

**Performative Pedagogy:  
Writing choreographically a dance space of imaginings**

by  
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## Abstract

*Performative Pedagogy* is a philosophical essay on dance telling of the necessity to reintegrate dance in the curriculum as well as a performative inquiry that recognizes space-moments of learning realized through performance. Dance/tool of exploration/research is the integration of multiple layers of understandings, intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual, in the absence of word and the presence of silence.

This text is a creative response to researchers seeking a legitimate space of recognition for our arts-based processes. *Writing choreographically* is the integration of phenomenology of kinaesthetic consciousness, hermeneutics, and the not yet known in a moment of imagining. Text sometimes linear, sometimes not, inter-danced with personal photographs, autobiographical narratives, poetry, dancing on the page, exploring a space moment of imagining with you. I explore concepts such as "embodied awareness", "thinking in movement", "voice of the soul", "intentional rhythm", and "language" using a methodology of performative inquiry.

*Writing choreographically a dance space of imagining* invites the reader in a historical journey of dance, from Ruth St-Denis, Isadora Duncan and Mary Wigman to post-modernists Merce Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer, the Grand Union, and Canadian choreographers Françoise Sullivan, Jennifer Mascal, Chick Snipper, and Daniel Soulières and myself, blurring the boundaries between dancers, choreographers, viewers, as well as between the mediums. This historical movement creates an opportunity for readers to question their own inquiry in dance.

*Performative Pedagogy: Writing choreographically a dance space of imaginings* is an artistic adventure inviting you to re-create meaning within this performative inquiry the same way a spect / actor would during a dance performance. Through the explorations of danced moments into the unknown, we may offer pedagogical possibilities.

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## Photography and Art legend

Picture Art No.	Page	Choreography/ Choreographer	Artists	Year/ Photographer
No. 1	4b	"Spectacles" /Giard & Soulières	M. Giard, D. Soulières	1983 R. Etchevery
No. 2	7b	"Miroirs" /D. Soulières	M. Giard, D. Soulières	1983 R. Etchevery
No. 3	9b	"Nuit de Noël" /P.Lapointe	M. Giard	1964
No. 4	11b	"Lily Marlène" /E. Lock	M. Giard	1980 R. Etchevery
No. 5	14b	/Iro Tembeck	M. Giard & G. Orbach	1978
No. 6	23b	"One day in the attic..." /M. Giard	M. Giard & T. Crane	1990
No. 7	24b	"Double Quintette" Improvisation	L. Bédard, : Cartier, J. Derome, M. Giard, G. Laurin, D. Soulières	1982 O. Ford
No. 8, 9,	25b, 25c	Dali's painting	Dali Burlington	1995
No. 10	27b	Dali's painting	Dali Burlington	1999
No. 11	32b	"Et la Nuit à la Nuit" /F. Sullivan	Sullivan's dancers	1981 J. C. Ewen
No. 12	33b	/Hilda Nanning	M. Giard	T. Knott/1990
No. 13	36b	"Drops of Love" /M. Giard	SFU Dancers	1987
No. 14	37b	Cafe Muller /P. Bausch	H. Pikon & D. Mercy.	1985
No. 15	41b	"One day in the Attic..." /M. Giard	M. Giard & T. Crane	1990

No. 16	43b	"Drops of Love" /Giard	SFU dancers	1987
No. 17	47b	Lily Marlène .. /E. Lock	M. Giard	1980
No. 18	51b	"Suite du capricorne" Improvisation	J. Derome, M. Giard D. Soulières	1983 O. Ford
No. 19	53b		Danseurs de Nouvelle Aire	1975
No. 20	55b	"Etcetera" /Merce Cunningham		1975
No. 21	58b		Yvonne rainer	P. Moore/1963
No. 22	59b	The Grand Union	TGU dancers	B. Mangolte/1975
No. 23	62b	Dance's painting	M. Giard	2000
No. 24	64b	"Et la Nuit à la Nuit" /F. Sullivan	M. Febvre & M. Giard	1981
No. 25	65b	"Erosiak" /P. Lapointe	M. Giard & : A. Fortier	1973 D. Poulin
No. 26	66b	"À Tout Prendre" /F. Sullivan	M. Giard & D. Soulières	1980
No. 27	67b	'Danse dans la neige" /F. Sullivan	F. Sullivan	1948
No. 28	68b	"Dance on the beach"	SFU dancers	1986
No. 29	69b	"Nullstadt" /M. Giard & H. Jesionka	SFU dancers	1989
No. 30	74b	"Le Jet-d'eau Qui Jase" /Giard & Soulières	Giard & Soulières	1981 R. Etchevery
No. 31	77b	"	"	"
No. 32	80b	"	"	"
No. 33	82b	"	"	"

*Dedication*

For my sons, Dali Alexandre, Félix-Antoine  
and in loving memory of my parents Juliette Richer et Thomas Giard  
my aunt Cécile and my sister Louise

and to all beings dancing their life

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# **Performative Pedagogy:**

**Writing  
choreo-  
graphically**

**a**

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ngs.**

## Entering a bare <sup>1</sup> space

*Writing choreographically* is a philosophical essay on dance as well as a performative inquiry <sup>2</sup> (Fels, 1999) telling of the necessity to reintegrate dance in the curriculum and create a transformative dance of knowledge together within a multicultural education<sup>3</sup> (Banks, 1993). This performative text articulates dance making as a vehicle of learning, research, engagement, and a space of embodied awareness<sup>4</sup> (Haskel, 2000). Dance looking for integration in the curriculum (Turner, 1957; Blumenfeld-Jones et al., 1990; Eisner, 1998) is a movement for visibility. This paper seeks to express these multilayered co-evolving worlds in motion toward recognition within the field of education. It is the articulation of a journey into a space / existence: The I that speaks or self-movement (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999) transforming into the I that dances mindfully<sup>5</sup> and metaphorically.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Brook speaks of "empty space" as a space of engagement between the person entering the space and someone watching, opening to possibilities, anticipation, memory, absence or presence. See Brook (1968), and Fels (1999).

<sup>2</sup> Lynn Fels (1999) defines performative inquiry as "a research methodology that recognizes explores honors the absences, journey-landscapes, and space-moments of learning realized through performance" (p. 30). The terms space-moment of learning and/or space-moment of possibility refer, as she explained, "to the "aha!" moment of interstanding that occurs when the not yet known becomes known within the interstices of the real world (known or unknown) and the not yet real world or imaginative world of performance" (p. 30). See also Fels (1998).

<sup>3</sup> Banks (1997) reviews the debate over multicultural education in his article "The canon debate, knowledge construction, and multicultural education." He makes a positive contribution by providing evidence that each position between Western traditionalists and multiculturalists implies a *kind of knowledge* that should be taught in the school and university curriculum. He stresses that "although the school should recognize, validate, and make effective use of student personal and cultural knowledge in instruction, an important goal of education is to free students from their cultural and ethnic boundaries and enable them to cross cultural borders freely (Banks, 1988, 1991/1992).

<sup>4</sup> Embodied awareness refers to the evolving learning that happens through experience similar to the progressive learning through dance.

<sup>5</sup> Mindfulness, as defined by Joel & Michelle Levey (1987), is the quality of attention that allows you to remember what you are doing. Mindfulness within the Buddhist tradition means that the mind is present in embodied everyday experience; mindfulness leads the mind back from the

This text is a creative response to researchers seeking a legitimate space of recognition for arts-based processes. Performative inquiry is like entering a dance studio the naked floor is open to receiving and creating a body of knowledge through explorations, jumps and repetitions, falls and freefalls,<sup>6</sup> in an integrated bodymind and spirit of imagination and perception. Dance/tool of exploration/action site of learning is the integration of multiple layers of understandings, intellectual, physical and spiritual, in the absence of word and the presence of silence.

This performance/text invites the reader into a collaborative act of re-creation. In entering the dance space like you do, readers/spectacle/actors<sup>7</sup> are accepting the pre-requisites rules of engagement in a process of re-creating re-naming dance from its deceptive emptiness (without meaning) to reconstructed fulness in your presence, altering its own existence. Through performative inquiry, dance as a research tool conceptualizes and articulates embodied awareness. Dance is the integration of phenomenology of kinesthetic consciousness and the not yet known in a moment of imagining. Through your presence, the performance is transformed and the conversation extended. Will we dance?<sup>8</sup> Is dance an intimate expression of self and/or community? Does dance challenge or reproduce?<sup>9</sup> How is dance perceived through multiple

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theories or abstract attitude to the experience itself (Varela et al. 1991, p. 22). Mindfulness in the Hakomi Therapy of Ron Kurtz is the main tool employed in his approach. Kurtz found that he could help his patients most in turning their awareness inward toward present experience. It is preverbal and pre-conceptual; therefore, they could be curious about it. If people don't know all there is to know about something, then there is the possibility of learning, the possibility of discovery and surprise that evokes curious exploration (Johanson, in Ron Kurtz, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Haskell (2000) uses the term freefall referring to 'freefall pedagogy' meaning the moment when a student uses all the skills learned to challenge and move into the falling zone of the unknown creating new possibilities / imaginings.

<sup>7</sup> Augusto Boal speaks of spectators not as passive viewers but active in their spectating.

<sup>8</sup> According to the British Columbia Royal Commission on Education (1988) "students should be enabled to pursue whatever educational interests their talents make possible" (p. 62) .

<sup>9</sup> Kelly and Nihlen (1982) address the notions of reproduction and resistance in their article: "Schooling and the reproduction of patriarchy, unequal workloads, unequal rewards." McLaren (1994) explains the theory of social reproduction and students' resistance to classroom learning because of their limited identification with the dominant culture.

lenses of society, education, performance, and pedagogy? Are we displaced or recognized in our dance? Are we empowered through dance?<sup>10</sup> Is dance part of the cultural capital<sup>11</sup> or an imposition? Does dance invite engagement? Does dance challenge the status quo?<sup>12</sup> Is stepping into the bare space of dance improvisation one of invitation, fear, or possibility?

*Writing choreographically* asks the question "Are you dancing with me?" This invitation to be part of the dance articulates the co-existence of possible universes within education. I invite you to enter the dance floor and engage in an inclusive evolving co-chain<sup>13</sup> of imaginings as a participant. Writing dance moment to moment. The magic of dance performance.

A moment of improvisation

Writing in the moment

*a moment dancing the words*

*Writing choreographically* is the expression of embodied awareness with other artistic forms of representation and learning. Writing dance allows us to see something nonhuman as human.<sup>14</sup> Writing dance gives forms to other aspects of social life. Acknowledgment of existence

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<sup>10</sup>Empowerment means not only helping students to understand and engage the world around them, but also enabling them to exercise the kind of courage needed to change the social order where necessary" (McLaren, 1994, p. 182). Embodied awareness realized through dance is a movement in that direction.

<sup>11</sup>The concept of *cultural capital*, defended by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, refers to the general cultural background passed on from one generation to another. Cultural capital exists in the embodied state, as long-lasting dispositions of the body and mind (McLaren, 1994).

<sup>12</sup>The status quo as we enter the millennium is the existence of an arts-based curriculum put on the shelves and not always experienced in the classroom in most schools in British Columbia for lack of teaching resources, time, space and experience.

<sup>13</sup>This co-chain refers to "La grande chaîne" in a traditional folk dance in Quebec, involving all participants in the dance. Knowledge is a verb as in dancing.

<sup>14</sup>Marie Chouinard, a Montreal choreographer, is a good example of humanizing the nonhuman. In her version of "*L'après-midi d'un faune*" inspired by Nijinsky's original choreography, she



No. 1

-4b-

of a movement only for its own beauty and meaning, with or without relevance to the past or future action, depending on where, how, what, or who is dancing. Text sometimes linear, sometimes not, interdanced with personal photographs, poetry, folk dances, and a song from Quebec, for pleasure and a sense of connectedness within the text. Dancing choreographically on the page, exploring a space moment of imagining with you.

<b>invisible spheres moving</b>	<b>sy- nergy<sup>15</sup></b>
<b>through</b>	
<b>the I that dances</b>	
<b>and around</b>	
<b>the forms on the edge</b>	<b>intra-nergy<sup>16</sup></b>
<b>balancing</b>	
<b>falling</b>	
<b>over</b>	
<b>in the holes of imagining</b>	<b>-nergy<sup>17</sup></b>

*Writing choreographically* is an adventure. One of many possible steps asking again and again those questions: "Why dance?", "Who is dancing?", "What are we dancing?", "What feelings do we have to have to dance?", "Does the feeling motivate the movement or does the movement motivate the feeling?"<sup>18</sup> Writing the dance within an educational vision of dance as embodied awareness, is imagining a dance space and the possibilities within a curriculum, and inviting in the dance teachers and those in positions of political power to recognize the primacy

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brilliantly performed with sounds and movement the life and ecstasy of a wild animal.

<sup>15</sup>Synergy refers to the simultaneous action of many organs in the accomplishment of one function.

<sup>16</sup>Intra-nergy refers to the life force within us. From Latin *intrap.* inside of.

<sup>17</sup>E-nergy (the letter E being the poem) with the prefix *e-* or *ex-* from Latin, refers to the notions of separation, distance or completion. Which prefix would you dance? Sy- Intra- or E-nergy?

<sup>18</sup>Judith Lynne Hanna (1983) answered some of these questions in her book "*The performer-audience connection.*"

of movement (Sheet-Johnstone, 1999) and legitimate embodied awareness. This philosophical essay questions the notions of power, leadership, collaboration, and co-creation. Exploring ultimately who makes the decisions and through what kind of processes? What can each individual teacher and school administrator do to create an educational environment supporting performing inquiry and self-realization through the arts?

Writing dance as a voice for the creation of selves and others. The experiential continuum of interactions with others provides opportunities to expand our thinking and doing. What are the pedagogical imaginings that arise from challenging ourselves to enter the not yet known space of creation? How do we provide opportunities of imaginings for students? These are the questions I hope you will choreograph after dancing this text. *Writing choreographically* invites you to re-create meaning within this performative inquiry the same way a spect/actor would during a dance performance.

## **Dance as research: performative pedagogy**

Dance improvisation as a method of inquiry is entering the bare space and studying lived experience in a moment of imaginings. Dance shifting from one state to another, from reality to another sphere of knowing. Presence is always elusive, shifting, and indeterminate (Denzin, 1995). Dance as research places considerable faith in the primacy of movement over *parole* (different from voice<sup>19</sup>) and text. Dance introduces us to the mystery of experience within movement. In writing choreographically, I witness myself being created. Dance as research and writing choreographically are mirroring each other and merging at the same time shifting from

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<sup>19</sup>Denzin (1995) explains the complexity of voice from utterances and sounds made through the mouth, as in singing and talking, to the web of expressions of opinions, including hearing, perceiving, and listening.

one sphere to another and back and forth and around. Writing and dancing, a moment shifting imagining.

*"The worlds we study are created through the texts that we write."*

Denzin, 1995, p. 9

*a space-moment of life*

*being becoming*

*a space-moment*

*of learning*

*possibility dancing*

*on the edge of chaos*

*breath-dance our absence present.*

Fels, 1999, p. 46

Danse maluron, maluré

Pas-de-bourré J'ai trop dansé

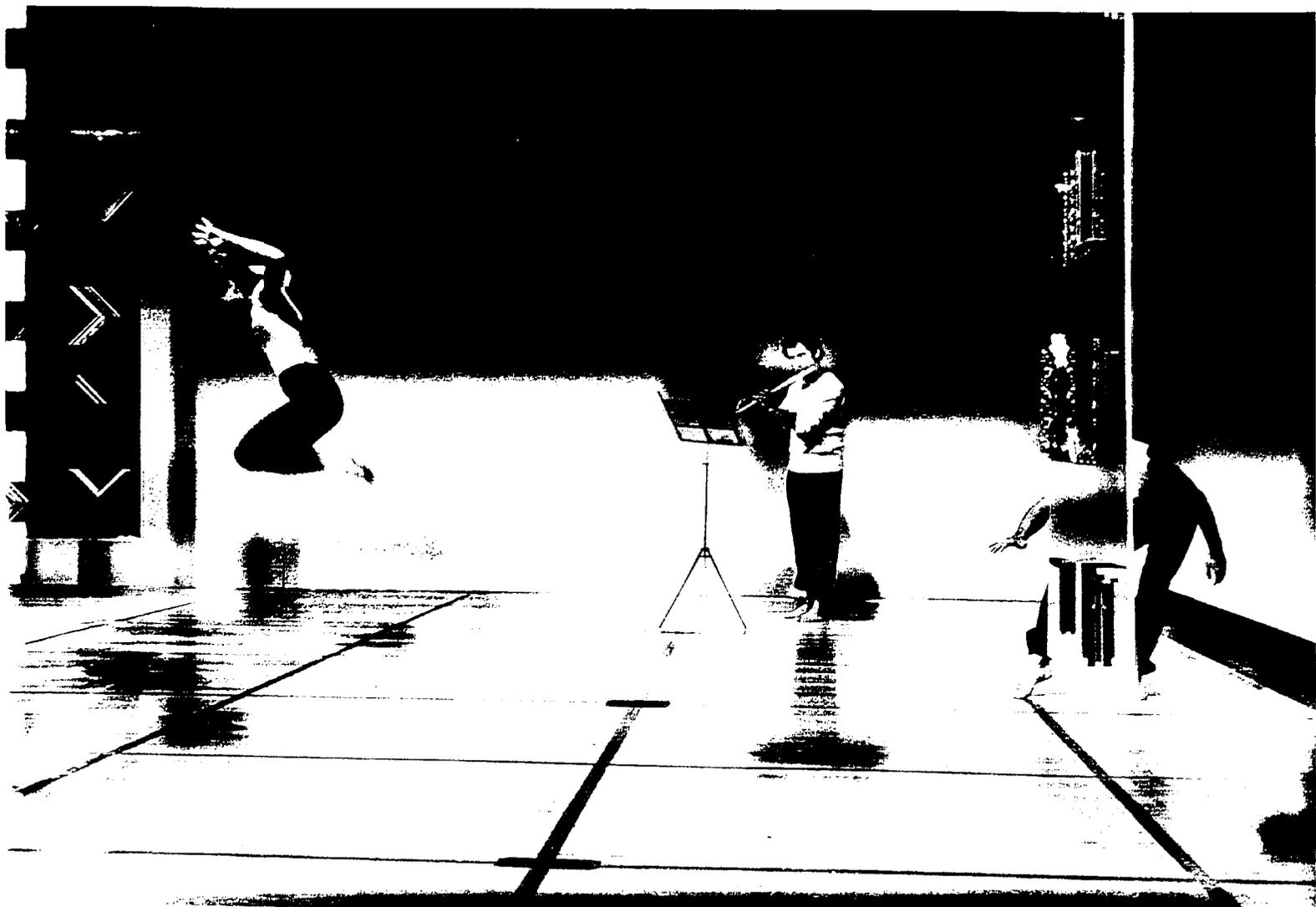
J'oublie mon nom et mon âme

Ami tiens-moi la main

Je tourbillonne dans la nuit

Giard, 2000

Unpredictable occurrence. No text or image can be repeated without a change in context and meaning (Denzin, 1995). My dance/writing is *éphémère* (short-lived). It would not be the same tomorrow. Speculative production. Unique moment of creation, moving, shifting with the passing of time and with others. The written danced text contextualizes lived experiences constantly moving filled with music, rhythm, bodily sounds and kinesthetic memories, footsteps, breathings and swishes on the floor or on the ground, falls and jumps echoing in the distance.



No. 2

Writing choreographically on the page is a glimpse of the past and present experience simultaneously. Time is volatile. This text is a new discovery witnessing and evoking the previously known and merging with the not yet known. It reveals new ways of seeing, feeling, being, and writing. This text is a form of discourse finding a space for what is being studied, the bodymind.<sup>20</sup> Writing choreographically is textualizing a moment dancing in relation to an ever-changing external world bringing performative pedagogy to the forefront.

Responding to percussive tambourines and whistles, no one knows in advance what will be our dance. No one knows the answer, not even the teacher. There is no right or wrong answer. The experience itself becomes the pedagogy and the inquiry all together, students and teachers. There is no question, no answer, only possibilities. Pedagogy of possibilities within experience in a moment of imaginings. Danced knowing. Listen to the sound and let your embodied awareness merge with music, counter- rhythmically in unison, expressing your existence in that moment. A moment embracing feeling hearing breathing touching weighting challenging inter-standing<sup>21</sup> human experience.

## **A dance space of pedagogical imaginings**

Constructing meaning in dance -or other events that are new- resides in our ability to build a world beyond the information given, and to use our imagination capacity to construct pattern, to perceive implied meaning, to read between the lines, in short, to break free from the

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<sup>20</sup>Lynn Fels (1999) writes: "The Cartesian duality of mind-body is replaced by the concept of embodiment which acknowledges the interactional embodiment of knowledge, cognition, and experience." (p. 42) See also Varela et al. (1993).

<sup>21</sup>"Understanding has become impossible because nothing stands under. Interstanding has become unavoidable because everything stands between." (Taylor & Saarinen, 1994, quoted in Fels, 1999, p. 31)

discreet, in order to form patterns which carry meaning to consciousness (Eisner, 1978). Dance improvisation offers a unique opportunity to enter the worlds of imagining.

I was seven years old when I asked my mother to take the ballet classes offered at my elementary school. I wanted to dance as a way to express the energy contained in my body. That was my way of constructing a meaningful world for myself. I am grateful that my mother said "yes" after all. Without her consent and money, there would have been no proper outlet to release all my fantasies and dreams. She allowed the discovery of my cultural and artistic uniqueness. I became 'wide-awake to the world' (Greene, 1995). As Maxine Greene (1995) says, releasing the imagination is a way of becoming empathic to others and entering their unique world of possibilities. Releasing the imagination is to accept alternative realities and that children could have a world of their own imaginings.

*Imagination* breathes life into

**e x i s t e n c e**

The social imagination is our capacity to invent visions of what should and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets where we live, in our schools. This kind of imagination is possible when we engage in a conversation with others. What would our schools become if we were to fully embody this concept of social imaginings (Greene, 1995) in the context of embodied awareness (Haskell, 2000) in a space-moment-of-learning (Fels, 1999)?



No. 3

Creating a space of pedagogical imaginings is how learning happens. Our task of education is to create those situations in which students are inspired and moved to inquire within a context of multiculturalism in our so-called democratic society.

*"My source comes from something that's circulating very deep inside.*

*What carries over is that something that's existing is already a marvel;*

*a tree is intense, the sun is intense, life is intense."*

Chouinard, quoted in Johnson, 2000, p. 15

### **Dance-moment-of-imagining.**

I am inviting you in a dance-moment-of imagining. Lie down in a comfortable position. Pay attention to your breathing and relax. Close your eyes and listen to my voice as I read the following paragraph. (You may ask someone to read this for you while you keep your eyes closed.)

Imagine yourself in an empty long dance studio, with the clean wooden floor, windows all along the room on the left side. It is a sunny day. You might already feel the warmth in this special comfortable room. So comfortable that you can just relax and enjoy the calmness and warmth. So calm and so comfortable that you find yourself relaxing completely. The sun warming your body. You feel that warmth now not only on your skin but inside as well. Your blood feels warm and the liquid in your veins is warm. So warm that you feel compelled to breathe deeply. You breathe deeply more and more, taking more and more air into your lungs. So big and so strong is your breathing. You feel so full of life that your body has difficulty containing all that energy. You feel a strong desire to move and stretch. So intense is the energy in your body. So intense is the sun. So bright and so warm. More and more air into your lungs

and into your whole body. You can't stop your body that wants to move. Your body is moving with the flow of energy. Compelled you feel an impulse. I am not sure what your body wants to do. Just follow the impulse and image. Visualize that energy inside of you growing bigger and bigger and moving your legs and arms and body. I don't know if you will push, or stretch, or stand up. You may want to open your eyes now keeping contact with the intense energy. So big and so powerful. You may want to jump that energy, like a volcano. Or run like a wild animal chasing its prey. Or grow like a huge tree. I don't know what you will choose to represent with that intensity. Allow yourself a moment to explore this intensity even more and let your body express it. As I count till 15 your body is feeling it even more and you see clearly an image or color or shape for that intense energy. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15.

Continue your exploration and let your dance flow to its natural ending.

*"...the chimpanzees assemble by night in great numbers and then the carnival begins. One or two will beat violently on this dry clay, while others jump up and down in a wild grotesque manner. Some of them utter long rolling sounds as if trying to sing... and the festivities continue in this fashion for hours."*

Reynolds and Reynolds, 1965, p. 408-9

Dancing with others offers a multiplicity of consciousness liberating and empowering individuals. In creating a dance space, we, teachers, engage in a co-evolving transformation of our identities. Dance by its nature confronts the question of what it means to be human. I would like to encourage the recognition of imagination as the new leitmotiv in education, opening opportunities, creating new ways of questioning, challenging, inviting the imagining of danced pedagogy: Yvonne Rainer, Merce Cunningham, and many post-modern choreographers and



No. 4

-11b-

dancers have opened the gateways to new visions and perspectives in dance. Imagination is the new leitmotiv.

*I dance to let my body speak of life.*

*Taking risks I find freedom.*

*I dance to meet your soul.*

*Complementing your motion, I discover the powers of partnership<sup>22</sup>  
the dance of our embodied sense of community.*

*I dance ecologically in environmental performing spaces.<sup>23</sup>*

*I dance my being here with you.*

It takes imagination on the part of the young people to perceive openings through which they can move. This is as true in a dance-moment-of imagining as it is true in a life situation. Therefore dance is a metaphor for life. Dance is a metaphor for trying to become different and move beyond where we are with imagination. You are not lying on the floor (as in the dance-moment-of imagining exercise); you are energy and vitality. Invent yourself in this dance as pure energy. This dance explores infinity and strength because energy is infinite. Be visible and big in your dance, as big as you feel this intense energy. Be visible in real life, as visible and loud as you wish to be.

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<sup>22</sup>Pilobolus Dance Theater excelled in the possibilities of moving as two. Steve Paxton's contact improvisation elicits the strength, balance and ingenuity of both partners, male and/or female. Dancers of the same sex lift each other.

<sup>23</sup>Many choreographers took their dances outside. Meredith Monk, *Vessel*, 1971; Twyla Tharp, *Medley*, 1969; Trisha Brown, *Roof Piece*, 1973; Kei Takei, *Light* (Part 5), 1972; Deborah Hay, *Circle dance*, 1971: In Livet, A. (1978) (Ed.). Françoise Sullivan, *Danse dans la neige*, 1948-1977, and *Accumulations VI*, 1980: In Gosselin & Letocha, L. (1981). Karen Jamieson, *River*, 1999: In Johnson, G. (1999).

*"The invisibility of too many students has somehow to be broken through."*

Greene, 1995, p. 15

**I was only a child thought my father  
therefore not to be heard  
Not to be seen either thought my mother  
resentful of my talent in dance.**

**Cut your beautiful blond hair little girl  
So no one will be attracted to you  
Self-indulgence is a sin  
So is beauty, she thought.**

**Passion you must constrain  
and enthusiasm never express  
Invisible and silent  
I must be, I thought.**

**For love, I will be  
I promised to myself  
Silent I must be.  
That silence ... that strangled me ...**

**Being a mother precipitated a succession of events,  
I broke the conventional feminine goodness  
and walked out of a neglected marriage  
I painfully left the dance career.**

**I found a voice never spoken before  
I awkwardly speak of love and compassion  
I continue to learn the power of my embedded awareness  
Not hiding any more suffering or love**

**Invisible and silent I need not be.  
My dancing will never be the same.**

*Pass-  
ion door-  
way for imagi-  
nation*

Like Maxine Green I believe in passion as the doorway for imagination (Greene, 1995, p. 16). Passion -and strength and looking at things 'large and big'- is what might move us on to reform. After you have danced the dance of the red shoes, everything is possible. Tapping into our imagination is to be able to break what is supposedly fixed and unchangeable. Emptying everything else and uncovering what is really important in that moment. Mindfulness. The ability to create what is not yet is the capacity of an inventive person. My danced life has taken me away from my mother's perspectives into a world of diverse experiences and perspectives. Dancing my life has helped me become mindful and able to contemplate the not yet known. Dance is my pathway to spirituality, the way climbing is a stairway to heaven, to climber/researcher, Johnna Haskell (2000) as expressed in the following poem.

*"We do what makes us fly above the world  
in the arms of the angels.  
The sweet beauty in thoughts,  
only memory can achieve."*

Haskell, 2000, p. 104

## **Writing choreographically my embodied self**

I have been writing and reflecting during the last years about the role dance has played in my life. In order to do this reflection, I needed to look back at videos of my dancing, photographs and newspapers' critique about my work as a dancer and choreographer. Looking back was painful for many reasons.

My dance experience had been filled with more pain than joy over my thirty years of experience. I started dancing when I was seven years old. I think those early years were glorious,



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but as soon as I entered high school, I had to fight my mother who feared that passion would become a career. I had to leave home to pursue in dance. She was very prejudiced and feared I would become "one of them." the dance world being for prostitutes and gay people. She pressured me to quit and expressed her resentment by not coming to my performances -not even at the prestigious Place-des-Arts in Montreal. My brothers and sisters did come from time to time and in their own way expressed their support. I did not need to know if they liked (or not) what I was doing since I knew my artistic choices were not mainstream or classical. I was part of the modern era that followed the *Refus Global* in the sixties. I performed with Françoise Sullivan, the choreographer and painter and member of the revolutionary post modern group of artists that signed the *Refus Global: les automatistes*. I worked with Françoise Riopelle, former wife of the internationally acclaimed painter, Riopelle, Edouard Lock, who became very famous afterward with the Company LA LA LA Human Steps, Ginette Laurin, Marie Chouinard, Martine Epoque and so many other well known artists that my dance experience may look like a history of modern dance in Quebec.

*Your dance overtakes my body  
as rhythm pulsates in my blood  
I balance on the edge of chaos  
Who am I?*

*I dance your vision  
Drowning in you I metamorphose  
Angels comforting my mutation  
Where am I?*

*I am too young to die  
Not ready yet to say  
good-bye mother  
Will I find love with them?*

*I breathe deeply  
opening to the unknown  
becoming possibilities and passion  
I step beyond*

But my mother did not approve of a dance career and for me that was a very painful rejection of who I was. I left home at seventeen in order to continue what I loved the most. My rebellion became my dance. I loved the freedom of moving with my body in any way I wanted and entering every other artist's world. That was magic. I was for them the clay of their imagination. They were using my body to express their fantasy, their voice. Their imagination was a part of mine. I was a little bit of them.

That is probably why I am today an advocate of arts in the public schools. I want every artistic child to receive the support they need to grow freely in their art form, music, dance, theater or visual arts. I want society to accept artists for who they are with respect and dignity. I want every parent to honor the artistic talent of their son or daughter, and to be aware of their body response to them. The faces that they make when talking about a child's interest in art. Or their comments. "What is THAT? You will never earn a living as an artist. You are not an artist. Who do you think you are?" or "You should get a 'real' job!"

### ***Missed Opportunities to cultivate sensibilities***

*"When we define the content and tasks that constitute the curriculum, we also define the kind of mental skill we choose to cultivate. The absence of attention to the aesthetic in the school curriculum is an absence of opportunities to cultivate the sensibilities. It is an absence of the refinement of our consciousness, for it is through our sensibilities that our consciousness is secured."*

Eisner in Rehage, 1985, p. 35

But more than that, I want parents to know about the sensitivity of all artists; the capacity to contemplate for hours in silence; to feel the beauty, the pain, the strange; to shake the contradictions, the nothing and everything; to challenge chaos and accept the universe as a place of discovery and invention; a place of sensations, colors, sounds, emotions, joy and sorrow; where the horizon melts in the red sunset; the purple snaky bloody warmth moving the body from the toes to the top of your head; the rhythm shaking your torso in a spastic contortion of pleasure; that voice not spoken before exploding in your chest; le cri de liberté, la chanson infinie, le mouvement ininterrompu.

In our actual school system in British-Columbia, many teachers at the elementary levels do not teach music, dance, theater, or visual arts because of lack of time, space, abilities, and resources even though the arts are part of the curriculum. For many children, their dream of taking art classes may never be realized. I was privileged myself to have been allowed to take ballet classes after school until I was old enough to pay for my own classes. However, in terms of having a voice as an artist, I was not supported by my parents and suffered from their resistance. Like many other parents and teachers in the 1960s and particularly in Quebec where Roman Catholicism had a real power over people's view and freedom, they believed it was "*complètement farfelu*" -not to say "*anti-religieux*" to imagine a future in dance and theater.

This story is not only mine. It is the story of many artists who felt pressured to change their route because of fears, misunderstandings, and power issues. The power used to discourage a person from voicing who they are. Adrienne Rich (1977) suggests: "Where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence" (quoted in Belenky et al., 1988). Being asked to silence what was most alive within me was a homicide. And this homicide is repeated so many times in the school system. Being personal and unique seems to challenge the academy

beyond the teacher's capacity to assess learning. But I maintain that writing in the personal voice enables the speaker to explore possibilities of meaning. That also suggests the possibility of doubting our own understanding. As Paulo Freire (1985) wrote:

*"Each day be open to the world, be ready to think; each day be ready not to accept what is said just because it is said, be predisposed to reread what is read; each day investigate, question, and doubt. I think it is most necessary to doubt. I feel it is always necessary to doubt. I feel it is always necessary not to be sure, that is, to be overly sure of 'certainties'. (p. 181)"*

Quoted in Leggo, 1995, p. 8

With an orientation to experiential aesthetic imagining, students would approach the textbooks with a creative and critical attitude, as they define themselves as scholars and critics, makers and appraisers of things made. In this sense, students will have less a tendency to see the world as beyond their power to alter (Eisner, 1985).

From my experience, I learned the importance of expressing myself regardless of my parents' will. I also turned my quest towards becoming a devoted teacher and in allowing students to express themselves with their own unique artistic voice and to always doubt my own understanding.

What I want to share in the context of pedagogical imaginings is my experience as a teacher and how I listened to my students' desires and passion, comments and experiences. My pleasure in teaching has always been to witness their growth as artists/people. After I graduated in Physical Education, commonly called a PE teacher, in Montreal (in the mid 1970s), I was invited to teach creative dance in an elementary school for girls only, in the East area of Montreal, which meant an area of low-income families. In 1975, having a dance teacher within

the school during those years was the girls' dream, since ballet and modern or jazz classes were very expensive (as always) and reserved for the rich families on the West side. What that also meant for them was the possibility of expressing themselves in a classroom that allowed freedom of movement. The regular PE teacher had access to the gym but because of the restricted space within the school, I was teaching in a regular classroom emptied of its desks. My approach to creative dance was to give fifteen minutes warm-up followed by twenty minutes exploration in one of Laban's four dimensions in dance: Space, Time, Energy, and Flow. Students were invited to dance their imaginings, as long as they used some aspects of Rudolph von Laban's principles. At times they discussed what they saw from other groups in the class and developed their critical thinking in dance. I don't recall any difficulty regarding their attendance, discipline, or behavior.

By the end of the year they were able to create dances of their own in groups and were evaluated according to their understanding of Laban's theory, in any way they wanted. One student from that class continued her training at the University of Quebec in Montreal. I met her many years later and learned that she was teaching dance to handicapped people in wheelchairs. She had been invited with her group to perform at the yearly conference of Dance in Canada in Saskatoon, where I was performing. She shared with me that she had been really inspired by my classes, which were the beginning of her story in dance. The voyage of the seven wheelchaired dancers was being filmed by the National Film Board.

*"The emerging perspective on embodied cognition may also offer the best hope so far for understanding central features of human thought and development."*

Clark, 1997, p. 35

**The wheelchair dance**

*Can you feel our dance?*

*Head, eyes and mouth dancing*

*Chairs giggling in circles*

*Music in our veins.*

*Forwards backwards*

*Where else do we go?*

*Breathe with us*

*And let yourself fly*

*Traces of joy on the dance floor*

*Vibrations rolling*

*We dance our being*

*with you*

Clark (1997) explores five major landmarks along the interdisciplinary frontier of developmental psychology and other sciences of the embodied mind: one of them being the highly interactive view of the developmental process according to which mind, body, and world act as equal partners. He concludes his study in stressing that "cognitive development cannot be usefully treated in isolation from issues concerning the child's physical embedding in, and interactions with, the world" (p. 36).

Decentralizing knowledge is the key concept in this philosophical debate. When people try to create patterns or structure in the world they often impose centralized control when none is needed (Resnick, 1994, p. 120). By taking the body in relationship and interaction with the world seriously, we invite emergent perspectives. How many of our old ideas and prejudices will we

have to abandon to do so? And how would this phenomena of kinesthetic consciousness influence our teaching environments?

Clark investigates further the study of human adaptive abilities by looking at Beer and Gallagher's (1992) robot insect and the many evolving solutions found in a complex environmental structure. Solutions for the robot insect are not found to solve a *fixed* problem but the problems themselves alter and evolve in a complex web of co-evolutionary change. What this means is that what we take for granted as our predetermined features as human intelligent creatures are in fact heavily dependent on a variety of *environmental factors* affecting their expression (Clark, 1997). Real embodied intelligence is a means of engaging with the world. How can we really engage in the world if we are not presented with opportunities to engage?

*"Every mode of knowing is participation in the continual creation of the universe -of one's self, of others, of the dwelling places of the world. It is co-creation."*

Huebner quoted in Rehage, 1985, p. 172

It is through a co-evolving imagining of danced space, time and place, and relationship to self and others, that spaces of embodied awareness may open within our teaching and in our schools. We need to make dance spaces available to our students to make possible the interplay of multiple expressions. In a co-evolving space of imagining, we can transform and adapt to a world in mutation by choosing to sing, to dance and to tap in our infinite capacities, as Huebner (1985) explains, so that institutions become places of knowing instead of places of knowledge. Knowledge is a verb not separate from life or the spirit. To enliven knowledge is to accept knowing with doubt. Those who engage in the curriculum-planning process need an understanding of the diversity of modes of knowing.

## Dance as kinesthetic consciousness

It is essential to elucidate the notion of movement as self-movement in order to understand the phenomenology of kinesthetic consciousness. It is important to correct Husserl's restricted view on this subject primarily because of his lack of acknowledgment of self-movement *tout court*. His concern is with external perception which he names an "oculomotor" activity (Husserl, 1989, p. 347) which is incorrectly restricting movement in relation to perceived objects with the eyes (*oculo-*). I echo Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's extensive research on the primacy of movement (1999), stating that movement has an internal life separate from our externally perceived world. However, these inner and outer perspectives are not exclusives but rather co-evolving.

As explained by Sheets-Johnstone (1999) to demonstrate this statement, we take a very simple movement, a movement very familiar to us, an overhead arm stretch. We slow it down and prepare the body prior to doing the gesture. As a way of preparing the body for action, drop your head so that your chin falls toward your chest and rest your arms on your lap. From this beginning position, lift your arms from the elbows - "as if" two strings were attached to your elbows- so that your upper arms move upward and your hands come off your lap. Continue this upward movement without a break by extending your forearms upward and overhead, and finally by extending your fingers upward and overhead. At the same time we do this, we slowly raise our head from its dropped position to the point that our chin faces upward toward the ceiling, and our chest is extended and lifted up. Then reverse the movement, first by letting the elbows flex while your chin and chest begin to move downward. Simply continue this movement of arms and head and torso downward until you come to your original position, hands on your lap. Now, stop

reading, close your eyes and repeat this exercise three or four times by yourself and slowly so that you can feel all the progression with kinesthetic consciousness (p. 140-141).

We next perform free variations on this movement theme or sequence of movement in order to discover what invariants pervade the variants of movement (Husserl, 1977, p. 54). I suggest that you move the sequence quickly, or only a part of the sequence quickly and the rest of it slowly, or any variation of speed that you might like, playing with acceleration and deceleration, or introducing some "freezing" moment, stopping the motion and then continuing. Or you can change the energy of the sequence, moving with great force or muscular contraction, or conversely moving with lightness. You can play with the intensity of the movement. I can move with a bursting energy in the beginning, letting the movement come to an end with a continuous flow of energy. You can vary these projectional possibilities at will. You can vary the movement spatially, augmenting or reducing the amplitude of it, changing its spatial orientation as well as moving forward or sideways.

The movement has an invariantly felt quality that belongs to the initial movement. All of these variations are not *changing* the intrinsic kinetic qualities of the original movement. "Kinesthetic consciousness", says Sheets-Johnstone (1999), "is fundamentally a consciousness of an unfolding kinetic dynamic." (p. 142). Kinetic free variations have to do with four primary qualitative structures of movement: space, time, energy or effort, and flow. These qualities are inseparable from the originated movement. We form space as we move, we create an energetic field as we move, and we create a continuum of movement as we dance.

Another important point is the relationship between kinesthesia and self-agency. The body moves as an integrated whole. Our bodies, through movement, are the very source of our being in the world. We come into the world with embodied knowing in the ways of being the



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bodies we are. We all discovered ourselves in the acts of sucking, swallowing, crying, turning, stretching, babbling within an environment of response and relationship. We learn our possibilities or limitations of our bodies before language. Therefore the meaning of kinetic experience is in the movement itself in relationship to response and environment (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999). Through such experience we approximate what is beyond memory (early childhood development) and before language. This turns us towards what Buddhists call "bare attention," rediscovering at the most fundamental level what it is to be animate.

## **Thinking in movement.**

Dance improvisation is the paradigm of thinking in movement. Dancers in a dance improvisation bring something into being which was not there before, and something which will never be again, thus something that has no past or future performances but which exists only in the present moment, in the here and now of the space moment of creation. The process of creating is the dance itself. Where it will go and what will happen next no one knows. A form that breathes in the flow of its creation.

How is such dance possible? How can dancers create a dance on the spot? What is essential in answering this question is the non-separation of thinking and doing (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999). When I dance-improvise I explore the world in movement. I am *not* mentally exploring a range of possibilities first, and then later choosing an action as a result of my thinking. I think in movement. That means a process that is ever changing and evolving. It is entering the not yet known.

### ***Dancing in wonder moment-to-moment***



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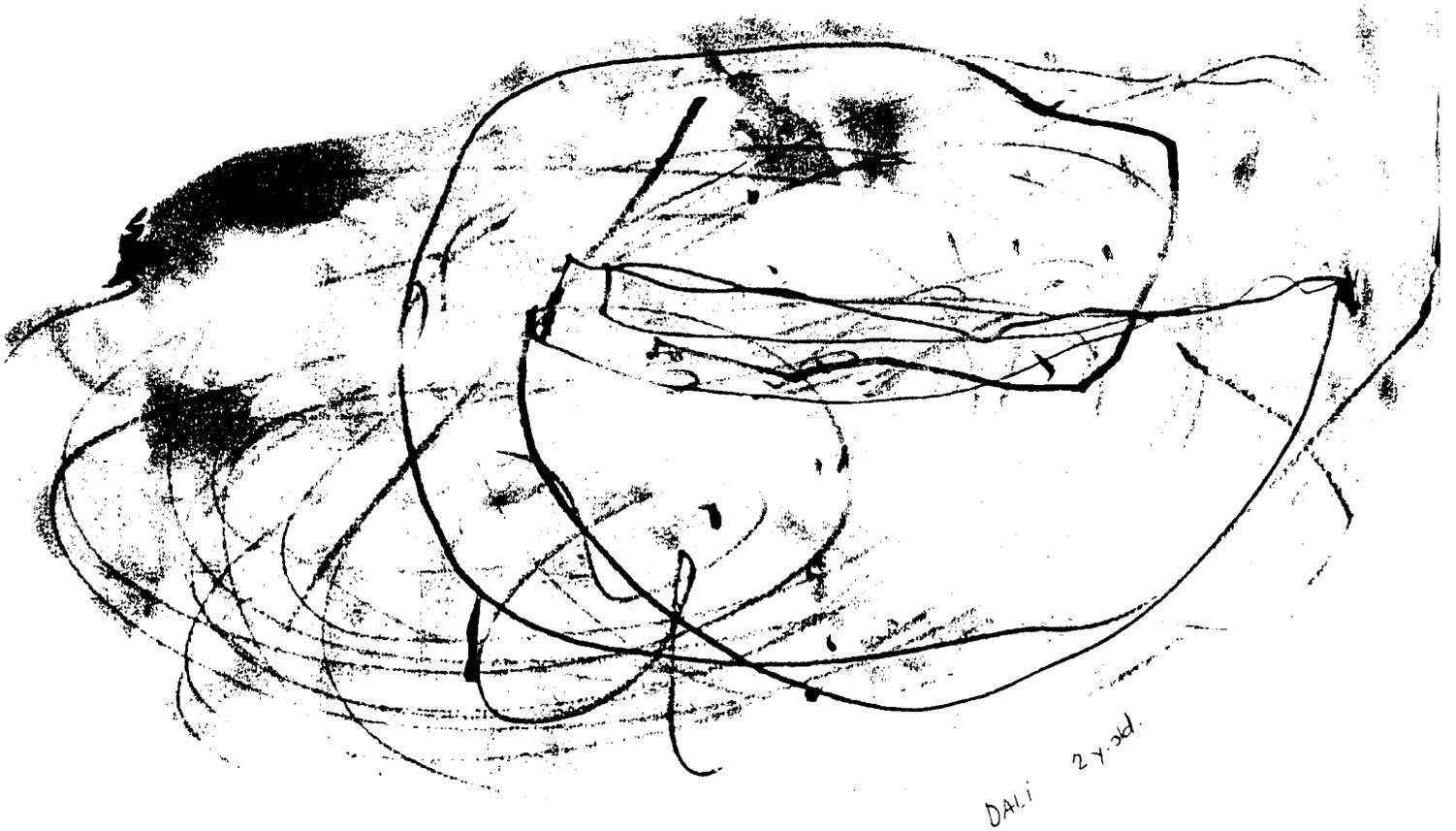
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To deny the possibility of thinking in movement is to deny that movement constitutes thoughts. Merleau-Ponty (1962) says that in order to understand what it means to think in movement, "*movement must somehow cease to be a way of designating things and thoughts, and become the presence of that thought in the phenomenal world, and moreover, not its clothing but its token or its body*" (p. 182). To believe in the Cartesian separation of body and mind is to assume that thinking is something only the mind does and doing is something only the body does, thus denying the possibility of thinking in movement. The notion that thoughts exist separately from their expression has been criticized by philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, and Fels. If movement is conceived merely as the medium of a body's everyday actions and transactions with the world, it is not given its due. "Thinking in movement is foundational to being a body," says Sheets-Johnstone (1999, p. 494). Perception is interlaced with movement to the point where it is impossible to separate out where perception begins and movement ends or vice versa. This thinking is implicit in Merleau-Ponty's remark that Cezanne's 'thinking in painting' is a description of a process in which "vision becomes gesture" (1964e, p. 178).

When I attended Anna Kindler's class,<sup>24</sup> I became even more interested in understanding my six year old son's drawing abilities. A prolific writer in her field, Kindler, supports the revised understanding of artistic development and argues that there is a non-linear progression in artistic growth, a perspective supported by many researchers (e.g. Darras, 1992; Golomb, 1994; Kindler & Darras, 1994, 1997, 1998). In order to look at artistic development in a comprehensive way, it is important to recognize aspects of movement as "iconic signs" (Kindler, 1999, p.331). She validates the importance of a dynamic interplay of visual, gestural and vocal

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cues in the development of pictorial imagery. When I looked at Dali's (my son and not yet famous painter) early drawings, I could see the movement in his pre-verbal expressions.

As he grew older, the "icons of gestures" became less and less apparent except at the time when he took art classes at Arts Umbrella. The teacher then supported the concept of gesture and rhythm in the painting and encouraged children to explore them.

As Dali 'learned' in school to reproduce his world, he became more interested in the artistic product than the artistic process. This distinction is in fact integral to an understanding of the difference between improvisational dance and dance as artistic product or finished choreography. The choreographer, for instance, acts like a painter, standing back from time to time to select, changing the timing, spatial orientation or force of a movement. There is an outside/inside difference. Thinking in movement is a kinesthetic experience. In selecting for a choreography, unless the choreographer is using improvisation as part of the dance, a choreographer is thinking critically in movement, perceptually experiencing the dance as an unfolding kinetic drama, a dynamic form-in-the-making (Sheets-Johnstone, 1996). It is simultaneously "gesture into vision" and "vision into gesture". The process of thinking in movement is the same in improvisational dance and in choreography; the difference is in the presentation. The improvisational dance is presented while it is in the making, and a choreography is performed (most of the time) in its final selected version.

A dynamically attuned body that knows the world from within is kinetically and thoughtfully attuned to the variables of things and events in the surrounding world. Caught up in the stressful rhythm of life we too often lose connection with our internal kinesthetic intuitive

capacity to think in movement, necessary for a well balanced and healthy<sup>25</sup> embodied way of living.

**I Balance my life in dancing**

**Movement**

**On the edge of falling**

**rhythm of colors**

**Painting**

**living through me**

**Colors dancing**

**I imagine**

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<sup>25</sup>To learn more on the health aspects of embodied awareness, refer to Alexander Lowen (1975) and the relationship of illness and self-expression for example (self-expression and survival, p. 261-304).



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# Why dance?

## *The voice of the soul*

*"Man has no body distinct from his soul."*

William Blake<sup>26</sup>

When I dance, something in me changes. It takes an imperceptible instant to switch from functional movement to a danced movement. The difference is in the intention<sup>27</sup> / intension<sup>28</sup> / attention<sup>29</sup> / intuition. As I write this text, I intentionally suspend my volitional typing and attend to the differences between my typing for the purpose of communicating my thoughts and dancing with my fingers. While dancing with my fingers, slowing down my activities above the keyboard, I become aware of what my fingers might want to experience. I am in agreement with Fraleigh (1987) who says that we do not order the body to do this or that; instead the body is the dance and the dance creates its own meaning and reaches metaphysical realms. My fingers dancing above the keyboard want to explore the space away from the keyboard.

Soon I find myself standing in my work room. I am one with the dance and my fingers dancing. In this moment-to-moment emergent formation<sup>30</sup> (Varela et al., 1991) I dance my

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<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Kurtz, 1991, p. 73.

<sup>27</sup>Intention is an extremely important process, explain Varela, Thompson, and Risch (1991), when stating that each moment of consciousness consists of the consciousness itself (called the primary mind) and its mental factors: contact, feeling, discernment, intention and attention.

<sup>28</sup>Tension stems from the Old German *danson* (to stretch) and Sanskrit *tan* (tension). In Lincoln Kirstein (1969). Tension is the root of *intension*, which phenomenologists define in terms of consciousness and human will.

<sup>29</sup>Attention arises in interaction with intention and serves as the basis for the factor of alertness.

<sup>30</sup>The five mental factors of consciousness when joined with variable factors (ignorance, mental inflation, etc.) interact with each other and produce the character of each moment of consciousness. The quality of each factor as well as the resultant consciousness is emergent

evolving alertness. My arms, my legs, soon my whole body are involved in the dance. I am embodied in my dance. I am becoming danced. I am standing, stretching upright and my arms are raised up high with the flickering similar to the typing gesture, but different. The vibrations have more determination. Now my whole body is vibrating, seeking freedom. My hands want to let go of the tension experienced in the typing. Tension, the root, essence of dance. I am becoming aware of that tension. Its relaxation is both physical and psychological. This tension is the source-essence of the 'Keyboard dance'. The more I explore dancing with my hands the more I feel the tension and the coercion I impose on my hands for hours writing over the keyboard. It becomes more and more difficult for me.. to come back.. Typing.. I am my dance. My Unlimited Self<sup>31</sup> is expressed. Could you see my dance? Being the dance is inseparable from doing the dance.. Let me be my dance for a moment.. longer..

### **Keyboard dance**

Ta dac- ty- lo va ta per.. <sup>32</sup>

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Ta dac- ty- lo va ta per..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Ta dac- ty- lo va ta per..

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

My hands are clapping and following the rhythm created by these words:

Ta dactylo va taper... tap tap Ta dactylo va taper...tap tap

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(Varela et al. 1991, p. 121).

<sup>31</sup>Self is understood here as self with others and self in relationship to environment, as well as the many selves that we discover as we live.

<sup>32</sup>The French words are used mainly for their sound value.

And soon my legs are dancing the same rhythm.. A twelve-count rhythm phrase.

And the rhythm becomes the dance: the body submitted to the rhythm, to the keyboard. My body seeks freedom within the constraint of the rhythmic pattern. The same repetitive movement.. tap tap. Ta dactylo va taper.. tap tap. Moving beyond the limitations reaching to other realms of being within the space and time borders. A metaphysical realization of joy and suffering simultaneously. How can the body reach a place of magic within the confinement of a rigid rhythmical pattern? The ultimate challenge. Opening to possibilities and exploring the answer. Through the moving and doing I am dance. A space-moment of learning through performance.<sup>33</sup>

My arms and legs don't seem to agree and I feel the dichotomy within myself. My legs trying to keep up with the rhythm are influenced by the flowing sensual exploration of my arms, in counterpoint. The rhythm is now breaking its rigorous pattern and dissolves in the continuous phrasing of my whole body. A metaphysical realization of joy. The initial coercive tension is now transformed into a warm ever-reaching soothing tension touching the extremities of my infinite spiritual space not visible for the eyes. I that dances is not the same self that thinks or speaks or gestures. I that dances knows while dancing the meaning of this word: mindfulness.<sup>34</sup>

I would love to be in a state of mindfulness while I write these words. Could I be? It takes an imperceptible moment to switch from one state to the other. The I that dances is in a state of meditation and contemplation.

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<sup>33</sup> Lynn Fels uses the terms "space-moment of learning" in reference to the moment that occurs when what is not yet known becomes known, thus reflecting the relationship between the real worlds and not yet real worlds (Fels, 1999). She explains: "A space-moment speaks simultaneously to a space of embodied time and place. Space-moment acknowledges Heidegger's proposal that rather than time and space being seen as separate entities, they are embodied as a single entity which he labels time-space." (p. 6) The 'not yet real world' in dance often refers to the world of the soul. See also Fels & Meyer, 1997; Abram, 1996.

<sup>34</sup>See footnote number 5.

*"Mindfulness is part of a tradition that recognizes the reality of consciousness, either as equally real or more real than matter. It also recognizes organicity, openness and sensitivity, and it allows the inner wisdom of the other to create change through awareness rather than effort."*

Kurtz , 1990, p. 27

As I dance I stay with what is being experienced a little longer, gathering information and allowing things to happen by themselves. Mindfulness. All I need to do is step in or step out. Like a dance, I step into mindfulness. Like a dance I step out of it. Magic. It works. You may try it too. Something changes in my perception of myself and I reach spiritual resources not ordinarily called for in everyday life.

The cultivation of mindfulness does not require instruction though instruction may help. Dance and rhythmic activities encourage mindfulness of simple body sensations to move away from intellectual problem-solving into experiencing the perceptual world. Claxton (1997) emphasizes the importance of mindfulness as a way of rediscovering the ability to dwell in perception and experience its charm and its vitality.

*"The I that dances I is the I that affirms concrete existence as well as the metaphysical mystery of embodied consciousness."*

Fraleigh, 1987

**J'ai tant dansé , j'ai tant sauté  
Dansons ma bergère ô gué,  
J'en ai décousu mon soulier à l'ombre.  
Dansons ma bergère joliment  
Que le plancher en rompe.**

Dance movement is not functional movement even though functional movement may appear in a dance. The original intention is seen for its aesthetic qualities. My awareness of myself, my bodily awareness, changes. The dancer dances the mystery of the body reaching into sacred and mysterious ground. The body becomes an expressive medium, the voice of our unconscious. The voice of our soul.

I reach a trance-like state allowing my consciousness to reach another sphere of knowing. My soul wants space, feels entrapped in my body ordinary state of consciousness. My intuitive intelligence reveals the richness of human life and danced possibilities. Altered states are valuable to us because certain very important questions can't be answered through the intellectual function. Emotional intelligence, intuitive intelligence, and altered states are necessary to uncover our truths (Miller, interviewed in Kurtz, 1991).

I was twenty nine when I worked with Françoise Sullivan in *Et la Nuit à la Nuit*. Coming from ballet training, it was difficult sometimes to understand or feel from within the energy that she wanted us to discover, as a stimulation for movement. She wanted me to feel gravity, the heaviness or lightness of my movements. I needed to go inside my body and feel every gesture organically. The mirror was unnecessary, you can imagine. We were rehearsing in her studio on St-Laurent Street, the smell of her last painting still in the air. She wanted us dancers to become the mountain, the river, the goddesses in a ritualistic metaphor of our changing society. With her I learned to internalize my dancing like a meditation. "Your dance comes from within." It required a profound looking inward.

*Miroir, miroir*

*Tu ne me diras pas qui est la plus belle*

*La beauté du geste est en moi*



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Also, Françoise was interested in the representation of women as round and nurturing like the Rubens' type of women. She created a costume that made all of us women feel more connected to the elements of earth, air, fire and water as well as to the natural roles of child bearing, nurturing mothers. We also felt even more, by contrast, our transformation into a socially media reinforced concept of femininity. We dancers had worked so hard at maintaining a slim and socially rewarded look that wearing this overweighed appearance also contributed towards increasing our feminist conscience.

*"Le danseur doit donc libérer les énergies de son corps, par les gestes spontanés qui lui seront dictés. Il y parviendra en se mettant dans un état de réceptivité à la manière du médium. Par la violence de la force en jeu, il peut atteindre jusqu'aux trances et touchera aux points magiques."*

Sullivan, 1981, p. 21

In the early 1900s, Ruth St-Denis understood and viewed the body as a manifestation of the spiritual condition. She was one of the first dancer choreographers in modern dance to have a dancer's body move with its own natural rhythm and occupy the space and time wanted. Mary Wigman, in the mid 1900s, explored trance states and mysterious rituals. She explored, as well, the spirituality of the dancing body. She wrote:

*"Without ecstasy, no dance. Without form, no dance. The creative moment... creates in us out of longing need, an urge to communicate the psychic state of which the idea is born."*

Kaprelian, 1979, p. 56



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## *The poetic corpus*

**J'en ai décousu mon soulier  
Dansons ma bergère ô gué  
J'ai été trouver l'ordonnier, à l'ombre.  
Dansons ma bergère joliment  
Que le plancher en rompe.**

To think of dance as poetry is to suppose that the body is capable of speaking without words. In fact, the art of dance is to translate the expressive innate human embodiment into an aesthetic form. It is simultaneously expression of preverbal and post verbal expression. As Isadora Duncan, and later John Cage and Merce Cunningham attest in their works and words: "If we had something to say we would use words." Merleau-Ponty (1962) notes that:

*"It has always been observed that speech or gesture transfigure the body, but no more was said on the subject that they develop or disclose another power, that of thought or soul. The fact was overlooked that, in order to express it, the body must in the last analysis become the thought or intention that it signifies for us. It is the body which points out, and which speaks... This disclosure of an immanent or incipient significance in the living body extends the whole sensible world, and our gaze, prompted by the experience of our own body, will discover in all other "objects" the miracle of expression." (p. 197)*

Dance dwells beneath the word used to describe the experienced thoughts and feelings.

Language<sup>35</sup> comes after dance and dance comes after words in a different inspirational way

co-evolving in their own and complementary worlds. It takes an instant moment to shift from one

<sup>35</sup>I do not favor the use of the word 'language' as a way of talking about dance the same way I don't use this term to speak of paintings, but rather the term "expression". Language often refers to a *system of symbolism*; for the present, in the absence of any convincing analysis, aesthetic, non-thematic, non-narrative dance must be concluded not to be symbolic and hence not to be a language. For that reason I agree with Sheets-Johnstone's argument against dance being understood as a language. For more discussion of *Is dance a language?* read Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, 1984, p. 167-187.

mode to the other. Something in me changes when I dance. The body is highly intelligent and expresses intentional motion. It is difficult to call attitudes and actions of the body a 'language' since they usually are unconsciously performed and involuntarily uttered. I would not call the expression of our unconscious a language. Having worked for almost ten years as a hypnotherapist, I found the description of one's experience in language limiting. L' "*état d'être*" (state of being) so specific in this altered state is similar to the '*état d'être*' in dance. Language for me is a technical term without the vocals or colors or energy. By definition the term language does incorporate the *language of arts* as a system of expression and communication. However, I suggest that if we do use the term 'language' we might guide the dance-viewer in thinking that movements does not belong to a system of symbols in which movement has a correlated meaning<sup>36</sup>. While we cannot translate the expression of the body into words (since words and movements are situated on different spheres of meaning<sup>37</sup>), we can describe dance as it becomes meaningful to us.

*Understanding curriculum as aesthetic text requires our commitment to creativity, communion, and cooperation in educational practice."*

Blumenfeld-Jones, 1990, p. 604

At times, dance might be very close to language<sup>38</sup> or to narrative attending to the aesthetic values of intentionally formulated movement expression. The expression of the body might have

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<sup>36</sup>The use of the term language would be appropriate when talking about mime, pantomime, theater-dance, and even ballet (which incorporates specific coded movement meaning specific recognizable behaviors or intentions).

<sup>37</sup>These spheres of meanings are not hierarchical or different in value. They are simply relating to different ways of being in the world.

<sup>38</sup>In psychotherapy the terms 'body language' refer to the emotional language not always communicated but expressed in the body. Facial expressions are important in determining the congruency or not of a statement. Sometimes the 'body language' speaks more eloquently than the words therefore determining a person's feelings. '*Focusing*' in Gestalt approach is the process of supporting the client to focus on the body experience and to sustain that focus long enough for the sensation to become clear and differentiated, to emerge as a figure. The aim is to shift focus from cognition to body experience and allow that experience to become important. Kepner

a recognizable significance, referring to our wide range of behavioral attitudes and gestures. At other times, the expression of the body may take the form of a disjointed disconnected utterance. In this way, dance is closer to the immediacy, rhythm of poetry than it is to linear language. Poetry offers opportunities for the reader and the writer to dwell between the words, opening to a vast space of interpretations, possibilities, and imaginings. Away from language into the not yet known or not yet articulated into words, or not yet actualized. In a space-moment, suspended between the words.

The interpretation of a dance/poem is both an individual and a collective act: entering the space of interpretations is entering the universe of multiple reflections and refraction. A dance may have as many interpretations as the number of people involved in the dance (dancers and viewers). It is recreated as it is originated. You, the viewer, recreate the dance in bringing your own senses into the dance. A dance dances through you as you engage (communion) in finding a meaningful connection within yourself. For that connection to happen mindfulness <sup>39</sup>is necessary. An embodied mindful expression. Rudolf Laban, a dance-poet himself,<sup>40</sup> believed that motion, emotion, form, content, mind, and body were united (Hanna, 1983, p. 35).

**J'ai été trouver l'ordonnier,  
Dansons ma bergère ô gué,  
Beau cordonier, beau cordonier, à l'ombre.  
Dansons ma bergère joliment  
Que le plancher en rompe.**

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(1987) insists that equally important is the development of language to describe body experience with specificity. In Gestalt therapy as in creative dance, the purpose is to validate the person's experience as they remain true to their emerging self, not to shape them to our own ideal (Kepner, p. 104).

<sup>39</sup>Mindfulness is necessary for creativity to flourish but mindfulness does not always involve creativity.

<sup>40</sup>Foster, 1977, p. 39.



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Although dance movement does not have linguistic meaning, it can be said to have remarkable expressive value.<sup>41</sup> Choreographers like Anna Sokolow and Pina Bausch use gesture seldom realistically even though they both work at 'translating' into movement their perception of who we are as human beings living in cities. They both are interested in the behavioral aspect of dance. For example, in *Rooms*,<sup>42</sup> choreographed by Sokolow, she uses chairs 'as if' they are rooms, each dancer owning a chair, isolated from all the others. Her intention was to convey feelings of loneliness and non-communication, those feelings evolving as she worked with dancers. The dance produces its own meaning from the dancer/spec/actor 's perspective. It has no word correlates per se, but the viewer finds meaning through the poetry of the body and lived movement. This dance offers an imposing array of interpretations: one may read the dance as showing the self-created limitations, or the notion of co-dependance, or simply exploring a chair for the sake of it.

### Imagination of the soul corresponds to meaning

Pina Bausch, prolific German choreographer with the Wuppertaler Tangtheater ( since 1973), skillfully transcends the misery and isolation of the human condition in a collective display of metaphors and suggestive images, touching something deep and common to all of us: a quest for the answer to the metaphysical question "Who Am I?".

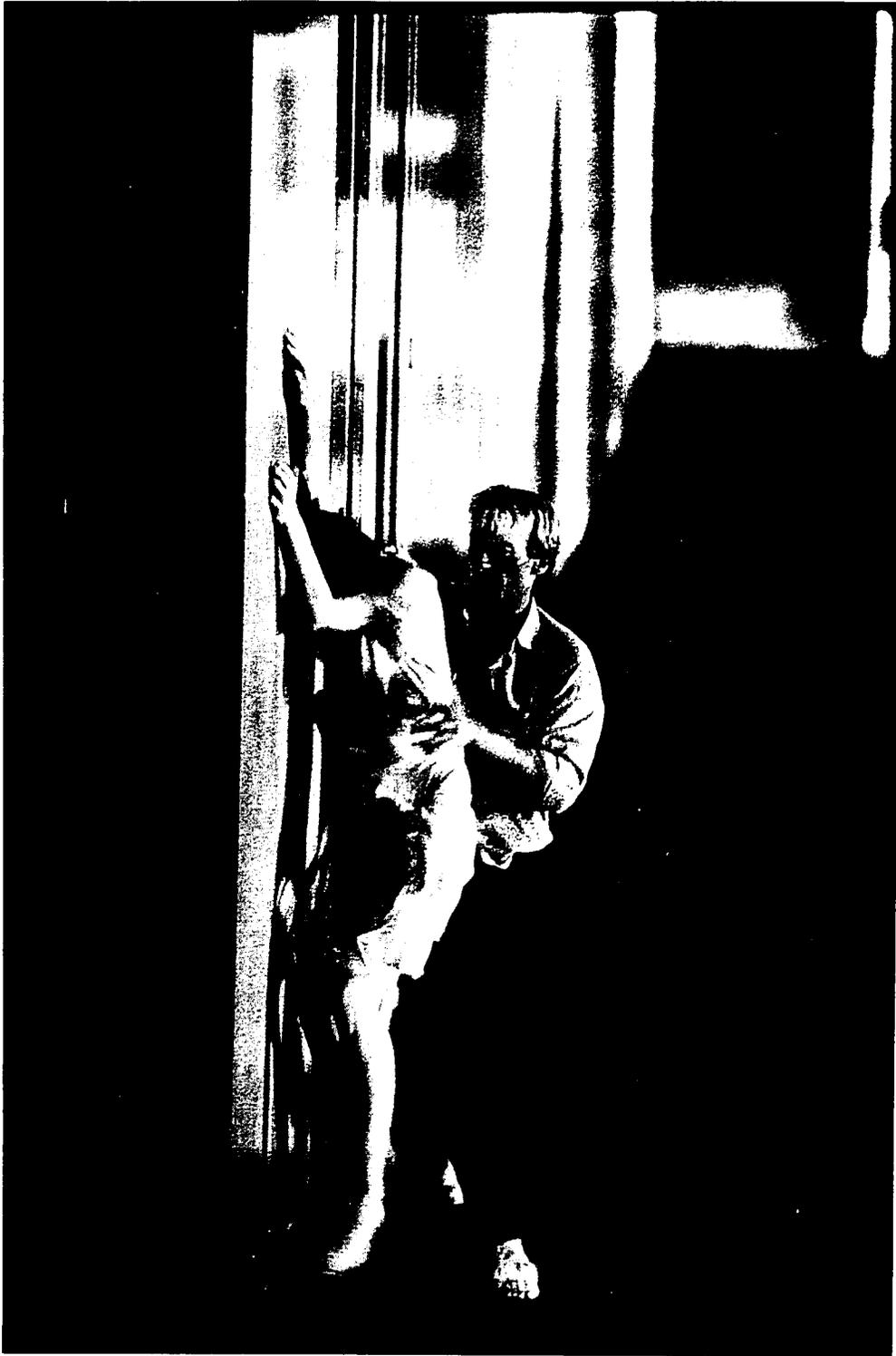
I met Pina and her fabulous dancers in a Dance in Canada Workshop, in Toronto in 1985. She received a twenty minute standing ovation, following their performance the like of which was never seen before in Canada.<sup>43</sup> She works with her dancers in a very unique way, observing

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<sup>41</sup>Paul Ziff (in Fancher and Myers, ed. 1981) addresses problems central to the issue of whether dance can be seen as language.

<sup>42</sup>More on Sokolow in *The Vision of Modern dance* by Morrisson-Brown (1980), editor.

<sup>43</sup>I have only heard of Maurice Richard getting a 20 minute applause in Montreal.



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people like an anthropologist, and the results are breathtaking. She observes everything, each emotion, reaction, and is inspired by the misfortunes and calamities of others to better understand her own. Like Sullivan,<sup>44</sup> everything is felt, organically and emotionally from within. She wants to touch the essence of each dancer so they can give the best of themselves. Like Sullivan, she works only from improvisation and never suggests a movement or gesture. Everything comes from the dancer, highly personal introspection. From their danced fragments of anecdotes and stories she creates a *chef d'oeuvre*. I saw *Cafe Muller*, a moving piece on despair and solitude where even love drowns in an ocean of *in-communicability*. A simple gesture, a presence so filled with passion and strength. Nothing without meaning. An absence of trivial artificial movement.

*Les danseurs vivent le désespoir  
Comme Alexandre Dumas écrit l'espoir  
Sommes-nous rois et maîtres de notre destin?  
La fleur à elle-seule parfume de vérité  
Giard, 2000*

Naming a dance is part of the choreographic task. A name *symbolizes* the dance metaphorically, with words. Names give the audience a way to think and communicate about dances verbally. Words name dances but dance embodies meaning that words name.

*"The first time I talked while doing "Accumulations" I said, "My father died in between the making of this move and this move." Which knocked me out. I was amazed that my body had stored this memory in the movement pattern... I became silent and composed myself. I was devastated that I had said that."*

Brown & Rainer, 1979, p. 34

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<sup>44</sup>Françoise Sullivan is a Montreal choreographer and artist well-known for her sculptural and performative collaborations with dancers (Gosselin, 1981).

If we cannot translate dance into words, we can risk interpretations.<sup>45</sup> I am drawn to dance because it transports me beyond the literal word and into the body's own poetic world and memories.

*"...knowledge depends on being in a world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history in short from our embodiment."*

Varela et al., 1991, p. 149

When you join me in my dance you are invited through my poetic experience of bodily being in your presence.

## ***The voice of liberation***

In 1948, Françoise Sullivan, Montreal artist and friend of Paul-Emile Borduas, the leader of the group of revolutionary Quebec artists known as *les automatistes*, wrote *La Danse et l'espoir (Dance and Hope)*. Her statement was part of the *refus global*, "a passionate demand for change in Quebec society and one of the first visible signs of the growing ferment that was coming to a head beneath the surface of social repression perpetuated by the church-dominated government" (Wyman, 1989, p. 61).

As Wyman (1989) explained in his book, *Dance Canada: An illustrated history*, '*les automatistes*' saw surrealism as a tool to break French Canada free of the cultural and economic *corset* in which it had been kept for too long by the church and state. Françoise Sullivan, herself,

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<sup>45</sup>The term hermeneutics originally referred to the discipline of interpreting ancient texts, but it has been extended to the entire phenomenon of interpretation, understood as the enactment of bringing forth of meaning from a background of understanding (Varela et al., 1991, p. 149).

believed in the liberation of energy from within the dancer and not imposed by a technique. She rejected the traditional training, which submitted dancers to insignificant gestures without meaning. Isadora Duncan, Jacques Dalcrose, Mary Wigman were her mentors, they too believed in a dance full of emotions. She wanted to dance the essence of humanity. She wrote:

*"Moving spontaneously and following the dictates of the soul, the dancer is freeing energy contained in the body. One could release in that way in a state of receptivity like a medium. The concentration involved in this liberation is so strong, the dancer could reach a trance state penetrating a magic domain."*

Sullivan in Gosselin & Letocha, 1981, p. 21

**Beau cordonnier, beau cordonnier,  
Dansons ma bergère ô gué,  
Veux-tu racc'moder mon soulier, à l'ombre.  
Dansons ma bergère joliment  
Que le plancher en rompe.**

My last performance dealt with issues of violence against children. What is amazing about this choreography is that I was quite unconscious of the fragments of childhood embodied in the performance. I discovered through my dancing that the dance was part of my life story. It is only after a period of ten years of working with adult survivors of sexual abuse that I was able to clearly see the message embedded in my last work. Dance has been delight, suffering, ecstasy, joy, healing, chaos, confusion, paradise.

One day in the attic Bernice had a dream

Little girl dancing  
angels watching  
Are we in heaven?

Rock with me and  
sing for me.

Quiet the shivers.

Dance with me

till we fall

asleep

Wake me to beauty

Seule et sans crainte

dancing fears and hopes

Healing through moving

Vertical within my soul.

Dance little girl

Open your wings

angels watching



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## *Dance recreates who we are in relation to the world*

Something changes in me when I dance. I feel so whole and so immense in my heart.

Through this embodied mindful expression, I recover my sense of being in the world. It grounds me, vertically. My physical sensations are defining my being in the world. Dance does not allow any slippage between body experience and self.<sup>46</sup>

*"Our attempt... is to recover all experiences concomitantly whether they be physical or mental, sensory, emotional, or verbal for it is in the unitary functioning of 'body', 'mind', and 'environment' (these are all abstractions) that the lively figure / ground emerges."*

Perls et al., 1951, p. 83

I feel the energy in my body when I dance. Vitality, vigor and strength I feel. The I that dances is different in awareness of bodily sensations from the I that speaks or gestures. I am mobilized.<sup>47</sup> My respiration increases and I feel the warmth through my upper body. There is a nice tingling in my fingertips. Is that the meaning of vitality and excitement?

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<sup>46</sup> The notion of self is not just a concept, idea, or psychic structure, says Kepner (1987), but a muscular self, and an expressive self - self of bones and joints, of feet, hands, spine, and jaw (p. 140). In Gestalt therapy we define *projection* as an interruption of contact by treating a part of the self as if it were an object in the environment (Perls et al., 1951). The I in this case does not refer to bodily experience. A therapeutic way to reconnect the body and the self is to encourage the client to connect the physical sensation to their emotional state: "I am tensing because I don't trust you." The aim in therapeutic dance work is the restoration of the sense of I to body experience.

<sup>47</sup> Gestalt expression meaning the process of mobilization or gathering of energy and impetus for the action to take place. Example: If I am hungry (sensation) and want food (an aware figure), I must move myself to get up from my chair and get the food (action) so that I may eat it (final contact) and satisfy my hunger (post-contact). What is not mentioned in this sequence is the

*"Energy is blocked most often by fear of excitement or strong emotions... many individuals feel if they allow themselves to become angry, they will annihilate their environment; if they become sexual, they will be maniacal and perverse; if they allow themselves to brag, they will be ridiculed and rejected."*

Zinker, 1977, p. 102

The I that dances enjoys the excitement of living. I embrace life with all the challenges.<sup>48</sup> My awareness grows with my dancing. My lifeless self is awakened and I fully engage in this danced moment. I feel emotionally<sup>49</sup> and spiritually connected to the world.<sup>50</sup> Something changes in me when I dance. I feel so whole and so immense in my heart. Through this embodied mindful expression, I recover my sense of being in the world. It grounds me. *I am my dance*. Being the dance is inseparable from doing the dance. Let me be my dance for a moment... again. My physical sensations are defining my being in the world. *I am my dance*.<sup>51</sup> My unlimited self is

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mobilization that must occur between wanting food and getting up to eat. Without mobilization, inertia would occur. Lowen (1975) and other Reichian therapists call this building up a 'charge'.<sup>48</sup> More than once in therapy I have experienced clients becoming energized (either through dance therapy or Gestalt techniques). That meant they no longer had any excuse (depression or inertia) not to change the things in life bothering them. After such revitalizing sessions I sometimes encountered clients saying that they did not feel they could continue in therapy and were not ready to make the change necessary for them to move on. I could only honor their decisions. At other times I witnessed breakthroughs and changes in my clients renewed vigor and vitality.

<sup>49</sup>Doris Humphrey (1959) insisted that dancers find the emotional motivation for movement for their full expressiveness to come out. She would then start working on the stylization without losing the deeper emotional connection.

<sup>50</sup>The origin of the term "emotion" is from the Latin for "move outwards" (Kepner, 1987). The use of movements that are emotionally expressive have been associated with body-oriented therapies (Lowen and Lowen, 1977), dance therapy (Kepner, 1987) and expressionism in dance (Humphrey, 1959).

<sup>51</sup>"*Bis repetita placem*", used to say my mother when repeating a request. I repeat those lines mirroring the phrasing repetition sometimes used in dance.



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expressed. Can you see my dance? Being the dance is inseparable from doing the dance. Let me be my dance.... again.

*"I want to be brash, blunt, delicate and internal... There is definitely a male part of my being that I feel very close to and a female part I feel very close to. I want to express both, as a prototype of what I think a human could be. I still believe in the goal of a whole human being with all the parts expressed... The goal is an integrated self, as opposed to different parts. Everything I do, even bringing together different art forms together into one form, tries for synthesis and integration"*

Meredith Monk, in Luger & Laine, 1978, p. 68

When I dance I want to overcome technical difficulties, and successfully perform more difficult movements. In that search, I recreate myself because something new appears that was not there before, a new skill is created. Since the dance is the self, a new self is created with new abilities. The material that comes through me never ceases to surprise me. I become an altered self. I enter an internal kinetic space. I discover myself through what manifests as I dance. I follow my intuitions. I have learned to listen to my dreams and images and when I dance I just go "there." Many artists learn to cultivate those moments when images drift by with intensity. The trusting of my own voice is a prerequisite for making dances just as I trust in writing choreographically this moment between us. Dances are built on intuitions. The intuitions and the trusting of possibilities. Mindfully, I dance my voice not yet knowing the meaning of it. Do I want to know the meaning? Not yet! I want to wonder a little longer and linger with my

becoming. A part of me is shifting in the unknown, unconscious self with others. Can you see my shifting? Are you transcending the moment into imaginings?

*"I create myself as I enact my freedoms and push back the boundaries  
of my limitations; my purposes project me into action not my contingency."*

Fraleigh, 1987, p. 18

I started taking ballet classes when I was seven years old. I remember coming back from school and asking my mother if I could take the three o'clock classes offered in the basement of my elementary school, l'école Marguerite d'Youville. Mme Moreno (later called Mme De St-Pierre after she remarried) was my first teacher. She had beautiful eyes and a smile that could only have meant pleasure.

*Pas-de-bourré, "Maman je veux aller danser"*

*Glissade, "Mais oui ma fille tu grandiras en beauté"*

*Pirouette, sans me douter de la passion envahissante*

*Arabesque, je danserai plusieurs saisons*

*Pas-de-chat, forte d'images et d'ambition*

And it was a real experience to listen to her voice and learn *the vocabulary*. The "*grand-pliés, arabesques, pas-de-bourré, pas-de-chat, pirouettes, or entrechat-quatre*" came home with me and never left my dreams and aspirations. I learned the classical 'language' of dance at a very young age and still remember the joy of being able to not only say those words but actually move the words. I was dancing the words. They were in my body and I was dancing them. That could not have been more exhilarating. I remember that excitement. I was only seven

when I started dancing. But soon I rejected what I considered a "limited vocabulary." I wanted to explore a different kind of motion-expression. I turned to modern dance and improvisation.

The I that dances feels the freedom from the understanding that my dance can never be wrong.<sup>52</sup> I follow the expression I sensed my soul wants to make. While it is true that a dancer may attempt to do something and fail, a dance fails only if the dancer is filled with feelings of self-limitation and inadequacy in relation to the requirements of the dance. A dance can never fail. When united with the intentions in the dance, a dancer expresses infinite possibilities. Success is related to commitment and engagement in a 'space-moment of learning'.

The paradox of freedom through commitment and effort. In order to experience freedom the dancer needs to merge with the intention within. To be free is to be sensitive to the possibilities of the present situation and to be able to act in an open manner that is not conditioned by past actions. If my dance is difficult or risky, I need a strong commitment of will.<sup>53</sup> The source and intent of the movement guides my bodily response to the ideal effort. Intention dissolves in action effortlessly. That does not mean that the movement is weak. Strong movement may be performed with ease the same way heavy or energetic movement may also be performed with effortless ease when such movement is intended and fulfilled with the right amount of effort, which is effort in perfect harmony to intention. The self strives for freedom through mindfulness and awareness.

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<sup>52</sup>At a very young age I developed a perfectionist approach to life in general including and mostly in my dance training. It was a way for me to be appreciated. And at the same time, paradox of life, I knew at some level that my dance could never be wrong!

<sup>53</sup>Dance training can be a difficult and challenging process: it gives an opportunity to the trainer to push the body's perceived limitations. It is the same process in any athletic training where the will and commitment are allies. You need to want to push the limits to actually commit yourself to doing it.

*Dancing my fingers, freeing my legs*

*in the space flowing through me.*

*A meditation, transcendent moment,*

*dance lives through me.*

*I enter the trance.*

*Fearless of the unknown, I mindfully become aware.*

*Close your eyes, listen to your soul.*

*Ahhhhh!<sup>54</sup>*

*Frightened you need not be!*

*You are guided, always.*

*Moving your body where your body needs to go*

*to be free.*

*Ahhhhh!<sup>55</sup>*

*Apprehensive you need not be!*

*Open your heart,*

*surrender.*

*Tantric bliss. Sublime joy.*

*Ahhhhh!<sup>56</sup>*

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<sup>54</sup>Utterance of fear

<sup>55</sup>Sound of both fear and excitement

<sup>56</sup>Sound of delight



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*"Curriculum as dance, suggests a way out of the apparent obsession with control and prediction of outcomes in school practice."*

Pinar, 1996, p. 603

## ***Dance is experiential mindful knowing of the human being.***

Dance is often referred to as kinesthetic intelligence which is an important aspect of skillful dancing. But dance is more than just knowing how to do a movement. It is also an awareness of the aesthetic intent of the movement and how to create aesthetic movement imagery. These forms of knowing are forms of the bodily lived knowledge or embodied awareness. The thinking involved in this process is the whole-body consciousness.

Martha Graham says that "dance is knowledge."<sup>57</sup> Knowledge through the body as a feeling, thinking, mysterious whole. Since I am the dance, an important value appears through the actualization of the self, the self freely projected in the work of dance and realized through it. I become within my dance. Who might I have become if I had not danced? I come to know myself through the actions I take. How can I break the chains of conditioning mind and foster mindfulness and insight in this space-moment of imagining?<sup>58</sup>

**Je te donnerai un sous marqué,  
Dansons ma bergère ô gué,  
Des sous marqués j'en ai assez, à l'ombre.  
Dansons ma bergère joliment  
Que le plancher en rompe.**

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<sup>57</sup>In Barbara Morgan (1941) *Martha Graham: Sixteen dances in photographs*, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup>Understanding causality, or how habits form and continue over time, is central to the tradition of mindfulness/awareness in Buddhism (Varela et al., 1991, p. 110).

This bodily awareness extends beyond self knowledge. Something arises in this experience. An understanding of what it means to be in the world as lived and danced. Something is found in the dancing. My embodied actions<sup>59</sup> give meaning to the I that dances. I share Steinman 's (1986) statement when she says that "movement is assertion, and assertion is one of the primary acts of the mind" (p. 2), although I would rather write 'the primary act of the bodymind or embodied mind.'<sup>60</sup> The I that dances trusts the wisdom of my body.

### ***Dance of the not yet known***

I attended the Mascall Dance Improvisation in their studio in West End Vancouver last May. The challenge for the Mascall Dance group (musicians and dancers) was to use any section of *Brutal Telling*<sup>61</sup> in any order, in any interpretative way they wanted. They were invited to re-create the dance in the moment. Improvisation calls for immediacy and spontaneity. The content of the dance and music is the content of the present moment. In this context, the level of communication among dancers is a whole new nonverbal expression.

Having done many improvisation performances in my years of performance,<sup>62</sup> I came with little expectation. I was an open-to-anything-spectator. This improvisational evening had

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<sup>59</sup>Varela et al. (1991) define cognition as embodied action since cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities, and second, that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context (p. 173).

<sup>60</sup>Steinman is in accordance with Sheets-Johnstone's view of the primacy of movement but does not update her linguistic expression to her embodied knowledge. This is another reason why I do not use language as a term to describe dance because of the limited use of language as a symbolic cultural contextual device. See Fels about bodymind, 1999.

<sup>61</sup> *Brutal Telling* was presented in Mascall Dance's studio (1130 Jervis Street, Vancouver), May 17-21, 2000.

<sup>62</sup>Daniel Soulières and myself created in the 1980s *Les événements de la Pleine Lune*, always performed during the full moon. We were six dancers and musicians exploring with our audience the mysteries of dance improvisation. Some nights were fabulous, some others, not so. Anything

nothing to do with *contact improvisation*,<sup>63</sup> a dance form based on momentum, gravity, and inertia, and performed with partners sharing the demand of weight and momentum. In improvisation, contact or otherwise, the challenge remains to be available to the flow of the moment and become a medium to the unconscious. What is constant in embracing the unexpected is risk and play.

That evening with the Mascall Dance group, the audience was invited to discuss the improvisations in small groups with the guidance of group leaders from the Mascall Dance group. One question our group leader asked wasp. "Is using parts of an existing choreography a new creation?" Most of us agreed it was a new creation because of the difference in the creator's intention / *intension* / attention / intuition. The dancers did not have in mind the continuity or the story line that inspired Jennifer Mascall to create her *Brutal Telling* piece. They were performing on the spur of the moment. The friend who joined me that evening was curious about the meaning of it all and wondered about the dancers' engagement toward each other. She found them unrelated, disconnected and the dance appeared disjointed. To whom is the unknown being known in a group improvisation? Can the audience perceive it when dancers play on known material? What is the meaning of a dance-moment-of-imaginings in this particular context? I was part of the dance myself. I quickly entered their creation without hesitation, within my embodied vision. I danced their search, their quest, their not yet known adventure. I was re-creating their dance. It did not matter if it was known material or not. Dancers re-created the dance with the spectacle/actors in the space that evening. I gave the meaning I wanted in that moment of imaginings. Time was suspended, they could have danced all night, like water in a cascade. I was

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was possible within the boundaries of our guidelines.

<sup>63</sup>Created by Steve Paxton in the 1970s.

witnessing their being through movement and connecting with others in a unique aesthetic form of expression.

Improvisation is a visible manifestation of a thought process (Steinman, 1986). Following Isadora Duncan's path, gesture reveals the inner moment. To be able to dance the not yet known, dancers must trust themselves and pay attention. You are a vessel for something else coming through. For magic to happen though, improvisors need to communicate with each other, and the audience as well. Spectators bring meaning to an abstract dance through their interpretations and re-constructions. We are re-creating the dance as it is being performed.

In performing improvisation, you pay attention to everything that is happening inside and outside of yourself. The more we can pay attention to, the more we can experience. In order to pay attention to more, one needs to let go of the control and surrender to the moment in a larger way: Seeing more, feeling more, hearing, dancing, living.

### ***The communion of dancer and audience.***

Movement is more than a functional movement and the difference lies in its intention / *intension*/ attention / intuition. Movement is selected, objectified and intentionally created and performed for others for an aesthetic purpose and an end result. Without devaluing the importance of dance expression for self fulfillment, dance is basically a theater art, a form of communal expression. Dance seeks to reach an other. Dance is a communion. What dance expresses belongs to the human body and its own truth.

A dance work challenges the expression of what is *unsayable*, how to speak it through movement so that the movement may speak and open a closed ground. But what is being



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expressed? What does motivate a movement? How does the performer infuse movements with a reason for happening? What feelings does one need to have to dance? Does the feeling motivate the dance or does the dance motivate the feeling? How does the dance speak to an audience?<sup>64</sup> What kind of meaning, what kind of significance do these movements have?<sup>65</sup> Dance as a symbolic system resists linguistic analysis but allows interpretations and metaphors.

Mary Wigman, following Isadora's path, explored the expressiveness of the human body and liberated the body from centuries of the balletic manners. More than Rudolph von Laban, she listened to the body's primal energies, sharp edges and violence, away from the dictatorship of music. Dance is music by its own rhythm. She influenced theater dance, dance education and even dance therapy. Her dances were not about self-expression but an extension of the expressive condition of the human body. Wigman saw dance as "one of the original vehicles of human expression" (Lewis, 1973).<sup>66</sup> Wigman concerned her art with the tension between the personal and the universal. As a dancer I am both universalized (like dancers in every culture and time), and personalized (I am my own body, I am my own dance, I am dance).

When I dance,

I move beyond the persona,

to the larger aesthetic of the dance

and in communion with others.

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<sup>64</sup>Hanna (1983) answers these questions in her book *The performer-audience connection*.

<sup>65</sup>Paul Ziff (in Fancher & Myers, ed., 1981) brilliantly presents the many problems about the appreciation of dance, particularly when understanding dance as a language.

<sup>66</sup>In the *Washington Post*, 21 September 1973. "Mary Wigman, modern dance pioneer, dies" by Jean Battey Lewis.

The dancer's individuality is transcended in favor of the dancer becoming unified with other selves through dance with mindfulness/awareness. The sublime experience of discovering the not yet known I that already exists within the self. The I becoming. A dancer's performance is a path towards knowledge and that knowledge is shared with other performers and an audience (Steinman, 1986). In the energy exchange between the performer and the audience a tremendous amount of learning co-exists beyond human capacity.

In the 1980s, many artists such as Robert Desrosiers,<sup>67</sup> Edouard Lock,<sup>68</sup> Pina Bausch,<sup>69</sup> Paul André Fortier<sup>70</sup> and Karen Jamieson<sup>71</sup> opened the expressive domain of dance with a new range of movement possibilities. In their own ways they were all moving away from the *corset* of ballet training. Expression for them, is not a simple term but the fusion of *content* and *action* which translates into embodied awareness.

Is it when the intentions<sup>72</sup> are clear that the dance is successful from both creator and spectators' perspectives? Sometimes, the intentions could be clear for the spectator and different from those of the creator, in which case it is also successful. At other times, the viewer in the re-construction process could find the intent clear but the dance unsuccessful. Is intention the key to success? I wonder. Choreographer Chick Snipper<sup>73</sup> speaks of her clearer intentions in *Chrysalis*. In the past, she says, her choreography was more subtle, even obscure. "In some ways,

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<sup>67</sup>Canadian dancer choreographer for the National Ballet of Canada in the 1980s.

<sup>68</sup>Canadian choreographer and director of La La La Human Steps, dance troupe in Montreal since 1979.

<sup>69</sup>German choreographer and director of the Wuppertaler Tangtheater since 1973.

<sup>70</sup>International choreographer for Fortier-Danse-Creation, since the 1980s.

<sup>71</sup>Vancouver choreographer and dancer.

<sup>72</sup>Intention is the clarity of the medium without interference of doubts, fear or self-defeating thoughts.

<sup>73</sup>Vancouver choreographer and director of DansTaBat.



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it was too discreet, and it was not accessible (for the audience). I think it's more accessible now. I think that's something that all of us choreographers, need to recognize, that we have a responsibility to the audience. It's not a frivolous piece, but I think it's more accessible. My vision is more refined."<sup>74</sup>

Anna Sokolow, well-known modern choreographer and at the peak of her career in the 1960s, was interviewed by Fraleigh in 1980. She commented on her dance being a reflection of her struggles in life and her desire to make things. She confronts the realities of loneliness (Rooms, 1955), emptiness (Steps of silence, 1968), and fear (Dreams, 1961). In her dance composition classes she would ask: "What are you trying to tell us?" She was not interested in "nothing" as an answer.

**Faut aller trouver le curé,  
Dansons ma bergère ô gué,  
Pour dans un mois nous marier à l'ombre.  
Dansons ma bergère joliment  
Que le plancher en rompe.**

Merce Cunningham, in counterpart, saw dance from a formalist point of view, focussing on movement for itself without the emotional connotation or psychological content as in Martha Graham or Mary Wigman's communication of feeling and social concerns. Pure dance became Cunningham's label for dances performed for the sake of satisfaction in the movement itself. He was the first to reveal movement as object of dance in his radical rejection of dramatic representation. His work reduced dance to its movement essence. Kenneth King extended this formalistic view to dance about what cannot be known. For him, dance reveals the unknown, or

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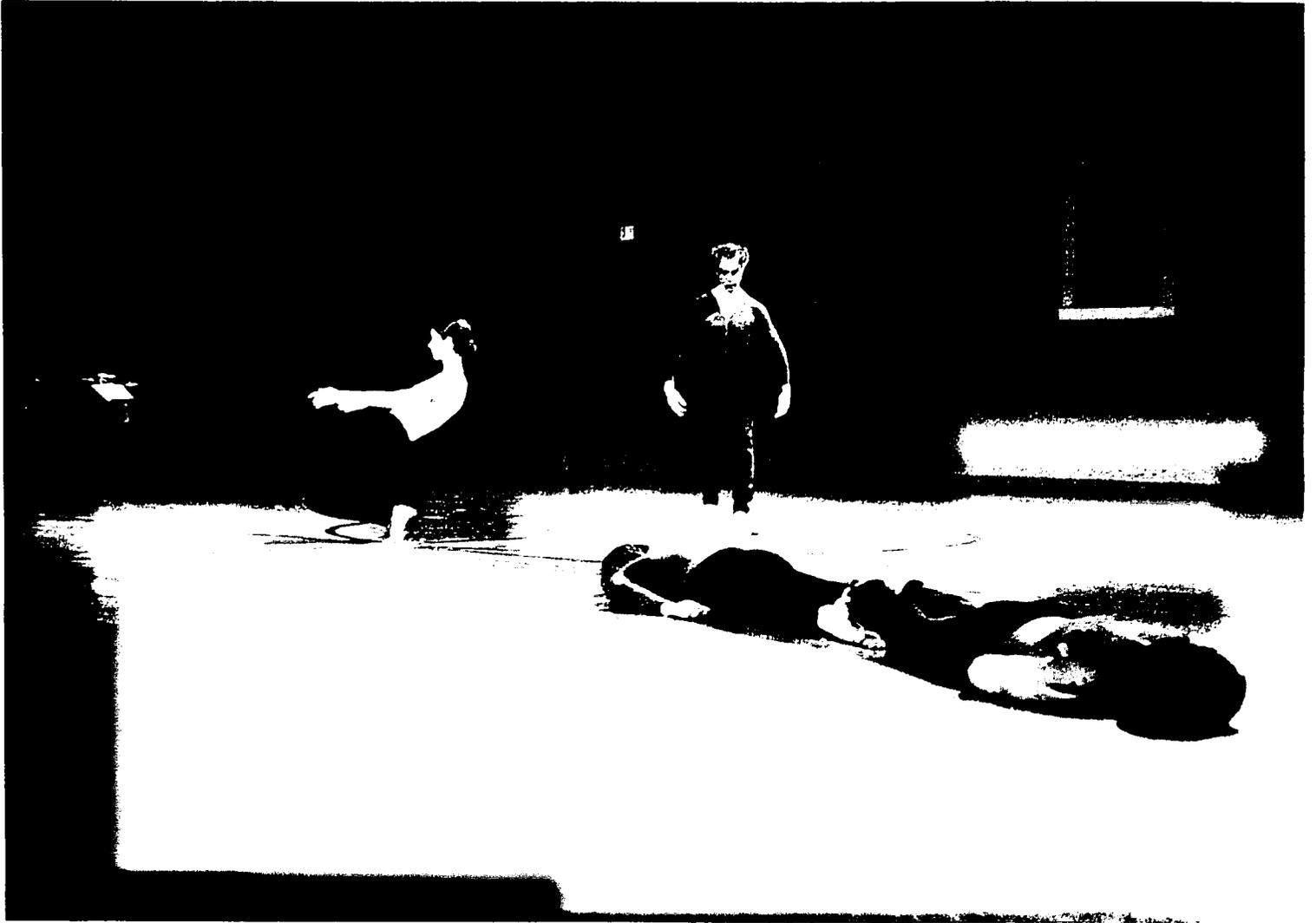
<sup>74</sup> Chick Snipper in an interview with Gail Johnson, for the Georgia Straight, "The boldness of bursting forth". May 11-18, 2000.

what can't be known through any other means. He believes that the phenomena of consciousness is inscribed in dance. Cunningham developed 'chance' choreography, which avoids usual or expected movement sequences. The choreographic philosophy expressed in the following statement continues through his work:

you do not  
separate  
the human being  
from the  
actions he  
does, or  
the actions  
which sur-  
round him,  
but you can  
see what it  
is like to  
break these  
actions up  
in differ-  
ent ways, to  
allow the  
passion, and  
it is pas-  
sion, to ap-  
pear for each  
person in his  
own way<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Merce Cunningham's statement in *The vision of modern dance*, Brown , 1979, p. 91.



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The arts,  
and curriculum experienced aesthetically,  
provoke questioning that supports sense-making  
and the understanding  
of what it is to exist in the world  
Greene, 1978, cited in Pinar, 1996, p. 577

The I that dances is the I that extends to other selves reaching for our emerging passion and mystery. The I that dances is involved in an exchange with the environment, the field in which we are embedded. As I dance the difference between the self and the environment is less defined. The separation point is blurred. The space seems to expand beyond the tangible boundary into some space surrounding me. My dancing body allows me to feel different physical bounding of myself in contact with the environment. My receptivity changes as I change my dance.

With dance partners I explore the meaning of interpersonal distance and personal space. My boundary space is constantly formed and reformed, defined and redefined. In contact dance improvisation, my boundary space is permeable. The I that dances is opening the boundary space.<sup>76</sup> With the boundary dissolving for this moment of contact, the I that dances absorbs the other and growth occurs. We are co-emerging in a moment of growth.<sup>77</sup> The I is less prominent and the other is fully realized (Kepner, 1987, p. 186).

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<sup>76</sup>Kepner (1987) defines issues related to body boundary such asp. 1- The ability to modulate the form and pace of contact; 2- The permeability of the boundary layer; 3- Discrimination of the experience of contact (p. 173).

<sup>77</sup>"Enactivism envisions cognition as embodied within the knower through action and interaction." (Fels, 1999, p.41) Enactivism challenges the Cartesian view of the separated mind and body theory of learning. Enactivism proposes the co-actualization and co-emergence of possible worlds in which action and interaction are inter-dependent.

*"The feeling of absorption is 'self-forgetful'; it attends completely to its object; and since this object fills the entire field... the object becomes a 'Thou' , it is what is addressed. The "I" lapses altogether into attentive feeling... "*

Perls et al., 1951, p. 418

Knowing and meaning of dance appears before us with structures and qualitative characteristics. It is an object that can be appraised and the human body is the subject with the implication of a mutual dialogue between body and world. I that dances the self is the judge of the work and part of the work's reason for being is not realized until it becomes an aesthetic object for others. One reason for dancing in front of others has been and still is for many choreographers one of expression conveying feelings and ways of being in the world. The dancer and the observer become dynamically interrelated in a communication process through dance. Thus the dancer is inseparable from the dance and is also objectively known as *the dance* perceived by the audience and appraised. Dance is expressive, dance is more than movement.

Post modernists in dance moved against expressiveness which term refers to the emotional and behavioral aspects of movement. Yvonne Rainer brought a new definition to dance in the 1970s.<sup>78</sup> Minimalist and pedestrian styles emerged as a result moving away from explicit to implicit movement. Rainer's goal was to present movement purely and simply. As a viewer, we can imply significance in terms of our conceptions of dance depending on the lenses we choose to look through. Post-modernists attempted (in my view unsuccessfully since their dance remained very personal) to depersonalize or clear dance of expressive feelings. However, this minimalistic movement could not displace technique and expressiveness as valued qualities

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<sup>78</sup>Banes saw that the cycle of conflict between technical dance and expressive dance had been broken through the introduction of dance that was "neither perfection of technique nor of expression, but quite something else, the presentation of objects in themselves" (Sally Banes, 1980, p. 49, 51).

in dance, which continue to dominate dance. In the narrowest sense of expression, the avant-garde choreographers have drained expression from their choreography, that is of the expression of feelings. In a broader sense in which movement is expressive, they can express or communicate ideas. Taking a close look at Yvonne Rainer's *The Mind is a Muscle, Trio A*, we could say that Rainer is saying "no" to the inclusion of expressive quality in her choreography. She says of her dance: "The movements are not mimetic, so they do not remind one of such actions, but I like to think that in their manner of execution they have the factual quality of such actions" (Morrisson Brown, 1980, p. 147). She is expressing her position within the historical context of dance and she introduces qualities at other levels.

An interesting question here is how the intentions of the choreographer enter into the expressive quality of the dance and how it is perceived by the viewer. Maxine Greene (in Fancher & Myers, ed. 1981) defends that to attain some degree of dance literacy we need more aesthetic education in order to enhance awareness. In her view, dance literacy can only be achieved through participatory experiences, perceptual experiences, and particular encounters with performances. The goal is to challenge the taken-for-granted, the stereotyped, and passivity. I suggest that we explore this form of expression within the classroom and use dance as a research tool in order for students to find solutions for themselves in their moving, perceiving, and imaginings. Viewers and dancers with such an education may become consciously participant in what they see and consciously engaged in bringing certain dances into existence. Greene writes:

*"The individual who has been provided opportunities to move, to find his/her own center, to explore gesture, to sketch images in space with his/her own body, may well be in the best position to appreciate the critical dimension."*

Greene, 1981, p. 22



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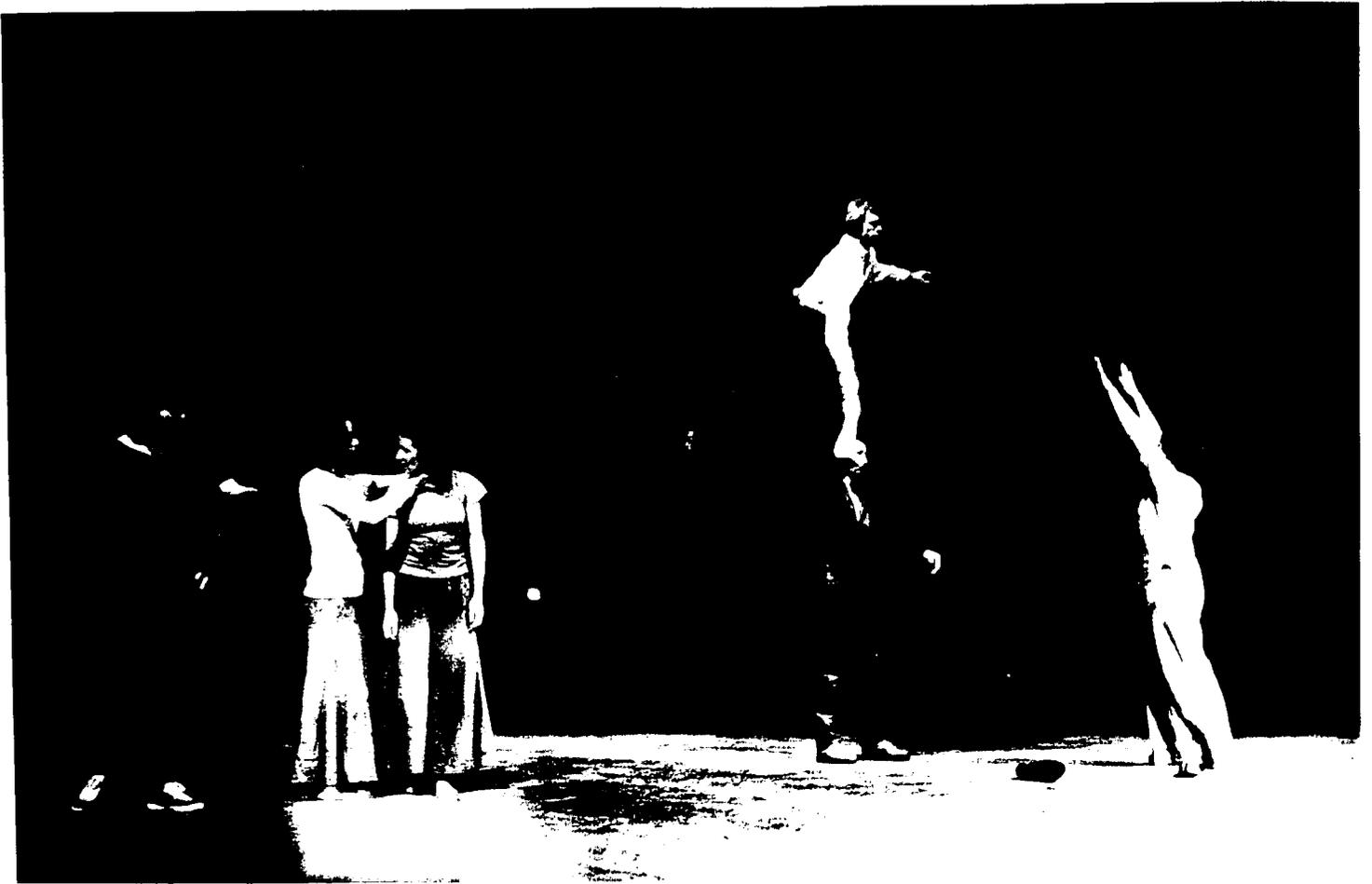
**Nenni, un mois c'est pas assez,  
Dansons ma bergère ô gué,  
Faut m'attendre encore une année à l'ombre.  
Dansons ma bergère joliment  
Que le plancher en rompe.**

This historical overview of dance, from the choreographers' interests and from the evolving objectivist status of dance, helps us to understand the assumptions about the intrinsic connection between movement and meaning and how they inevitably correspond to other events in the world. In order to give meaning to dance the viewer is perceiving and organizing relations between things in the world and chooses relations with an understanding of the conventions<sup>79</sup> (Foster, 1986) governing each approach. I agree with Foster, that dance, depending on its time, space, environment, and the maturity of the performers, finds meaning according to the conventions of a time (historical contextual time).

The 1980s were years of intense questioning and for many who were experimenting, dance improvisation provided a model for a new way of behaving, learning. On the east Coast, The Grand union, a collective of choreographers who all worked together in arranging the performances by choosing music, costumes, props, and performance space at the last minute, creating inconsistent and unpredictable events. They all had a commitment to cultivate 'art as life' and to create dance out of a choreographic process. Out of a collage of movement, vignettes of American life would emerge. By developing a different rapport between body and subject and arts, interacting among them in a non-conventional manner, the Grand Union allows viewers an

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<sup>79</sup>Susan Leigh Foster (1986) uses the term *conventions* as the organization of dance around a specific purpose or meaning in a historical time: Renaissance choreographers approach the history of dance as a world of implicit moral analogies; eighteen century choreographers classified dance as they conformed to various models; expressionist choreographers assessed the evolution of dance as the integration of emotion into an organic whole; in the objectivist manner of Cage and Cunningham, the subject-body presents itself as its own passionate message (181-187).



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intimate collaboration in re-creating the performance in an vast array of possibilities. They blurred the boundaries between the dancers, the choreographer, and the viewers, as well as between the mediums.

*"The body could be a voice through which the interior feelings and desires of the subject are made manifest, or it can simply enunciate itself."*

Foster, 1986, p. 227

When I dance I bring all my embodied knowing in the space-moment of learning. I make a choice and pay attention to what is around me and inside of me in this environment. Perceiving and imagining involve choice (Hanna, 1983, p. 17). We are largely responsible for what we come to know. With mindfulness/ awareness breaking the chain of conditioning, discovering the unknown I become moment-to-moment emergent formation.

*"Because of the interrelation of dance and society, we can view dance performances, at the very least, as a window on the nondance world and a way to gain insight into the human condition."*

Hanna, 1983, p. 8

During my dance career, I went through many dance conventions myself. From a vigorous ballet training with Eric Hyrst at Ballets Metropolitains, and later at the school of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, to modern dance with a student of José Limon's technique, Linda Rabin, to post-modern dance with a student of Merce Cunningham, Simone Lavoie, to improvisation with the equivalent of the American Grand Union, *Les Événements de la Pleine Lune* with Daniel Soulières, Jean Derome, and René Lussier.

As a teacher and dancer, I valued improvisation as a creative process and enjoyed each moment of simultaneous composition and performance. In considering structure, order, space,

time, materials and mood or 'tone,' the dancer-creator makes decisions quickly in the moment. In improvisation, one needs to be present to the moment-of-imagining. We must create situations in the classroom which encourage the release of imagination in this way. Study becomes natural and desirable when you work in such a collaborative and respectful manner. It is important to create a space-moment-of-imaginings in our schools where artists and audience can do their work with the greatest interchange.

### ***Dance-painting activity***

I invite you and a partner to do a creative activity in mindfulness in a space-moment-of-imagining. With your partner you will do a dance-painting activity but first you may decide who will dance first and who will paint. The selected dancer will express to the viewer an aspect of last month 's life experience with a dance performed with hands and arms and upper body, while sitting on a chair. Take a moment and close your eyes. Think about how life has been for you during the last month. Did anything special happened? How were you feeling? You are the dancer and you dance your last month's life experience.

Second part of the activity: The viewer is invited to respond to the dance and create an interpretation of it in a painting. "Take a moment, slow down your thinking, and use any color and paint brushes available to you on the table and paint your interpretation of the dance."

Third part of the activity: From the painting, the dancer is now invited to explain to the viewer the meaning of the painting. How the dance was perceived as well as the original expression.

Fourth part of the activity: Reflect on the meanings and interpretations of the originated dance moment-to-moment. Were there any similarities in the interpretations? What is the meaning of expressiveness in a dance / painting activity? Is knowledge co-evolving in this process?

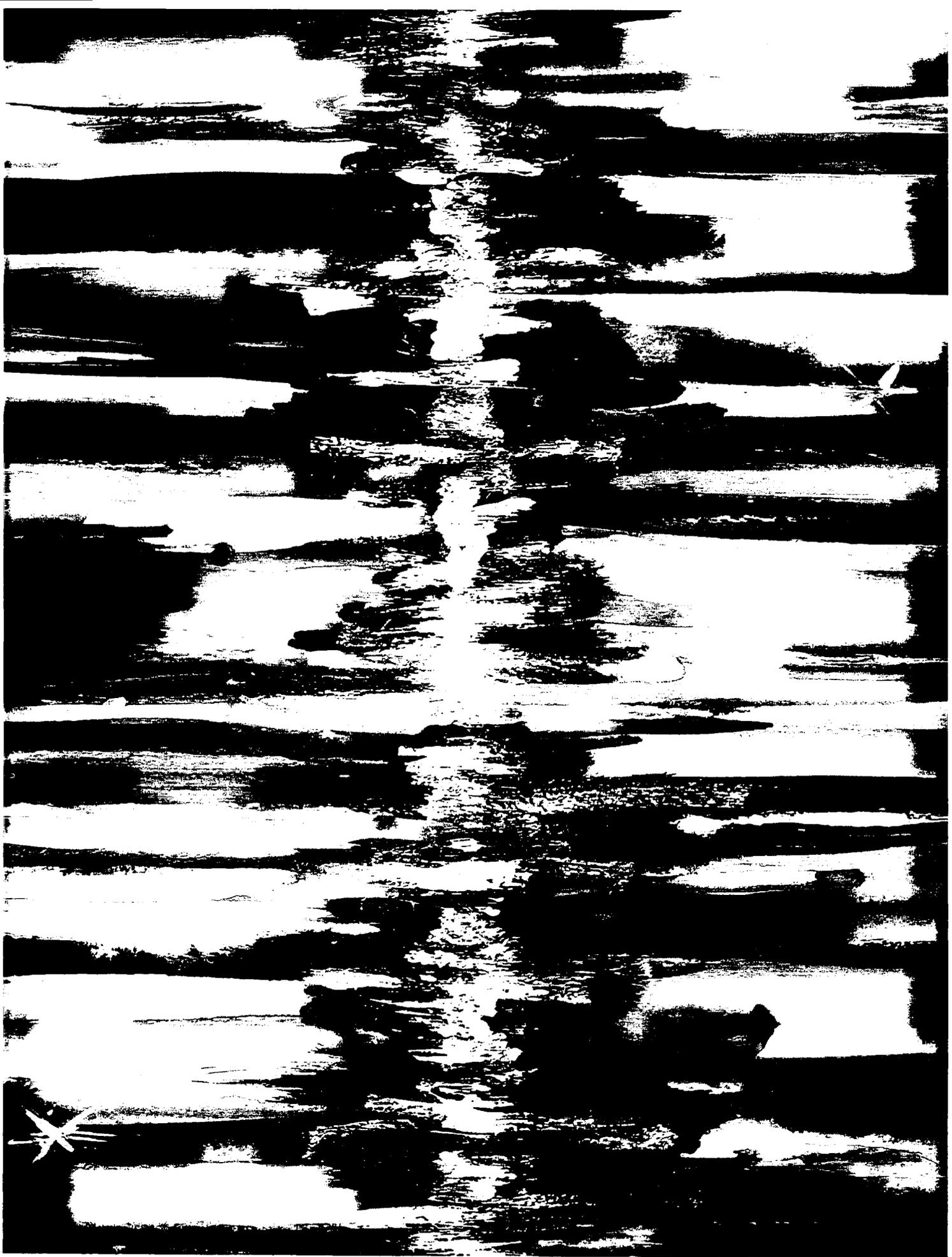
I attended Graham Good's<sup>80</sup> workshop at the University of British Columbia and we explored similar processes. We were invited to dance and improvise within a group: Each soloist went into the center of the group and danced something in the moment. People in the circle around the dancer would respond with similar or counterpoint movement and sound reactions. Later on, when everyone in the circle had a chance to experience this dance-sound improvisation, we were asked to paint individually this group danced experience. This painting would -in a third activity- motivate an individual viewer to respond poetically in writing. We were co-evolving in a space-moment of learning. Each experience inspiring another person to express the lived experience in another art form. It took just a few minutes for someone to break the inertia of the dance group. Some people confessed their self-consciousness later on in the reflection sharing group.

Our dances were rather short (fifteen seconds or so) most of them limited to going around the circle once. Graham kept repeating: "Get out of the box!" meaning getting out of the known as 'dance'. Somehow, without a proper "*mise-en-situation*," it was difficult not to feel in a box. We did not have sufficient time or space to feel the possibility of getting out of the box, to internalize and step out of it, or into it, in mindfulness.

What did happen in this workshop was the expression, in dance, painting or poetry, of a collective mindful embodied sense of self in relation to others. How we experience a moment,

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<sup>80</sup>Graham Good is an Associate Professor in the English Department at University of British Columbia.



how we see, and feel relates to our capacity to mindfully perceive what is around us. The I that sees the dance is a "system of possibilities." I open myself to the imaginings of this moment. A dancer's body entering a world of possibilities and meanings. The spatiality of situation of the body.<sup>81</sup> The body's volitional involvement with the world (Burwood et al., 1999, p. 172). I paint my experience of this dance moment of possibilities.

## **Dance as a social critique and a social critique of dance.**

In this section *Dance as a social critique*, I write dance, embodied knowing, through the co-evolving process of choreography in the search for understanding the self in relation to others. Art engages us. Dance engages us in a process of creating meaning through intentional movement and actions. Meaning in art evolves through the artist's discoveries as he or she creates a unique work. *Dance as a social critique* is the co-creation of our own individual being toward a collective consciousness. Dancing with others within this text presents us with the possibility of entering into the same frame of reference. The questions are: "Are we in the here and now on a common project? Is this *our* dance?" Our consciousness in meeting the challenges of the dance might not always be the same but we are engaging ourselves as one towards a possible unity of understanding through action. It is an occasion for mutual embodied awareness.

Dance as a social critique speaks of exploitation, power, insidious domination of one over another, and how one learns about social justice through danced ecological discourse.

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<sup>81</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1962) explains the distinction between the subject as both physicality and as a set of capacities in saying: "What counts for the orientation of the spectacle is not my body as it in fact is, as a thing in objective space, but as a system of possible actions, a virtual body with its phenomenal 'place' defined by its task and situation" (p. 249-250) . In fact it is determined by both.

When I was seventeen years old, I was still training in ballet, thinking that this technique was the only one capable of forming and sculpting my body in the shape and look acceptable for a professional dancer. It was only in my late twenties that I understood it was not so. When I chose to continue my training in modern dance, I was actually rejecting the values associated with the ballet technique. I was opposing to the hierarchical system prevalent within the technique: only prima ballerinas are allowed to perform certain steps, namely the famous *piqué* turns. Balanchine was one of the first choreographers to suggest the idea of egalitarianism by allowing all dancers to perform the reserved-to-ballerinas *piqué* turns and *fouettés*. Moving away from ballet technique meant a rejection of the hierarchy and values of ballet in favor of what was perceived as a more egalitarian approach. Central to this notion of rejection of the values associated with ballet is the role of dance as a social critique, more specifically, of the notion of communication, in a broader sense of expression.

If I ask myself *who* among all the great dance teachers and artists I was privileged to work with and *how* they have affected me, my teaching, and my view on education, Françoise Sullivan stands out and I find myself filled with memories and kinesthetic sensations from the rehearsals with her. It is only recently that I truly realized the meaning of her work and her influence on me. Her art made a statement about women trying to become more manlike in order to be successful. *A priori* dance doesn't seem to be the best medium for a social critique. Sullivan broke that belief. She was able to send a very strong message through her work, namely *Et la Nuit à la Nuit*. My interpretation of Sullivan's social perspectives on women -for instance, in this particular choreography- is that she is nostalgic of a time when women were essentially mothers, caregivers, nursing their children and caring for them. She recalls women's great earth



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connections by creating a costume emphasizing with *les parures* (ornaments) the roundness of their plentiful hips and breasts, with Goddess-like head crowns made of woods, tree bark, feathers and threads.

I remember the feeling of sliding into this fat foamy skin colour coverall and wondering about the aesthetics of it. But I never questioned it or opposed it. It felt totally right to embrace her proposition. But not every spectator did. I was not surprised to read in the paper a very severe critique of the performance the day following the premiere by a male critic who did not appreciate Sullivan's highly critical view of our womanizing society. Throughout the one hour and thirty minutes long choreography, Sullivan skillfully portrayed women's transformation into male thinkers, emotionless, suits, ties, briefcases workers, sometimes deprived of their femininity, like many other male workers. *Et la Nuit à la Nuit* spoke of the pressure most women experienced in conforming to a male dominant hegemony in order to succeed, and how they lose contact with their true nature in the process .

### **Erosiak**

*Ethereal ballerinas silently conforming to aesthetic regimes*

*Carrots and yoghourts for your pleasurable sight*

*Glamorous seduction, choreographers I am yours.*

*My beauty is my soul, I thought.*

*Come on little girl! Come out of your isolation.*

*Show time now. Show us how beautiful you are.*

*We all love you and want to see more of you.<sup>82</sup>*

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<sup>82</sup> When I worked with Paul Lapointe in *Erosiak*, I did not have the understanding I have today



Monique Giard. Paul-André Fortier dans *Érosiak*

D. Poulin, 1973

*Nude and exposed I felt violated.*

*How beautiful she was with her long hair and white skin.*

*So white and pure that nothing else existed.*

*We entered heaven with each of her moves.*

*Legs strong and delicate cutting space gracefully*

*Privacy does not exist in the show business.*

*I made a choice and had to live with the rules.*

*You are my family, I guess, I must obey.*

*Tears go down and the show must go on.*

*Important and visible I must be.*

That was the beginning of my dance career. I was beautiful and young and choreographers knew how to exploit my skills. There was a contradiction that as a dancer I had not resolved yet, lack of experience and discernment: I did not need to do anything to be loved, and did not know that yet. Exposing yourself knowing your limits. Understanding the difference between comfort and discomfort to the point of exploitation.

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nor the language to explain my reluctance in presenting myself in a *quasi nudity*. It felt like a violation of my body/temple. I thought that's what I had to do to in order to belong to the group. I remember "making a big fuss" the first time I was asked to wear the transparent costume, for a performance presentation of *Erosiak*, at the historical Monument National, in Montreal. We had been rehearsing with a *juste-au-corps* (dance leotard) skin colour but not see through as it was going to be for the premiere. I ran in the washroom, locked myself behind the door and refused to come out. I was sobbing and felt violated. Martine, the director of the company, tried to convince me, while the public impatiently clapped for the continuity of the show. No body had told me about it, and as a "prude catholic girl", I was not ready to expose myself in the absence of proper costume. I don't know how long I stayed in my refuge. I don't recall anything the director may have said to console me but I know I did come out of the toilet. I did the show disconnected from myself and numbed. After that episode, I appeared many times barely dressed, detached from my feelings but performing to the audience's delight. Looking back at those pictures I know I did not like it, and still feel the violation in my stomach.



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Another dance spoke of social critique to me. I performed *A Tout Prendre*, Sullivan's latest choreography created in 1981.

*"To the sound of violent hammer blows and strident whistles made by the musician the dancers raise their legs higher and higher in a gesture that reminds us of the rhythmic steps of the German regiments. A Tout Prendre offers us an experience wherein self-distorsion, antigravity and anti-personalization of the dancers' selves are the outcome of a disorientation of the senses".*

Racine, 1981

The feeling of grabbing objects and hooking them to the heavy large overcoat painted grey, and walking with very heavy boots, scraping the ground, was hypnotizing. I became a numb, depersonalized consumer, devouring objects as if I had been deprived of buying any thing for a while. It had a war-like, end-of-world atmosphere, intriguing and critical of our materialistic appetite. Here again, Sullivan made a statement about our declining society.

But Sullivan's work was not always heavily metaphorical and critical. She also introduced the Quebecois audience in 1948 to performances outside the theatres and traditional environments for art and dance and performed herself *La danse dans la neige*. In 1977, after an absence of eighteen years -during which she took care of her children- she created a series of performances in different settings in the city; in a parking lot, on Mont-Royal mountain, in an Art Gallery. Her dance was a social-environmental-aesthetic response to traditional settings in art.

I realized that all my experiences with Sullivan influenced me greatly. When I was teaching at Simon Fraser University, I invited students to explore movement also in different settings. I wanted them to experience how those places would influence their mind/ spirit and therefore affect their body/ movement. In different environmental settings how would they interact with nature and others? Are they performing differently in a different setting? Is one



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setting more evocative than others? Do they feel inspired? Is their motivation to move, explore, research, different when confined to an indoor studio? If so why? Is the environment contributing to the release of imagination? Are the relationships among themselves changing with the change of setting? Dance as research in the environment brought us to the magic of experience.

## Conversation on 'intentional rhythm'

*"Sometimes the choreographer is deliberately breaking the cultural rules or parameters of dance rhythms to which the dancer has been socialized."*

Hanna, 1987, p. 29

Dance involves more than just rhythmical movement, the pulsing flow of energy in time and space. Dance can be viewed within several time perspectives. The duration of the performance itself, the duration and interval between the audience's perception and understanding / reaction to the dance, and the choreographer's conception of time<sup>83</sup>. Temporality in dance may be created by transformations of time itself in creating periods of quiet and activity or by representing different events related to the past, present or future time. Time could be condensed or extended. We can refer to '*objective*' time or clock time, '*natural*' time refers to ecological variables like the seasons or the diurnal cycle, '*biological*' time centers on the human organism experiences of aging and energy expense, '*historical*' time refers to the recapitulation or chronology of events .

*"Energy is, after all, the ultimate source of social control and with the body as an instrument, dance may signify power and / or be charged with it. People use*

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<sup>83</sup> For discussions of different views of time, see Leonard Doob, 1971; Mary Douglas, 1973; Edmund Leach, 1971; Richard Schechner, 1969.



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*dance images, institutions, and behavior to send messages about themselves to themselves and to each other."*

Hanna, 1983, p. 131

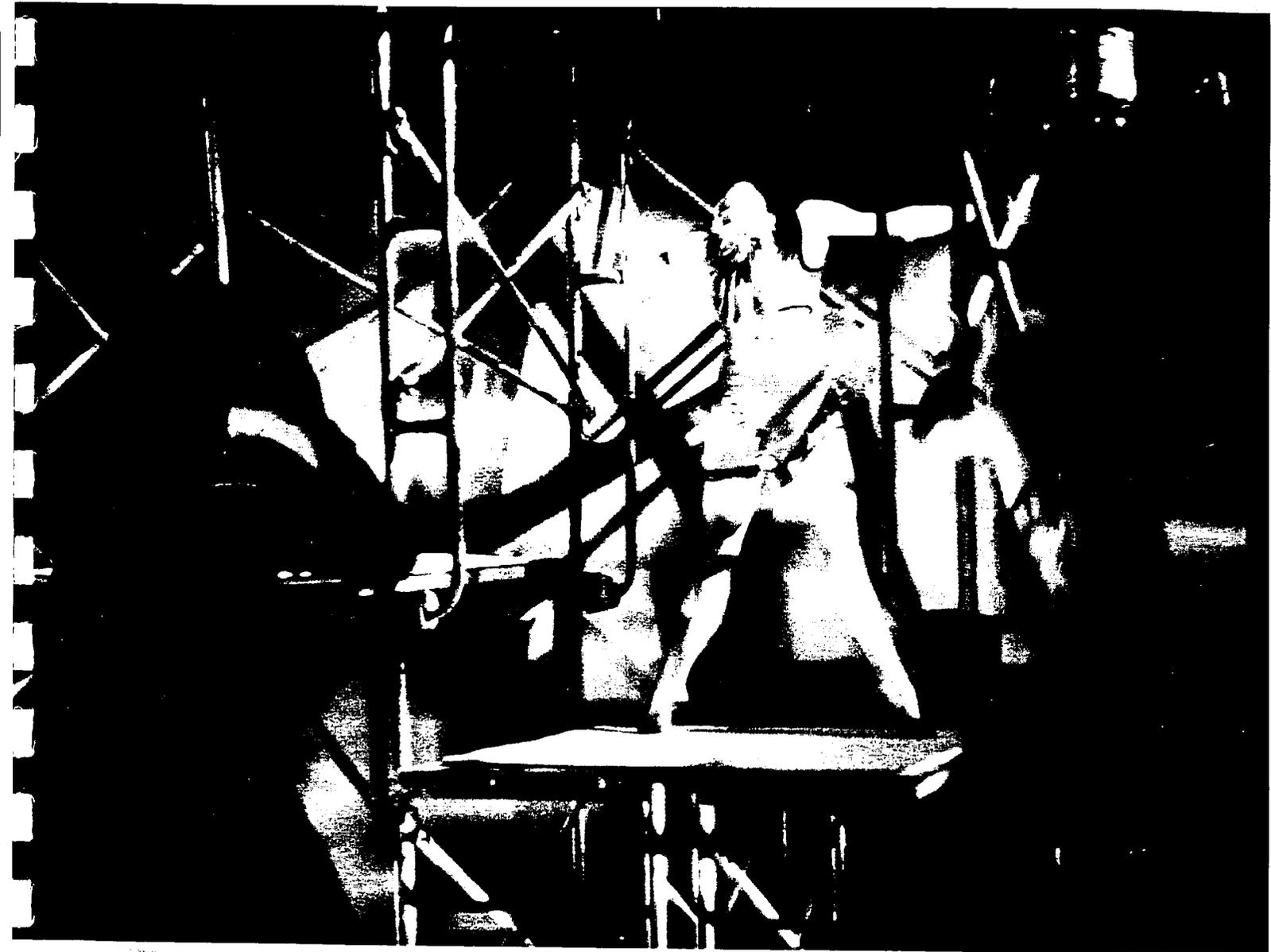
At another level, it is known that dance provokes a sense of personal and group power for performers and observers (Herbert Marcuse,<sup>84</sup> 1970; Judith Lynn Hanna, 1987). Dance is the vitalization of animate and stagnant powers of both positive and negative energies. This section heuristically explores the relationship of dance to power over self and others. The notion of power refers to the ability to influence others while the notion of politics signifies the exercise of power involving who gets what, when, where, and how.

(...) *Nullstadt* - a project which examines the impact of television on everyday life through the collaboration of Giard, filmmaker Henry Jesionka and composer Bruno Degazio. Monique Giard explainsp. (...) "Defining dance as a pure art form ignores the reality of the world we're living in", (...) "We live in a time when the artificial barriers of art are no more solid than the walls of our living rooms which are dissolving under the invasion of electronic media. (...) *Nullstadt* has taken me away from personal drama and human emotion into an environment where the body is an object of communication. I want to challenge myself as an artist by exploring what can happen in collaboration with others, and what happens when you take dance out of the theater and into other kinds of space."

Whyte, 1989

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<sup>84</sup> Herbert Marcuse is known for his writings on dance as political voice. He wrote: "Dance will bring the dead world to life and make it human." (Hanna, 1983, p. 128)



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*"Viewed as a 'language' of command and control, dance may be a significant symbol and medium of power and politics. "*

Hanna, 1983, p. 129

When we speak we often use body metaphors to objectify and communicate. Bodily imagery is common in the language of power, government, and authority ( Douglas, 1973). Expressions like the "head of the state", the "long arm of the law", or "body politic" , and "*avoir le bras long*" (meaning having good connections), or "*le bras droit du ministre*" demonstrate the efficacy of body consciousness as political thought and action. The main reasons for these powerful interpretations are related to the multi sensory phenomenon of dance: the importance of vision, motion, the emotional impact of body symbolism, and the interplay of communicative skills and specific ability. The communicative efficacy of dance lies in its capacity to fully engage the human being. The energy arousal process of dance involves altering central nervous functions. Furthermore, it can lead to altered states of consciousness and thus communicate a variety of ideas and emotions. For instance, dominance or submission hierarchies might be communicated through homologous dance patterns. Individuals often assert territorial possession through dance as a conceptual boundary marker; and sometimes dance is a means of asserting ethnic or class identity or aspiration in a heterogeneous situation (Hanna, 1983, p. 67).

### **A dance of deep power**

Chrysalis

New dance by Chick Snipper.

Vancouver East Cultural Centre, May 17 to 20.

*"There is a word for choreographer Chick Snipper's latest project, an adjective that accurately describes the astonishing earthy, hipthrusting energies that run the length and breadth of Chrysalis. The word chothnic, and it is virtually never heard in*

*daily life. But then the unrepentant, uninhibited female energies presented here are rarely seen in daily life either. Even in the liberated, Grrrl Power-coloured dawn of the 21st century we do not see women so unguarded in the display of their personal power as the four dancers in this ground-breaking work. "*

Scott, 2000

## **More on performative pedagogy**

In order to develop a critical reading of the world, it is important that we be exposed to many different situations and environments from the least coherent sensibility to a more coherent understanding of the world (Freire, 1998). Dancing by the beach or at a bus station offers a moment-of-imaginings in a dance space of embodied awareness where we can explore the not yet known through movement. Allowing that freedom of expression sends an implicit message that we can imagine and breathe the world. For moments-of-imaginings to happen teachers need to recognize their "unfinishedness," claims Paolo Freire (1998, p. 51). By "unfinishedness," he means our human capacity to spiritualize the world, to invent our existence which "involves the emergence of language, culture, and communication at levels of complexity much greater than that which obtains at the level of survival, self-defense, and self-preservation" (p. 53). We can make the world beautiful or ugly and we can intervene. A dance-moment-of imagining allows a moment of re-creation calling the nonhuman, human, the non-sayable into voice.

Teaching requires humility and the awareness that our knowing is unlimited. How could a teacher be doubting of his or her knowledge? How could parents be doubting of their parenting? How could one be doubting of their own values, beliefs, or myths? When exposed to other views,

possibilities, and when entering the unknown with an open spirit we come to doubt. From the Latin word *dubitare* (*craindre, hésiter*) "to doubt" implies some fear. Is it the fear of losing control and power? The fear of not being right? The resistance to change? Or all of them? Is it so destabilizing or complex to constantly re-think and question the notion of multiple voice / multiple truths that some teachers want to ignore them? Doubting of our own knowledge implies an opening to other ways of thinking being and understanding, allowing freedom in the expression of embodied awareness with other artistic forms of representation outside the criteria defined by standards or the authority.

A moment of embodied pedagogical imaginings offers an opportunity for conversation, in which students learn and grow by confronting their differences and voicing their uniqueness. I am convinced of the role of the unknown in the process of reaching the known. In not being afraid to reveal my ignorance or unfinishedness in dance improvisation, I am opening to others also facing their incomplete selves. Humility and the acceptance of our smallness in a world of possibilities is required for an enlightened and open-minded teaching practice.

At the same time, it is important to recognize the role we play as teachers without denying that our work could either help or impede students in their own search for embodied awareness. My position as a dance teacher is political in accepting or rejecting the historical dominance of ballet or any other dance training. What I choose to teach is a political act. Teaching dance is not just transferring technique. It is opening to a world of imaginings.

As I write and re-write my dance-story I realize how much dance taught me. I began to voice my presence in dance when I started listening from within. Being a voice is being heard and listening interchangeably. Listening is paying attention to the surroundings inside and out. When I started paying attention to myself I increased my capacity to hear my own voice and the

voices of others. This knowing was embedded in my own dancing. I needed to trust my own dancing and my own voice in order to be present to others.

Dance taught me that change is possible. Dance taught me that being curious and not knowing stimulates questions and critical reflection. Improvisation taught me how I am with myself and others in a moment of unexpectedness. I learned to question and ask myself the "So What?" and "Who cares?" questions. What came out of my being curious? Is being curious a challenge, a provocation for some established convention, or not? Could a person even be curious if not prepared to think or question their own curiosity?

It takes courage to open this kind of space in an educational environment, and a huge amount of caring for the children to create an educative experience in which I participate. Dance improvisation is an opening to the joy of living and furthermore, to a space where movement is essential.

*"The cornerstone of the educational adventure is precisely  
the unfinished nature of our historical presence in the world  
and our consciousness of that unfinishedness"*

Freire, 1998, p. 127

# Le jet d'eau qui jase

(The blabbling fountain)

## Dancing the immeasurable slowness

*"Émergeant de l'obscurité, une femme jeune et pieds nus, vêtue de blanc, pénètre dans un faisceau de lumière à l'extrême gauche. Son déplacement s'effectue avec une infinie lenteur, comme si elle savait l'importance de chaque geste et désirait en goûter le déroulement; ce soin confère à son mouvement un autre sens que celui d'aller vers."*

(Lévesque, 1982, p. 165).

Lévesque (1982), who saw the dance three times in three nights, captured in a few words the essence of this ballet choreographed in 1980 with my dance partner Daniel Soulières. "*Avec une infinie lenteur*," with an immeasurable slowness, I, the dancer-choreographer, knew the importance of each imperceptible move and relished in transforming space and time. I, the dancer-choreographer, knew the impact of my body-mind changing shape and rhythm. I embodied time and form inside of me. Internalized movement. Imperceptible like the clouds moving so slowly. Perceived progression in the transformation of shape. The infinite gesture.

So slowly the hypnotic movement traveled in the spectator's body-mind. A gestured mesmerizing conversation about the never-ending presence. I, the dancer, felt the weight of lightness inside my veins, muscles and joints. The vertical embodied awareness of being in a specific place, for no specific reason but being there, at that time and space. The random concept of time and the fluid notion of presence or self.



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**Au ralenti**

**So slowly**

**I**

**exist**

**à contre-courant**

Entering the performing space, I experience my own being. In front of you waiting for my performance, silently watching sensing every breath taken, every imperceptible change in my posture, I will not change my pace regardless of your discomfort inexperience with my eternal repetitive progression.

Sustained movements, without changing the dynamics in my body. Steady. Even. Slow cautious movements in actions of balance. If I change the dynamics of the movement, I will change the feeling. Heightened sensitivity and awareness. I am concentrating on keeping the flow. No percussive movement or swinging. My body is adapting to the pace through my muscles and adjusting to the desired intensity of energy release. Presence..

I remember the hours in studio, problem-solving the intricacies of our duet. How could the body absorb the weight in a way that it makes the dance look light and easy? How can we move from one position to another without breaking the flow?

Monique Giard and Daniel Soulières are two Montrealers who turned their meeting into a dance. *Le jet d'eau qui jase*. A tranquil work based on shifting weight and balance in which Soulières tries to impede Giard's progress through a path of light... Their debut revealed them as an astonishing partnership with great potential.

Howe-Beck, *Canadian Dance News*, 1981.

*Le jet d'eau qui jase*, astounding spectators with not only their choreographic ability but the rare perfection of their performing partnership.

Howe-Beck, *The Gazette*, 1980.

### **A spiritual / emotional rhythm.**

The rhythm in *Le jet d'eau* was particularly slow and echoed composer Philip Glass' never-ending repetitive pattern. Doris Humphrey (1959) defines three main sources of rhythm: the motor rhythm or beat, the breathing rhythm and the emotional rhythm. The emotional rhythm is one that describes best *Le jet d'eau qui jase*. Like a water fountain, constant in the overall aspect but bursting and falling as well. The dance starts in a repetitive slow motion, slower than what spectators are used to seeing on a dance floor. It is not obvious what the emotion may have been as we choreographed this duet. We started exploring two bodies moving in and out of a shared space. We choreographed our unconditional friendship partnership. We were not in a romantic or sexual relationship but partners in our choreographic search. The dance was a result of our being comfortable together, without expectations or demands. In a way we had a very exceptional relationship without being together in a more possessive sense of relating. The term spiritual might be more appropriate than emotional. We had a spiritual timeless connection transcended in our dancing.

## Conversation with the reader: Creating a dance about us.

The dance is really about who we are as people. I perceive both myself and Daniel as gentle and hesitant. Far from being aggressive or arrogant. It shows in the dance. We both have a strong need for independence and for connection, as contradictory as it may seem, and that too is shown in the dance.

Our dance incorporates all movement available for choreographing. We use stylized movement of walking, pivoting, holding, falling. I think we are moving away from the technical dancers, but not completely. We are still pointing our feet. This dance was created in 1979. In the late sixties, in the States, there was a group of artists with Yvonne Rainer looking for people who did not know how to point their feet (Morrisson Brown, 1979) . Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Françoise Sullivan, Marie Chouinard have all greatly influenced my dancing.

*Inner*

*Concentration*

*Charismatic*

*Presence*

*"Following in the steps of the modern painter and the modern composer, the modern dancer has infused movement with that vibrant restless texture and that intense inner concentration typical of our psychologically oriented age."*

Horst & Russel, 1987, p. 48

Each step is calculated. Each position in the body is analyzed. Once we have a solution we can't change it. It is set for eternity. The dance is performed with the same precision over and over. More than one hundred times Daniel and I performed *Le jet d'eau* without altering it. Our



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inner concentration may have been different from time to time but without altering the dance. Only the intensity might have been slightly different. More or less energetic, more or less indifferent to each other, more or less ethereal.

When I re-choreographed the dance for two dancers to be performed at a symposium in Seattle, during my teaching time at Simon Fraser University, I realized the dance was not so easily transferable. The dancers were not the dance. For them to become the dance, they needed to experience the dance the way Daniel and I had experienced the dance. The new dancers did not correspond to our physical characteristics, did not have the dance experience we had together as dancers, did not have the charisma<sup>85</sup> that distinguished our dancing. I did not consider these factors seriously enough. Therefore, the re-construction was problematic. "It is that special feeling sometimes called *soul* or *charisma* that distinguishes the average performer from the star," says Hanna (1983, p. 6). The male dancer was much taller than Daniel rendering the lifts more difficult, quasi impossible for the woman. I needed to change most of the choreography. It would have been better to create a new dance.

When this reconstructed *Jet d'eau* was performed in Seattle, the slow pace and repetitive nature did not appeal to the young dynamic audience. It was out of context<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup>Judith Lynne Hanna (1987) added an additional category to her semantic grid as a tool for interpreting the meaning of dance: the sphere of presence, denoting the charisma or magic so often emanating from dance.

<sup>86</sup>For some it may have appeared too slow and uncomfortable although no body reported feeling that way except after a representation in Seattle. I understand the significance of cultural and historical moment as defined by Derrida (Gregory Ulmer's explication of Derrida's meaning of the sign and its context in "The Object of Post-Criticism," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-modern Culture*, 1983).

**Dancing  
vertically  
into  
existence**

*"Chaque rien franchi de distance ne l'est pas sur le plan horizontal, mais plutôt verticalement, à l'intérieur de la femme, perpendiculairement à sa progression."*

Lévesque, 1982, p. 167

*Le jet d'eau qui jase* embodies the elusive and ephemeral notion of self. Experience of our body is experience of our self, our corporeal reality (Kepner, 1987). Self, me, the dancer-choreographer, a fluid presence becoming known in the light, and in the presence of others and in a specific environment. I, dancer-choreographer, integrator of timelessness and presence.

*"The self has no nature of its own except in contact with or in relation to the environment."*

Kepner, 1987, p. 10

**In the light**

**I exist**

**Can you see my breathing?**

**Can you heard my pivots?**

**Invisible presence**

**Vertical**

I feel again that moment behind the curtain, waiting for the right moment to make myself seen by the audience also waiting for the dancer to appear. Philip Glass' music penetrating their soul through their eyes, waiting for the seen to be seen. The repetitive circular sound setting the atmosphere. I feel your waiting for me. Moment of desire. I am compelled for completion in your presence. Without you I don't exist. In this moment I need you otherwise the performance does not exist. Only the dancer lives. The necessary conversation between the spectator / reader and the dancer / writer.

*As a speaker and writer I use words to speak myself into existence, but I am always aware that I cannot get it right... Always I am aware of my difference, my separateness from all other human beings. And yet always there is the overwhelming desire to be connected with others, to ask in community, to know completion in interdependence with others, to word my wholeness in conjunction with the Other, even in the knowledge that the desire will never be satisfied because there is no wholeness, no oneness."*

Leggo, 1996, p. 235

How do we define our existence?

I am a dancer.

I exist in my dancer's bodymindfulness

I know you can see me now, as I slowly walk into the light, dressed in white, capturing the innocent light. I walk, pivot, touch the air, sensing a presence other than mine. We engage in an unspoken dialogue. Existing in your presence I continue unaffected, unchanged. I exist because of your presence. I sense my subconscious abdication.



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Never let go. I reach to my vertical sense of self, grounding my feet  
I touch the floor with conviction. **I connect to the earth (Lowen, 1990).** I  
dance into existence yet separate from you all. My desire to connect  
beyond the abyss. I sense my intra / depen / dance. I dance into my  
existence inter / extern / ally. You are witnesses of my desire. My allies. I  
know, my desire will never be satisfied.

of selves.

embodiment

shared

ending

Never

*... "Ce ballet avait pour titre *Le jet d'eau qui jase* et Sylvia en a été  
émue au point d'y retourner trois fois en trois soirs. Ce qui l'a  
bouleversée dans ce ballet, c'est la rencontre chacun pour soi de  
deux personnes, une rencontre sans promesse, sans durée que  
l'éternité du ballet, accomplie sur une pulsation qui rend si  
aléatoire le temps entre l'homme et la femme, et l'homme, et la  
femme. Une rencontre ou rien n'est donné mais prêté, ou rien n'est  
dû, demandé, ou l'échange tient au hasard d'un pan de soie."*

(Lévesque, 1982, p. 167)

In *Le jet d'eau qui jase*, the fundamental desire to connect to one self and others prevails.

The scarf symbolizes the self-afflicted suffering. Liberation from within. Enjoyment of an  
ephemeral moment of seduction and warmth. Dancers connecting through their symbiotic play.

Lévesque (1982) saw a coming together of two dancers never really connecting "la

rencontre chacun pour soi de deux personnes, une rencontre sans promesse," (p. 167) she says. Isn't there the beauty of not possessing anyone? The freedom of existence without owning anything or anyone. Connecting profoundly through their bodies. Never-ending shared embodiment of selves. The connective tissue of the unborn is more than connected, the yet to be born is partly the mother. In the womb the baby is the mother and the mother is the baby, undistinguished yet. Dancers as embodied connected beings.

**She holds the man on her back**

**"like a burden, like a child" (Lévesque, 1982, p. 166).**

*"Au milieu il la rejoint, jamais ils ne se font face. Il dénoue la ceinture de soie, et la femme l'enroule à sa taille, puis elle se penche, les bras tendus, et prend sur son dos l'homme, dos à elle, comme un fardeau, comme un enfant. Contemplant l'un à l'intérieur de l'autre des météores, ils s'échangent tour à tour le fardeau qui est l'autre, se reposant entre les portées."*

*(Lévesque, 1982, p. 166)*

Another presence slowly moves in the darkness, not yet seen, murmuring an incomprehensible monologue. A man, whom I may be attracted to. I don't know. I see him now in the same stream of light. He enters my eternal fountain, and find myself transported yet unchanged. Suspended in a time-space, unaltered, I continue on my own path, feeling his presence.

The third time he enters the stream of light we engage in a conversation without looking at each other but supporting each other harmoniously. I like his presence and yet want to recover my space. We struggle for separation yet inseparable. I hold him on by back, like a burden, like a child .



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Le Jet d'eau

*Daniel and I are moving synchronically  
harmoniously until the rupture*

*chasm  
into the darkness.  
suffering  
pleasure.*

*bodysoul  
alive  
vibrant  
pleasurable distance*

*Harmonious split.  
Divergent happiness.  
The fullness of chaos.*

Never facing each other we are mutually borrowed for a brief moment into existence. His vertical scarf around his neck and later around his waist is reminiscent of his own existence without me.

We complete this poetic journey in opposite directions and with increased freedom disappear into darkness, our energy reverberating in the fading light.

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