SPRING 1989

Writings on Dance

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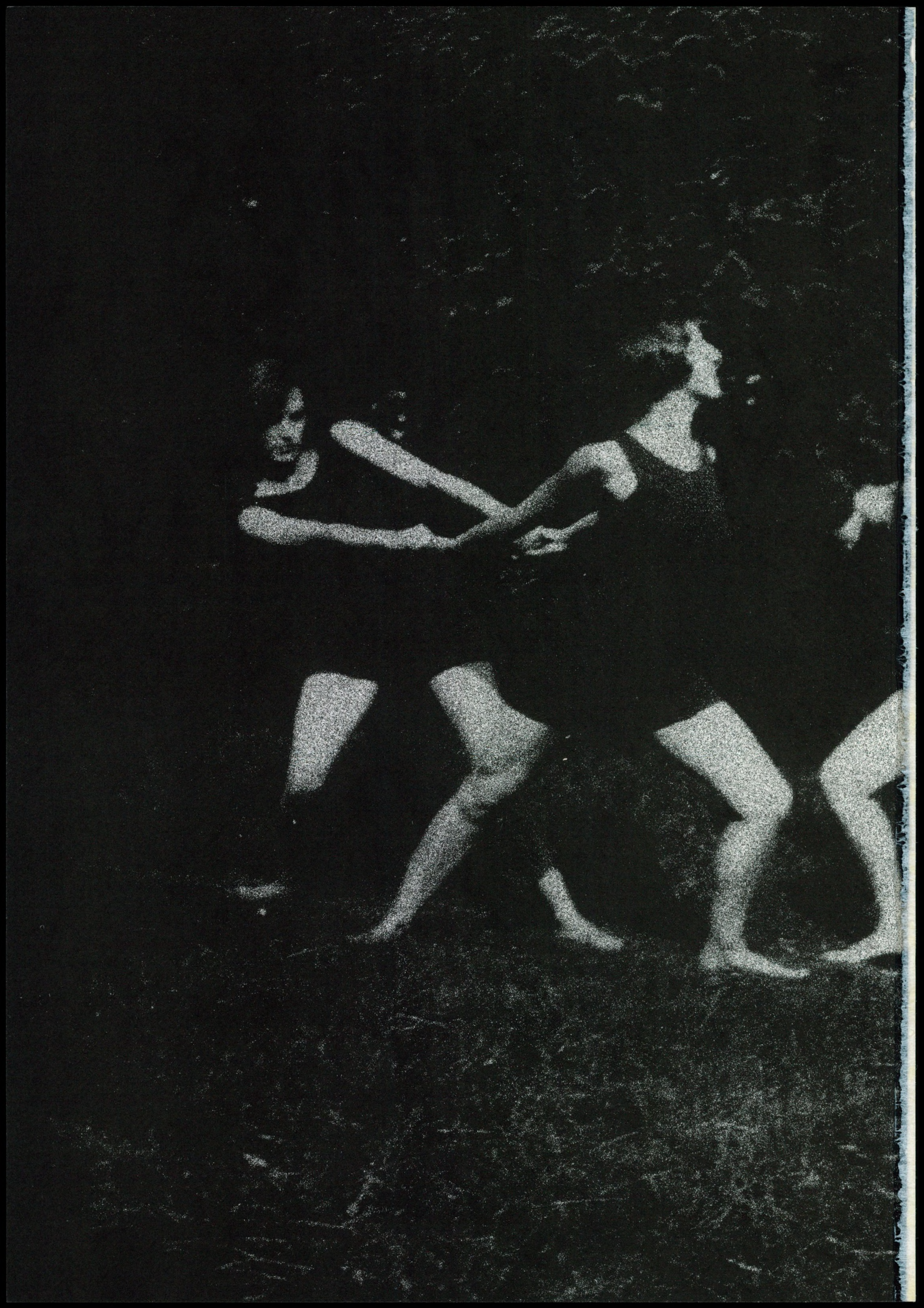
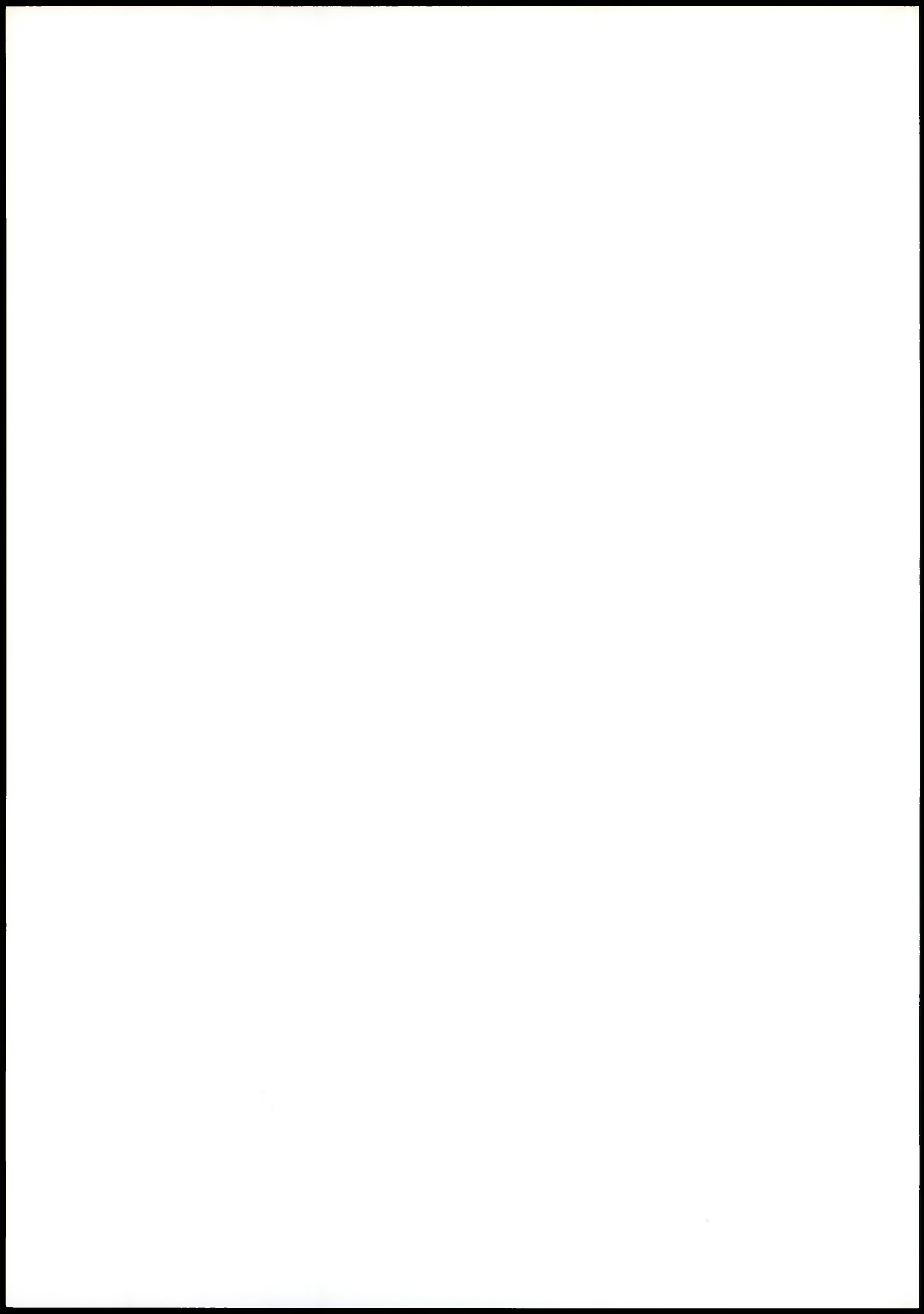
Making History

PHILIPPA CULLEN • MODERN DANCE
HISTORY PROJECT AND ARCHIVE





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4. Making History

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ENDPAPERS: Dalcroze movement study, circa 1926. From the
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Preface

WHAT WE OFFER here are some personal records of two moments in a history that has been made, if not always yet made public. The 'histories' presented here are neither comprehensive nor do they seek to be representative of the whole field of 20th century Australian dance. Philippa Cullen and the dancer/choreographers of the '30s and '40s however have at least one thing in common – the desire to connect, through dancing, with the socio-political reality of which they were a part.

We too must contend with the cultural climate of our own times – a climate in many ways much less congenial than the one in which Philippa Cullen developed her vision. This magazine itself is a sign and a vehicle of our desire for an ever extending, not restricted, field of dance. Some of our dancers of the '30s and '40s came to Australia to escape fascism in Europe. In the continuing struggle to fight fascism wherever it may surface we contribute a small gesture – we embrace and help to create a discipline in which individuals are free to forge new connections between self and world through the act of moving.

JILBA WALLACE

A Life's Work

Philippa Cullen 1950 – 1975*

"(Make) a movement: set sail for the sun until you feel its individual vibrations."

BORN IN MELBOURNE on March 24 1950, Philippa Cullen was schooled at Queenwood and later Loreto Convent, Sydney. At the age of eight she became a pupil at Bodenweiser's dance studio where she studied primitive dance and jazz. At the Bodenweiser School Philippa, like her contemporaries there, Jacqui Carroll and Chrissie Koltai, was encouraged to make her own dances. She also took part in Bodenweiser productions by Margaret Chappel, Keith Bain and Jacqui Carroll. She was never really interested in classical ballet preferring instead to look at the communal dance models of other societies such as Africa and New Guinea. In 1970 she graduated from Sydney University with a B.A. degree majoring in English and Italian with sub-majors in Fine Arts and Medieval History. During her university years she specialised in the study of medieval and contemporary drama and its cultural context. Her thesis for the Italian major was the relation of the contemporary play *Zip* by Scabia to art, dance, music and the technology of the 20th Century.

> **"Dance must follow theatre onto the street. As the art object is being replaced by the event so the special time/space fixity of the performance can be replaced by the older jongleurs of street event. Most important is that the regular effective working rhythms of the pedestrian be transformed into irregular play rhythms. This transformation seems to me more important than all the dogmatic slogan events of the student elite.... It is the kind of transformation which cannot be easily translated into words or given a conceptual basis. It is a demonstration of the transfer of energy which goes on in the world of non-animate objects and which Stanislavsky consciously uses in his acting exercises."**

• • • • •

It was in about 1968 that Philippa started classes in the quadrangle at Sydney University. Many of us who danced with her in later events met her through these sessions. Philippa herself seemed to have the unique gift of bringing together people from many different disciplines to experience their untapped

*This article was transcribed from the video-tape: *Philippa Cullen: A Life's Work* Edited and assembled by Jilba Wallace.

Facing page: Philippa Cullen with wireloop aerials, *Homage to Theremin 2*, 1972.

resources. She drew her inspiration from the poetry of Eliot and the yoga of the East, from Stockhausen's *Stimmung* and from medieval plays. Altogether she was very versatile. She taught us basic Stanislavsky acting techniques after a workshop she had with Brian Syron in 1970. Poets, photographers, technicians, as well as dancers, some professional, many amateur, all met up with each other at these improvisational workshops.

> **"In my view dance can only have the power to penetrate by embracing religion. But what is the religion of today in a multi-valued society? It is the religion of survival. It is the faith that man will not only survive but grow. For this growth cannot do without technology and we cannot allow technology to overcome us in the form of a bomb or a computer. Responsibility, imagination and the power of choice are the important things in the use of Science. Artists are people with an inordinate sense of responsibility. The union of art and science can serve to open eyes, ears and hands to previously hidden realities and to cleanse perception."**

Philippa was interested in many forms of theatre and the arts. She searched out what she wanted from the academic world of music and literature and what she wanted to experiment with to develop her own expressions of sound and movement. She played with David Ahern's AZ Music in Cage's *Imaginary Landscape* in 1970, and in Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Digest* 1971-1972. She played the part of Eve in the medieval plays of Creation produced by Sydney University's English Department, and she performed in Yeats' plays for dancers and The Suds workshop production by Peter Grey.Philippa's connections with AZ music stretched over two or three years of intensely interesting development for her. This period was one in which she was to meet Don Banks, Bernard Rams, Luciano and Cathy Berberian, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, the so-called father of electronic music, on his first Australian tour. Later she translated some of Stockhausen's poems into movement scores or workshop sessions.

• • • • •

Right Durations

"Make a movement
Make it for so long until you feel that you should stop
again make a movement
Stop when you feel that you should stop and so on
but whether you move or stop keep watching the others
At best move when people are being attentive."

• • • • •

Around this period two young artists, Jim McDonald and David Smith,were experimenting at the Sydney University Fine Arts Workshop with an instrument called a Theremin. Invented by a Russian named Leon Theremin in the early days of radio, the instrument is very simple in its principle of operation. Its sound output is controlled in pitch and loudness by the changing capacitance of a human movement near it. Philippa was to adapt to the Theremin the idea of the dancer generating her own sound through movement. The closer the dancer moved to the aerial or capacitance plate the higher the pitch of the amplified sine wave.

> **"My peculiar link with this movement is my interest in the unseen electrical vibrations of the human body. Now there has been discovered a number of electronic devices which can transform human movement into different forms of energy. The detection can be through radar, light intensity or a change in the electro-magnetic field around the dancer. The energy released can be converted into sound. Thus the dancer can make his own music."**

Electronic Aspects, a ballet choreographed in 1970 for nine dancers and a Theremin was the basis, crude as it may have been, for further research into electronics and dance. But Philippa was dissatisfied by the limitations of the sound produced by the Theremin in these performances and went looking for technicians and composers to assist her in developing its musical capacity.Professor Platt from the Department of Music, Sydney University lent Philippa electronic equipment, including two VCS 3 synthesisers and a space to rehearse in for three months. The Australia Council for the Arts gave her a grant which was to culminate in *Homage to Theremin 2* in June 1972. Philip Connor was the engineer who designed most of the special technical equipment and an architectural student, Manual Nobleza, designed and built the aerial.

A concert at International House Sydney University drew a good critical response from Beth Dean of the Sydney Morning Herald and consolidated Philippa Cullen's claim that her studies in electronic movement should continue overseas. Her program notes:

> **"A few dance companies around the world have used the Theremin but not in conjunction with the synthesizer and mainly using it for chance effects as Merce Cunnningham has done. John Cage tells about a class of Thereminists; these are musicians who use this as a musical instrument to be played by the hands only. In 1970 David Smith in Sydney used it to work an environment he made in the Fine Arts workshop. Numbers 3, 4 and 5 and so on will be created as further steps evolve towards a new medium in which dance is inseparable with technology, music and lighting."**

By now Philippa had built up an impressive list of choreographed pieces, as well as considerable teaching experience. She was an Outward Bound course instructor in dance, drama and music, 1970-71; she taught at Loreto Convent in 1970, at the Bodenweiser studio, St. Joseph Girls School, the Australian College of P.E. and many more.

A ballet in blackout called *Lightless* was performed at the music auditorium at Sydney University and a thirty minute dance piece *Utter* was performed at the Cell Block Theatre for the AZ Music Sound Venture series. These pieces demonstrated the audio-sensory involvement of her work.

In May 1972 Philippa applied for an overseas travel grant for the evolution of a new dance art form. It was to be in the nature of research, practical lessons, observation and experimental participation, both in Asia, Europe and the United States.

> **"I intend to explore the medium of electronics and its potential for extending dance as an art form. Specifically to see what is being done with Theremins. It is well known that Germany and the U.S.A. are far ahead in electronic music and have better facilities. I shall be having discussions with Gordon Mumma, the technician/musician of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, and Volkwang Hoschule. My second purpose is to investigate the disciplined traditional Eastern techniques of dance which integrate sound, movement and expression in each performer and in each performance.**
>
> **I will also continue the important experiments I have started with Teletopa, David Ahern's musical group, at the Sound Festival in London during August. Then I shall collaborate with Bernard Ram in London and Stockhausen in Germany on his musical score for the body.**
>
> **I don't know all the experiments I shall be participating in, it depends on what happens in each country...**
>
> **Dance in Australia has been too limited to those who want to learn it as a performance skill. The dancers are merely bodies used by the choreographer. This is unsatisfactory for an intermedia type of production where the performer must have an acute awareness of all the media involved. I hope my experiences will help me to produce this type of performer here and thus give the theatre arts a strong boost which they badly need."**

Philippa was overseas from August 1972 to early 1974. It was a period of intensity which culminated in *Homage to Theremin 3* with 'the Floors' and a gradual realisation that she was the sole exponent of her particular specialised skills both in England and Europe. Jacqui Carroll joined Philippa for the performances in Holland, a country well known for its patronage of the experimental arts.

Philippa Cullen on pedestal with bonnet aerial, and Manual Nobleza. *Homage to Theremin 2*, 1972.

"The triangular floors have underneath them an electronic transducer which enables a change in weight or pressure on the wood to produce a change in the electric signal. This then produces a change in the sound generated by the voltage control synthesiser, so a change in weight produces a change in sound. "

Upon her return to Australia after touring England, Germany, Holland, Brussels, seven weeks in Ghana, one month in Nepal and three months in Madras and Auroville, she gave a seminar on her discoveries at the Central Street Gallery in Sydney.

"I went overseas leaving a very good group of people, hoping to find other choreographers and artists who had explored this field of electronic instruments for dancers, before me. Only to find that in Europe and England nobody's even attempting this field. I cannot know about all the individuals in the USA who may be experimenting with electronics and dance but at the International Carnival of Electronic Sound I met the key people related to dance and electronics such as Gordon Mumma. These people considered, after seeing the video documentation and photos, that our Australian activities were unique.

David Tudor, musician for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, expressed enthusiasm to work with Theremins in exactly the same way as we did in 1972. Therefore I am set to continue my research and development in Australia, not anywhere else, because there are willing and talented people here; also I am an Australian citizen and therefore entitled to certain rights. And Australia is a place to develop new things and ideas, Europe is a place to learn the old ones. America? This could be an uniquely Australian art form. It just needs a lot of patience, understanding, concentration and enthusiasm."

Central Street drew many interested people for a programme of demonstrations and teaching. Bush Video videotaped some of the Theremin and floor demonstrations. Professional dancers, street theatre people, photographers, musicians and technicians joined the classes in Ghanian, Indian and Nepalese dancing that Philippa gave.

"Seven weeks in Ghana was enough to make a big impact on my whole outlook on the function of dance in society. I observed that it was mainly a vehicle through which all members of a sub-group could jointly express joy, and that participation was more important than perfection. This was a new outlook for me because I had come from the Western tradition of high art, perfection oriented, competitive and highly individualised, modern dance.

I had always been admired for my originality. In Ghana people were measured by the extent to which they obeyed all the laws of behaviour laid down by the elders. That is how they fitted in.

Since arriving back in Sydney I have sought out communities which I could help by means of dance. This included people who have lunch in Martin Place on Thursdays, Caritas Hospital Psychiatric patients, Long Bay jail inmates and students of the Australian College of P.E., and people in trains! But I have not found a job which would give me the role of dance encourager in the community here."

For the workshop situation Philippa had borrowed medical detectors i.e. electroencephalographs for monitoring heart beat, muscle potentiameters and so on. She used them in demonstrations of biofeedback, that is responding to the rhythms in the muscular activity of the body and trying to change or alter both the activities and the sound produced by them. She had experimented in Holland in the anatomy lab of the Utrecht University with these particular instruments as well.

Philippa's original electronic dance group was no longer in existence, although Jacqui Carroll and Brian Coughran still kept in touch as well as a few other dancers. Philippa moved more into aspects of community movement, teaching and performing in public places, and creating environmental happenings. She moved into Guriganya Free School in Paddington and found an interested technician, Arial, as well as Melinda and other members of the Bush Video group. She had the weight sensitive floors, originally developed for her by the Steim studio in Holland and for *Homage number 3*, made up again in

Sydney and started once again to train a small band of interested people, few of them professional dancers, to work and move together through electronic and natural sensory means.

In September 1974 a twenty -four hour concert took place. According to the program, the aims of the work were to unite dance with life, performance with process, the art object with the perceiver, and fixed design with change. To highlight movement and natural activities such as cooking, walking, labour and office work was the subject. About thirty dancers, musicians and artists were involved in activities in Hyde Park, Martin Place, The Domain and N.S.W. Art Gallery. Our base was the Hogarth Gallery where we took turns sleeping and moving - no talking was allowed.

The Festival of Creative Arts and Sciences in Canberra, March 1975, was planned to bring together in a national showcase, many individual projects combining artists and scientists and to provide the public with some insight into art and technology. The computers and electronics section was organised by Doug Richardson who invited Philippa, and well as Phil Connor and Greg Schiemer to take part. Bush Video, as well as demonstrating and showing its work, was to link up with Philippa and the floors using banks of TV screens to monitor in colour the electronic movements of the dancers. It was not a particularly happy time for her as there was a small budget, many technical problems to solve and of course the usual personality clashes. The dancers could not afford to stay in Canberra the complete length of the Festival and she herself was not in good bealth even then.

It was a hectic time for Philippa and she had planned to return to Auroville as soon as possible after her commitments here had finished.

> **"While working with Stockhausen he had given me a book by Sri Aurobindo. It seemed to me that his principles coincided with my aesthetics and philosophy. Investigation and synthesis of the arts, of art and science, of all nations into one state, of the ancient and modern wisdom, the east and the west. So I decided to visit the city which was founded in South India to carry out his principles. I was a guest there of a community called Far Beach where everyone was interested in dance. I joined with an American, Martin, who had trained in Grotowski technique and physical education, to give a workshop every morning and every second evening. It was the most beautiful teaching situation I've ever experienced. We did by the end of time open up many channels of communication which had been blocked between and within people. To create a society in which dance is an expected form of community expression would take years and I intend to do that thing when I go back to Auroville. India then for me was a great learning experience. It was the place where I could make the necessary links between the primitive villages of Ghana and my sophisticated electronic systems. Since being back in Australia for a year I know that I have not finished this direction of enquiry and I intend to find some financial backing for my next trip, hopefully as a research officer for UNESCO in the field of evolution of dance forms and their changing relationships to society."**

Next on Philippa's agenda before she could return to India, was the Sculpture Biennale at Mildura where Tom McCullough had programmed quite a hectic series of performances and demonstrations. But first Philippa, Melinda and Noleen had a short raft trip on the Murray River on the way down, before a group of us met to help Philippa on the floors and erect the synthesiser, also to join the street dancing that she'd prepared at Mildura. The floors were used in the theatre at the Arts Centre and at two other performances: at the Ozone Theatre and at the Garage which the Contemporary Arts Society had turned into an Arts Centre. These events were not very well attended although other events she did organise, such as folk dancing, Pipi Storm Circus' puppet show, and the Mummers play attracted much better audiences.

> **"It seems indifference is more common here than in Sydney. In general it was not possible to react very spontaneously to our environment – it was necessary to have structured things to do. In general I think street dance is more successful in the city than in a country town. We really need the multiplicity of the city population to get a reaction. I would have liked to have worked from the other end introducing classical dance students to modern dance and then some of my own activity."**

We knew at this stage that Philippa's head and heart were already in Auroville; she seemed to want to leave Australia as quickly as possible now. One of the last times that we were all very close to each other as a group, was on a day's excursion to Lake Mungo, an ancient dry lake bed once inhabited by Aboriginals and regarded by them in some areas as sacred ground.

She left for India a few weeks later, leaving the floors in Adelaide, but taking her own synthesiser with her. She died in South India on the 3rd July, 1975.

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THE AIMS OF THIS PROGRAMME WILL BE:

to impart information received fromtwo years of activities undertaken on an ACA travel grant in Europe, Africa & India
to bring together dancers and musicians to discuss overlaps in their various fields;
to explore various new fields;
to reach a group decision about directions for music/dance in this society;
to act as catalyst for individual artists.

There will be 9 days of 2 sessions 9.30 am - 12 noon and 1-3 pm or 7-9 pm.

The form of presentation will vary according to the subject matter. In general the morning session will be introductory talk and questions and the afternoon and evening session will be more practical and creative.

WEEK 1 Dance and electronic music in Europe 1972-3
July 1 Modern dance schools and companies
July 2 Live electronic music
July 3 The gallery situation for performance
July 4 Academic electronic music
July 5 Bio-feedback and its relation to dance & music

WEEK 2 Some non-western forms of dance and music
July 8 Indian dance
July 9 Nepalese folk dance and music
July 10 Ghana, the social situation of dance and music
July 11 Auroville, an integrated community of East & West.

Sponsored by:
The Institute of Contemporary Art (Aust.)
Contemporary Galleries Limited
1 Central Street City, Sydney

A PROGRAMME FOR DANCE
PHILIPPA CULLEN
GREG SCHIEMER
ROGER FRAMPTON
JACQUI CARROLL
CHRISTINE DUNNE
PHIL CONNOR
ARIEL
1-11 JULY 1974
2
ONE CENTRAL ST.
SYDNEY

Philippa Cullen: A Programme for Dance. One Central Street, Sydney, July 1974.

JULY 1 MONDAY
MODERN DANCE SCHOOLS AND COMPANIES

Folkwang Hochscule
The Place- Strider and The Contemporary Dance Theatre (Jacqui Carroll and Phillipa Cullen)
Mudra and Bejart's Stimmung
Tanz Forum in Cologne ---- Jacqui Carroll
Rotterdam Dans Teater ---- Jacqui Carroll
Kurt Stuyf
Teaterschool in Amsterdam
Pauline de Groot.

9.30 Talk about the sort of choreographic and teaching work done in these schools
Questions throughout.
Demonstration of Tai Chi and of Sufi Exercises.

1.00 Demonstration class
Pauline de Groot's technique.

JULY 2 TUESDAY
LIVE ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Stockhausen --- Alphabet, Momente, Inorj.
Feedback Studio --- David Johnson, Johannes Fritsch, Rolf Gehlharr.
Steim in Amsterdam --- Peter Schat.
The summer concert series in Oeldorf.

9.30 Talk about the sort of equipment and techniques and rehearsal methods of these composers.
Questions.

6 pm Experiments by Gregg Scheimer & Phil Connor.

7 pm Exploration of Plus Minus score and adaptation to dance some versions of Aus den Sieben Tagen in dance.

A workshop situation, led by Phillipa Cullen and Jacqui Carroll.

JULY 3 WEDNESDAY
THE GALLERY AND PERFORMANCE

Bart Stuyf and the mixed media group in Stedelijk Museum
Joe Jones in Judith Weingarten Gallery
Alphabet by Stockhausen in Liege
My electronic performance in Philips Recreation Hall with Eindhoven Museum of Modern Art.
Agam in Paris.
Evoluon, Philip's permanent Exhibition Hall
Documenta in Kassel.
Computer Arts Society and the Institute of Contemporary Art in London.

9.30 Lecture and questions videotape of performances

7 pm Demonstration with theremin.

JULY 4 THURSDAY
THEORY AND ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Institute of Sonology in Utrecht, headed by Koenig.

Summary of all courses: electro-acoustics, history of electronic music, use of computer, systems theory and calculus, perception, classical studio technique.
Barry Traux, Otto Loeske, Henk Koppelaar, David Maguire.

9.30 Detailed description of activities and equipment at the Institute.
Tapes and talks on the works of these composers.

1-2 Discussion: Directions for electronic music--live or taped, is an academic rationale necessary, how can artists master technology????

2-3 Explanation and performance of a dance composition by Otto Loeske.

JULY 5 FRIDAY
BIO-FEEDBACK MUSIC DANCE

Medical research in Holland, in United States.
Music experiments in United States.
Equipment available in the world, in Sydney.

9.30 Short introduction and history.
Demonstration with equipment of how to use it for medical purposes. Each person trying one of the detectors.
Questions and scientific explanation.

1 pm Discussion: How can it be used creatively? What is the artist's role with advanced technology?

7 pm An example of bio-music and bio-dance.

SOME NON WESTERN FORMS OF DANCE AND MUSIC
JULY 8 MONDAY

India

The classical origins
The present renaissance.
The Kalakshetra and Rukmini Devi.
The Tamil villages.
Kathakarli, Bharat Natyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak.
The performance of Balasarasuati.

9.30 Lecture and slides.
11.00 Performance of Alarippu and a Padam. Questions
1-3pm) Demonstration class in Bharat Natyam technique
7-8.30)
2.30) Film of Indian hand and face mudras.
8.30)

JULY 9 TUESDAY
NEPAL

The political situation and how it affects the theatre institutions. The disappearance of the Eastern tradition or the Russianisation of Nepalese theatre. Cultural domination? My experience of Nepalese folk dance and drumming. Its relation to other dance and drumming patterns.

9.30 Lecture and questions.

11.30 Demonstration of some folk dance and drumming. Teaching some steps and rhythms.

1 pm Slides

Discussion: Preservation of tradition versus cross cultural influence. A model of theatre, east or west. What is a communist artist? Toward a world concept.

JULY 10 WEDNESDAY
GHANA

The way of life in an Ewe village.
The Ghana Dance Ensemble and the university scene.
The place of dance in their life.
The teaching situation.
My experience of Ghana dancing and drumming.

9.30 Lecture. Questions
Teaching of some movements and rhythms

1 pm Slides
Discussion: Are there any community situations outside Ghana where dance could be an intrinsic part of the community life? Is dance related to an extra-terrestrial life, i.e. is it an expression of man's spirit? What are the basics of dance for all people? How can we revitalise it as a function of society and as an art form?

JULY 11 THURSDAY
AUROVILLE

The concept of building and its practice.
The way of integration with the surrounding villages.
The extent of east, west unity.
The art of living in consciousness of ecology.
The place of dance and all the arts when living is an art.
A comparison with the Kibbutz.

9.30 Lecture and slides...questions.
Teaching of some techniques of Sufi, Tai Chi and Haikido which I learned there.

7 pm Conclusion. What can we do here in Australia? A plan of action for dancers and musicians and composers in the field of education, in the theatres. Anywhere else? With what purpose?

Philippa Cullen with sculptures in Deakin Avenue Mildura, Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1975

PHILIPPA CULLEN

Towards a Philosophy of Dance

June 1973

IF THIS ESSAY appears too logical and too final a solution, you are wrong. Though it begins from a factual basis, its focus is entirely subjective. It is an attempt to interpret the origins and function of dance from where I stand in the dance world and in society, and I have tried to construct a definition of dance from which I can spring off into my electronic and happening ventures.

Why dance? The first man danced before he spoke.[1] It was not the desire to communicate information which caused him to dance; it was something more physical. Man has been endowed with the will and energy to play. What could be a better way than to dance? The immediate stimulus was however the curious correspondence between the rhythms of the body and the rhythms of nature. Perhaps music grew out of the very reaction of man to these rhythms. The most primitive music requires the most vigorous movements e.g. the tambourine and African drums. It is appropriate that in this non-physical world we should be producing music that requires only the turning of knobs and yet it is considered scientifically the most complex music.

The human body is a living resonator of sound.[2]

From this it may be understood that I see dance as a way of integrating with nature, as a reaction to a stimulus and as an extra activity, set apart from the bread and butter business. For me it is an act of rejoicing, more than a tool of communication.

Let us look now at the function of dance in other societies. Unlike our individual-social dancing, dancing in Bali and New Guinea and Africa is a communal affair. It may be segregated as with the Australian aborigines, and perhaps not everyone present dances, but those who don't, participate in other ways such as swaying and clapping. In these societies dance plays a role for social activities such as birth, initiation,

Margaret Mead reports: The Kayans of Sarawak perform a dance the purpose of which is to facilitate delivery. The dancer, usually a female friend, dresses a bundle of clothes and places a dummy in the cradle.

1. *Dance in Society*, Frances Rust (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1969)
2. *The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan II* (Barrie and Jenkins, London 1960)

marriage and war. Dance is always a form of ritual, it has an object in view like sympathetic magic. Of course the main function of dance in these societies is religious... in request for rain or harvest, in exorcism of devils, in curing of the sick, in funeral ceremonies.

We may say now that dance for curing the sick has been replaced by hospitals; for exorcising devils replaced by psychiatrists; for bringing rain and good harvest and superiority in war... by aeroplanes; and for initiating the youngsters, gangster groups.

Gradually dance has fled from religious ceremonies first into the courts and then into the theatres. But entertainment has become mere consumption by the "cultured" members of society. No longer has it the role of play. Dance has certainly lost any serious function, having been removed to these centres of entertainment for the established, and to the discotheques of the young, who indeed approach a ritual activity in their violent gyrations. But I don't know if they find a true release; it is rather like a fatal laugh.

• • • • •

Is there any function dance could have in this society?
If we take the needs of society as defined by the structural anthropologists, we can see how dance fulfills these needs:

a. Maintenance patterns and provision for release of tension.

b. Adaptation to the human and non-human environment.

c. Realisation of societal goals.

d. Integration of culture and nature.[3]

All confusion and despair seem to be accounted for by a lack of rhythm.[4]

a. A dance group can be a powerful structural unit and by its non-verbal physical nature is an effective instrument of anarchy, which breaks up bureaucratic structures in the same way as laughter destructures personality. (See reference to street dance page 21) Another function of dance is co-ordination of the body, which goes a long way towards establishing mental balance.

The forces acting on various bodies within a system depend just as much on the field as on the bodies.[5]

These functions presume of course that the real needs of society are not met by an educational system which manufactures tools of the state who have, as well, lost all contact with their body through an early specialisation. But that is infringing on the subject of integration.

Margaret Mead reports: A hunch-backed boy imitated a turtle; a little albino boy danced; a dumb boy used his deafmute gutterals as a running accompaniment to his dances; the most precocious girl dancer was blind.[7]

b. Dance requires adaptation to the architectural space and to the moving environment of other bodies in space. It can be a kinetic extension to the indoor or the outdoor shaped or unshaped space. It can enliven neglected urban areas[6] and enhance sculptured areas. Dance is a special way of adapting to teenage meetings of the opposite sex, just as it is for the mating birds. In addition dance can help distinguish roles because everybody has a special way of moving if it is not moulded into shape by a classical ballet teacher or over-constricting clothes.

c. The goals of society are set by the mass-media and education. The fact that dance plays almost no part in these reflects the split of mind and body that has perpetuated a race of people who will soon find their legs being oppressed by an ever-growing head.

If dance, drama and music were taught in the schools as one subject, then dance would begin to play a direct role in the formation of goals, since dance can make ideologies have an experiential basis, and this is its function when united with drama.

d. Now at last we come to the function of dance as integration which is I think the most important function.

In order to learn a discipline such as mastering the body it is not necessary to grit one's teeth and peform bodily functions with the mind being frozen. Stanislavsky devised an acting technique which integrates movement and sound. Dance must require a training of the whole person, not just the body.

Dance is the blender of drama and music. It makes music more concrete and drama more esoteric and abstract.[8] The new plays have learned a lot from the ritual forms of dance; now music theatre must look to dance to bring musical elements into a visual and total form. This implies that the body rhythms will have more influence on the temporal structure in music.[9]

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Out of the rhythm of Siva's dance the universe was born. By the rhythm of Siva's dance is the universe sustained in equilibrium : Siva contributes to the cycles of destruction and rebirth by the burning ghats; Siva leads the people through many lives in the reincarnation process; the fifth movement is Salvation or Ultimate Release: eventually each of us and everything becomes aware that it has always been a part of the rhythm of Siva's eternal dance – a Nirvana... of blissful, eternal, rhythmic and expressive activity, the activity of God · consciousness.[10]

In order to realise all these important functions in society, dance must be repossessed of its power both in depth and in breadth.

Dance must have power and contact with more people, not just the theatre-goers. This can happen if dance follows theatre onto the street. As the art-object is being replaced by the event, so the special time-space fixity of a performance can be replaced by the older form (medieval jongleurs) of street event. Most important is that the regular efficient working rhythms of the pedestrian be transformed into irregular play rhythms. This transformation seems to be more important than all the dogmatic slogan events of the student elite... It is the kind of transformation which cannot be easily translated into words or given a conceptual basis. It is a demonstration of the transfer of energy which goes on in the world of non-animate objects and which Stanislavsky unconsciously used in his acting exercises. All games are an organisation of the transference of human energy but adults are subject to more powerful structures which organise their energy flow and their games

3. Frances Rust op. cit.
4. Hazrat Inayat Khan op. cit.
5. *Chance and Causality in Modern Physics*, David Bohm (Harper Torchbooks, 1961, U.S.)
6. Tulane Drama Review, New Dance Issue, 1972 (New York, University School of the Arts)
7. Frances Rust op. cit.
8. W.B.Yeats *Plays for Dancers*
9. Stockhausen, see the texts of "From the Seven Days" and read "Bio-Music" by E. Orton.
10. *Gods who Dance* by Ted Shawn (E. P. Dutton U.S. 1929)

(e.g. church organises bingo; capitalism organises stock-exchange). My feeling is that adults should again be involved in games which embody not the competitive/spectator spirit but the more dangerous intuitive physical co-operation with their fellows.

So I can see a way in for dance through public channels of recreation. It is not so easy to see how dance can be given a power which treads deeply in the human consciousness. Very little goes deep these days. The superficiality of dance and most theatre entertainment is merely a reflection of the imperviousness of audiences who have adjusted to the everyday violent stimulus. Think of the Laude plays of the Italian medieval times, or of the religious presentations of the near East. These are passionate and deep and of course involve the audience, but this involvement is based on the fact that they share the values of the presentations... In today's multi-valued society no one work can reflect the values of all people, so one may as well forget about trying, unless one's aim is commercial success.

In my view, dance can only have the power to penetrate by embracing religion. But what is the religion of today in our multi-valued society? It is the religion of survival. It is the faith that man will not only survive but grow. For this growth we cannot do without technology, yet we cannot allow technology to overcome us in the form of a bomb or a computer. Responsibility, imagination and the power of choice are the important things in the use of science.[11] "Artists are people with an inordinate sense of responsibility." The union of art and science can serve to open eyes, ears and hands to previously hidden realities and to cleanse perception. Blake says: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would be revealed to man as it is, infinite."[12] This is what I mean by religion and my aim then becomes to reveal the infinity of the body, of sound, of light, of all matter.

But the miracle which reveals this can only happen if the concept of the wholeness of the world, of knowledge and of man is accepted.

At the moment there is not even a common language for describing inanimate matter, the body and the mind.[13] Scientists just think in different realities.[14] Atomistic thinking, which has increasingly dominated our thought since the Renaissance, has caused our perception of the world to be split into subjective and objective, religious and scientific etc. But there is now an enlightened movement groping for holistic reality.[15] In the East such a reality has always existed, since science has never been separated from art.

My peculiar link with this movement is my interest in the unseen electrical vibrations of the human body and the untapped resources of the person as a whole. Some of these are being discovered in parapsychology institutes[16] and new instruments are being developed for measuring electrical waves in the field of psycho-physics.[17] Many things such as alpha waves were thought to be superstitions of yogis before the west had developed an instrument which could record them. Bob Irwin, the visual artist, and Jim Turrell, a psychologist, were working with alpha waves as part of a sensory environment.[18] Afterwards Jim

All organisms have electrical energy and send out waves. This was discovered in 1770 and was the beginning of electro-physiology.

Turrell gave up and said: "There's got to be an art and technology Christ." He could not cope with the power he had unleashed. He gave up because the human being is not yet ready to use this instrument, just as had happened with the steam engine. Although the Greeks knew the principle of steam power, the steam engine was not introduced until almost 2000 years later, when slavery was no longer thought to be a better source of driving force.[19]

Now there has been discovered a number of electronic devices which can transform human movement into different forms of energy. The detection is through radar, light intensity or a change in the electro-magnetic field around the dancer.[20] The energy released can be converted into sound. Thus the dancer can make his own music. But whether this discovery is taken up by the dance world depends on our readiness for this reversal of the elements; and whether dancers are skilled enough to make music and whether they should be producing recognizable musical structures. The separating of dance and music in the Merce Cunningham group and the work in silence of some other companies seems to me a good preparation for this new relation. It releases the dance from the imposed dynamics and time of the music and forces a new independence. I have for the last three years worked with these new electronic media which I have developed into body instruments. Just as the use of the new material of prefabricated concrete changed the shape of the building and the life of the people inside, so I found that the use of electronics changed my concept of dance and my values for dances.

Thus I would define Dance as an outer manifestation of an inner energy in an articulation more lucid than language. What do I mean by inner energy? It has something to do with "current squared times resistance" and also with Noh drama. What do I mean by articulation? The differentiation of one movement from another; the finest becomes the most subtle. What do I mean by lucidity without language? I mean that dance has nothing to do with communication of information such as a story or anything that could be a verbal message. It communicates on a level which is at the same time above and below language.

11. *Science and Technology in Art Today* by Jonathon Benthall (Thames and Hudson, London, 1972)
12. *Heaven and Hell*, by William Blake.
13. "A Scientific View of the Creative Energy of Man" by Lancelot Law White in *Aesthetics Today*, edited by Morris Philipson. (Meridian World, 1961)
14. "Fragmentation and Wholeness" by David Bohm in *The Structurist* 1971 (order from The Structurist, University of Saskatchewan. Saskatoon, Canada)
15. See related figures and fields: David Bohm, Hans Jenny, Gestalt psychologists, systems theory in mathematics, anthroposophy, Sri Aurobindo.
16. David Bohm, op. cit.
17. There are parapsychology institutes in Utrecht, Holland; Freiberg, Germany; Russia and the U.S. (you can write Parapsychologisch Institut. Springweg 5, Utrecht.)
18. *Handbook on Experimental Psychology* edited by S.S. Stevens (john Wiley and Sons, Sydney 1966)
19. A Report on the Art and Technology Programme of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967 - 71, edited by Maurice Tuchman. (p. 140).
20. *Man and Energy* by A. R. Ubbelohde p. 47 (Penguin, 1963).

Dance can be repossessed of its power by using both the broad contact of the streets and the deep contact enabled by electronics.

What then is the function of dance in our society? The main function will be an integrative one. In the streets dance unites performers and public, all participants with the everyday environment, play with work. Through the medium of electronics, dance becomes the intermediary between one art form and another. More importantly it brings man in intimate contact with his most advanced tools. And not as facts but as beings with all their unexplainable behaviour patterns. Electronics allows a dialogue between machine and dancer. You react to each other. Thus there is a most direct bridge between art and science, between man and technology.
If this is the function of dance and if it really will become a powerful part of life , we need pretty powerful dancers! Doing three dance technique classes a day is not enough. These dancers must have a much larger experience, both wide and deep, than what they can get in the present dance studios. Here is a list of requirements.
These dancers must

- be capable of confronting individuals in the street in all their non-verbal nakedness
- have an attitude to the environment which is receptive rather than imposing i.e. they should react rather than act
- have training in the development of the mind and the instinct along with the body in such techniques as yoga, Tai Chi and Stanislavsky
- have developed themselves as producers of sound and movement equally as vehicles of the imagination
- have a strong sense of fun
- have a large resource of inner energy.

Barrault expresses it well:

> "So long as the human being is considered as a complete instrument capable by its breath, its voice, its speech, its song, its movement, its gesture, its fear, of DANCING all aspects of life, even its laughter, true theatre will be made, and life will be served truly."

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A last word.

Only in this way can we expect science to contribute to an expanding consciousness of humanity, instead of making redundant proofs of phenomena that artists already make manifest. And only in this way can art be other than a futile escape from or a mere reflection of a fast decaying world.

Let both science and art be

"a light that made visible immaterial things

an energy of perpetual transience...
This is her secret and impossible task
to catch the boundless in a net of birth
to cast the spirit into physical form
to lend speech to the ineffable
She is pushed to reveal the ever unmanifest."
Sri Aurobindo I

Let dance be the two most sacred acts in life: laughter and prayer.

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**Philippa Cullen with
Brian Coughran and Wayne Nicholls on the pressure-sensitive floors at the Canberra Arts/Science Festival 1975.**

GEORGE ALEXANDER

The Hot Electron

Some notes on the single-dance of Philippa Cullen

DANCE as prayer, dance as laughter, wrote Philippa.

The terrain of her work mixed the sacramental power of dance with a Dionysian element that tipped all the scales. That range was her way of eliminating the gap between being and art. It was a celebration of the present, as the intersection of time with timelessness. The dancer must be part saint, part clown, along the line of Peter Brook's "rough" and "holy" theatres. For Philippa, it was not either/or, it was *both... and...* The whole spectrum, the whole catastrophe. And so Philippa Cullen proceeded to develop a sensibility that could encompass both neo-Dada Fluxus and Sri Aurobindo, both Luciano Berio and the African Burundi, Margaret Mead's *Dance and Trance in Bali* alongside Wilhelm Reich's *The Psychology of the Authoritarian Personality.* This was less about making a particular kind of art, than about being a certain kind of subject. "A training'', she wrote, "of the whole person". A single dance, a wave oscillation, the single dance of one's life.

But institutions divide: they set up departments like "drama", "theatre", "music", "electronics", "performance" etc., as though that's the way God Almighty divided up the world. And in the early '70's, critics confronting her sort of work were forced to make up oddly hyphenated words for its 360° scope. Caught between the music column and the dance column, men with briefcases and matrons of the faded-tutu set, fell upon the word "experimental" to pigeonhole this Space-Age Isadora. "Experimental" is journalist's shorthand for "tentative" or "doubtful", rather than a way of dealing with phenomena to trace what is happening, (not controlling variables and making it happen in an artificial situation).

Well fifteen years on, this issue of *Writings On Dance* is proof of her high survival value. I can't offer pigeonholes, but I shall trace a flight, a feeding pattern, a song from those far woods.

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FOURTH WORLD POSSIBLE DANCE

THE WHOLE more than the sum of its parts – that synergetic principle Philippa believed in. Nature exemplified it, so did every child. Politics did the opposite, it was the art of accommodating desires to real or imagined scarcities, lack. Philippa was a pioneer of a genre that is now more acceptable, if abused – the notion of a Fourth World Possible art: a way of synergizing First and Third World; between the

Facing page: Philippa Cullen, Indian Dance workshop, Central Street, Sydney, July 1974.

conceptual and electronic reach of the one, and the energetic transmission of community contact of the other; between invisible energy patterns extended by technology, and the inventive physicality, rhythmic sophistication of moving bodies.

So Philippa studied Kathakali dance in India and explored electro-acoustics in Holland; danced to drummers in Ghana and danced to sine-wave machines in Sydney. The kind of community she longed for was metaphysical, not geographic.

And with the charismatic authority of vision, Philippa pursued this utopian conjunction. Each step was courageous and uncompromising. And when you realise she died at a mere twenty-five, her sense of mission and operational sweep is staggering.

There were two modes of this project: participation and critique.

Central to her philosophy – or, more accurately, her danced faith – was that participation gave a thing meaning. In Africa, the elderly and the fat are often considered the best dancers for their effortlessness, balance, dignity, not their virtuosity. Hence that mixed bag of non-specialists who joined her Sydney University Quad classes. To dance was to invite the making of community. Dance was the primary model for interpersonal dynamics. As in Africa and Asia the dancers respond to each other equally with the music. Dancers in her choreography were like voices in some polymetric choir. Throughout her work dance and sound are in a dialogue on the relationship of time and presence.

So dance is not a purely aesthetic manifestation, but brings its faithful into communion, intimately, to the rhythm of those communities which dance, of the World which dances.

But the West multiplies simultaneous lives. The prevailing forms of social reality make us feel more numb and complicated than the sociologist's "alienation". Our community highs have the bland detached excitement of TV. So much of Philippa's work is not about dancing as about behaviour, opposing the programmed responses of everyday life. Bodily rigidity (whether of ballerinas or soldiers at attention) corresponds to mental rigidity. Hence all those "guerrilla" street actions and interventions into public space – whether plaza, park or train. But her dances were far from unrestrained emotional expressions. They were structures for ethical actualisation. Spontaneity and creativity of the individual had to be the issue and matrix of personal relations. So she read the public site, watched people in the West with large holes in their lives alternating between stillness and semipurposeful activity. Watching the way we spatialised the city, militarising daily life, Philippa Cullen changed them into wild ellipses.

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THE POLITICS OF EXPERIENCE

WE MET at University in 1968. A generation known in France as the *soixant-huitards.* We were eighteen and studying under the extraordinary Frederick May of the Italian Department, learning literature, art and how to cook for ourselves. It was a time of the Viet Cong and L.S.D., Cohn-Bendit's Sorbonne disorders and magic love zap, alpha-waves and revolution as *vie quotidienne.* It was a time of the first photos of Planet Earth as seen on *The Last Whole Earth Catalogue* captioned, "We can't put it together. It is together". No one escapes their age, but Philippa was one of those who didn't just know where it was at, she knew what it was.

In the art world it was a time of situationist events, body art, kinetic lightworks, soundworks, happenings, street actions. We listened to Terry Riley and Steve Reich, Messeian and Cathy Berberian. We read about La Monte Young, Anna Halprin. We read Bucky Fuller, R.D.Laing, Marshall McLuhan, John Cage. We kept sidelong glances on Poor Art (from Italy) and Poor Theatre (from Poland). It felt like there was a new culture to resist with. We were not just disputing a few borders, there was a whole new mapping system operating.

Philippa had eyes so deep and languid you could have spent whole lazy afternoons floating in those pools – except she never stayed put. She was doing Primitive classes at Bodenweiser, Stanislavski with

Brian Syron; was learning about the Theremin at the Tin Sheds with drop-out engineers, drop-out sculptors, drop-out architects. She took her own movement classes on Sunday mornings; and danced or performed at Uni. drama events. The first time I saw her perform was in a Yeats' play for dancers (derived from Japanese Noh). Wearing a great stylised mask she played the Hawk, doing the Dance of the Guardian of the Well. The language was haunting ("...as though a flute of bone / Taken from a heron's thigh / A heron crazed by the moon / Were cleverly, softly played...").

This was the edge of "theatre", a play with no stage to create the expectation of the paranormal, no special effects – but simply at one end of the room in which we were sitting, lit by the same lamps, breathing the same air. There "by a gesture of an arm" wrote Yeats, "an actor can recede from us into some more powerful life". Philippa was on the edge of trance.

At the edge of "music" was the avant-noise and pretonal effects of David Ahern and *Teletopa* including the jazzman Roger Frampton and virtuoso Geoffrey Collins, with fully-free or semi-directed instrumental improvisations. There was the mix of Stockhausen, Cage and Cornelius Cardew. It was work that reminded you that music which made its logic explicit to the ear was a relatively short-lived abberration in music history, nascent in 16th century madrigal, full-fledged in Hadyn, ill in Scriabin and nearly dead by 1950.

At the edge of "dance" were the recovery of primeval choric feelings, contact with the ground by rhythmic stompings and embryonic kicks. Mood music was replaced by noises of unamplified voices, feet, hands, mantras, open chord droning, noisy yoga exhalations, gibberish, screams of rage, groans of agony, yesses of willing victims. Dancers were choreographed into amorphous turbulences eating up gobs of the audience or making up carpetpatterns of writhing bodies.

Philippa Cullen's early work (1970,1971) grew organically from her work at these edges, while generating esprit de corps from her Quad exercises. Transformation was a key tool: performers freely inventing patterns of movement and sound and offering it for mimetic response to freely chosen others... who responded cooperatively by copying and modifying each pattern into their own self-expressive thing. Other exercises were the re-routing of the senses, changing the ratio between sight and sightlessness, call and response, sun and shadow.

Lightless, a work from this period was performed in a blackout – audience and performers relying on the proximity senses, communicating with a tactile body, seeing with the whole body, hearing with the whole body.

Utter explored the relationship between sound and movement when both were made by performers. I (a drop-out writer) was asked to work on a polyglot phonetic script that corresponded with the four elements. ''Do not think of the vocal instrument as an instrument itself. Do not think of the words, but react – react with the body" (Grotowski).

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DUENDE

THOUGH NOT a superdancer herself – in terms of classical technique – Philippa in her performances at Watters Gallery, the Cell Block theatre, Inhibodress Gallery, Central Street Gallery – was capable of heartstopping *duende* (what Garcia Lorca defined as a power, rather than a behaviour, a struggle not a concept), or black *mojo*, a kind of spirit-calling and vision-receiving. Though she could not volley pirouettes, she danced with fire, boisterous intelligence, dark mischief.

Her body was too strong for ballet, but it was open and clear. Her study of African dance gave her a rhythmic power, while above this strong base, intricate arm gestures, eyes, brows, lips, hands would flash and quiver embodying something like the amorous poetry of the Gita Govinda.

She didn't have that evanescent grace of the ballerina doing soft turns, offhand leaps and vaporous rolls. Her phrases looked as though they had been carved out of some powerful substance, rather than

assembled, often spitting out the movement at twice normal speed.

Neither did she have the cool, loose-bodied walk-dancing style of postmodern dance. That suggests, it seems to me, that space is just a state of mind. Philippa's was a real space that she occupied with a robust physicality. Essentially she was *incarnating the spirit,* not disembodying herself for some transcendental purpose. Thus her sensuous fluidity evoked primal ebbs and flows – especially during those brilliant and plotless improvisations that never meandered or became thin. There was a crackling of energy, much of it from the audience, and it should be pointed out that her dancing was greatly affected by subconscious feedback from them. But don't just take my word for it, here's Maria Prerauer, *The Australian,* April 23, 1972:

> **...the capacity audience squatted on cushions on the floor. Then the gallery was blacked out except for a single ritualistic candle. Immediately the long window-wall leapt into brilliant life, flashing and flaming with a glitter of Kings Cross skyscrapers... Against this the Teletopa players and the leotarded figure of the solo figure stood out strikingly as black silhouettes... Philippa Cullen herself, long hair flying, wove in and out among the musicians, bare feet stamping, jumping, twirling, arms sensuously lifted, miming in movement every emotion, every passion, every humour known to man – love, hate, joy, fear, greed, desire... the lot. Sometimes she just stood there, head thrown back, laughing, mouth opened ecstatically, her profile a living Greek mask. Sometimes she screamed out silently or battered her bare fists in temper against the wall or wailed in dumb anguish or gyrated erotically between the players, overtly sexual – Salome among a herd of Herods.**
>
> **It was infintely expressive, full of original ideas and carried out with a wealth of technical knowhow. Even more remarkable, Miss Cullen kept this up for over an hour and half non-stop and only just began to repeat herself towards the end. But perhaps the biggest revelation of the night was not what Philippa Cullen did for dance (impressive as this was) but what her dance did for the music. It was she who usually called the tune. The change of mood, the change of pace came mostly from her. The players followed her lead intuitively... In some strange telepathic way she became almost both composer and conductor...**

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THE THEREMIN

THIS INTIMATE connection between sound and movement found electronic expression in the sine-wave machine named after its inventor,Theremin. In *Utter* the performer mobilized a focus of bodily energy for each of her sounds and movements, so they became linked to a kind of focused emotional energy. We know emotions galvanise bodies (clutching buttocks during a harangue) – could the tension be translated into sound?

The Theremin (current squared times resistance) linked to a VCS-3 synthesizer (to monitor sound variables), and attached to aerials (shaped to electromagnetic wave forms) and photo-light cells and pressure-sensitive floors – was a way of playing with currents, pure invisible energy patterns so large-scale people think them random.

It embodied Philippa Cullen's belief in communication accomplished beyond just the tuneable range of seeing, hearing, touching. It is telepathy as ultra, ultra high-frequency electromagnetic wave propagation. The Theremin was a tool to funnel the randomness into a regenerative receiver. The effect, in performance, was of dancers with streams of semi-visible electric force pouring through the skin, filling space with a sustained banshee tone, from inaudible pips and pings to big complex imaginative sonic outbursts. Sometimes currents chased their amplified images round and round. Here is dance critic Beth Dean in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

> **..soloist Jacqui Carroll took her place upon a circular pedestal base (aerial A). This created a quiet humming tone. As she slowly extended her arm upwards the pitch (frequency) sound rose louder and higher. The mood evolved to an intensity of yearning. The fingers opened. She reached out stretching both the sound and the body to taut heights of thinnest strain. She clenched her fist. The tone of audible sound and the visual tension receded...**

Though the Theremin continued to create technical and financial problems, it was a device that could provide a glimpse of the roots of the moment, to quiet the body, rendering it susceptible to "influences", to revel in irreducible forms.

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THE GIRL WHO DANCED WITH THE SEA

AMONG DANCE CIRCLES of the time, this was bizarre and marginal; could it survive the Mainstream, sponsored by the wives of fur dealers. Many audiences felt their courtesy and patience, not their perception, were being challenged.

Always tough on herself, demanding more, accepting less, Philippa took herself to Europe, Asia, Africa. She met with Stockhausen and involved herself with his music events; met with Gordon Mumma and David Tudor; travelled with Cornelius Cardew's ensemble. In the avant-garde scene of the time, her dance-as-laughter, and dance-as-prayer, could be situated between Allan Kaprow's *Breathing*, and Robert Filliou's *Erotic Sidewalk*.

Kaprow's proposal pieces were a performance of living, a way of Doing Life. For example: Hold your breath – you suffocate. Is it yours after all? Let go – do you lose it? Breathing could be the big trees in a high wind. Or the breaking of waves on a beach. Or the breathing of a crowd at the fireworks. Breathing in and out of synch with your lover as a kind of dance too.

Erotic Sidewalk was a proposal for some sort of electronic device embedded in the street so that men and women could get sexual gratification when they see women and men they fancy walking by. Writes Filliou: "Think also of the facial expressions and physical contortions that would follow. What a show for those resting between orgasms".

Philippa's inspired sense of Serious Fun, made her untimely death in India too wrenching. But rhythm is Fate and we build both our joy and our suffering on it. Her work was the clearing of inumerable paths of desire: the desire for the body mediated by the language of dance, a body with the full weight of cultural codeification, and a desire to peel the layers back to find something of herself unmediated, unnamed, unlearned; the desire for the body as substance , flesh, and the desire for an "other" body , detatched from its reflection, a desire to go out behind the mirror of the studio and dance with the unknown. Her work was powerfully physical yet when she dropped softly into a predatory squat you could imagine she could keep going right through the floor.

When she danced with the Theremin the floor seemed flooded with water and the air with light. Her death made her spirit a power and I imagine her, as a plucky shoeless goddess ending as a temple dancer – flesh and spirit dancing together.

She shared I think something of the dance philosophy of Min Tanaka. Her relation to discourse, the same as the relation to language that prayer and laughter have.

Philippa Cullen danced the single dance of her life. She danced the dance of the gyratory earth, she danced with the wind and the sea. She saw politics through dancing, stood against power through dancing, danced her history, ethics, knowledge; through dancing assented to love against all odds.

SYDNEY 16.11.88

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ELIZABETH DEMPSTER

Talking History

Margaret Lasica's modern dance history project and archive[1*]

FEW AUSTRALIAN DANCERS today would be aware that during the 1930s and '40s a very lively modern dance culture existed in this country. This period, and the generation of modern dance artists which emerged during those years, is the focus of Margaret Lasica's modern dance history project and archive. The project is one of many creative and educative endeavours which have been initiated and directed by Margaret over the years. With its growing archive it is testimony to her longstanding commitment to the development of a more diverse, vibrant and informed dance culture in Australia. Margaret's decision to embark upon the project in 1985 was prompted in part by the realization that present generations of Australian dancers and choreographers had little access to or understanding of the work of earlier generations. More particularly she was concerned that the dance artists who had contributed to an important period in Australian cultural history should not be forgotten.

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OVER HER MANY YEARS of involvement in the teaching of modern dance in Australian schools and colleges Margaret was repeatedly faced with the situation of having insufficient time or resources to respond to the interest that her teaching provoked. Very few materials were available to direct interested students to, and what materials there were invariably refered to overseas experience. There was no record, no reflection upon, or analysis of modern dance in Australia. Australian dancers were growing up quite ignorant of the work that had preceded them. In particular they were unaware of the extent, range and vitality of modern dance activity in this country during the 1930s, '40s and '50s. Access to this period was virtually closed.

1. Margaret Lasica is the founder and director of the Melbourne based Modern Dance Ensemble. She has been actively involved in modern dance in Australia since the 1940s, working as a dancer, choreographer and teacher, and as a consultant and advisor on dance at a number of tertiary institutions.

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* This article condenses several hours of conversation held between January and May this year. It is in itself a kind of dialogue, steering a sometimes circuitous route – on the one hand, presenting, and the other, responding to, the information, ideas and opinions put forward by Margaret in the course of those meetings.

Facing page: Sonia Revid, circa 1925. Revid, a graduate of the Wigman School in Dresden, Germany, established a studio in Melbourne and toured throughout Australia and New Zealand in the 1930s. Photograph by G. Riebicke Studio.

Margaret was aware that the work of a whole generation of modern dance artists had been devalued and that an important era in Australian dance history was in danger of vanishing completely. It had not been written about, it had not been acknowledged or properly appraised, and the opportunity to do so was fast disappearing. With few tangible artifacts – some photographs and programs, a few magazine articles and newspaper clippings – access to the modern dance work of the past is primarily through the dancers themselves. Taking as her point of departure the modern dance of the 1930s, Margaret's first priority was to record and collate first-hand accounts of the dance of this period by interviewing the artists where possible and their associates and friends.

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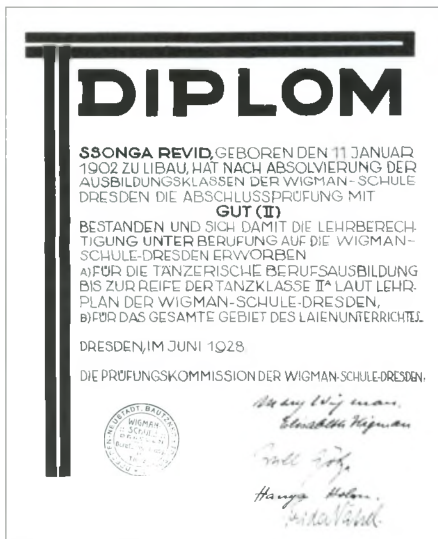
A DIGRESSION: DANCE AND MODERNISM

WHEN DANCE is discussed in the context of 20th century modernism it is often represented as a special case, an anomoly. It is as if dance somehow stood outside history, isolated and untouched by the social, political and intellectual forces which have shaped other arts. The argument, many times reiterated, is that modern dance is not modernist. But our notions of what constitutes modernism in dance are confused, the result, Susan Manning (1988) suggests, of a failure to discriminate between critical and historical method. In Manning's opinion, critics and would-be historians have written the history of 20th century theatre dance as the partisans of one or another generation or school of artists. Many writers – she cites Martin, Kirstein and Banes have mistakenly attributed to only one generation or school of 20th century choreographers a set of concerns shared by other generations and schools as well. These partisan histories have distorted and obscured the larger contours of dance modernism.[2] When these larger contours come into view it is apparent that dance is not a special case but is as responsive as any other art to the social climate in which it evolves. Modern dance, from its beginnings at the turn of the century, is decidely modernist.



DIPLOM

SSONGA REVID, GEBOREN DEN 11 JANUAR 1902 ZU LIBAU, HAT NACH ABSOLVIERUNG DER AUSBILDUNGSKLASSEN DER WIGMAN-SCHULE DRESDEN DIE ABSCHLUSSPRÜFUNG MIT

GUT (II)

BESTANDEN UND SICH DAMIT DIE LEHRBERECHTIGUNG UNTER BERUFUNG AUF DIE WIGMAN-SCHULE-DRESDEN ERWORBEN

A) FÜR DIE TÄNZERISCHE BERUFSAUSBILDUNG BIS ZUR REIFE DER TANZKLASSE II^A LAUT LEHRPLAN DER WIGMAN-SCHULE-DRESDEN,

B) FÜR DAS GESAMTE GEBIET DES LAIENUNTERRICHTES.

DRESDEN, IM JUNI 1928

DIE PRÜFUNGSKOMMISSION DER WIGMAN-SCHULE-DRESDEN.

Sonia Revid's Diploma from the Wigman School.

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ART HISTORIAN Richard Haese has described the 1930s and '40S as "the revolutionary years of Australian art." These two decades, between the Depression and the beginnings of the Cold War, were years of unparalleled social and political, intellectual and artistic ferment. Haese identifies these years as a seminal period in Australian art, as a period which marked the emergence of a radical and innovative modernism.

> We are dealing with a period in which Australian artists and writers made their first real contact with a twentieth century sensibility. Such an assertion begs many questions. If the modernist movement in art is accepted as one of the most powerful expressions of such a sensibility then how is it defined? Modernism as a broad concept resists ready and narrow definitions, given its complex and contradictory character. What is clear, though, is the dualistic future of modernist art. On the other hand it involved a profound investigation into the nature of art itself – into the formal language and means of expression on the one hand, and into the wellsprings of the creative act itself on the other. Artists addressed themselves not only to extending the vocabulary of form but also the means by which new forms and images might be generated. The second feature of modernism is that with this investigation went a search for new social and intellectual roles for art and the artist.
>
> (HAESE 1981: viii)

The modernist tradition was forged at a time of almost unbroken political crisis:

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Bodenweiser dancers Shona Dunlop and Hilary Napier, photographed circa 1940 by Margaret Michaelis. Photographed reproduced courtesy of the Australian National Gallery, Canberra.

> The 1930s and 1940s, as the era of Hitler and Stalin, were intensely political years marked by ideological crusades and cynical opportunism, the conflicting claims of nationalism and internationalism, and the experience of economic depression and total war.
>
> (HAESE 1981: viii)

The impact of this climate on Australian artists was profound and it was an impact reflected not only in the work of visual artists but in literature, in theatre and in dance. The history project and archive attests to the fact that modern dance artists in Australia were engaged, like the painters and writers, in an intensive investigation of their art form. They expanded the expressive range and potential of dance by extending not only how the body moved but what it communicated. Formal investigation of the dance medium was coupled with a reappraisal of the social, political and intellectual role of dance and dancers. The relationship between radical aesthetics and radical politics was a source of debate as politically committed artists, dancers amongst them, sought to integrate their art with their desire for social and political change.

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MODERN DANCE arose in Europe and America from a fusion of nonclassical styles of theatrical dance and other, extratheatrical sources, such as the methods of physical culture. The first experimental dancers in Australia came through a similar background.

In the early part of this century in Australia, as in Europe and America, there was widespread interest in physical culture. Systems of aesthetic movement, such as rhythmic gymnastics, were an important element in the popular holistic health movements of the time. The women's emancipation movement was another significant factor in the popularity of the new forms of physical culture and the subsequent development of modern dance. In Australia, as elsewhere, women began to experience their bodies in new and different ways, unencumbered by rigid corsetry and rigid codes of social behaviour. But of the many Australian women who practised disciplines like Swedish gymnastics or calisthenics only a few would have been aware that these methods, so assiduously pursued for health, could be the basis for a new form of aesthetic dance.

Dalcroze Eurythmics, acknowledged as an important influence upon European and American modern dance , was also taught in Australia during this period, principally as an adjunct to music studies.

It would seem that many of the elements which contributed to the vigorous development of modern dance in Europe and America during the 1920s and '30s were present in Australia and might similarly have been a stimulus and support for a developing local tradition.

In the 1930s and '40s, modern dancers fleeing from Europe emigrated to America, England and Australia. The dancers who settled in this country were colleagues and students of Wigman, Laban and Duncan. They established studios, presented regular concerts of their work and developed enthusiastic and devoted followings.

The significant contribution that European dancers made to the development and consolidation of modern dance in America has been widely acknowledged. The cross-fertilization that occured when the two traditions met contributed greatly to the subsequent growth and diversification of the American modern dance. But in Australia modern dance did not flourish; indeed, it barely survived into the 1960s. And yet it would seem, as we have noted, that many of the ingredients for a strong modern dance tradition were already in place by the 1940s. Why is it that today we cannot look back on an unbroken modern dance tradition? and Why in the 1970s was it possible to say that "there is no modern dance in Australia"?

2. Manning puts forward her own 'non-partisan' definition of dance modernism in a critique of Sally Banes' *Terpsichore in Sneakers* published in a recent issue of The Drama Review. In Manning's view, dance modernism encompasses two conditions: the reflexive rationalisation of movement and the dual practice of 20th century ballet and modern dance. Manning's TDR article, and Banes' response published in a subsequent issue, are incisive contributions to an important and increasingly complex debate.

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"THE WORK DISAPPEARS, PEOPLE DISAPPEAR, IDEAS DISAPPEAR.." [3]

IN 1977, on the occasion of the Dance Exchange residency at R.M.I.T., members of that company were reported as commenting to the effect that there was no modern dance in Australia, that a tradition had never developed here.[4] It would seem that these artists were not deliberately or mischievously casting aspersions upon the work of their predecessors. More disturbingly, their comments were evidence of the fact that they, like most artists of their generation, were quite unaware of the extent and intensity of earlier modern dance activity in this country. They clearly did not feel themselves, at that point in the late 1970s, to be part of an Australian modern dance tradition. Modern dance had not entered the wider cultural milieu; it had not been embraced as a significant part of Australian cultural life and heritage.
What Margaret Lasica knew, and was becoming even more acutely aware of, was that a vital and adventurous modern dance culture had been seriously misrepresented and neglected. A tradition of modern dance did exist but it had been ruptured, suppressed, and at times subjected to enormous hostility. By the late 1950s and early '60s many of the pioneers had stopped dancing and choreographing. They had grown too old or too discouraged; many had simply given up, some had died, and others had left Australia for more conducive cultural environments.

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MARGARET TELLS A STORY of a dancer, now an elderly woman, who has kept a scrapbook – very detailed – documenting her work in dance. Leafing through the book of clippings, photos, programs and notes, Margaret comes upon a blank page where the documentation suddenly stops. When questioned about this abrupt termination of what has been up until that point a very rich and detailed record, the woman falls silent, refusing to discuss the matter further.

What happened ? Margaret cannot say, precisely, but what she does describe in more general terms are the conditions and circumstances of these dancers' working lives.

The dancers were working in a time of severe economic depression and many of them suffered extreme financial hardship. The European dancers had come from a culture where dance was recognized as a field of artistic research. It may not have been popular, but the work of dancers like Wigman was respected and recognized as part of the world of art and theatre. Dancers were active members of the intellectual and artistic avant-garde and were acknowledged as such. These artists came to a culture where modern dance was almost non-existent, and certainly not recognized as a serious art form. For modern dancers there were no opportunities for professional performance or training, no funding and no critical recognition.

If anything characterized the dance artists of the 1930s and '40s it was their idealism and their desire for social change. Many were socialists, most were progressive liberal thinkers, and their questioning of aesthetic and social structures took place (as Richard Haese notes of the radical painters of the period)..

> ... in the face of a conservative backlash and an all too apparent trivialization of art by popularizers. There was an acute sense, rarely felt with such intensity before or since, of the thinness of local art and cultural life and of the strictures imposed by those who presumed to set the standards and lay down its forms.
>
> (1981: 3)

Haese also notes, rather bleakly, that:

> Whatever the signs of change in the courageous actions of isolated individuals and coteries, the 1930s remained a 'wilderness'. In a world without grace, its features were marked by poverty. The weight of Australian society lay like a sodden grey blanket over the efforts of anyone who refused to conform politically, socially or culturally.
>
> (HAESE 1981: 37)

In order to earn a living the dancers looked for ways of turning their art into a saleable product. Some created dances for the variety circuit and some turned to teaching. They taught dance where there was

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sufficient interest, but also deportment, gymnastics and such like. Private schools were one source of employment; dance and expressive movement were considered to be appropriate and pleasant cultural "extras" for girls.

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SOME OF THE NEW DANCE CONCEPTS and methods from Europe had gained a foothold in the field of kindergarten teaching. At teacher training institutions in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, trainee teachers were introduced to some of the principles of 'expressive dance' as part of their preparation for the education and care of young children. Their introduction to dance and 'creative movement' included studies based upon the theories and methods of Dalcroze and Laban.[5]

The recognition of creative, expressive or modern dance (the terms were used somewhat interchangeably) within the curricula of kindergarten teacher-training colleges created its own problems for the professional artists however. Graduates who had been exposed to some elements of modern dance theory and technique began to think they were dancers; and they had no direct contact with or experience of the professional application of modern dance ideas to disabuse them of such notions. When modern dance artists came to Australia from Europe they used terminology similar to that in use in the colleges. They called their work 'expressive dance ' or 'modern dance', but what they were describing was a rigorous professional practice supported by a solid physical and intellectual discipline and based on years of experience.

3. Margaret Lasica, interview March 1989.
4. See Owen's 'Style Without Definition'. The Age, June 18, 1977.
5. The Laban work offered here was quite basic and drew upon English interpretations of Laban's theories of modern educational dance. In its simplicity it bore little resemblance to the conceptually sophisticated methods of Labananalysis practised today.

EXERCISES FOR FLEXIBILITY

A PULL, PRESS AND PUSH PERFORMANCE

PUSH DOWNWARD AND RETURN WITH PULL (Above)

PUSH UPWARD AND RETURN WITH PULL (Above)

PUSH FORWARD AND RETURN WITH PULL (Right)

Exercises for flexibility: *The Home* magazine, 1934.

Widespread confusion and some acrimonious debate over the definition of terms and territory ensued. Meanwhile, outside of the specialised fields of teacher training and professional dance the term 'modern dance' was applied indiscriminately to anything that wasn't recognizably balletic.

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BUT THE FUNDAMENTAL and perhaps the definitive factor influencing the development of Australian dance was that of isolation. It had its positive aspects, as Laurel Martyn observes:

> the tyranny of distance fostered much local creative work, throwing us back on our own resources and giving local dancers, musicians, choreographers, composers and designers opportunities which are not forthcoming under more affluent conditions, when artistic directors and dancers can travel and guest artists be invited here.
>
> (PASK 1982:11)

Martyn is speaking specifically of the beneficial effects that geographical isolation has had upon ballet in Australia. For the modern dancers the advantages of isolation were not as evident but there were nonetheless some benefits. Separation from European and American sources meant that the modern dancers had to work out for themselves a language and a means of expression. They had to find ways of further developing their art from the basic principles and techniques they had been exposed to. For young dancers isolation created an open space which stimulated discovery and invention. In Margaret Lasica's experience the sense of isolation engendered a particular kind of energy, freedom and confidence, and encouraged artistic growth.

But Margaret also speaks of the fragility of exploratory work and of the particular difficulties faced by dancers whose art is by nature ephemeral. After an initial period of development creative work needs critical attention and some support if further development is to occur. For the Australian-based modern dancers of the '30s, '40s and '50s this recognition and support was not forthcoming.

In America during the 1930s and '40s, critic John Martin was an articulate and forthright supporter of the exploratory modern dance work of Graham, Humphrey and their colleagues. He acted as an advocate and an educator, creating a bridge between an uninititiated audience and the avant-garde dance of that period. He represented the modern dancers as courageous pioneers and as symbols of American modernity. His recognition and support of modern dance during those years contributed significantly to its growth, development and widespread acceptance.

In Australia modern dance was virtually ignored by the critical establishment. Critics simply didn't write about it. The themes, subject matter and style of modern dance were not regarded as legitimate and the artists were marginalized and patronised. Most Australian historians and critics showed little interest in modern dance activity, choosing instead to align themselves with officially sanctioned companies, particularly those which had kudos from overseas. Modern dance was neglected, receiving some coverage if it was exotic in style or displayed some theatrical novelty. It was regarded, at best, as a diverting pastime.

There is undeniably an element of sexual discrimination underpinning this pattern of neglect. The feminist implications of the modern dance practice of the 1930s and '40s deserve fuller discussion than

Top: Ruth Bergner and Pat Eadie in *Eastern Motion*. Bottom: *Egyptian Fresco*, from *Fete Fantastique* (1944), directed by Ida Beeby on the occasion of the Fifth Anniversary performance of the Patch Theatre, Perth.

is possible here, but suffice it to say that modern dance is an art form which has been defined by and identified with women artists. Recent works on Australian women writers and painters of this period have attempted to redress the neglect from which their subjects suffered relative to their male contemporaries. The fact that in the early years modern dance attracted few male dancers and choreographers – it was overwhelmingly a women's art form in Australia – meant that not only did female practitioners of modern dance suffer neglect, but the entire art.

The European modern dancers were victims of another kind of prejudice, a legacy of Australia's colonial past enshrined in the attitude that anything that was worthwhile, that was of significance culturally, had to be English. Australian cultural institutions were founded on English models and the infrastructure that grew up around the arts – the festivals and sponsoring organisations like the Elizabethan Theatre Trust – were dominated by English taste and English values. Furthermore modern dance had not fared well in post-war Britain. The conservatism of English dance militated against major modern dance development both within Britain and in her former colonies.

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ANOTHER DIGRESSION: A QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY.

ELAINE SCARRY, commenting on changing patterns of cultural dominance, writes:

> It has often been noticed that artistic creation frequently occurs in conjunction with an absorption with military matters, both in the realm of the individual artist (Leonardo da Vinci is the most familiar example) and in the realm of the nation state – the history of changing national supremacy in art (belonging now to one country, now to another) tends to follow the same path as the history of changing political supremacy.
> (1985: 141)

She goes on to qualify this statement:

> Whether or not this correspondence exists is debatable. If it does exist, there are at least two antithetical explanations of its existence: one, that a militarily and economically powerful country is also an artistically active culture (Ezra Pound is perhaps the most familiar exponent of this reading); two, that "artistic excellence" is an unstable and arbitrary category, and those who have other forms of political power will also have the power to designate their own form of art as the best of that era.
> (SCARRY 1985: 353)

Twentieth century dance modernism bears a nationalist imprint. Describing the gradual institutionalization of modern dance after World War I, Susan Manning writes that "modern dance became an arena for the forging of national identity." Twentieth century ballet, on the other hand, became "an arena for international competition." (1988: 34)

The roots of today's modern dance first appeared in America and Germany around the turn of the century and in the early years the developing traditions held many values and principles in common. After World War II American and German dance followed different paths of development for clear sociopolitical reasons.

> After 1933 National Socialism appropriated *ausdruckstanz*, (literally "dance of expression"), as modern dance was known in the 1920s, and made it serve ideological ends, as in the opening night spectacle for the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games staged by Wigman, Gret Palucca, Harald Kreutzberg and others. After the war ausdruckstanz never regained its earlier stature, in part because of its Fascist ideological taint. To Germans it seemed unsuited to the new era of post-war recovery, an era that preferred the supposedly untainted classicism of ballet. Yet, in actuality, the Nazis had promoted ballet as requisite training for professional dancers and an appropriate public diversion. Even so, as West German cities vied to found ballet companies of international stature during the 1950s and early '60s, they built on the foundation laid by National Socialism. Ironically enough, ballet at that time seemed a refuge of internationalism, classicism and formalism.
>
> While West German dance took refuge in ballet during the early post-war years, American dance adopted an increasingly formalist credo. Ballet choreographers followed the example of George Balanchine, and modern dancers that of Merce Cunningham, as both idioms enjoyed the security of America's newfound cultural and political dominance.
> (MANNING 1986: 58)

Ausdruckstanz virtually disappeared in Germany after World War II, while American modern dance achieved a world-wide reputation. The explanation for the international dominance of American dance modernism is, as Scarry suggests, open to debate, but whatever the reason, it was an achievment clearly underwritten by the economic and political power of the USA.

Throughout history dance has been appropriated for ideological and political purposes and American dance is no exception. In the 1950s, at the height of the Cold War, the American State Department was actively promoting and exporting American culture. The national self-image projected through American cultural exports like the New York City Ballet was of an athletic, outward-flowing and streamlined modernity. When the N.Y.C.B. toured Australia in 1958 it did not disguise the fact that it was being used "as a not unimportant arm of an enlightened foriegn policy."

The N.Y.C.B. program acknowledgment of the support of the State Department is prefaced by a confident assertion of the triumph of American dance:

> The American style of classic dancing, its supple sharpness or its metronomic rigidity, its richness of metrical invention, its insistent development of the most legible and persistent residue of the traditional, has invested the American dancer with a kind of Olympic prestige, a secure area of championship, the self-assurance of a working method which, in competition, dominates. It has not only become the classic style of American dancing of the Twentieth Century; it has become the accepted standard for the rest of the world as well.[6]

Modern dance was also represented in the International Cultural Program sponsored by the State Department: Martha Graham visited Indonesia in 1955 as the representative exponent of American modern dance. Alvin Ailey and the Jose Limon Dance company toured Australia in 1962 and 1963 respectively.

I am not suggesting that there is anything particularly sinister in these exercises in cultural exchange. I cite these examples merely to draw out what Manning has termed "the nationalist implications of dance modernism," that is, the fact that dance development over this century has been so closely tied to issues of national identity.

But there are of course debates of a more personal and parochial nature which have significantly influenced the character of dance activity at particular points in time. Marcia Siegel (1987: 181) observes, for example, that Lincoln Kirstein's vehement attacks on modern dance during the 1930s and '40s were fuelled in part by his ambitions for Balanchine and the company which was to become the New York City Ballet. The growing popularity of modern dance was perceived as a threat: modern dance was drawing the audience Kirstein hoped to attract to the new style of modern ballet being developed by Balanchine. Siegel also notes that the work of Balanchine and of Martha Graham managed not only to survive but to enjoy a high public profile throughout the 1940s and '50s because they had secured private patronage where other artists had not.

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THE ISSUE OF MODERN DANCE development in Australia hinges upon questions of national identity and national self-image, and upon historically determined patterns of political affiliation and social allegiance. Dance in Australia has been subject to both European and American modern dance influences but it remains, not surprisingly perhaps given its colonial past, strongly shaped by the example and tradition of English ballet.

These are obvious statements but the implications of these given conditions have not yet been fully examined. If we wish to comprehend the failure and the neglect of modern dance in Australia, a whole complex of issues and forces must be taken into account. There are international, national and local dimensions to this lack of development and lack of recognition.

6. From the official program N.Y.C.B. Australian Tour 1958.

Top: A work by Ida Beeby, the Patch Theatre, Perth. Bottom: Rehearsal photograph of Elizabet Weiner's *Return to the Earth*. The work was premiered in 1947 at the Union Theatre, Melbourne University. "The Forest of Human Souls stands on the Threshold of Life. A young girl enters it, almost unaware. She seeks the loftiest and purest creative soul, and finds the Mother, who is earthbound. a. The Dance of the Seeking One. b. The Dance of the Earthbound One. c. The Dance of the Forest of Human Souls."

As was suggested earlier, there are parallels to be drawn between the fate of the dancers of the 1930s and '40s and that of radical women writers of the period. Drusilla Modjeska writes:

> What these women were trying to do was important. That it was not more successful, that it was, ultimately, politically stillborn was not due to personal failings. It must be understood in the context of a critical history of culture and politics in this country, a history to which they have contributed.
> (MODJESKA 1981: 257)

It has been all too easy to ignore the larger picture and to assume that the problem lay with the artists themselves. That we have no grounds for such judgement should be obvious. Unlike the work of other neglected groups such as women writers and painters, the creative production of this generation of modern dancers cannot be experienced directly. Their dances have gone; they cannot be re-read, re-viewed or reappraised.

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POSITIONS AT A POINT IN TIME [7]

> "Who writes the history?
> Who speaks and who listens,
> and what is remembered?
> How does a dancer who has been ignored in her lifetime wish to be remembered?
> When she is interviewed, what does she say?"[8]

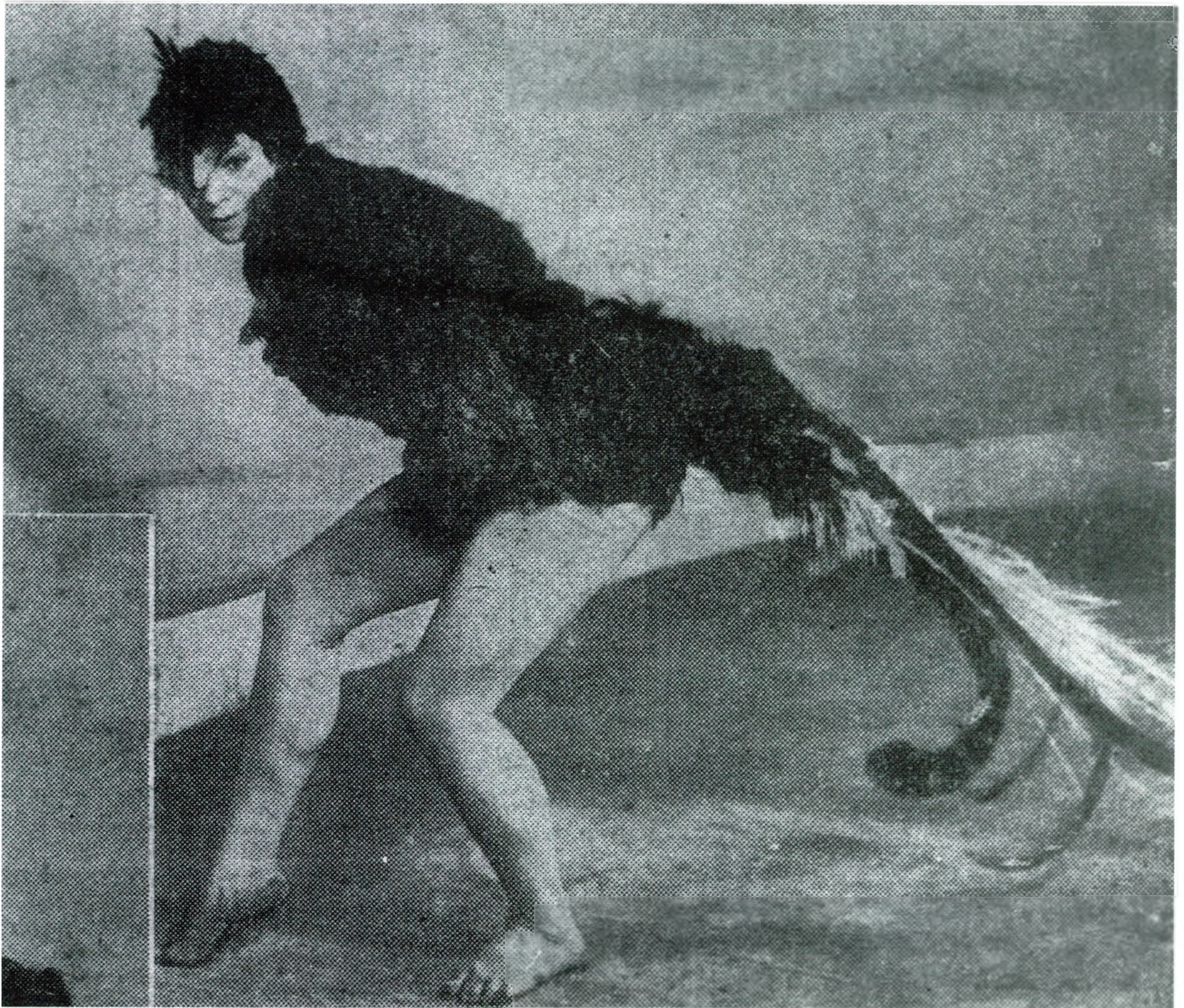
MARGARET LASICA has no desire to pen the definitive history of modern dance in Australia. Indeed the experience of the history project has led her to mistrust what historians write and to question the smooth confidence and authority which characterises much dance history writing. Like the work of the early modern dance artists in Australia, who sought and found their own ways of working, Margaret's task has been to find a method and form appropriate to the subject at hand.

In 1985 Mararet received a small grant from the Australia Council which enabled her to employ a team of assistants to undertake interviews and other research. She located the artists and matched interviewers with subjects, where possible linking people with common interests or common points of reference. In addition to the researching and recording of oral histories, members of the team have undertaken library and archive searches and have uncovered valuable secondary source materials. As Margaret remarks, there are materials lying around that haven't been taken much notice of.

The Image '85 Festival featured a presentation of materials dealing with modern dance of the '40s and '50s. The presentation, accompanied by a photographic display, made no pretence towards complete coverage of the period. It offered some examples of individual stories and individual lives and the presenters introduced their materials informally – simply as accounts of "what they had been told". The aim of the first stage of the project was essentially to get information written down, to have a record of what people said; and secondly, to begin to disseminate some of that information.

The archive contains materials and information which have been made available with the full understanding that they are not the whole story. Margaret believes that the period of modern dance history covered by the archive can be neither fully appreciated nor properly appraised without an understanding of the circumstances of its production. The work of individual artists has to be seen within the broad socio-political and economic context in which it was made. As the history project evolves and moves into a second stage, these questions of context are assuming greater prominence.

7. Title of the Image '85 forum, in which archival materials were first presented publicly.
8. Margaret Lasica, interview March 1989.
9. Ibid.



Patricia Edie: *Lyre Bird Dance*. Photograph reproduced from a *Women's Weekly* article published in March 1935.

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THE PROJECT which began within the sphere of Margaret's immediate knowledge and contacts has grown.

> People lead you; someone remembers someone who remembers someone else, and you need to be willing to spend time, to follow the threads. Some of the artists are now elderly, and we are asking them to recall a period in their lives perhaps almost fifty years in the past.[9]

And some of the dancers have no wish to remember; the many years of neglect have left some bitterness. Some have burnt materials, others have thrown them out.

The project continues and it is slow and at times painstaking work, but gradually a picture of the past is being revealed. It is a picture which presents a deeply committed generation of women artists, who created and performed their dances in the face of considerable adversity. They had no money; they enjoyed little recognition or support outside of their immediate circle; they had to believe in the work and find their own reasons for doing it.

It might be easy to dismiss or to reject this past as amateur, as naive, as idealistic, as out of fashion and irrelevant to the '80s. The work is not glamorous; the artists were not successful in mainstream terms.

But to reject this past is to deny the possibility of a different and better future for modern dance in this country.

Many of these individual artists were working experimentally, that is, in ways which fell outside the accepted canons of theatrical dance. Their work was not discussed in the public arena and effectively speaking it was silenced. Partisan interests still cloud the public representation and discussion of dance in Australia, and perhaps there are lessons to be learned from this first generation of modern dance artists.

The past impacts upon the present. It is important that the ideas and debates which have shaped Australian dance in the 1980s be put in perspective, and that we know something of what went before. The conditions and the issues faced by the modern dancers of the '30s clearly differ from those facing dancers today. But their stories may have much to tell us about the specificities of working in this place, if not in this time. The archive is a valuable resource which offers insight into the ideas, beliefs and convictions which have motivated and influenced Australian modern dance since its inception.

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FOR TOO LONG we believed that there was no tradition of modern dance in Australia. The modern dance archive presents evidence to the contrary and demonstrates that a modern dance culture of considerable diversity once existed here. In the short history of Australian dance attempts have been made to establish one story as central and others as marginal. The history project prompts us to ask: What kinds of dance have been legitimated, and how? Which have been marginalised, and why?

The object of the modern dance history project is not to rewrite history, nor to attempt to construct a more flattering picture of the past. As Margaret says, she is not trying to prove a point, because there is no (single) point to prove. The archive does affirm, however, that the work of the modern dancers of the 1930s and '40s is an important part of Australian cultural history that should be recognized, acknowledged and understood. In honoring the efforts of a remarkable generation of dance artists, Margaret Lasica reminds us that any history of Australian dance which presents one genre as central, neglecting and marginalising others in order to do so, cannot be the whole story.

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NOTE

The modern dance archive currently holds materials representing the work of Margaret Barr, Ida Beeby, Ruth Bergner, Gertrud Bodenweiser, Rosemary Coutts, Pat Edie, Hanni Kolm, Thea Mangiamele, Laurel Martyn, Daisy Pirnitzer, Margaret Reid, Sonia Revid, Margaret Walker and Elisabet Weiner. The archive is an ongoing project. Margaret Lasica welcomes inquiries and/or further information on the above-named and other modern dance aritsts. Margaret can be contacted through *Writings on Dance,* or direct: 246 Domain Road, South Yarra, Victoria, 3141.

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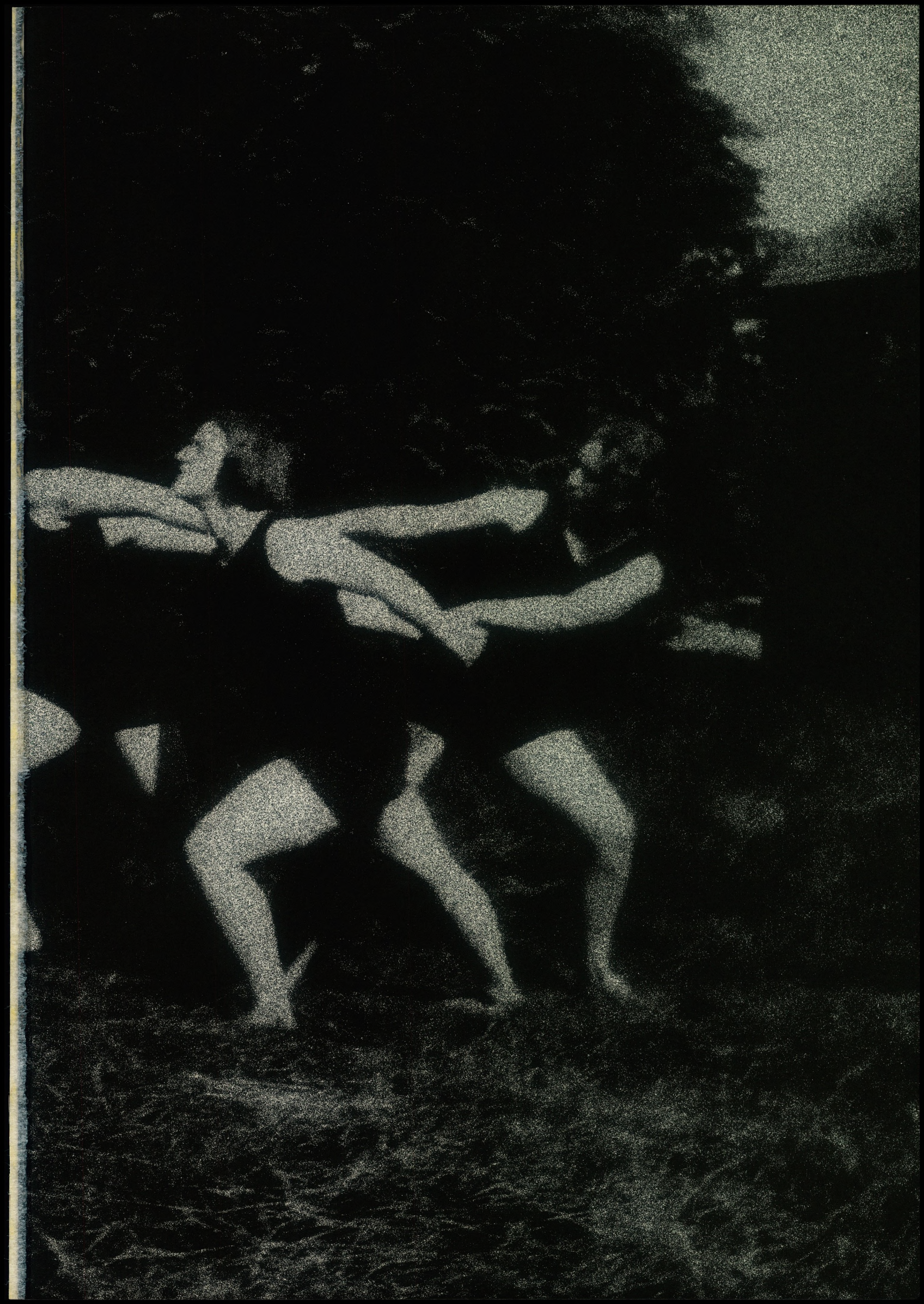

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