memories with her, the movement of forty years ago which is thoroughly alive here, wrapped in the weave of how things became what they did, reinvented in this very particular present.

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Fire (2001) CHOREOGRAPHY Deborah Hay ADAPTATION Ros Warby PHOTO Jeff Busby

Ros Warby: Framing Practice

AN INTERVIEW BY SALLY GARDNER & ELIZABETH DEMPSTER

Ros Warby is a Melbourne based performer and choreographer. Her choreographic work focuses on the development of improvisation and solo performance practice, and the choreography between dance, film and sound. Her internationally acclaimed solo dance work has been presented in Australia, Europe and the USA. Warby's new solo work *Monumental* was premiered at Melbourne International Arts Festival in 2006 and will tour the US in 2009.

Writings on Dance spoke with Ros Warby shortly after the conclusion of her Learning Curve residency at Dancehouse, Melbourne. The project, entitled SOLO DANCE, introduced participants to Warby's approach to dance making and performance practice and the work of her mentor Deborah Hay.

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SALLY Can you tell us a little about the Solo Commissioning projects of Deborah Hay and the people who are involved in them?

ROS Deborah began the Solo Commissioning Projects (SCP) in 1998. I was doing them between '99 and 2001, and the participants were mostly Americans with a few internationals; now she's doing them in Scotland and there are many international artists, and a huge waiting list. Deborah's approach to performance and choreographic practice is unique and tends to attract artists from both dance and theatre. The participants commission Deborah to make a solo and each dancer learns and practices that solo in a 10 day intensive workshop environment with Deborah, and is then free to perform it in their own contexts, but only after 'practising' for another 3 months.

When I performed *Fire* (SCP 1999) in a program with Deborah in NY in 2001 I think, for the audience seeing a trained dancer perform her work alongside her enabled them to see the choreography in a different light. There was a shift in how people began to perceive the work. In 2005 we did this quartet in New York with four very experienced dancers, again at Dancespace, and that really woke people up. *The Match* toured extensively and the French particularly got very excited about it. After that she received a multitude of invitations and she had a very full schedule teaching and performing, mostly in France that year.

So, through this new exposure and interest I think she's now getting some very interesting people to her solo commissioning projects. She's doing a new project in Germany in April, seven female dancers, William Forsythe is producing it; he was very interested in her work after seeing *The Match* at Montpellier in 2006. So she's picked her seven favourite female performers across the world – a few from Europe, a few from America and me.

Earlier on in SCPs there seemed to be a percentage of those who came who resonated with the work and those who didn't, and those who knew something about her practice and those who didn't. And a lot of these students who applied to do this Solo Dance Project with me had no idea of who I was, let alone Deborah or my history with her – their curiosity and understanding of this work and lineage evolved over the three weeks.

[ELIZABETH] LIBBY Were you involved with the application and selection process?

ROS A little. I asked David if I could read the written applications before he chose. And there were maybe two or three who sounded like they would benefit; everything else was very general.

David had initially offered eight places and we lifted it to twelve. Most of the time the students' writings weren't representative of how they actually were in the studio, and some of the time not at all. He asked them why they wanted to do it and what their artistic bent was if you like, which seemed a bit loaded for somebody coming straight out of college. But it seems that's what students are trained for these days.

I was a little surprised at what I read. The pressure put on them from wherever they're coming from to have to write beyond their experience seemed ridiculous. It's challenging to write an artist statement at any stage, let alone twenty-one. I did have a lengthy talk about it with the students, and I said 'I can't believe you feel you have to do this, come out of college and immediately apply for funding to make a new work.' That's the pressure they feel and therefore put on themselves. But for those dancers who do not get work with some of the better known companies or choreographers – Chunky Move or ADT or Lucy (Guerin) – there are very few other situations to develop – there's nowhere to go. So then Dave Tyndall. (Artistic director) is registering that somehow Dancehouse is supposed to fill a gap there I guess. Some seemed confused and the prospect of creating was so way beyond them and without wanting to completely stuff up their enthusiasm, gently suggesting that not everyone need take this path seemed key. I did wonder if it would be better for more experienced dancers who are particularly interested in this work, my practice, Deborah's practice, to participate. Can you have anybody coming in and doing it? That can be breathtaking or disheartening, as you never know what will manifest.

LIBBY We just came in on the last day of a three week workshop and I guess by that

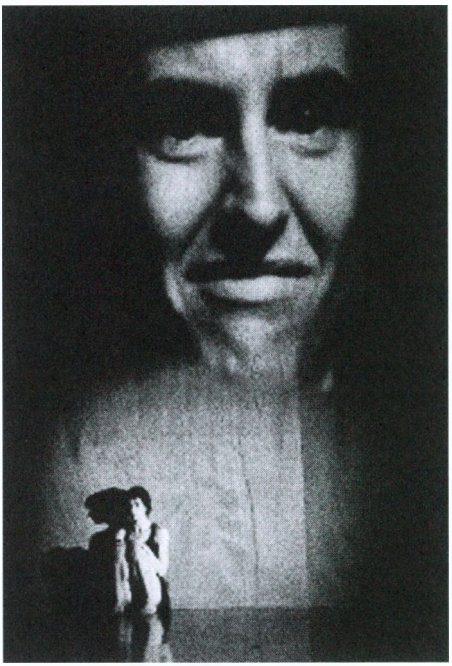
stage you are very implicated with what's going on, but I am curious about what happens for you when you see a lack of understanding being manifest in relation to your work, because they're all doing some version or other of your work aren't they? I'm thinking here of Yvonne Rainer's comment about *Trio A*, when her very open, non-proprietorial attitude to the dissemination of that work was challenged – she saw a version she really didn't like!

ROS I do find it uncomfortable watching a version I don't like. It happens. I've seen it happen to Deborah, too. And she is open to almost anything. But I do base my teaching model on Deborah's. She has set up a context of teaching a group of up to 15 dancers a solo that they will ultimately perform, and she may perform it herself at some stage as well; so in this context the adapted solos (by the dancers) are credited as: choreography by Deborah Hay, adaptation by Jo Smith. But in most of my teaching contexts I suggest this adapted solo I am teaching the participants, of *Monumental* say, is not a solo to be performed; it's a only a vehicle for me to begin communicating to you my practice, my performance practice, my dance practice and my history with Deborah – not exclusively that, but particularly my history with Deborah. And so, in terms of it being a true adaptation of my solo, it's not, because the work I am performing is so much more complex than that in terms of the relationships with Margie (Medlin), Helen (Mountfort) and the composition, design and production values I engage in, which I wouldn't even dream of bringing into that teaching context at all.

LIBBY That is really an act of generosity I think, and there was a sense, on that last day of the workshop anyway, that the students all seemed to feel quite honoured to be part of it. They looked thrilled to have done it, but I think also at that point, if they didn't realise it earlier, they then seemed to have a sense that they were just beginning.

ROS I think in this work there's so much about completely letting go of one's idea of what performance and dance is and that's probably the most significant thing the students got from it, that whatever they've learnt so far is not *it* ... something like that. I think I'm pretty sure most of them got that, at least. And then what happened was there was the occasional breakthrough that an individual would have on the floor in front of everybody, that each dancer would witness. That would only happen once every couple of days or something, but they witnessed it ... while I'm giving instructions as the dancer performs, the rest of the dancers watching, see the performer's shift in perceptual awareness and performative style. They don't necessarily understand what happened there, but there was an expansion in their awareness of what is possible, and potentially more engaging, I think.

SALLY That sort of language resonates a lot with my experience of watching *Swift*. I think it was the second version, *Swift Reframed*. There was certainly a generosity



Ros Warby *Eve / Swift* (2001) PHOTO Jeff Busby

in the way as a solo performer you included the audience... in such an embracing sort of way without any hoo haa. There was something else you said just then... Oh, yes, you said you don't quite know what happened there and I guess also that what you actually did in *Swift Reframed*, even though all of the elements were very beautiful, but what you actually *did* was irrelevant to the sense of being, (well not irrelevant)... involved in something. That's quite difficult to put into words. It was interesting to see the students because then it's very clear that the attention in the moment of performance is the critical thing.

ROS You know, I think as a young dancer performing solo, or in others' work, I was naturally inclined to that way of performing anyway, but something about meeting Deborah gave me a language to begin to pull it apart a little bit and to use it more effectively by understanding different ways into that state, that state of invitation. I suppose in contexts of teaching like the one I have just done, opening anybody up to that possibility is pretty primary because the shut-down, physically and perceptually, is so ingrained for most people.

SALLY With your interest in going that far with the live, performance situation, how do you integrate all the other elements? What about the film work, for instance? And also with the most recent work *Monumental* too, it was a very different

experience but similar, insofar as it is the same performer... but because the Playhouse is such a different space, it's a different experience for the audience. How do you think about that transition?

ROS Into a venue like that?

SALLY In terms of those values.

ROS I've been improvising all the way along. My history is I was always engaged and delighted by improvisation and how best to frame that. There I am working with Danceworks, I meet Russell (Dumas), I am just coping and I don't know what I'm doing, but I'm just trying to find anybody and everybody who can give me some information about it, about how to practice. Russell brought Lisa Nelson out and it was so exciting for me, she just blew my mind and it was thrilling. But all the way through that was this dance, this practice, this work that I was interested in; some form of improvisation. It was very unformed at that point, but straightaway I wanted to be able not only to expand my potential within it, but ultimately to frame it in a way that could be seen formally, as opposed to in a studio context where you mainly see it or practise it. I wanted to frame it in a way that dance is framed traditionally, so that audiences can have access to it. I don't know where that comes from. Maybe it's my history in and attraction to the classical training and traditional form.

LIBBY What constitutes that framing for you? It probably changes from work to work?

ROS Yes, it does keep changing. In the beginning it was just spatially in relationship usually to Helen, the cellist and then I became interested in light. I did a workshop with Jennifer Tipton and Dana Reitz and I found it incredibly engaging. My interest in framing the dance was heightened. Then I expanded it out a little bit from there. I was working on and off with Margie and with a 20 minute solo work, *Eve*, which ended up forming the second half of *Swift*, the original *Swift*. I had started to work with the idea of film and approached it initially much in the way that Russell Dumas does ... almost. I was interested in framing detail in arms, hands, face, torso – the most expressive parts for me. I was attracted to the aesthetic of it more than anything and then that led me, because of my tendency, through the improvisation that I do, to allow character, and related images to emerge. These images would then become quite specific. I often wanted an image playing against something that I was dancing at the same time. For instance, in *Monumental* I wanted footage of a dying bird. Margie and I found some archival footage of a cormorant dying, slowly from an oil slick. It was set against a section of the dance referencing the Black Swan. So each work started to evolve creating a new dialogue between the dance and the film. So then I would take little video studies, show them to Margie and we would storyboard from that place. Slowly, the environment got more complex and

consequently the framing of the dance got more complex, gradually building into an integrated choreography between the elements – space, dancer, light, film and sound. The choreography between, and the integration of the elements has become quite a focus for us. Along with the dance and the performance practice, I place as much emphasis on this work. This choreography. This framing if you like.

Margie and I have had a very relaxed journey to this place. I always imagined the film images to be quite small and discrete, just here, by my side. You don't really notice them, they're just there, but Margie blew them out of the water – she sent us off in another direction completely and it's been a fantastic collaboration since then, really fantastic and very respectful. I think both of us have a lot of patience in it.

In terms of how the framing changes from work to work ... I think of *Swift*, beautiful and fluid and in the original set there are scrims hanging everywhere. But every time I make something new it seems I want it to be more minimal and more formal. I was interested in framing *Monumental* more formally, in much the way it's actually staged, and hoped the work might be more formal in terms of the theatrical context. I also imagined the characterisations (I hate the term, but there's no other word) would fall away, but they crept back in again. In the end the work undoes into itself.

With *Monumental* I guess the design of the dance came early on and then the opportunity from MIAF was there to present it in the Merlyn Theatre or the Playhouse, but somehow the Playhouse felt more accommodating of our imagined staging. It was useful to understand the space we were going to be presenting the work. Once we got in there it was fantastic; it was so easy to execute the technical demands that we'd set up. You never get that, normally, you know, many of the technical set ups go by the wayside because you don't have the facility. We use a fly system in *Swift for* instance, but only once or twice have we had a theatre like the Playhouse where you could execute that section properly. It's just magic when it happens, otherwise someone's on the side, winding the scrims up on some invented and not very functional pulley system...

LIBBY As you describe it, it doesn't sound like it has been a major operation to figure out how to present your work in a large venue like the Playhouse as opposed to a smaller, more intimate one. You've described it as very organic process. One of our starting points for this issue was the White Oak *Past Forward* season at BAM, which has helped create the sense that the works by Judson artists presented in that season are now sort of postmodern classics, part of a canon. But in an earlier period (I am thinking maybe about ten years before) there was a lot of discussion about whether Trisha Brown had "sold out" when she began to present her work in main stage or opera house situations.

Ros Warby *Monumental* (2006) PHOTO Jeff Busby

There was a lot of talk back then, which perhaps is not so relevant any more, but there was a lot of talk about what this meant for Trisha's work. There was an assumption that there would be certain difficulties inherent in that process.

ROS In terms of shifting to a bigger context and more traditional context?

LIBBY Yes, and what that might mean for her work and the values that had been instituted in it, because the work had been shown in the same space as the audience, rather than a space apart. Then there were the other logistical problems, which she did overcome, over time, but you sort of watched it happen in a way as she figured out how to be seen in those theatre spaces. I remember seeing *Locus* and some other Trisha Brown pieces at Riverside in London back in the early 1980s and it was a rather cavernous space and actually it was really hard to see that intricate, intimate work. But there are two issues and the other one is probably more significant and that's the values and habits that an audience brings into those spaces. The main stage, proscenium space certainly does set up certain expectations and modes of viewing.

ROS It's interesting, you know, with responses from people who have seen my performance in small spaces and those who first see it in a larger scale space – their responses are exactly the same, if they are interested in the work.

LIBBY Very interesting.

ROS It is. If I do *Swift* in a small space – very few people saw that season of *Swift*

Reframed for example – and then *Swift* in a large 800 seat theatre, there's a very similar response and I can't tell who is seeing what, because surely you do see more, close up, in an intimate setting. But that's when framing becomes interesting to me, because I think, especially with the film and the sound and choreographing them together with the dance to actually give opportunity for the audience to see through seduction if you like.

I was in Montpellier with Deborah and the Cunningham Company was performing and I haven't seen them perform a lot – this might have been the third time, they were performing *BIPED,* and there they are on this massive stage, and there I am sitting watching it and you know, there's Cunningham's funny little movement and these odd combinations, they're not organic at all, but something about the enormity of the space and the inclusion of the other elements does reframe my possibility to see this odd movement in a different way and it was fantastic. I was very moved for the first time watching his work, as opposed to when I was younger, when I found it harder to reach.

SALLY Just thinking about the framing, is the Alexander work somehow connected to the framing process?

ROS I don't know if that influences the framing; it influences my ability to see, or notice the work, meaning being subjective and objective simultaneously, being inside and outside the work. So I'm interested in the dancing and performance practice itself, and the framing, or design, at the same time. The Alexander practice is instrumental in helping me be able to do both those things simultaneously. And this capacity is also required in my practice of Deborah's work. They kind of all mesh now.

Whereas Deborah's not interested at all in framing – her interest in production values is just zip, you know, it doesn't engage her. She's becoming more aware because of the pressure on her over the last few years to do these larger scale projects. When she invited me to New York to Danspace to do *Fire*, Jennifer Tipton agreed to light it, so the possibilities were terrific, you know, and Jennifer just whipped something out very quickly and it was beautiful and it was very sparse, but I remember we sat down for days and days waiting for Jennifer to come down. Deborah just doesn't think about it. It was like, 'Well what do we do?' And she asks me, 'Why do you use sound and film?'

When we sat together and watched these Cunningham pieces, Deborah loved the more minimal work – I think it was *Views on Stage*. In *BIPED* he had all this stuff going on, animation figures and design, and she feels it gets in the way of seeing the dance. Which I do and don't agree with, you know, I mean that brings me back to what I do and I know when I get on stage and do *Monumental* and introduce all these elements it's absolutely distracting me from the highest possible focus on the performance practice. And I try – and I guess that's my

choice – but that's the most challenging work that I have, to try and maintain a certain attention to the performance practice within that context. I do notice when it's interrupting the integrity of my performance and I would love to be able to eventually bring the work to a point where I'm not being distracted. On the other hand, something about the feedback I get from the element elevates my performance capacity. But essentially that's why I love performing Deborah's work, because I always choose to do her solos in silence with nothing except the costumes, pretty basic costumes, and I love it because I think that's where I do my most rigorous work and yes, it does seem a bit of a dilemma.

SALLY It's interesting. Maybe that was one of the things for me with *Swift Reframed*, because I saw *Monumental* as well, but the framing elements in *Swift* seemed almost as spontaneous as your performance somehow. Whereas I think in *Monumental* they had a kind of monumentality. There is a sense that they're the things that are making the demands, and they're not going to kind of budge, so you have to fit in with that.

ROS I suppose with *Swift,* I've performed it a lot and by the time I'd done *Swift Reframed* I'd done the material over many years and we also had three weeks in the space before the show... all those things add up to a more seasoned performance. I mean we do that anyway, with each show; we try and have a space for four weeks with the whole thing happening before we go up, but the development of *Swift* was more organic in a way. The formation of the film and the dance happened much more on the floor, finding the relationships as we went, we let the material evolve, plus we had more time I suppose. But I think I took that experience (of creating *Swift*) into *Monumental* and I was able to design to the point where I knew I could with Margie before we hit the floor.

So, yes, I had the capacity to build those sequences and images in my mind more than I would have in developing *Swift*, just from having gone through that. And, you know, *Swift Reframed* was designed in a non-theatrical space in a way. We created a site-specific set. It was fluid and *Monumental* is not so fluid. With a proscenium arch stage it took me longer to get from one side to the other and I only had a minute to change. With the costume changes I had to have somebody help me ... all that stuff. So, you know, the pressure was different in the actual experience of navigating it.

But looking back at the video, because I've just edited the documentation, I can see the first half of the work needs so much practice; I can see where I haven't articulated well enough, in the choreographic language or form or something. I feel much better about the second half and again the second half happened much more organically somehow than the first half.

LIBBY Are you performing it again?

ROS Yes, we have a five week US tour in April 2009. It's supported by the National

Dance Project – part of New England Foundation for the Arts. We were running into the problem of there being very few venues of scale, proscenium arch venues of that size available to us in the US. In New York, for instance, the Joyce was a possibility, but Martin Wechsler explained they can only commit to one Australian artist every year or two, and he had already done that in a way. So we are now going to DTW (Dance Theatre Workshop), which is great. And there is also, you know, the issue of an audience for a solo performer not being so large. We now have David Liebermann, a US booking agent and artist representative, booking the tour and he has actually booked several proscenium arch venues, but we may still have to present in *some* smaller scale black box spaces and downsize the work.

LIBBY A downsized *Monumental*?

ROS Yes, downsizing. We had to do exactly the same with *Swift* and we got used to it, but it's really hard work. Margie is very particular about the design; she does want the rear projection and the front projection as specified in the original version; she wants the 35mm film, not video and so all those things add to the complexity. It sometimes makes it difficult for presenters. So we're just working on sort of reducing the technical demands initially for those theatres who can't accommodate the proscenium arch version.

SALLY So, what about your daily practice or perhaps it's not daily, necessarily, but your ongoing practice?

ROS I would work maybe two or three times a week for a couple of hours when I'm not in production development, or have funding for four weeks to actually work solidly on a project or whatever. So over two years, say I'm working on a project, I might have three full-time blocks of four weeks or so for production development, but the rest of the year it's just a few times a week to either work in the studio on new work or practice current work; and after really intense periods, which I finished at Christmas, I stop, I just stop.

But the older I get, the harder it is to get back again after time off. So for instance, somebody wanted my performance of *Monumental* in November in Miami, just one, and then I'll be doing the rest of the tour next year. For me to get it up in November and then again six or eight months later is huge in terms of the practice, because I really do have to run the piece in for three months beforehand. If I had a date for a performance anywhere I would start three or four months before and start going in three or four times a week and then in the month beforehand I would do a little bit every day and that usually involves just going in and performing the piece. So there's that practice, which I enjoy a lot because the hard work is done in terms of the creation and I just have to focus on the dance and the practice of the performance and I love it.

Getting in the studio cold to start a new work feels nice, but frustrating,

because I'm back in that place of dancing and improvising but with ... I was going to say with less rigour. That's not true, but once the choreography is in place, then the rigour I can apply to my dancing within that choreography is greater, so it's much more stimulating to practice. When the choreography is not there I enjoy it, but I'm less interested ... something like that. I think, say ten years ago, I'd go into the studio and dance and I was thrilled because I was still involved in all that body work and I was discovering this, that and the other and I had the influence of people like Eva (Karczag) and it was tremendous and I was doing my Alexander training. It was thrilling what was happening in the body. That's not so present now; so the stimulation comes from the practice of the choreography, where my attention is more on the performance practice perhaps.

SALLY Is that in terms of some of these conundrums, or directions that are sort of self-contradictory, such as we heard when you were working the other day with the students?

ROS I'm undoing my knowing of where I am, while continuing to fire, to move or stay awake ...

LIBBY What constitutes the choreography if then in performance (forgive me if I'm a bit ignorant about Deborah's work) there is this proposition that you are undoing the dance? How do you know what is the dance? And the process of arriving at the choreography does sound an arduous one.

ROS Deborah's choreography is articulated by a series of instructions and spatial pathways. Often these instructions are nonsensical and impossible to do, like 'take six steps into the light without taking a step'. I don't know if Deborah asks you to 'undo the dance', but she would invite you to engage with your perceptive awareness. She talks about your perceptive awareness in fabulous ways. She suggests 'your perception is the dance' – so in a way this takes the attention off the body and choreographic instruction in the way that we know. She introduces us to the concept of the whole body at once. Through her instructions we are stimulated to not attach to where we are, but simply notice. I find it really difficult to talk about because that language was just thrown at me and just like that it completely stimulated my whole system. And I've watched that happen with a lot of other people too. But here's a story: we were having a barbecue and Kristy got the hiccoughs and Lucy says to Kristy, What is tofu made of? And Kristy went silent and then her hiccoughs stopped. Well it's kind of like that. It's about constantly being in a state of question. It's the same with Alexander work. The body is thrust into that state; it's not just the mind, or just the body, but both engaged as a whole. So the whole body is processing nonsensical questions or instructions that are impossible to achieve, but the sheer attempt of them is what stimulates this performative state, and what performance material then manifests.

LIBBY Earlier you were talking about your interest in framing. The questions, if

you like, can only be postulated if there is a frame – they arise in relation to something. So what's involved before the frame is there? How does that frame arise?

ROS I guess then the frame is the body and I do start from noticing where my body is, engaging with it, and framing it through my perception of that experience. This question comes up a lot with the students, when they start dancing in open practice. In the Solo Dance project for an hour each day we were dancing in open practice and I would be feeding information and instructions, but a lot of them just let go or release, or collapse, exploring or noodling around I call it. And Deborah has started saying in the last few years, 'the body needs to be engaged; you cannot practice this without a level of engagement.' So in relation to that and in relation to my background, I'm interested in articulating the body, so framing what can be seen. If I'm standing still, something about my interest in the body is to organise that, a framing in the body, so that the whole body at once can be seen. So I would be starting in the studio in silence from *that* place. It's just much harder work for me than later down the track, in terms of practising. But at the same time it's more brilliant, because there I am back in that preferable place of rawness, like I am with Deborah's solos in silence, where I'm just dealing with the dancing body and the performance practice.

SALLY Well, is it that you're discovering what that framing throws up?

Fire (2001) CHOREOGRAPHY Deborah Hay ADAPTATION Ros Warby

ROS Yes, and I might notice where I am, and then notice the feedback, and be able to begin to articulate that and maybe while I'm on the floor, engaged in practice, images start sort of falling in behind or with.

LIBBY I've been asking you about this process of developing a new work, but it may not be the phase you're in at the moment.

ROS No, I've just stopped, except for the teaching. I've just stopped and I'm taking six months off. This is the first year I haven't had to perform. I don't remember having a year when I wasn't working. I've had three months off, and I've had six months off when my son was born - three months before and three months after. Besides that, I have never had that space. I was so excited at Christmas to be able to take a sabbatical. And it's interesting that some of this teaching has come up – I did the same three-week workshop structure with an Adelaide troupe in December. Again, they're a collective of young graduates; there were six of them and they applied to the Australia Council for a kind of mentorship program where choreographers could make a work on them. So Becky Hilton went over there and made a piece and they were looking for another person for the next year and Becky dobbed me in. There I was with these people who had no idea who I was or Deborah's work or background or anything. And I made an ensemble adaptation of one unit of *Monumental*. I'd just premiered *Monumental*, and then been on tour with *Swift*, and I came home and went straight into teaching. I had a very similar experience to what has just happened now in the solo dance project.

In this space, where I'm not performing, these things have come up and it's really interesting for me to be in a position where I'm having to share this information with people. Sometimes it's completely thrilling when you see, because I guess I have stood in Deborah's workshops and studio with her and watched her do this for so many and I'm completely gobsmacked when I see what is coming out of her mouth, translated into somebody's body. To see that happening somehow unconsciously is really amazing. I don't know exactly what's happening, but it's completely new territory. So there's that side of it and then there's the other side of it where you just see all these young students up there and they're really *not* understanding what you're talking about. I don't know what they're doing.

LIBBY Why do you think that is?

ROS Well, in open practice, some days are okay, but there I am completely using all my might to practise what I've been teaching and *they're not*, and for a moment I can be devastated. But then Deborah does this fantastic thing, you know, the language she uses – 'your body my teacher', 'I perceive you are practising what I'm practising'. I remember being in one of her workshops here in Melbourne; there were fifty people and most of them were non-dancers and there I was, I think I was twenty-six and I was still a bit hoity-toity about what a dancer was

and who could dance and who couldn't, you know ... and I had to dance with these completely untrained people ... and it was the most liberating experience I had ever had. It really cracked open my perception of what dance was, really what it was on the floor. So I can switch that perspective on in this context of teaching, which is very liberating too. And you can see them puzzled. I'm having a great time, perceiving that they are practising what I am practising, and then just suddenly, with one person something happens, and you can notice they switch, a light goes on, and then they're having a great time – they are stimulated by their dance.

But since I've been in any of these teaching roles I don't think I've met one young dancer who has any clarity of what they are interested in, or even which artists they are interested in. I mean it's very surprising. And they ask me, "How do you get where you've got?" And I start to try and explain and they ask, "But how did you choose the people you want to work with?" For me, it was such an organic process. I knew nothing, and slowly but surely one person led me to the next. When I did apply for my travel/study grant I had a pretty clear idea – I really wanted to work with those people (Eva Karczag, Lisa Nelson, Dana Reitz). I was passionate about it. Now, I'm not sure, but that's not how it seems today! People seem to just want to go to Europe and hang out and see who's there.

And there are a lot of dancers, mid-career dancers, around thirty, those who work with Lucy, for example, they don't all go and see work. They don't seem to feel the need to. I feel like my generation was kind of the last generation that had any curiosity beyond Melbourne. The students I get, they're graduates and when they were still in college they had to do their special study, they have to learn a choreographer's work but they don't go much beyond Lucy (Guerin) or Gideon (Obarzanek), which is fine, it's important they're learning this work, but ...

LIBBY Perhaps we could explore a bit further than 5kms, even 1 km, 500 metres round the corner! It's bizarre isn't it? That suggests a lack of curiosity, which is really quite a deep problem.

ROS It's just so frustrating. It feels lazy; I feel there's laziness there.

SALLY I think a lot of the people who might come out of a university dance course will have come into that course liking dancing in a very personal way and with their horizon having been the local jazz ballet academy. It would be exceptional if they were seeing dance as more than that. During their studies they might begin to see that there might be a possibility for themselves in dance in a professional rather than simply a personal sense. But how to get from a basic recognition that dance might be a professional activity to actually understanding what it might mean to be an artist – to realising that it can be a lifelong incremental process of enquiry...

ROS The notion of deep learning continuing, once you start performing as a professional dancer, has diminished enormously.

SALLY It would be a completely unfamiliar idea.

ROS Yes, completely. I got the impression that a lot of those students just did this workshop thing. It was a great experience, but the idea of the ongoing experience of learning and practice is not so necessary.

SALLY That's the dilemma of teaching in an institution where there is an idea of course content to be covered and so on and where students might read or encounter things that are potentially quite unsettling and life-changing, but the implications of that idea or moment can so easily be missed in the impersonal and homogenising educational context or where the resulting confusion might not be rewarded in assessment.

LIBBY Did you graduate from one of these institutions?

ROS No, it's interesting. On the first day the students all went around and explained where they had come from, because I just wanted to get a context and their histories of a college education made me pause and then I said to them, 'I would just like to say I'm not a graduate at all; I never graduated, I don't know and I don't have an experience of where you've come from.' I was going to go to VCA when I left school but then I got accepted into an international ballet school, and straight away I was attracted to working with really fine teachers. I wanted to do another year of classical and then I went to London and then I wanted to work with this person, that person and then I came home and then I just bee-lined for Danceworks, then I bee-lined for Russell. I mean I had to chase him down the street, did I tell you that story?

Well, what happened was I heard he was having Lisa Nelson out and I bumped into him on King Street in Sydney and it was purely by chance and I introduced myself and said I really wanted to work with her and he did this ' oh, leave me alone'. I chased him all the way down Pitt Street until we got to the Strand and we had a cup of coffee and he finally let me do the workshop and that was that and at the end of the workshop he said, 'Oh – do you want to come and work with me?' Anyway, so when they ask me, 'how do you choose who you want to work with,' I don't understand, at one level. I think it's because students are interested in so many things and I was pretty single minded about my interest in dance improvisation practice and was very focused on refining my dance training simultaneously I guess, and I see less and less of that clarity.

And I think, here they are working with me but in the back of my brain I'm thinking why aren't you over working with Deborah, or if I were you I'd be doing that ... only because that was what I did. That was *my* big learning perhaps in this workshop.

SALLY It is very different to go overseas and I think people take more responsibility for their own learning in that situation. It is very safe just to stay in Melbourne and apply for things that others have devised – you are still not taking responsibility or really being able to understand the consequences of your choices because there is little to compare those choices to.

ROS For the last ten years I've thought that since the last generation of dancers came up, the ones behind me, it was odd, there was a different energy, there was a different ambition that stopped on the outskirts of Melbourne or something.

LIBBY Well there was a lot of jingoistic rhetoric around during ... do you remember, perhaps it would have been in the 1980s. And there was a lot of hostility to any suggestion that it might be necessary to leave this place. It was quite concerted and I think quite self-serving too, insofar as institutions were being set up and expanding their course offerings and there was employment for people as teachers. So it was self-serving to that extent, to say, 'oh, you can just stay here; all you need as a dancer is here.' There was quite a strong campaign against the idea that it was necessary to leave or even to situate yourself in relation to a wider field of practice. They were saying, 'well you can situate yourself in the world just by staying here,' and I think that was a falsehood. In an embodied practice, one that is passed body to body, it's not possible. It might be possible in a field like literature; it perhaps doesn't matter so much where you are, but if is body practice, that's a very different situation. It was a version of the cultural cringe in dance. So I think what you might be recognising or encountering in these students is a product of quite an active 'buy Aussie' campaign kind of thing; it wasn't just happenstance. And it was based in a very wrongheaded way of thinking, not sensitive to dance practice, to the art form.

ROS There was one woman who was very interested in coming to work with me from actually seeing *Monumental*. I went, great, you've seen something and she came and it was great, but a little ways in she said, 'Do you live in Melbourne?' and I said, ' Yes, I live here.' And she said, ' Oh, I never see you around or hear your name. I haven't seen you perform very much.' And I said I only do a new work every two or three years and I've been touring a lot and then I work with Deborah, so I'm away a lot. But I could tell and I know this from my experience in the dance community, that from living a life like that over the last five or six years, the fact that I'm not performing somewhere locally every three months or six months or every year, and I'm not teaching all the time, that my profile, if you like, in the dance community with younger dancers is pretty small. It makes sense, but it is as if people are very Melbourne-centric. It is rather insular.

SALLY I think people relate to companies, but also I think they relate to the young dancers in those companies as well, you know, they can see themselves in those roles.

ROS It was a shock, because this came from the woman who had been to the performances. I think it was also a shock for her as she has been in Melbourne for quite some years training, but anybody who started training since I stopped performing with Lucy wouldn't have identified me as a practicing performer. So that makes sense, but when I start talking about well I've been working with Deborah and touring and dancing a lot over there, it's kind of irrelevant to many. And that's another thing, you know, anything that happens offshore in terms of career or profile is almost irrelevant. Unless you're doing something here your contribution can seem irrelevant... but not necessarily so in the long term perhaps.

SALLY It makes sense, but it's still surprising. The idea of an artist in dance is still a very difficult idea.

ROS There is one young woman who did resonate with the work and she has come back to me three times. She had just performed her solo before you came in and that's the one they kept referring to at the beginning, they kept mentioning, "when F. did this" or "F. did that." She unexpectedly really did have huge breakthroughs with her work and her performances relatively consistently. Extraordinary, very raw, but I was really impressed and the other students could see it and after you left I actually decided to say to the group, "Just so that you know, this person has come back to this work three times now and that is practice, it makes a difference, you've seen it. Whether she just naturally resonates with this work or not is kind of irrelevant, but what definitely contributed to her understanding of this work is her coming back to it and practising, or maintaining an engagement with it. I mean I just thought it was worth airing that with them because I've never seen that happen before.

What I was going to say is that she is in a university structure, she can stay in there for a long time and keep doing what she's doing and like you were saying not necessarily be forced out to do other things. And you know she is trying to get out, she does want to go and work with Deborah. Some of her fellow VCA graduates are now also doing Masters. They're in there just making work. I don't know what they're doing so I can't judge, but I wonder how far they can go without having outside relationships with dance artists beyond that system.

IMAGE DETAILS FOR COLOUR PAGES

A: **Trevor Patrick** stills taken from a work under construction: *a small dance catastrophe – I could pretend the sky was water* (2007)
B: **Lisa Kraus** *50 moves* (2003) PHOTO Jacques-Jean Tiziou
C: **Lisa Kraus** *50 moves* (2003) PHOTO Tom Berthoff
D: **Lisa Kraus** *Tracing Lineage – excited* (2006) VIDEO STILL Carmella Vassor-Johnson
E: **Trisha Brown Company** Montiverdi's *L'Orfeo* (1998) produced in partnership with La Monnaie, National Opera House of Belgium. PHOTOS Johan Jacobs, Brussels
F: **Tere O'Connor Dance** *Rammed Earth* DANCERS Heather Olson and Matthew Rogers PHOTOS Paula Court
G: **Twyla Tharp** *Country Dances* (1976) DANCERS Tom Rawe & Jenny Way ORIGINAL PHOTO Herb Migdoll
I: **Simone Forti** *Logomotion. Intensive Workshops* Palazzo Carajaval, Orvieto, Italy 2006 Zip Zip Festival. PHOTOS Alys Longley
J: **Ros Warby** *Swift* (2003) PHOTOS Kristy Edmunds
K: **Ros Warby** *Monumental* (2003) PHOTOS Jeff Busby
L: **Ros Warby** *Monumental* (2003) PHOTOS Jeff Busby
M: **Ros Warby** *Monumental* (2003) PHOTOS Jeff Busby (left) / Lisa Tomasetti (right)

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