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Writings on Dance 3

HABEUS CORPUS: FEMINISM, DISCOURSE AND THE BODY

POSTSCRIPT ON DANCE TRAINING

OF BODIES

THE TEACHING OF BALLET

DANCE IS AN ETHICAL STRUGGLE

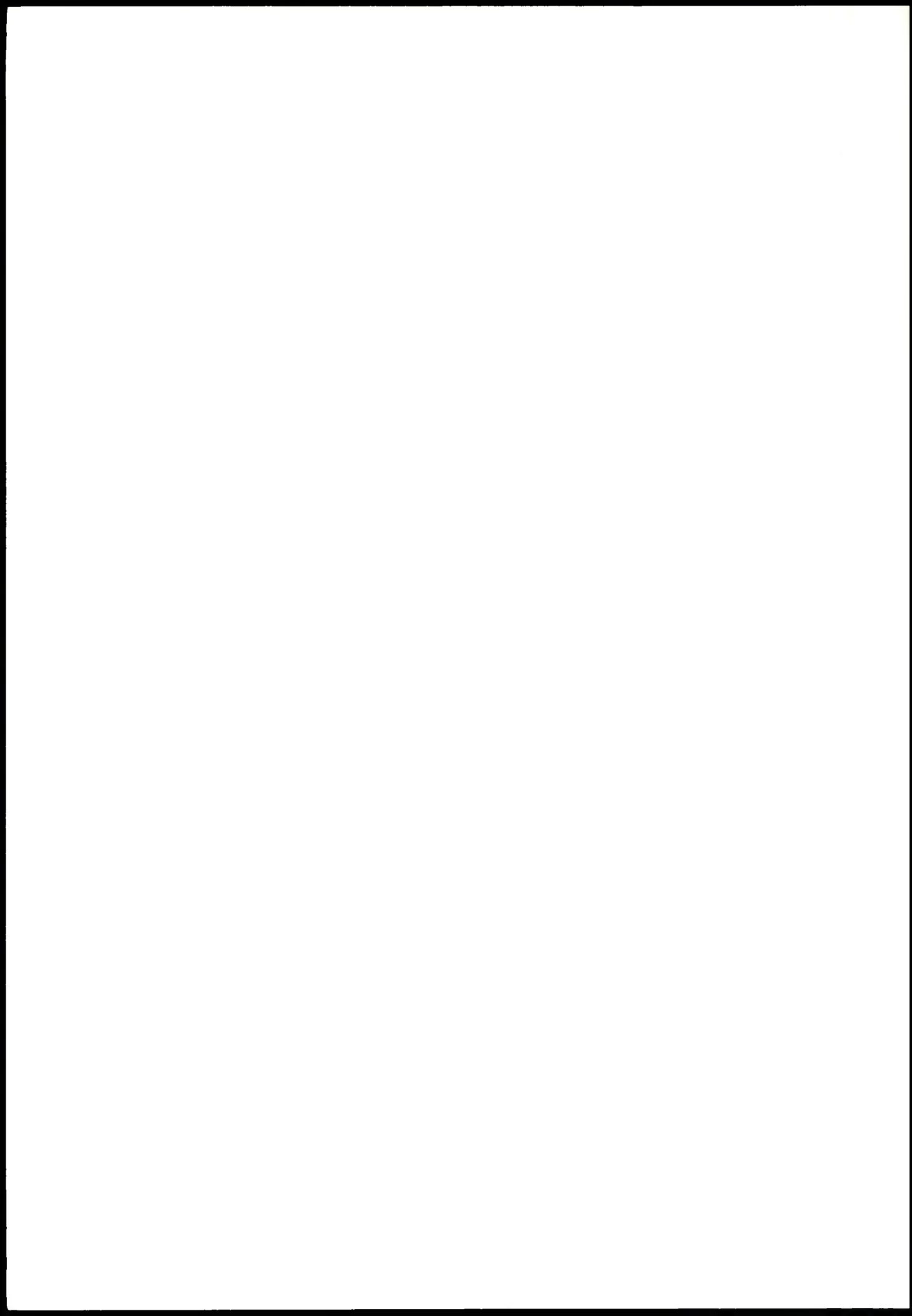
DISLOCATED ISOLATED SEDUCED AND ABANDONED

WOMEN WRITING THE BODY

AND POWER

DANCING OUT OF CONFINEMENT

LYNDEN NICHOLLS OF THEATRE OF THE ORDINARY



Writings
on Dance
3

**OF BODIES
AND POWER**

Writings on Dance
3. Of Bodies and Power

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P R E F A C E

Writings on Dance 3: Of Bodies and Power brings into focus some of the political attitudes and agendas which are shaping dance today. In presenting this issue we are conscious of the fact that there is little history of political discourse within or about dance in Australia. However, as the articles presented here amply demonstrate, there are many points of departure from which a politics of dancing and a dancing of politics can proceed. *Of Bodies and Power* will we hope provoke a wider awareness of the political and ideological nature of dance and more particularly, will stimulate further analysis and debate concerning the function and action of politics in Australian dance practice.

PHILIPA ROTHFIELD

HABEUS CORPUS

FEMINISM, DISCOURSE AND THE BODY

There are many different fields which have produced texts on the body — religion, sport, philosophy, feminism, medicine, dance. More recently, some of these texts have questioned the kind of body which has been represented, either in writing or in various cultural forms such as TV or magazines. In some of these texts, it has become possible to talk of the production of the body. No longer do we aim for the most correct or true account of the body, but we are trying instead to identify the institutions, the discourses, and the historical factors which go towards shaping particular forms of the body. This implies that there is no given, neutral body, but rather, bodies are always located in particular socio-historical contexts. This enables an analysis of the factors which have brought about the kind(s) of body we experience today e.g., the various representations of the body we see in art, the media, advertising, the social practices in which we and our bodies move, and finally the social institutions within which and in relation to which we act.

This discourse of the body has historically been influenced by psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, cultural analysis and semiotics. The usage of the term 'production' comes from two contexts, **semiotics** and **Marxism**: (1) French semiotic theory grew out of the view that meaning and language are socially created/constructed rather than that they merely reflect reality¹. Semiotics and structuralism grew out of Saussure's linguistics which were developed around the turn of the century. In the 50's and especially the 60's, his ideas were seized upon by Levi-Strauss in anthropology and Barthes in literary criticism. Originally about signification in language, semiotics was later applied to any cultural form, e.g., art, social behaviour, advertising or pornography. (2) Marxism, a socio-political theory, focuses on the way in which production is organised in particular societies. Taken narrowly, this means work, but Marxist theory looks at many aspects of the social practices and structures within which work is organised. It is a particular form of social analysis, concerned with questions of society and culture, as they exist under capitalism. Putting the two historical usages of production together, in the context of the body, leads to an analysis of the social and cultural ways in which the body is socially constructed (produced), its meaning(s) and the forms of power and politics which influence it. There is an emphasis on *representations of the body* in contrast to the idea that there is an objective body 'out there' which we all have — a natural, given entity. Our experience of our bodies is always mediated by social and semantic factors. The movement away from the conception of an objective, natural reality towards a socio-historically informed perspective has parallels in a variety of areas. For instance, feminism traces the social production of masculinity and femininity rather than appeals to nature or biological essence. Or, in the area of cultural studies, there are numerous analyses of differing social themes — e.g., youth, colour, race, hooliganism — whereby the politics of their representation, and therefore the representation of their politics, is traced.

The focus upon various discourses on the body, rather than upon the body per se, calls for comment. The term, discourse, has gained much currency through the influence of French semiotics. At one stage, **language** was the central figure for all manner of social explanation, from anthropology to psychoanalysis. The linguistic emphasis was at its greatest when structuralism was at its height. Since then, rather than look at language systems, composed of words, not really relating to other levels in society, many have turned towards looking at forms of discourse. Diane Macdonell writes of a crucial difference between language and discourse,

In taking up the historical conditions of meanings, work on discourse has questioned the idea of an abstract and general system or structure of language... A crucial argument concerning discourse is that meanings are to be found only in the concrete forms of differing social and institutional practices: there can be no meaning in 'language'.²

The difference is that discourse is always understood within its social context, i.e., as a form of social practice. Discourse is about writing, representation and communication, and is located within institutional structures of power. Thus, an emphasis on the various kinds of discourses on the body is two-fold; that our own bodies are always to be found within particular discursive contexts — let's see what they are — and what the possibilities are for changing them.

Having traced the history of some of the terms, in what follows I will briefly mention some of the different recent approaches to the body, and then try to say something on relating these areas to dance. My intention is to relate hitherto unrelated fields of discourse, writing and theory. There is no sense here of any complete or exhaustive account — I am just attempting to relate some views on the body to others, and to give a brief exposition of recent French thought on discourse and the body.

1. Semiotics incorporates a view of language which sees it as a social system whereby meaning is created within particular language systems. Meaning is relative to particular languages, and is a product of such languages. This differs from the view that somehow language incorporates reality, that meaning 'mirrors' the world.

2. Diane Macdonell, *Theories of Discourse, an Introduction*, Blackwell, 1986, page 12.

DISCOURSES ON THE BODY

There has been a spate of writing on the body recently, within feminist texts, and more generally, in French social and political theory. Issues around *women's bodies* have been at the forefront of feminist politics since the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement in the late sixties. Abortion, contraception, women's health and sexual assault represented attempts to achieve a certain bodily integrity for women, whether in terms of autonomy (choice), availability (education and cost) or security (from attack or intrusion). Although the focus on the body did not initially explore the nature of the body, it led to a fundamental distinction between kinds of bodies. The most basic difference here being that between male and female bodies — *sexual difference*. Moira Gatens writes,

Concerning the neutrality of the body, let me be explicit, there is no neutral body, there are at least two kinds of bodies; the male body and the female body.³

This need not suggest there are differences which transcend time and traverse all social contexts, that is, that there are **essential** differences between male and female bodies. There are a good many feminist analyses which locate sexual differences in specific social and historical contexts — they argue that the body is always mediated by social factors and that one can never experience the body as if it were in a social vacuum.⁴ In *The Sadeian Woman*, Angela Carter writes that,

But our flesh arrives to us out of history, like everything else does. We may believe we fuck stripped of social artifice; in bed we even feel we touch the bedrock of human nature itself. But we are deceived. Flesh is not an irreducible human universal.⁵

Such questioning of sexual difference has put the body on the agenda for social and political discourse. In his attempt to generate a sociology of the body, a general absence in social theory, Bryan Turner writes,

The body is at once the most solid, the most elusive, illusive, concrete, metaphysical, ever present and ever distant thing — a site, an instrument, an environment, a singularity and a multiplicity.⁶

Turner argues that several paradoxes cluster around our experience of 'the' body, our bodies, their immediacy and alienation, and admits that his own enterprise left him rather unsure as to what the body is.⁷

Another point of entry for questions around the body has been through psychoanalysis, and the recent extension of such theory to social and political forms of explanation. This is partly because Freudian theory makes much of the genital (bodily) differences between the male and female — the possession or lack of a penis is the central figure in the Castration Complex and hence for the development of sexual identity — but also because, for Freud, the body is an originary source of pleasure. In his 'Three Essays on Sexuality', Freud gives an account of infantile sexuality. He claims that the genitals are only the final focus of sexuality, and that sexual pleasure arises through the pleasure which accompanies instinctual experiences, the first being sucking at the breast. At first, hunger satisfaction and pleasure are attached but subsequently the child desires a repetition of the pleasurable experience beyond mere hunger. This is the birth of sexual desire, and it is associated with, but separable from, particular regions of the body — the child's mouth, lips and tongue. This could explain thumb-sucking as the attempt to reproduce the pleasure gained from sucking. As a result of this pleasure, Freud writes that

3. Moira Gatens, 'A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction', in *Beyond Marxism? Interventions After Marx*, edited by Judith Allen and Paul Patton, Intervention Publications, 1983, page 148.

4. See Gatens. Op. Cit., page 150.

5. Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, Virago, 1979, page 9.

6. Bryan Turner, *The Body and Society*, Blackwell, 1984, page 8.

7. Ibid.

the mouth becomes an erotogenic zone, with the anus and the genitals not far behind. The place of the body in the constitution of desire here is central, though no particular regions are essential to the development of sexual desire. If we sucked milk through our ears, these would become the first source and focus of sexual pleasure.

Pleasure and areas of the body are linked in Freud's account of the development of sexual identity. According to psychoanalytic theory, sexuality and the unconscious are the central (interrelated) elements which go to make-up our identity.⁸ The relation between feminism and psychoanalysis has been highly controversial, and much has been written on the politics of sexual difference.⁹ As far as the body is concerned, the mark of sexual difference, being the genitals, is purely physical. However, the physicality of the body is never experienced in a social vacuum. Within Freudian theory, it is the *meaning* of our bodies and their parts which is central, and this is affected by our unconscious fantasies. Biology is always socially mediated. For example, it is the child's *interpretation* of what it means to have or not have a penis which lends it special significance (see Freud's Castration Complex). In other social contexts, it might be the ownership of breasts which lead to a fundamental male envy rather than Freud's infamous penis envy.

The work of Michel Foucault has done much to draw attention to the body. *Foucault sees the body as a central site for the operations of social and political forms of power.* In contrast, Marxist theories of ideology explain the politics of people's beliefs and attitudes as in some way connected to economic/productive forces. The effects of ideology then are to be found in people's **minds**, whereas *Foucault is interested in the effects of power upon and within our bodies.* Foucault looks at the history of various institutions which regulate the social order and how they affected the body. For instance, in *Madness and Civilisation*, he looks at the history of madness, and the institutionalisation of the insane. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault traces the changing nature of punishment upon the body of the criminal — from torture, through the public spectacle of the scaffold, to imprisonment, and its attendant forms of social control. In an interview, Foucault discusses the social body (which, in the nineteenth century, succeeded the King's body as the place of Sovereign power) and the idea of society as formed by a universal consensus.

Now the phenomenon of the social body is the effect not of a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals.¹⁰

What is significant about Foucault's work is that he regards power as more than something external or repressive, for he also looks at the ways power is both positive and productive,¹¹ and part of what is produced is the body.

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression... 'Sexuality' is far more of a positive product of power than power was ever repression of sexuality.¹²

So in the *History of Sexuality*, he looks at the ways sexuality has come to be constructed, understood and experienced from the nineteenth century to today. He asks why and how *sexuality* has come to

8. See Mitchell and Rose (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality, Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, Macmillan, 1982, page 2.

9. See for instance, Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Penguin, 1974, Gallop's *Feminism and Psychoanalysis, the Daughter's Seduction*, Macmillan, 1982, and Rose's *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, Verso Books, 1986.

10. Foucault, 'Body/Power', in *Power/Knowledge*, edited by Colin Gordon, Harvester Press, 1980, page 55.

11. Foucault, 'Truth and Power, *Ibid.*, page 119.

12. 'Truth and Power', in *Body/Knowledge*, Op. Cit., page 120.

have the social and personal roles it does, and argues that Freud's focus on infantile sexuality, had the consequence of sexually exciting the bodies of children, sexualising the parent-child relationship and sexualising the familial domain.¹³ Foucault looks at the bodies *produced* by Freudian discourse, not at what Freud is said to have **discovered**.

There has been a classical tendency to equate bodies, especially women's, with nature as if they are objects outside of cultural forms. There are several women artists who have critically explored the cultural nature of women's bodies.¹⁴ Foucault's work, with its focus on the body, power, discourse, knowledge and truth would deny that bodies are natural or outside social influence. Indeed, he wants to argue that they are integral to the operations of power.

Depending on what bodily theory one holds, rather different approaches to the moving body will follow. If the body is problematised, the different theoretical resolutions would clearly have something to say, for they say something about what it is that is moving through space and time. Also, many of these approaches highlight the socio-cultural setting in which we find ourselves and our art. If, on the one hand, *bodies were seen as wholly natural organisms which are the same throughout all social settings*, this would say one thing about dance compositions involving people's bodies — that basically they are the same and have been throughout history and across different genres of dance. On the other hand, if we understand *the body as always produced within certain social and historical contexts*, our attitude to dance pieces will incorporate reference to those particular socio-historical factors which pre-condition performance. Such discourses also question the relation between the body and identity. It is not a matter of either A or B. There are a multiplicity of understandings of the body as of subjectivity.

THEORY AND DIFFERENCE

(1) From one perspective, to draw together disparate fields of discourse and relate them to dance is an illegitimate move. Given that the institutional settings and theoretical spaces are distinct, and that we are not talking about some singular 'truth' of the body, how is it possible to cross disciplines with gay abandon?

(2) What is the relation between theory and artistic practice?

To restrict discourses to their origins is to limit their impact. I've argued for the importance of tracing the socio-historical setting for all manner of social phenomena, but this is not to pronounce 'everything in its proper place'. Michael Newman cites *bricolage* as a term used to describe 'the combination of fragments of quotation from other works in a single work of art',¹⁵ a particular example; the usage of found objects in sculpture. The 'found objects' of various discourses on the body can be arranged. This is not to efface their histories, but to extend them in other dimensions. Shelley Lasica has warned us not to impose paradigms from other regions of art criticism, and use them as templates for dance criticism.¹⁶ The attempt to subsume all art forms within the same critical language was expressed in Adorno's modernist enterprise, and has been subject to Lyotard's attack on all grand narratives.¹⁷ The consequent regionalisation of discursive domains is important as a move away from a singular totalising discourse — enter the age of heterogeneity. Yet the differing fields can relate (inform each other) without indulging in the bland quotation of eclecticism.¹⁸ Lyotard argues that the culture of 'anything goes' is subject to the realism of money, purchasing power and the interests of capital. And so we need to

13. Ibid.

14. See the work of Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman and Mary Kelly. See also, Lisa Tickner, 'The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists Since 1970', in *Looking On, Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*, Pandora, 1987.

15. Michael Newman, 'Revising Modernism, Representing Postmodernism: Critical Discourses of the Visual Arts', in ICA Documents 4, *Postmodernism*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London: 1986, page 45.

16. Shelley Lasica, 'Writing the Past Dance Ideologies', in *Writings on Dance*, Issue 2, Spring 1987, page 25.

17. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester University Press, 1986.

18. Lyotard, Ibid.

beware politically blind homogenisation. But this is not to foreclose upon critical communication. I've come to praise discursive intercourse, not to bury it. The infusion of different fields of discourse can create new ones.

The classical separation of theory from practice, of criticism from art no longer dominates. Postmodernism refuses the dichotomy between theory and practice, whilst feminist art is a critical practice *inter alia*. Craig Owens writes also about postmodernism and feminism,

Many modernist artists, of course, produced texts about their own production, but writing was almost always considered supplementary to their primary work as painters, sculptors, photographers etc., whereas the kind of simultaneous activity on multiple fronts that characterizes many feminist practices is a postmodern phenomenon. **And one of the things it challenges is modernism's rigid opposition of artistic practice and theory... At the same time, postmodern feminist practice may question theory...**(my emphasis)¹⁹

What have we got? The entry of the body into the art object in performance art, the concern with the body apparent in the work of (some) women artists,²⁰ the presence of the body in dance performance, and a theoretical turn to the body accompanied by a quizzical look. The audience's gaze upon the body in performance, the returning look of the performer upon the audience, upon the assumed framework within which the piece occurs. Performance can interrogate, utilize theory as do other art forms. Is it harder for the dancer to avoid being seen in certain ways, than perhaps the artist? The female body is viewed in such particular ways. Similarly with the male. This is what Moira Gatens means by her denial of the neutral body, and assertion of fundamental sexual difference. The sexualisation of the body to which Foucault refers has got to enter the scene. Classical dance pieces with their boy-girl configurations overstate the case. But what of the more abstract dances, costumed against the grain of the human body altogether? How important is the gender of a dancer in such pieces? Does the audience 'register' the data of sexual difference in such instances? Necessarily? I was looking at a set of images of a famous model, Verushka, whose body was painted to match the walls and surfaces she was standing against. On the one hand, the effect was a *tromp d'oeil* of a wall or door, yet her painted breasts and pubic hair also stood out and marked her body as female. Francette Pacteau writes,

The androgynous-looking figure presents me with an impossibility, that of the erasure of difference, that very difference which constructs *me* as a subject. From the instant my biological sex is determined, my identity is defined in difference — I am either a boy or a girl. I shall consequently take up my position in society on one side of the sexual divide, behave according to the genderized codes, reaffirm the difference. The androgynous 'position' represents a denial, or a transgression, of the rigid gender divide, and as such implies a threat to our given identity and to the system of social roles which define us.²¹

Threats are not always a bad thing. Sexual difference can be exploited — gender reversals, transvestism, overt fetishization of parts of the body, the grotesque, irony, parody. Mary Kelly uses a variety of representational form to suggest and question femininity. Her recent work, *Interim*, 'asserts that desire is a manipulated but mobile concept, and that masculinity and femininity are attached to particular objects and images through social convention alone. This makes them inherently unstable categories.'²² So that whilst sexual difference, and therefore differentiation, is in some sense given, it is not unassailable. Cindy Sherman's strangely discomfiting photographs of herself forms an intrigue between femininity and masquerade. Barbara Kruger uses photomontage to, at once, both address her viewers and challenge

19. Craig Owens, 'The Discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism', in *Postmodern Culture*, Hal Foster (ed), London: Pluto Press, 1985, page 63.

20. See Lisa Tickner, *Op. Cit.*; Lucy Lippard, *From the Centre, Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, New York: Dutton, 1976.

21. Francette Pacteau, 'The Impossible Referent: Representations of the Androgyne' in *Formations of Fantasy*, edited by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, London: Methuen, 1986, page 63.

22. Sandy Nairne, *State of the Art, Ideas and Images in the 1980's*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1987, page 156.

the effect of their/our gaze. She draws our attention to the consumption of the look, the subject-position of the audience. These strategies both work with, and attempt to undermine, the givens of sexual difference.

Whilst Foucault's genealogy of bodies does much to trace its descent:

'Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body.'²³

Scott Lash suggest Foucault's body is passive, undynamic — the recipient of discursive inscription²⁴. It is possible the body of dance is able to actively interrogate, not merely impersonate. I don't see why dance cannot both appropriate and distort the productions of the body Foucault is so careful to document. That elusive notion of embodied subjectivity²⁵ might become real in multiple ways. To put the point less didactically, some of the discourses on the body, especially Foucault's work and writings on sexual difference, may depict real social effects. But this is not to present the body as unalterable, and perhaps both dance practice and criticism could be the scene of such change.

The social and the cultural is only one genre of productive influences on the body — their effect is not final, but it is real. The psychic and unconscious experience and perceptions we have of our bodies are also of great impact.²⁶ Even if, as Foucault claims, discourse and sexuality are primarily inscribed on the body, this could not suggest that the whole process **bypasses** the mind. One would have to hold to a clear mind/body split, such that things could go on in the body which have no truck with consciousness. It would be possible to say that these bodily inscriptions operate via or in relation to the unconscious — an unlikely view of Foucault who is critical, though not wholly rejecting, of the Freudian discourse. But the unconscious is also part of the mind. This is to recognize the space that exists for learning about those processes of bodily inscription, and the co-operation they require of our minds. Learning about those realities we have adopted in our bodies sets the groundwork for the possibility of change. The positive work of the dancer, his/her technique and characteristic movements will have effect upon the body in performance. Any of these may be able to be shaped, reshaped or changed. Perhaps it is also the case that there are limits, that the body is not entirely plastic. We will only find this out through discovering the space(s) of experimentation.

* * *

23. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and History', in *Language, Counter-Memory and Practice*, edited by D Bouchard, Oxford: Blackwell, 1977, page 148.

24. Scott Lash, 'Genealogy and the Body: Foucault/Deleuze/Nietzsche', in *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol 2, No 2, 1984, page 4.

25. For a discussion of embodied subjectivity, see Allison Caddick, 'Feminism and the Body', in *Arena*, 74, 1986 and my 'Subjectivity and the Language of the Body', in *Arena*, 75, 1986.

26. In alternative medical culture, there is a growing interest in the mind/body connexion and its relationship to disease. See, for instance, *You Can Heal Your Life*, by Louise Hay, Hay House, 1984.

ELIZABETH DEMPSTER

WOMEN WRITING THE BODY:

LET'S WATCH A LITTLE HOW SHE DANCES

"Asked what he thought of a new school principal,
a Central African responded to Carrington:
'Let's watch a little how he dances.' "

WALTER ONG (1982:55)

1. The dancing professor.

On the inside back sleeve, where they usually have the head-and-shoulders shot of the author, there is a photo of Susan Leigh Foster, author and academic, dancing ... mid-flight in fact. *Reading Dancing* is a book about dance, a book about a theory of dance, and just as sometimes a book about gardening features the author in action in a vegetable patch, so this photograph of the author-as-dancer has, we might presume, been chosen to establish a certain credibility with respect to the subject at hand. But there is more at play, and at stake, in this image.

It is this author-dancer's intention to place two practices, two unlike bodies, of writing and dancing, in dialogue. In *Reading Dancing* a distinctly formulated body, a body which has been shaped to a precise physical articulation, is identified as the site of discourse. The author's body asserted as dancing presence exceeds the smooth surface of the

page. Her body intervenes and demands that the reader become spectator. In articulating a vision of the body's movement as an act of writing, and picturing herself as dancer, Foster reminds us of the bodily ground of all these acts of reading, writing, dancing and watching dancing.

2. Stumbling, (st)uttering, and other disorders.

In the original presentation of this essay another coupling of bodies, more disjunctive than harmonious was proposed. The paper was presented in the form of a dance in two parts, one spoken, one moved through. It was a duet between speaking body and dancing body, between muteness and loquacity.

A play of two voices was intended, a play in which both were to some degree suppressed; and this suppression was symptomatic of a disordering of relations between the body and speech. However, in presenting dancing and speaking as polarities the dance/paper appeared to confirm the impossi-

bility of dialogue between the two practices. Stumbling and stuttering the author-as-dancer unwittingly pictured herself as an unspeakable presence and as a site of nostalgia.

The dancer is a place of mourning where readers search for an other lost body of pleasure and innocence. Dance is a mythical site where the body, speechless and thus uncorrupted, plays. This is, of course, a nonsense. Dancing, like speaking, is a social act, produced by and within given discourses.

3. LALEEN: When you moved from dance to film you made a comment to the effect that the body alone is no longer sufficient.

YVONNE: What the body can say without verbal language is limited, which is why I so frequently used language in my dances ... to tell stories mostly. I would speak or project texts and later used more elaborate scripts, including multi-media. But I guess I grew impatient with the limitations of the body's

expressivity. That is why I no longer involve myself in the kind of 'physical research' I had done through my body.

(Laleen Jayamanne, Yvonne Rainer: 1986)

MARTHA: (The body) is an instrument with which to express great truths of life; it must be prepared for the ordeal of expressiveness.

Movement never lies.

(Martha Graham: 1963:53)

The contrasting choreographic projects of Martha Graham and Yvonne Rainer are emblematic of two distinctive periods and genres in twentieth century dance — the modern and the post-modern. Graham, ascribing to the body a superfluity of expression, creates dances which are descriptive of such a condition. For Rainer the insufficiencies and limitations of the body's speech necessitate a relocation; the body and its movement are contextualized by other more overtly discursive practices.

* * *

The object of this lengthy but introductory play of terms — speech, writing, text, body is to delineate a space of inquiry where one might ask not only What does the body speak? but How is the body written in dance? and Whose stories are told and what bodies are silenced in this process of inscription?

In recent years the question of 'the body', the way the body has been inscribed with cultural codes, has been a focus within feminist theory. Strangely, this questioning of the body and its representation which has played such a significant role in the development of new critical strategies has rarely been brought to bear upon the practice of dance, surely the most bodily of cultural productions. My intention in this paper is to present an overview of the ways in which the body is being written in dance, and the ways in which dance, within the Western theatrical tradition, has defined and redefined bodies, particularly women's bodies. It is a survey and a reading which is necessarily schematic and it is at best a preliminary diagnosis — a few lines drawn across the surface of a large and silent body, marking points of entry for future and deeper incisions.

* * *

Bodies and dances are not only legible but comprehensible. I have chosen to borrow, in a somewhat illegitimate manner, terms and methods drawn from contemporary literary theory in order to establish the dancing body as a location of signifying practices and to foreground the reflexive relationship existing between the dancing/speaking subject and the dance/language. Dances have no existence except through the body/bodies which produce and reproduce them and they can be considered as texts written of and through precisely inscribed bodies.

But the dancer's body is not merely a written-upon page; it is more accurately described as an artefact, of blood, flesh, organs, bone and skin, arduously and meticulously constructed. Social and political values are not simply placed or grafted onto a neutral body object like so many old or new clothes. On the contrary, ideologies are systematically deposited and constructed on an anatomical plane, i.e. in the neuro-musculature of the dancer's body, and a precise reading of this body can only proceed if the reader/spectator's gaze is not deflected by, but penetrates beneath, the brilliance of the body's surface.

* * *

And simultaneously with its attraction, we find testimony to the fear and loathing that that body has inspired: beautiful but unclean, alluring but dangerous, woman's body (can we say that it is always in some sense, the mother's body?) has appeared mysterious, duplicitous — a source of pleasure and nurturance, but also of destruction and evil.

Susan Rubin Suleiman (1986:1)

In the Western theatrical tradition, certainly since the Romantic era, often termed the 'age of the ballerina', dance has been closely associated with the female body. The dancing body is in this cultural context constructed as a female, feminized, and sexualized body, a body which is site and source of powerful and conflicting passions. Curt Sachs' *World History of the Dance* opens with the statement 'The dance is the mother of the arts', in *The Principles of Art* Robin G. Collingwood identifies dance as 'the mother of all language', and for choreographer George Balanchine ballet is a 'woman, a garden of beautiful flowers',¹ The dancer's body is the ground, the soil, from which all these beauties spring. Ancient themes — woman's body, mater and matter.

If dance is the space of 'the feminine' and 'the maternal' it follows within the logic of a patriarchal social order that its power and the power of the body, be controlled, constrained, disguised or denied. Dancer and choreographer Russell Dumas has spoken of the regulatory mechanisms which are brought to bear upon the body and its representations:

The body and the dance images which are presented through the body are subject to immense social control. The control over the body which is apparent in particular areas of dance, for example the Royal Academy of Dance system of examination and accreditation in classical ballet, is one aspect of what is a much more pervasive surveillance and control over the body in our society. Part of the reason why dance is marginalized and trivialised, and why the body is satirised, is that such measures control the body and delimit and reduce its potency. (DEMPSTER 1987:49)

Dance has been represented as a secondary, derivative, diversionary and minor art, an art which is not generative of its own meanings. It has traditionally been defined in relationship to the male-identified art forms of music and drama, and its communicative potential, force and action is commonly misrepresented as being dependent upon those relationships. In this (false) representation, the body is dispossessed of its capacity for mindful action. The 'male' arts of music and drama commandeer the space of mind and spirit; the female identified art of dance is relegated to the nether regions of an unthought and unthinking body. Dance may be the mother of all manner of things but she cannot know or speak of herself.

Dance is identified with a body which has been defined as a dependent, contingent object, lacking autonomy, lacking the capacity to speak of, or otherwise represent itself and lacking a transcendent symbology and function.² This conception of the body denies its capacity, and by extension that of dance, to allude to other realities or to create new fictions. As I have argued elsewhere:

...dance is in the world, refers to that world, but also creates its own reality. It is not simply reflective of a current social reality but can be a gesture towards some other; it is able to project other possibilities, alluding to a future, to a past, and to another present. (DEMPSTER 1987:48)

Dance can be thoughtful action, a movement of embodied mind. It offers the possibility of a distinctive mode of action, a mode of action embracing a conception of the body which is not shadowed by habits of thought based on Cartesian dualism. But when dance is not regarded as a signifying practice in its own right and when it is assigned a minor role within a cultural economy this distinctive capacity remains disguised, delimited and reduced. Some dancers are innocent of the cultural economy of which their work is part; others recognize and are willing to accept the parameters of dance practice - the

1. Roger Copeland (1982:48) cites Balanchine's 'notorious proclamation' as follows: 'The ballet is a purely female thing; it is a woman, a garden of beautiful flowers, and the man is the gardener.'

2. See Luce Irigaray's *Divine Women* (1986) Sydney. Local Consumption Publications.

shape, scale and status of dance, as determined by that economy. Ann Daly (1987:16) in discussion of the work of Balanchine, analyses the encoding of gender dichotomized difference in classical ballet. She asserts that the 'ballerina is not simply an innocuous, isolated theatrical image' but is an icon of femininity which not only reflects but inscribes gender behaviour in everyday life.

The ballet is identified by Daly as 'one of our culture's most powerful models of patriarchal ceremony'. The ballerina, by her compliant participation in the enactment of this ceremony in effect contributes to her own oppression and 'ratifies her own subordination'. Daly argues that the gender prescription evident in the ballet's representation and deployment of the female body is fundamental to the ballet form. Ballet would not be ballet without these gender demarcations. She concludes that women are inscribed by, but cannot represent themselves in the classical ballet. It is a form which denies the female dancer her own agency. For the balletomane these may be controversial and unwelcome assertions but in my judgement Daly's analysis is acute, persuasive and salutary. I will return to some of the issues she raises later in this paper.

If, as Daly implies, there are dancers who are compliant with existing conceptions and definitions, there are others who challenge such prescription and who seek transformation of the terms of exchange to which they have been subject. Some of the most remarkable art of the twentieth century has been produced by women working in the medium of dance. These dancers and choreographers have written and continue to write the body in distinctive and diverse ways, projecting 'other possibilities' through and for the body. Although Western theatrical dance has rarely been subjected to rigorous scrutiny in socio-political terms, it is nonetheless a social practice which is inevitably and profoundly political, and any history of dance, even if it simply be a tracing of the changing imagery of the body's deployment in space and time, will contain fragments of a political history of the body. It requires a careful reading, but the history of Western theatrical dance can be interrogated in such a way as to reveal the residues of political actions and representations upon, through, and of the body.

In *Towards a Sexual Politics of Contemporary Dance* Roger Copeland (1982:45) introduces the work of a number of women dancer/choreographers who have vigorously challenged established dance practices. His article emphasizes the political significance of the aesthetic innovations in dance over this century by linking developments in modern and post-modern dance with various stages and styles of feminist thinking. The following survey of three major genres of concert dance — classical, modern and post-modern, takes up some of the themes touched upon in Copeland's reading of twentieth century dance.

The history of dance is conserved and continually renewed in contemporary bodies. Multiple texts and multiple bodies co-exist in the present time and although dance forms are adaptive and subject to redefinition, contemporary examples can still usefully be studied as historical texts in which the social, cultural and political values of the time in which they originated are encoded. The three genres under consideration are based on strongly contrasting conceptions of the body and strongly contrasting modes of representation and training practices. It is through participation in the given discourse of a genre — constituted by dance classes, rehearsals and performances, that the body characteristic of that genre is constructed and inscribed. This is not to imply that the dancer's body is solely a function of discursive procedures, or, expressed differently, that an appropriately inscribed body can be achieved by training alone. The classical ballet body for example is predicated upon a 'natural' body of particular anatomical characteristics and dimensions.

* * *

The introduction of the proscenium arch marked the transition from the allegorical aesthetic of late Renaissance dance to the pictorial aesthetic of the neo-classical dance of the eighteenth century. Neo-classical dance, elevated and framed, presented 'perfected pictures of human society' articulated through an ideal or set of ideal bodily forms.³ A pictorial aesthetic continues to characterize the ballet genre and governs the presentation and definition of 'perfected bodies'.

The classical ballet posits an ideal, and idealized world, and it is an overtly synthetic construct, utilizing a system of precisely coded, highly patterned abstract movement, and incorporating the stylized gesture and deportment of the 16th century French court. All traces of the 'natural', the unschooled, the mundane or contemporary gesture are erased from the body in a lengthy and rigorous training which begins in childhood. The classical dancer's body is defined by achievement of the greatest degree of frontal legibility as established in the 'turn-out', by a commitment to the vertical, to lightness and speed and, in the words of Lincoln Kirstein (1976), by a commitment to 'the conquest against gravity of aerial space'.

The 'turn-out' established in the five positions of the feet is the root of ballet training and is fundamental to the ethos and image of the ballet form

for 'turning-out' means that the dancer, whatever the convolutions of the dance, continually shows as much of herself as possible to the spectator...

In ballet the human passions are expressed by the gradual unconvoluted curves and straight lines of the extended human body. There is no residuum, no veil. The human body is purged of atmosphere. All is shown. (STOKES. 1935)

The classical dancer's body is a body orientated to display and to a celebration of outwardness but this disclosure is highly regulated and ordered. The dancer's training begins at an early age when the body and the mind are most impressionable and it is a training directed to a re-creative purpose — the reproduction of master works. Her body is subjected to intense scrutiny as it strives for achievement of the already existent and long established lexicon of some two hundred steps which determine the range of its permissible movement. If, as Ann Daly states, the ballet is a cultural institution which ceremonially inscribes patriarchal ideology, then this training process is the female dancer's initiation into a patriarchal symbolic order.

The classical body is a highly disciplined, highly regulated one and the female dancer enjoys a very limited degree of autonomy with respect to the deployment and representation of her body in performance. A transition into a position of greater independence, such as that offered in choreographic work, is rare for the female dancer in this tradition. Indeed, orthodox ballet training tends to suppress precisely those qualities of independent judgement and self-definition essential to choreographic development and innovation.

George Balanchine has described the choreographic process as an activity of the male mind ordering and transforming 'raw nature' as incarnated in the bodies of women. In the ballet tradition, choreography, that is the *writing* of movement, is almost exclusively the province and privilege of men. The traditional ballet company structure, although foregrounding the female performer, continues to delimit her participation in the definition and extension of that form and perhaps, with Daly's analysis in mind, a situation of fuller participation is a logical impossibility. If dichotomized gender imaging is fundamental to the ballet form, any major redefinition which redressed gender-based inequalities would produce dances no longer recognizable as 'ballet'.

One of the most striking paradoxes of the classical ballet genre is that this most athletic, physically demanding of dance forms harnesses the considerable strength, stamina and will of the female dancer in service of narratives representing female passivity, dependence and frailty. Critic Chris Savage-King (1985:28) wonders why a form that promotes the female is treated with disdain by feminist observers. She suggests that we should look to the dancer and the dance, and not, as it were, to the distractions of the drama. But the context of the dancer's labour cannot so easily be put aside. Whilst the skill and talent of many ballerinas is formidable and indisputable, the display of which they appear to be centre is a display which is controlled and guided by a male hand and a male eye. The ballerina's power

3. For a detailed discussion of the modes of representation and choreographic conventions in Renaissance and neo-classical dance see *Reading Dancing*, Susan L. Foster (1986)

is more apparent than real. Although her body enunciates with great vibrancy and vitality she is not granted authorial rights over performance texts.

* * *

Major innovation in dance has occurred largely outside of the ballet academy. The radical redefinition of concert dance which began at the turn of the century was a movement initiated by women artists working independently of traditional structures to develop new languages of physical expression. The early modern dance was a repudiation of the tenets of nineteenth century ballet with its emphasis on spectacle and virtuoso display. It was an avowedly female-centred movement, both with respect to the manner in which the body was deployed and represented, and in the imagery and subject matter employed. The early modern dancers were asking that the body and its movement, and the place and context of dance be looked at in new ways. They inherited no practice; the techniques and the choreographic forms they developed were maps and reflections of the possibilities and propensities of their own originating bodies.

In the early 1900s dancers such as Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, Maud Allen and Ruth St. Denis constructed images and created dances through their own unballetic bodies, producing a writing of the female body which strongly contrasted with classical inscriptions. These dancers, creating new vocabularies of movement and new styles of presentation, made a decisive and liberating break with the principles and forms of the European ballet. The modern dance genre is now most closely identified with the choreographic output of the second generation of modern dancers — Mary Wigman, Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham, and the training systems they developed. It is to this body of work that the following discussion refers.

Modern dance is not a uniform system, but a corpus of related though differentiated vocabularies and techniques of movement which have evolved in response to the choreographic projects of individual artists. Common to these contrasting styles of dance — and it is this that allows us to group otherwise disparate works under the banner of 'modern dance' — is a conception of the body as a medium and vehicle for the expression of inner forces. The spatial and temporal structure of these dances is based on emotional and psychological imperatives. The governing logic of modern dance is not pictorial, as in the ballet, but affective.

For the modern dancer, dance is an expression of interiority — interior feeling guiding the movement of the body into external forms. Doris Humphrey described her dance as 'moving from the inside out', for Graham it was a process of 'making visible the interior landscape'. This articulation of interior (maternal) spaces creates forms which are not, however, ideal or perfected ones. The modern dancer's body registers the play of opposing forces, falling and recovering, contracting and releasing. It is a body defined through a series of dynamic alternations; it is subject both to moments of surrender and moments of resistance.

In modern dance the body is in a dynamic relationship with gravity. For Humphrey the body was at its most interesting when in transition and at a moment of gravitational loss, that is, when it was falling. Modern dance has often been termed 'terrestrial', that is, floor-bound, and inward-looking. As such it has been negatively compared to the ballet and the aerial verticality and openness of that form. But as Graham has stressed 'the dancers fall so that they may rise'. It is in the *falling*, not in the being down, that the modern body is at its most expressive.

The modern body and the dance which shapes it, is a site of struggle where social and psychological, spatial and rhythmic conflicts are played out, and sometimes reconciled. This body — and it is specifically a female body — is not passive but dynamic, even convulsive, as Deborah Jowitt sees it:

In many of (Graham's) important works of the forties and fifties, you felt the dancing shuddering along in huge jerks, propelled by the violently contracting and expanding bodies. When I first saw Graham in 1955, I was stunned by the whiplash of her spine; by the way, as Medea in *Cave*

of the Heart, she writhed sideways on her knees — simultaneously devouring and vomiting a length of red yarn; (JOWITT 1978).

Jowitt concludes that Graham's dancing was like no other she had witnessed and that 'it was like a body language consisting solely of epithets'.

Modern dance posits a natural body in which feeling and form are organically connected. Graham, for example, has conceived the body as a conduit, a responsive channel through which inner truths are revealed. The body has a revelatory potential and technique is the means by which the outer manifestations of the body are brought into alignment with the inner world of the psyche.

Through all times the acquiring of technique in dance has been for one purpose — so to train the body as to make possible any demand made upon it by that inner self which has the vision of what needs to be said. No-one invents movement; movement is discovered. What is possible and necessary to the body under the impulse of the emotional self is the result of this discovery. (GRAHAM 1941).

The function of technique in modern dance is, as Graham has described it, to free the socialized body and clear it of any impediment which might obscure its capacity for 'true speech'. Ironically perhaps, this concept of the 'natural' body was expounded in support of highly systematized and codified dance languages and training programs which inscribe relationships — necessarily conventional and arbitrary — between the body, movement and meaning.

Modern dance's valorization of the 'natural' and its positing of an individualized pre-symbolic subject are not features of the classical system of training. Ballet training shapes, controls, improves upon, and perfects the body's given physical structure; in this process both the natural body and the individualized subject are erased. As the principles of modern dance have become progressively codified into systematic techniques the concept of a 'natural' body, pre-existing discourse, can no longer be sustained. Modern dance, now distant from its creators' originating speech, is passed on through highly formalized training programs and like the classical system, this training involves erasure of naturally given physical traits, and processes of reinscription.

How is the body and 'the feminine' inscribed by the female-devised languages of modern dance? Graham dances sacralize and mythologize the female body and this body is shown to be subject to forceful emotional, unconscious and libidinal impulses. In Foster's reading it is the body of the hysteric:

...the action begins in the abdomen, codified as the site of libidinal and primitive desires. The symbolic contents of the abdomen radiate through the body, twisting and overpowering the body with their message. Graham's characters seem to be subject to the psychological mechanism of repression. The powerful message from the unconscious makes its way only with difficulty through the emotional and intellectual centers of the person and into the world. Graham depicts the tense conflict between corporeal and psychological elements. (FOSTER 1986:81)

Graham's location of 'the feminine' may seem uncomfortably close to the space traditionally ascribed to the body, women and dance within patriarchy. Her choreographies however represent the inner world as a dynamic, outward-flowing, conflictual force; 'the feminine' is not passive but voluptuously, and sometimes violently active. It is a force which shapes the outer world. Graham's work reflects the psychoanalytic preoccupations of her time, but the public and performative nature of Graham's articulation of these concerns, and the power she ascribes to the female body significantly distinguish her representation of the feminine from that associated with clinical practice.

As early as the 1930s Graham and her fellow artists were presenting a newly defined dance practice in the public arena and in so doing they created spaces for dance and for women which had not existed before. But this form of dance, once an oppositional practice, is now offered as a second language supplementing classical ballet in the training of the professional dancer. In my judgement it is the fact of modern dance's gradual codification, its identity as a formularized technique, which has rendered

it susceptible to colonization; and it is this rather than any inherent ideological complicity which permits the subsuming of elements of modern dance into the ballet.

Lincoln Kirstein, the founding father of the New York City Ballet, has cursorily dismissed modern dance as a 'minor verse' of theatre. He considers it time-bound, nostalgic and lacking the 'clear speech acts' and universal legibility of the ballet. He is one of a number of critics who have argued that ballet is the only enduring Western concert dance form.⁴ In Kirstein's view, ballet's pre-eminence is assured because modern dance has failed to produce a stable lexicon and is therefore lacking in consequence.

Modern dance has clearly developed vocabularies and syntactical conventions and Kirstein's perceptions are misplaced. He would be less inaccurate if his subject had been post-modern dance. The post-modern is not a newly defined dance language but a strategy and a method of inquiry which challenges and interrogates the process of representation itself. Once the relation between movement and its referent is questioned, the representational codes and conventions of dance are opened to investigation. Analysis, questioning and manipulation of the codes and conventions which inscribe the body in dance are distinguishing features of the post-modern genre.

* * *

In the 1940s Merce Cunningham had already begun to demonstrate that dance could be primarily about movement. In contrast to the expressionism of modern dance, in which movement is presumed to have intrinsic meaning, Cunningham choreographies emphasize the arbitrary nature of the correlation between signifier and signified. In his deconstruction of existing choreographic codes Cunningham challenged the rhetoric of 'the natural' which surrounded modern dance. The political dimensions of this deconstructive project have been addressed more directly in the work of some of the later post-modern choreographers.

Susan Foster defines two stages/modes of post-modern dance practice — objectivist and reflexive. The first is the precondition for the second, but the two modes were coextensive in the 1960s and '70s and together constitute the genre. Foster differentiates the two stages of post-modern dance as follows:

Objectivist dance focuses on the body's movement, allowing any references to the world to accrue alongside the dance as a by-product of the body's motion. The reflexive choreography... assumes that the body will inevitably refer to other events, and because of this asks how those references are made. Whereas objectivist dance has laid bare the conventions governing representations to allow the body to speak its own language, reflexive choreography works with these same conventions to show the body's capacity to both speak and be spoken through in many different languages. (FOSTER 1986:188)

Like Cunningham, the post-modern choreographers emerging in the 1960s distinguished themselves from both the classical tradition and the then firmly established modern dance, in that their focus was on the fundamental material and medium of dance, the moving body itself. The body was no longer to be trained to the task of interpreting or illustrating something other than its own material reality. Post-modern dance does not present perfected, ideal or unified forms, nor bodies driven by inner imperatives, but bodies of bone, muscle and flesh speaking of and for themselves.

The dances are about what they look like. Because (objectivist dances) simply present individual people in motion, the dances clearly do not presume to represent idealized experience or experience that might be common to all people. (FOSTER 1986:185)

In *Work 1961-73* Yvonne Rainer writes of her 'chunky' body not conforming to the traditional image of the female dancer. Elsewhere she recalls a Boston reviewer, writing in the '60s, disdainfully commenting on the 'slack' bodies of (the later-termed) post-modern dancers.⁵ A democratization of the body and of dance was heralded in the post-modern work of the 1960s and '70s. Whilst Cunningham pursued a deconstruction of choreographic conventions through technically trained bodies — bodies which maintained the 'look' of the dancer, post-modern works of this period featured both trained and untrained

performers, in short 'any-old-body'. Widely used choreographic devices such as rule games, task-based and improvisational structures provided a frame for the perception and enjoyment of bodies in action — be they trained or untrained, old or young, thick or thin, male or female.

The play of oppositions and the gender stereotyping embodied in the ballet and perpetuated in modern dance traditions were systematically de-emphasized in the post-modern work of this era. Within the selection, structuring and performance of movement strong contrasts and oppositions were reduced or eliminated. Rainer speaks here of *The Mind is a Muscle, Trio A* (1966):

The limbs are never in a fixed, still relationship and they are stretched to the fullest extension only in transit, creating the impression that the body is constantly engaged in transitions. Another factor contributing to the smoothness of the continuity is that no one part of the series is made any more important than any other. For four and half minutes a great variety of movement shapes occur, but they are of equal weight and are equally emphasized. (RAINER 1974:67)

The post-modern dancer's range and style of movement was not determined by gender and sex-specific roles were rare — notable exceptions being a number of works by Yvonne Rainer⁶ in which issues of gender, sexual identity and seduction in performance were addressed directly. The early post-modern focus on non-hierarchical and non-genderized use and organization of the body and its movement continues in current post-modern dance.

Post-modern dance, as Foster has indicated, also involves the reworking and re-assessment of earlier forms of bodily inscription — drawing from, quoting, subverting and manipulating the classical and other lexicons. Referring to Rainer's *Trio A* (1966) and Trisha Brown's *Accumulation* (1971) *With Talking* (1973) *Plus Watermotor* (1977) Foster (1986:186) has noted the tensions which arise when (at least) two disparate modes of representation are juxtaposed or brought into dialogue. In these works the body is present as an instrument concerned simply with physical articulation but at the same time it also alludes to other discourses — Rainer's *Trio A* contains references to earlier dance forms and Brown's dance presents speaking and dancing as simultaneous but independent texts. The play of contrasting discourses and the use of quotation in post-modern compositional process produces layered and complex dance works which are open to multiple readings. Yvonne Rainer, in conversation with Trisha Brown, discusses this effect in Brown's *Glacial Decoy* (1979):

The costumes bring in another dimension...of, not exactly a persona, but an association with personae created elsewhere and earlier, somewhere between *Les Sylphides* and *Primitive Mysteries*, maybe even *Antic Meet*,⁷ which has that take-off on *Primitive Mysteries*. And it is the dress that produces this association. There's a recurring, fleeting transformation from a body moving to a flickering female image. I think that because the dress stands away from the body the image is never totally integrated or unified, so one goes back and forth in seeing movement-as-movement, body-inside-dress, dress-outside-body, and image-of-woman/dancer, which is not the same thing as seeing or not seeing your work in terms of your being a woman. Femaleness in *Glacial Decoy* is both a given, as in your previous work, and a superimposition. (BROWN & RAINER 1979:32)

The processes of deconstruction and bricolage commonly associated with post-modern dance also describe an attitude to physical training. The development of what might be termed the post-modern body is in some senses a deconstructive process, involving a period of de-training of the dancer's habitual structures and patterns of movement. The dancer brings intelligence to bear on the physical structure of her/his body, focusing close attention upon the interaction of skeletal alignment and physiological and perceptual processes. Through this process the dancer reconstructs a physical articulation based on an

4. See Lincoln Kirstein, *Dance: A Short History of Classical Theatrical Dancing* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1935)

5. Yvonne Rainer, A Conversation about *Glacial Decoy*. (1979:36)

6. See Rainer's *Work 1961-73* for descriptions and scores of *In the College* (1972), *Lives of Performers* (1972) and *This is the story of a woman who...* (1973).

7. *Les Sylphides* (1909), Fokine. *Primitive Mysteries* (1931), Graham. *Antic Meet* (1958), Cunningham.

understanding of what is common to all bodies and what is unique to her/his own. Our bodies evolve in dialogue with a complex physical and social world and the training systems which have informed post-modern dance are based on a conceptualization of the body as an organism in flux. The post-modern body is not a fixed, immutable entity, but a living structure which continually adapts and transforms itself. It is body available to the play of many discourses. Post-modern dance directs attention away from any specific image of the body and towards the process of constructing all bodies.

If it is a 'writing' of the body, it is a writing which is conditional, circumstantial and above all transitory; it is a writing which erases itself in the act of being written. The body, and by extension 'the feminine', in post-modern dance is unstable, fleeting, flickering, transient — subject of multiple representations.

* * *

When the written and written-upon body dances what is spoken and what is received? Laura Mulvey's analysis of the dynamics of male spectatorship relative to narrative cinema⁸ has been usefully applied to narrative ballet and its audience. A feminist critique, such as Ann Daly's, focuses upon analysis of the ways in which the act of displaying and viewing the female body in dance reinstates male power. But what of the female spectator? When a woman is watching another woman dancing, what happens?

Ambivalence towards the body and judgement against one's own can be part of the terms of exchange operating between dancers and spectators. Dancer and writer Shona Innes⁹ has argued that orthodox ballet training prepares and conditions the young, female dancer to fail. The would-be-ballerina is encouraged to compare herself (unceasingly) to an image of a never-to-be-attained perfection. This conditioning to failure underlies what I have elsewhere termed an economy of shame.¹⁰

In the classical dance the spectator is invited to gaze upon a distanced, ideal world where the female dancer is traced as sylph and cipher, a necessary absence. The perception of the body as a natural, physical entity is obstructed and suppressed by distance; the mundane body has no place here. The classical ballet thus creates conditions conducive to self-forgetfulness. In the body of the ballerina the watcher might seek another transformed body; in the contemplation of distanced virtuosity a space of forgetfulness opens, a space in which her present imperfect body is subsumed in the perfected body of the other.

Contrastingly, dancing which is located in the space opened by post-modernist practice demands not a forgetting but a heightened awareness of the commonality of all bodies and the particularity of each. This dance which plays across, puts on and takes off, a variety of modes of symbolic discourse, is written through a pedestrian body. It is a dancing which stresses the materiality, the fleshliness — and therefore the vulnerability and mortality, of all bodies: the dancer's, and by a reflexive action, the spectator's.

Post-modern dance presents the potentialities of the mundane body; it is an ordinary body of bone and flesh, common to spectator and dancer alike, which is posited as locus of dancing. The presence of the pedestrian body as the ground of danced action invalidates the participant criteria endemic to the ballet, and challenges the limits and conditions encoded in that form. There is in post-modern dance no image of perfection or unity, no hierarchy and no failure.

Furthermore in the classical genre the specificity of the female body is obscured. The dancer's body is regularized and abstracted; difference is reduced to same. Post-modern dance foregrounds the kinaesthetic and the tactile and denies the privilege of a universalizing gaze. In asserting the materiality of the dancing body it affirms the specificity of each dancing presence, of each body's lived experience. The post-modern body is plural, polyvalent, mutable. When a woman watches this dancing what happens?

* * *

The dancing body is a cultural production, dynamically interacting with the socio-cultural matrix of which it is a part, and dances are projected images not mere mirror reflections of already existing social

realities. Dance's capacity to project images of the body's action and inherence in the world marks it as powerful means of enculturation. As I have indicated above, certain dance forms and training practices tend to reinforce patriarchal and phallogocentric modes of social and sexual interaction. The enduring popularity of recreational ballet classes amongst preadolescent girls is an indication perhaps of the continuing influence of this dance form in female socialization. But it is also the case that the body, dancing, can challenge and deconstruct dominant cultural inscription. The early modern dance proposed a feminist dance practice which would return the real female body to women. The work of Isadora Duncan, perhaps the most mythologized of the early moderns, has been linked with the women's emancipation movement of the 1900s. For Duncan the dancing body was a paradigm of freedom. The loosening of the fetters which bound the body itself — Duncan danced uncorseted and barefoot — was part and parcel of her vision of the social and political liberation of women. As she wrote in *The Dancer of the Future* around 1902:

The dancer of the future...will dance not in the form of a nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette, but in the form of a woman in her greatest and purest expression. She will realize the mission of woman's body and the holiness of all its parts. She will dance the changing life of nature, showing how each part is transformed into the other. From all parts of her body shall shine radiant intelligence, bringing to the world the message of the thoughts and aspirations of thousands of women. She shall dance the freedom of women...

As expressed by Isadora Duncan, the goal of the 'free dance', as it was termed in the 1900s, was to provide a pure reflection of the natural, unwritten body of woman. However, as Mary Doane points out in discussion of the representation of the female body in feminist film:

The ideological complicity of the concept of the natural dictates the impossibility of a nostalgic return to an unwritten body. For it is precisely the massive reading, writing and filming of the female body which constructs and maintains a hierarchy along the lines of a sexual difference assumed as natural. (DOANE 1981:24)

Duncan's vision of the dance of the future presumes an unproblematic return to a body of untainted naturalness and to an essential purity which she believed was fundamental to women. To recognize that Duncan's vision is unrealizable and perhaps, from a 1980s perspective, in some degree complicit with the concept of 'natural' sexual difference is not to deny the power of her rhetoric, nor to dismiss the considerable impact her dancing had upon audiences of her time.

The later modern dancers continued to employ the rhetoric of the 'natural' and yet they were prolific in their production of distinctive — and one could argue decidedly 'unnatural' — female languages and texts. It seems that modern dance might once have been a viable mode of self-representation for the women who wrote and spoke it into being, but once codified — one woman's speech becoming 'women's language' — it became vulnerable to colonization. Although modern dance's representation of the feminine stands in contrast to that of the ballet, it has become in its own way as prescriptive as the system it originally sought to challenge. Because post-modern dance is not a newly-defined dance language but an interrogation of language itself, it presents the possibility of an interventionist practice.¹¹ Post-modern dance acknowledges the specificity of each dancing body — as that body is con-

8. Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975)

9. See Shona Innes' article in this issue.

10. Dempster. *The Economy of Shame. Spectator Burns: Performance/Theory* 1. Oct. 1987.

11. Post-modern compositional strategies are not in themselves oppositional. In her discussion of reflexive choreographic structures Susan Foster distinguishes between resistive and reactionary forms of post-modern dance. A resistive form of post-modern dance is concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition; it questions rather than exploits cultural codes. A mainstream and reactionary post-modern (the work of Twyla Tharp is Foster's example) plays across dance languages and traditions uncritically, exploiting conventional codes, but not questioning them.

stituted naturally, that is as a physical entity with given anatomical and physiological characteristics, and as it is constituted within particular discourses. The body, not disciplined to the enunciation of a singular discourse, is a multi-vocal and potentially disruptive force which undermines the unity of phallocratic discourse. Post-modern dance does not eschew the dance of the past but suggest tactical procedures by which the dancer might keep a hop, skip and a jump ahead and away from reductive and normalizing prescriptions.

* * *

Contemporary practice in dance as represented in the three genres briefly discussed here is a rich and virtually untapped field for feminist inquiry. It is a repository of past images, a measure of the present and a site where new images of the body (and images of a new body) are being drawn. This preliminary sketch of a terrain is offered in the hope that other bodies, other readers, writers and dancers will also say: 'Let's watch a little how she dances.'

* * *

and 4.

But what if the object began to speak?

Luce Irigaray, *SPECULUM OF THE OTHER WOMAN*

Dance contains within itself gestures towards a dissolution of the dichotomous pairing of terms fundamental to the Western philosophical tradition. In moments of dancing the edges of things blur and terms such as mind/body, flesh/spirit, carnal/divine, male/female, become labile and unmoored, breaking loose from the fixity of their pairings. This vision of dance is not utopian but a felt experience occurring fleetingly, elusively, in many styles and occasions of dance. It is a potential not so much unrealized as unrepresented, and perhaps unrepresentable. Throughout this paper I have borrowed terminology from literary theory, but dances are not books and the body is not a written-upon-page. Dance requires its own close watching. It takes time and the 'reading' of dance is an undertaking which may necessitate the development of new critical strategies. Literacy in dance, from which a political reading proceeds, must begin with attention to the

body and to the gravity, levity, spatiality and rhythms of its movement. When the object speaks, when the body dances, perhaps it is not a watching but a listening which is required. Or if it is watching it is with an eye that glides under the surface of skin and rests there, listening without expectation. We need to learn to look critically at the body in dance and to resist the seductions of the glittering surface, of old stories and old bodies in new clothes. I have likened this vigilant watching to a process of dissection; it is an incisive glance which destroys the deceptive unity of the dancing body. But in this act of incision another, evanescent body is born.

The realm of the 'proper' is his body, his dance, his speech. To speak his tongue she leaves her mother and hands her body over to the academy. For the rest of us, we have no option but to be 'improper', to speak pidgin, to mutter, to stammer, and to block up our ears against his bitter scorn. But sometimes in an unguarded moment a fissure opens in a once silent body and from it flows an unstoppable, uncontainable speaking as we cast our bodies without thinking into space.

* * *

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The Dance Exchange in performance



RUSSELL DUMAS

*DISLOCATED, ISOLATED
SEDUCED AND ABANDONED*

Dance is a living tradition
whose history and inheritance
is passed in direct lineage
from dancer to dancer.

Dancers are developed as performing artists
by meeting the rigorous demands
of choreographic artists.

All great dancers have been
developed and nurtured in relation to
choreographic artists.

In both the classical ballet and modern dance traditions of Europe and the USA this notion of lineage is as clear as it is in the familial traditions of Eastern dance.

The techniques and traditions of classical ballet cannot be learnt from books; they must be passed on through personal contact of ballet master with students. Thus all classical ballet companies are related and can trace their ancestry back to the company that staged spectacles for Lorenzo de Medici in renaissance Italy. Where the links with European traditions of ballet are most direct, the ballet is stylistically authoritative — for example, The Royal Danish Ballet, The British Royal Ballet, The Kirov.

Contemporary Australian dancers, although they have been inscribed with the values of English dance since they were children, lack authority in the classics of ballet, even when coached by the best custodians of the balletic traditions (the balletic equivalent of elocution teachers). The accent is never quite true or natural. This lack of authority (or insecurity) is due to distance from and unfamiliarity with the cultures being portrayed. An analogy: — Personal mementos and bits of inherited furniture occupy physical and emotional space in our home environments. These threads of memory connect us with our ancestors and form part of our cultural fabric. The Australian dancer, lacking direct access to and connection with the culture and heritage of ballet, cannot embody that heritage with authority, nor can he/she reflect the cultural understandings embedded in it. The dancer's body bears no understanding of the present having been shaped by the past.

* * *

Different people interacting with landscape form part of what we term culture, and this process takes hundreds, if not thousands of years. Even within Europe difference is easily and unmistakably perceived — for example, in no way could one mistake the German countryside for the French, Dutch or Italian. Thus inhabiting the same landscape for long periods gives distinctive cultural understandings which are often so much taken for granted that they become invisible. These values seep into a people. In much the same way the perceptions from Chado have given a distinctiveness to Japanese culture, even when individual Japanese protest they know nothing of the Tea Ceremony as such.

Just as different cultures inscribe bodies differently so within the same culture the inscription changes or erodes in time. The ethics or morals of different eras are discernible in bodily attitudes. Furthermore in Western societies attitudes towards the body have undergone enormous changes in the past forty years. This compounds the problems of revivals of dances of the past. For example, if we do not feel the same social commitment and belief in our power to change the world that the American modern dancers of the 1940s felt, can we ever really recreate their dances? Even though we have films and notation to show exact position, duration and effort expended etc., the integration of mind and bodily attitudes (and political intention perhaps) is something specific to a particular era and not satisfactorily accounted for in any notation system that I am aware of.

* * *

Heritage art was essential for the colony of Australia as it provided links with our European past. The balletic tradition was well catered for in terms of visiting companies and the establishment of groups such as the Borovansky, Kirsova and later the Australian Ballet, as well as various state companies. Clearly, a vision of English ballet has been bestowed on Australia by a series of capable English directors (Van Praagh, Woolliams, Gielgud, Taylor).

The desire for this authoritative and authentically English style is nurtured at a grass roots level in all ballet schools across the country. English ballet is taught in all suburban and country ballet schools. (The Royal Academy of Dancing, The British Ballet Organisation and Cecchetti are all English systems and all Australian examiners are answerable to their English superiors.) Despite repeated tours by entrepreneurial blockbusters of the 'stars of' syndrome, the lack of access to the rich and varied heritage of the ballet and isolation and dislocation from the cultures that produced this heritage have created generations of ballet dancers who are only semi-literate. Australian dancers, like other ex-colonials — South Africans and Rhodesians, are distinguished by their 'physical prowess' but are considered 'stylistically improper'.

Australian ballet, while it persists with its English bias, isolated from European culture generally and hence lacking continuity with its past, can at best be a colonial reflection of the mother culture.

* * *

The ballet affirms our status as colony; heritage arts reinforce these historical connections. In part the importance and value of a heritage lies in its ability to project a future. But the Australian experience of the lineage and heritage of ballet is a dislocated and disconnected one and we have yet to ask what future this legacy does and can project.

* * *

If ballet even with its extensive grass roots infrastructure has fared poorly, consider the predicament of modern dance. Its past has been almost invisible here and what physical traces there are function as 'vocab. expansion', reduced to the status of elective or supplementary studies for dance students.

The notion that modern dance can be taught or learnt by studying the techniques of particular artists (Graham, Cunningham etc.) without access to their works is as ludicrous as the idea of studying Monet's technique of applying paint without the ability to refer to his paintings or the concerns of Impressionism. Yet this is not an inaccurate description of what is being attempted here, both in colleges and in companies. 'Modern dance' is relegated to being just another item on the technical agenda for the training of contemporary ballet dancers.

The heritage of modern dance has not been witnessed in Australia and Australian perceptions of dance have not been informed by modern dance sensibilities.¹ The philosophical concerns of 50 years of modern dance have scarcely impinged and yet it is these concerns, contrasting strongly with the tenets and values of the ballet, that have defined modern dance.

Europe and the USA may have returned to the dance de l'école with new insights and understandings but they do so with a post-modern sensibility. Australia's 19th century vision of ballet is intact and it is this vision that stymies the development of all contemporary dance here. It is as if the last 50 years of development and change did not happen — and indeed in Australia it did not!

* * *

The Australian nation did not start by an act of renunciation as did the USA. There was, and is, no break with English values.

The infrastructure that has been set in place for the development of dance in Australia by the Australia Council is dominated by an English bias that is usually unrecognized. Structures and companies have been established without analysis or understanding of the development of dance here, or for that matter anywhere. By the 1980s, 'modern dance' was identified as an area needing development, primarily because the rhetoric from the USA identified it, correctly, as the growing edge of an art form that in other areas had been, in the main, languishing.

In Europe in the 1960s and early 1970s 'modern dance' was a term used to describe all dance that was not show-dancing, ballet or folk. Companies like Netherlands Dance Theatre and Ballet Rambert assumed initially that what they were doing was 'modern dance'. Ballet Rambert was used as a prototype for the development of 'modern dance' in Australia. Australian Dance Theatre under Jaap Flier and Elizabeth Dalman was seen as Australia's 'modern dance' company. (Clearly all other Australian companies were balletic.)

The Australian perception of what constituted dance was dominated by the view from English ballet — after all, every town of even a few thousand people always had a ballet teacher who was answerable to English examiners. Just as the corporeal inscription of young Australians by the ballet examination system reinforced our status as colony, so the importation and continued presence of English experts such as Van Praagh, Woolliams and Taylor ensured the dominance of the English view of dance inside the funding bodies. This is the situation that we have inherited.

* * *

In Australia in the 1960s and '70s 'modern dance' was used to describe dance that was 'not ballet' and 'not ethnic' (ironically often including tap, jazz, ballroom, show, acrobatic, stunt etc.) By the mid 1970s the perspective from Australia had changed and 'modern dance' was perceived to be connected to the techniques of Martha Graham and to a lesser extent the techniques of a few other individuals such as Cunningham, Horton and Nikolais.

The general perception was that we could acquire modern dance, by learning Graham or Cunningham technique for instance, in much the same way as we had acquired ballet. The significant effects of the events that shaped the course of dance in the 1960s and '70s in the USA, and to a lesser extent Europe, simply were not felt here, or if they were made little impression. It was as if we were in a time warp.

At the Small Companies' Conference (Melbourne, January '87) Cheryl Stock, Theatre Board member

and director of Dance North, spoke nostalgically of this era, seeking affirmation that what happened here was significant and vitally connected to what happened elsewhere, rather than just a recycled, recreative colonial practice.

Aside from Edward Pask's two books there has been little attempt to put into perspective or even record the history of dance in Australia (and Pask's books really only speak of ballet). Is the absence of writing that deals with our history in fact proof of something that we all individually know but fear to articulate for personal, political or jingoistic reasons? Namely that it has been so impoverished that we do not want to examine it in a critical context. Elizabeth Dempster's question comes to mind: 'Is Australian dance unremarked upon because it is unremarkable?' The title of Pask's book, *Enter the Colonies Dancing*, would seem to endorse the sentiment contained in this question.

* * *

Many of the problems which arise in discussion of dance in Australia revolve around the inconsistent use of such terms as *modern*, *contemporary*, and *classical*, combined with *dance* and *ballet*. Producing:

1. modern dance
2. contemporary dance
3. classical dance
4. modern ballet
5. contemporary ballet
6. classical ballet

The addition of the word *new* to the above gives us:

7. new modern dance
8. new contemporary dance
9. new classical dance
10. new modern ballet
11. new contemporary ballet
12. new classical ballet

As well by substitution we have:

13. new dance
14. new ballet.

At the level of language all 14 scenarios are intelligible, that is, any English speaker could construct meaning from the given words. They have a more particular meaning for dance practitioners generally (e.g. modern dance does not, but could, mean jazz dance) and an even more specific meaning that is intelligible only in parts of the dance community that are aware of the historical context in which the usage of terms evolved — e.g. modern dance was used as an oppositional term to classical ballet. As such the term embraces the work of the precursors — Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St Denis, the historic generation — Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey for example, and the post-moderns Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs and Twyla Tharp etc. as well as such figures as Merce Cunningham and James Waring. Adding to the confusion are perceptions drawn from other art practices — modern dance does not, but could, refer to the period in art described by the term modernism. The general cultural interchangeability of the terms modern and contemporary compounds the problem.²

1. In the past 20 years only 8 modern dance companies have visited Australia, and of these, 5 visited in the past 2 years. Furthermore these visits were often restricted to one or two cities.
2. All dance is contemporary. The medium of dance is the body and the body is always a contemporary one, responsive to and inscribed by the political, ethical and other agendas of a particular culture at any given time.

Further complexities are achieved by the amalgamation of these terms with those of other practices — ballet theatre, dance theatre, dance drama, new dance theatre. The multiplicity of meanings in the above scenarios points to an enormous confusion in definition and communication. A different but related problem of classification and definition emerges with the use of such words as *traditional*, *theatrical*, *folk* and *primitive*, in conjunction with *dance* or *ballet*, and especially in Australia with the use of such terms as *ethnic* or the preferred *multi-cultural*.

Language presupposes experience in common — without that no analogy can be made. In Australia, isolation from the living heritage of dance and ignorance of historical context lead to an inability to make meaningful local analogy.³ The lack of a common language, the lack of analysis, and the ignorance and cultural prejudice which surrounds the use of what language we have, makes discourse almost meaningless and reduces criticism to the merely descriptive or personally interpretative.

I have deliberately attempted to reveal the complexity of this situation because the failure to use terms in an informed way has had serious repercussions on local practice. For example, in the 1980s when 'modern dance' was identified as an area needing development in Australia, what was understood by that term?

* * *

In the early days of the Australia Council successive dance project officers, competing for money with other arts, thought that the best way of securing funding for dance was by tying into the General Grant structure with the formation of companies.⁴ This status ensured at least the ability to project a future for two years, hence the ability to plan ahead. Funding for individuals was always problematic and had to be administered through other institutions mainly, and again understandably, for reasons of financial accountability. Whenever funds were scarce (and when aren't they?) it was always the individual projects that suffered — again because of the commitment to the General Grant structures, but also because of a belief that by maintaining such structures the future of dance was being ensured. Certainly the future of these structures was ensured but unfortunately for Australia this did little for the creative development of dance. Basic analysis would have revealed the seminal importance of the choreographer to the development of the art and would also have given clear insights into the prerequisite conditions for the emergence of choreographic artists and the structures necessary to sustain them in their creative development. This analysis did not happen.

The perceived necessity for setting up mixed repertory companies⁴ as a strategy to ensure that dance got its share of arts funding is understandable. What is not justifiable is to persist in this rationalisation when it is apparent that these mixed repertory companies have failed artistically. Not even one new significant choreographic artist has emerged. The few choreographers we have who are currently heading companies in Australia were all aesthetically defined elsewhere.

A few years ago this failure was tacitly acknowledged and funds were prioritised for 'individual artists'. It is not good enough to lament that there are no individual artists in dance who warrant substantial funding. (This has been the catch-cry of the Australia Council project officers.) It is not that I disagree with this assessment but with its cause. If the Australia Council in effect legislates against the emergence of choreographic artists, can it complain that none develop? If functioning individual artists do not head our dance companies how can there be creative development?

* * *

Ballet history has clearly shown that significant development occurs only when artistic authority is vested in a principal choreographer. In ballet companies, both classical and contemporary, the physical vocabulary is a lingua franca that is continually rearranged but rarely altered or expanded and it is not essential that these choreographic artists still dance; in fact it is unusual because ballet is defined by its relationship to other arts — scenic, musical, dramatic, etc. and it is usually necessary for the

choreographer to also take on the role of coordination of all these elements.

By contrast, in modern dance the choreographer is involved with the evolution of a personal body/mind expression and it is this creative process which distinguishes the modern dance tradition. It is unusual to find a modern dance choreographer who is not also principal dancer — in fact, the choreographer's authoritative definition is most commonly the measure by which others in the company are gauged in regard to style etc.

Modern dance has always been the territory of individual choreographic artists who have formed companies around themselves to amplify their choreographic visions. In the interest of clarity let me reiterate, using a specific artist as example: Twyla Tharp is an individual choreographic artist. Twyla selects dancers to work with her and through meeting the aesthetic demands of her choreography these dancers are defined as performing artists. Twyla's work evolves from a creative dialogue with the dancers she has chosen. Her development as a choreographic artist is tied to the development of these dancers, just as the dancers' development is dependent upon her choreography. Twyla is able to make pieces for mixed repertory ballet companies such as The Joffrey Ballet and The American Ballet Theatre, precisely because she is a developed artist with her own company (Twyla Tharp Dance) on which to conduct her choreographic research. Although attempts have been made elsewhere to form mixed repertory modern dance companies they have always failed. Dancers are developed by meeting the rigorous demands of choreographic artists. The corporeal inscription of the dancer needed to give definition to the work of any major modern dance choreographer is such that it precludes mixed repertory. The processes of 'making a dance and making a dancer are bound together' (Susan Foster: *Reading Dancing*). In one's life as a performer one can dance with Trisha Brown, Twyla Tharp and David Gordon, but not successfully at the same time. Even a cursory analysis of the history and development of modern dance would confirm these observations.

A mixed repertory dance company structure does not nurture the development of performers as artists, let alone the development of choreographic artists. What it does produce are step arrangers, who are legion. In Australia we clearly lack the structures to produce modern dancers and hence modern dance choreographers.

* * *

Choreographic artists like all creative artists are self-defined. They are not brought into existence by companies set up specifically to develop them, nor are they developed by occasional commissions by the various mixed repertory companies around the country (almost all Australian dance companies fall into these categories). I am not advocating that these companies be dismantled as for the present they are all we have. But are they all we want?

Members of these companies, precisely because they are already funded and hence 'professional', are perceived to be the elite of the dance community and dominate 'artist' membership of funding agencies. This has ensured the future of these companies⁵ but has done little for the development of dance as an art form in Australia. Until developmental dance policy is implemented there is no way to break the stranglehold that the major companies have on funding. Catch 22: Until very recently artist members

3. The illiteracy of Australian dancers referred to earlier in discussion of ballet is also pertinent here. Illiteracy is not simply a benign problem. Arts bureaucrats and critics become experts in 'what is', and resistant to more informed (ie. dance literate) opinion.
4. By mixed repertory I mean companies that do the work of more than one choreographer.
5. Theatre Board records over the past ten years show clearly how financially advantaged companies have been while their artistic directors or administrators were board or panel members. Of course this could be merely a matter of coincidence and may mean no more than that the artistic directors and administrators of the best companies have been board and panel members of the Theatre/Performing Arts Board during this period. The fact that this situation has gone unremarked upon in the public domain for so long is perhaps more telling.

could not be in receipt of direct Theatre Board funding. This ruling did not exclude artistic directors of companies whose funding was perceived to be indirect. This effectively eliminated individual artists and disenfranchised all outside the company system.

* * *

The predicament of dance in Australia is further compounded by the mechanisms of patronage here. The co-operation and rationalisation of resources between State and Federal Government funding agencies has effectively eliminated diversity and this situation is exacerbated by the fact that there is very little corporate or private foundation funding to appeal to. Australia's relatively small population supports only a few major arts festivals and these are tightly controlled by a small number of arts bureaucrats. When all these factors are taken into account the picture that emerges is of a very highly centralized system of patronage/arts funding. It is difficult to see how such a system can support diversity of practice, especially in Australia where the arts community is small and widely spread.

* * *

My intention in undertaking this analysis is to draw attention to the state of current practice in Australia. What our ballet lacks in stylistic authenticity is compensated for in 'spunky muscularity' — a 'virile style' befitting a young and vigorous colony! In Australian practice where 'real dance' is defined by ballet, modern dance is indeed its retarded cousin. Most so-called modern dance, post-modern dance, recent post-modern dance etc. references modern dance in name only. Philosophically the concerns are the same as for the ballet and the work produced reflects the impoverishment of what is essentially a colonial practice. This deplorable situation will change only when Australian choreographers are defining contemporary practice. But this development cannot happen whilst we lack the structural and financial support necessary to produce choreographic artists. If we cannot support the development of choreographers we can expect no significant Australian dance development.

The lack of continuity of staff employment within the Australia Council, and consequent lack of historical perspective, has ensured that comprehensive and coherent analysis has never been undertaken by this body, hence no strategy for dance development has ever been initiated. Dance policy development has been relegated, it would seem, to the too-hard basket; what masquerades as 'policy' is the blatantly political and revolves around cost analysis and access. (Access to what and at what cost?)

Although this 'policy' reflects current practice, in no way is it capable of informing or challenging this practice. In the absence of developmental policy what we are left with is support for the status quo and this support encourages yet more sumptuous versions of the same trite fare. Without strategic policy development and implementation our future can be no different from our impoverished past and we will all be the losers.

* * *

It is tempting to blame the arts community or the funding agencies for the malaise of dance in Australia, but more correctly understood this state of affairs is a symptom and expression of the Australian condition — dislocated, isolated, seduced and abandoned. The condition of dislocation and isolation has induced a particular brand of larrikanism, defensiveness and a propensity to believe in the jingoistic mythologies that the media are thrusting upon us - 'Celebration of a nation', 'You helped make this state great', 'They said we'd never make it' etc.

And what of seduction and abandonment?

Just as women are aesthetically defined within the Judeo-Christian tradition by their relationships to men (wife, mother, sister, whore) so dance in our tradition has defined itself by its relationships to the other proper arts (music, visual, dramatic), all of which are male dominated — Terpsichore curtsey-

ing behind Dionysus. In our tradition the perception of the body is related to the fate of women, ie. the body and women are devalued. The medium of dance is the body and this is a devalued medium. More particularly, Australian society is one of the most homophobic in the world. This in combination with the position of women reveals much about our arts practice and especially the perception of dance – that is, that dance is, or should be, youthful, muscular, sexy, glamorous etc., in other words, the whore.

In a phallocratic society arts practice is synonymous with women's work (artists weaving the cultural fabric). Of course political bodies have shown themselves only too willing to oblige with cultural erections. The construction of the numerous multi-arts complexes across Australia is yet another costly testimony to the 'edifice complex' of Australian politicians and to the absence of informed analysis. Many of these physical structures are inappropriately located and most are ineffectual for the development of the arts.

The insignificant part that the arts play in Australian politics is perhaps a true reflection of the place of the arts in Australian culture generally. Lumped together with Sport, the Environment, Tourism and the Territories, and occupying the minor part of this relatively junior portfolio, the arts are truly abandoned.

* * *



SHONA INNES

THE TEACHING OF BALLET

Ballet teaches an unquestioning obedience to authority at all times. It teaches that success in dancing is based on the achievement of a place in a hierarchical structure and that dancers exist only to please others. What seems to be a form of creative expression turns out to be a form of self control negating personal freedom even at the most fundamental level of speech and thought.

The correct execution of the technique is the primary physical focus and in this way the body is ordered and controlled in every detail. This control emanates from the teachers and is internalized by the dancers, always ensuring that teachers hold the power and dancers remain obedient. The body is the site for the enacting of this relationship and an understanding of the kinesiology of ballet can reveal much about its philosophy.

* * *

EMULATION OF A FORM — CONTRADICTION OF THE BODY'S WISDOM

The action of raising the arms above the head — the prime-movers for this are the upper trapezius muscles, those that attach to the upper border of the shoulder blade and insert at the base of the skull. As these muscles contract to raise the shoulder blade their partners at the lower end of the scapula lengthen.

The action of depressing the shoulder blades, (pushing the shoulders down), is done by the lower trapezius. As they contract to pull down on the scapula their partners at the upper end lengthen. The two muscle groups operate as a team, the upper group lengthening while the lower group contracts and vice versa.

In ballet, the action of lifting the arms up to fifth position over the head involves the upper trapezius group. This action in its raw untutored form often means that the space between the raised arm and the neck is quite small. In order to maintain the picture of a long neck it is necessary to open this space. This is done by making some muscular and bony adjustments — the arms are rounded rather than being held in a parallel vertical relationship to each other, and then the student is asked to push their shoulders down to reduce the bulk of the contracted upper trapezius. Pushing the shoulders down means contracting the lower trapezius muscles. The body is then receiving two instructions which would normally exclude each other. The two trapezius group of muscles are asked to contract at the same time in reference to the same bone — the scapula.

Most people experience much difficulty with this action of raising the arms over the head and they wonder why. They are often chastised and ridiculed for the stupidity of their error, as it is seen as a beginner's mistake. Unfortunately, their teachers rarely wonder why, and in accordance with tradition they repeat the instruction exactly as they heard it during their own years of training. Their programming to accept information without question perpetuates this 'push your shoulders down' rule.

Another major factor which encourages this type of instruction is the fact that it does produce the muscular aesthetic which ballet requires. It is not enough that work is done; it must be seen to be done. There should be evidence. One force opposing another of equal force produces a particular physical state, a particular look, a particular mind set. It is itself a celebration of the 'great struggle' of life. Partly, it is the struggle to stop time. This particular characteristic of the ballet technique is seen most clearly in the leaping and jumping of the men. They attempt to suspend themselves in mid-air at the height of their elevation. There is a special physical stamina and mental set required to achieve this feat and watching their efforts to hold the moment is fascinating and exciting.

However, this is no reason to unquestioningly accept the training regime which creates this kind of spectacular event. My main concern is for the health of dancers, their physical as well as their psychological well-being. And I should say that this applies to men doing ballet as well as women. If you go into any major ballet school and look at the young boys who are training there, it is clear what kinds of major distortions are going on in their perceptions of themselves and how they relate to other people.

What I see when I look at their bodies is extreme tension in all areas and a kind of striving within the body to achieve a certain sculptured look, so that everything is in its place. For example, the way that the shoulder blades are drawn together and depressed to create the illusion of a broad, open chest. Even though these young boys have small chests, they are expected to develop broad chests and arms as quickly as possible so they can do their assigned work of lifting and framing females.

While the required musculature hasn't developed, they are pushing and prodding their bones to achieve that state. Pulling and pushing the shoulder blades together and down and holding them in that position produces the right look and satisfies the work ethic. But as a state to be in constantly, it is very undesirable. The effect on the breathing mechanism, the rib-cage and the emotional centres within that is profound, and I'm sure it causes or at least exacerbates psychological problems later in their lives.

It also produces a body which has very limited range of movement because of the amount of muscular holding which accumulates within it. It is only capable of producing certain kinds of movements in

certain ways. So not only is there a reduction in the range and kind of movement which can be performed, there are restrictions on the expression, the dynamic and the qualities available. All possibilities are honed down so that there is only *one* quality, *one* movement, *one* range. Everything is known, predicted and held. Philosophically, this is consistent and creates a safe, secure system, but physically, it can be damaging and dangerous. The more tense and immobile a body becomes, the more likely it will be prone to injury.

Finally, this detailed codification of movement and behaviour acts as a controlling mechanism not only over the physical body, but over the dancer as a person. For the disciplinarians it is a very economical method of exercising power, as it mainly involves the dancer internalizing that role.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault speaks of the growth of scientific knowledge about the body in the 18th century, and the consequent viewing of it as some kind of fantastic machine or object. Much of what he has to say is pertinent to the physical ordering produced by ballet.

He observes that there were discoveries made concerning the 'subtle coercion' of the body,

of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself — movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body . . . it implies an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement. These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called 'disciplines'.¹

Even though Foucault was using the training of soldiers as his main example here, there are some striking correspondences with ballet training, especially in relation to the partitioning of time, space and movement. Descriptions of the manner of executing certain ballet movements are revealing in the light of Foucault's statements. Talking about *battement frappé*, Tamara Karsavina says,

Two very important points should be observed. The *degagé* goes out in a direct line with the *sur le cou-de-pied* position; that is, the knee remains on the same level whether the foot is *sur le cou-de-pied* or extended in *degagé*. It follows that if the *sur le cou-de-pied* is placed too high, a drop down of the *degagé* will be inevitable . . . Secondly, the ball of the foot must brush the ground before it fully arches in the *degagé* . . . The up and down stretch exercises the toes, the extreme point of the perfect arch of the instep. The brushing movement applies of course, to *battement à terre*. There is no need for it when you do the *frappé* from *demi-pointe* . . . The position of the foot in *sur le cou-de-pied* behind needs a slightly different adjustment. The arch of the instep between toes and heel touches the ankle of the supporting foot. The toe in this position is relaxed, slightly lifted up and points away from the supporting ankle to avoid the appearance of sickling.²

So what this brings me to is the fallacy that the ballet trained dancer has the greatest potential versatility and range for a choreographer, that they could do any style of dancing well, that they could do anything that was asked of them by any choreographer, modern or classical. Ballet trains people to do ballet and these purely ballet trained people are of almost no use to a contemporary modern choreographer.

The held state of the body produces a corresponding fixity of the intellect and emotion which is almost pubescent in a lot of cases. For choreographers who are interested in individuals and in what happens on the inside of a person while they are dancing, pure ballet trained dancers present many difficulties.

This tradition of thinking of ballet as the base of all contemporary dancing filters through to most

1. M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Penguin, 1977); p. 137.

2. Tamara Karsavina, *Classical Ballet — The Flow of Movement*, (A & C Black, London, 1975); p. 303.



of the small modern dance companies in this country, so that even though the dancers within these companies might look like they're doing contemporary work or using modern styles of movement, they're very often people who've been trained in the ballet model and don't have the intellectual, physical and emotional range to be interesting to choreographers who want to deal with immediate realities.

'WHEN IT COMES TO BALLET, NOT ALL BODIES ARE CREATED EQUAL'

WILLIAM HAMILTON, M.D.

Because of the nature of ballet, only a small number of people whose bodies possess a particular set of characteristics are capable of executing the technique with any degree of success. The implication is that bodies that are able to master the technique are not only better instruments but are better people by virtue of their physical attributes. As a result, that small number are clearly differentiated and acquire prestige, legitimization and superiority, not only as dancers, but as human beings.

To the elitism of ballet, I have no real objection. I can't see how it could be any other way considering its aristocratic origins and its anatomical requirements. There are other cultures which specially hand-pick and cultivate dancers for the performance of traditional dance forms, (e.g. Bali), and it doesn't seem strange that Western culture should do the same. However, what does irk me is the pretense that the situation is otherwise — that ballet has an egalitarian spirit. Most teachers of ballet are unaware of the contradiction between ballet as every little girl's dream, and the fact that only a minute proportion of those who begin the training ever see the dream realised.

In my experience, which I think is a fairly standard one, I found myself struggling with this technique for years. As a little girl, I could see myself as another Margot Fonteyn. By the time I reached age eleven, it was becoming very clear to me that my body was lacking some of the vital physical attributes

which ballet requires — a well-arched foot, slightly longer legs in proportion to torso, outward rotation of the thigh bone approaching 180° 'turnout', and flexibility in tendons and ligaments. Fairly easily, I took on the notion that my body was intrinsically wrong, since it didn't measure up to the ideal.

This does not have to be the case if the physical form being learnt is seen to exist outside of the individual and T'ai chi is a good example of this. Like a hand slipping into a glove, the T'ai chi student steps into the form of the movement. This action is done without adjustments or uncertainties. If the desired union does not take place between body and form, the body is not seen as intrinsically wrong, (unlike ballet, where the wrongness of the form becomes the wrongness of the person and the student is held culpable). In the martial arts the goal is achieved by repetition with relaxed concentration coupled with an understanding of the form's philosophy. A martial art form is an embodiment of its philosophy and corrections are given in these terms. However, in ballet, the students are not encouraged to know what its philosophy is and it pretends to be value free, (except to say that as 'pure' movement it is in the art for art's sake category).

FAILURE AND THE GLIMMER OF HOPE

For a long time, when recalling my ballet training, all I could feel was that I had been damaged by the experience, that all my effort was a waste, that I had been duped by the idea that hard work is character building and good for you. I felt like I hadn't learned anything worthwhile from all those years of study. Most puzzling of all, I couldn't understand why I continued with it when the odds were so overwhelming. I hated going to classes, but I still went. There seemed to be no other choice. Ballet was the epitome of excellence in dance and all other forms were inferior to it.

Many other people who studied ballet and found it too difficult just walked away from it. Something drove me to continue with it, to find out exactly why I couldn't perform it. There was a challenge there that I couldn't ignore. Walking away from it meant failure. But staying also meant failure.

The ballet studio is a haven and a hot house for notions like: there is nothing that I know; there is nothing I can do; I am much less than perfect; I have very little to offer. This is correct thinking. The dancer can feel good about feeling bad about herself. Ballet gave me a way of using this disbelief in myself and for that to be seen as a desirable trait within the ballet studio. To see myself as much less than perfect was the stimulus I used to work harder — always striving for the unattainable. I was good at putting myself down; I was a disciplinarian and I was a hard worker. I was always trying to 'better myself, believing all the time that I never could.

Because ballet is supposedly the most technically difficult form of western dance, that sets it apart from the others. This difficulty confers superiority on it. It embodies 'the perfect'. But no matter how long you study and dance it, the technical perfection is always out of reach.

I was less than perfect in both my body's formation and my ability to perform the technique. These two factors combined, reinforced a basic lack of self-worth. Very early on, I clearly realised that I would not become a ballet dancer. It seems that my major reason for continuing to study was that there was no other dance form which could legitimize me as a dancer.

Many students who study on a full-time basis at an advanced level realise that they fall short of the physical ideal by one or two vital characteristics. The glimmer of hope that they can eradicate their short-comings drives them to continue their study — if they can just strengthen and enlarge the arch of their feet, if they can just lose some weight from their breasts, if they can just manage to lift their leg higher . . . The glimmer of hope causes all kinds of abuses of the body in the attempt to fit the mould. How is it that these students continue to such an advanced level when it is fairly obvious to them and their teachers that they are not going to achieve their dreams? By the time someone has reached this level they have invested too much in terms of time, money and emotional commitment to give up. They continue, despite their better judgement. They have sacrificed many things to make ballet their number one priority, including a working knowledge of the world outside the studio. Their identity is almost totally dependent on being called a ballet dancer.

**'I LOVE THAT SMILE THAT DANCERS HAVE
WHEN THEY'RE TOLD THEY'RE DOING SOMETHING WRONG.'**

So what else does ballet offer all those girls who will never 'make it'? A traditional education for a middle class or aristocratic woman included a study of music, dancing, correspondence, needlework, elocution and deportment. The studies were undertaken with the aim of fostering particular personality characteristics and teaching fundamentals of social protocol. These days, it is generally thought that the study of ballet continues this tradition, by teaching good posture and discipline and by cultivating a pure and genteel spirit. It fulfills the traditional model of what a girl should be — totally accepting of the word of authority, always available, non-intellectual ('lightweight'), and always beautiful to look at.

Gentility of spirit in many dancers is just a euphemism for timidity and diffidence. Their dance training teaches them an unquestioning attitude to information and those who provide it.

. . . says critic and balletomane Norma McLain Stoop . . . Besides sweat, I think their discipline is the thing I love. The very top dancers are told, sometimes not too nicely, that they're doing something wrong. I've heard company members being screamed at and told they're absolutely terrible, and except for the little kids, there are no tears. There's never any argument. There's a smile exchanged. I love that smile that dancers have when they're told they're doing something wrong . . . '3



So central is criticism to the ballet experience that it becomes, perversely, a compliment. If a teacher bothers to recognize a student and stops to inform her of her faults, it is because he feels that there is hope and that the student is worthy of his time and attention. In this system, even anger is a kind of gift: dancers worry if they are not chastised. They know that many teachers communicate only with prized students and neglect those they feel are unworthy.⁴

The use of anger as a teaching aid has another more general function besides that of setting up the hierarchy of prized and unworthy students. Many teachers direct anger towards their students as a method of driving them to achieve better results, but it is as a method of intimidation and control that anger finds its most productive use. Especially with young children, the anger of the teacher fills them with fear — the fear of rejection or disapproval. As a result their bodies become tense and filled with apprehension as they search to find the movement and behaviour response which will please the teacher and pacify their anger.

Fear of disapproval, of being wrong, silences dancers very effectively and so maintains political power in the hands of the teachers and choreographers. This relationship to authority is highlighted when you observe a group of dancers and actors working.

In the theater, where Stoop spends much of her time observing actors talk back to directors, there is far less submission to authority. In ballet, someone yells at the dancers, they nod meekly, and do as they are told; someone insults them and they smile sweetly. "This is an ideal setup for a productive world", Stoop says. "You don't get talking back in the dance world. People acknowledge the right of the person who knows more to tell them what to do".⁵

A MASTER IS SOMEONE WHO STARTED BEFORE YOU DID . . .

He begins from the centre and not the fringe. He imparts an understanding of the basic principle of the art before going on to the meticulous details, and he refuses to breakdown the (tai chi) movements into a one-two-three drill so as to make the student into a robot. The traditional way . . . is to teach by rote, and to give the impression that the long periods of boredom are the most essential part of training. In that way a student may go on for years and years without ever getting the feel of what he is doing. . . . A master teaches essence.⁶

What do ballet teachers teach? Is it dance? Ballet teachers teach much more than they are aware of. They know they teach the vocabulary, the technique and the discipline, but they do not see that they are involved in a strict process of changing and moulding behaviour.

Many teachers think they are simply teaching people how to move their bodies in space according to the ballet vocabulary — very straight-forward, cut and dried. This equates with their idea of what dancing is. Ironically, because of the content and method of traditional ballet training many students never 'dance' at all (in the fullest sense of physical/spiritual expression), but they do learn how to behave according to the rules. The general ignorance about the power of classical ballet as a behaviour control encourages the traditional approaches to be passed on unchanged.

The vocabulary of ballet is set and codified to the nth degree, so the teaching of it is seen as a totally objective transference of information. The simplicity of this view operates like a cover or distraction

3. Suzanne Gordon, *Off Balance* (McGraw-Hill, N.Y., 1983); p. 208.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

6. Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* (Fontana, Great Britain, 1986); p. 34.

and allows other things to be taught without ever being referenced or included in the syllabus or course outline.

A strict concept of success and failure accompanies the teaching of this vocabulary and is in fact integral to every moment a student spends learning it. It is one of the major functions of the training as a whole to create a hierarchy of success. The tradition speaks of those who 'made it' and those who didn't, those who succeeded and those who failed. Both these categories of dancers are involved in teaching. In general, teachers who have had a reasonable degree of success as ballet dancers can impart an enjoyment of the experience of dancing and moving. Teachers who have experienced the pain of failure (that's 90% of all teachers) often finish up teaching exactly that.

Why do ballet teachers teach? For many it is simply a means of survival. It earns them a living, pays the rent and requires no further study. And probably best of all, it means they don't have to confront the difficulties of taking on another occupation outside the ballet world. So these people pass on the tradition without alterations and without question. For those who actively involve themselves in teaching it becomes a task of creating extraordinary dancers, or more broadly speaking, they engage themselves in creating another class of human being. These beings are the models, they are 'rare birds' as Anne Woolliams remarks. If they remain undiscovered they are "paragons . . . singing in the wilderness, but to fulfill all possibilities this rare creature should also have the added bonus to be seen at the right time, in the right place, by the right person. Only those who have been found can be cherished, and then everything must be done to retain their song and the colours of their plumage".⁷

And this is the job of the teachers, to safeguard the future by continuing to discover and create these models of excellence. The model is the yardstick and all other beings can then place themselves in relation to it and so maintain the hierarchy of success/failure. The power which the role of teacher embodies is another attraction in teaching as an occupation. In western society generally there is a great ignorance of this power — both of its use and abuse. The dance world is no exception. Having been denied personal freedom and power during their training, dancers who take on a teaching position find themselves in a situation which is very unfamiliar to them yet very attractive. The title 'teacher' means all-knowing. Suddenly they have somehow acquired an enormous store of knowledge and the unquestioning response of their students. This knowledge means power over bodies and it is the reward for enduring years of hard work and sacrifice.

Most often, not having developed analytic and verbal skills of their own during their training, dancers will often fall back on the behavioural models of the teachers who taught them. Once again the system perpetuates itself by denying the individual access to skills and information other than what is set out in the hidden agenda.

DISCIPLINE FOR EXPRESSION vs DISCIPLINE FOR CONTROL

Discipline is a strategy which can take you through the doing of something to achieve a specific goal. It is goal oriented. It suggests that the 'doing' has some difficulty associated with it, either physical or emotional. A discipline imposes a fixed time schedule over the activity so that personal desires, which would interfere with the doing of the practice, are by-passed, in order to arrive at the goal required. Discipline is a problem when it becomes a way of life rather than being seen as a means to an end.

The ballet tradition uses discipline as its sole strategy for teaching its physical subject matter and so students find themselves with only one mental approach for their study. The tradition's understanding of the meaning of discipline is narrow and fixed and so prohibits other options.

In Thalia Mara's book *Third Steps in Ballet*, she commends ballet's ability to teach discipline. Her viewpoint is still widely held and continues to prompt many parents to send their children to ballet classes.

7. Anne Woolliams, *Ballet Studio* (Ure Smith, Aust., 1978); p. 15.

8. Thalia Mara, *Third Steps in Ballet* (Constable, Lond., 1958); p. 7.

The tendency, today, to make everything easy for the developing child is certainly no boon to that child. The habits of concentration, perseverance and the ability to face up to challenging problems by meeting and overcoming them must be formed in childhood. One reason that exposure to ballet is so good for children is that ballet is such a highly disciplined art. The child learns to discipline both the body and the mind, something that stands us all in good stead in adult life.⁸

It is certainly true that the ability to control and direct one's body and thoughts is a valuable and useful skill. The problem is not with what Mara is saying, but the way this kind of statement is interpreted by most ballet teachers.

When discipline is totally external to the student and is imposed on them, it denies or invalidates any internal knowledge. An awareness of the body's internal workings is vital to keep a balance with the external exigencies of maintaining the discipline. After all, in an ideal situation it is the internal desires which are the motivators for adopting the discipline in the first place. If the student is not in tune with their inner world then the discipline becomes form without substance and the student becomes mindless.

The most common interpretation of discipline by ballet teachers sees discipline as holding the body and mind in a fixed state. As I see it there are two stages to a balanced understanding of what discipline can be. The first is encouraging an awareness of the workings of body and mind.

Then, with this awareness and an understanding of the goal, it is possible to discipline by directing or guiding body and thought through the formal structure of a set of activities. Here the concept of discipline is a facilitator for a specific learning experience but I often see discipline being used to teach discipline and I suspect it is just a euphemism for subjugation.

The most common use of discipline is as a method of controlling large groups of people by just a few. It relies for its success and economy on each individual internalizing the persona of the disciplinarian, thereby regulating and controlling their own behaviour. It then appears that any schedules that the individual imposes on himself are results of his own wishes. It soon becomes difficult for the student to separate his own true desires from those of the disciplinarian within.

I still wonder too, whether ballet training creates disciplined people or whether it just attracts those who already have a predisposition for that kind of order.

UNTHINKING BODIES

Dancers and Soldiers, Girls and Boys

In the same way that boys are sent to cadets, girls are sent to ballet classes. The public is trained to see these two activities as vastly different things. Yet the method employed is basically the same though the products may look worlds apart. Both activities teach discipline as self control and unquestioning responses to commands.

The major similarity between cadet and ballet training is that neither soldiers or ballet dancers ever talk back, the instructor says jump, and they say 'how high?' In fact, a dancer probably wouldn't even say that. They would be too afraid to ask the question and exhibit their ignorance, thus tempting the anger or disapproval of their teacher. The strategy would be to try and guess what the teacher wanted to see and silently provide it, hoping to hit on the correct response.

The activity is defined in the narrowest possible terms and so is the body (the person). The activity is: moving with obedience. A dancer/soldier is: one who moves with obedience. They immediately respond to an instruction and there is only ever one correct response. Personal deviations and changes which would interfere with the economy of producing the activity are held in check by the restricted definition of the body and the occupation.

Dancers should be seen and not heard

By restricting the verbal capacity through this notion of discipline (not talking in class) and through the simple idea that moving and talking (thinking) are mutually exclusive, dancers rarely get the chance to use their tongues and speak their minds. It is very difficult to order and analyze your thoughts if you are unable to verbalize them. The simple act of speaking can clear the mind and make space for deductions and mental progressions.

Having been through this regime many teachers are unpractised in the process of analysis. They do not have the tools of experience to begin to analyze what they are doing. Many of them, I'm sure, would not even see it as an option or a need. There is an enduring naivety about them which perpetuates the system.

The Body is the Tool

Dance training methods in general encourage a learning process in which dancers take little responsibility for their own education. They continually hand over their bodies and their minds to those who occupy positions of authority. The body is the tool of the choreographer. The mind is narrowly defined as 'the will'. The will drives the body, and is separate from it. The separation of mind and body produces a kinesthesia which is restricted and contained. Since the mind is no longer 'in' the body, sensation and perception are seriously affected.

. . . dancers are taught not to participate in the creative process. They empty themselves out and allow the choreographer to fill them up. "In ballet, the dancer isn't really a creator," explains former Boston ballet dancer Rachel Isadora Maiorano, . . . "You're there to dance, not to think or suggest, but just to focus. The difference between the dancer and other artists is that in dance, you don't use your experience. You can get by being a superb technician and being entirely unthoughtful."⁹

MIRRORS, VISIONS, SURVEILLANCE

Another major similarity between dancers and soldiers is that their respective disciplines order their bodies to be viewed. And conversely, they are viewed in order that their bodies can be disciplined.

Dancers and soldiers are always being observed. It is taken for granted that no learning takes place unless the instructor is present and watching. The participants are 'held' in their places not only by the rigid set of physical moves which they must perform, but by the close observation from their instructors. The instruments of power are physical conformity and visual availability.

The loss of personal power which is inherent in the event of being constantly observed holds the whole network together — the dancers constantly surveying themselves, the surveyors scrutinizing their students and being in turn surveyed by their supervisors. The mechanisms of power involved here, Michel Foucault addresses in detail in *Discipline & Punish*. Speaking of labourers in factories and students in academic institutions, he says,

Thanks to the techniques of surveillance, the 'physics' of power, the hold over the body, operate according to laws of optics and mechanics, . . . without recourse, in principle at least, to excess, force or violence. It is a power that seems all the less 'corporal' in that it is more subtly 'physical'.¹⁰

Economy of surveillance is increased if people are trained to internalize the surveyor. Unlike soldiers, dancers use mirrors for this purpose and it is this factor alone which can disguise the fact that ballet training is every bit as authoritarian as military training. In the absence of a teacher the mirror can substitute more than adequately, however the two are rarely separated. Dancers use the mirror to monitor

9. S. Gordon, op. cit., p. 107.

10. M. Foucault, op. cit., p. 177.

themselves and so actively participate in the control and management of their own bodies. And as Suzanne Gordon says, it is most often a painful experience....

To study and correct themselves, the dancers gaze intently at their image in the mirrors that surround them. From an early age, they have developed a scrupulous dependence upon these mirrors, an indispensable feature of any ballet studio. An almost painful fascination, this scrutiny is hardly narcissistic because it holds so little pleasure.¹¹

Mirrors in a ballet studio are supposedly there as teaching tools. However, many teachers don't consider the fact that they have the choice of using them or not using them. There is a silent understanding that they are obligatory. Ballet dancers rely on the reflected image to let them know whether they are executing the technique correctly. Mirrors do not lie, or so they say, and they are constant reminders of a student's shortcomings. Dancers then develop all kinds of minute adjustments and compensations to play the game of manipulating the image.

The apparent objectivity and distance which a mirror provides to the student emphasizes the notion of dancers as beings 'to be seen' rather than beings to be experienced. It sets up a distance between them and their reflected image which parallels the distance between them and their audience. Finally, it restricts their own experience of themselves to that of sights or visions.

* * *

In Western culture there is little acknowledgement that the training of the body is also the training of the mind and spirit. Dance is conveniently seen as a purely bodily activity. Ballet, being the epitome of what is considered to be dance, supports and builds on this notion by teaching a concept of the separation of mind and body.

It is important that an alternative training is offered to offset this view. There is a need for a dance training which takes into account the whole person not just their physical presence. Any definition of dancing would have to include freedom for the intelligence and the spirit but it is rare in dancers who are technically very competent.

Ballet's influence on the dance world is subtle and profound and until recently has been beyond reproof. As a modern dancer I am concerned to find many aspects of ballet's training method being used in the training of modern dancers. The basic tenets of ballet are not compatible with those of the modern tradition (especially the post-modern) and it does seem that those who place themselves within the modern stream, should realise the kinds of borrowings and compromises which have taken place. If teachers and choreographers are aware and clear about where they stand in relation to these two traditions, dancers can then make informed choices about their working lives.

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11. S. Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.





SALLY GARDNER

POSTSCRIPT ON DANCE TRAINING

I.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to take the body for granted. Contemporary theories, many of them articulated within or influenced by the intellectual tradition initiated by feminism, have begun to uncover the processes by which bodies 'become integral to the operations of power'.¹ It is no longer possible to speak of a 'neutral or "natural" body — only (of) forms of the body produced within particular socio-historical contexts'.² However, despite the theoretical developments, it is true that the processes of formation of particular bodies in dance has until relatively recently remained largely unscrutinised.

What does *to become a dancer* mean in practice? The articles in this magazine pursue this question in terms of the way power is exercised in the making of dancers and also in terms of the kinds of meanings that can be generated through and as a result of these processes.

In this culture one merits the title *dancer* above all by acquiring a technique — a way of moving, a set of skills that is codified, recognisable and approved. Of course this is true also in other cultures, such as in India or Bali. There, however, the dances and their dancers are embedded in philosophical and religious traditions that are thousands of years old. The role of the dance is to affirm these traditions, albeit perhaps by giving them a contemporary relevance. In the West, however, there is an assumption that the dancer, trained by definition, is capable of expressing whatever she/he or the choreographer may want to communicate and is in some sense freer or has a greater range of expressive possibilities than, say, an untrained person. It is against this assumption that the effectiveness or actual outcome of dance training must be assessed.

The acquiring of a technique, the substance of most dance training, can be thought of as a process of inscription whereby, among other things, the body adopts and transmits through moving in defined ways, a set of values. At the same time as certain values are inscribed so other possible communications are silenced or repressed. In ballet and in contemporary dance, even though the latter often refers back to the once liberatory forms of modern dance, training encourages subjection to an order or discipline whose function is to contain within a strict decorum the individual's teeming and idiosyncratic corporeality.

* * *

II.

Notwithstanding these deep, subtle and sophisticated plays of power on and around the body, it is well to remember that there (still) exists within the institution of dance and particularly within some dance institutions a more crass and overt kind of domination. Recent events at the Victorian College of the

Arts bear witness to this. Last year almost half the students in the School of Dance³ were failed following a late and arbitrary change in assessment procedures. These procedures, instigated without warning at the end of the year, had the effect of a bias in favour of classical dance and performance⁴, disadvantaging students whose strengths lay elsewhere or even students whose personal progress and participation may have been exemplary and who may have attained high marks in previous years.

The then Dean of the School⁵ maintained that the procedures had become necessary because, due to a lack of continuity of staffing, full attendance and progress records in classical dance had not been kept. However, the occasion of the School's own failure here was not taken, as one might have thought, to indicate a need for discussion and questioning of its organisation, its aims, its teaching standards and practices, nor to raise questions about the ethics of the institution's relations with its students. Rather it became the moment for an unprincipled and contemptuous exercise of power.

The precise motives for these actions are probably complex. They appear to involve, at least in part, a reaction by the School's leadership against students perceived to be impervious to the inscriptions of a particular technique. The students themselves, however, through these events and their own subsequent actions of protest⁶ will at least have become clearer about the political nature of the training process they have chosen to pursue.

These events are outlined here not only because, locally, the operations of power make it difficult to conceive of where else they might come under public scrutiny, but also because they are a reminder of an immediate and urgent dimension to the subject of bodies and power.

* * *

1. see Philippa Rothfield, *Habeus Corpus: Feminism, Discourse and the Body*, in this issue.
2. *ibid.*
3. The Victorian College of the Arts is a College of Advanced Education. The School of Dance offers degree and diploma courses in Performance (classical and modern), Notation, Choreography and Teaching Studies.
4. In classical dance and character dance the entire year's work was assessed on a one and a half hour examination — a practical class executed before a panel consisting of examiners from both outside the college (including members of the Australian Ballet Company) and from within it (teachers and the Dean). However, the standard, publicised assessment criteria for all practical subjects require an assessment in which half the student's mark should derive from an examination and half from a mark for attendance, participation and progress throughout the year. As regards the assessment criteria for the examination and guidelines for assigning an A,B,C,D, or Fail, the Dean himself admitted never having seen them. The College administration must take some responsibility here for failing to adequately educate and inform its appointee, a dancer, on the ethics, rules and protocol of running a tertiary institution.
5. the 'interim Dean, appointed to head the School during the (lengthy) period when selection procedures to fill the position left vacant by the departure of Anne Woolliams were taking place.
6. The students' well organised and sustained protest has now resulted in a compromise settlement with all students being given a pass in classical dance and being able to proceed to the next year or to graduate, albeit without proper grading.



SUSIE FRASER

*LIFE DOESN'T STOP
IT JUST CHANGES SHAPE:*

*DANCING OUT OF
CONFINEMENT*

*Pregnancy, birth and dancing:
a conversation.*

For the performer in theatre or dance, pregnancy has historically been regarded as a calamity — an event capable of ruining a woman's career or, at the very least, leading to a lengthy 'rest'. It was something to be feared, suppressed or at least disguised for as long as possible if she wished to continue to earn her living as a performer.

After several decades of active feminism, women's sexuality can no longer be seen as apolitical: the traditional role of mother has been reevaluated, and the role women performers play in presenting alternative role models has been explored in women's theatre and art practices. We now have legislation making it illegal to discriminate against the pregnant woman in the workplace, yet these laws are rarely relevant in affording any protection to the performing artist.



For the dancer the decision to have a child is still one with far reaching ramifications for her work. It also offers the chance to challenge the lingering taboo of 'confinement' which still renders the representation of pregnancy in live performance a blank.

In the light of these issues I decided to talk to Eva Karczag when she was in Melbourne last year. Eva works with release and improvisational techniques; is a certified teacher of the Alexander Technique; was a founding member of Dance Exchange 1976-1979; a dancer with the Trisha Brown Company 1979-1985; and presently performs and teaches in NYC and throughout the US, Europe and Australia. In February 1987 she became a mother. In June 1987 Eva toured Australia teaching and performing in Sydney and Melbourne. Over lunch one Saturday in Melbourne, accompanied by her four month old baby son, Bryn, Eva talked with friends Jude Walton, Rachel Fensham and Susie Fraser. We were interested to know what perspective her years of investigation of the body as a dancer had given her to pregnancy and birth, and how these experiences might link back into her work.

I decided to leave the material in its original form as a conversation — with its meanderings and breaks. Issues get interrupted, take off in side shoots and return to be developed. Conversation is not so much about necessarily having arrived at conclusions, it is rawer more unmediated and more malleable matter and, as mothering is partly the art of interruption and of picking up, I think the form is well suited to the subject matter.

SUSIE FRASER



'into my body and into him...'

- E I enjoyed being pregnant but I was really happy to get my body back again.
- S Did it really stop feeling like your body?
- E No, it just felt like my body with someone else . . . (laughter). It was quite easy to deal with because I didn't get very big until the end.
- S And do you think that was because of the way that you were working with your body?
- E Yes, I think it was the way I was working with my body and the way I was eating; I went macrobiotic. But I also think it was the way I was holding myself, making room for him in my back.
- S And letting him go that way rather than . . .
- E . . . yes back and up rather than down and out!
- R Did you work on that sense consciously?
- E Oh yes — and I would try and exchange as much as I could with friends, Alexander friends, so that I could get as much hands-on information going into my body and into him: because I thought that he would gain . . .

B Cry Cry Cry.

All OOH OOH OOO OOO THERE THERE.

* * *

**'a full-bellied creature,
moving - around dance'**

- J What about dancing when you were pregnant, because you did perform?
- E Yes I did, and I taught all the way through. I think I stopped a week and a half before I delivered.
- R You were teaching Alexander?
- E Yes, I also taught a weekend movement workshop at the end of January and he was born on the 23rd of February. That was a lot because I was there all day and had to deal with many people, but it was also nice to be moving. And performing. I performed in New York when I was five months pregnant and I performed in Amsterdam when I was seven months. I enjoyed dancing and feeling the differences in my body. When I performed all my friends who knew that I was pregnant said, "Oh yes, we could see," and all the people who didn't know said, "Oh no, we couldn't see it, you couldn't tell". So that was kind of interesting.
- S Did it change the way you felt inside your danc-

ing? Your relationship to your dancing?

- E There was a lot of feeling about having the child. I felt my sense of myself expanding, becoming fuller. I'm sure that went into my movement. Also the kinds of movements that came up. In the piece I do a whole floor section but with my belly I couldn't roll. So that section had to change completely.
- S How did it become?
- E Much more of a squatting, wide, kind of full-bellied creature, moving-around dance, instead of being able to smash into the floor and out of the floor. So that was a totally different sense. When I first started pushing I . . . the moving that I did in labour was a lot of semi-squatting and hanging off, like the edge of the tub was a really good place, or we have a pillar that I could hang off, or I would drape myself over the table so that my belly hung off. Just to be resting there was helpful, for my belly just to hang. Then when I started pushing, I started squatting, and I felt that I could be very open and that gravity was helping me. But then the midwife wanted me to lie on my side and when I got there . . . he was already out some and then he went back up, because of the shifting, and I had to start again pushing. I don't know whether squatting would have allowed my perineum to open up even more, but lying down I had to have an episiotomy, to get him through . . . But I think if I ever have another child I would like to try it squatting the whole way.
- S You do a lot of those deep squatting movements in your performance, do they have that kind of reverberation for you now?
- E Not so much consciously, but there's another piece brewing!
- R Your pelvis actually reorientates itself during pregnancy doesn't it. How did you find that feeling?
- E Well mostly that whole area opens and that felt really nice. Being upright was easier and sometimes when I was lying down during the night I'd feel a pressure, I'd feel the weight of him so much onto my back, it hurt me. It almost felt like the two arms of my pelvis were opening out so far that my sacrum was about to drop through. Working with one of my Alexander friends, she kept saying, 'What I want to do is to push your sacrum in', which is not what you would usually want to do . . .
- S So it was almost an insecure feeling that it could

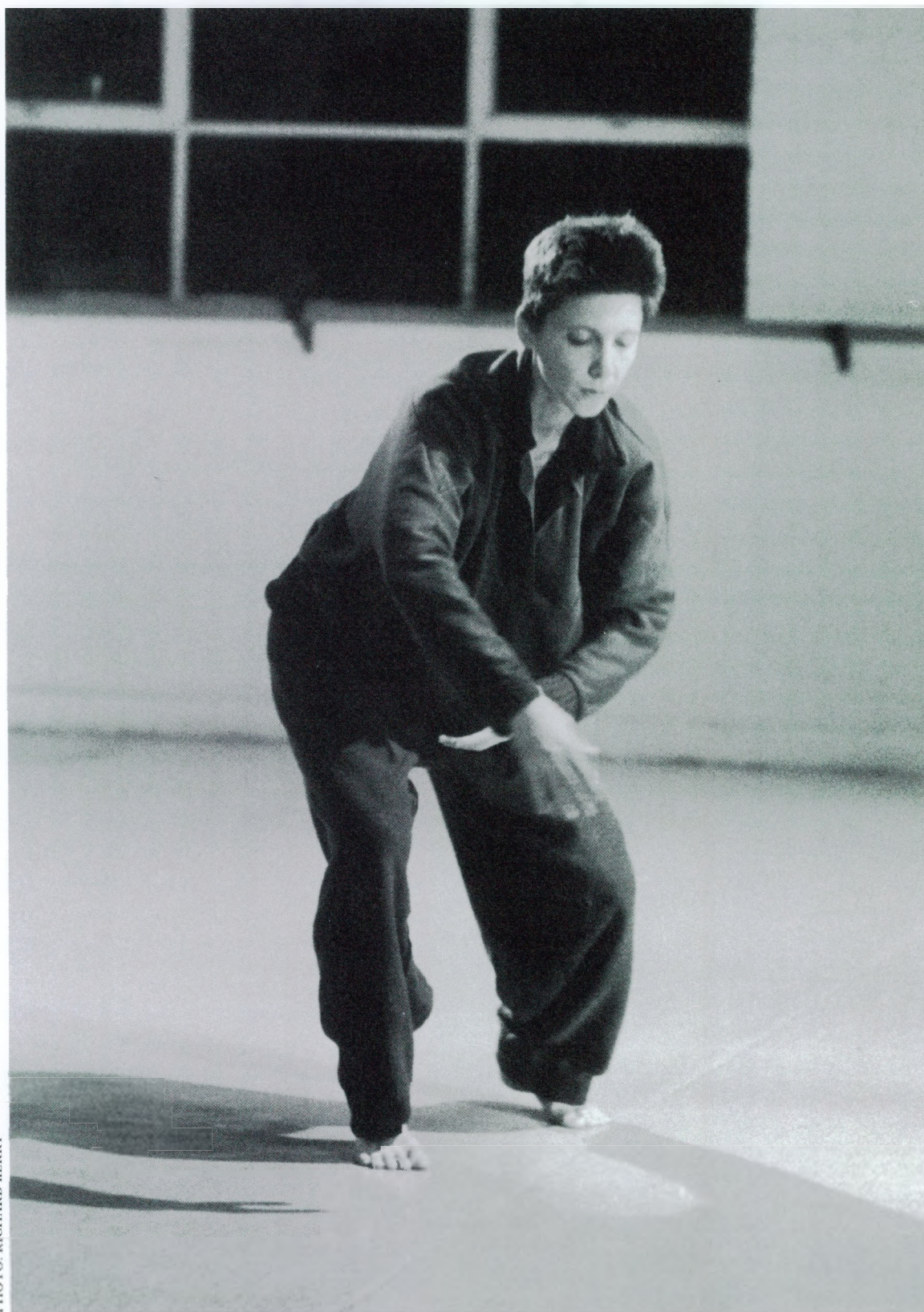


PHOTO: RICHARD KERRY

go too far?

E Yes, but then I had to very consciously image the support that I was getting from the two halves of my pelvis and the support of the sacrum in at the back. Not the other way round.

R And if you could do it perhaps you could also think it in reverse while giving birth?

E I don't know that during the birth I was very conscious of working on anything. It felt more to me like I was following rhythms, that the birth itself took over. And sounds came out, which was very exciting, and it made the time, because I had a twenty-two hour labour, which seems like a long time, but during the course of it didn't seem long, except right toward the end, just before transition, I felt like I didn't know where to go. Up till then it was almost like following a thread and it just kind of led me through. But the sounds were very primal. They reminded me of being very much like chants or they seemed to be real songs, having rhythms and melodies, and I know different amounts of pain created different intensities.

S Did it feel like dancing at any point?

E Oh yes, the other amazing thing was the changes of energy. At one point it would be mellow, and then there was so much power behind the moving and the sound, it was almost scary. I kept thinking at times, I hope I can remember some of these states because they could be really extraordinary as performance.

R Do you think you do remember them?

E Well I don't remember the pain.

R That's right, you don't remember the pain, because it is so totally of that moment and it is so total. It's like your whole body is engaged.

E I think also that pain is not something that we consciously remember. I think the memory of pleasure stays with us longer. There's something very seductive about the whole experience, it's totality, just the changes, the fullness one feels, the . . .

J Is it sensual?

E Oh definitely. Oh yes, extremely. I felt extremely sensual and sexual while I was pregnant.

R Yes, I did too. I really did like being pregnant. It is very erotic.

E I loved my body, I loved the shape of it, the changes, feeling round, and my breasts filling out and my belly filling out.

R And there's the different — the change in your mind, so that the mind actually relates to rhythm

and flow differently. It did for me.

E I became a lot more mellow. I slowed down a lot. I couldn't rush.

* * *

**'there's an idea that
a pregnant woman is not
a functioning woman...'**

S So it must have been curious performing. I don't know how hyped up you usually get before a performance. Is it usually preceded by some anxiety and rush?

E Oh, sure, I get my nervousness and my jitters and my adrenalin rush and fear of failing.

S Was that put into a slightly different perspective by feeling these different things? I imagine that to be performing whilst pregnant, you would have a very interesting double focus.

E Well, I think it was exciting, also because there's an idea that a pregnant woman is somehow not a functioning woman. So I found it very exciting to work right through.

S It seems quite anarchistically subversive performing pregnant and people not knowing; there's something quite delicious about people taking you to be the same as you were, and you knowing

. . .

E . . . yes, me knowing that I was different. Actually, one thing that people said was that there was a different kind of sensuality to my moving, a softness that I think could have come from being pregnant. But I think that once it was visible then it was really nice to be performing — knowing that people knew and could see, and that I could move. And one of the things people said afterwards was that it was incredible to see how light I could be with this big belly and that it didn't really matter. It didn't really weigh me down and make me immobile. And what was nice was that I felt he gave me energy. For instance, when I was teaching, doing Alexander work with people, I felt that my hands were more vital and vibrant. There was more energy, more heat coming out of them, and it almost felt as if he was supplying me, and that felt very nice. And people actually said that my hands were different. My teaching changed.

* * *

**'I mean do fairies copulate?
do angels...?'**

S We never see pregnant women on the stage, in theatre or dance, or any art form in the western tradition, do we? Do you know of women who have performed pregnant?

R Meredith Rogers did last year in *Running Up a Dress*, which was great, but she dressed in a way to disguise it.

S What about other dancers?

E There's been a couple of women in New York who performed pregnant but I don't think they were too public. They were small down-town performances. But it's a pity because I find the pregnant woman's shape so beautiful.

S I suppose that's connected to the way dance is usually thought of as being extremely athletic . . .

J . . . as well as athletic it's that image of the dancer, you know, without breasts, without bum, without belly. You're not even supposed to be a woman really to be a dancer.

E No, well it's undeniable really — when you're pregnant you're a double woman!

S I still think it's curious though, you think how many ballets are about romantic love.

J That they're not more voluptuous?

S Well that it's all one stage of a sexual relationship, the outcome of that romantic love may be pregnancy and that is never portrayed.

E Well sex is semi-taboo.

J Also women dancers are expected to remain pre-pubescent in their image in order to enhance the voyeurism and fantasy of both the male and female viewer, but for different reasons.

E I think that there is so much fantasy built up in terms of the whole thing, I mean do fairies copulate? do angels copulate? do Swan Maidens?

S But you can have *The Rite of Spring*.

E That caused a real furore because there was more sexuality present than in anything before that. But also what is interesting is that if you see photographs or drawings of ballet dancers from the nineteenth century, they are round, they are not boyish.

J Yes, in the visual arts of that period the image of woman and what was considered seductive in drawing or painting was round, very full.

S There is an assumption in our society that round bodies can't be graceful; yet often when you see a large person moving, there is such precision

and lightness it can be quite fascinating to watch.

E Oh yes.

J Elephants are like that, we have this whole image of them as clumpy but they are so delicate about the way they place their weight down.

E I saw a film of elephants, they were rolling in the mud, and there was such sensuality, it was incredible to see these huge animals just . . . Oh it was beautiful. Often when I work on people one of the things I keep saying is that the body is round — it is three dimensional. We see ourselves as being two dimensional and much flatter than we are. I know one of the most intense experiences I can have is of filling out, of becoming more spacious internally.

S How about choreographing a piece for pregnant women, funded by, say, the Bicentennial Women's Fund? (laughter) No, seriously.

E I don't know if that would be of interest to me because then you would be imposing. I think that a pregnant woman should be able to do the things she does, and that other people do and that other women do, without being seen as a 'special case'. I know that if I make a piece that has its origins in my feelings about being pregnant, or having a child, I would not want that to be too blatantly obvious because it would probably be more interesting . . .

S . . . if those things informed the work.

E . . . yes, rather than 'this is my piece about pregnancy'. Well, I think that maybe women are forced into having to make those statements because it is not allowed to be expressed so much.

J I think that with Mary Kelly's *Post Partum Document*, the emphasis she was placing was to include it as a work of art, as a part of life and therefore as a topic that could be realized in art.

S It's just that it usually doesn't get into the public domain at all.

E And also that she chose an area — I mean, who would usually choose the babies nappies — that was interesting.

S The stains on the nappy liners framed.

E In a way, that is the first tangible thing that a baby creates, too.

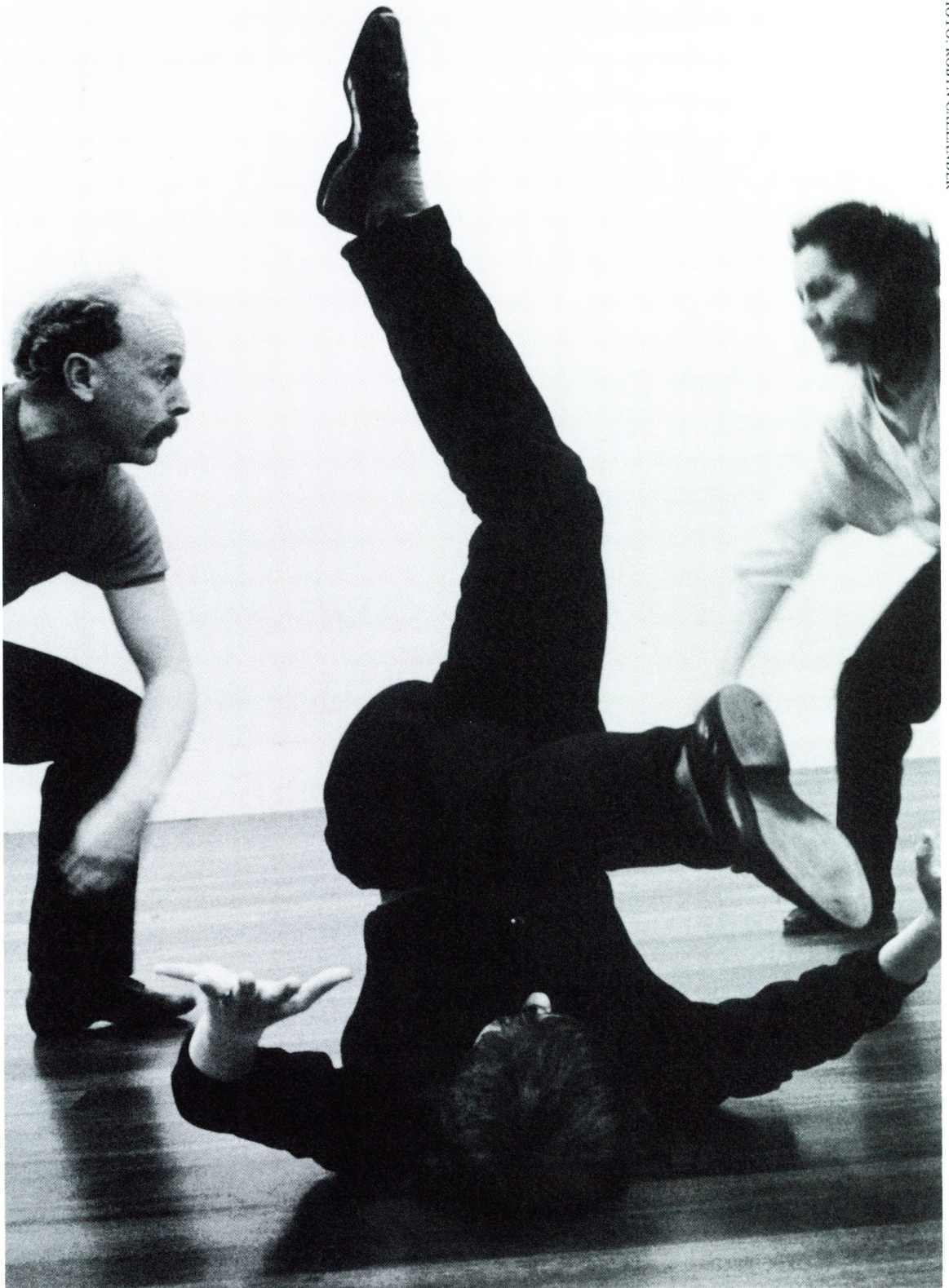
S Very tangible.

E I take Bryn along when I teach, carrying him along in the snuggly, and I think that Nan used to teach with Mark strapped on her back sometimes.

R Life doesn't stop, it just changes shape.

- J The sort of work that you do, Eva, would be simpler. I can see it accommodating and integrating a lot more than, say, the kind of work I do.
- E Because you teach in a college?
- J Yes, the structure is imposed on you.
- S Probably if Eva was still with the *Trisha Brown Company* it would be harder to do.
- E Yes it would be very difficult especially now with all the touring that she's doing.
- S Having your own teaching practice has allowed you to create your own terms.
- E Yes, up to a point — I teach when I need to teach. Valda Setterfield used to tour with her son, when he was quite small. He's there on a lot of the photographs — so I think it's possible. There are a number of other dancers in N.Y. now who have recently had children, and they're continuing to work and dance and tour — I think it is possible.

* * *



Theatre of The Ordinary: l-r Andrew Marrish, Lynden Nicholls, Lynne Santos.

INTERVIEW LYNDEN NICHOLLS
OF THEATRE OF THE
ORDINARY

From a very early age Lynden Nicholls had a conviction that she was going to be a dancer. She attended ballets and pantomimes and saw The Sleeping Beauty when she was six. Both the dance and theatrical elements of the performances excited her. She began ballet at age seven and loved it so much that she knew what she was going to do and be. As a consequence of this early commitment she has always known what to do with her life.

Dancing not only provided Lynden with an activity and a future, it also created a place within her own family where she could achieve and enjoy without talking. There was always her and her dance, a hide-out and a best friend. It took a number of years of performing with ToTO before Lynden was able to use verbal material because for so long dancing had been a non-verbal retreat. The ToTO rehearsal process of positive feedback gave her the confidence to value her own chattiness. When Lynden was pregnant and ordered not to dance she actually enjoyed writing down her experiences. The result of this experience was Pregnant Ponders, a performance which was all talk and no movement.

ANN TREGGAR: When was ToTO formed?

LYNDEN NICHOLLS: When Al (Wunder) came from the States in 1982 I organised twelve people to work together with a performance at the end. Al wrote to me saying that he wanted people who could sing, people who could dance, people who could act and people who could play music. Al had been Terry Sendgraf's (the trapeze person) teacher. Al's connection with Australia came through Bob Beswick, Terry and me. Bob and Al were best buddies at Nikolais. Bob had been to Australia in the early seventies. He was a real inspiration to me, physically wonderful with long grey hair. It was the first time I'd seen a dancer with an undancerly figure. I thought 'Isn't this great, you don't have to be the balletic image.' His technique wasn't right or wrong. I suddenly realised that there were other ways of moving that weren't ballet and weren't Margaret (Lasica). The first show *Pedestrian Crossing*, at Rosina Hall was a great success. People who came to see it loved it and we all found it a great experience. It wasn't totally improvised, it was really a series of connected vignettes, very scored. But there was some singing in it and some talking and movement.

When you say scored you mean a certain structure was set up or certain instructions given?

There were very strong structures set up — the opening of the show was Karen Bond and me. Karen was sitting in a chair, I was sitting on a case and we were improvising writing letters to each other out aloud. What we said we made up on the spot each time but we knew that we were going to be alternating what we were saying and we knew what came next. Out of that show a number of people started working together, improvising together. We did a couple of performances and that was ToTO. Al and I did a couple of duet shows. In 1985 we started performance workshops. There are now six of us working together and we work together four times a week.

You are quite an accomplished person, you have quite a lot of skills.

Ten years ballet and ten years contemporary. I've been dancing twenty seven years which is a long time.

How does your technical background mesh with the work you are doing?

Because I have that background it would be more likely to be the tool that I use through improvising. I tend to communicate physically. If I had a drama background I might perhaps slip into characters more easily, create more dramatic contexts, just because that would be part of my background, my material and my skills, my know-how. I think clarity of expression is really important and if I had no skill it would be much harder for me. I'd probably focus on a particular field, physical skills, moving, dancing, whatever you want to call it, dramatic skills, singing or music skills; I think I'd have to choose one of these and work at it really hard.

What did you find about ballet and contemporary dance that you needed to move away from?

I moved away from ballet because I was frustrated at never being chosen to be the person in the tutu and it dawned on me that I wouldn't be chosen and that I would be a character person. I was seeking a way from technique more into a physicality of things and falling and running really turns me on. Byron Brown was getting into the body without any wrong or right and I discovered the floor, and began to discover how I wanted to move. That was before I discovered how I wanted to move by choreography which I found difficult step for step, and that's what the Modern Dance Ensemble did.

Even if people tried to choreograph for your body you felt that didn't help you in the way you wanted to move?

In a way it did because I enjoyed performing and I always felt that I performed through the steps. However working within such a technical framework and someone else's teaching wasn't my body's technique. I could do it and I loved doing it, but the movements weren't coming truly from me because they didn't come from my body.

With Terry Sendgraf and Byron Brown I thought 'This is me, I exude in the floor' — I was looking for what I enjoyed rather than following what someone else told me to do. In the States I did lots of

Just Your Ordinary Crocodile Attack, Lamenting the Moose, and now Hedgehog Slice. These are the three names we chose out of hundreds in search of the PERFECT title for each performance series we have undertaken in 1986.

Hedgehog Slice has nothing to do with delicious morsels or little animals being chopped into slices!! We are free to choose virtually any name for our shows because what we do is TOTALLY and absolutely improvised. We do not depend on stories, or suggestions from the audience nor do we use the structure of games to present an evening's work. Our interest is to combine our dance, music and language skills to create a single piece of spontaneous theatre based on our impulses as performers.

So although the performance has no pre-conceived format, our rehearsal process involves developing form and continuity from personal impulses. This takes us into abstract, character and naturalistic modes which intertwine throughout our performances. Tonight there will probably be some dancing, a bit of storytelling, maybe even a song or two . . . Content can range from true personal material to outrageous lies and fabrications.

Neither the performers nor the audience know what will happen next.

Theatre of The Ordinary: Programme note

improvisation classes, no right or wrong way, very lightly scored classes and I was noting what I did enjoy.

Improvisation was your key for developing your own way of moving. A way of discovering something about the way you move?

Yes and it also gave me ways of relating to other people moving.

When working with a partner in an improvisationally structured class I could actually be dancing with the person in the way they wanted to be moving at that point of time. In a technique class we are all doing the same movements or we are told how to relate. Even in creative movement you'd mostly be told how to relate. In an improvisation class I'd enjoy the sense of feedback from someone through moving and it was feedback that I could give them through my moving too. So it was just dancing with other people that gave me a sense of my own enjoyment, and style as well. My teaching was important here too — if I'm trying to put out ideas it helps me know what my ideas are or how I stimulate myself to find interest in movement.

You were always regarded as a very responsive partner.

I just love the essence of dancing and I can always see that in other people and I can tune in to the way they're working and moving. I can't put into words what I mean — I just read things physically.



PHOTO: ROBYN CALLANDER

Theatre of The Ordinary: l-r David Wells, Gill Shaw, Al Wunder, Lynden Nicholls, Lynne Santos, Andrew Marrish.

I can feel what I need to do in order to try and join in with others.

Can you clarify that last statement?

I can feel a number of duets. Firstly, a duet with simultaneous solos ie. some awareness of the other in the overall relationship, basically solos in the same space; secondly, two soloists involved in a single event which looks homogeneous, thirdly, two people doing the same thing. I would go in between all three and be fairly conscious of what I was doing. I'd want to sense what they were doing and how my work related to theirs.

Is all ToTO's work fairly unstructured?

Yes, though not necessarily every performance will be without structure.

How do you work in rehearsal?

There is so much to work on. An hour by oneself warming up. We'd have talked to each other about what we ideally wanted to focus on. I feel I haven't much stamina therefore my responsibility would be to include some stamina work. Al's knees and feet are stiff, so he'd focus on that. Then we work with partners and are trying out working with a consistent partner for a ten week period.

The process you are using to start work — an outsider couldn't just join in?

No. To be a skilled dancer there's a certain level of skill you have to have under your belt. To be a skilled improviser is just the same. There's a body of knowledge which is improvising just as there's body of knowledge which is technical skills. We work on that body of improvising knowledge.

What sort of things?

Things such as how to grasp on to something that's happening for you, which we call material, and how to develop that material rather than letting it fly by.

What techniques do you use to grasp that material?

There are no really hard and fast rules. It's more through repetition and outside feedback from having others watch you improvise till you gradually acknowledge, well, this was some material for me. The very strong underlying thing through AI's and my teaching and TōTO is positive feedback. For instance 'I really enjoyed it when you spent so long in the corner on the floor' rather than 'It was too long for me or it wasn't developed'. What happens through the positive feedback is that you start to say to yourself about things you enjoyed 'Yes, I did like it and it felt good to others'. After only hearing good things and what others enjoy you begin to know what your material is.

Does it happen that you like things and others don't?

Sometimes. We say getting a sense of clarity in communicating not like or dislike, they're the wrong words! One would like to think that the more you improvised, differences in the way you and others perceive it would happen less and less. Things that you felt were really clearly expressed would have a sense of clarity for the outside eye, but the watcher may have a different interpretation from you. That is fine and I like that — all can have their own interpretation including the performer but what you want is the clarity of presenting something. You are always after the feeling of clarity through what you are doing and that's a bit like developing material.

Do you want to say something more about improvisation as a body of knowledge — what techniques you use.

After a guided warm-up, 'focus on a different body part — what is the relationship between the feet and the front of the chest', you could work on that body articulation. But you'd keep it open in terms of your own style, making you aware of your own body and articulation. TōTO has noticed it's physical contact work falling into patterns and we are working specifically in rehearsals to expand the range for people being in physical contact. For example travelling and moving in and out of the floor in counter-balance. The real base of the group is movement skills.

What does the 'ordinary' mean in Theatre of the Ordinary?

What's behind it is the belief that you don't have to be an extraordinarily talented or gifted sort of person to perform. People in their ordinariness are interesting and that can be performable material. So it's about the type of people that could perform and the type of material that can be performed and that people actually find interesting if it is performed.

As opposed to what?

As opposed to creating a piece of theatre around an issue like say, apartheid. The issue of personal relationships within a house might be just as interesting; things are perhaps more everyday. But TōTO is not just that.

What are you showing in your performances?

The structure of the group of TōTO, the type of people in it and the nature of the work. We have a five year project and are developing the work as we go along. Underlying the phrase 'Theatre of the Ordinary' is a political statement. We will always want teaching to be an important part of TōTO. We want to encourage other people to perform, ordinary people to perform, older people to perform, together with people with dance backgrounds, the mechanic from next door — ideally we'd love people like that to be doing our workshops.

Through people like that performing and appreciating each other's communication through their perfor-



PHOTO: ROBYN CALLANDER

Theatre of The Ordinary: l-r David Wells, Gill Shaw, Al Wunder.

Dance is my country. Improvisation, ToTO style, is my adventure out into the world. At last my unconscious need not hide amongst abstract movements but can exude, burst or pop into my conscious work through various channels of skills and communication.

An adventure treads the unknown. It has an immediacy of perception, of alertness to situations, decision making and acceptance. There's an exuberance in improvising that I love to feel and express. People responding to themselves and others with honesty and clarity.

Theatre of The Ordinary: Programme note

mance in the workshops and classes, they'd then get an understanding of what we were communicating through our performing; it's got lots of levels for a community theatre set-up.

In terms of performance, why your insistence on ordinary when most of you are highly trained and in the process of training others, working with a body of knowledge? Isn't that just another form of training?

Yes and yes it is open to anyone but you do need an interest and belief in the work.

Although there is no insistence on physical type, there is an interest by ToTO in very contemporary skills of performance or communication or self-awareness.

ToTO did and does want this work to be accessible for all to participate in and that's why the title is important and the name is also to give a multi-skilled umbrella under which to work. ToTO performances are by the six people . . . there are a couple of levels of ToTO. Firstly ToTO the performance group, secondly, people doing classes with ToTO for a number of years.

The skills developed are not just improvisatory but come about by the performers close association over a number of years.

Yes.

I see a great deal of comic material in ToTO's work.

A lot of the work is funny and I think that's because it is spontaneous. If you do something and people laugh it spurs you on to follow that material and you are getting direct feedback from your audience. There is a tendency to develop funny or light material. In the last year we as a group have developed the skill in an evening's work to control the overall emotional dynamics of the performance (in the first performances we would get high — sort of out of control, and so would the audience and it would get sillier and that would be the show). We now have the confidence to cut across the funniness if we want to and I think that's better theatre.

How do you start a performance?

We either decide to enter from the audience, or make a separate entrance. Once we had a formal start.

* * *

ANNE THOMPSON

*DANCE IS AN
ETHICAL STRUGGLE:
AN ILLUSTRATED TALE:*

*Dig deep into black heart,
black earth.*

*Dig with stick,
down, down
through worms.*



*Piercing the heart of the matter
and losing heart*



CHAPTER ONE

I arranged for friends and professional acquaintances to attend a religious ceremony. We walked with the others there, around and around, in a figure of eight. We then stood back against the walls of the hall as they formed a series of lines. They robed themselves and burst into song: a ceremony had begun. At some stage I found myself seated with a religious leader and some children around a low, small table, in front of the altar. We drank red cordial. There were cakes and bread and butter. I felt uneasy and was hesitant in my actions because I did not know the protocol.

I stayed behind afterwards because the religious leader indicated that he would tell me something of what he knew. Sitting in the empty, silent space, I waited. The religious leader came and sat down opposite me. I heard the sound of running footsteps outside the building and became frightened. There was a tapping on the side door. I looked to the religious leader for guidance. "It is your choice," he said.

I went and opened the door. A young boy stood there in disarray. He explained with urgency that he had lost an animal a friend had asked him to mind, a tawny hare.¹ We went in search of the hare. We followed the hare as it moved through the undergrowth around the building. The boy raced after the hare; the hare darted away.

I explained to the boy the need for quietness and gentleness. I walked to the hare and held my arms open and extended. The hare leapt into my arms. Its weight shocked me. I explained to the boy that if, when holding the hare, he panicked and clasped tightly, the hare would struggle to be free. If he held the hare gently, with no sense of being its captor, the hare would stay of its own accord. I was not sure the boy had learned enough to take the hare home. The boy took the hare inside. The boy, the religious leader and I, made a box out of cardboard in which to keep the hare. The hare jumped around the building.

After the boy had gone, taking the hare with him, the religious leader explained that because I had chosen to answer the boy's call, he no longer had time to speak with me. "But he was calling me," I said. "It was still your choice," he answered.

Caption: I dreamed this on January 4th, 1987.

* * *

1. In a variety of cultures the hare is associated with female energy and is a symbol of the feminine principle.

CHAPTER TWO

In seeking to know I turn to established structures believing that these structures house knowledge. Sometimes this habit blinds me to what I do know.

I trace the threads of this dream.

A woman searches for a knowing of 'God'. She goes to where this knowledge is housed, both within a building and within a practice. An individual who is invested with the power of this knowing offers to tell her what he knows. Can one *know* by being told?

The woman responds to the needs of a child. Through attunement she knows something of being a hare. She uses this knowing to assist the child achieve something he has been asked to do.

What is this attunement? The only words which come to mind are *heightened awareness* and a *dissolving of the boundaries of self*; poor words because overused words.

In one situation the woman understands herself to be separate from knowing and outside of knowing. In the other situation she understands herself to be connected to what she is seeking to know. She is inside knowing.

Poor words which say so little. Poor words which say too much.

What can writing do? Writing can allow recognition of shared experience. Someone else's words can give an unworded apprehension, presence of being, give it substance.

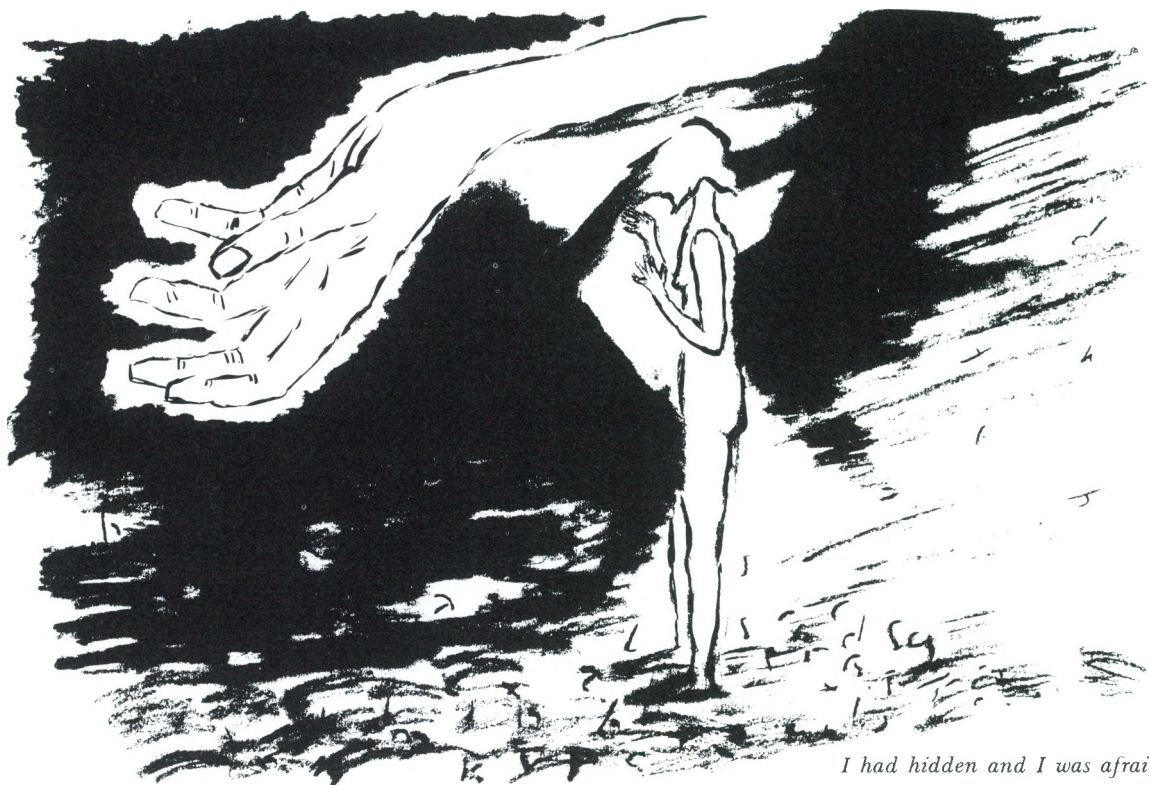
Writing is an art. Dance is an art.

Art could be a manifestation of the fact that every thought evolves a form.

What else can writing do? Writing can be used as if it, in itself, it housed knowledge. It can serve to separate knowing from people. It can make people feel outside of knowing.

Writing is an art. Dance is an art.

Art can perpetuate certain knowing at the expense of other knowing. Art can be a manifestation of the fact that form can keep certain values in place.



I had hidden and I was afraid.

CHAPTER THREE

The choice to stop dancing professionally was prompted by my need to examine the relationship between femaleness, dance and theology. Theology is defined as the rational analysis of religious faith. I use the term to describe the search for self; meaning the individual self, the community self and the pervasive self in the universe. This decision was precipitated by the growing realisation that I was "not myself" and the work I had created and my dancing were suffering because of this. I had difficulty constructing a workable identity as a female dancer and choreographer whose dancing is motivated by a theological quest. In this article I describe some of the obstacles and pathways I encountered on this quest.

* * *

CHAPTER FOUR

I no longer found dwelling on male power, patriarchy, domination and power-over useful as a means of generating creative action. I was confused about how to fully utilise my skills and talents and yet not impede the expression of others' skills and talents. In Starhawk's books, *Dreaming The Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*, she introduces the concept of calling forth a power based on a principle different from power-over. She suggests that this power is related to the root meaning of the word power, "to be able". It is the power that comes from within.

"There are many names for power-from-within, none of them entirely satisfying. It can be called *spirit* — but that name implies that it is separate from matter, and that false split is the foundation of the institutions of domination. It could be called *God* — but the God of patriarchal religions has been the ultimate source and repository of power-over. I have called it *immanence*, . . . And I have called it *Goddess*. . ."2

This power is released through the body when the body is grounded and uncharacterised by postural fixity. By posture I am referring to the body-set or pattern that is the substrata of a particular individual's movement. Such a body state permits the universal forces — gravity, inertia and momentum, and the forces of human consciousness — thought, feeling and sensation, to play through the structure of the body and the body to accommodate this play in responsive, dynamic, life-perpetuating ways.

I found the following list of the principle characteristics of mystical experience useful when contemplating the experience of this power-from-within in dance. Michael Cox defines mystical experiences as 'direct experiences of the Presence of God'.

- i. Ineffability — an experience which is unutterable.
- ii. Noetic Quality — intellectual speculation motivated by feeling; states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect.
- iii. Transiency.
- iv. Received — mystical states bring with them the feeling of something given."

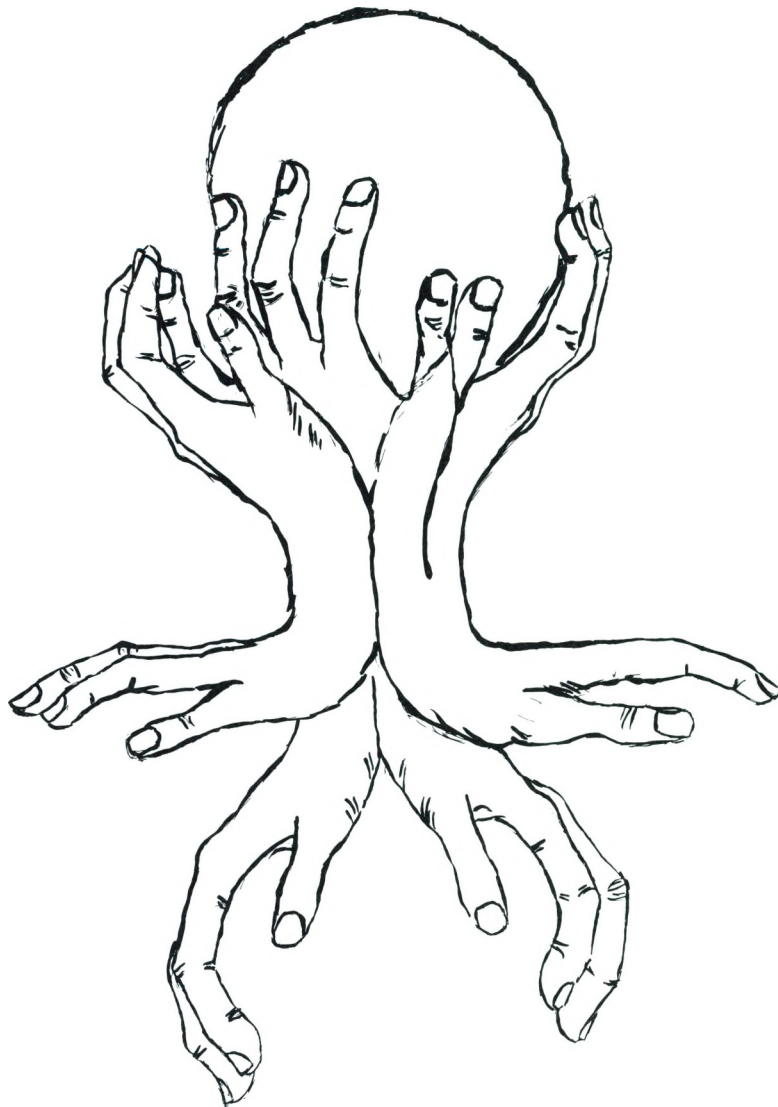
Much experimentation in the performing arts has been prompted by the search for immanence. In an effort to find ways of moving expressive of spirit dancers have always improvised. Initial experiments in improvisation are often limited to knee-jerk responses to stimuli and unformed releases of energy of various sorts. In movement experimentation dancers have sought to refine and trust a physical intelligence — the dynamic interplay between awareness, stimulus and action. To do this, many dancers train in techniques which bring to consciousness, the activity of the perceptual systems, including the propri-

2. Starhawk, *Dreaming The Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics*. Page 4. Beacon Press, 1982.

3. Michael Cox, *A Handbook of Christian Mysticism: An Introduction To The Christian Mystical Tradition*, Pages 24-26, Aquarian Press, 1986.

ceptive system. A legacy of this training has been the acknowledgement of the physiological basis of thought. The notion of self as mind and body becomes an anachronism in the lived experience of the felt image of movement, particularly the construction of the mind as the force of intelligence and the body as the matter which houses this mind and asserts itself in uncomfortably animalistic (stupid, by implication) ways.

Examples of these techniques are Alexander, Feldenkrais and Ideokinesis. These systems are processes rather than dance languages. They involve particular ways of thinking/moving which serve to free habitual (unaware) postural fixity. Posture is the energy pattern, neuromuscular patterning which constantly characterises the form and presence of an individual. The self which is the mind/body/spirit is valued for its capacity to change and respond with situational intelligence. Such intelligence requires the discipline of remaining aware so that at no time one commits to movement (whether shiftings within the body or movement through space) that is destructive to the maintenance of the functional integration of self.



CHAPTER FIVE

How can immanence be realised in dance performance?

Dance as spoken, sung and heard c.f. Dance as written, drawn and read.

In Susan Foster's book *Reading Dancing*, the terms 'reading' and 'writing' are used as metaphors for interpreting dance. This choice draws upon contemporary discussions of these terms in literary and cultural criticism. Foster cites the works of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Haydn White. Borrowing from the ideas in currency in contemporary semiotics, she asserts that no dance style is expressive of the natural body because the body cannot be considered natural, but must be understood as organised, structured, defined and represented in particular ways with particular social meanings. The body cannot serve as an instrument for expressing intrinsic correspondences between movement and human feeling although for much of the twentieth century, American concert dance has been viewed as the natural and spontaneous product of the choreographer's inspiration whose meaning is conveyed with primordial directness to its viewers.

Foster articulates how dances operate grammatically as a series of syntactic procedures for manipulating a vocabulary. This vocabulary may be as specific as the lexicon of moves of ballet and many types of folk dance, or may be defined by a generating principle as in the modern dance tradition i.e. a Graham principle is the organic sequencing of movement through the body. Principles inform the selection and combination of the vocabulary of a particular dance style. The basic syntactic choices, once movement phrases are established, are repetition and variation. Contemporary choreographers have experimented with chance procedures, the conversion of mathematical equations and game structures into templates for dance sequences and variation of the spatial, temporal or tensile properties of a move or phrase. In her book Foster proposes a set of conventions by which choreographers and viewers of dance make dance legible.

It is clear that any communication using a language is not a straightforward transaction, is not morse code transmission. Any dance piece elicits a range of responses. Given this, I propose that it is useful to consider dance in performance as a spoken, sung language rather than as a written, drawn language. Considering dance as an oral language invests dance as an art with the power of living languages operating in specific contexts to allow communication of the human condition within those contexts. The spoken is not severed from the speaker.

Dance performance can be understood as, at least, a social occasion and at most, a communal occasion. For the realisation of immanence to be recognised and appreciated the occasion of the dance performance must permit participation of the audience's consciousness.

Often dance is dished up as a visual spectacle to be consumed front-on. This spatial relationship is accepted as the normal way to witness dance. The implication of this relationship is that dance is pictorial statement. The presentation of dance as pictorial statement separates the dancer/s from the audience. It creates the formal relationship, viewer and viewed. This separation divorces the audience from the carnal, mortal presence of the dancer's body and the possibility of experiencing a shared humanity with the dancer.

It also places the movement experience of the audience outside of the dance language being presented, creating significance by asserting difference. Dance language is presented as movement refined beyond the capabilities of the viewer, except in some post-modern dance or folk dance performances. The idealisation of the human body in certain kinds of action and the presentation of movement as if dance had more inherent meaning than everyday body language perpetuates the tendency in our society to perceive one's own body as separate from self, imperfect, inarticulate and best ignored.

This self-forgetting is reinforced by the fact that dance performance functions as a movement statement by one (or few) to others who are still and silent. Dance performance, as a rule, insists on the bodily confinement of the audience. Then the still many pay the one (or few) to dance. The mute many pay the one (or few) to speak, to sing. What conditions allow the mute many to hear what is being spoken? Do they need to be familiar with the dance language being used? Do they need to be



My dying mother dances

physically fluent in the dance language being used? What are the responsibilities of the dancer and the choreographer in this process of speaking *to*, speaking *in front of*? How are they implicated in the process of cultural rejection of the body as self, as ageing, weathered, flesh and bone self? How are we implicated in the Australian tendency to equate virility and power with youth, agility, suppleness of limb, physical prowess and the seeming ability to conquer space and time?

When dance is presented as a visual display of bodies in motion unaffected by the audience's consciousness, their perceptions of dance are often limited and defined by the following constructions of the body in our society — the body as a machine fuelled by muscle power, certain kinds of bodies as objects of aesthetic beauty, and the physical form of the body as the only site of sexual attractiveness. These constructions are in evidence and perpetuated in some dance criticism and some dance advertisements. The pleasure derived from witnessing dance then becomes synonymous with the entertainment provided by athletic prowess (exemplified in gravity defiance and muscular definition), classical beauty and formalized images of phallogentric eroticism.

In discussing dance as spoken, sung and heard, my use of these terms is informed by the ideas of Nelle Morton, a feminist theologian. In her book, *The Journey Is Home*, she suggests that the deification of Logos reduces communication to a one-way relationship. The glorification of speaking bypasses the far more radical, divine aspect of hearing. She asks the reader to experience the divine, not as the Word, but as a depth hearing, a hearing that is far more than acute listening, a hearing engaged in by the whole self, a hearing that evokes speech. This idea suggests a reversal of the going logic in which someone speaks precisely so that a more accurate hearing may take place. She seeks to give recogni-

tion to a hearing that takes place before speaking. The implications of such a hearing by an audience challenge we artists to create occasions where our art can be created in the moment of being actively received. The implications of such hearing challenge each of us, as members of various audiences, to hear each other into speech.⁴

* * *

CHAPTER SIX

This re-evaluation of terms which have been systematically constructed as pairs, ie speaking/hearing, male/female, mind/body,⁵ is an example of the feminist metaphysical discussion and New Age spiritual teaching which has been informed by Jung's description of consciousness, both individual and collective, as the flow of psychic energy between various poles. He terms this psychic energy 'libido' — desire, longing, urge. Jung believes that libido is transmuted through symbols from an instinctive to a cultural purpose. Two of the most significant symbols of the collective unconscious — the pool of material from which our individual consciousness emerges — are anima (the feminine) and animus (the masculine). Using this construct, some suggest that the free operation of the feminine principle will restore harmony and balance to the earth. This belief can result in choosing uncritically to use the capacities which have been relegated to women in the spheres of operation traditionally allocated to women and occupied by women — intuition, expression of feeling, concern for the personal dimension of relationships. In her critique of Jung's theories Naomi Goldenberg asserts that Jung's theory of the operation of the anima and the animus in the psyche served to codify images and rigidify them into stereotypes. She suggests that although this was done with the intention of giving women a better place in the patriarchal systems of religion and psychology, it had the effect of prescribing a limited function for women and institutionalising a psychic difference between men and women.⁶ The problem of remaining bound to old dualisms seems particularly evident in the work of those who reclaim traditional women's experiences.

However, naming women's experience can be the model for feminist transformation of religion and culture. The argument that the overarching divine principle is more appropriately symbolised in female terms, as Goddess, given that "the female who gives birth to the male, includes the male, in a way that the male divinities cannot include the female",⁷ is an example of feminist critique of tradition based in women's experience.

4. I am not attempting to value speech at the expense of writing but to suggest that the lived experience of the spoken word, where the listener is in the presence of the speaker, is a suggestive metaphor when contemplating dance performance precisely because human presences interacting can permit transference of meaning in ways that the absence of human interaction disallows.
5. Liz Gross lists the following effects of binarisation —
 - a. The two terms are constructed as logically contradictory, incompatible ones, between which there can be no mediation. If one term of the pair is selected ipso facto the other is excluded;
 - b. a binary pair is not simply mutually exclusive, it is also mutually exhaustive: there is no third term, no middle ground between them. Binary terms define all the possibilities inherent in each situation;
 - c. one term is accorded logical priority and given positive-value; the second is characterised only as the absence or privation of attributes of the first; and
 - d. if the second term has no positive qualities of its own, then it becomes an infinite, formless, undefinable aggregate of all that is not the first." Article: Liz Gross, *Derrida and the Limits of Philosophy*, Thesis 11, Number 14, 1986, *Post-structuralism and the Limits of Philosophy*.
6. Naomi Goldenberg, *A Feminist Critique of Jung*, Signs, 1976, 2 (2).
Naomi Goldenberg, *Jung After Feminism*, in Rita M. Gross, ed., *Beyond Androcentrism: New Essays On Women And Religion*.
Naomi Goldenberg, *Feminism and Jungian Theory*, Anima, 1977, 3 (2).
Naomi Goldenberg, *Dreams and Fantasies As Sources of Revelation*, in Carol P. Christ & Judith Paskow, ed., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader In Religion*, Harper & Row, 1979.
7. Starhawk, Op. cit. Page 11.



Power as momentum

In Sufic teaching the body is the Virgin Mary and Mary is the matrix of all divine possibility in form, here, in the world. Mary's purity is understood to be her complete adaptability, the ability to flow with each moment and her capacity to give birth to Christ is understood to be the capacity to yield to transformation unhindered by ego. It is said that as we become awake and receptive to each moment immanence becomes a possibility.⁸

* * *

CHAPTER SEVEN

The application of theology in society.

"The aesthetic position assumes that there is a pre-existing harmony between all parts of reality. Yin and yang, male and female, spirit and flesh, humans and nature, nature and the divine, all are parts of one primal rhythm. The breaking of this harmony into contraries is an illusion... It is a lie foisted on us by antinatural civilisation. This primal harmony lies under the sign of the mother...

The 'ethical' or 'liberation' perspective on feminist theology also believes in original harmony as a symbol of the authentic ground and potential of human life. But it takes more seriously the broken relations between self and body, self and others, self and nature, self and God.

It sees this brokenness as generating a massive historical counterreality, a system of relationships that divides all reality from its authentic potential.

This corruption does not leave either side uncorrupted.

Liberation feminism does not believe that one can banish the contradictions by cultural methods of identifying with the maternal pole against the paternal pole of the traditional dualism. Rather, it

calls for an ethical struggle to transform both the self and the social system that supports exploitative relations."⁹

"The extension and deepening of psychic integration led women necessarily towards a critique not just of male psychic dualism but also of male sociological dualism. Psychic integration demands a sociological revolution... The crossing of the psychic-social boundaries of the male, dualistic world leads women on to a further vision, a transformation of the relationship between the spheres of psychic capacities and social roles."¹⁰

Some artists who agree that art is a psychic-spiritual matter would, however, challenge the notion that art has anything to do with socio-economic changes. This individualising and spiritualising of art can constitute a splitting of self into the spiritual and the social (embedded in sociopolitical and ecological systems). Those who have abandoned religion may find the juxtaposition of feminism and theology bizarre and misguided. "Theologian Paul Tillich defines religion more inclusively as the expression of humanity's ultimate concern — the articulation of longings for a center of meaning and value, for connection with the power of being. Ultimate concern centers life and enables people to choose among competing values."¹¹ Marxism, existentialism and feminism can similarly function to give meaning and direction to human existence.

My theological quest was spawned by my confusion when confronted with decisions involving ethical choices. Having rejected the dualistic and hierarchal mentality that Christianity inherited from the classical world, because it serves the act of domination, I sought an ethical framework which would further the process of transformation of patriarchal culture. The product of such an ethical framework would be moral intelligence.

In *Right-Wing Women*, Andrea Dworkin discusses the formulation of ethical frameworks by women. She makes the distinction between morality and moralism. She defines morality as the set of rules learned by rote that keeps women locked in, so that intelligence can never meet the world head-on. Moral intelligence, on the other hand, is active; it can only be developed and refined by being used in the realm of real and direct experience. Moral intelligence is the exercise of moral discernment. Discernment could be viewed as a habit of mind and heart, specifically a habit of reflection that is rigorous. When moral intelligence does not inform decisions of power, decisions often get made from a cost-benefit or purely consequentialist analysis, or are made on whim and justified retrospectively.

* * *

CHAPTER EIGHT

Factors which obstruct the operation of moral intelligence in the dance culture in Australia¹²

1. The dogmatism of tolerance

"As a dogma, tolerance asserts that there should be no value judgements made about anything. Using the rhetoric of not imposing values on others, women buy into a dangerous philosophy in which they strip themselves of the capacity for moral judgement... Values will always assert themselves. When women do not take responsibility for generating and representing their agreed-upon values, they become

8. Reshad Feild, *The Last Barrier: A Sufi Journey*, Element Books Ltd, 1985.

9. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Feminist Theology and Spirituality*, in Judith L. Weidman, ed., *Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity*, Pages 13-14, Harper & Row, 1984.

10. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and Godtalk: Towards a Feminist Theology*, Page 113, Beacon Press, 1983.

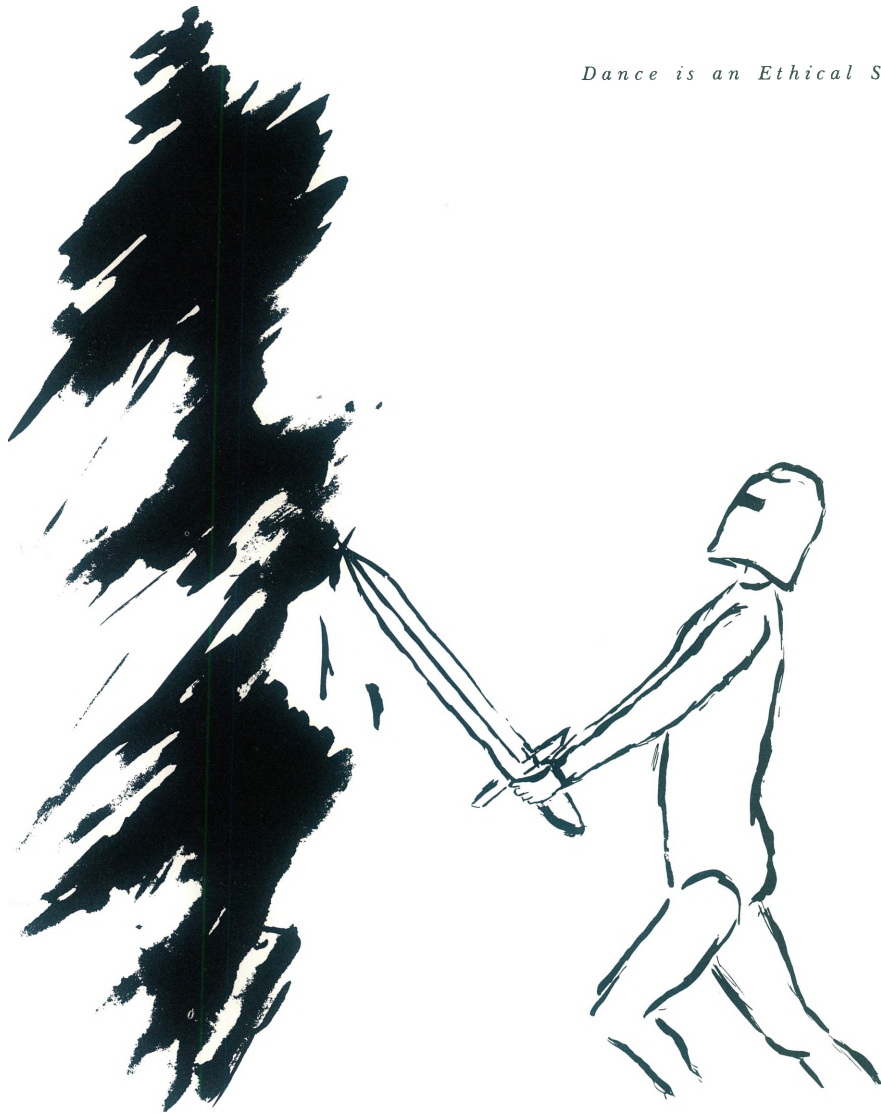
11. Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith*, cited in Carol P. Christ & Judith Plaskow, ed., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader In Religion*, Page 2, Harper & Row, 1979.

pushovers for the tyranny of others' values... The sources of this ethic of value freedom are several: women's natural reaction to the tyranny of patriarchal values that are absolutist and unbending; ... the equating of morality with moralism."¹³

2. Alienation from personal and political power

Janice Raymond asserts that women's alienation from their own power of being confuses other issues of power-over. She considers that this alienation manifests as —

- i. an automatic, uncritical acceptance of and demand for collectivism and nonhierarchical structures. This insistence often levels real differences that women have in competence, commitment and capacities. When differences in talent or leadership are, asserted, women who feel less powerful are threatened. Women who manifest individuality or directiveness are berated for setting themselves apart from the group. Assertion of these attributes is experienced and labelled as implicit criticism of a less vocal woman;
 - ii. a tendency to endow the group with false power. For many dancers the company or group endeavour becomes an entity with a life of its own. It is conceptualised as a bastion of omnipotence. Because they identify completely with a group, some dancers are unable to perceive the choices of action available to them. This attitude breeds a complacent acceptance of the established modus operandi;
 - iii. the use of indirectness to achieve a goal. When direct power of being is not called forth by the values of a group, the encouraged ethic is indirectness. Some group members will then seek influence indirectly. These members become able to manipulate others in the group, using power-over to indirectly achieve their goals;
 - iv. spending an inappropriate amount of time and energy sorting out internal politics. The dynamics of the group process are allowed to overshadow the goals of the group which describe its relationship to the wider community. Such activity can spawn a 'false' sense of life in a group whose reason for existing has become confused;
 - v. the emphasis in classical dance education is on disciplining the body, the development of grace and deportment and the handpicking of a special few to be trained as performers for already existing situations results in the deindividualising, depersonalising and dehumanising.
12. To articulate some of the factors which obstruct the operation of moral intelligence in the dance culture in Australia I have referred to my own experience of this culture and to Janice Raymond's detailing of obstacles to female friendship in her book, *A Passion For Friends*. I find feminist analysis of women's experience pertinent when examining dancers' experience precisely because women and dancers share a universal devaluation based on a cultural assumption of the hierarchy of culture (the sphere of human control) over nature (spontaneous processes that humans don't originate or control but are dependent upon). "Women are symbolised as 'closer to nature' than men and thus fall in an intermediate position between culture as the male sphere and uncontrolled nature. This is due both to woman's physiological investment in the biological processes which reproduce the species rather than in processes that enhance her as an individual and to the ability of male collective power to extend women's physiological role into social roles." (Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and Godtalk*, Op. cit., Page 72.) Dancers are often seen as the cultural embodiment of women and as such are often reduced to tamed and subservient bodies. Because of this I use the terms 'dancers' and 'women' interchangeably in my description of some of the attitudes which hinder the development & practice of moral intelligence.
13. Janice Raymond, *A Passion For Friends: Towards A Philosophy of Female Friendship*, Pages 169 & 170, Women's Press., 1986. Yvonne Rainer challenges John Cages legacy of chance procedures as methods of non-hierarchical, indeterminate methods of ordering materials which is the application of the belief that every action is of equal value in art practice. "For all John's Buddhist leanings and egalitarian espousals, for all his objections to hierarchies and consequent seeming to operate in the space left by the absence of God, his ideas lead inevitably back to the 'no contest' of medieval annals, an early form of European historiography. We can't have it both ways: no desire and no God. To have no desire for 'improvements on creation' — is necessarily coequal to having no quarrel with — God-given — manifestations of reality." (Yvonne Rainer, *Looking Myself In The Mouth*, an article in October 17.)
14. At the 1986 Community Arts Network Conference, I attended a workshop which examined the problems which arose when attempting to achieve a group objective. Megan Evans presented a model of operation which challenged defining conflict as a problem. Conflict was presented as an opportunity to clarify the objectives of the endeavour.



Little rebellions in the shadow of the father

ing of the dancer's body. This process demoralises the dancer. The dancer transforms the reality of this oppression into a psychosocial identity whereby she takes on the status of victim as a primary self-definition and role.

3. Affinity as dependent on absence of conflict

Many individual ethical frameworks become confused because, as social creatures, individuals want their ethical framework to be valued and supported by those with whom they associate. Because of this, ethical frameworks are not made explicit for fear that such assertion will produce a recognition of irreconcilable difference which will alienate people from each other.¹⁴

4. The operation of capitalism

i. Competition for scarce resources.

It is usually in the economic interest of groups to define their aims broadly to attract personnel and funding. This can limit the practical usefulness of these aims and objectives.

ii. Cultural production is equated with material production.

Cultural production becomes limited by the pressure of time and it becomes necessary to resort to known methods of achieving goals in the effort to make art production economical i.e. to maximize output and minimize production costs.

5. The necessity of reaction

The dilemma experienced by feminists and dancers/choreographers alike, is what whilst their own personal response to patriarchy and the dance establishment in turn, shifts from reaction to coherent, articulated expression born of reflection, the potential of these insights and their creative action is minimalised by the re-assertion of the traditional and the known. This, in turn, may provoke reactive behaviour which merely expels energy and supports the existence and perpetuation of the existing forms. Reflexive behaviour, on the other hand, uses energy to create new form.

6. Insistence on radical strategies

Radical strategies can be as oppressive and inappropriate as traditional methods, and operate as unyielding and unresponsive means of achieving a goal. Moira Gatens makes the distinction between tactic and strategy.¹⁵ Tactics have the immediacy of uncodifiable subversive action. Strategies succumb to the danger of inflexible codification.

* * *

CHAPTER NINE

My observations and experiences of group processes have led me to understand that individual freedom within a social context is not a point of departure but a point of arrival. The operation of individual freedom in a group must have as its limit the collective interest. To permit maximum individual freedom the values and goals of a group (the reasons for its existence) must be made explicit and must be responsive to changing circumstance. If values and goals are articulated individuals can choose to commit to being a member of a particular group, can participate in group decisions and have reference points if they wish to oppose a decision.

One of the problems we women and dancer/choreographers face is confining ourselves to little rebellions. Because we live in a patriarchal society it is difficult not to be seduced by power-over and the ability of such authority to protect and assign value. Unless we formulate and articulate new ethical frameworks and value systems we will continue to refer and defer to inherited frameworks and systems and revert to reacting against these.

"If we are to survive the question becomes: how do we overthrow, not those presently in power, but the principle of power-over? How do we shape a society based on the principle of power-from-within? . . . The power relationships and institutions of immanence must support and further the ability of individuals to shape the choices and decisions that affect them. And those choices must also recognise the interconnectedness of individuals in a community of beings and resources that all have inherent values. . . The implications are radical and far reaching, because all our present society's institutions, from the most oppressive to the most benign, are based on the authority some individuals hold that allows them to control others. . . A society based on the principle of immanence. . . would be dynamic, alive with the drama of conflicting needs and choices, with a constant demand for new and creative solutions."¹⁶

The only route to new social relations is "down through our common life together, letting go our logic, our authority, our use of one another" and sharing and supporting the spirit from which new understandings and new action can flow.¹⁷

15. Moira Gatens *Corporeal Representation in/and The Body Politic*, *Politics of the body Conference*, Performance Space, Sydney, October, 1987.

16. Starhawk, *Dreaming The Dark*, Op. Cit., Pages 4 & 12.

17. Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home*, Page 224, Beacon Press, 1985.

CHAPTER TEN

Performing occasions where the traditional audience/performer relationship was transformed

Performing as a member of a community for that community

I grew up in a small Methodist community. When I danced in church as an adolescent, the context and the attitude of those watching imbued the dancing with shared meaning. My dancing had a function for that community. It was understood that my dancing was a form of worship, a theological quest.

Establishing links of shared experience with a community: introducing a particular aesthetic by providing opportunities for participation in that aesthetic.

In 1986 Dance Works created a group-devised piece with a fabric artist, Tim Newth. This collaboration developed out of a community dance project in Wangaratta. The performance of this dance, *Around Squares*, in Wangaratta, was a secular example of community celebration. The audience recognised and delighted in the solutions expressed in the piece to the creative question with which they had been engaged — how can fabric be combined with movement? The community knew the creators because of the teaching work of Beth Shelton and Tim Newth, and the performance contributions of Dance Works built a familiarity and appreciation of Dance Works' movement style and dance language.

Creating performances which provide the audience with a choice regarding what relationship they have to the event.

In 1979 Lyndal Jones devised a piece for the University Gallery at Melbourne University, entitled *Dances To Order*. The structure of the piece was explained in the performance notes and involved taking on body positions and performing walking patterns. The vocabulary of body positions was introduced as projected slides. A number of performers alternated between performing this structure and watching it be performed. The audience was given a similar choice.

Making the structure of a piece explicit so that the audience can become involved in constructing the piece in the action of viewing. Disclosing the method of ordering the movement phrases.

In Nanette Hassall's *Transformations* a variety of performers would develop improvisations which would then be encoded as the language of the piece through accurate repetition. Units of improvised activity, once encoded would then be deconstructed, reordered and juxtaposed. This activity included movement and storytelling. The continuing interest for the audience was the pressure placed on the performers to recall with accuracy what had been created spontaneously. The audience as viewers tended to have a clearer sense of the specific material in each of the units of action than was possible for the performers. The performers not only had to recall individual choices of action but incidental and detailed interactions with others. This piece was performed in the Sydney Town Hall in January, 1981.

Performing with generosity in non-traditional venues which render the performer accessible.

In 1976, through to 1979 an alliance of dancer/choreographers worked in Australia. The personnel of this company called Dance Exchange included Russell Dumas, Nanette Hassall and Eva Karczag. What marked the work of this group was the simplicity of the presentation of the dancing in venues freed from cultural baggage which can detract from the purity of the dance statement. The dancing was the content of the work presented, and this dancing was striking, spirited, adventurous, virtuosic and generous.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Performances in 1987 which spurred on my thinking in relation to this article.

The Fall
Elizabeth Dempster,
Athenaeum Theatre, October 1987

The work of the solo dance artist speaks/sings of the value of individual action. Through presenting an individual artistic statement these individuals choose to register in the community psyche, the right and responsibility of the individual to speak and act. The power of the individual voice occasionally recalls the role of the shaman in other cultures — to invoke the unspoken images of the community psyche. At these moments dance is edged towards ritual.

Elizabeth Dempster is a dance artist who has created a number of solo and group works in Australia since graduating from Dartington College of the Arts in Devon, England. She performed two works in this program titled, *The Dialogue Of The Angels*. In *The Fall*, the garden of Eden is suggested by a series of skeletal pyramid structures positioned across the mid-section of the space. Libby dances in semi-darkness in the distance. I sense rather than see the woman-like creature moving. I recall watching animals move and am drawn in, although I cannot apprehend the context and source of the movement. As Libby traverses the terrain the light brightens and she comes into view. Sight alone cannot read the physical thought which is this being in motion. The movement drips from her, a liquid flow of thought.

I must watch this dancing with my body, the matter of my body which understands the subtleties of meaning conveyed in muscle work and the movement of flesh and organs. Slowly, slowly I am made aware of human presence materialising, the force of human consciousness. Another beginning is suggested in this dancing — woman unspoken into being, unspeaking in being.

Libby's physical articulacy is skeletal rather than muscular, structural rather than stylistic. When she moves I sense the space in her joints and the softness of this separating of bone. It is not as if Libby's body collects or organises to act, but as if it expands internally to allow shiftings of thought to seep through the body. In recognising the movement choices that Libby makes, I am shocked into recalling/imagining a time when the value of specific movements was not an assumed fact; a time when movement emerged from sensory, perceptual and motor imperatives; a time of lack of articulated differentiation.

Libby's training is in image work. (Refer to *Writing on Dance* 1.) Image work, a process of thinking in and through the body, permits philosophising and knowing in ways unencouraged in any of my schooling and training. It requires a discipline of mind and receptivity of body, a discipline of body and receptivity of mind to allow full participation of self in a thought, full experience of a thought. In this process my yearning towards fullness of being and an experience of self as part of the environment begins to be answered.

Performance work informed by the process of ideokinesis demands the kinesthetic participation of the audience. Physical proximity allows such participation.

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Passion Lies Between The Black and White,
Jude Walton,
Reconnaissance Gallery, May 1987

In her work, *Passion Lies Between The Black and White*, Jude arranges the iconography of the piece to be viewed. Much is exposed. This piece is for viewing, is about viewing. The iconography refers to visual art practice — a slide screen, a sculpture (positioned in the performance space so as to be unavailable to touch), a photographer's silver umbrella and a two-dimensional drop on the back wall

*Jude Walton:
Passion Lies Between
The Black And White.*



PHOTO: ALEKS DANKO

of black and white squares. The only visual statement positioned obliquely in the space is an article of clothing to be worn by the performer — a black, silk dress hanging on a side wall. The work is in a gallery. It is constructed as a picture. It is only the fact of Jude's presence and movement which establishes three-dimensionality.

The piece begins with the appalling image of the identity-less, disembodied female body. A story of her murder is told by three male, disembodied (taped) voices. Three men stand on the periphery of the space, framing it and occasionally watching Jude. Sections of Jude's body are presented, back projected onto the screen, framed by the camera eye — images of a woman caught, viewed, cut into sections. The men leave the space and join the audience. Their presence lingers for the duration of the performance. Gender is at issue here. Jude is letting us know that she knows a dangerous game is being played out. Her body is on show. The risk is dissection, objectification. The piece becomes one woman's attempt to establish a temporal, spatial gap within the closed construct of performance — you sit there and watch, I'll stand here and do — for female 'presence'; a substantial, sensual, mutable, carnal, embodied female identity. . . In this way Jude suggests the possibility of a temporal, spatial gap within the closed construct of patriarchal society which defines woman as 'other' and 'lesser'. Performance becomes the site of redefinition of woman from 'object' to 'subject' of her own bodily discourse.

Jude inhabits the space alone now. Though created by her, she does not appear a part of the space but in relation to it. She dances. I recall an elongated diagonal leap, a soft wrap of her arm

around her body. The perception of the length and strength of her body catches me unaware. What about her had suggested fragility to me? There is a studied abandon in her moving. She speaks of the inclination to be sexual or to murder so as to reveal the shadowy intimacy of moments of passion. Her hand tenderly traces a series of curves. She draws us into the experience of sensuality.

She sassies through an alluring, wry statement of the game played out between men and women. The reference is chess. The playing field of black and white squares hangs suspended on the back wall, looking a little like kitchen linoleum. This dance is about moves presented for us to enjoy.

She positions herself in relation to the aluminium tower. Her body begins shaking. She gives into this movement of flesh and then breaks free to charge the tower. She battles with this monument, building, memorial, symbol of permanency, dominion over flesh. She knocks into it, knocks it over, controls its fall, restores it, is caught underneath. Can she possibly win this battle given its durability and her soft humanness?

Finally she reappears, having changed in darkness, dressed in a silk slip of a dress and she begins a journey of stepping forward and through, and retracing her steps. The light is golden, soft, dusk or dawn, a time of transition. She sings. It is a haunting melody, picked up by, in chorus with, her own taped voice. Her tangible self and her disembodied self calling for each other as her body moves haltingly forward to the edge of the performance space.

Jude's tactic is the intimacy she allows as a performer. This intimacy is of the body. The piece traced, suggested what it is to live as a female in relation to the substance of maleness. The presence of woman being like an absence, a lingering half-remembered thought.

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Grotesque Under Stress
Theatre of The Ordinary
The Church, September 1987

An example of collective enterprise is the work of The Theatre Of The Ordinary (T.O.T.O.). This group operates without Government funding. This fact speaks of a lack of presumption regarding the cultural value or otherwise of their art.

The structure of the performances is simple. The space is empty except for a number of musical instruments placed on the edges of the space. Individuals enter and the performance begins. The performance is totally improvised within the bounds of the structures which have obviously been established over the time of the group's operation. The relationship between performer and audience shifts between that of being spoken to directly and the more conventional interaction of audience member watching performer.

The performance content includes sound, movement, verbal language and performer-performer relationships. Contexts are created and then dissolved. There is no doubt that this performance is taking place for the audience and because of the audience. What is communicated is a range of individuals co-operating. Implicit in the structure of improvised performance is the presence of agreement amongst a set of individuals to be 'out there together'. There is awkwardness, embarrassment, clumsiness, grace, wit, exposure, emotion and effort. It is this offering of the effort to communicate frankly about what it is to be human and a social being that never fails to touch me. This is not the theatre of solutions. This is the theatre of surviving with humour and personal integrity amongst other humans.

Sometimes I am irritated by the gaucheness of these performers, the fact they resort to defensive strategies, such as humour based on gender stereotype. In general I delight in the experience of watching their improvisations. I value the intelligence displayed in improvisation. This intelligence is a liveliness of mind and body and an attentiveness to the environment. In improvised performance I recognise the play of choice operating at each moment. The danger is rehearsed action is the danger of all codification. It allows us to fall asleep rather than to awaken, to be mindless rather than mindful. ●

FORTHCOMING ISSUES
WRITINGS ON DANCE 4: HISTORY ISSUE
WRITINGS ON DANCE 5: FOCUS ON AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS

