

Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy

THESIS

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Dancer BA

A Tale of Colliding Ideas

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Lights come on stage. A female dancer standing upstage center. No music, no movement. After standing for a very long time, she begins to walk slowly towards the audience. Glacially slow. Eyes are fixed straight ahead as she moves forward. After fifteen minutes, she reaches downstage center. Standing in front of the audience, she looks left, she looks right, then she looks out past the audience. She begins to urinate on stage.

INTRODUCTION

How did the art of dance get to this place?

Through the retrieval of moments in my memory bank of life in dance and weighing memories of my time as an audience member against the present landscape of contemporary dance productions. I would like to clarify for myself what my feelings truly are concerning the state of dance in the 21st century. Having spent many years agonizing over the lack of depth and artistry in dance productions, I have come to realize my reactions to questionable performances as being a bit biased. The better part of me wishes to empathize with my fellow artists by reaching out and extending a benefit of the doubt. For what I see and feel to be a lack of artistic sensibilities may be for them, a true testament to the belief that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.

In my case, as it may be for others who have not, obviously, achieved a high enough level of comprehension and insight into the current wave of some contemporary dance performances. Bad taste is bad taste in the eyes of this beholder. Yet, in all fairness, there are performances which fall in between these two extreme points of *beauty* and *bad taste*. Performances which give validity to the idea that with innovation, one must be prepared to accept the failures which will take place throughout the choreographic trajectory of a revolutionary era such as the postmodern dance era of the 1960's in New York City.

In an attempt to recalibrate the prism through which dance performances are viewed, it is imperative both sides of the spectrum are explored so as to formulate a more sound judgment or perspective. With this in mind, I want to make sure I allow space in my consciousness for my fellow artists and their creative journeys in dance and choreography.

In my search, I want to augment my reflections of my time in dance with connections and references to the origins of modern as well as postmodern dance with additional allusions to art and music in order to shed some light on how we in the world of dance and society, as a whole, may have come to the conclusion that urinating on the stage is worthy of the art of dance. Realizing this to be a very subjective task, I wish to sketch out some of my conclusions with the fervent hope of later applying the finishing touches to a future larger work which will finally put to rest, in my mind what is art and what is not.

My journey in dance began forty three years ago. In that time, I can honestly say I have been around the block a few times and, in spite of the fact that I have experienced performances such as the one I have described above. I remain open to the act of creation and the acceptance of opening the doors to those who wish to dance and create. I remain hopeful to the idea that maybe, just maybe something interesting, something important may be coming around the corner at any moment.

As I have mentioned, innovation is necessary if progress is to be made. Out of the multitude of voices out there investigating, exploring, creating some will have shrieked off key, at some point, before they find their own distinct, resonating timbre within their own voice.

There are times, though, when I find myself screaming at the heavens asking the dance Gods: 'How did we get to this place?' 'Quick!' Close the doors before everybody thinks they can come in and urinate on the stage and call it art. Then, as suddenly as I realize those screams are in my head I immediately return to the understanding, good natured person/dancer/choreographer who just seconds before cursed the Gods for giving me such a capacity for compassion. Because, in spite, of this understanding and compassion I have for all people who wish to

dance and/or create a part of me, albeit, the secret part of me wishes the doors remained closed and only those who could pass the test could enter.

The next questions to be posed could be: what is this test? What does the test consist of? Who administers this test? Who determines the questions and, furthermore, who decides whether the answers should allow entrance to this world of dance, of art, of performance? We could say the best, most sure way of determining who is allowed entrance into this world, would be to leave it in the hands of the audience. We know, though, that audiences can be swayed and, therefore, be made to follow like sheep. Marketing has a tremendous power when it comes to convincing people something is art and should be seen. Is it a question of education? What words of wisdom could we pass on to audiences which would help them sharpen their sensibilities, fine tune the receptors in their hearts and minds giving them the tools to discern art from a misguided attempt at choreography.

Without wanting to sound elitist, not everyone can dance, not everyone can go onstage and perform at a high level and, definitely, not everyone has the talent for creating. Everyone, though, should be allowed to try yet, at what point does it stop being so inclusive and where is the starting point for distinguishing where the line is drawn. More importantly, should there be a line determining who can be allowed to dance or perform and who should not?

I truly believe that time will solve this for us all. At the very least, I remain hopeful the moment will come when we will have traveled full circle and return to a place and time when our ancestors will be proud to call us their own.

The more time I have spent on this earth, the more I have come to realize that everything and I mean *everything* has come about through a series of events emanating from a source point. My investigations in dance, in music, in art, take me to different places and through different pathways. While researching, I realize that every bit of information, seemingly unconnected, has significance. For example, with the discovery of the meteorite ALH84001 in Antarctica on December of 1984, the meteorite was said to have contained evidence of dead, fossil bacteria. The implications of such a discovery could create such an upheaval in the scientific

community as well as in most religious circles where such a hypothesis could have a disastrous effect on the history of all religions and, consequently, on the idea of God and creation itself. The possibility that life could have been deposited on Earth by meteorites billions and billions of years ago is enough to shake the very foundations of our entire civilization.

Not wanting to equate a dance performance in the 21st century and its historical roots to the cataclysmic effect of discovering that life on Earth might have come from Mars shedding light on the origins of life on earth would be Man's biggest, most profound discovery in its entire history. Likewise, yet to a much lesser degree, researching the myriad pathways of the mind of modern dance in order to discern why and how it could have gotten to such a point of acceptance of mediocrity, raises the question which must be asked and, therefore, must be answered how could we allow creations such as the "Urinating Lady" to exist under the guise of art.

Being aware that the subject of meteorites, God and creation could very well seem as if the central idea of this paper has lost its bearings. I, simply, would like to give importance to the act of creation with a particular emphasis on the origins of such a creation so that we may be able to identify the variable or variables which, when left unexamined, could leave a lingering ambiguity to an artistic environment such as dance. Tracing the origins of postmodern dance and its many components could lead us to important discoveries as to where and why we are at this point in our dance history.

We should, at the very least, search for answers wherever we can find them. Meteorites, God and creation – *dance, art and performance*: universal truths hidden within. It is our pioneering blood which should motivate us to filter out the truths in life in art. Therefore, establishing possible beginnings and reasons for how the art of dance could have gotten to the point where urinating on stage could be considered art becomes a clear necessity if modern dance is to continue into the future undiminished by an inconclusive and mysterious origin.

In the case of the performance of the artful urination on stage, it too "contained evidence" of a history of events which paved the way for the possibility

of such a performance to exist at all. It is this source point as well as the series of events which have followed thereafter, which I wish to explore in order to shed more light on 'how did the art of dance get to this place' (p. 2).

It will be important to note that not all of the personalities involved in the evolution of postmodern dance, nor those which are inextricably interwoven in such a complex web of interrelationships will be able to be explored here. It is my hope that in spite of it, this investigation will not be limited in its scope. Nevertheless, artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, the composer John Cage, choreographer Merce Cunningham, dance teacher Robert Dunn and fellow Judson Dance Theater founders Yvonne Rainer, Anna Halprin, James Waring, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs among others who all contributed to this evolution. Consequently, it is important this labyrinth be navigated and the personalities involved be brought to light in order to bring as much clarity to the progression of events leading to this new and historical era of postmodern dance.

As a twenty four year old male dancer coming into New York City in the mid-1970's, I did not realize there were two worlds of modern dance. On one side, there was the traditional modern dance training to which I was totally devoted and, on the other side, there was a group of individuals who worked in the Judson Dance Theater who had already woven themselves into the fabric of the dance world as an avant-garde postmodern dance force tracing their roots to the early 1960's and even further back into the early 1950's.

As I look back at my time in Manhattan, I begin to understand the extent to which traditional modern dance and postmodern dance were similar yet fundamentally different. Each were confronted by a pivotal point in which their need to express themselves ran counter to the current of their times. How each manifested themselves is the central, most significant contrast between these two landmark expressions of dance.

It must be pointed out that their respective eras of existence dictated their actions and responses to the times. Traditional modern dance had no precedent; it had no example from which to model itself. That, in and of itself, was a major difference between the difficulties it experienced as opposed to what post

modern's circumstances were in the 1950's and 1960's. The socio-economic climate of the late 19th century set the tone for the emergence of modern dance. Industrialization gave rise to a middle class with more disposable income and free time.

The decline in Victorian social strictures led to a new interest in health physical fitness (Kurth, 2001: 28-29). It was in this atmosphere that a 'new dance' was emerging as much from a rejection of social structures as from a dissatisfaction with ballet (Legg, 2011: 1). During this same period, 'the champions of physical education helped to prepare the way for modern dance, and gymnastic exercises served as technical starting points for young women who longed to dance' (Anderson, 1997: 8). Women's colleges were already offering 'aesthetic dance' (McPherson, 2008: 5) courses at the end of the 1880's. Conversely, the period of time in which postmodern dance came onto the scene was ripe for innovation and free thinking. Precedence had previously been established, yet differences from its earlier modern dance counterpart set it apart. From the beginnings of the Beat Generation in the 1950's, where anti-materialism and the search for inner peace and knowledge was a basic philosophy to the 1960's hippie counterculture where anti-establishment rhetoric and demands for personal freedoms were rallying cries, the 1950's and 1960's counterculture set the groundwork for a more free thinking, politically active movement of people who questioned the existing social and political order and believed that peace and love could conquer all.

On the one hand, you have a late 19th to early 20th century movement which takes root because of the socioeconomic inadequacies of the times. On the other hand, you have a counterculture in the 1950's and 60's which, according to its philosophy, rejects anything having to do with the established social order and promotes personal freedoms along with sweeping social and political changes.

Both of these eras exhibited intolerance for the existing circumstances they found themselves in. The pivotal difference is the way in which each manifested itself through the art of dance. The former wished to codify its new found freedom of expression into a language which could be transferable or passed onto others

while the latter wished to allow the individual to create spontaneously, without judgment or censorship. Anything was possible, nothing was wrong. Yvonne Rainer said, There was new ground to be broken and we were standing on it (Anderson, 1982).

Consequently, codification was difficult and, at times, frowned upon. Anything having to do with a connection to modern dance or classical ballet was to be rejected in search of a more human, more pedestrian approach to movement.

Because of this desire to be free and express one's self through one's personal movement, the generation of dancers in the 1960's decided to denounce the very foundation of the rebellious movement which had come before them in the early 20th century. They chose to distance themselves from all the dance techniques established through years and decades of modern dance development. Some even went so far as to reject those very freedoms of expression which, ultimately, had connected them to diverse dance styles and vocabularies.

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Robert Dunn

As mentioned earlier, tracing the origins of postmodern dance history could lead us to discover important connections. Robert Dunn was an integral link in the chain of events which led to the historical Judson Church performance on July of 1962, the moment known as the beginning of postmodern dance. His classes consisted of experimentation with improvisation, musicality, phrasing and logic for the purpose of developing a new style of dancing. Writing was also one of the tools used in order to delineate the parameters of the dance (Morgenroth, 2004).

What further distinguishes Dunn in the constellation of people surrounding the Judson movement, was his association with Merce Cunningham whom he met and collaborated with in performances in Boston and New York in 1958. This collaboration being musical in nature, led to his moving to New York to begin work as an accompanist at the Cunningham Studio. Dunn then met John Cage whose seminars in composition at the New School for Social Research in New York City he attended. Dunn continued composition studies with Cage at the Cunningham Studios where classes were first taught. This association with John Cage, to a great degree, informed Dunn's work as he began to apply Cage's music principles to his movement classes (Morgenroth, 1987). Dunn's students included musicians, visual artists, and dancers such as Simone Forti, David Gordon, Steve Paxton, Meredith Monk, Lucinda Childs, Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown (Dunning, 1996).

In retrospect and in my eyes, these three individuals were very instrumental in establishing the momentum for the origins of the postmodern dance era of the 1960's. Here you have a composer who based his compositions on the I Ching – a Chinese classic text which describes a symbol system used to identify order in chance events and commonly used for divination, but for Cage became a tool to compose using chance; he meets and begins a collaboration with

dancer/choreographer Merce Cunningham who adopts this method into his general philosophy of movement and creation; who meets Robert Dunn who becomes one of his dance class accompanists and who called Cage one of the greatest learning experiences of his life (Edsall, 1997). Continuing with Dunn's dance composition students who approached the Judson Church in order to get permission to present their first performance on July of 1962 which, then, became the origins of the postmodern dance era.

So many tributaries flowing into the larger idea that was the Judson Dance Theater (JDT). Yet, it was two in particular which draw attention to each other because of the perspectives they shared as well as those they did not.

Cunningham and the Judson movement both shared the concepts of:

- No narrative, no theme, no intention, no emotional references.
- Abandonment of the idea of criterion based on beauty or expressive qualities.
- Rejecting the need of communicating something or coming from an interior impulse.

The single most important difference being Cunningham's incorporation of ballet vocabulary into his dance classes and, more importantly, his choreographies in direct contrast to JDT's rejection of all structured dance movement.

From all this innovation in the 1960's, my mind has a very difficult time finding a balance between the JDT period with that which brought Merce Cunningham to the forefront of the postmodern era. Clearly, one preceded the other yet, if it was Cunningham's philosophical perspectives which were paving the way for the avant-garde of the 1960's, then, how does a group of individuals who base their philosophy on pedestrian movements and rejection of structured, codified techniques and styles...accommodate the structured, ballet oriented movement vocabulary utilized by the Cunningham technique?

Merce Cunningham

From the beginning of his collaboration with John Cage in 1942, continuing with the series of concerts and tours in 1943, Merce Cunningham utilized this period of time for the purpose of exposing his new ideas concerning dance. Onward to 1953, he created a group in Black Mountain College (North Carolina) that allowed him to further develop a method full of new artistic postulates. He sought innovation from almost all of the possible perspectives: choreographic, compositional, technical-interpretative, musical, philosophical and others. It is during this period of time where he sets forth the concepts of postmodern dance which, then, become ingrained in the minds and bodies of many dancers of the time. To this day, we can feel the reverberations of this wave of thought from the mind and body of Merce Cunningham.

In the summer of 2000, I met Merce Cunningham in Vienna, Austria at the ImpulsTanz Festival. Many of the faculty members during that summer had met at a hotel to, among other things, have the opportunity of individually sitting and talking to Mr. Cunningham. One after another, dance teachers, performers, personalities some of which were viewed with high regard in the world of dance sat wide eyed and looking insignificant alongside one of the most famous modern dance artists of the 20th Century. I would have liked to have heard some of the conversations, but it was not possible since the atmosphere was as solemn as a Buddhist temple full of monks in prayer.

Throughout my dance life while in NYC and afterwards, I never really felt an affinity to Mr. Cunningham's work. For me, his work was bereft of the qualities in dance I most revered: passion, warmth, vulnerability a mirror to the human condition. Had I known then what I know now I would have liked to have asked him more relevant questions. Questions such as: Was your meeting with John Cage the catalyst which helped formulate your philosophy of dance and art or were your concepts and beliefs already in place and your meeting merely a confirmation of those convictions? That answer, by the way, came to me after discovering Cunningham adopted Cage's idea of chance in 1953 out of fascination for the

movement of the human body (Emmerik, 2009). Another question could have been: Did those beliefs did that philosophy ever waiver? In other words, did the years bring any change in the view of life and of dance? This question would have been very interesting for me because it was clear he and John Cage shared the same belief system concerning art, music and dance. Whether one inspired the other is of no consequence to me since, in the end, the philosophy itself was shared by them. What would have been very interesting would be knowing whether time had altered any part of their belief system? Were there any discussions later in life which brought into question the choices from their youth with regards to some aspects of their concepts?

It has been my experience that when a person is younger they can be quite adamant about what they believe in that nothing will make them change their minds, regardless of what people might say or what the mind and heart might whisper in a moment of introspection. The only force which has the power to change such a deeply embedded belief system is Time.

My question could have, would have been 'Mr. Cunningham, did Time bring with it a certain realization that to be vulnerable, to express human emotion is ok?' To acknowledge the full gamut of the human condition, full of emotions which are inherently built into our DNA is ok. The question remains: do we negate those feelings when speaking of the aesthetics of dance, music of Life? Do we bring them onstage with us?

In life, as in dance, we are moving, we are walking, running, jumping, we are feeling, we are crying, we are laughing, we are sad, we are joyful. When done with taste and a sublime sense of timing, these emotions can be transformed into reflections of the human condition. They need not be demeaned or relegated to a purgatory of actions which require hiding or, worse, sterilization in order to be deemed worthy of the stage. They need not be eviscerated of their value so as to conform to a philosophy based on detachment. These emotions are in our DNA and so, therefore, they simply require a good eye to guide them through the labyrinth that is the path towards artistic integrity and aesthetic value.

I brought up my meeting with Merce Cunningham because it is precisely the

issue of emotions, or lack of, the use of narrative, of the significance of the relationship between music and dance, between two dancers in a duet, between the different elements utilized onstage to bring a choreography to life: dance, music, costumes, decor, lighting which is at the forefront of this investigation and in conflict with all that is human.

The radical upheaval in the world of postmodern dance somehow presented an incongruity the likes of which I could and cannot find peace with. The contradiction, for instance, between the rebellion in the 1960's against the established modern techniques of the previous generations and the resulting choreographic output of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company is a mystery to me. Together with Lucinda Childs and James Waring, both involved in establishing the Judson Dance Theater, they and Merce Cunningham utilized classical ballet as their movement vocabulary of choice.

With regards to these three choreographers and their work, how does a postmodern defection from all structured movement styles result in the maintaining of the classical ballet structure as the foundation of its movement vocabulary? It is, precisely, from this revolt where I would imagine the free spirit, the supple torso, expressive dancing would emerge. Instead, the world is treated to a stripping down of emotion in dance, a torso which when used to do so without manifesting itself through the gestural potential of the arms and hands. Granted, Cunningham's philosophical perspectives had, by the 1960's, already been implemented on his company and it is generally acknowledged that his avant-garde perspectives set the tone and laid the foundation for the wave of minimalistic dancing to come.

With all due respect for a person who remained faithful to his beliefs, who was steadfast in his pursuit of excellence with regards to his creations, Merce Cunningham deserves all the accolades of the world. Having said that, the tenets upon which his philosophy of dance is based as well as the results which can be attributed to them, remain detached and distanced – to my sensibilities – from the body's potential for being the conduit between the inner self and the world around us an inner mirror capable of reflecting the full spectrum of emotion with all its weaknesses, strengths, angst, joys and shades of the human story. Denial of this

is inconceivable.

At the risk of being accused of dance blasphemy, Mr. Cunningham's approach to dance and the creative process could have been the reason for the seismic shift in the foundation of an art whose roots reach back to our ancestral desire to communicate and express the human condition through movement. This deviation from our tribal need to convey through dance the preparation for the hunt, for the battle to express to the Gods the need for a strong rain and a good harvest. All of these movement rituals were woven into the fabric of a people whose sole wish was communication.

Mr. Cunningham's desire to disconnect these innate qualities in dance from the human equation has always been difficult for me to reconcile. His philosophical perspectives on dramaturgy, composition, music, scenery, interpretation sent tremors through the dance world dislodging the visceral nature of man from his connection to the earth. My wish has been to examine how his concepts, and others who believed as he did, might have played a role in the state of choreographic creations in the last fifty years. Such an examination would not be complete without bringing to light how some of the other individuals of the 1960's postmodern dance rebellion moved forward with their creative agendas: Lucinda Childs, James Waring, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer and Anna Halprin, to name a few.

I cannot speak to the caliber of work created by the other personalities from the Judson Dance Theater era. I can only comment on some of the elements which, for me, connected them to the principles proposed by, seemingly, all of the founders of the Judson Church era.

Lucinda Childs

Lucinda Child's use of classical ballet's vocabulary reminds me of Cunningham's need to utilize ballet movement to transport his ideas. 'Judson made me interested in dance, but it also made me feel torn between different things – technique, working outside the dance vocabulary, using objects and texts'

(Sulcas, 2001: 67).

Child's work was based on minimalist movement which crossed the space forming different patterns by executing simple steps which were repeated in diverse ways yet never repeating themselves, much like Cunningham's work.

James Waring

James Waring's dances sometimes looked like Merce Cunningham's with their decentralized use of space, collage formats, disconnected structures but balletic carriage but his method was based on intuition rather than chance. Waring abandoned narrative and dramatic structure in the mid-1950s, creating atmospheres (often nostalgic) referring lovingly and archly to variety dancing and ballet, and mixing musical as well as dancing styles (including ordinary and idiosyncratic gestures). Waring was a gentle humorist, sometimes parodying other dance genres, often close to camp (Banes, 1980: 8).

Choreographer David Gordon, who first danced professionally in Waring's company, describes Waring's process:

'Jimmy [Waring] was an education for me, as he was for most people who came in contact with him. ... [He] taught me about art and developed my taste ... Jimmy's approach was whimsical. His way of working led you – or led me at any rate – to accept any idea as valid simply because I'd thought of it. I thought of it and I kept it, and what came next was what I thought of next. I don't believe Jimmy meant to absolve me of all responsibility for my work, but I got the impression that wild intuitive guessing was all I had to do to make art. I never threw anything away. I remember distinctly Jimmy's saying, 'If you don't like it now, you can get to like it. If you can't get to like it, who says you have to like it?' The point of it was to demystify art and free the artist from the limitations of his own taste. There was a great sense of liberation that stemmed from John Cage's championing of this philosophy, and Jimmy, among others, was establishing alternatives to the kind of teaching that had dominated modern-dance composition up until then.'

(Croce, 1982)

Other members of the Judson Church movement all embraced the same principles yet, not all used the classical ballet vocabulary in defining their choreographic intention. The majority of the remaining members rejected all structured dance movement. From Trisha Brown's use of ropes and harnesses and later her pedestrian or simple movement styles; to Steve Paxton's approach to a movement vocabulary which included the pedestrian world around him (walking, sitting, eating, etc.); to Yvonne Rainer's neutrality in her dances, presenting the objective presence of the human body and its movements and refusal to project a persona or create a narrative within her dance; to Anna Halprin's abandonment of stylized forms of modern technique to create her own way of reproducing the art of everyday life.

Trisha Brown

Of all the Judson Dance Theater founders, Trisha Brown was the only one whose performances I was able to experience while living in New York City. The first was *Walking On The Wall* where she used equipment such as ropes and harnesses to secure the dancers while they walked on or down the walls of the building. In 1983, I attended a performance at The Brooklyn Academy of Music's New Wave Festival where she collaborated with Robert Rauschenberg (set design) and an original score by performance artist Laurie Anderson. Unlike Merce Cunningham and John Cage, who worked separately on projects and left it to the viewer to put the elements together, Brown and her collaborators worked toward a shared vision.

Lastly, while performing at the American Dance Festival with the Jose Limon Dance Company, I saw an evening of her choreographies which confirmed for me my initial reaction to her work.

Like Cunningham, I felt Brown's connection to the Judson Church concepts:

- no narrative, no theme, no intention, no emotional references
- abandonment of the idea of criterion based on beauty or expressive qualities

- rejecting the need of communicating something or coming from an interior impulse

These were what rendered their work void of any expression, impassive, bordering on apathetic. These are not qualities I think of when I think of the sheer enjoyment and power of movement.

Steve Paxton

Before developing Contact Improvisation in 1972, Paxton was fascinated with the human body. His approach to a movement vocabulary included the pedestrian world around him (Reynolds & McCormick, 2003: 409). He was known for eliminating any outside influences that would prevent the piece from just being accepted how it was (Reynolds & McCormick, 2003: 408). Paxton minimized the differences between the audience and the performer. In turn, his movement vocabulary became fragments of 'everyday' movement mechanics and this held a world of possibilities for individual potential (Banes, 1979: 71). Not only was Paxton a revolutionary to the changing world of dance around him but his experimentation with movement and the structure of the human body crafted a different version of what it was to be a dancer. He changed and challenged the aspects of traditional modern dance. Today dancers, performers, choreographers, and teachers from around the world have incorporated some form of his teachings of Contact Improvisation into their studies.

Yvonne Rainer

In the 1960's, the nuts and bolts of emotional life, comprised the unseen, or should I say, unseemly (inappropriate, crude) underbelly of high U.S. minimalism. While some of us aspired to the lofty and cerebral plane of a quotidian (daily, ordinary, commonplace) materiality, our unconscious lives unraveled with intensity and melodrama that inversely matched their absence in the boxes, portals and jogging our austere sculptural and choreographic creations.

The language of specific emotional experience already familiar outside the avant-garde art world in drama, novels, cinema, comic books and soap opera promised all the ambivalent pleasures and terrors of the experiences themselves. Seduction, passion, rage, betrayal, grief and joy, for instance. However, the terms or formal conditions of my new world would remain tied to the disjunctive (divisive) and aleatory (chance, unpredictable) procedures which had laid claim to my earliest development as an artist via the ideas of John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg. In a nutshell, this mindset can be characterized as a refusal of narrative and a deep distrust of the telling and shaping strategies of fiction and history.

(Where's the Passion? Where's the Politics?, 2016)

Yvonne Rainer's words strike a chord within me because she seems to be expressing what I have felt to be the underlying reason some artists from the Judson Church era, created as they did. She seems to be acknowledging the fact that even though they were all experiencing and living in a world full of emotions from the drama of day to day life in a big city, their mindset of 'refusal of narrative, of a deep distrust of the telling and shaping strategies of fiction and history' (Where's the Passion? Where's the Politics?, 2016) was what insulated them from the realities of life. Their 'choreographic creations' seemed to mask the 'intensity and melodrama' of what was actually happening in their unconscious lives.

Anna Halprin

Anna Halprin seems like the individual I would most have wanted to get to know and work with. She describes being aware of one's kinesthetic sense as being 'your special sense for being aware of your own movement and empathizing with others' (Halprin, 1995: 33).

'A lifetime of passion and devotion probing the nature of dance and asking why it so important as a life force. I find great excitement in sharing my deep love of dance with ordinary and diverse people. Their unique creativity inspires me to make dances that grow out of our lives. I want to integrate life and art so that as our art expands our life deepens

and as our life deepens our art expands. I continue to believe in the shining potential set forth by all of this work, in its evolution from rebellion to expansion to community to healing and back again to the natural world.'

(Anna Halprin, 2008)

For me, this is a person who, in a period of her life, experienced and lived a time of exploration, of camaraderie with her fellow artists, of embracing a philosophy of perspectives on art and dance which shaped her early years as an artist in New York City. The concept of Minimalism which was shared by the majority if not all of the members of Judson Church movement, evolved in each of them. Some continued on this path, some took their ideas into film, others like Anna Halprin transformed those perspectives into life affirming, healing processes which not only helped her overcome colon cancer but also inspired her to use these tools of the body, movement, dialogue, voice, drawing, improvisation, performance, and reflection, to provoke others to explore themselves and use art as a therapy to heal themselves (Halprin, 1995: 242).

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

As I reflect on the lives of the individuals who came before us in this dance universe of ours, I come away with a sense of empathy towards much of what was experienced by those early dance pioneers. My affinity to those individuals, each with their feelings, thoughts and histories, allows me an opening, a window to the life situations which might have existed within their world during the historical trajectory of modern dance's origins on through to the present. The individuals who all were on this journey, were living proof of the word 'evolution'.

We, as species, have needed to find ways to survive the environment we lived in. On all levels possible, we overcame obstacles which kept us from moving forward into the future. After emerging from the water, to standing on two feet, to crossing oceans and climbing mountains in order to find a better life for ourselves, we survived to this day because of our need for something more than what was in

front of us. We, as dancers, have done the same. When we could not exist in a world which was created for the elite, for the wealthy, we climbed over the walls of imaginary castles and mores which isolated us from expressing ourselves in ways which were real for us. No more of the classically structured dance world of the royal courts. No more of the stifling rules which governed expression and creativity. The pioneering spirit of our dance ancestors energized our search for a better world in which we could liberate our bodies and minds from the limitations of a structured world of dance. From the origins of modern dance to the beginnings of postmodern dance to the present, dancers have evolved as in all other areas of life. We have seen what is in front of us and we have responded by creating alternative forms of expression in order to survive the wave of conformity and complacency threatening our human spirit.

In order to have survived this threat, we have needed to utilize whatever is at our disposal. It is in this very moment of survival where the fittest evolved. The most clever, most ingenious, most self-aware individual artist survived the battle with past structures and systems. These independent figures opened the doors to liberating our bodies and our minds allowing us to discover another world where anything and everything could be the basis for a choreographic work. This concept blew open the doors separating the dancer from the non-dancer. Now, the opening has grown so wide that everyone can come through. And they have been coming through ever since.

In the case of postmodern dance and its need for creating an alternative to the dance environment of the time, it could be said these pioneers used every tool at their disposal in order to create change. The most important tool, from my perspective, was the human body. I say this because the cataclysmic changes which took place not only in the early 20th century modern dance revolt but also in the 1950's and 1960's insurrection, were changes which came about, first and foremost, because the human body yearned for ways to let its spirit run free. The origins of this longing could be debated. Was this change coming about due to physical limitations or was it philosophical in nature? Whichever the case, what is clear, a change was coming and postmodern dance was at the crest of this

colossal wave engulfing the world of dance.

In my desire to fuel this debate, I contacted a few of my colleagues who I danced with or who themselves danced in New York during the 1970's. After stating the premise of the question: did the changes in modern dance in the late 1960's and 1970's happen because of physical limitations or were they brought on because of philosophical beliefs? It became clear that the majority of those I contacted were of the belief that the physical limitation of most of the dancers during that revolutionary era was a deciding factor in the creative as well as of the performance process.

After speaking with Jennifer Scanlon, formerly with the Jose Limón Dance Company as well as being its Associate Director for many years, she agreed as well. The majority of the performances she attended were danced and created by minimally trained dancers yet, she was of the opinion that other companies such as the Merce Cunningham Company and the Lucinda Childs Dance had technically trained dancers but they seemed to be performing without any emotion whatsoever. This to her was at the center of her disagreement with this type of work. She couldn't understand how dancing with no emotional intent could even be possible. According to her, even dancing a minimalist, abstract work could contain an emotionless, emotional intent (06/06/2016).

My other interviewee, Marla Bingham, who danced with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Jennifer Muller/The Works and the Kazuko Hirabayashi Dance Theater, also felt as if the performances in those days were populated with dancers who had physical limitations and so, therefore, created works according to those limitations. Having said that, she added that she experienced a performance by a choreographer whom she could not remember, who really stimulated her interest. He gave the dancers very simple movement yet, was able to do so much with the very little he had. The formations were creative, the musicality was very present throughout the entire piece. She went so far as to say she learned a lot from the performance of that piece. She learned she didn't always have to be so technical in her own creations. She became aware of the fact that she, most times, would do too much in every aspect of her own creations. Her appreciation for the

work she saw was evident in the change of her mood. She became more animated when speaking of the clever way in which the choreographer moved the dancers around the stage. His use of formations were subtle yet, to the point. His creative way of bringing all the elements of the performance together inspired her to the point that had I not asked her the next question, she would have continued with her glowing review of that piece long ago. She went further when she said that what separated the good ones from the bad ones during that era, was style. Some had it, others were clearly following trends of the day. But those with style were 'sustainable artists'. They created works which did not follow someone else's lead. Their style carried them from piece to piece. One such artist, according to Marla, was Dianne McIntyre who has sustained a level of excellence throughout her 40 year career. An artist with style. Neither felt the philosophical perspectives of the personalities coming from the Judson Church movement and others following that era, to be the reasons for the performances and creations of these individuals (30/08/2016).

Then I was very interested in asking Caroline Kleindienst what she remembered most in working with Anna Halprin. Her words were part respectful, part humbling but always with the sense of honor of having have worked with a teacher such as Ms. Halprin. When I asked her about the creative process, she immediately began speaking about the RSVP cycles which, in turn, led to 'scoring' (20/08/2016). Scoring is based on process. A score is a series of activities in space, over a period of time with a group of people. This process would involve all the individuals connected to the process: the lighting technician, the dancers, the musician, etc. Everyone contributing to the process of creation. Students were asked to come up with a theme which would then lead to writing the intention of the piece. Activities for realizing the theme were explored. These activities were then eliminated, added, reinvented, moved around so as to recycle the material. From the way Caroline described it, working with Anna was the epitome of teacher wanting the students to discover on their own. Community projects were very important for her. Everyone participating in the creative process was what motivated her. We concluded our conversation with the thought that what was

important for Anna Halprin was the stimulation which came from dance reflecting and relating to what is real in her life.

Essentially, Anna Halprin seems to be one of the individuals who truly created her work from following a philosophical approach to determining the movement which would express the desired thematic intention of the piece. Because modern dance and ballet stopped feeling appropriate for her, she continued with her search of rediscovering movement. So yes, the basis for her exploration was rooted in the rejection of the established dance techniques yet, her evolution took her through pathways which, eventually, resulted in her allowing the beliefs of her concepts, the RSVP cycles, scoring, to inform her movement decisions in the creative process.

I am able to identify with both sides very easily. The physical need to express myself in ways other than the modern techniques which inhabited my body's muscle memory was the overriding factor in my search. It is because of my personal experiences with creating dances, where I felt I had to explore and live the changes in my body. It is through the process of living these changes that I have been able to emerge with a dance language which has, at its roots, the earth as its home and nature's elements, as its expressions, gestures and voicings of humanity's condition. Both, my physical limitations and my beliefs as to what and how I wanted to create, were actively participating in this process.

The dance vocabulary coming through my body had and has as its goal, the desire to communicate. Very rarely do I create something which is about nothing. Whether it be bringing to the stage the awe inspiring gift possessed by the migratory birds who must, because of their instinctive need, travel South during the winter or, whether it is about expressing the feeling of isolation and aloneness of a single human being, the dance language must be able to convey this or, at the very least, risk falling flat on its face in the attempt.

My search for source movement which will give voice to this instinct is a challenge for me. More importantly, it is my intuitive necessity to communicate, to have a dialogue with myself in order to remain connected to what is real for me, to what is of essence in my life. This dialogue with myself keeps me with my finger

on the pulse of my existence. Staying current with the growth and evolution of my inner world is as important as breathing. As I do this, I realize I become the conduit through which all of nature's qualities and emotions, good and bad, pass through and express themselves, first, to me and then through me to the world outside.

I speak of my need to tune in to my body's desire to move in its own way because I imagine this to have been a very strong, motivating factor for the post modern dance pioneers of the Judson Church era. Most of the dance individuals of that era were not necessarily technically trained dancers. Even though there may have been other factors involved in the epic changes of the postmodern dance era, it would be fair to say that many of the individuals involved expressed themselves the best way possible according to and listening to their own body's limitations.

When confronted with a need to express one's self within the concept of utilizing no physically technical framework, a dancer will go with whatever their strengths are. If their strength is limited in its physical and technical scope then, the result will be a less demanding technical approach to movement. This, in an of itself, is not a weakness but, more so, a factor. This lack of physical and technical ability gives rise to the possibility that the insurrection which occurred during the Judson Church era, could have happened because the bodies involved were not able to fit in to the technically demanding requirements of its counterpart in modern dance and, even more so, classical ballet.

It is at this juncture where I feel the specific factor of physical limitation takes over and reshapes and redefines the landscape in which the postmodern dance world chose to call home. That home was a world of wonder and awe because it no longer had any restrictions or limitations for what was right or wrong. The fact that these individuals explored the hidden potential within their physical limitations, was a testament to their survival instinct as well as their creative instinct. In spite of the, sometimes, simplistic approach to movement, this pioneering spirit allowed for so many possibilities in creating and shaping new choreographies.

In all fairness, there were some technically trained dancers who chose to

break away from the structured dance environment of modern dance and classical ballet. They, instead, expressed themselves within a minimalist view of movement which didn't require so much use of all their technically trained vocabulary yet, strived to distill the essence of movement in order to follow their desire and philosophy of not expressing anything in particular.

The majority of individuals involved in this postmodern dance revolt, though, were dancers who didn't have all the technical dance tools available to them. Their body's desire to move and its limitation for doing so opened the door to forms of dance expression and creativity unparalleled in dance up to that point. There was a movement vocabulary which anyone could execute. On one hand, you had a physical limitation which forced you to explore other creative possibilities which did not require strong technical training. On the other hand, you had a philosophy of movement and creation in which the simplest of every day human movement could be used to express these perspectives, while any idea for a choreography was creative, good and should not be judged or discarded.

This newfound freedom of movement created a wave of personalities who stormed through the doors of the postmodern dance world. The acceptance of everything created in the name of art, partly served to dilute the quality and integrity of some dance performances. By creating this environment, though, postmodern dance left itself open to anyone from the street who had a desire to move and create. The Judson Church founders were brave and gifted yet, once the doors flew open, the prism through which dance was being viewed, began to get unfocused. The lines which distinguished between a work of art and an act of abuse of an art form were being blurred.

The end result was that there were no lines to distinguish what was good and what was bad. Everything was good because, conceptually speaking, everything which was thought of and created, was good. This idea runs counter to my desire for communication, my desire to share, to dialogue with others the world I wish to create onstage. If there is a vision of what wants to be projected onstage, then there must be an idea and a language of what will project that vision on to the stage. To allow anything to go onstage for the mere reason of it having been

thought, to me demonstrates lack of vision and a lack of will to carry out that vision. Granted, there are times in moments of creation where one's intention is to, purposely, be vague, abstract or to move for movement's sake. One's vision for a choreographic work could be to communicate nothing, convey nothing. If this is the case, then it should be valid and accepted as a choreographic statement. The creator should have the freedom and right to take such a direction. Yet, if the conceptual foundation is based on always communicating nothing or conveying nothing, then this philosophy becomes stale with its predictability and uninspired in its potential to realize a vision.

My dance performing career existed within a world of technical precision, of physical demands on the body. These demands required a discipline which could only come from constant, daily physical, technical practice. This preparation of the body was to create an instrument so finely tuned that it had the ability to express itself through movement and even, when taken to a higher level, create magic.

The drawback from this process was the inability of the dancer to think or create outside the box. Looking back on my years in dance in New York City, I regret not having been exposed to the Judson Church rebels and their processes. Together with my technical dance training, I feel my search for my own choreographic voice would have taken me to a place where the best of these two worlds could have existed in harmony and creativity.

Having said this, I cannot help feel grateful for having gone through technical dance training. The physical demands of such training always connected me to my roots in sports. The goals were similar: get stronger, be precise with your technique and exercise your willpower to overcome. The key was to be able to utilize these factors, as well as others, in overcoming whatever adversity awaited you, be it an opposing team or the technically and musically demanding moment on stage. It is in this arena of physical demand where I continue to take issue with regards to the minimalist creations of the past decades. Because it is not only the act of acquiring a strong, technical and expressive body, it is also putting into practice the will and the work required to have a choreographic vision and to do whatever necessary to reveal that vision on stage, no matter how long it takes and

no matter the amount of work needed.

I will be the first to admit to the weakness in my dance whereby I first create from the perspective of the technical dance approach. Yet, I can also say that I have the possibility and the potential of leaving that technique on the side and, instead, use minimal, pedestrian or any movement I want, to convey whatever I want. My point is: I am glad my vocabulary of movement has expanded because of my ability to fuse the two processes, technical dance and pedestrian movement. This would not have been the case had I only the Judson Church movement philosophy at the core of my dance career. Continuing with my point, most of the Judson Church pioneers did not have alternatives. They could only express themselves within a given physical limitation. It could be said this attribute could be a positive quality, giving them more freedom to create anything and everything.

Ultimately, the question must be posed: which came first, the chicken or the egg. With regards to the postmodern dance philosophy for creating, did those individuals acknowledge the fact they were at a physical disadvantage when it came time to create and, therefore, created works based on pedestrian movement because it was the most accessible, the only alternative available to them? Or, did their philosophy for creating choreographies dictate the need to express themselves in a more minimalistic, pedestrian manner?

Whichever the case, the end result is a dance environment which spearheaded the race for innovation. Acknowledging the reality of innovation's double edged sword, the desire for choreographic creativity also required it to welcome the possibility for mediocrity and pseudo artistic endeavors onto the stage. When all is said and done, once the doors flew open and anyone was able to pass through into the post modern dance world, nothing was ever going to be the same. This openness, this inclusiveness gave rise to the possibility of the genuine, original, exciting work of art emerging from the massive influx of human creativity.

CONCLUSION

All of these contributors to the postmodern dance evolution of the 1960's, brought with them their ideals, their philosophies, their idiosyncrasies, their insecurities, their talents, in general, they brought with them their entire histories into the dance universe which was being created at that very moment in time. This was a period where reverberations from the counterculture of the 1960's created an atmosphere of questioning, of exploration, of rejection of past modern dance techniques. Could it not have been possible for some of these contributors to post modern dance to have brought with them such a minimal lack of knowledge of technical dance training that, consequently, limited them in the world of its traditional modern dance counterpart? Could these limitations have created a need to find other forms of expression and, in so doing, transcend their limitations by pushing the boundaries of dance towards unknown creative territories?

According to Yvonne Rainer, who was the Judson Dance Theater's designated spokesperson, 'I had a sense of my potential. That I was going to make something out of this recalcitrant, un-dancerly body. And I was going to carve my own way'. (*Feelings Are Facts: The Life of Yvonne Rainer*, 2015)

To each member of the Judson Dance Theater who carved their own way, including all who participated in performances and classes, as well as all who were loyal audience members, to Merce Cunningham and John Cage and all the musicians, visual artists and actors who for many, many years inhabited the postmodern dance world, and finally, to those following in their footsteps: I believe with all the good that remains on this Earth, the circle will return into itself and dance will aspire to something more than urinating on the stage.

I have begun the filtering process after which I hope to retain all the information on all the individuals who have populated this story, a story which belongs to all of us who love and care for the well-being of dance in the 21st century. Their courage and fortitude in light of all that was placed in front of them was, and is, of great value and inspiration to those of us who wish to continue this

adventure into the future of dance.

Each and every participant in this journey, beginning in the early 20th century, deserves our utmost respect and appreciation. Regardless of the inevitable disagreements we may have with philosophical perspectives, with incomprehensible inclinations of choices made, what is certain is that there is no progress without innovation. Without two opposing energies going at each other's artistic soul, there is no life on or off stage. Without the friction created by ideas and concepts pitted against each other, there is no fire. If there is no fire, Life and the performance stage is an insipid wasteland.

A toast to all who dance and to all who create.

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