

Turning Inside Out

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Over time my movement practice has shifted from the strictly codified aesthetic of classical ballet, to something more indeterminate, open and unique. This subtle shift working on physical and intellectual ‘intelligences’, acknowledges my embodied history of various techniques that seek to find a ‘dialogue’ with the ‘body’.

During the last twenty years, I have developed a movement practice that draws on various dance techniques, movement work within a drama context, and improvisation, often involving artists from other disciplines. This PhD project is concerned with how ‘attention’ informs and refines movement practice. This investigation of a physical and psychological process will be realized through making, collecting and assembling ‘objects’. The ‘body’ and ‘attention’ (attentiveness) will provide the focus and parameters of the research.

It is useful here to articulate what ‘the body’ means, I borrow from Edmund Husserl and his description of the physical body (*Körper*) and the lived body (*Lieb*) (1960, 97). The physical body is the corporeal entity, made up of organs, bones, neural pathways, and a range of systems often not under conscious control. The lived, living body, is my perception of my own body, not as a thing, but a ‘phenomenon’. The lived body, described paradoxically as a ‘Body without Organs’ by Deleuze and Guattari, ‘is a body populated by multiplicities’ (1987, 30) similar, but from another perspective, to the idea of ‘cellular consciousness’ which performer choreographer Deborah Hay utilizes in her performance workshops (1994, 58). The German philosopher Edith Stein elaborates

further that the living body perceives and is perceived by itself, that is, sensations that resonate on/in the body are given to the living-body-senser. Stein calls this reciprocity of experiencing the body ‘fusion’ (1989 (1917), 47). This ‘fusion’ is demonstrated in tactile work, predominantly with the hands, (including the body’s contact with different surfaces, other bodies, floor, chair, air) in Ideokinesis (Sweigard, 1974), Perceptible Breath work (Middendorf, 1990), Contact Improvisation (Banes, 1977), Shiatsu (Masunaga, 1987) and Reiki (Stein, 1996).

At the core of much contemporary dance is a practice of bodily self-awareness. Techniques such as, Tai Chi Chuan, Chi Kung (McKenzie, 1999), Aikido (Yuasa, 1993), Yoga (Belling, 2001), as well as Feldenkrais (Feldenkrais, 1977), and Alexander (Barlow, 1973), are practised not only by dancers, but also actors, musicians, sculptors, visual artists and performers concerned in relating their ‘bodies’ to their creative work.

Two important points about the movement practices outlined above are that, firstly, unlike classical movement disciplines (e.g. ballet), they are not restricted to the studio or performance space and, secondly, and more subtly, these activities allow an indirect connection to occur at a subliminal level and allow other information unconnected to an external reproduction of the actual form to come into the body. The physicality of these forms, their languages, their different perspectives and references are unique to each, but they share a common thread in the process of attention, on, or attentiveness to, ‘the body’.

Discovering and working with the Alexander technique during the mid 1970’s while dancing professionally in a classical ballet company was my first introduction to ideas of physical intelligence and experiential anatomy. What it indicated was a radically different way of experiencing the body.

Experiential anatomy and improvisation both necessitate an attentive listening to the body, to the nuances and subtle shifts of rhythms, sensations, and conversations.

Phenomenologist Drew Leder contends that the body tends to ‘disappear’ when functioning unproblematically, and comes to our attention most strongly at times of dysfunction (1990, 153). This is useful as a generalized perspective, but negates the possibility of a more pleasurable, positive relationship with the body’s ‘appearance’ achieved through the practices outlined above.

Attentiveness connects my body in the studio to the larger world (as can happen in meditation), thus the interaction and integration of quotidian and studio practice places the aesthetic concept not as ‘a separate sphere but as a perspective that encompasses the whole of actuality’ (Broadhurst, 1999, 169).

The prime focus for this study is *attention on, in, and from the body*. As a self-reflective process, this work will acknowledge my quotidian, public and private interactions—standing in a queue, driving the same path at different times of the day, gardening, turning over in bed—as well as work in a studio. My *attention on, in and from movement* will direct the path of enquiry.

In this project I will extend the construction process of object making to include, writing, photographs, video, sound, and assemblage, (predominantly out of everyday materials). Deleuze and Guattari, writing in another context say that ‘assemblage is fundamentally libidinal and unconscious’. This is suggestive of a means of communicating with the body without the imposition of movement training and habitual imagery being spoken in the head. Indeed, as Minchinton points out, Deleuze and Guattari writing about the difficulty of improvisation argue that the performers are “momentarily caught in a ‘component of passage’ a plateau that cannot be easily resolved” (Minchinton, 1996, 171, Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 158). Further the process of improvisation can connect to a reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s own writing. Brian Massumi translator of *Mille Plateaux* points out that the book can be read in any order ‘You can take a concept...particularly to your liking and jump with it to its next appearance’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, xv).

Jaana Parviainen in writing *Bodily Knowledge: Epistemological Reflections on Dance* cites the work of Michael Polanyi and his description of tacit and focal knowledge. Knowledge about the object or phenomenon in focus he calls 'focal knowledge'. Tacit knowledge functions in the background, assisting the accomplishment of the task in focus. They are not mutually exclusive or levels in a hierarchy, more like dimensions of the same knowledge (Parviainen, 2002, 17). This articulated division will provide a starting point to assist in tracing the path of attention and in editing accumulated material. The choice reflects directing selective attention to aspects of an accessible event, and investigating what to stress or pick out from among the innumerable ways it may be construed (Howard, 1982, 87). The representation of the ideas in a range of media links to Howard's analysis of synaesthetic description as a mode of metaphor; where descriptions of one sensory modality are given in language literally applicable to another (1982, 146). Within a movement practice metaphoric description is often utilised. This study will assist in making extrinsic that journey through the process of composition in other media.

The act of encoding information is the act of arranging elements into a pattern, putting intelligence, purpose, or intent into something. The act of decoding (retrieval) is to extract that organization out of the pattern, sensing the intent or intelligence behind the organization of that pattern (Viola, 1995, 68).

Attentiveness allows for the possibility of moving from a fixed standpoint to one that is open and flexible, exploring and providing connections within sensorial modalities and pursuing linkages of a more theoretical or intellectual sort.



Floor feet 2003 still from video by cb

Twigs 2002 still from video by cb

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