

WINTER 1992

# Writings on Dance

## Living Dancing

SARA RUDNER: A CONVERSATION

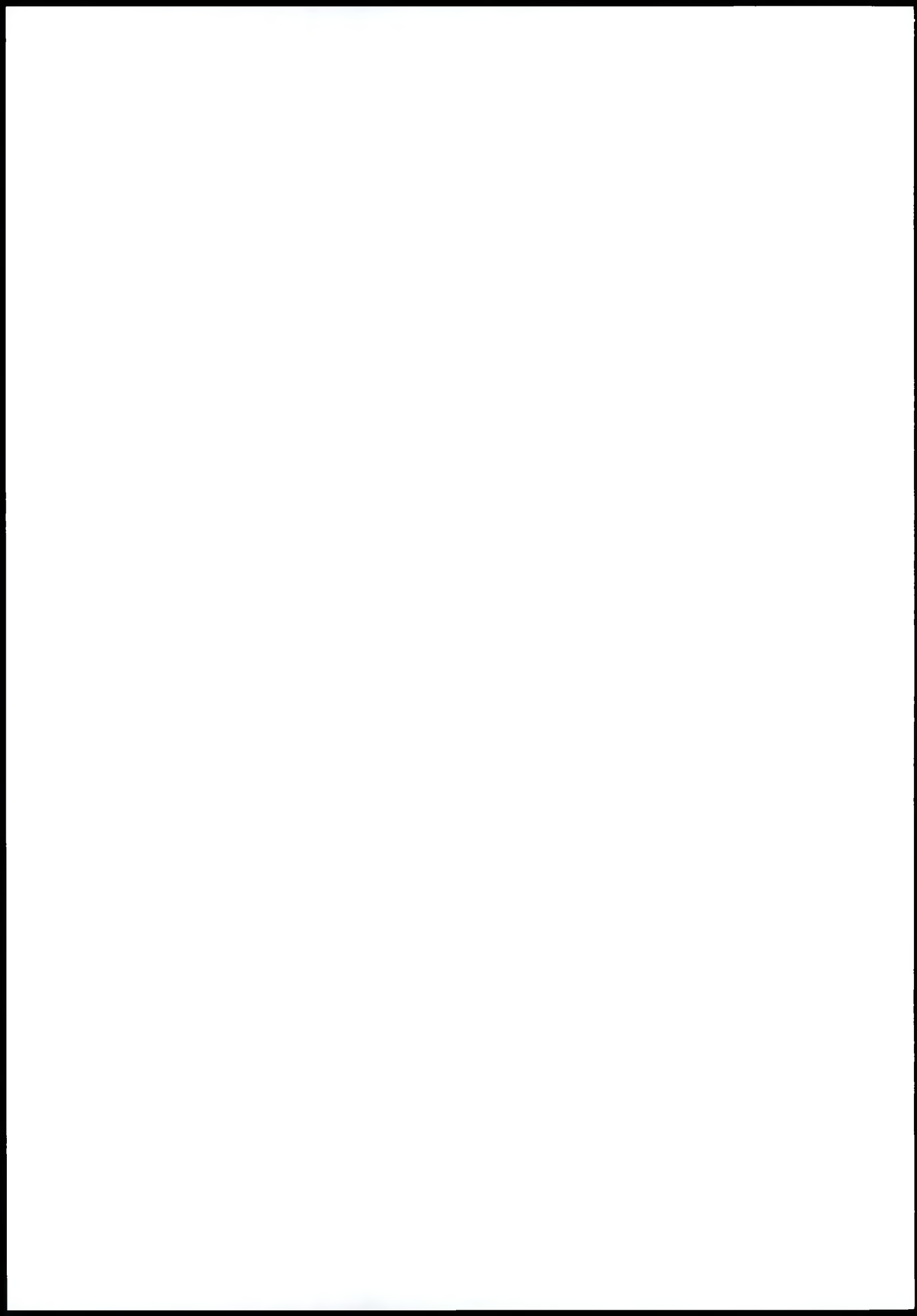
DANCE AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

LOOKING OUT / LOOKING IN

JUDE WALTON: NO HOPE NO REASON







*Writings*  
*on* *Dance*

8

**Living  
Dancing**

**WRITINGS ON DANCE**

**8. LIVING DANCING**

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

ELIZABETH DEMPSTER

SALLY GARDNER,

JUDE WALTON

**DESIGN/TYPESETTING** IAN ROBERTSON

**DISK PROCESSING** ON THE BALL

**PRINTING** IMPACT PRINTING

ISSN 0817 - 3710

COPYRIGHT © 1992

*WRITINGS ON DANCE* AND THE AUTHORS

*ALL RIGHTS RESERVED*

*WRITINGS ON DANCE* GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE ASSISTANCE  
OF THE PERFORMING ARTS BOARD OF THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL, AND  
THE VICTORIAN MINISTRY FOR THE ARTS.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

*WRITINGS ON DANCE*

P.O. BOX 1172 COLLINGWOOD 3066

VICTORIA AUSTRALIA

*WRITINGS ON DANCE* WELCOMES CONTRIBUTIONS:

LETTERS, ARTICLES, AND PHOTOGRAPHS/ILLUSTRATIONS.

ALL MANUSCRIPTS SHOULD BE ORIGINAL AND UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL,  
TYPED WITH DOUBLE-SPACING AND WITH WORDS INTENDED FOR ITALICS  
UNDERLINED. A COPY OF THE MANUSCRIPT SHOULD BE HELD BY THE  
AUTHOR/S AS *WRITINGS ON DANCE* ACCEPTS NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR  
EITHER LOSS OR RETURN. PHOTOS/GRAPHICS TO ACCOMPANY ARTICLES  
ARE APPRECIATED. INCLUDE CAPTIONS AND CREDITS. A SELF-ADDRESSED  
STAMPED ENVELOPE SHOULD BE ENCLOSED FOR MATERIALS  
YOU WISH RETURNED.

**ENDPAPERS:** *NO HOPE, NO REASON*: JUDE WALTON

(PHOTOGRAPH: WARWICK PAGE)

# Contents

- 7 Preface  
*Sally Gardner*
- 9 Dance as a Social Movement  
*Randy Martin*
- 22 Looking Out / Looking In  
*Bryan Smith*
- 35 Sara Rudner Dances: A Conversation
- i. Sara Rudner Interview  
*Libby Dempster*
- ii. Working with Sara Rudner  
*Lucy Guerin*
- iii. Sara Rudner's *Eight Solos*  
*Reviewed by Deborah Jowitt*

## REVIEW

- 44 Jude Walton's *No Hope No Reason*  
*Review by Jackie Dunn*  
*Photography by Warwick Page*

## CONTRIBUTORS

**ELIZABETH DEMPSTER** is a Melbourne-based choreographer and writer, currently lecturing in Dance at the Victoria University of Technology.

**JACKIE DUNN** is an artist and writer living in Sydney.

**LUCY GUERIN** moved to New York in 1989. Previously in Australia she danced in the companies of Russell Dumas and Nanette Hassall. She now dances with the companies of Tere O'Connor, Sara Rudner and Bebe Miller in addition to presenting her own work.

**DEBORAH JOWITT** has been the principal dance critic of *The Village Voice* for twenty years, as well as a contributor to many other publications. She is an award-winning writer and a sought-after lecturer and teacher. Her books include *The Dance in Mind* (1985) and *Time and the Dancing Image* (1988).

**SARA RUDNER** is a graduate of Barnard College and was a member of the Twyla Tharp Dance Company from 1965 – 1984. She formed her own company in 1975, choreographing and performing at home and abroad. She has appeared with Pilobolus, in repertory and in work of her own, and with the Joffrey Ballet, in choreography by Twyla Tharp. Grants and awards include a 'Bessie' in 1984, grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

**RANDY MARTIN** is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. He has performed, taught and studied dance, theatre and clowning in the United States, Italy, Cuba and Nicaragua. He is the author of *Performance as Political Act: The Embodied Self* (Bergin and Garvey, New York, 1990) in which "Dance as a Social Movement" appears as a chapter.

**BRYAN SMITH** has been involved in the field of modern dance in Australia for the past 15 years, working mainly as a dancer, choreographer and teacher. He is currently acquiring a skill base in the technologies supporting performance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Dance as a Social Movement" was originally published in *Social Text* #12, Fall, 1985. It is reprinted here with permission from the editors.

Jackie Dunn's review of *No Hope No Reason* was originally published in *Eyeline* #17, Summer 1991. It is reprinted here with the permission of the author.

*Looking Out / Looking In* was originally performed at the *Performance & Its Discourses* conference, Melbourne University, September 1991.

Deborah Jowitt's review of Sara Rudner's *Eight Solos* originally appeared in the *Village Voice*, New York, 24/3/92. It is reprinted here with the permission of the author and the *Village Voice*.

# Preface

**T**his issue focuses in a variety of ways on the nature of dancing. The contributors believe that dancing ought to be meaningful, both socially and personally.

It might seem self-evident that this should be the case. Yet the idea that dancing, in a professional sense, is little more than a technical accomplishment, is widespread.

The dancers whose essays are presented here understand and experience the role of the dancer as far exceeding a technical or instrumental one. In the relationship between choreographer and dancer, for example, they insist that the dancer's role goes beyond the simple carrying out of choreographic commands.

We could say that implicit in each of these contributions therefore, are a number of answers to the question of the work that dancers do, of the nature and value(s) of the labour that brings about the making and performance of a dance work. That dancers twist, turn, fall and jump is obvious; less obvious is what meanings are generated around and by these actions, and in whose name.

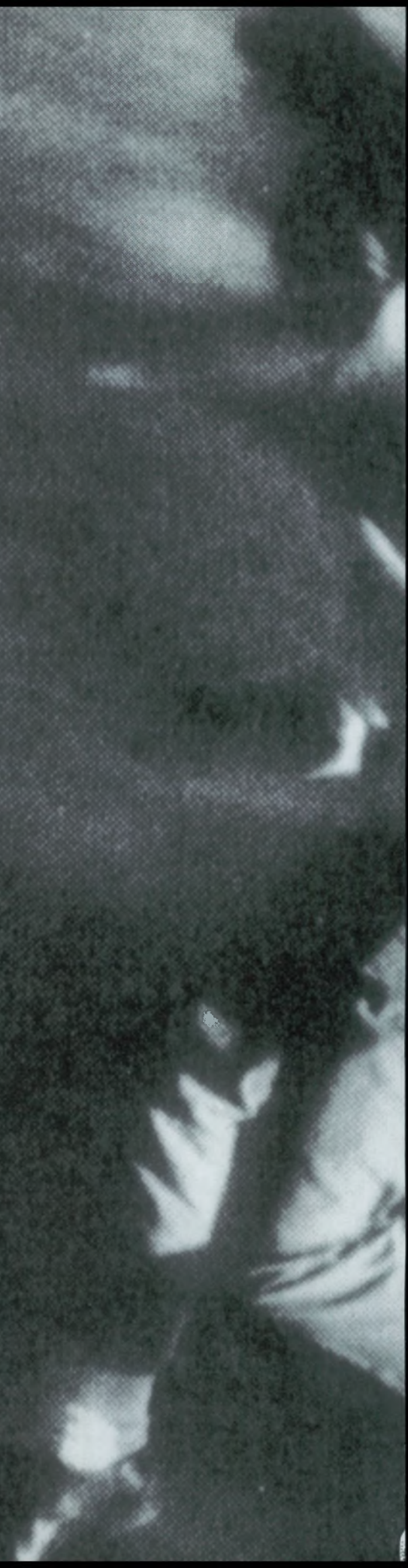
Drawing on his experience as a dancer in a small company, Randy Martin finds in the dynamic interaction between the choreographer and the dancers, and in the work they do to make a dance, a potential model for social action in the world at large. Thus, throughout the process of rehearsal, he charts the course of a transfer of authority from choreographer to dancers. In the performance itself he perceives the possibility of the performers communicating to the audience a desire to act (politically). As though to make concrete what he is proposing, as the essay proceeds, Martin gradually moves his own dancing body, as the locus of action and meaning, into the forefront of his text.

From a less Utopian perspective, in his performance-paper documented here, Bryan Smith stages a challenge to the institutions that both create and surround the very limited space that he sees dance performance currently occupying. His definition of himself as a dancer is only provisional: it demands or awaits the acknowledgement of his need for a dance practice whose values are not set apart from, but partake of, an imperfect, yet fully lived, full-bodied existence.

For New York artist, Sara Rudner, dances, or choreography, arise from within dancing. For her the condition of possibility for this simple truth is the training of dancers who feel empowered to explore and to take responsibility for the meanings of their own dancing. When Rudner makes a dance work nothing of the dancer is excluded *a priori* from finding a place in it. The material of the dance is not the movements the dancer executes but the ways they are inhabited by the life of the performer. This life is not driven out by technical demands. It is animated and taken further by them.

SALLY GARDNER

**The making  
of a dance ...  
is a fable of  
liberation;  
the story of  
one group's  
response to  
conditions  
of authority.  
In the process  
of their  
day to day  
response to  
the choreographer's  
command,  
dancers form  
a community  
which transcends  
those conditions  
of restraint.**



Randy Martin

# Dance as a Social Movement

## WARMING UP TO PHYSICAL POLITICS

“And God said, ‘Let there be light. . .,’” but absenting myself from religion and squinting in the face of abundant light, I had to find some other voice of authority to divine the spirit. Such could be described as the dancers’ plight, poor souls so entwined in the corporeal that they abandon themselves to the choreographer’s command. But in this sense the dancer is only a mild inversion of the mover *sans leotard*. For what has become an outspoken demand and response for the dancer has a silent partner in the choreography of everyday life. The mutual naming of dancer and choreographer that transforms an empty space into a kinetic architecture, can reveal much about the more anonymous social physique that we all share. A study of how a dance is made, through the explicit direction and expression of the body, can therefore serve as a map for those felt but perhaps unknown reaches of social experience. The dance as a social situation illustrates how the reaches, grabs, twists and shimmers of the body, too often seen as the shadows of God’s light, are themselves acts of worldly production and transformation.

Many questions are provoked by a study of dance. Yet, the constraints of space are as profound for the writer as they are for the dancer. I would like to acknowledge some of the problems before turning to those I shall focus upon. The aesthetic issues alone are numerous. Dance is a well fortified position from which to attack the distinction between art and popular culture. The proliferation of dance as a social practice in various forms continues in the neighbourhood disco, dance hall, or school. The line between professional and amateur is most often difficult to draw given the paucity and poverty of performance

opportunities. Break dancing is only the most recent example of coronated street expressions partitioned only by the stage (ballet is an earlier example of this same phenomenon).

In turn, many of the postmodern camp have based their stage experience upon that of the pedestrian and quotidian. These diverse forms themselves constitute a problem. Ballet is the wealthiest but modern dance is in many ways more prevalent. Further, dance forms appear to be cumulative, with the majority of output at the turn of the century still finding expression today. On the other hand, sense can be made out of periodizing dance output. In the 1930s in the United States, there was a conjunction between the emergence of new forms and the broader concern with the assertion of will over the human condition. In the sixties, the movement of many media into the realm of silence focused attention on the nonverbal body.

The focus upon the body itself evokes for many complex issues of sexuality. Modern dance has often been a haven from these issues. Jazz and other forms anchored to particular musics have been an extension of them. Ballet has tended to ossify gender roles. Among these divergences and diversities there remains a common subject; the body itself. The question of this subject’s relation to politics will concern and inform the pages that follow, while not excluding the problems raised above. Before setting the reader loose on the text, I should like to privilege certain issues, and ultimately a particular reading of the development of a dance performance.

While it is certainly true that many forms of dance employ gestural vocabularies that represent

specific meanings (e.g., Balinese dance), and many choreographers use movement to symbolize states of being (Martha Graham is perhaps the best known), much contemporary dance is decidedly non-symbolic and nonsignifying. For choreographers as diverse as the late George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, Alwin Nikolais, movement is abstract not symbolic. A particular movement is not a sign because, while repeatable, it represents nothing in and of itself. It is not a signifier to any signified. Rather, the movement communicates through its kinetic effects. Kinetic effects, the stimulation of the senses or sentience, are feelings expressed directly from one body to another and amongst a group of bodies. Hence, to study the experience of dance is to isolate both the unique communicative aspect of the body and the moment of pure action of an unrepresented (and unrepresentable) subject.

Isolating the workings of the body through a study of dance from "the inside" may provide intriguing material for the next Broadway hit, but its pertinence to political activity remains unclear. Let me spell out my case. It strikes me that one reason the sign has enjoyed pre-eminence as an object of analysis is the convergence of the theoretical breakthrough of linguistic-based theory with the legacy of the role of consciousness in Marxist thought. According to that legacy, consciousness is the agent of political activity. When the appropriate class or social group becomes aware of its position (objectively and subjectively) vis-a-vis the social totality, it is on the road to reconstructing that totality. If, as in contemporary society, the nature and contours of that totality are mystified or systematically misrepresented, linking (or deconstructing) signifier and signified may indeed heighten a totalizing consciousness. The assumption however, is that some threshold of consciousness constitutes an agent of activity. Yet it is action itself which appears impossible.

This is not simply a question of the appropriate organizational vehicle. Demonstrations in the eighties have been as large as those of other times (e.g., one million at the anti-nuclear rally in New York, June 12, 1982). Left parties continue to appeal for unity under the higher symbolic authority of the correct line. Activists from the labor to the feminist and environmentalist movements have not lost their militance. Despite the persistence of all of these

conscious expressions of opposition, sustained and widespread political action is illusive. Yet what seems to me precluded from the consciousness scenario is how political activity can be entered into and sustained. The suggested but absent term from such theory is, quite literally, the desire to act politically.

Desire here will be defined as the physical agent of activity. The body as subject in a social environment is both responsive to and a transformative element of that environment. In this sense, the body is the seat of desire and desire a mode of performance. Performance is always a production, a communication through action. At its best, a study of dance as a phenomenology of the body can serve to isolate desire as the absent cause in human social agency.

Desire has figured prominently in much postwar thought but in a shadow, disembodied form. Whether as the difference between need and demand (Lacan), the contradiction between signifier and signified (Kristeva), or a simpler loss and thereby mnemonic longing for an infantile absolute (Kovel), desire has been anchored to the sign and rooted within the conscious-unconscious axis of experience. To give desire positive force, to locate it in the body's performance, is to free it from the sign and place it on another axis of experience; what could be termed sentience. How these axes are coordinated is material for another discussion. Suffice it to say for now that desire carries the sign through performance, but is itself unrepresentable. Movement of the body can be frozen into wordlike gestures and decoded for meaning but this does not explain how that meaning is carried or acted out. The value of the modern dance to be discussed here is that its movements carry no meaning per se and so permit the analysis of the performance of movement as the production of desire.

A methodological note is in order here. This study of dance is based upon my experience in a New York pickup company (a group of dancers assembled for a single run of performances). It traces the process of making a dance from first rehearsal to performance. It is decidedly a text written from the standpoint of the producer rather than the receiver of the dance. As was mentioned at the outset, this is not a study of the aesthetics of dance or more pointedly how a dance is read, perceived, or understood by a viewer. Instead, it is a report on the making of the conditions for performance out of circumstances where the dancers initially are themselves reception-

ists to the choreographer's command.

Hopefully, the writing of a productionist text turns the reader into a performer caught in the midst of action without representation, as part of the totality that makes the dance. Hence, instead of describing appearances of the dance which could be analyzed as signs, only the actual mechanisms of production are detailed. While no picture may emerge of what the dance actually looked like, some sense may be imparted of the body's trajectory into performance. Those senses engaged are the subject of the experience aimed at in this text. If a reader of these pages can get a feeling of how desire is produced, this is the first step in understanding how dance makes desire available to an audience. While an audience is only implied in this account, a productionist text affords a view of what there is for an audience to receive, for the dance is made with the audience in mind as well as body.

To be useful in the political project I have suggested (augmenting consciousness with desire), the dance account must stand for a more general hermeneutic of practice. While dance may not be signifiable, stories about dance certainly are. But this is precisely an example of the relation between desire and consciousness in political practice. It is desire that carries the prospects of interpretation. The dance company, while poised for the production of desire in performance, could stand for any community or totalizing agent bound by some means of authority or regulation. At the onset of the rehearsal process, choreographer and company exist as state and people, capital and labor, patriarch and gender, as a totality which finds its representation and as such identity or consciousness of itself through an external authority. In this sense, authority can be said to symbolize totality without the means to realize it. Initially, the company looks to the choreographer for dancing, as people look to the state for government. What is obscured in this signifying gaze is exactly who wields practical power over social action.

Dancers, like the citizenry of a bourgeois polity, do not remain in this posture of misrepresentation. In the course of making a dance, the role and position of authority is transformed as the company totalizes performance as a collective practice. Performance marks the recession of authority symbolized in the choreographer's person to author-

## **The body as subject in a social environment is both responsive to and a transformative element of that environment.**

ity as an abstract or essentialized element of totality itself. Hence the movement from first rehearsal to performance traces the transition from symbolic authority, external to and bounding social action, to an abstract authority contained within and expressed through social action of a totality.

The fit between dancer and citizen is not isomorphic. The choreographer's absence is replaced by the audience's presence and the dancer's desire is directed at their demand. That demand however has made dancers both aware and sentient of themselves as totality. In the case of state and people, we could say that authority and audience are combined. State rule is executed by maintaining a watch on the people. To move from that authority therefore would be to cast the eyes of the state into opposition and the body of the people into action. The making of a dance then, is a fable of liberation; the story of one group's response to conditions of authority. In the process of their day to day response to the choreographer's command, dancers form a community which transcends those conditions of restraint. This is achieved, paradoxically, in the name of choreographic control. In the process of embodying the choreographer's wishes, her authority is eclipsed. Domination creates the conditions of its own transcendence. Demand is realized as desire.

Such scheming is appropriate for the stage. Indeed, the stage for political theatre permits a lived utopia. Particularly, when dreams are anchored to what is (mis)represented as immediately possible, the path of ritualized performance like dance can provide some inspiration for more quotidian histrionics.

I have asserted that the dance rehearsal process begins with the relations of authority and totality found in the polity at large. From the point of view of the body itself however, daily physical practice is much closer to performance than the initial machinations of choreography. Rather than simply contradicting myself, I hope to trace a dual movement in the description of choreographic process. On the one hand, dancers begin to work under the rule of the

sign as does everyone else. As the rehearsals proceed, the power of the sign recedes and the dancers become a collective social body intent upon moving an audience. The desire to act is produced in performance. This is what I claim is absent from the quotidian body politic. On the other hand, dancers begin the rehearsal process with a consciousness of the body that would appear quite bizarre in daily life. In most moments, barring pain, disability, danger, the body is felt and little thought about. Yet at every moment the quotidian body is directed, commanded, socialized, choreographed such that the body is viewed as a sign (gender, age, class) and desire is obscured. When the choreographer of the body becomes explicit and concrete, as in the initial stages of dancemaking, the otherwise invisible process through which the body is signified comes to the fore. When the choreographer no longer actively organizes the body in performance, her mark is left on the structure of movement that the dancers bring to life.

On both levels of the dual movement described here, dancers transform relative control to relative freedom. The movement from symbolic (external) to abstract (internal) authority is a utopian model for the performance of politics. The movement from conscious to sentient organization of the body, moves from a model of constraint over physical behavior to something approaching daily physical experience.

The transition from symbolic to abstract or choreographer's to dancer's authority proceeds through a series of mediations. Some of the key transitions or mediations are outlined here, though each day of rehearsal layered new means as well as new movement material on the dance to be. In the first rehearsals, the choreographer took movements that individual dancers had made, altered them, assigned them to groups of dancers, and set them to the counts of the music she had selected. The musical counts then were the first step that shifted authority from the choreographer's voice to that of an other. That other was the initial bridge between dancer and choreographer.

Soon the choreographer began to introduce improvisation as a means of procuring movement. The improvisations consisted of rules which the dancers must transcend both in order to turn ideas into actions, and to turn constraint into the experiential freedom of movement, which in turn obscures the

very existence of the rules. Improvisations regulate and totalize at the same time while authority is shifted into the dancers' domain. Dancers have the means to produce movement collectively. As the performance date approaches, they begin to arbitrate differences and regulate rehearsal themselves.

In performance, the movement material, regardless of its source, takes on the quality of improvisation. The movement has kinetic intent and that intentionality is directed at the audience. The desire produced in performance is secured but unnamed. In sum, choreographic authority represented or symbolized outside the group cannot realize the intended object (dance) of its daily activity (rehearsal). The very mechanisms introduced to assure the realization of the object sever ties to the external authority that had implemented them.

The choreographer's predicament is not so different from that of capital or the state. They too, must structure improvisations to elicit the realization of intents, be they surplus value or legitimation through elections. So long as the power of the body to assert its own needs and demands is masked, desire will appear only in the negative to be (mis)represented by candidates and commodities. Conversely, should the left as an intervention in people's lives succeed in mobilizing not only consciousness but sentience, not just meaning but desire, a social body capable of sustaining its own activity becomes possible. Ultimately, what makes dance performance distinctive from more quotidian forms is that it only exists as a social activity sentient of its power as an agent and its effects upon others. Is this not the gait of politics?

• • • • •

## **FIRST MOVEMENT: CONTOURS OF A COMPANY**

The company is the raw material out of which the dance will be hewn. It is the social body that must speak the choreographer's mind. Against the singularity of choreographic authority, is the collectivity of the company that constitutes totality. The dance will develop in the dialogue between these two. The relationship is more than one of command and response. At first the company only knows itself through each member's relation to the choreographer. As the rehearsals proceed, the company will take on more of its own identity as totality itself

becomes more prominent. Totality then, is not the group of dancers themselves, but what they are capable of producing as a group and this is certainly facilitated through their exchange with authority.

Authority and totality are relations particular to the creation of each dance. Choreographers and dancers have lives and movement resources that precede and inform each dance. In the interests of uniqueness, the choreographer must draw from those histories as well as break from them. She must create an inside to the rehearsal to which the rest of the world is an outside, while drawing from the riches of that world. Setting up a rehearsal schedule is the first step towards that break. The schedule carves up the dancers' space and time to reallocate it within the rehearsal. The schedule correlates the diverse points of departure to their common arrival. Hence, the authority-totally nexus commences on its own coordinates of space and time.

The rehearsal space is flanked by a kitchen on one side and a bedroom on the other. Its smooth polished wooden floorboards are tight together, facilitating falls and slides. The red brick walls and sashes of fall afternoon window light give the space a warmth and its rectangular proportions gives it the feeling of intimacy of being tucked inside an envelope.

Our initial instructions are to break into two groups and begin teaching each other phrases we composed on our own. After repeating the phrases three times, the dancers have a rough idea of what they look like and can approximately dance them. The choreographer does some editing, eliminating the arms from a turn and rearranging the sequence of movements, or simplifying a movement so that others can learn it more readily. We begin on the inside of the dance with our own movement becoming the movement of others. We pick up immediately where we left off before coming to the rehearsal, with movement we discovered before coming into contact with the group. By making adjustments, assigning counts and tempo according to the taped score, the choreographer places our individual movement into the context of the group and implicitly, of the dance that is to become.

Each dancer now has a range of several phrases, which also aligns them with a group of dancers who

know and do the same phrase. The choreographer's intervention begins by calibrating all of the phrases to the same time, thus removing them from their creator's beat and applying them to the standard of the musical score. The music applied to movement that knew nothing of it, already changes the rhythmic and kinetic sense of the phrases. The counting

## **Totality then, is not the group of dancers themselves, but what they are capable of producing as a group.**

turns the individual phrases into boxcars on a train capable of being hitched and unhitched at any point. The structural manipulation of boxcars is primarily a mechanical task and is executed by the choreographer with the supervision of a trainyard controller.

We begin in two groups doing two phrases and in the middle of a phrase the choreographer will stop us and have an individual change group allegiance. This presupposes learning more movement and alludes back to the previous process. The choreographer must also select the spatial path of the groups, paths that utilize contrast without inviting collision. The space is largely undifferentiated by the existing movement and the choreographer's control consists of her arbitration of difference at this point. There is no mirror in the studio and the choreographer is the only outer eye. While each dancer has authority over their own body, only she has authority over the group. While each dancer must command their own body, their internal space, the choreographer directs the overall disturbance in the space. We dance now through the direction of the choreographer rather than with each other. Our very isolation prohibits us from knowing difference, that is from knowing what the other dancers are doing in the space at the same time. We cannot see the other paths and our focus on the purely mechanical execution and memory of the steps limits our feeling of the other dancers' presence. At this point, technique is what we all bring to the rehearsal but it is also what separates us within it.

The process of learning phrases in groups, cutting and splicing them and adding them to the existing sequence continues much in the same way

for the first four rehearsals. The dance progresses not only in length but in complexity. Singly or in pairs or trios, we break with the phrase we are dancing to join together. Our memorization is both of phrases and the moments of change. The control that makes these changes possible is the counts. In contrast to the choreographer, the counts administer continuity. They serve to calibrate the individual dancer with the group. The counts are an external metric that, although based upon the music, are quite arbitrary delineations. After initially counting the movement in measures with four beats (4/4 time), the choreographer decided to change the counts to five beats to a bar (5/4 time). The musical score is highly polyrhythmic and emphasis could be found for either pattern.

While counting is itself arbitrary, its effects on the dancing of the movement are not. The individual phrases were made with either a duple or triple feel (suggesting four-four or three-four countings). Recalibrating the phrases lifted them from their original rhythmic contexts, and especially where phrases were syncopated, changed their kinetic feel. The more the dancers had to find new motional values for the forms they had produced, the more they mourned the loss. "But it just doesn't work in five. I can't make any sense of this turn. I don't know where it comes now." At this point, the counts did not create a new kinetic feel, for the movement was still driven by the inner musicality of the dancer's body; rather, the counts demanded new values. It remained the dancers' task to produce them. These new acts of production occurred on the terms and terrain of the piece itself.

In subordinating all individual movement to a common metric, this initial authority rendered all dancers dependent on a count system that belonged to none. It could thereby provide a basis for a totality that was beyond and yet belonged to all. When other sections of the dance were choreographed, this first section was dubbed "the fives." It was the only section named for the way it was counted.

At this point, the choreographer and the counts were the two primary authorities in rehearsal. Not only were they functionally divided into diachrony and synchrony, respectively, but they were also independent. Counts adjudicate interpersonal rivalries while the choreographer placates the demands of the space.

• • • • •

## **SECOND MOVEMENT: DANCE FROM THE INSIDE**

The first four rehearsals proceed as a series of hows. The focus is on codeterminous execution of movement within the space. Caught up in the how, the dancers as yet know little of the why, or sense of the movement. From the first, there have been moments where the movement was exciting or engaging. There are passages for each of us where we feel we are really "dancing". But it is not clear what we are dancing for. The dancers have feelings of motional satisfaction that they call kinetic. But the sequence of movement has not formed a particular context that would favour one kinetic interpretation over another. Whereas kinetics have been stolen moments for individual dancers, by the third week with three rehearsals a week, this begins to change. The dancers kinetic moments enter the real time of the rehearsal. The rehearsal process begins to concern itself with what will become the aesthetic content of the piece, the movement's intent. As the discussion and nature of the choreographic problem is no longer purely technical, so do the relations between authority and totality change. Where there was visible only scaffolding, now is visible something of the building to be, for the structure is given some basis for identifying itself that is not contingent on its support. Where totality was subordinate to authority through the demands of technique, now the two meet on more equal footing. The new terms of encounter are a consequence of the demand for kinetic intention which is itself a product of that encounter. Kinetics are the dancers' response to a motional situation, though the choreographer must find the means to create those situations.

Between the third and the seventh week of rehearsal, authority and totality will make their contribution to the possibility of a specific kinetic intention. Authority establishes a means of exchange between dancers and choreographer that permits the creation of movement within and by the rehearsal process, improvisation. Authority generates a set of rules that bound the conditions for making movement. Through rehearsals, dancers erect a form of community that is both a bastion and expression of totality. The community is a response to the rules which permit the passage of the rehearsal from the production of movement to kinetic expression. This

passage is marked by the shift of emphasis from technical solutions to mechanical problems (codeterminous movement), to kinetic solutions to technical problems (performance).

In this next phase of the choreographic process, the choreographer begins to speak of quality, the "what" of the movement. Quality defines the nature of the movement's execution. It gives dancing a point of view which can then crystallize into an intention. As such, quality is a window between technicity and kinetic motivation. It is a surface that borders both worlds. Quality is not itself intention, for just as in speech the tonal manipulations of a word can change but not explain its meaning, so quality is only part of what displays a kinetic intention. It is the part that is accessible through the exchange between choreographer and dancers.

The dance now only exists in groups. Just as the individual changes that dancers make are now always group changes, now individual kinetics depends increasingly upon collective moments. The experiential change in one's own body is a function of the changing environment of bodies. The break with synchronicity, continuity and allegiance are the same moment in which kinetic effects occur. That is, kinetics occur within relational differences rather than personal changes. By creating a form which can be filled, spacing like quality builds kinetic moments. The phrasemaker's authority which begins with teaching movement and regulating counts, is extended to maintain the spatial integrity within the group. Dancers return to the person who originally made the phrase for clarification of movement to achieve spatial uniformity within the group. The phrasemakers are called upon to refine the movement beyond its original exposition. The refinement is simultaneously the tuning of the group. As the group gains in spatial solidity, arrivals and departures of individuals have clearer resonance, and new kinetic moments are created. This creative process drives the life of the piece.

At the same time that quality and spacing are applied to existing movement, another method is added to the choreographic process. No longer is movement brought to rehearsal from phrases dancers have prepared outside. Improvisation

emerges as the new structure which embodies choreographic authority. It is the meeting ground of what dancers and choreographer give up, authority and technique, and what they each contribute, movement and its identification. Improvisation as a means to expand the pool of movement is itself beyond dancers and choreographer at the same time that it is the medium through which they touch. The choreographer cannot imagine the specific movements of ten dancers any more than they could improvise and select and set their collective movement. Dancers and choreographer contributed movement through their own individual improvisations. Now that improves are a collective process, not only movement but kinetic relations among dancers

**Dance is an intrusion in space and what it displaces is felt as a new spatial environment between dancer and audience. A painting similarly moves visual orientation. Hence, in a literal sense, art works, and by working it has effects.**

are discovered. When the movement is replicated, so are the relationships among dancers such that the kinetics found in the moment of discovery do not recede in the process of structural refinement. Where quality followed the technique-based movement, it precedes movement found through improvisation.

The first improvisations were simple problems in search of a technical solution. In pairs we assumed a mutually coiled position, one on the floor, the other standing. While the former uncoiled and slid away, the latter fell in an arch over them. The choreographer watched while we worked simultaneously, letting her eye get attracted from one couple to the next. Struck by an event, she would call on the rest of us to replicate the actions of the one. "Let's all do what (Ginger)'s doing. Hold there, now bend your torso. There! Anne's got it. With the head on the floor. Yes." The movement is constructed as a composite across individual dancers' bodies. It is also the product of a collective body which is beyond each

of theirs. For a moment the choreographer follows the dancers, the dancers forget what they have learned about movement and respond with the developed resiliency of their bodies to the demands of the problem.

The improvisation terminates when a working solution is found. Yet, at the moment of selection, the logic of what works is not clear. A worthy solution is not merely one that fulfils the problem's function. There were many solutions that achieved a balanced fall and recovery. The problem only suggested a response; it did not prescribe a means of selection. The composite movement is actually a series of selections, each sharing in the discovery. Like the premium awarded to uniqueness in an inspector's adjudication, the selection of movement is determined at the moment the bounds of the problem are transcended. The surprise of discovery eclipses the problem's demand and seals the decision. The choreographer finds what could not be imagined in setting up the problem, the body's response. Improvisation as choreographic process disappears with selection. Dancing our way out of the problem led to a solution that would no longer be improvised. With the setting of the movement, however, the improvisational kinetics remain. The one dancer still triggers the other's movement. The surprise in the discovery then is the kinetics themselves, unimaginable responses that speak directly to the body.

Improvisation bounds time and space to free the dancer within them. Improvisation is the limit that permits limitlessness, the scarcity that creates abundance, the rules that invite breaking. The freedom is relative. The dancer soars, shifts, stops, unaware of the structure that has become a silent authority; transcending the rules obscures their constraint.

The investment of the body over the mind's intelligence, in the very materials of the work, transfers the source of creation into its mode of expression. This is not to imply that the medium is the message, but simply that it has one. The body speaks through its own kinetic means. But kinetics are possible in the dance because improvisational situations were imagined and assigned. The autonomy of the body's means of articulation is embedded within other systems of communication. In finding means to transcend those other systems (improvisation), a space is cleared for the experience of physical intent. The filling of a stage or a canvas

with a system of surprises-as-solutions makes a piece work. Work, not in the sense of fulfilling a function or imparting a message, but work in the sense of a formation of actions performed on a relation of objects. This is the work in a work of art. Dance is an intrusion in space and what it displaces is felt as a new spatial environment between dancer and audience. A painting similarly moves visual orientation. Hence, in a literal sense, art works, and by working it has effects.

By the end of the sixth week there is a kind of send-off that marks the recession of authority as directing the choreographic process and the ascension of totality, albeit moulded by the choreographer as constituting dance making. The functions of spacing and what is called picking (corroborating movement at certain points), shift from an inner to an outer focus. Spacing had been something to insure the survival of the dancers in the space. Spatial intervals were set to prevent collisions, create openings for groups to pass one another, and to maintain the identity of the groups to those within them. Now spacing is set so that the section can be danced "full-out" (i.e., performed). The activity is the same but its different ends give it a more precise focus. Conversely, dancing with full energy and commitment (to intention) requires more precise spacing. Positions and shapes of the body are approached with the same precision. All the dancers in a group would stand side by side and extend their legs to see whose was lowest, setting the position of the leg to, that level. Suddenly dancers are dancing not to execute steps in concert, but to be seen. As the focus of the rehearsal shifts from apprehension to performance, the dancers shift from input to output and their relation to the choreographer changes from leader to audience.

The choreographer states, "Now that we've got the steps it doesn't mean we're ready to perform them. Now we have to dig for the meaning inside the steps. Later she clarifies what she means by this. "It's all coming together now and there are some beautiful moments, but there're times when you let it drop and I can see the confusion. You have to be able to do the steps precisely and full out in order to make it legible. If anyone's doing something they're not supposed to do it stands out right away." In effect, the response to meaning in the movement is technique. Legibility is achieved through a highly technical process, picking. The assumption is that when the movement is made

coherent enough by unifying its form it will be read by the audience. These instructions appear tautological because they address only what is named in the choreographic process. On face value it appears that meaning in movement is attained through technique. But the question remains, what is fulfilled when the movement is danced "full-out"? Clearly there is an expressive intent to dance that is identified only by and through performance. The process of that revelation can be described as one of removing obstacles, of chipping away at incoherence and this itself is a technical process.

. . . . .

### **THIRD MOVEMENT: TO SEE AND BE SEEN**

Seven weeks of rehearsals have yielded a dance company. The company is a social totality, a community, that places demands for choreographic meaning and can articulate kinetic desire. That is to say it is a social totality that embodies choreographic authority and dancerly totality. Up to now the choreographer has held in her conception the soul or essence of the entire work, or at least a yearning for that essence that has driven the rehearsal process. The choreographer has something she wants to say, and forges the rehearsal process to say it. But just when she would find that voice, when the dance is complete, the body that her yearning implies, is materialized in those of the dancers. Her desire to speak becomes their movement.

The last weeks of rehearsal appear to accelerate. The audience to be sucks the dancers towards the performance date. The primacy of totality is both reflexive and essential. For the dancers who refine the movement through technique while they produce something beyond it, this time marks the receding role of the authority embodied in the person of the choreographer. For all the excitement of the creative process, perhaps one of the cruelties of choreography is that it leaves the choreographer not so far from where she began. Shortly before a performance she laments, "I feel depressed, sort of let down and empty because now my part in the concert is over." As the essence of the piece is

realized and passes into danced experience itself, the choreographer's loss makes performance possible. The dancers' gain has been continuous. The choreographer's loss is almost as sudden as the audience's surprise. The choreographer's effect on the dancers is concentrated in their effect on the audience. Performance, the moment when dancers are at their fullest as the subject of dance, when their experience of dancing is truly totalizing, is also the instance when the dancers' bodies are the pure object of the audience's eye. It is the dancers' vision that reveals themselves.

Improvisation has reached a new level of refinement and complexity in the rehearsal. Dancers improvise entire sections, and all the dancing takes on something of the freshness of kinetic problem solving. Needless to say, it is improvisation that characterizes the quotidian experience of the body. In our daily lives we have one shot to deal with the problems posed by motional situations. It is difficult to imagine repeatedly walking up a crowded staircase to find another path down, and yet this is what the dancer does in the choreographic process. Perhaps this is why quotidian movements are so constrained

### **As the ... piece is realized and passes into danced experience itself, the choreographer's loss makes performance possible. The dancers' gain has been continuous.**

and authority never yields to totality in a moment of performance. By successively breaking the bounds of the motional problem, dancers create an autonomy for totality, albeit a totality that has internalized authority. Even this independence is checked when the new found subject meets its object in performance (dancers dance to be seen).

For the streetwalker and the walker of the street, what the making of a dance reveals is something of the conditions of freedom for the body. The community the dancers erect which has the body's expression at heart, brings to the sentient fore what is peripheral in most people's lives. Hopefully, in the moment of performance, what the dancers produce can move the audience from periphery to centerstage. The public body departs the theatre with the motion towards the forefront intact. By stimulat-

ing the kinetic life of the audience, by privileging their bodies' possibility for action, the dance lives on beyond the stage. If social movements could reembody this desire, then the political potential of dance could be realized. Having anticipated the final bows, let me return to the process of contemplating the dance.

The Saturday before the show we worked in the theatre space for the first time. It is considerably larger than any space we have worked in before. After running the piece through, the immediate problems were spacing and projecting the movement outside the dance space. The group seemed to naturally turn to the fives as the place to work out the problems. But immediately there was a polarization between those who wanted to discuss the points of difference and the ones who wanted to resolve the problems by dancing. The choreographer was busied with other aspects of the concert and did not mediate these decisions. Whereas four weeks ago, the dancers would almost shyly confront spacing problems, that air of politeness was absent from the current proceedings. The conflict, however, only served to strengthen the relations of polity as assent was given to argument. This time it was decided in favor of the whole, at another time a part was picked at. Tensions flared quickly as accusations were made on "mistaken" movements but just as quickly a decision would be negotiated and the episode would be dropped. There was an understanding, hastened by time constraints, that adjudication of difference was not only possible but permissible.

The second problem posed by the new space was how to project movement that was qualitatively introspective across a large space. This question was posed to the choreographer in a way that effectively demanded she articulate the meaning of the piece as a whole. Once the question of performance perspective was addressed to her, an overall statement was the only redress to the dancers' need to express meaning. The choreographer began by suggesting that the intensity of the movement be projected into the body rather than out into the space. The body's power was to be incandescent. This remained a technical explication and she admitted an uncertainty about the dramatic content and development of the piece.

To the dancers' internalized continuity and synchrony, the choreographer could only offer difference. She described the various sections of the

piece as a "layering of images" and denied any linear continuity to the narrative. But the dancers' experience belied this disclaimer, not on the basis of any epic narrative but rather a sentient one. For the dancers, there was a cumulative kinetic effect that demanded articulation, though it would ultimately have to wait for performance. The dancers now could offer more than questions. Whereas previously they had been mute on questions of interpretation, now a stream of synthetic comments flowed. Statements were made on transitions, on the switching of roles from victimizer to victimized (the piece was "about" victimization), on the recurring theme of scarcity, on the development from dancery to dramatic exposition of the movement, and so on.

Suddenly the dancers had a lot to say, and they spoke through their experience of the totality of the piece. The choreographer certainly mediated the discussion and her voice rose above the rest, but her setting of policy did not emanate from her own volition. When a dancer said she felt the stick-dowels controlled her, the choreographer replied, "You should let the stick be an expression of your body rather than the other way around. It is always you, the human, who is controlling the object." The dancers' questions come from inside the work and express just as much of an understanding as a need to know. Without an audience, that need takes the form of a demand that experience be named, but when a public receives the performance, these needs are expressed in a way that is both apparent and anonymous. Kinetic intent is as yet without a home and takes the form of an esthetic problem. The demand for esthetic clarity surfaces however, only when the whole exists to impede upon the parts.

Up until the very afternoon of the performance, the fives (the first section) remain the barometer of the whole dance. It is in rehearsal often the only section that is actually run. No matter how developed the relations of totality become, technicity remains the dancers' window to the outside world. It is a window in which their reflection is blurred and partial, but it is their only means to external certainty, and as such helps to allay nerves that mount before performance. Consequently most of the work on the dance occurs with the fives. While grounded in technicity the metonymic function of the fives must also be recalled as developing totality. In one instance, frustrated with problems of counting, the dancers turned directly to the music to set cues. It was the first time since the piece began that we just sat still and listened to the music together. The music cues became physicalized signposts outside of any individual

dancer yet experienced by all as an internalized objectivity. The musicalization of the collective body as opposed to the individual's movement helped to etch the kinetic divisions of the space.

The eve of the performance was a combination dress and lighting rehearsal. All of the elements (except the public) were introduced which would transform this space into a specialized performance sphere. The new bounds of the space (lights, equipment, and a black plastic cover called a marley floor), introduce their own set of technical constraints to the dancing. Although we have adjusted our spacing to fill the space, we must now readjust it to stay in the lights which have been set for fixed points. In the darkness outside the light, we cannot see beyond the floor (and sometimes not even the floor itself) to the darkened cavity where the audience sits. Nor can we see the stage from the wings and so we lose many visual cues for entrances to new sections. In each of the wings there is now a lighting stand with tiers of lights, and other equipment which must be avoided, without diminishing the velocity of a backwards running exit. In short, the dancer's visual sense is eroded in the performance space both by bright lights and by darkness.

The effect of the loss of sight is to heighten the tactile senses in performance, and in turn contribute to the kinetic experience of the dancer. The additional boundedness of the performance space helps to crystalize the intent in performance. The space has been rendered special and also specialized in a way that gives closure to the rehearsal process and creates a distinctive realm of performance. Lights also contribute to the difference of performance with their own sentient effects. High and low density, reds or blues, excite the body in different ways, as has been noted in any stage manual. But lights also increase the partisanship of the space as a real landscape upon which the dancers' intrude. The more strongly the space is carved by lights, the more intense the dancers disturbance of the space. The outer disturbance reverberates within the dancer's body and draws the dancer ever more deeply inside the kinetic life of the performance.

It is simple enough to state that what is produced in performance is kinetic intent, which has been

expressed previously as the dancers' desire. The passage from authority to totality secures performance as the world of desire, whose expression is displayed on the stage but not named. The difference between the experience that the choreographer conceives and the audience consumes, and the one that the dancers perform can best be communicated by tracing the dancers' journey through the work. It is here, in and through the work that the dancer is moved to act not as individual but as social body. It is this social body that the audience will receive and return to their daily movements with.

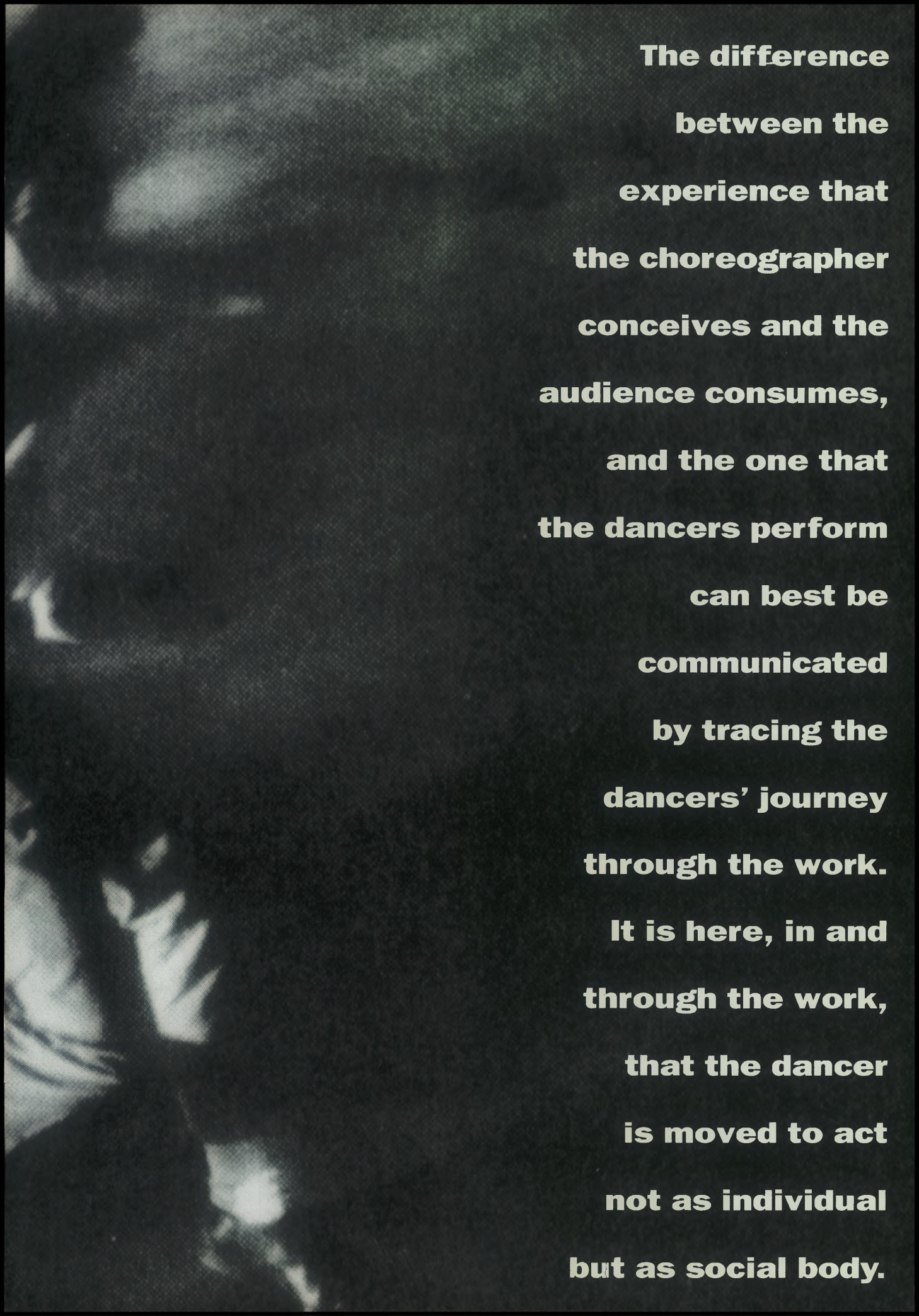
In the dance before the last piece, I played the comic role of a mime replete with clownface. The removal of that face aided my transition into another body. The new body already felt softer, more ragged and exposed than the other. When I took my place in the third wing, in the moment of silent darkness before the piece began, I felt strangely alone. As the choreographer enters to perform her solo that initiated the piece, the light downstage does not illuminate my condition. Although I do not see her, she is working the space, warming and coaxing it. Our entrances are marked singly by the discarding of the sticks that the solo figure bears. Four are dropped before the one that bears me. I am to replace an object. Not the one symbolized by the stick, but the space that I fill. I move to my spot. The light grays my vision. The space is warmed by those that enter after me and insert me into my position. The map is complete, the music comes on, and I feel the surge drop through my ears down the inner

**By stimulating the kinetic life of the audience, by privileging their bodies' possibility for action, the dance lives on beyond the stage. If social movements could re-embody this desire, then the political potential of dance could be realized.**

chamber of my body to rebound as the initial movement. My head swings around with four others and I feel my body widening to embrace the space we displace. I am a form inside of others, both my

group's and the stage. The constant crossings and reformulations spark my kinetic responses. The first moments of the dance, I remain in the same place until I am swept into the path of a passing figure. My new allegiance takes me cross stage. The three of us form a wedge that cuts through two other groups. I am pulled through the opening only to bounce back at a different pulse. My body has not lost its softness, the quality I had before entering the stage. But that softness is now the membrane through which I register the changes around me and chart my own course. There are moments when I think of nothing, not the counts nor the movement I am doing, nor my next change. I am inside dancing. I am propelled between being drawn and drawing. The other dancers are my kinetic field and I a part of their's. The possibilities appear infinite, yet the choices are always specific and occur at the instant of their execution, not before. Time swallows itself as I make it. There is nothing to measure where I have been. There is only a sense of where the motion that is me is going. That is my intent. The time comes for the phrase I originally made. There is a flash of recognition. I am downstage of the others who have picked up the phrase and I feel the newly formed group constructed around me. I pull to the right and feel the group pull with me, lose and pick up a new member on a roll before myself changing allegiance again. Changes later, I have accelerated around the periphery of the stage and see there will be no slot for me to fit into if I do not suspend this movement just a little more before falling to the floor with the others. The fives have ended and we crawl our way toward the sticks that have been deposited downstage. I take a circuitous route to mine to avoid crossing paths with another dancer. Stealthing to my place in the line of sticks, my fantasy paints adversarities while my body maintains our physical compatibility. When my stick is taken, I bolt from the line and sprint across the stage only to be blocked by a stop I have put in the space that reverses my path. I run the gauntlet of the line and stop where another is standing; she becomes my body's motion and I am left with my heart beating in my ears and a stick in my hands. The group bounds together into the bed of sticks. The last runner flings herself at us and we respond like a sprung trap. Her weight courses from my knuckles where I hold the stick along the outside of my torso to my feet. She crosses stage overhead, is released and my body leaves her.

Regroup. Again. The final catch downstage keeps her from the audience's lap. Against my back, the thanks. I exit for the stick dance though part of me is still on stage. Entering again with a long cloth five feet high, four of us partition the stage. My body tenses, holding and moving the cloth while others are displayed in the gaps. I am replaced as holder and spill through the gap downstage of the partition followed by the others of the gang of five. I fall back to lift another dancer onto the stage. We are one shape until we jump away and the group moves in unison. We fall to the floor and I am anchor to four bodies arched above me. One rolls over me, another around and I am squeezed through the legs of a third to spin up and swathe my own arc on the stage. I am alone now between the cloth and the public. The thunderous crossings have been reduced to one figure and my body bears that recent history. My body lurches to the air, and for that instant I am suspended seemingly in the middle of the entire space. The sharp inhale that has brought me here feels as if it has been drawn from just beyond the seats and tousled a few hairs on its way to my lungs. I turn on my shoulder and feel the viscera through the darkness. The music warns me. Another distorted jump and I shoot myself into the wings, the cloth follows and the space is emptied of all but the energy that has been left there. The choreographer tickles through her second solo. I am still soft, and warm. The plumbobs are released. There are three that arc their way across the stage. We roll on underneath, pulled unevenly by the pendular magnetism overhead. I curl up to my knees as the bob is revolved around me. There are three of us on stage now, inside the circumference of the bobs. I feel my movement through the changes of the others. Weight drops to my right and I spring up. The bob swings closer, the sparks collide inside me. I catch the bob as the company enters. The center bob is run round again creating a cone that we enter singly until all are inside. The bob swings. The diameter narrows. We move closer. We are pressed on top of one another. There is nothing outside the cone, we have drawn in all the dancers, all the space, all the audience. I am alone in here. We help each other inadvertently. We are pressed into a pyramid. There is no more singular action, there is no room. We are the available space. We draw our breath in. The audience deposits theirs with us. I am on top of the pyramid, my hand reaches up the center of the cone. The bob almost brushing our skins, still revolves. The lights and music fade. ■



**The difference  
between the  
experience that  
the choreographer  
conceives and the  
audience consumes,  
and the one that  
the dancers perform  
can best be  
communicated  
by tracing the  
dancers' journey  
through the work.  
It is here, in and  
through the work,  
that the dancer  
is moved to act  
not as individual  
but as social body.**

# Looking Out /



# Looking In

## Negotiating the Personal and the Political

The observations, assertions and intuitions that constitute this paper outline a felt sense about the current state of play in the arts generally and in dance/theatre specifically: the disappointment of performance both watching and doing. ■ I aim less at formal analysis than at description, anecdote, metaphor, hypothesis and supposition. ■ The Performer (dancer), 'looking-in', meets questions about identity, work, performance and lifestyle, and in 'looking-out' locates/finds a prevailing sense of un-ease. ■ The performer asks out loud – Is this a creative recession? Is it worth it? What's not working? Why is everybody so depressed? ■ The dancer in the act of re-writing his body is making an evaluation of purpose, function and meaning and re-asserting their intrinsic connection to values, principles and ethical processes.

**Bryan Smith**

[ A Performance Paper ]



About twelve years ago I entered into the pursuit of becoming a dancer and in this practice gradually came to regard myself as *performer*, that is, as artist whose medium of realisation was in performance. With fervour, passion and commitment I embarked on the cultivation of an identity wherein large components of my occupational, creative and even social senses of self became immersed in this ongoing definition of *self* as this being *performer*.<sup>1</sup>

That is what I was and if you would meet me in the street and ask me what I was doing I would say that *I was dancing* or that *I was performing* and there was a time when it seemed that both of us would regard this as significant.

No longer. Most recently I have discontinued to dwell in this assumption about myself and in the assumption of the efficacy of performance. Performance has become an ignominious pursuit. Fickle, insubstantial, fruitless. From the performer asking everything and giving very little in return; for the viewer offering little of its felt sense of worth, depth, consequence, or matter.

*After the performance in the foyer, the down-turned eye, the grimace, shrug and whisper; breathing the heavy sigh; edging towards the long haul home. Disappointment, again disappointment. I watch their moves, unmoved. They dance and I remain undanced. Minutes later I may barely even remember, we don't talk about it, we change the subject.*

The performance that costs a lot but doesn't matter. Yet I can remember, clearly remember a time, another age perhaps, when performance had, or seemed to have had, some power. Power to move, transform, transport, captivate, enliven, enrapture; power to include. I can remember performance that was important. Was it different? Was I simply naive? Has it changed? Have I? Do I see too much? Do I see enough?

In seeking to become something, I apply myself to, and allow to have applied to myself, the dictums of excellent performing in all aspects of my life, public and private. In this culture at times it seems that there is almost nothing else but the insistent inculcation to perform and the adulation of good performing. We define per-

1. I have used the terms dancer, artist, performer in this text in a loosely interchangeable way.

formance as “an action or proceeding of a more or less spectacular kind”, or as “the way in which something reacts under certain conditions, or fulfils the purpose for which it was intended”.<sup>2</sup>

We must and we do perform well scientifically, mathematically, linguistically, artistically, theatrically, physically, creatively, sexually, reproductively, socially, financially, politically, in achievements in business and career, and in all our social relations and relationships. I call this performance the performance of success. As one of the most powerfully shaping and driving forces in our society of Euro-american culture it is the index by which we measure ourselves and others. It is part of the substance of our myths and our history. It shapes values and value systems; is invested in dreams; informs attitude; dictates choice and motivates action and behaviour.

To perform is to be judged. Performing is measuring up. Successful performing of the career *performing*, with its unmitigated allure, promises all of glamour, wealth, status, recognition, acclaim, notoriety, fame, glory, myth, mystery, legend, and perhaps finally, even if not consciously, a kind of nirvanic completion. The general desperation to be successful might be just the backdrop for the performer's especial desperation to claim success. Both are visibly reinforced by a kind of opposite, the performance of failure, and the regime of terror that failure commands.

The ruthless putting on display of failure that exists as a public pastime, via the channels of mainstream media, is a continual daily onslaught that serves to reinforce the unquestioned, habitual urge to be seen to be successful, well within the terms of definition.

Travelling rapidly in the opposite direction I pause a moment to notice your ruin, *your* loss of face, in order to reaffirm the knowledge that it is not mine.

There is a myriad of ways to display successful performance and the struggle to win it can lead to any number of commonplace or bizarre addictions, behaviours or disorders. Phenomena identifiable in every walk of life but particularly note-worthy in the lifestyles around dancing and performing: anorexia nervosa and substance abuse being but two examples.

The insistent and unrelenting admonition to perform pervades and invades all of the institutions and discourses of gender, class,

education, occupation, and relationship. One of its most popular avenues of contemporary representation is via a secular iconography embodied for the culture by the performer. We show them the images of beauty, attainment, wealth, opulence, adventure, skill, talent, perfection, success – a lifetime of heaven on earth.

The iconography of the star system (pop, rock, TV, film, sports, super-mega), relentlessly hammered at us by the intensely powerful and persuasive machinery of the media, betokens consummate performing success. It must and does exert a special influence on all of us who embody our *selves* as performers, even if the response to that influence is to resist the prevailing mythology.

Performing success and the endless hankering after the fruits of labour have become interminable labours in themselves. Artistic practice is contorted and convulsed by the artist's desire to be recognised and photographed as artist. Performance disintegrates within the hype that surrounds and sells it. Madonna's art, for example, is the careful selection and manipulation of a series of identity-pastiches systematically chosen, crafted, controlled moments, hailed as art-stylish, inventive, innovative, charismatic. Yet this art has its basis in the insatiable desire to establish a mythology of itself. It is largely driven, as the performer herself admits, by the fear of and flight from mediocrity.

Art so strongly motivated by such agendas cannot but reflect them: the irony is that the substance of the work or product so clearly becomes the mediocrity that it frenetically attempts to escape.

This kind of performing is all of doing and nothing of being. Its underlying concerns, I believe, have to do with spiritual notions of immortality and communion but in this instance it is a bogus spirituality, a false promise.

Immortality, or the desire for it, as celebrated in the emphasis on sexual love relationships between man and woman (flesh, sex, the ripe reproductive body, the definition of energies masculine and feminine) has always been evident in dance and a source from which it has derived much of its power and efficacy, as both an artform and a practice. It is not surprising that still, even now, immortality is the enduring subject and that the work of the contemporary cultural machinery is to maintain and elaborate a primitive cult of fertility worship.



Now, though, it is fertility constructed and marketed in the images of the glamorous, beautiful, successful body and the popular face of dance is becoming one of its latest vehicles of expression.

*I know a woman who works behind a lighting desk.  
She has a term for audience members – punters.  
She calls them punters. Every night just before the house is opened she calls out, in her larrikin way – righto, open the doors and let the punters in – which someone does, and the punters file in to become the bums on seats. Shortly after, over the intercom she says – OK, notify the troops that we're about to go up. Someone calls the performers to the stage, and the show goes on, as it must. Then at the end, at the very end after all the punters have filed out again, having won or lost as they judge the event to have been, she pushes back in her chair, lets out a heavy sigh and says, oh well, another one bites the dust – which it does.*

#### DANCES

#### IN BED WITH MADONNA



*... and you can dance  
for inspiration  
Come on ... I am waiting  
Get into the groove Boy  
you've got to prove your love to me  
Get up on your feet  
Yeah step to the beat  
Boy what will it be?  
Music can be such a revelation  
Dancing around I hear the sweet sensation  
We might be lovers if the rhythm's right  
I hope this feeling never ends tonight  
Only when I'm dancing can I feel this free  
At night I lock the door where no-one else can see ...*

MADONNA *Get into the Groove*

[Slavishly follows beat of music, disco-style;  
reflex pelvic thrusts.]

So we arrive at a place where it is not so much the capacity to make art that is the telling thing in the current climate, but the capacity to make it saleable (on a number of levels). Tacitly or explicitly, depending on who and where you are, the emphasis has shifted and the scope of an art venture now requires of its practitioners a whole series of *other* manoeuvres.

The effort must pitch itself in a number of directions, though in many cases may begin and end its accountability with the bureaucratic structures we call “funding bodies”. Along the way it must also connive to win or buy the various acknowledgements, support and recognition of corporate sectors, print and audio-visual media, promotional arenas, worlds of fashion and those nebulous entities, audiences and general public.

In the business of going about being an artist, assiduous activity must be devoted to a multiplicity of tasks that are now part and parcel of artistic thought and practice. These days, in order to be funded (and funding to a certain extent determines credibility), the artist, regardless of medium, must first render his/her ideas in language, and not just any language – the language of the submission, an artspeak of categories, ticked boxes, brief accounts, summaries, objectives, methods, time lines, budgets, projected outcomes, and so on. This is a language that ultimately may have little to do with the real concerns or practice of the art, but that nevertheless comes to precede it and to shape it in both conscious and unconscious ways.

The artist’s work is inextricably bound up with his/her relations to bureaucracy because she/he must comply with its procedures and in doing so come to represent its values. These procedures demand thought and responses shaped in certain ways, contouring the artist’s conception, possibility, attention, direction or outcome.

To be funded or to seek funding necessitates a willingness to accept a certain number of the current terms of reference. The art that can write itself well to these terms becomes the art that is credited, thrust into view and hailed as the newest, most enlightened offering, when it may only in fact, or in reality, or in retrospect be the art that has managed to keep itself bouyant on the treadmill of bureaucratic machinery.

For many artists the pursuit has become known as *the funding game*. A sophisticated twist for more experienced players is to latch onto the shifting priorities that are redesigned from year to year and to write their visions in the catch phrases of the day. The artist's dilemma is that in being confined by the series of manoeuvres she/he must continue to make in order to experience his/her own survival, he/she sacrifices, time, process, integrity and the satisfaction of a worthwhile product and for what?

*On a tram. We chat. He has a grant to develop his work but he says it has really only provided him with the time to learn Word Perfect 5.2 and to get on with the next round of applications.*

Are the 90's going to require us to take on board an approach that demands that artistic work cannot just be done but must be made to be seen and that performance must be sold to bums on seats, however and whoever they are?

The arts of tantalizing and selling dance are the current playthings of the market place. As dance struggles to assume a place of equitable *adult* status among the artforms, it cashes in its most marketable commodity, the body (and soul) of its young available flesh.

The agile, virile, nubile willing dancer. You can be it or you can have it. In this, many a dancer has played his/her part, unwittingly or not.

Recently, in the publicity that supports and promotes the dance company system in this country, I have not seen a photograph of a dancer, male or female, who does not have the latest haircut and a neckline plunging to infinity and that has not been taken with a *soft* lens. Dance's vehicle may well be the body but it must, if this artform is going to grow up, include more than the young glamorous easily sold body of fashion, sex, hype and hi-energy.

Dance loses its power and fails to realize itself as *adult* because it is practised by so few mature artists. Certainly they move into positions of power, influence and control around it, but they do not continue to do it – an incredible indictment of the (im)potency of its practice. There are so few people over thirty still dancing in this country it is alarming. The continuing disappearance of the mature dancer as a visible presence especially in the mainstream company

area maintains this art form in a state of early post-adolescence. Of course the young body is a worthy body but there is a life-time of concerns beyond, that it simply does not and cannot address.

As I move into those concerns myself I find the lack of recognition afforded them, in an artform that denies and disempowers the adult through its authoritarian, parenting structures and its controlling, distorting technical regime, is neither appropriate nor sustaining.

Dancers are mute beings and a dance capable of speaking out about important and serious issues remains largely silent or largely unheard. The danger that arises is that we begin to define good dance as monied dance or glamorous dance because it is the dance that is available and that we find ourselves buying. Work that goes on unmonied or unhyped and that remains primarily concerned with the integrity of its investigation and its process remains unseen.

because it is content to be the product of a deeply felt artistic process, not a product of the manipulation of variables external to itself and supported by the power of the dollar, a power calculated to beguile, to persuade and to sell.

The art that we see is the art of the submission; the art of the display; the art of the business of art. We watch the politics of performance and the performance of getting bums on seats. The art we buy is the art of the sell.

*I ask what he thought of a particular performance we both saw. He replies in all earnestness – I don't know. It may have been really good or it may have been really bad. I have no way of telling.*

#### DANCES

“Review”

[slouches in armchair and across coffee table.]

“Pure vanilla essence”

[somewhat robotic treading and waving of arms]

#### READS

One windy Saturday afternoon in Melbourne in the early 1970's mum thinks I'm at the footy but I'm not. I'm meeting my friend,

Gina, on the steps of Flinders Street Station and we are sneaking out to see *Hair*. Sitting up in the gods at the Bourke Street Metro I am utterly entranced and transported by the powerful magic and conviction of this event.

In 1991 it is pertinent for me to remember this because the remounted version of this controversial show is currently playing in this city (Melbourne).

For me the difference is somewhere in the *Hair* I was motivated to see and the *Hair* I was motivated not to see. One has the power to inspire in me a great love of theatre and a belief in its capacity to really matter, that is, to spear-head social conscience, to provoke serious reflection, and to affect cultural change. The other is cold fish.

I wonder too about the differences inherent for the relative performers. Differences in intention, commitment, conviction and ideology. It is not for me to say what another's motivation is, but it is for me to notice that one creates a theatre of power and potential to move while the other at the very, very best, constitutes a reasonable night's entertainment.

What emerges is another layer of questions that must be dwelt in. What do I mean for myself when I call myself dancer, performer, artist? What does this self-definition afford me? Where am I leading to? What cultural place am I looking to embody and to inhabit?

Is my view of myself as a dancer, performer, artist tied to the aesthetics and values of what I find myself performing. When I place myself there to be viewed by you, what do I want you to see? How do I want you to see?

In your ferocious commitment to become dancer – what have you made your commitment to? Body? Self? Artform? Technique? Style? Choreographer? Excellence? Recognition? Power? Status? Influence? History?

When you do your dancing what do you want me to watch? Can I watch and acknowledge all of the signs and signals given in the duration of your presence before me? Can I watch you seeing me watch you? Can I see you saying please watch me, please like me, please think I'm good? What do you want from me watching you?



The body of the dancer is an imagined body. A rehearsed body. A bound, approval-seeking body. This is not a body of spontaneity and delight. It is a honed and elaborated body. Often it is a body in pain. A highly-trained, highly-neurotic, precious studio body. It is a body that monitors, restricts and controls movement. A body that judges and denies movement.

Don't call me a dancer, that two-dimensional, pointy-footed thing.  
Don't call me a dancer, that mute, obedient, regimented thing.

Don't say he's a dancer unless you say he's a dancer-thinker,  
dancer-writer, dancer-artisan, dancer-scientist.

It's not a dancer's body, its a gone for a run body. A walking down  
the street body, a making love body.

Say he's a dancer but he's gone to his maths class; he's a dancer but  
he's digging a hole, building a house, reading a book, learning  
Indonesian. Say he's a person who dances sometimes, perhaps and  
perhaps not today, and that can be what a dancer is for a while.

*We were talking about dancing and some way into the  
conversation he says, – Do you think I will be able to  
start again if I stop? – A little further into the conver-  
sation, – Do you think you will be able to stop if you  
start again?*

#### DANCES

“Spirit level”

[moves slowly forward in silence,  
a meditation on balancing a spirit level]

“Recovery”: to The Monkees: *Daydream Believer*

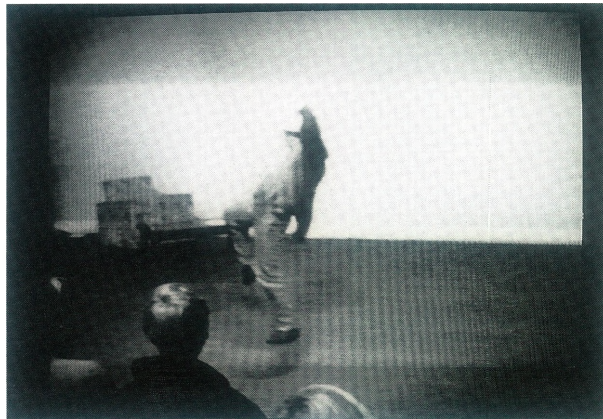
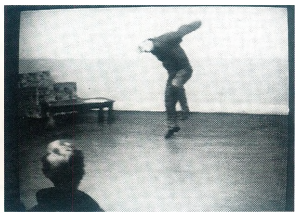
[ungainly, undancerly bounding about with reference to  
stylised leg lifts and *ports de bras*.]

#### READS

For dancing, as for most art, most things, the process cannot re-  
main separate from the time it takes for the process to occur, nor  
can I engage in the process without really engaging in the process.  
This may seem ridiculously obvious yet all the time I witness at-

tempts to operate outside of its simple truth. To do it without really doing it, to half do it, to quickly do it, to pretend to have done it or to refer to it as if done.

I don't believe it.



“Looking Out/Looking In” was first presented at the *Performance and its Discourses Conference* at Melbourne University School of Visual and Performing Arts Education in September 1991. The two-day conference, an initiative of the Melbourne Performance Research Group, was intended to open up a space for the putting into question of the institutional division between performance practice and theory, and for the investigation of possible relationships between the two. For further information on the Melbourne Performance Research Group (MRPG), its publications and activities, contact the School of Visual and Performing Arts Education. Telephone (03) 344 8362.



Libby Dempster

# Sara Rudner Dances

## A CONVERSATION

Superb performers are always in some sense virtuosi, even when ... they seek to look natural, untrained. On the other hand, great dancers such as Sara Rudner ... may operate at a high level of physical daring, and yet not be perceived primarily as virtuosi; their spiritual transparency, their air of being divinely inspired colors them differently.<sup>1</sup>

**V**irtuosity is “a tricky subject”, as Deborah Jowitt has observed, and yet how else to describe Sara Rudner’s dancing? Rudner’s remarkable qualities as a dancer have long been recognized by fellow artists, dance audiences and critics. In 1984 she was awarded a *Bessie* in acknowledgment of her unique talents as a performer. A long-time member of the Twyla Tharp Dance Company (1965–1984), in recent years Rudner has concentrated on her own choreographic practice. Earlier this year, however, she was dancing once again in Tharp’s *Deuce Coupe*, in a 1992 restaging of the 1973 ‘classic’. Her performance met with widespread critical and popular acclaim – evidence enough that the brilliance and power of her dancing, her ability to deeply move audiences, continues undiminished.

Sara Rudner’s contribution to dance and dancing over the last twenty years has been profound and far-reaching. Her skills as a performer have been widely acknowledged but the influence she has had upon the work of her colleagues and as a teacher and mentor for young dancers is, if less publicly known, no less significant. Sara frequently teaches techniques of composition and performance at the Laban Institute of Movement Studies, as well as teaching workshops in and around New York City.

A distinctive feature of her approach to teaching and to her own choreographic practice is her concern

for and interest in the individual dancer. She insists that the dancer not be disempowered by the process of training, rehearsal or performing and that the dancer must learn to take up this responsibility for her/his own empowerment in dancing.

Dancing with Sara Rudner entails the integration of physical skill, moments of daring and courage, great mental agility, stamina and emotional resilience. The dancer undergoes a sometimes gruelling, sometimes playful, de-construction and reintegration of her body/self. The complex physical co-ordinations and configurations produce shifts of sensation and feeling; these movements of sensation have particular resonances for the dancer. Rudner asks that all of that complexity and humanity be brought forward, that the whole person be there, and that that is what is danced. Fine dancing, in Rudner’s hands, is not empty virtuosity but a “very deep subject” indeed.<sup>2</sup>

The text that follows is an edited transcript of a conversation with Sara in late 1990, at her home in New York City. Sara had just returned from rehearsal with dancers Lucy Guerin and Josephine McKendry and as we talked she reflected upon the processes of dancing, training the dancer and choreography. The dances Sara was working on at that time were presented in March this year at the University Settlement, Eldridge St, New York, as part of Rudner’s *Eight Solos*.<sup>3</sup>

**SARA RUDNER :** In the studio today we were talking about the break away from a classical sensibility both in terms of historical development and in our own dancing. This classical sensibility is defined as harmonious, gracious, generous, open. But at some point the form which embodied that sensibility became a little polluted. The body was doing the actions but they were no longer in the spirit of the form and the form became no longer vital, no longer interesting to certain people. There were other influences in this world, a lot of political unrest, new ideas that needed other forms of expression, other body configurations and so the modern dance came about. This is, of course, a very simplified way of talking about it but it brings us to the question of expressionism in dance and the rethinking and reworking of expressionist ideas today. Dance artists were exploring very honest ideas about actually having sensations and emotions; not pretending, but having those sensations and finding how to express them. If you're not working on an abstract problem, like entrances and exits, but you're interested in a different kind of problem – like 'confusion', for example – then in a certain way

SARA RUDNER IN 1976 : PHOTOGRAPH BY NATHANIEL TILLESTON



you rely on your own physical memory. You go into your own backlog of memory, your own states of confusion, as well as watching other people being confused. Where is your body when you're confused? What does your body look like when it's confused? You are sort of pretending you are confused at that moment but you are not really. You are just trying to get at what it means to be confused. So that you do use imagination and it becomes almost real. It becomes an art form in that you are not really doing that; you are not really a confused person. You are representing a confusion but you are doing it as accurately as you can. And then I think that perhaps you actually do become the other. You put your body and your spirit in that situation and you do, for a moment, become the confused person. It becomes quite a real experience.

There was a time in American modern dance when people were definitely rebelling against Graham and the early expressionist dancers, and Merce was definitely at the forefront of this rebellion. He'd say, you just move, movement is movement, it's nothing else; one movement can follow any other. The dancer just does what they're doing and the audience feels whatever it's feeling and that's it. I'm sure it's much more sophisticated than that, but it was a very important statement to make. It was very important for people to start giving more attention to rhythm, to structure, to all of this. I think that this change in orientation started people in dance identifying a certain kind of expression as old-fashioned. It's regarded as old-fashioned, as retro.

But I think that a lot of what was valuable (in the early expressionist work) has been lost and what people today are returning to seems to be the verbal. People have returned to expressing things verbally, instead of going into body language. A student of mine was having this very dilemma. He said to me: "I just want to have more communication. I don't think this is enough." A lot of people think that you need the verbal clarification, you need the musical clarification, you need the decor clarification of situations. I have always regarded the verbal and the voice as part of the body, so I have no problem with that. But I said to this student: "Well, you know, think of all the communication that goes on non-verbally." I just really have a belief that we can tell whole stories through our dance and that there is a purpose to that. Other cultures do this all

**I THINK THAT A LOT  
OF WHAT WAS VALUABLE  
(IN THE EARLY EXPRESSIONIST  
WORK) HAS BEEN LOST  
AND WHAT PEOPLE TODAY  
ARE RETURNING TO  
SEEMS TO BE  
THE VERBAL.**

the time. Dances are communicative and teaching devices. They are about that, about letting people know how you feel or letting people experience those feelings themselves.

**LIBBY DEMPSTER:** It would seem to me that the communicative power of dance, as you have been discussing it, is really dependent on a degree of complexity and refinement in the form. It demands great agility – physical, emotional and intellectual – on the part of the dancer. If a dancer is operating in a limited way, working from an unexamined idea about what dance is, that it has to be strongly presentational, or only certain kinds of movements, or whatever, then I'd agree with that student. You need something else, because there isn't enough going on, not enough material, not enough dialogue going on within the body. But rather than see that as a failure of 'dance', perhaps it's a failure on the part of the choreographer or dancer to go further, to go to the next stage.

**RUDNER:** Well, I think the reason people are afraid to go further is that they consider this territory to be old-fashioned.

**DEMPSTER:** The whole question of expression, they see that as retrogressive?

**RUDNER:** Yes. The teachers that you have, your ballet class, your Cunningham class, whatever, the teachers are saying: This is the movement: one, two,

and one, two, and one, two! Forget what does **and** one, two, **and** one, two, mean. You know, an up-beat can be expressive of so many things. It could be a little jerking 'one, two', a smooth 'one, two' a staccato 'one, two'. It can be a full range motion up-beat or something else. There are all these questions to ask and every answer makes you do something slightly different physically which has a different communicative value. But this process takes a long time, you see, and people say: Teach me how to be a dancer. Teach me how to be good, how to get my leg up high and how to make lots of turns. Teach me how to be a star! We were all twenty years old once. We know what it's like. I was in New York at that time and I wanted that as badly as anyone else did. But there was no teacher who was slapping us down. We were being humiliated on one level. Oh, you can't do that! But there was no teacher who was saying, you may do that for a little while, but you must also learn this. You must! If you don't know how to distinguish between "hello" and "heLLO!", if you don't know how to distinguish between those two, you are not a dancer. Do you know what I'm saying? No-one puts value on it; the value isn't placed there. Now if you have a dancer, or a bunch of dancers, and you give them a dance about confusion, well, dancers don't want to look con-

**IF YOU ASK SOMEONE  
TO COME ON AND KIND OF  
SHRUG A SHOULDER OR  
PUT THEIR FOCUS DOWN  
OR BECOME INWARD,  
MANY DANCERS ... WILL JUST  
NOT ACCEPT THAT  
AS DANCING; THEY WILL  
NOT ACCEPT THAT AS  
A PHYSICAL STUDY.**

fused. They want to look in control. That's the way we are educated now in dance. As a dancer you are educated to know what you're doing; to grind out those turns, have those high extensions and to really present yourself. So, if you ask someone to come on and kind of shrug a shoulder or put their focus down or become inward, many dancers, not all by any means, but many dancers will just not accept that as dancing; they will not accept that as a physical study. But if they stay with you and you can convince them that this is interesting to learn, what they then add to their own physical vocabulary is immense.

**DEMPSTER:** You are talking about finding a way to work with and work on people so that they become more finely tuned, more differentiated in their movement. I think people recognize that quality in a dancer but it's presumed to be some innate and rare talent, not something that can be cultivated. You are describing a situation in which a dancer might really develop a full range of physical expressiveness.

**RUDNER:** Yes. After a while, if you put your body through these different experiences – if you just say 'hard/soft, hard/soft' (Sara demonstrates) – your body learns this differentiation and then it becomes part of your vocabulary. It's no longer unusual, it's no longer weird. I also think that your imagination is opened up in the process. Once you have different somatic experiences your imagination opens up and allows new things to come out. I see that in the studio all the time. I suggest something and then the dancer who is actually doing it comes up with something so much better, just naturally, because something has suggested itself to this person. It just comes out. Then I say, well, that's the sensation and I think your sensation is better than anything that I ever thought of: it's clearer or whatever. I think this is part of empowering the performer, to not always be at the mercy of the choreographer. That's the other thing that happens between dancers and choreographers. A dancer might say: "The choreographer told me to stand in first position and hold my arms out and then all they could say was 'don't be so stiff.'" Then the dancer objects, "But you told me to put my arms out and put my feet together!" You have this interplay where the dancer is only listening to the obvious things or they get so rebellious that they can't do anything else except what they are doing

already. There's no communication. But I do believe that people have certain desires. They are either interested in working with their bodies or not. You can't tap into every personality; we have different temperaments. Not every person is meant to be involved in writing, or legal work, or dance. But given a desire, once a person comes to a situation there can be an enormous change, an enormous development from the time they're twenty to the time they're forty or fifty. But then we don't talk about dance in that way. We talk about 'Twenty'! You're dancing when you're twenty years old and you stop when you're thirty-five! If you are a modern dancer you may go on until you're forty or forty-five but definitely if you're a ballet dancer your career ends when you are twenty-seven, unless you are one of the top, top stars. Think about it. Twenty-seven years old! In our culture because we don't take on other kinds of responsibilities earlier than that, you've barely lived. Twenty-seven in other cultures and in other times was an older person, but not here, now.

When I think about my own training, because I started so late I did not go through a lot of that early squashing. I had a little interpretative dance when I was seven and I started ballet class when I was eight or nine. I went once a week and did the pliés but it was very much part of home life. All of my friends from round the corner went there and you just did it as a family, more or less. Then that school closed and there was really nothing to go to. I tried going to a studio further away from home but it was a big trip and my parents lost interest and I did too. I don't know who lost interest first. It was becoming more intense and I wasn't understanding it, I think. I don't remember the exact progression but I stopped. Later I went to dances; I social danced and when I got to college there was a modern dance club. I'd never seen modern dance; I didn't know what modern dance was, but I started working with my friends. Again, it was just college friends working together and I really loved it. I always knew I loved dancing. But I did all my academics and the day after graduation I went to a dance class and that was it! I didn't know anything! I'd never heard of Merce Cunningham and this was the middle sixties. Merce had been around dancing with Martha, he had a wonderful reputation as a dancer and as a choreographer, but I just knew nothing. I was very, very innocent and I really depended upon the

**IF YOU PUT YOUR BODY  
THROUGH DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES  
– IF YOU SAY 'HARD/SOFT,  
HARD/SOFT' – YOUR BODY  
LEARNS THIS DIFFERENTIATION  
AND THEN IT BECOMES PART  
OF YOUR VOCABULARY.  
IT'S NO LONGER UNUSUAL,  
IT'S NO LONGER WEIRD.**

people I met. My college roommates had had a teacher called Danya Feuer as children and she had a studio with a partner named Paul Sanasardo down on 19th Street. I didn't know anything else so I went there. I was the oldest person there; I was eighteen and everyone else was fourteen or fifteen. I did some work there when I was eighteen and later when I was twenty but I didn't feel comfortable there after a while. Paul was very nice, a very generous person, but I didn't really understand, I didn't understand the style. I hadn't been brought up in the tradition and something didn't make sense to me. I felt strange about the work I was doing, I had to see more. I was young enough. I had no responsibilities. I could follow my intuition. Also I had had the college training that taught me to question and not just accept things. So if someone was standing there telling me: do a grand plié then battement to second, I didn't have to accept that that was the way you became a dancer, that that was the only way you could work. I was trying to find something that would mesh more with my personality and I was actually feeling kind of down about it because I felt that I was never going to find anything that was really interesting to me. I was about to stop when I met Twyla. The early pieces were very minimal. We just walked. We did hard things but they were all very minimal and we were just on a

**IF YOU ARE USING  
THE DANCE FOR THE PURPOSE  
OF EDUCATION, AESTHETIC  
EDUCATION, OF THE DANCER,  
THE PUBLIC AND YOURSELF,  
WELL THE STUDIO IS YOUR LAB.  
BUT AT SOME POINT  
THE RESEARCH GETS OUT.**

similar wavelength. I understood what she meant, I understood her energy, and she appreciated my desire to work there with her. Other people were there at that time too and they were more of my generation. I was taking ballet class and some modern dance but everything was pretty removed; it was not very personal. The Cunningham classes were also pretty removed. They were wonderful classes to do, physically interesting and stimulating but taking a class is a very different process from working intensively with one person. That's one of the hardest things about modern dance. Once companies got larger the choreographer wasn't so available to teach in a certain way. Although Merce still did a lot of teaching, his attention was to his choreography. He taught in order to train dancers and to make money; he wasn't devoted to the idea of teaching. But he also believed, I think, and part of his whole philosophy was, that you can't teach anybody to be a dancer. They just are or they aren't. I remember having an argument with Edwin Denby about this. He was an older man at the time. Douglas Dunn and I were talking with him about this issue and we had very different feelings about it. I said that I really thought that you can teach people; you can present situations where people who are interested can learn things and make changes. And Denby was definitely not buying it!

**DEMPSTER:** Do you think of the studio work you are involved in now as a kind of research?  
**RUDNER:** Yes, I get really involved. I set things up, I start working on something and then I get involved with the implications of what I've set up and sometimes rehearsal and classes really bog down. I get very involved not only in physical investigations but in philosophical questions. But I think it's important to share that, to open the discussion for the person who is trying to work on it. It allows a breaking of tension. It helps put things into perspective. Why are we working on this anyway? I mean, the question does come up for people. What's so interesting about working this way? This kind of work can be very frustrating; frustrating because it doesn't feel like you're dancing. You are in a process of sort of 're-neuralising' your body, connecting in new ways, getting new sensations and sometimes it's really nit-picking. Now we were working on something today. I was talking about focus. If you have your eyelids down, if your eyes are always cast down, you miss a whole sense, a whole range of things. When you lift your gaze when you look at your shoulder you have to open your eyes. So I kept saying, open your eyes a bit more and that will give you another sensation. Just by opening your eyes a little more you will have different physical sensations, different feelings. Another thing happened in the studio today. I was asking Jo (McKendry) to do something with her head. I wanted the head to spiral down and the focus to go down but the body not to collapse. The focus would start up and then go down. Jo is such a sensitive dancer that her whole body responds immediately to her initial thought. Her whole body would go into it. I'd say, okay Jo, now try really hard to abstract this. She got it but you could see that part of her difficulty was the idea that every time you have a problem, you soften the body to do it, which is alright, you can do that, but you can soften the body and still keep form. You don't have to be holding the muscles hard. You can be holding them in an order, a form, that's not going to hurt your bones; but they can still be ordered. All of this is just the next step. I'm saying, now we have all this information. We are understanding this process of the mental configurations and the organisation and initiation of movement (ideokinesis and alignment methods) and what our bodies are capable of through it. But we can also come out of this and go

into other and different mental and muscle configurations. I think that will come, that will be the next thing. It's going to be interesting.

**DEMPSTER:** Are you working towards performance? Is that the direction of the studio work?

**RUDNER:** Firstly, I think people just need to do stuff. I think dancers need to do things over and over again – especially young dancers. If you are using the dance for the purpose of education, aesthetic education, of the dancer, the public and yourself, well the studio is your lab. But at some point the research gets out. The procedures that people have been working on for years and years come out and they can be of great benefit to others. So, I think in some ways it's part of the communication. It's a communicative art. But it's always hard to show the work.

**DEMPSTER:** I find it very heartening to hear your commitment to studio work, to research. When there is so much emphasis on product we don't have much access or insight into the process of a work's development. By the time a piece is performed it can be very distant from the process that generated it.

**RUDNER:** It may be that the process itself has changed. For instance, with Twyla's work: those early years were all process and we did maybe one or two performances a year. Then gradually, well, two things happened. She became much more competent; she had done this extraordinary research and she had it all at her finger-tips. It meant that she could go into the studio and she could tell very quickly, what was going to work and what wasn't. So that the dancers who started to work with her at that point didn't do as much, they didn't physically go through as much as the earlier ones had. She knew what she wanted and she would say: "Okay, go over there, then go over here, do this here, rearrange this here." Those dancers still had to do more process oriented work than perhaps if they had been working with another kind of choreographer. But she had already passed through these stages and she was not interested in going back because she was not innately a teacher. She was always pushing forward. She has an extraordinary energy, extraordinary! Then there were those of us who had the desire to communicate more on a teaching level. Temperamentally, Twyla and I were very similar about some things but in our relationships to the work we had a very different idea about the next

thing, about how to get things done. I was always the one who was interested in the teaching projects. I was interested in how to set teaching up, how to communicate that, how to spend time in the studio. You know, I could spend two hours in the studio watching someone trying to get one co-ordination and it didn't infuriate me. It would infuriate Twyla. She'd want you to DO IT! But I could, with my imagination, go into some kind of alpha state. I don't know exactly what I'd be doing, but someone would just go on and on trying and I'd learn how to become engaged with that process, with trying to direct it and move it on a little bit more. I was thinking myself today if I could do a fast work. If someone called me up and said, look we'd really love to have a dance. We have only five weeks rehearsal and you've never met any of the dancers. Now, to date I've been very loathe to do those kinds of things. I thought about it for an instant and said I don't think I could really do that. But then I thought, if I took them all with me, if I took all the dancers I'd trained, if I had enough of them with me, I could do it. That's how I could do it. Maybe someday I would have to do it (for economic reasons or whatever) and maybe I'd find a way. There are so many variations on it that things could turn out fine.

#### NOTES

1. Jowitt, Deborah, 1988, *Time and the Dancing Image*, William Morrow and Co., New York p.366.
2. See Jowitt's review of Rudner's *Eight Solos* (reprinted p.43 of this issue)
3. *ibid.*

## Lucy Guerin: Working with Sara Rudner

**W**hen I first came to New York to dance in 1989 one of my means of survival was baby-sitting. This was how I got to know Sara Rudner, through looking after her young son, Eli. Some time later I began to dance with her. She was then, and still is, working on a series of solos so I had the good fortune to begin working on one with her. I think now, that our having built a relationship previous to working together was important to Sara, and that this kind of relationship with the dancer is at this point necessary to her developing work.

She is at present engaged in two processes, each informing the other. One is developing dancers through her classes and the other is making dances of which the solos are her current project. In her classes she is working with yoga as a means of informing the body systems and each session begins with an hour or so of practising, and discussing these principles. This experience and information is carried into the next section of the class, in which Sara works with a phrase through many and varied processes. For example, an arm phrase may be superimposed onto a leg phrase, sections may be executed in retrograde (as in running a film backwards), every other count may go to demi-pointe or each count may be repeated on the other side as the phrase progresses. The concern is not with producing an interesting phrase (though this often comes about) but with locating the difficulties or limitations of the dancer and working to overcome, accept, or make use of them.

It can be quite uncomfortable to disturb neural pathways habitualised over decades and I have, at times, felt frustrated, hopeless, breathless and even ill. But overcoming certain co-ordination or physical problems is like learning a new word. It enriches one's dancing vocabulary and enables more accurate expression. Sara's approach to making dances is very generous and closely linked to her knowledge of the person with whom she is working. This generosity extends to rehearsal hours which are flexible according to Sara's and the dancer's needs. It is inspiring to see that at this point in her career, and without diminishing the importance of dance, she

has gained a certain control of it in relation to the rest of her life. This attitude is also evident in the way she makes material. She is very comfortable employing the processes I mentioned earlier, processes which can be daunting for many dancers. She manipulates them rather than allowing them to dictate to her; and she will discard them at any moment to follow an impulse that is more emotionally, rhythmically, thematically or structurally motivated. After years of exploring these methods they are definitely at her service.

The themes which have emerged in the construction of the solos (there are eight so far) are very diverse but always derived from some aspect of the dancer. With some people, Sara has worked with more physical concerns. My own solo, for example, juxtaposed formal classic lines with loose-limbed, flung movement which she perceived to be an interest of mine. The solo sought to resolve this contradiction both aesthetically, through the development of the piece, and physically in my body. Other solos have been drawn from more emotional sources; the contention between one of the dancers and her teenage daughter, for example. Another dealt with the relentless demands that an unseen choreographer placed on a dancer. Whatever the source of the dance, the body of the dancer was where the drama took place: it was not a matter of an idea being illustrated through movement. Many of these solos contain an element of humour in the inherent struggle to resolve such conflicts. All of the dances are a gift to the dancer.

There is always a lot of discussion in Sara's classes and rehearsals and in one of my first classes with her she impressed me with the view that the dancer's relationship to the choreographer involved not only executing her/his directions but insisting on understanding the translation of those directions to one's own body. This is the essence of the dancer's work.

## Deborah Jowitt: Sara Rudner *Eight Solos*

University Settlement House  
March 1992

**S**ara Rudner may have re-invented the private solo; the solo that gives the impression of dancing as a meditation on itself, and by extension, on life. Such a solo isn't about assuming a role or acting out emotions. The dancer investigates the dancing, and when thoughts or feelings shade her movements, it's hard to tell whether they are motivating the dancing or vice versa.

Rudner herself doesn't own one of her *Eight Solos*. She made them for others: Amy Lieberman, Lucy Guerin, Josephine McKendry, Linda Cohen, Risa Jaroslow, Renée Lemieux, Patricia Hoffbauer and Kristine Lindahl. The women perform these in a wide, shallow, white studio at venerable University Settlement. There is no music. The dancers are warming up when we enter – not vigorously, but settling into their bodies, breathing, stretching. They're all in various styles of black practice clothes. Only Michael Stiller's bright white lighting separates out our area from theirs'.

The transitions between solos delicately convey ideas about shared enterprise and friendship. When Guerin is finishing her dance, McKendry walks up to her and they talk very quietly, head to head, for a few minutes. Lemieux spins in as if she means to bump Jaroslow out of the room. Hoffbauer chases Lemieux away. When Hoffbauer is shuddering and thrashing uncontrollably, Lindahl rushes in and holds her tight, saying, "Stop. Stop it."

The solos themselves express the women's kinship. They might be variations on a theme that's never shown. The deep, elastic lunge, one hand braced on a thigh – we see that quite often; many gestures look like inversions or adaptations of others. The formality gives the individual differences structural integrity. And the differences are striking. Lieberman's solo is stretchy, half asleep; like a cat, she settles and re-settles herself into the floor. Guerin, on the other hand, is at work. She lashes her arms fiercely around, pauses and considers, then drops into an elegant, ballet-class plié. No. She tries something loose and floppy. She counts out loud. Guerin, small, lean, and strong, has a tartness to her dancing; she *will* nail this. Eventually she's combin-

ing the various steps and energies in a single phrase.

Like Guerin, the wonderfully fluid and sensitive McKendry comes from Australia (both have worked with Russell Dumas there). Her body seems to have a mind of its own. One arm is strangely heavy. She drops it and catches it with her other hand, testing its weight. Her head starts rolling, looking where she isn't going. She hauls her legs into place. With some difficulty, she reaches out curving arms as if to take hold of something huge and round.

Cohen is harsh with herself, her gestures driving, jabbing. She takes big, purposeful steps. But she also moves softly, drops her head into her hand. At one point, she shudders and crashes dreadfully to the floor.

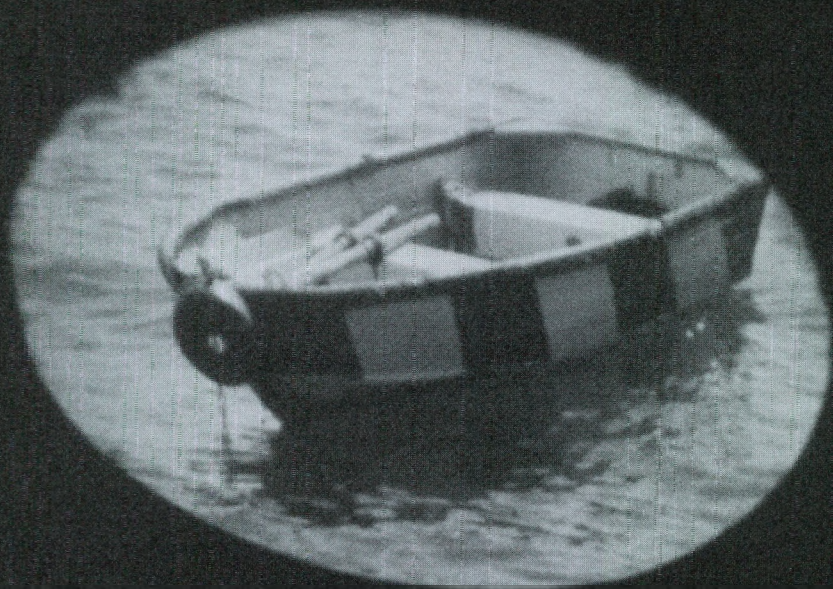
Jaroslow seems put out at someone we can't see. Exasperated, but loving. There she stands, small, strong, calm – tapping her foot against the floor, folding her arms, stamping rhythmically.

Lemieux is gayer, smiling as she tries out rhythms, checking herself out in the mirror of her hand, jumping.

Hoffbauer, much, much moodier, stamps like a Spanish dancer, hands to forehead. This is one of the richest of the solos, and Hoffbauer mines both its ferocity and its comedy – defiantly trying out poses for us (you *like* this?). Happiness is fragile.

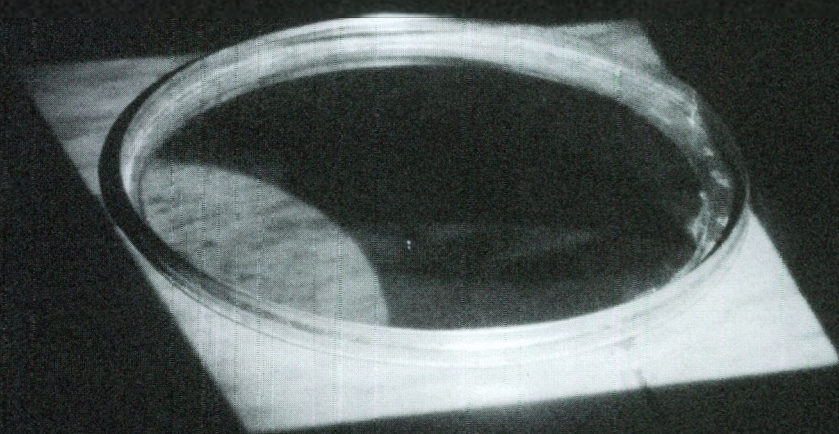
And, Lindahl, looking marvellous after seven years away from performing, begins by taking on Hoffbauer's desperate thrashing, but works her way through to serenity. She sees something relieving overhead. She swims in the light.

These nourishing solos are full of halts and imperfections. Taken as a sequence, they show us something deeper than fine dancing. Or maybe it's that they show us that fine dancing is a very deep subject.



# No Hope

I ... LIKE DONT LIKE LOVE NOT LOVE DONT LOVE



# No Reason

DONT CARE DONT CARE IF I AM NOT YOU ARE NOT

## Jackie Dunn: Jude Walton *No Hope No Reason*

Deutscher Brunswick Street  
June 1991

To write about the temporal is difficult. To speak of dance, the soul thinking the body, is to use a language often ill-fitted to it. One encounters perhaps, some of the same problems of choreography as the performers themselves. To seek an understanding of "No Hope, No Reason", Jude Walton's recent performance at Deutscher Brunswick Street is, Walton herself reminds us, to do so with love. For love is curiosity, the want to know. And to understand, one has to look at with love.

This work is not solely a dance piece: Jude Walton's work here as always, is a blending of many practices but always with the sense that "all ideas rise like music from the physical." (Guy Davenport, *Ecologues*).

Dance/movement, complex slide projections (here in collaboration with Ian de Gruchy) and music/text (the texts of John Barbour being set to music by Hartley Newnham) are spun together. This formal compilation, this structural layering, correlates directly to the ideas offered up by Walton. It is a work of the contradictory contrariness of love, of its necessary but incongruous presence in the bleak, cold world in which we live. This is the story of love

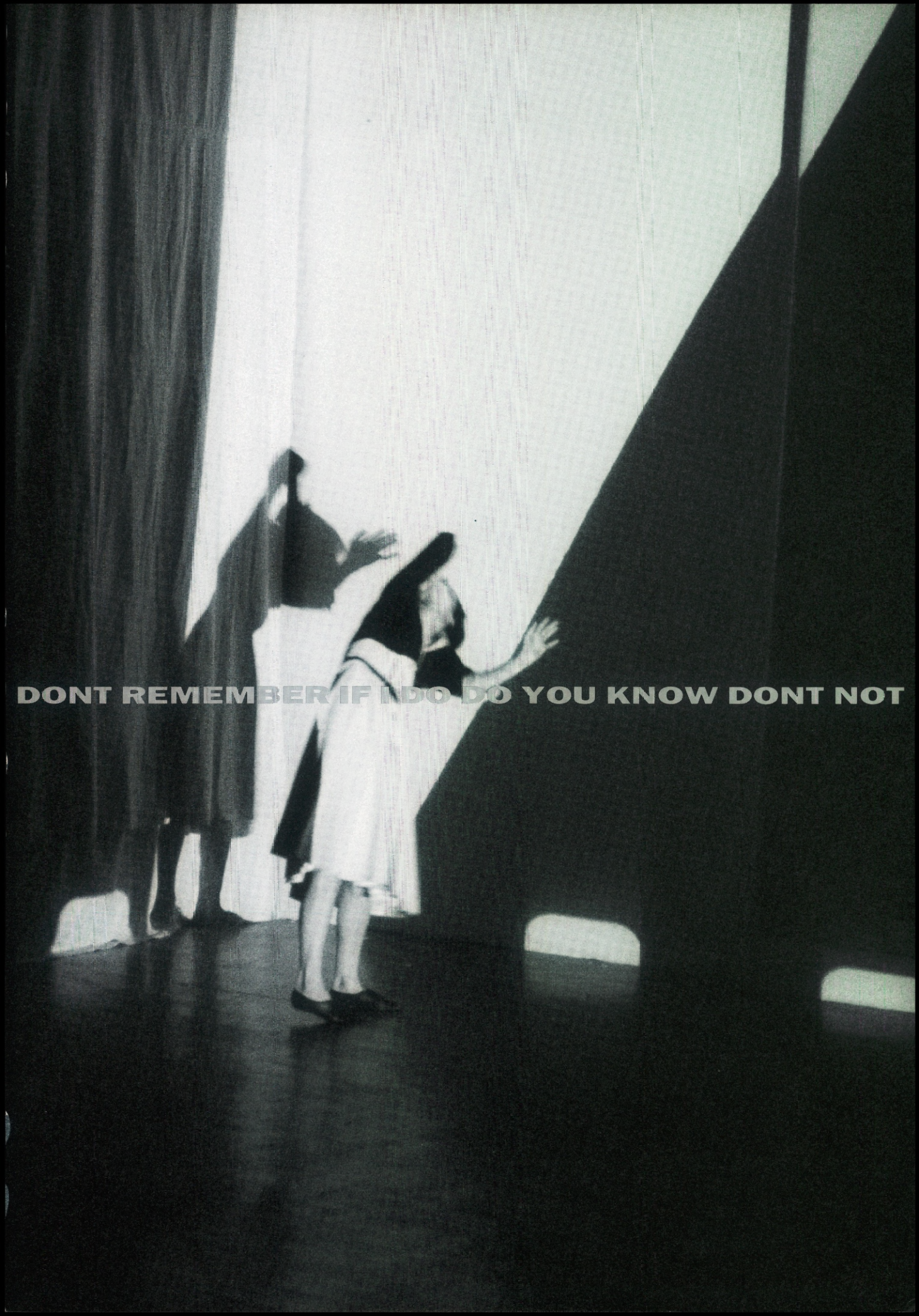


within the story of the city; the one creating the other infinitely ... ceaselessly creating variations on the themes.

It is in the opening solo from Shona Innes that this most basic dichotomy between reason and sentiment emerges: feelings blunt our reason, reason blunts our feelings. *Love* is what melts these paradoxical impulses together... and tears them apart again. It is the ultimate paradox (giving and taking; revealing, concealing; seeking, denying): the equivocal expression of love.

Here, Innes' body dis-locates itself – splitting along its central axis, an arm and upper body reach out to love while hips and feet stick rock solid to the floor, awkwardly; a turning away in fear, to the dark, while hands seek out the light. A tense and nervous body divided along the chiasm between pleasure and pain. Nearly-neurotic gestures hopelessly ambiguous, duplex in their apparent non-reason, moving in and out of the stark shadows between reason – toward hope – and unreason – beyond hope. A sort of chiaroscuro of desire and denial – a dance between the black and the white, where the passion lies. Untrusting gestures in a world of lost trust, where





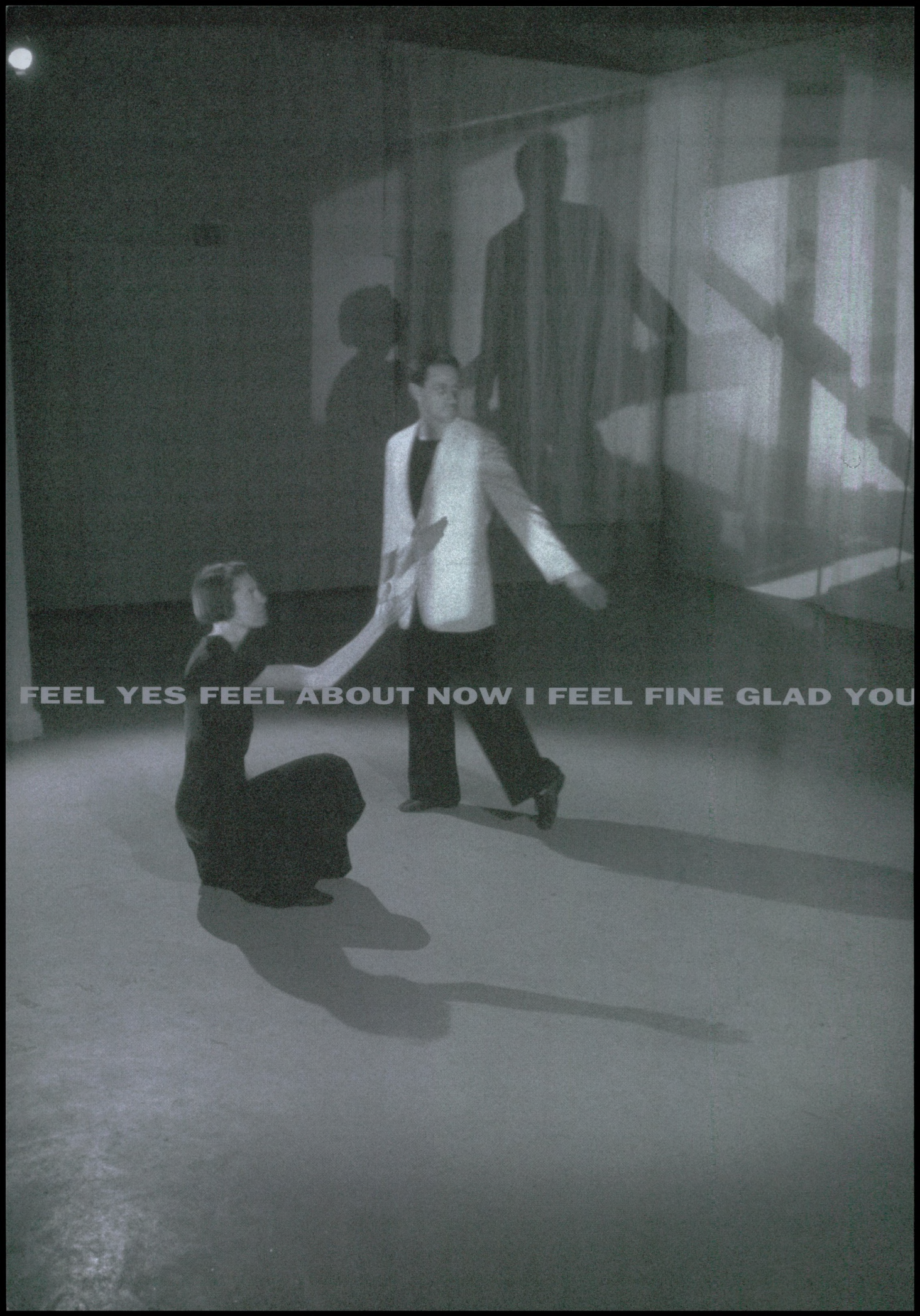
**DONT REMEMBER IF I DO DO YOU KNOW DONT NOT**

A black and white photograph of a man in a dark suit standing in a dark room. The background is dominated by large, glowing, abstract shapes that resemble stylized human figures or limbs, possibly projections or large-scale art. The lighting is dramatic, with the glowing shapes providing the primary light source, casting long shadows and highlighting the contours of the man's suit. The overall mood is mysterious and artistic.

KNOW NOW ANY MORE YES MORE NO NOW I CARE I



**ONT CARE ABOUT LOVE NO NOT LOVE LIKE NOT LIKE**



**FEEL YES FEEL ABOUT NOW I FEEL FINE GLAD YOU**

offers of love are taken back. What we have here is communication breakdown; one critically examined by Walton and the dancers through their rigorous use of imagework/ideokinesis, as well as by Newnham in his creation of a score coolly denying the troubling message of its librettos.

Barbour's text penetrates together with the score to form a three-part harmony of voices singing an ironical Renaissance ode to love: *I...like don't like love not love don't love don't care don't care if I am not you are not interested interested no interest remember don't remember if I do do you know don't know now any more yes more no now I care I don't care about love...* The broken syntax, the punning punctuation are symptoms of a form of paralalia particular to lovers.

Blithely ignoring the confusion of the signals they give voice to, these three extraordinary singers in harmony create a single voice. By reaching for such purity of tone, of pitch, their voices meld to one, analogous to the work as a whole:

the initial thought, the pure, the original is *voice*;  
the move back, the denial, the memory is *image*;  
the two combined is *movement*.

There is a space between contradictory or harmonious gestures which reflects the resonant traces of the two, creating a third. This third then becomes the essential, the one voice, arrived at through the investigation of space. For it is in space that all three elements seek and find their place: the searching out acoustically, situating the voice; the searching out of the images folding over the walls

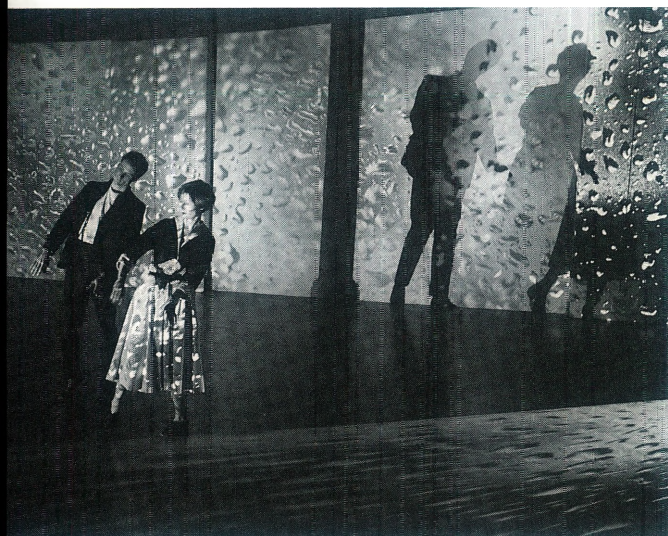


and floor before settling; the searching out of bodies, of lovers, this slow patterning of many menages a trois, a quatre, a deux, in space. The curiosity to know the spatial limits forms a link – for once again it is that curiosity which seeks understanding: *love*.

The site to which this work is specific (yet unspecified) – above Deutscher Brunswick Street – used to be Frank's Stairway to Heaven, a poolhall for the city's destitute. An image of a rainy night curls around the walls, picking up the name in glitter still on the door and we can laugh nervously at the posturings we have taken up in a place like this. Relationships at breaking point, solitary nights without hope, without reason. A place like the performance's own space, of "expectation and desire combined", of a "hoping against hope: clinging to mere possibility". (Concise Oxford: *hope*) A place where one can no longer believe anything, but continues to, regardless.

*By a paradox that is only apparent, the discourse that makes people believe is the one that takes away what it urges them to believe in, or never delivers what it promises.* (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*)

These dream writings of Barbour's are matched by de Gruchy's projections, dreamlike in their simultaneous intensity and obscurity – walls of raindrops, waterfalls, clouds, roses, layered and overlaid to create a breathless, painful beauty. Piercingly pink roses in turn pierced by a note so pure it vibrates, resonates and wraps up the wall,





sliding over the images, adding yet another. A pitch so unsettling, it has the dual but indivisible effect of the sublime: this is a note of chaos, standing in for the unrepresentable, where there is no reconciliation between feeling and understanding, between hope and reason. This cold city space has been fired up, momentarily; has been *sublimated*. Even when we enter the space, we are seated on specially made wooden crates; objects which suggest the packaged protection of fragile things, things of value, commodities. Objects whose function has been upturned. We sit arranged in a staff-like arc, our bottoms on the symbol of economic rationalization: the j-curve. For this is the hopeless/hopeful, reasonless/over-reasoning space of the contemporary city. The work



ends with a complex choreographed run up the stairs – feet running in the Underground – where all line up singing “it isn’t enough, it isn’t enough”.

*The memorable is that which can be dreamed about a place.* (de Certeau). Oneric images, images of memory are captured on film – our space is shifted outside to the tops of trees speeding by, viewed from a child’s backseat in a car; to a boat bobbing upsidedown, stranded – the film’s topsy-turvyness re-emphasizing our isolation on the waters. Up comes the boat again, right side up, caught by Walton in an extraordinarily evocative image. By reflecting the boat-image into a mirrored pool of water, it continues to bob, until Walton as performer comes and makes it ripple, then splashes the water and the boat implodes. We are shattered by the casual gesture of a hand idly playing. Shattered because we’re more that just looking on. Through the integrality and resonant linking of music, image and movement, Walton and her colleagues draw us into this beautiful vortex. We fall into it as one of the dancers earlier falls – in a fall constant and apparently never-ending: from what? From grace? from the exhaustion of romantic games? from love? The text, these words uttered are a defence against the fall into love. The image of the fall works through the body in an endless, almost seamless expression of our struggle against the seduction of the abyss. *I fall therefore a chasm opens up beneath my feet. I am falling endlessly and therefore the chasm is bottomless.* (Bachelard, *The Imaginary Fall*)

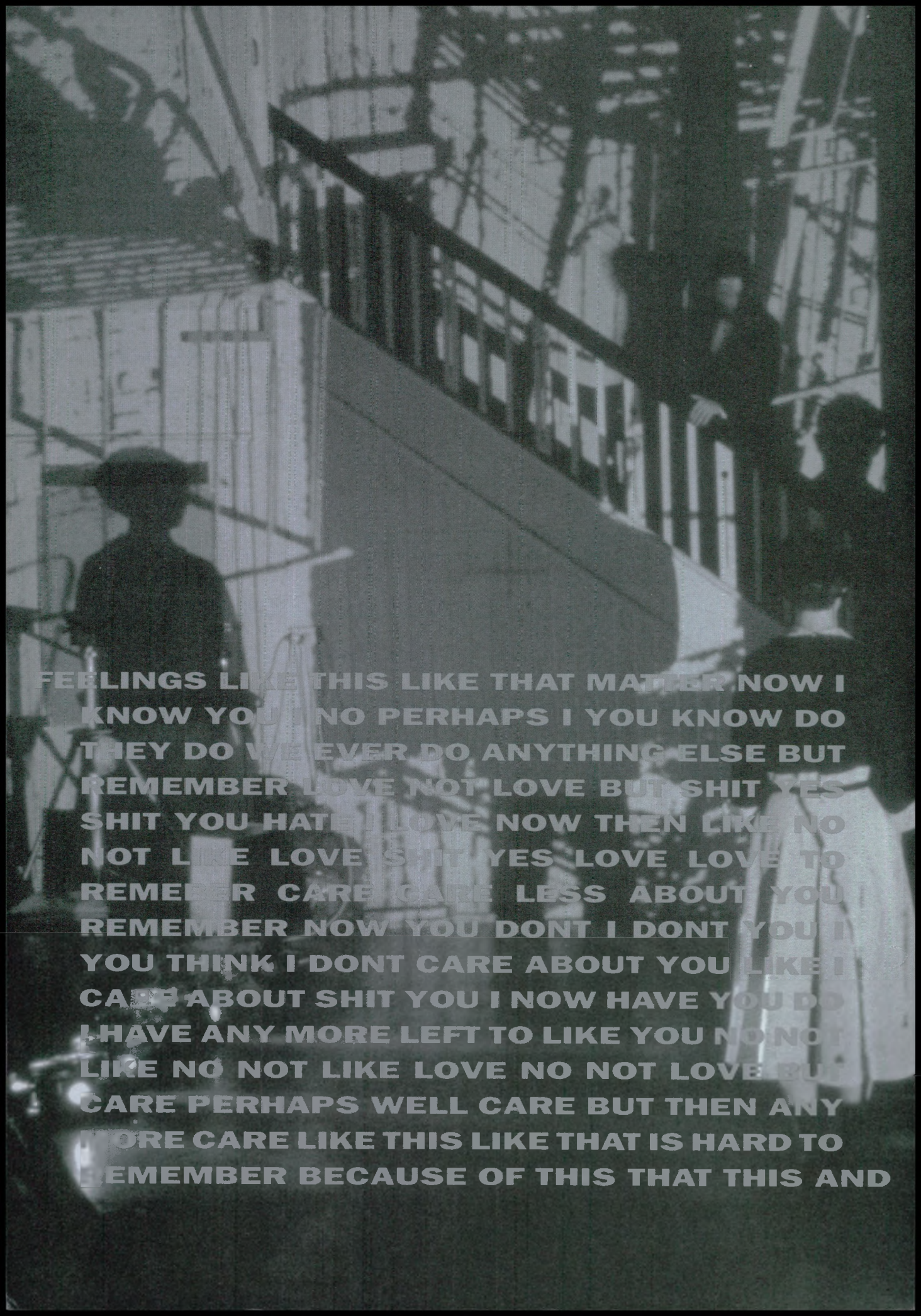
This work is of the sublime, and I don’t use the word without caution. For it is a dual notion, the sublime. This *one*, this symbolic whole, is a one made up of two, is the sensation of the sublime, confounding by its duality: this work is cleverly seductive, beautiful but more than that – we have *pain* with our pleasure. At the end of the piece, where the images again grow cold, steel girders, black, white and grey, speak of the desolation that is the city, the despair that is the human, and of the perverse optimism that is love.

---

*No Hope, No Reason* was performed by Jude Walton in collaboration with Simon Biazek, Ian de Gruchy, Vivien Hamilton, Shona Innes, Hartley Newnham, Mark Minchinton and Tim Preston. Text by John Barbour. All photographs by Warwick Page.



**THAT YOU KNOW I DO HATE YOU SOMETIMES DO**

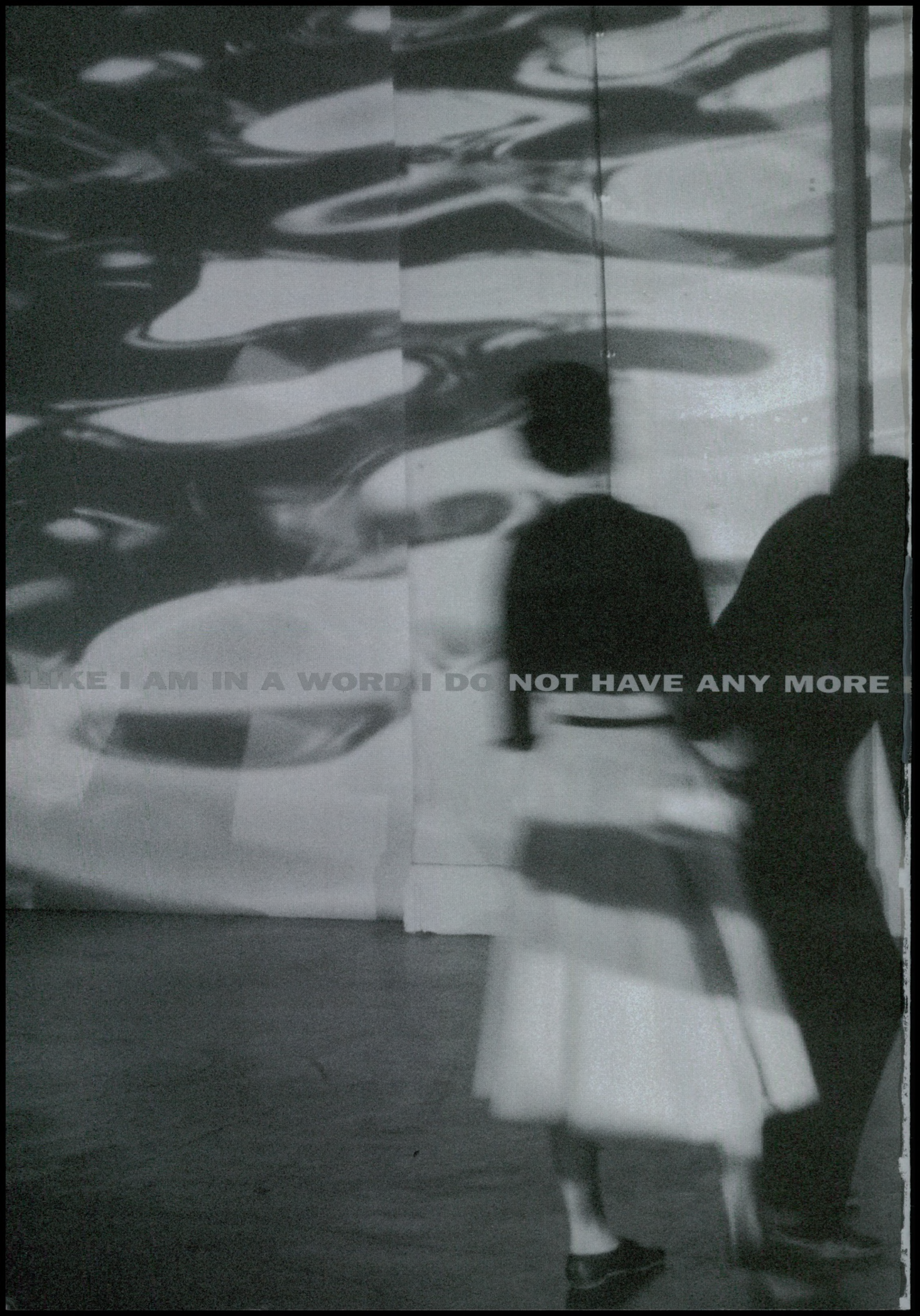
A black and white photograph of a construction site. The image is filled with a complex network of scaffolding and structural beams, creating a dense, geometric pattern. In the foreground, a worker wearing a hard hat is silhouetted against the background. To the right, another worker is visible, wearing a light-colored jacket. The overall atmosphere is one of industrial activity and structural complexity.

**FEELINGS LIKE THIS LIKE THAT MATTER NOW I  
KNOW YOU I NO PERHAPS I YOU KNOW DO  
THEY DO WE EVER DO ANYTHING ELSE BUT  
REMEMBER LOVE NOT LOVE BUT SHIT YES  
SHIT YOU HATE I LOVE NOW THEN LIKE NO  
NOT LIKE LOVE SHIT YES LOVE LOVE TO  
REMEMBER CARE CARE LESS ABOUT YOU  
REMEMBER NOW YOU DONT I DONT YOU I  
YOU THINK I DONT CARE ABOUT YOU LIKE I  
CARE ABOUT SHIT YOU I NOW HAVE YOU DO  
I HAVE ANY MORE LEFT TO LIKE YOU NO NOT  
LIKE NO NOT LIKE LOVE NO NOT LOVE BUT  
CARE PERHAPS WELL CARE BUT THEN ANY  
MORE CARE LIKE THIS LIKE THAT IS HARD TO  
REMEMBER BECAUSE OF THIS THAT THIS AND**



EXIT

THAT OH YOU KNOW JUST THIS AND THAT WE  
HAD ALOVE ALOVE YOU DONT FIND VERY  
DAY OR SO THEY SAY SO THEY SAID THEN  
YOU SAID AND THEN YOU SAID BUT WELL I  
DONT CARE ABOUT THAT ANY MORE JUST  
REMEMBER WHAT YOU CAN AND BE GRATE-  
FUL YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING AT ALL  
SHIT YES YES I DO WELL AT LEAST I THINK  
SO I THINK YOU CARE I CARE NO ANY WAY  
YOU LIKE IS THE CARE YOU GET FROM ME  
I THINK YES YES ID WELL AT LEAST I FEEL  
FINE ABOUT HIS AND THAT THAT HATE HATE  
TO SAY IT BUT DO YOU KNOW IF THERES  
ANY MORE OF THIS LEFT TO COME I DONT  
BUT NOW I FEEL FEEL LIKE FEEL LIKE I FEEL



LIKE I AM IN A WORD I DO NOT HAVE ANY MORE



**ATE NO NOT HATE ONLY LOVE TOO**

Writings  
ON  
DANCES