

THE COMMUNICATION OF SENSATION
AND
AFFECT AMONGST DANCERS

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AFFECT AMONGST DANCERS

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A Thesis

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Abstract

Drawing from current anthropological theory of affect, this thesis explores the communication of sensation and affect amongst professional dancers. According to Brian Massumi, affect is about the body's ability to be affected and to affect others. Affecting others opens one to being personally affected and visa versa. Teresa Brennan argues that bodies are porous and receptive to affective non-verbal transmissions. In harmony with these theories, I explore how the communication of affect during dance performance allows both performers and audience to feel communal moments of visceral affectivity.

This thesis adds to the ongoing debate in social theory about whether the body is active or passive (one's position in the debate might also presume that active bodies are "better" than passive bodies or visa versa) since my research findings indicate that, amongst my informants, the body is positively perceived as simultaneously active and passive. In other words, the body simultaneously receives and transmits affect while communicating. This highlights the view that the body is porous and not-self contained as has been argued by both Hegel and Freud.

This thesis has forced me to struggle with what communication means and how I, as a budding anthropologist, would like to communicate in a way that does not require translating or changing experiences to fit another framework of knowledge. The word affect is itself disruptive when set against certain "master" frameworks such as neo-liberalism where great value is placed on speed, moving fast and distraction from feeling. For my informants, moving slowly, being "transparent", existing "in the moment" and

revealing vulnerability were essential to the communication of affect and have a disruptive quality when set against neo-liberal values.

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Petra Rethmann for encouraging me to write about dance. Dr. Rethmann's guidance has helped to clarify and challenge my thinking while expanding my knowledge considerably. Her guidance has also brought me closer to areas of life that I feel passionate about. I would like to thank Dr. Kostalena Michelaki for her help and support throughout this process. I would also like to thank my husband Aaron Kelly for his immense generosity in supporting me emotionally and spiritually, and for continuing to challenge me intellectually throughout this journey. Finally, I would like to thank my Mom Hilary White-Nunn for her never-ending ability to inspire.

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Preface

August, 2007

...dances...

Inhaling, exhaling, relaxing her body, feeling the weight of her body. Closing her eyes for a moment and feeling the soft, lubricated warmth surrounding her eyes... letting that feeling nourish her as she breathes. Opening her eyes she sees as she feels, using her eyes as she uses her fingertips to touch; imagining a warm wind blowing across her face, listening to the sound of that wind through her skin. Feeling with her skin as if she could see through it textures and light.¹

Sensation is particularly heightened for me right now because my Mother recently passed away. Her sudden passing has intensified my appreciation of the material reality of being alive. It is for this reason that I have decided to frame this thesis with some experiences that occurred before her death which brought me closer to the realm of visceral affect. The choice to include these personal experiences points to my use of subjective and phenomenological experiences to inform my research. My reasons for taking this approach will be discussed further in the introduction.

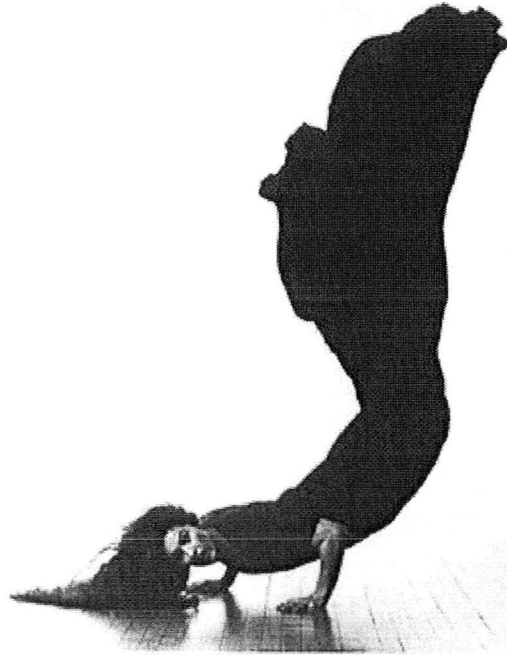
In the few weeks I had with my Mom before her passing to love her and care for her, there were many moments of intense affectivity. One night while sitting with my Mom a few days before she passed away, time seemed to change. She could hardly speak anymore and seemed largely unconscious. Her eyes were mostly closed but I sensed that she was still aware. I started to tell her about what I could hear and see out the window. *“There is a beautiful soft wind with an undercurrent of coldness and*

¹ Inspiration for talking in the third person came from *Ordinary Affects* by Kathleen Stewart (2007) and from the almost spectral experience my informants spoke of during performance.

briskness that hints of winter coming.” As I spoke, I realized she would never experience the feeling or sound of wind again, let alone fall, winter or any other weather or seasonal change. *“The wind is blowing against the leaves and the leaves are flickering in the light. I imagine the leaves are starting to turn red in Toronto.”* I could feel the intensity of change and time passing everywhere in my body. This intense feeling of time may have been heightened with the knowledge that she had not even a month to say goodbye to the world. The next day she was determined (even though she could barely communicate anymore) to lie facing the window. Perhaps her need to look out the window indicated a curiosity that still drove her to want to experience material and sensory existence. Or, perhaps her need to look out the window says something about her readiness to be free of an attachment to the body and the material world. She was so beautiful... Sitting next to her, she seemed saturated by the light and colour coming from outside the window. It was such a dense feeling; my heart was tearing and yet I couldn’t cry - it wasn’t about me. Again, I could feel time expanding to create space for this dense moment of affect that I seemed to be sharing with my Mother. These experiences have made me really appreciate colour, light and living material experience. I have included the above experience because I want to be able to write as I live and dance, through sensation and affectivity. My hope is that this will open a space for others to feel their bodies and material existence.

My goal is to write in a way that creates a visceral response in the reader. With the same intensity and humanity that came from all of the people I spoke to about this topic. There are certain themes that arose from these discussions that were important

elements involved in communication: an honesty or transparency which reveals the complexity of humanity, an openness which allows a two way flow of energy creating a dialogue of affect and the use of imagery to spark the imagination. Many dancers also held the view that the more one is able to be aware of sensory and affective experiences related to living in the present, the more one is able to feel their human existence. Indeed, there is a plasticity of affect. Meaning that the more you become aware of moments of affect the more frequently, intensely and quickly you feel them. All of the above elements which help one to communicate have an inclusive quality which allows for community through the sharing of human experience. In other words, for my informants, the body is able to communicate because it is not self-contained; the body can be both a receiver and sender of affect. The body is simultaneously active and passive as an affective communicator.



Margie Gillis in *FLUID STABILITY* (Greenfield 2008).

Introduction

This is a materialist study in that it is about the body's sensory experiences in the moment. The body is not fixed in any categorical way but, rather, malleable, open and immediate. Being saturated by the immanence of visceral affect, the felt understanding of the body deepens. Energy, or life force, momentarily becomes recognized through the dancers.

I was compelled to do research on the communication of sensation and affect for a number of reasons. My own experience as a professional dancer coupled with my experience in anthropology inspired certain questions, in part, due to a cross pollination of concepts from the two disciplines and, in part, due to a frustration with how dance has been written about in academic dance and anthropological literature. In preparation for this thesis, my background reading seemed to be missing some of the most profound and life-changing elements of dance. Discussions of dancers seem to revolve largely around their dysfunctions and their puppet like existences. These discussions, for me, are missing the incredible sensitivity and awareness that dancers develop. Discussions also often veer in the direction of giving detailed notation of dance movement without any of the political, spiritual, aesthetic or affective intention motivating the movement. To add to this, social theory has tended to portray the body as passive and self-contained. Neither of these concepts of the body seem to describe the complexity of my informants experiences through dance.

According to Todd Ochoa, Hegel held the view that ambiguous sensations indicated flawed moments because the body was a passive receiver to a visceral

transmission. In his way of thinking, reception is passive and inferior to penetration. Self-containment, or the sovereign body, was upheld against plasticity, openness and immediacy in order to enforce a masculine European subjectivity (Ochoa 2004). However, based on this research, sense experience and affect do seem communicable. My informants felt a comfort with sensation and energy passing through their bodies. The communication of energy and affect amongst the participants is considered a healthy expression of humanity and not pathological as Hegel (Ochoa 2004) and Freud have suggested (Brennan 2004).

I will begin this thesis with a discussion of the theoretical and methodological approaches that have inspired my thinking. Once this groundwork has been laid and I have situated myself within this exploration, I will explore how the communication of affect is learned. This will involve looking at the development or re-learning of the skill of picking up on kinaesthetic, visceral and affective impulses. Many of my informants spoke of ways in which they can prepare and open their sensory bodies to receive these transmissions of affect as well as allowing these transmissions to pass through their bodies – funnelling their energies in unique ways depending on how the transmissions interact with their “being in the moment”. Preparing the body in this way requires varying approaches such as meditation, eating specific foods, specific ways of rehearsing, visualization, memory recall, human interaction or isolation, listening to certain music, reading certain poetry or literature and looking at visual art.

The moment of affect and communication of affect is a moment difficult to describe with words since words can easily fall short of mimicking the essence of visceral

affect. In the section, “The Communication of Sensation and Affect”, I will draw heavily from the words of my informants in the hopes of picking up on the affective impulses experienced. Many informants spoke of the importance of improvisation, “being in the moment”, or “being in the space”. In many cases my informants were affected by internal triggers of imagination and memory. While affected, some of my informants spoke of sensing time, space and music in different and intense ways. Also expressed, was a sense that affect was being shared by the performers, musicians and audience creating communal moments of affectivity. There is power in our ability to communicate visceral affect. Some informants spoke directly about the relationship between this power and their political hopes for a kind of freedom and openness in the body. Brian Massumi has also equated this power of affect with political freedom and openness (Shouse 2005). This final section of my thesis will explore hope in relation to sensation and affect by looking at how diverse sensory experiences allow for an opening up of affective and sensory possibilities that inspire hope.

Theory: Affect As Interaction

The word “affect” seems to carry a variety of possible meanings. The word itself has been traced to the Latin *affectus* which can be translated into “passion” or “emotion” (Brennan, 2004:3). Ancient Greek taxonomies of emotion have been found to include: love, lust, hate, anger, envy, shame and guilt. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is the first philosophical text to discuss affect in terms of “anger and mildness, love and hatred, fear

and confidence, shame and esteem, kindness and unkindness, pity and indignation, envy and emulation.” (Brennan, 2004:4)

To understand affect in the context of dance, the main thinkers I am drawing from Teresa Brennan (2004) and Brian Massumi (2002). Both Brennan’s and Massumi’s concepts of affect have helped me to understand the depth of my informants’ experiences. In contrast to the above concepts of affect, Brennan (2004) and Massumi (2002) argue that affect is more than a personal feeling or emotion. Rather, it is about the body’s ability to be affected (to feel) and to affect others (causing others to feel). The two work together: affecting others opens one to being personally affected and visa versa. Affect happens in the moment and is not fixed (Brennan 2004 and Massumi 2002). Affect is subjective but is also more than that, because it is communicated and shared. It relates to a direct sense of being human and how we connect to the world and others (Massumi 2002).

Massumi is critical of using emotional terms since our lexicon of emotion does not adequately convey the possibilities of affect. Instead, our English lexicon of emotional terms tends to categorize affect and limit the possibilities. Further to this, Brennan shows how categorical notions of affect (anger, happiness, sadness) have been heavily intertwined with psychological notions of the body as contained and the ultimate source of these feelings (Brennan 2004). Neither of these concepts of affect as something categorical or contained within the body seem applicable to the experiences of my informants. However, the following quote by Massumi seems to mirror the way many dancers spoke about their experience of affect and sensation while performing.

The autonomy of affect is [...]its openness[...]. Something remains unactualised, inseparable from but unassimilable to any particular, functionally anchored perspective... When the continuity of affective escape is put into words, it tends to take on positive connotations. For it is nothing less than the perception of one's own vitality, one's sense of aliveness, of changeability (often described as 'freedom'). One's 'sense of aliveness' is a continuous nonconscious self-perception... It is the perception of this self-perception, its naming and making conscious, that allows affect to be effectively analysed – as long as a vocabulary can be found for that which is imperceptible but whose escape from perception cannot but be perceived, as long as one is alive. (Massumi 2002:35-36)

Gilles Deleuze also shows how affect is about a capacity for interaction (or force of emergence) between the affected body and an affecting body (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:xvi). The idea of becoming a character in a dance work is a good example of this affective interaction. Informants spoke of adopting specific movements and forms when dancing a character role. This new relation to the body allowed the dancers bodies to uproot themselves and become part of the other character. In this scenario, the transmission of affect goes two ways, the dancer affects the character and the character affects the dancer. This affective interaction was also felt with space, time, music, other performers and the audience highlighting the porousness of the body that Spinoza perceived.

Though Spinoza makes repeated references to 'individuals' it is clear from his conception of bodies and minds and affects as manifolds that for him the prior category is what he calls the 'alliance' or 'relationship'. So affects, for example, occur in an encounter between manifold beings, and the outcome of each encounter depends upon what forms of composition these beings are able to enter into. (Thrift 2008:179)

The use of affect in Deleuze and Guattari (1987) also draws from Spinoza's concepts of the idea, which include a pre-personal feeling of intensity and relate to

transition from one experience to another (Thrift 2008:182). The idea of transition will also come up again in “Communal Moments of Affect” when one dancer explains how being affected by transitions from movement to movement or sensation to sensation reveals one’s vulnerability and humanness and that transparency helps to transmit affect.

Affect and Reflection

Reflecting on affect occurs after the fact and seems to be framed within some measure of understanding or culture. So, what is the relationship between culture and affect? How are sensation and affect conceptualized in terms of experience cross-culturally? In Toronto, the cultural influences on how one perceives affect are likely quite diverse. I do not presume to know what the cultural genealogy of perceived sensation and affect are for my informants or for the Toronto modern dance community more broadly. However, I do feel that what is being experienced in this community occurs within the conditions of a predominantly Anglo-American cultural backdrop. This dance community does not exist in a bubble, it feels the push and pull of Anglo-American beliefs and attitudes.

To engage with this intersection of culture and affect I have found Jason Throops discussion of hypocognition and pre-objectivity very useful. Jason Throop writes about ambiguous or “uncanny” sensations and affects using the term pre-objective experience. He argues that pre-objective experience is pre-conscious reflection whereas, objective experience is consciously reflected upon, categorically structured and articulated (Throop 2005). Pre-objective experience, or visceral affectivity, is challenging in terms of understanding it in relation to theories of culture and consciousness because it exists in

the moment of sensation and how can a moment of sensation be culturally framed? This is why phenomenology has become integral to understanding affect in the context of the Toronto modern dance community. Wilhelm Dilthey, Edmund Husserl, Alfred Shütz and Merleau-Ponty, who all came out of this school of thinking, have been useful for challenging the depth of my analysis of my informants' experiences.

Wilhelm Dilthey, a 19th century German philosopher, argued that pre-objective awareness is the most basic level of experience prior to analysis (Throop 2005). Pre-objective experiences exist on the fringes of our awareness and are often unnoticed according to Dilthey. Phenomenologist Edmund Husserl believed that "pre-predicative" or pre-objective awareness was "sensuous data" (Husserl 1948:74 in Throop 2005:502) developed through memory of experience. In his formulation, past experiences inform consciousness which is in turn what gives form to the "pre-predicative" "substrate" or experience (Throop 2005). Alfred Schütz (1899-1959) adds the element of time to his understanding of pre-objective experience. Pre-objective experience, for Shütz, occurs when consciousness is completely immersed in "the felt flow of duration" (Throop 2005:502). Reflection of this felt duration occurs after it has been experienced. For Schütz, there is a tension between "living experience within the flow of duration and reflection on the experience thus lived through." (Schütz 1932:70 in Throop 2005:502) These "ineffable" experiences "can only be lived but never 'thought'...[and are] in principle incapable of verbalization." (Schütz 1932:53 in Throop 2005:503) I believe this is why affect can be such a powerful way of communicating in the non-verbal form of dance. These concepts of pre-objective experience: rudimentary experience, affect

through memory and alternative perceptions of time, will be discussed further in relation to experiences of my informants in the section entitled “Communication of Affect”.

Merleau-Ponty argues, in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), that history and or memories implant themselves in our bodies and create meaningful experiences as they synthesize with sensation. However, for Merleau-Ponty, pre-objective experience or “pure sensation” can not be understood immediately and can only be understood through analysis after the moment of experience. Thus, in his view, the concept of pre-objective experience is an abstraction. In other words, pre-objective experience doesn’t exist without cultural context and is “...a world constituted from the unnoticed ossification of habituated perceptual acts of constitution.” (Throop 2005:503)

There are some important differences among these theorists. For Dilthey and Husserl, pre-objective sensory experience is registered immediately and is not merely an abstract concept like it is for Merleau-Ponty, who feels these experiences are only understood after analysis and are imbued unconsciously with “culturally patterned habituation” (Throop 2005:503). Where they converge is in the idea that there is a distinction to be made between experiences that can be articulated according to some mode of categorization (hypercognized affect) and experiences that evade structure because they have no language for articulation or culturally shaped conceptual base (hypocognized affect).

One of the most intriguing aspects of this area of research is the uncategorical nature of the material. It is also intriguing because it seems in some ways to exist outside of culture because it occurs spontaneously without analysis. However, even within the

uncategorical nature of affectivity, Throop points out three types of pre-reflective or pre-objective experience. First is a reflection of a “micro-genetic account of those stages of perception where the mind is initially confronted with the unmediated flux of the sensory field before it has been categorically structured according to culturally shaped interpretive frames.” (Throop 2005:504) The second kind of pre-objective experience is explained by Schütz to be resistant to objectification even in a period of reflection. And the third is Husserl’s “natural attitude”, meaning everyday experience which is taken for granted and not reflected upon (Throop 2005:504). These broad understandings of pre-objective experience help to tease apart the fleeting and momentary affective experience in a way that allows for further exploration.

All of my informants spoke of trying to remain outside of rational thought or planned decision making when in the midst of being affected. For example, according to Sean Ling,²

the release, when someone falls to the ground, really affects me. It’s so delicate it hits me. Or a big lift that comes down softly, the release of harsh struggle makes me catch my breath. The emptiness of that tension, the release, the sudden space, surrender to gravity is breath taking. It causes me to inhale or make sounds that just come out spontaneously. I’m pretty analytical, but when this happens I don’t have time to analyze; I just feel it. Sasha Ivanochko in *Four Towers* is the perfect example. I can only respond to those delicate changes she creates. I don’t like analysing those moments. I just want to feel them in the moment, because once you analyse it becomes something else.

In relation to Sean’s experience, the idea of pre-objective experience seems to describe early perception at the intersection of sensation and meaning. This quote by Sean also

² Sean Ling started dancing when he was 18 years old. Sean has been dancing professionally for over 15 years.

reveals an element of analysis in that his experience is also framed by the awareness of his interest in the opposition of tension and release.

The work of anthropologist Robert Levy adds to the discussion of pre-objective affect by distinguishing between “hypercognition” and “hypocognition”. Hypercognition refers to feeling states that have been categorized according to their cultural context and have some level of doctrine about why those feelings have occurred and how to respond to them. Hypocognition, on the other hand, refers to affective experiences that have not been categorically elaborated on in a cultural way.

Whereas hypercognized experiences are those that through heightened cultural elaboration become highly conceptually salient and thus tend to be centers of recurrent attentional focus for individual culture bearers, hypocognized experiences tend to resist or defy explicit forms of representation due to their lack of culturally infused conceptual elaboration and because of the fact that they tend not to evoke the same culturally attuned attentional focus. (Throop 2005:506)

Levy’s use of hyper and hypocognition shows how sensation and affective experience can be conceptualized and articulated differentially, depending on the context. For Levy, individuals can have an immediate pre-objective experience which has been hypercognized but is not reflected upon in the moment of direct experience. All of my informants felt comfortable discussing pre-objective experience, since they all feel a relationship to affective experience through dance. Despite feeling a relationship to the topic, there was no substantial verbal lexicon that allowed us to discuss the topic. We had to improvise invoking images, sounds and memories to aid our discussions. This leads me to believe that pre-objective experience is for the Toronto modern dance community somewhat hypercognized (even if non-verbally) in a wider social context of

hypocognition. More specifically, my informants shared an awareness and a goal of having pre-objective experience without allowing the mind to analyse. The key here is that an awareness and goal of pre-objectivity coupled with a resistance to analysis is shared. Indeed, pre-objective experience without allowing the mind to analyse was the goal. For example, one day I was watching Susanna Hood after class. She has always been one of my favourite performers. She is a master at improvising with her body and her voice. She was moving and I couldn't take my eyes off her. She was so interesting. After she stopped, I asked her if she was improvising. She was. I asked what she was focusing on and she answered, "change". She was trying to just keep doing something different. I asked her where the ideas for movement were coming from and she responded, "my mind and body – I was trying to integrate everything together. As soon as I recognized anything, I dropped it and did something else. In a recent workshop with Benoit Le champ he was saying not to change but to just let go into something else." We talked about what that meant. Susanna felt that to change is very active and purposeful and requires a lot of energy. But to just let something else happen is not passive, but open. We agreed that the semantics of these words are kind of arbitrary. Nonetheless, we agreed that "passive" has a lethargy and weight to it that wasn't a useful feeling in this context. But, "openness" worked because it has an energy to it, a vulnerability and flow to it – it's playful. This relates to Throop's conceptions of hypo and hypercognition in that Susanna was resisting familiarity by trying to stay in a realm of pre-objective and hypocognized feeling, resisting objectification.

A lack of “culturally infused conceptual elaboration” kept the participants of Levy’s study from objectifying their experience. Even after reflection, the feelings remained “vague” and “ambiguous”. This lack of a framework caused people to describe feelings as an internal bodily state such as feeling “heavy” or “fatigued”. In other words, “Levy’s informants communicated through a phenomenological description of their internal bodily states.” (Throop 2005:507) The same was true of my informants who used words like “radiant energy”, “vibrant heat that starts at the base of the sternum” or “visceral spine”. It often took a good portion of the interview to get at these sense experiences due to a lack of cultural framework.

There seems to be a continuum of experience for both hyper- and hypocognition in terms of how they are objectively, reflectively or culturally framed (Throop 2005:504). Depending on one’s awareness of the experience, it might be more or less pre-objective even when hypercognized. Likewise, hypocognized, or less culturally elaborated feelings, might be more or less pre-objective, depending on the level of focus and awareness they receive (Throop 2005:508). According to Throop,

Once in the foreground of awareness, these non-conceptually elaborated experiences are thus to some extent objectified, thereby providing an opportunity for an individual to recruit personal and cultural resources in an attempt to give meaning to the experiences in question. Here a previously non-conceptually mediated experience may be imbued with personal and/or cultural meaning and as such partially or fully objectified and incorporated into the person’s and/or the culture’s experiential repertoire... (Throop 2005:508)

One of my informants spoke about changing a more conceptually elaborated experience imbued with personal meaning into a more pre-objective state that was less conceptually elaborated and more in an affective “zone”. In a memory of dancing

recently, Barbara Pallomina³ said she was feeling awful. Her feelings translated into a “sadness” and “heaviness”. So she used that sadness to ground herself. In other words, she manifested her emotional state physically through her bodily sensations. She attributes this ability to translate her physical sense of emotional heaviness into a quality of movement with a change in focus or a new line of dance. “I think it was going across the floor, maybe changing spots in the room.” Barbara and I agreed that there are a couple of key times in class when changing your relationship to space and those around you can also create an affective change. They are: from floor movement to standing movement, from standing movement to moving across the floor through space and when we split into groups to do standing work. Barbara, who feels she is very affected by space and visual stimuli, transformed her conceptually elaborated emotions to get into her affective and sensory “zone” of less conceptually elaborated feelings. In line with Barbara’s experience, one of the most important parts of the process of preparing to communicate in an affective way is transforming out of what is personal and knowable into a kind of conduit of energy that is shared on a level of pre-objective affective and sensory experience (this will be discussed more in the section entitled “Preparing the Body to Feel and Communicate”).

Sean spoke about an early memory of being affected by watching dance. In his memory, he speaks about appreciating not having a cultural framework for understanding what he was watching while, at the same time, others watching needed to adopt a cultural framework to help them understand what they were experiencing.

³ Barbara Pallomina is currently a dancer and a choreographer. She has danced professionally for 12 years.

Watching Alberta ballet perform when I was 15 or 16 years old, I remember watching two people moving together in a flawless way. It didn't feel like they were invading each other's personal body space. I didn't have any way of categorizing what I was watching within a cultural frame of reference. However, my friends assumed that to touch each other in such personal ways must mean that the two were married.

This memory highlights how affect can be more or less cognitive depending on the personal and cultural resources recruited in analysis of the experience.

In addition to this rich body of knowledge, Nigel Thrift and Brian Massumi have both brought into focus the work of Wilhelm Wundt who in the mid-nineteenth century discovered that consciousness takes a moment to develop. Later, in the 1960's, with the use of recording technologies Benjamin Libet was able to measure that consciousness needs .8 to 1.5 seconds to develop (Thrift 2008). Consciousness happens after the brain or the body has been affected. The body allows us to apprehend the world. Affect allows us to anticipate the moment and we sense that moment before consciousness. How this short delay before consciousness plays out in the phenomenological experiences of my informants in terms of culture and memory will be discussed in the section entitled "Communication of Sensation and Affect"

Methodology: Participant Observation and Interviews as an 'Insider'

There were three phases to my research and 20 participants. I recruited mature dancers which in most cases (except for two) means that each dancer has had between 10 years to several decades of professional dance experience. As a result, the dancers ranged from approximately 27 to 72 years of age. I felt that dancers with this number of years of professional experience (which for the dance community is quite a lot) would

have really developed their abilities to communicate non-verbally. I also recruited professional dancers with varying modern dance experiences. For example, dancers from The Danny Grossman Dance Company, Toronto Dance Theatre, Dancetheatre David Earle, dancers formerly with Dancemakers as well as independent artists who work with multiple choreographers and are themselves now accomplished choreographers. My hope was that there would be a diversity of opinion in the answers to questions I asked due to the varying influences on the development of the dancers' artistry. Regardless of identity and background, I found my informants responses to be more in common than I had anticipated but still with some distinct differences. I recruited dancers from Toronto and Guelph, Ontario. These are both places in Canada that have vibrant modern dance communities and are communities that I have insight into due to my own involvement in them. Both cities have dance communities which have nourished the artistry of the dancers I interviewed. Further to this, the dancers in Guelph, whom I interviewed, all danced professionally or studied dance in Toronto for a significant period of time (three years to several decades).

PHASE 1 – One-on-One Interviews

A first step to my research involved one-on-one interviews using both semi-structured and open-ended questions to understand the art and aesthetics of movement and sensation amongst my informants. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews were important for my exploratory inquiry. Conducting interviews in this manner allowed the participants to frame their experiences in their own ways and allowed me to pursue ideas as they unfolded. For the majority of the interviews, I used an audio recorder so that I

could transcribe the interviews for quotation and verification purposes later. I made handwritten notes while doing the interviews without the audio recorder. In total, I conducted 14 one-on-one interviews.

PHASE 2 – Focus Groups

I felt that conducting two focus groups would aid in developing a verbal articulation of this research amongst the participants. Since dancers are used to working in groups, I felt this would be an appropriate method to spur discussion and exploration of ideas. My expectation was that the one-on-one interviews would develop some momentum in terms of verbal articulation and that these interviews would be a basis from which to launch further semi-structured and open-ended discussion with the same individuals in small focus groups. In the end, I held only one focus group in Guelph with 6 participants. All of the participants were aware of my research interests well in advance of the meeting (I e-mailed copies of the questions and my research interests to all of the participants two weeks ahead of time). Two of the participants had already been involved in one-on-one interviews and four participants had not previously been involved in the research. I conducted the focus group in a studio space to allow dancers to get up and move around if it would help them to articulate their ideas. I also recorded the focus group as well as made handwritten notes.

After thoughts about focus group

There were some very beautiful and insightful feelings and thoughts expressed during the focus group. However, I felt a degree of resistance to explore the possibilities for verbally articulating the communication of sensation and affect. I was initially

surprised by this. But in hindsight, I can see that this may have been the result of an instinct to protect the magic that occurs in performance from objectification. I think there may have been an assumption that I was intending to come up with some kind of hard scientific equation to how this communication occurs. As a dancer myself, I would be resistant to that kind of project as well. I ran into this resistance again later when I was discussing the topic with two dancers after class. After I explained what I was researching, one of them told me about a woman in the theatre world who had come up with some kind of system to ensure that sensation and affect are communicated by actors. After mentioning that, both dancers expressed their frustration with the idea that one person would try to claim authority over such a personal and magical expression. It sort of negates the personal process of discovery as soon as someone claims to have the perfect system. I relate this claim for authority to a kind of controlling or, almost a copywriting, of what should be the personal play and growth of sense perception and affective communication.

I sensed that some of the participants in the focus group felt my inquiry would be fruitless and unhelpful because what gets communicated on a spiritual, energetic and affective level will be kept a mystery simply because there is no way of knowing and quantifying that process. I agree but still feel it important and interesting to explore what people are doing/communicating and feeling/sensing and why. My purpose is not to know or quantify but, rather, to explore possibilities and the mysteries of affect.

My other observation of the focus group was that the dynamic which exists in rehearsal carried forward in the interview. This meant that certain people contributed

more and certain others contributed less based on previously established group dynamics. I did not anticipate that the same dynamic would carry over into the focus group. Because some were leery of my intention, I feel others may have become less responsive to my questions. Of course it is also quite possible that I didn't explain myself properly. However, I gave them all the questions and my research interests well ahead of time and went through it all again before I started the interview.

I suspect that the same problems would come up again if I were to do another focus group with different participants, because the community is small enough that most people know each other on some level.

PHASE 3 – Participant Observation

I found it to be particularly fruitful to reflect on my own experiences while dancing during this process as well as to reflect on what I observed around me. To inform my practice of reflection, I drew from both dance and ethnographic research methods. I observed colleagues during dance performances and class when possible and, spoke to them about what their sensory experiences were. I then compared this with my own sensory responses to the participant's dancing for later analysis (Hanna 1983:217-222 and Green and Stinson 1999:100). In phase three, I spoke to many dancers about my research and have included the thoughts of three willing informants whom I didn't formally interview. I feel that participant observation in this context allowed me to be less of an outsider allowing the participants to communicate with me more comfortably. Being directly involved in trying to communicate sensation and affect through my own movement helped me to develop my thinking and questions about how this is done.

During the process of class participant-observation, I kept detailed notes for later analysis. As a result of my own involvement in this research, when referring to “my informants” I am including myself unless I am only referring to myself (in which case I will specify). In the case of personal reflections as an informant, I have used italics to separate my reflective informant voice from my latter analysis.

“Radiant Energy”

Affirming the Importance of Ephemeral Sensation – Disrupting the Generic

One of the biggest stumbling blocks in writing and talking about the communication of sensation and affect has to do with finding the appropriate words to accompany the thoughts and feelings of a non-verbal dance experience. Indeed the issue drives right to the heart of the politics of knowledge production. This difficult issue has been grappled with by anthropologist Tod Ochoa and it is from his experiences I find wisdom and some solutions to this matter. In his study of the African inspired practice of *Palo* and *Kalunga* (experiencing the dead) in Cuba, Tod Ochoa struggles to find a way to write about ephemeral sense experiences that are outside of western European lexicon and ontology. Quoting Ochoa,

writing about Palo and its ideas of the dead and matter requires disrupting habits of thought and writing in anthropology that are rooted in the Western philosophical tradition. Palo is too unexpected in its basic assumptions about the status of matter, the dead, and the living, to be seamlessly assimilated into the prevailing ethnographic modes of analysis as these are defined, above all, by their adherence to regimes of knowing organized under the signs of negation, identity, and being... (Ochoa 2004:479-480)

I share a similar struggle with Ochoa. However, in the case of my exploration of affect, the participants are experiencing visceral sensations and feelings within a predominantly western European and American cultural framework in Toronto, Canada. The visceral feelings discussed with my informants are hypocognized in this wider cultural context since they have not undergone verbal or written analysis. However, as mentioned earlier,

the subjective embodiment of visceral feelings is an experience commonly shared across the modern dancers who participated in this research.

Taking his inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari (1986), Ochoa aims to “create a new language within our own...” so that Palo’s dead might “survive its encounter with... [his] text and continue to resonate, vibrate, with a force of its own.” (Ochoa 2004:480) Ochoa learned that the dead in Kalunga are felt in “fluttering turns of the stomach, in goose bumps behind...[his informants] arms, and in barely perceptible sensations in...[his informants] chest, ...throat, and in the muscles around...[her] eyes.” (Ochoa, 2004:482) For my informants, words used to describe similar states of being varied slightly from person to person. For example, some discussed being in an affective zone as “being in the space” or “being in the moment”. Some preferred using the words “change” or “force” over “energy” and the word “allowing” rather than “receiving”.

In Nicole Rose Bond’s⁴ experience of watching and dancing in David Earle’s⁵ *Miserere*, a “vibrant heat” starts at the base of her sternum and radiates out causing her to inhale (inspiration). This is a feeling that Nicole gets when she feels anything extreme that includes joy, excitement, nervousness and anxiousness. It happens before performing and is transformative because it opens up the possibility for new feelings to enter in. Nicole also gets the vibrant heat feeling when she is in love or right before she goes on stage.

⁴ Nicole Rose Bond has been studying dance since the age of nine. She has been dancing professionally since 2005.

⁵ David Earle began dancing at the age of five. He is currently a choreographer, artistic director, teacher and (occasionally) performer. He has created over 130 works dating from 1963-2008.

It is a combo of joy, love and excitement – it's ecstasy. But, to have that feeling, it has got to be really good, something that is moving to me, that I can relate to... While performing, the vibrant heat transforms into something else. So, it becomes a transformative moment that sets you up for new feelings. It's like being in an ocean and having a wave come over you. You are still affected by the wave even after it has passed (you're still wet) but you have other new feelings too.

The subjective visceral moments described by the participants are all versions of the moment of affect and communication or being “in the zone” of performing sensation and affect. Dancers described “listening to the body move”, “chest being pulled around the stage”, allowing energy to pass through the body” and “a visceral spine in the front of the torso”. These feelings were all individually felt and subjectively experienced and, at the same time, collective in that so many aspects of these experiences were similar amongst the participants. This subtle internal visceral process is collective and influential within the community in an unspoken way.

I felt that my informants were able to articulate themselves in the interviews both intellectually and viscerally at once. Indeed, there were moments during the interviews where a shared memory of certain dancers or choreographic works created an affective experience for both the informant and myself (the interviews themselves provide examples of shared or communal affect). Again, taking my cue from Ochoa, I will have to find ways to communicate feelings of affect that allow them to continue to “vibrate” and “resonate” as well as not confine them to categories that suite the limits of our lexicon and perhaps even our ontological views. This was an issue I discussed with my

informants. In Graham McKelvie's⁶ view, "our being is made of subtle energies. Mixing up the senses like 'seeing textures' or 'feeling light' allows us to exist with energetic responses that are fuller than our lexicon allows for." Peggy Baker⁷ also spoke about the limits of language in movement and dance terminology.

We learn a kind of lexicon [...]. Well, in Graham technique⁸ it's so beautiful because "contraction" and "release" are totally opposite shapes and feelings and they are two complete extremes anatomically. So, basically we are learning to identify individual elements that we will combine in order to communicate - it's almost like mastering components of speech like vowel sounds. In modern dance we spend a huge amount of time exploring how we are going to articulate our torsos. We use this part of our bodies so much for the expression of movement and therefore it has to be highly articulate. And we have to develop or learn a real literal language to speak about it, "shifting laterally", "flexing forward", "flexing side", "extending". There are languages from techniques like [...] Graham to talk about it where they made words to speak about it like "contraction" and "release". So, those words are charged and we use those words to communicate as we learn the material. But eventually, I believe that we need to let go of those words, those names, so that we don't end up making movement generic, by reducing movements to the language we use. I think what we need to keep doing is exploring movement, and thinking about it, in very precise ways and then dropping that thinking and identifying the sensation [...].

I have this idea that the first elements you have to be able to pick up when you're learning a movement phrase, let's say for choreography, are the shapes and their sequence. And you have to memorize that sequence and you need to become more and more familiar with those shapes in a less and less generic way. So, some of the methods that I use for that are first of all to totally replace the dance language with something else. So, instead of saying "contraction", "triplet turn" for example, I'm going to replace it, first of all, with pure action words like "pull away", "spin high" something like that, more of a descriptor and so, to try to get away from a generic dance idea and move toward something more open ended. And then maybe go for just sounds that capture the essence like "whoa", "ya ah", you know like animated non-verbal language sounds. So I would engage in a practice of word replacement, replacing dance words first with action words,

⁶ Graham McKelvie is currently a dancer, teacher and choreographer. He has been dancing professionally for 20 years.

⁷ Peggy Baker is currently a dancer, teacher and choreographer. She began dancing professionally in 1974 and began performing as a solo artists in 1990.

⁸ Martha Graham (1894-1991) created a modern dance technique based on her lifetime of dancing and choreographing (Graham 1991).

then with qualitative words like soft, sharp (I'm just being obvious here) and then with guttural language sounds and then metaphors for sure - "a plane disappearing behind a cloud", or "leaves moving on a tree" or "a branch rebounding when a piece of fruit drops off", that kind of thing. An image will emerge for me that has a parallel kind of life to the dance movement. So, I really work very consciously to replace that generic, in some ways precise, but limiting language that was initially used to communicate the ideas.

I want to do the same thing with counts and replace them with rhythmic and dynamic feels. So, by the time I get ready to perform something, I've eliminated all of the tools for learning it and replaced them with a far more personal attachment to everything. Ultimately, I have to put the dance into my own words, into my own world of imagery and metaphor.

Peggy Baker's process strikes me as a beautiful example of disrupting a language so that it doesn't become generic and limited. Through her investigation of movement and conscious replacing of taken-for-granted language with new sounds and images Peggy Baker has infused movement with personal meaning that matters in the moment. The result is that her dancing is intensely charged and articulates very specific and nuanced messages. My hope is to apply this kind of disruption to this thesis and that through my writing, sensory and affective experiences will be given the weight and respect they carry within the bodies of the participants and, for that matter, within my own body of experience. I will do this by using the language the dancers themselves use in combination with using my own words and imagery if necessary to draw the reader physically into the strength of the sensations being discussed.

This thesis has forced me to struggle with what communication means and how I, as a budding anthropologist, would like to communicate in a way that doesn't require translating or changing experiences to fit another framework of knowledge but rather opens the reader up to new experiences and ways of sensing and communicating with the world. The word affect is itself disruptive when set against certain "master" frameworks

such as neo-liberalism where great value is placed on speed, moving fast, distraction from feeling through athleticism and efficiency. For my informants, moving slowly, being transparent, existing in the moment and revealing vulnerability were essential to the communication of affect and have a disruptive quality when set against neo-liberal values. I will explore this further in my section entitled “Politics of Sensation and Affect”.

“Honesty”, “Transparency”, “Energy”, “Being in the space”, “Being in the moment” and “Meditation”

Nov.14, 2007

She imagines her energy being sort of like the consistency of a jelly fish, or aloe Vera – something thick about it but clear and malleable to change in an instant with a sense of weight or lightness to it. Sometimes sensations just emerge without provocation. Sometimes fire-like energy flickers through her chest. It also has an echo if it is expansive or else strings of it lengthen in the directions they feel they should go. Sometimes it’s not expansive, it is rumbling and gurgling in on itself. Some days this energy is just around her torso, but often it generally expands to include her entire body including her limbs and the space directly surrounding her body.

There are many ways in which my informants chose to describe the feeling of communicating affectively during performance. In this section I will discuss why certain choices of words were meaningful for my informants. I will continue to use their choice of words throughout this thesis. Terms such as “honesty”, “transparency”, “energy”, “being in the space”, “being in the moment” and “meditation” reflect for my informants a feeling of connection to inner and outer experiences and a clear funnelling of those experiences through the body translating into expression. To understand this further, Brennan’s book *The Transmission of Affect* (2004) provides a theoretical framework for how dancers reveal inner and outer energies through being “transparent” or “honest”.

There is no secure distinction between the “individual” and the “environment.” Visual images, like auditory traces, also have a direct physical impact; their reception involves the activation of neurological networks, stimulated by spectrum vibrations at various frequencies. These also constitute transmissions breaching the bounds between individual and environment. (Brennan, 2004:6,10)

Margie Gillis⁹ also conceptualizes affect being communicated through our neurological systems.

Is it possible for two people to feel the same thing at the same time? [...] In the presence of someone you transform; the observed is transformed by the observer. [...] There is a level in which another human being gets the landscape of the person they're in the room with or with whom they are communicating with. The person on stage is creating a symbiosis with the audience. [...] My neuromuscular system and your neuromuscular system link up. Then your neuromuscular system, if you are watching me dance, sends messages down through your body to your muscles about what is happening in my body while I'm dancing.

How does sensation play into performing? That has to do with the neuromuscular system. It is the nerves touching off the muscles and making them contract and release. [...] There are a myriad of sensations and the only way to embrace them fully is with love/bliss. You are in a heightened state of sensation when you are moving faster than a logical thought. One could call it thinking really fast. It's faster than words. So, sensation is thought moving in a mysterious, profound and wise way. You use your morality, your love or compassion to tease out what part of this is good or not good and what part of this is transformative or not transformative. [...] It's just thought becoming muscle and it is very honest. It is a very true endeavour, a true and immediate manifestation of who one is.

When I asked what state do you enter when you communicate? Both Julia Sasso¹⁰ and

Peggy Baker responded that they wanted to be transparent. According to Julia,

I'm looking for as close to transparent as possible. I'm looking for the ability not to perform but to live and be the movement, the character - to just be and be transparent [...]. A lot of where this desire comes from is through the skinner release work because it's all about shedding layers and getting rid of the

⁹ Margie Gillis started dancing at the age of three years old. She is a performer, teacher and choreographer. She currently has 35 years of professional dance experience.

¹⁰ Julia Sasso has been dancing since she was four years old. She is currently a dancer, teacher, choreographer and artistic director. She has danced professionally for over 30 years.

extraneous and habitual. It's all about finding the essence of movement. There are no stated goals in the [Skinner Release] technique. The goal is in fact to become transparent, to allow people to see right into you and to see the movement as close to the personality and to see the purest, simplest version of what you're doing.

For Peggy, honesty and transparency come from being fully engaged and committed to communicating the choreography in the moment.

The sort of honesty I'm thinking of is the honesty of committing to the complexity, the challenges, the demands, the nuance, and the details of the choreography itself. So, it's like cleaning the apartment, washing the walls, the windows, dusting every single surface, not just straightening up. To me that's the honesty of the thing, it's actually having confronted over and over again your inadequacy in meeting the challenges [...]. Somebody who I got a big lesson in this from was Mikhail Baryshnikov. I got to dance with him for a year and one of the things I observed is that he didn't ever have a negative response to what was being asked. I didn't ever see it, not once. We were in a rehearsal studio having work made on us and we were also taking class together, and I didn't ever see him acting bored, or frustrated, not ever rolling his eyes thinking "that's not a good idea that the choreographer just put forward" or "I don't like this lift, or that step or that timing". He didn't fight anything. He just brought himself constructively to everything that was brought in front of him. And I realized by witnessing this that I had a lot of negative talk going on in my head [...]. So, right away, you have to get through that, you haven't even begun to look at the step yet, you're still busy explaining to yourself why you are not going to be able to do it because you don't like it, you don't want to or you don't think you can. Nothing about just identifying what it is and finding a means to fulfilling it. So, that is also something that I consider to relate to the idea of honesty – honestly looking and not getting in the way of moving toward that objective no matter what it is.

Then the transparency part for me is not working to make it look as if you are doing the step, but actually doing it... You want to stay inside the aesthetic world of the choreography and for every single person that's going to mean a different challenge because our physiques, our sensibilities, are the elements that govern how we finesse things. So, for me, the transparency part is even when it doesn't suit you, it doesn't show you off, you just let it be what it is [...]. I think this is what Christine Wright would call "un-conflicted" energy; physically, you're not at odds with the thing that you are doing.

Julia also spoke about transparency and the influence of Peggy Baker on her understanding of transparency.

I think really skilled performers look for a complexity inside of transparency. You always want to show more than one aspect of yourself, your strength and your vulnerability, your athleticism and your subtlety. When you use the word humanity that's a perfect word for it because I think that we all possess that complexity, the dark, the light, the dissonant, the harmonious... So I think that by aiming for transparency and allowing people to see into you, you are exposing all those things about yourself rather than putting on "now I'm going to perform this". I'm thinking of the performers who have been powerful to me; I think of Peggy Baker. It has very little to do with how she dances, it's about how much she opens herself and reveals. More and more I feel as she ages she becomes even more transparent. You see a whole life there.

According to Brennan, affect has an "energetic" quality (Brennan, 2004:6).

Affectivity involves the transmission of energy between an individual and their environment and is to some degree mediated through the individual's previous body of experience (Brennan 2004). For Sasha Ivanochko,¹¹ terms like "force" and "articulation" seem more applicable than "energy". However, Andrea Nann¹² uses the word "energy" to describe her connection to movement. Andrea needs to be connected to the energetic pathways of movement right from the start of learning choreography. According to Andrea,

as a performer, I need to understand, what is my reason for being there? What is my [energetic] pathway through the whole thing [...]. I don't think you need to understand what is happening as narrative but rather you need a feeling of having an experience and being drawn out of it again. It can be a very subtle emotion or feeling. You have to be aware of the power of these moments and that you've got the audience right on the edge of something and you have to take them through that experience and be responsive to the audience. And there is no one response to these moments, the energy can build, dissipate or expand. I have to understand the energy path. It's not a linear path or a story-line, it's a path of energy. Where is the pathway, is it in my body or parts of my body or outside of me, in the audience? The rehearsal process is about finding pathways. If I get the path then the sequence comes. The pathway can be redefined as you go along. If I can

¹¹ Sasha Ivanochko has been dancing for 23 years. She was 14 years old when she started and she is currently 37 years old. She has 14-16 years of professional dance experience.

¹² Andrea Nann is currently a dancer, teacher, choreographer and artistic director. She has danced professionally for 20 years.

understand that pathway, I can understand the piece. With repertoire that I have performed 40 or 50 times, the pathways become more profound. And depending on where you are in your life, you can have a completely different energy [pathway in the piece]. Suddenly, you expand to see so many possibilities, so many ways to communicate.

Most of my informants associated affect with sensing energy. The more they are “in the moment” or “transparent”/”honest” about what they are feeling, the more intensely that energy is felt. Barbara preferred to think of communicating affectively as “being in space” versus “being in the moment”. “Being in space” seems less temporal to Barbara than “being in the moment”, like Zen Buddhism existing outside of time. In both cases, the concepts of “being in space” and “being in the moment” are both feelings that seem to increase the energy of the dancers and give them the sense that they are communicating affect more clearly. According to Barbara,

in yoga “in the moment” comes up a lot but my personal tendency is not temporal, we’re always one with time. “In space” means a sense of timelessness. Being connected to the space means being everything or all energy (which encompasses time). That notion of space brings me into my body and sensation.

For Meredith Thompson,¹³ the more she can let go of consciousness, the more “in the moment” she can be. Quoting Meredith,

when you are experiencing a feeling it’s totally in the moment, it’s not conscious but there is an overall sensation that is vibrating or radiant. You let go of part of your consciousness to let that feeling take you.

Sasha Ivanochko described her performances as meditative. She, like Meredith, aims to push thoughts out of her mind to achieve an empty conduit like state or “being in the moment” where her sensory awareness is heightened. According to Sasha,

¹³ Meredith Thompson has been dancing professionally for eight years.

the thing that I find most profound is when I feel I can push away the veils of thought towards my self and when I am not really thinking anymore and very much in the moment [...]. Dancing is the closest thing to meditating, or it is meditation. It's about sensation and noticing things that come up when they come up and they are fleeting, they come and go, they're non-repeatable they're based on the things I'm seeing and touching and dealing with in the moment. I think of that [self] place as actually very empty, I think it is probably more of a conduit than a [self] place, it has nothing to do with personality or grace or co-ordination or interpretation.

The best performances are when remembering is not even at the top of my head, it's already been digested and it's in the body and that's when the other thing can come in the conduit or the vacuum tunnel [...]. I think the tunnel is the focus, it feels very directed; there is nothing else distracting from the energy into the tunnel or the single point of journey. It's a sensation that I can just feel and go to more and more and I think people can tap into it really easily. For example, when everything falls away and you are pure sensation or when you are meditating or when you are truly at a lost sense of time – yeah, that feeling of losing time that is what it feels like. I think for dance, having mastery with your physical vessel helps a lot. Gradually over the years as I get more comfortable with myself it happens more and more often. When it breaks it's usually because of a chatter inside of my head saying “that was awful” [...]. You are what you practice.

In the body of this quote, one can see an expression of “being in the moment”.

However, this quote also gives some insight into how this ability to “be in the moment” is developed through practice. In the following chapter, I will turn to look at how the development of “being in the moment” helps to develop the skill of non-verbal communication through dance.

Developing Affective Communication: Mirrors

Turing now to explore how my informants learned to communicate sensation and affect, I will start with a look at how this ability is developed on a physiological level. Then I will look at mimicry and kinaesthetic impulses. It seems one way that this form of communication is passed on is visually. In concert with this visual learning, understanding how the body itself contains the ability to vibrate energetically without thought and has a pre-perceptive ability to affect and be affected will be explored. Based on the experiences of my informants, it seems that the more a dancer practices “being in the moment” and sensory awareness, the more this awareness of feeling develops.

The Physiological Level

The brain’s involvement in sensory awareness seems part of understanding the development of this communicative skill. When I discuss the brain here in terms of its involvement with sensory awareness, I don’t mean sensory analysis. Rather, I mean that the body’s ability to sense involves the entire body, including its neurological system. Including the brain in this part of the discussion is intended to show how the mind and body are connected. Having said that, for many of my informants, the mind, in its capacity to analyze, can interfere with the body’s ability to be aware of sensation and affect. *The Brain that Changes Itself* by Norman Doidge has been of interest to my exploration of this development.¹⁴ Although the book does not interrogate its own

¹⁴Unfortunately, this book privileges certain sensory developments over others. Speed and memory are treated as though they are of the utmost importance. This is not surprising when you consider the “master” sensory framework set in motion by neo-liberal thinking (I will discuss this further in the section “The Politics of Sensation and Affect”).

cultural assumptions of the brain, it still provides insights into how the brain might develop its sensory capabilities. Different sensory contexts require different strengths and skills which would cause the brain to develop in favour of those sensory experiences. Brain structure is shaped by experience; it is dynamic (Doidge 2007).

Many dancers I spoke to talked about learning at an early stage of their training to be affected by the music they were moving to and to connect their internal feelings to their movement. According to Doidge, as new neural maps develop, they require more space. But as one continues to use these maps, less neurons are required and a process of “fine tuning” occurs (2007). I can personally relate to this development of “fine tuning” in many aspects of dancing. Sensation becomes more “fine tuned” and distinctive in terms of muscle work as well as energetic intention, a sense of instinct and intuition. For many of my informants (including Julia, Graham, Sasha, Peggy), the task of sensing these subtle connections and affect got more fine tuned as they gained experience in their careers. Again, the more experienced dancers were entering or had entered a stage of development where they were making connections with less athletic and more subtle movement to the point where their intentions and imagery registered through their physical performance by a simple change in focus, or a sense of listening to their own bodies. These dancers also felt they could get into “the zone” or “the moment” (when affectivity was occurring through embodying instinct, improvisation and sensory experience) more quickly and more easily as they gained experience.

According to Joan Blackmer, dancers can develop an external orientation “akin to an out-of-body experience” with excessive use of a mirror to correct form (Blackmer

1989:46). Closing the eyes or working without the mirror enhances proprioception which, according to Blackmer, is “the kinaesthetic sense within the body.” (Blackmer 1989:47) Proprioception helps one to feel when their leg is straight or bent and where their torso is in relation to the head and the rest of the body. To add to this, repetition of movement creates muscle memory and strength. This muscle patterning in combination with the guidance of both the mirror and internal sensation creates a kinaesthetic knowledge of the body’s experiences. As one develops an inner sense of experience in harmony with an external sense of form through an actual mirror or through external guidance, one begins to be able to have both an inner and outer experience simultaneously (Blackmer, 1989). Furthermore, this state of being is easier to tap into the more you work at it.

Many dancers spoke of the constant struggle to keep a balance between this inner and outer sense of movement so that the outer consciousness required to execute the choreography did not impede upon the inner sensory and affective experience. According to Blackmer, this state of inner sensory and affective awareness is easier to tap into the more you work at it. For some of my informants (myself included) there is a conscious choice not to use a mirror so that the inner sensory and affective experience becomes predominant and, in fact, becomes the most important part of the process of developing as an artist. According to Sasha, “when I’m fully engaged, I feel I’m beyond the thinking, I feel all my bits but it doesn’t compute on a brain level.” In the following quote, Meredith talks about the conflict between inner sensory awareness and outer consciousness.

In David’s class, which is Graham based, I struggle with being a muscular mover naturally. When I’m letting go of technique and muscularity I am trying to find

from the inside out sensations and motivations. But I struggle with getting caught up in the shape and the technicalities (such as injuries that could occur due to poor technique like lifting my hip when I shouldn't be). It's the struggle between maintaining structure and trying to let it go. The pleasure comes when the dancing feels bigger than you.

Kinaesthetic Impulses

Nov 14th, 2007

People that she learned from in class today... She picked up on the expansiveness of one dancer who really filled out the movement in all possible directions. She kept that feeling and tried to mimic it when it was her turn to dance to try to give that feeling to others. She often remembers the feeling of watching Julia Sasso in class. When Julia dances her movement exudes an energy that has a thick intensity to it. Julia is also very expansive and devours space when she moves. It helped her to pick up the movement to try to slip into the memories of feelings she had from watching Julia Sasso dance.

She remembers her ballet teacher (from ages 7-14) demonstrating movement... there was so much energy emanating from her chest. She picked up on that and tried to feel it in her own body. There was a dance picture of Mrs. Hanna¹⁵ in the change room; so much energy came from her chest and arms. Since studying with her, she has developed her own sense of what is happening in that part of her body. She now believes that the same amount of energy can come from the back, it feels like a more vulnerable place to draw awareness to and open up and allow people in to feel. It's more mysterious somehow.

For Blackmer, the kinaesthetic sense can become stronger the more one turns their attention to sense experience (Blackmer, 1989) Although many informants felt that “being in the moment” of affectivity became easier to access with practice, many informants felt that sense perception is a natural state of being and we learn how to block our sensations. In this case, as one starts to pay more attention to sensation, sense perception is re-learned. This re-learning also happens in a non-verbal way by watching other artists. Many of my informants spoke of other dancers in the community as sources of inspiration in terms of how to communicate sensation and affect in a non-verbal way.

¹⁵ Sally Hanna danced with the Royal Ballet in London before moving to Victoria, B.C. to teach.

Indeed, certain names came up repeatedly from numerous participants as inspirers; so much so, it seems an element of socialization has emerged within the Toronto modern dance community¹⁶ based on the expression and communication of sensory and affective experiences.

In terms of actually transmitting affect to the audience, some informants felt this was something they had learned to some degree. Barbara spoke about learning to transmit affect from Margie Gillis in part from working with her and watching her perform. “She very clearly talked about feeling the energy of the audience. She did an exercise with me when I was a student about walking towards the audience and away to feel the sensation of the audience.” Nicole also spoke about how watching Margie Gillis inspired her to trust what she is feeling and to communicate transparently what she is feeling,

Her [Margie Gillis'] technique is not important but for her and other dancers that really move people, it is about honesty and really being oneself. Margie is really committed to being there as herself in front of an audience she doesn't know. She's so vulnerable, it really moves me.

Sean brought up Peggy Baker and talked about how she seems to have an extremely high level of sensitivity all over her body.

She has that skill, awareness and sensitivity on a dense scale but with her entire body. It's a definitive skill with her full body awareness. She glows and is fully articulate in her communication during performance. Perhaps not consciously, but on some level she seems aware of all sensations.

¹⁶ The artists who have influenced this community are not solely from Toronto but, rather, have come from other dance centres in Canada and internationally.

Once while taking one of Trish Beatty's¹⁷ classes, I recall Trish pointing out that I was not feeling my lower to mid torso. I was just jumping from the base of my spine to my chest. She slowed me down and encouraged me to experiment and feel that zone of my body. I felt new things. I also felt more energy and sensation when I got to my chest. Trish had taught me the value of transitions; that there is a lot to experience enroute. It's not just about the destination, it is about the experience of getting there for both the dancer and the audience. According to Trish,

I worked hard at communication of sensation to make people look because my technique wasn't as strong. It's like doubt and faith. You have to keep going through doubt – don't let doubt take over – transition out of it. Transitions are important, to stay in the body and feel them. You have to accept yourself, you can't make yourself an idealized creature.

David Earle also spoke about going through transitions and not trying to avoid them. David feels that going around existence is very hard. It's better to go through the experience of living and the dance ritual allows you to go through life experience. In the realm of this ritual dance experience you don't need to question so much. Rather, you can trust. You can suspend disbelief and trust that in the activity of dancing, some wisdom will come through. Massumi's understanding of transition as deepening the experience of the body and movement seems in line with the views articulated by Trish and David. Quoting Massumi,

when you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight... [To affect and be affected]... gives the body's movements a kind of depth that stays with it across

¹⁷ Trish Beatty is a renowned choreographer, dancer and teacher with several decades of professional experience in the realm of dance.

all its transitions – accumulating in memory, in habit, in reflex, in desire, in tendency. (Massumi in Shouse 2005:2)

The learning/re-learning of sense experience involves following instinct and kinaesthetic impulses. One of the ways in which my informants affectively developed is through a kind of registering of the kinaesthetic impulses of other dancers and then of trying to apply the same or similar kinaesthetic impulses, using the impulse in concert with one's personal sensation or affective response to the moment to interpret movement. Some dancers spoke of trying out feelings that really moved them. Stepping into certain feelings inspired by others allows one to jump higher through emulating the quality or energy of a great jumper. This then becomes a kind of dialogue of kinaesthetic impulses between dancers. In other words, these impulses communicate affect to those watching and those watching communicate back creating a dialogic exchange.

Finding the right words to describe this process has been tricky. Some of my informants spoke of using "mimicry" or picking up on the "kinaesthetic impulses" of their inspirers. For those who could relate to this way of learning, most found the words "imitation" and "mimicry" diminishing. One of my informants suggested that the idea of picking up "kinaesthetic impulses" got closer to how this learning occurs than "mimicry". As a result, I have for the most part adopted this terminology because it seems to be the most accurate way to discuss this process. However, for the purposes of linking up this non-verbal way of learning with some of the theoretical concepts that seek to explain it, I will momentarily use words that seem to lack the appropriate depth of nuances such as in the following discussion of "imitation".

According to Thrift, many view imitation as a “higher level cognitive function.” (Thrift 2008:237) Imitation is “highly dependent upon the empathy generated in an intersubjective information space that supports automatic identifications.” (Thrift 2008:237) Further, Thrift argues that this kind of “affective contagion” is the norm not the anomaly. He also makes the point that “imitation is different from simple emulation in that it depends upon an enhanced capacity for anticipation...” (Thrift 2008:237) Imitation happens almost instantaneously when it can be non-conscious. Consciousness slows down the process of picking up movement and affective intention or kinaesthetic impulse. With imitation, the self-other veneer of a divide dissolves and shows the porousness of our bodies “...this is a kinetic empathy, of the kind often pointed to in dance, a kinaesthetic awareness/imitation which is both the means by which the body experiences itself kinaesthetically and also the means by which it apprehends other bodies.” (Thrift 2008:237)

Trish Beatty is a strong proponent of the idea that one needs to listen to one’s body in order to feel sensation and affect and not assume to know or predict the moment of sensation and affect ahead of time or speed over experience. According to Trish, mimicry is part of learning how to do that.

art and dancing are about communicating energy. You learn through sensation. Mimicry is a first step to learning how to communicate that way. Mimicry is a kinaesthetic response. You communicate more clearly when your energy is distilled. Martha Graham was extremely distilled. So, it’s a skill.

Barbara responds to internal as well as external impulses.

In class, I am reacting off of my own sensation. I also feel sensation from watching others in class. I bounce off of David’s [the choreographer] sensation more than with other choreographers because I really know his work.

Meredith really feels movement by watching other people. Seeing others dance inspires and affects what she does in class, rehearsal and performance.

Someone does something that affects you and you try it and you can feel it work - it's not always possible. That's a big part of how I feel movement. I can see it in my students. They aren't doing it yet. It is a way of sharing, I love it! You feel the feeling in you that you got when you were watching someone and you try to repeat it. But, maybe it doesn't look exactly the same. In class, you just hold onto the feeling you got from watching someone and you do it when it's your turn. This happens with performance and learning choreography. I remember seeing dancers convey feeling and being affected by that the first time I saw *Inching* by Danny Grossman. I was so engaged with watching them. I was affected by it at the time and it altered my learning it.

The following is an example of mimicry on the sensual and affective level. In Meredith's memory of watching *Inching* she felt innocence, sweetness and simplicity. Quoting Meredith,

the piece is about inch worms inching together. I feel it in my heart. I feel it under my skin and everywhere... also in the stomach sometimes. I get to see it, feel it (be affected) and then try it out.

When Meredith is watching and learning from a video, she doesn't worry about the steps at first, she just tries to pick up on the nuances and subtleties of the movement. She takes in as much as she can from watching because visual sources have a big impact on what she feels. She learns through feeling.

Nicole also gained inspiration and knowledge about how to articulate feelings through movement from picking up on the dancing style of Johanna Bergfelt from Toronto Dance Theatre (TDT).

Johanna did a solo for the TDT program and she was fierce – powerful and strong – almost overwhelming and at the same time feminine and beautiful. She inspired me to be bold and multilayered – to have different depths to my boldness.

Paul DeAdder¹⁸ also spoke about learning movement by emulating how you feel when you watch it. According to Paul, technique or form can sometimes draw you into the right feelings,

I think in some way I wanted to be able to give someone that was watching me doing that movement the same feeling that I got from watching. The whole thing was not just to feel that way but it was also to be able to show people that feeling in performance. There are people you watch when you are in class. Do you want to create what it looks like or do you want to create what you think it feels like. Because there are sometimes when I'm learning a movement and it doesn't feel right or the way I think it is supposed to feel and then you get that correction and intuitively, by doing it properly it feels right, it fits better so you feel like you can create that feeling that goes with the movement because it feels more organic. For example, in *Curious* everything about the character is so distorted, there are no straight lines, so you need the right hook or curve and then it feels right. Petit allegro [small quick jumps] has always been my nightmare, I always feel like a dancing bear. I see people like Coralee [McLaren], light as a feather and breathing normally and looking pretty, so I try to emulate that.

Graham who has inspired the dancing of some of my informants also spoke of learning from the affective sensibilities of his inspirers,

my great teachers have taught me how to listen. In an older dancer you can see an awareness that looks like they are listening to the body. This listening creates a weight to the moment because of the relationship and dialogue between the dancer and his/her body. The dancer is the listener and the body is the speaker. The audience in this scenario becomes a voyeur because it's a very important conversation they are being privy to. But, it is too far away to hear all of the details. This is a compelling dialogue to watch because the performer is having an experience based on what he is hearing. There is an event transpiring. There is weight to the movement because of the patience the dancer has to listen [waiting to be affected by what comes through sensation]. It's an experiential moment which creates a narrative in the dancer's own body. The viewer is not

¹⁸ Paul DeAdder started dancing at the age of 20. He has danced professionally for 12 years.

even important while the dancer works through this detailed conversation with the self. Because this experience is so engaging, it creates an aliveness for the audience. There is a morality to that because you, the performer, are being affected and it is affecting for the audience because the dancer has been affected.

Graham describes his learning process as one that has always been about listening and registering with his body. When I asked Sasha about mimicry as a way of learning how to communicate in a visceral non-verbal way, she responded,

I wouldn't use the term mimicry, I would think more that my ability to see the movement impulse is very strong so I can get what the choreographer wants physically, quickly. It's more of a kinetic sensation than an emotional sensation. I think I probably am adept at that skill but it is something that can be learned and it is something that teachers of dance need to be able to explain. And I don't think it's taught very well in Toronto. What I have seen is that in Toronto people pick up a general thing first and then stop at delivering a general thing. It might be in part because I move very quickly so I move on very quickly, so I'm learning to break things down. When I create, I feel more spontaneous if I'm moving quickly and I feel more because my nature is quick twitch so things come out of me and I can duplicate my quickness but it's difficult for people to see when I go to break it down it loses its momentum and it can be milked down quickly. But, what I see as a teacher given back when people are picking up movement is a very generalized duplication. So, I think it's about how we teach burgeoning dancers to look at movement and in the city I think it's because there are not that many kinds of ways of training and some of the training is just too general.

Sasha was also brought up many times by my informants in terms of mimicry and trying to explore qualities of lightness, quickness and instinct. That both Sasha and Graham came up multiple times in terms of dancers emulating a movement quality, speaks again to the element of socialization based on a lineage of dance inspirers in Toronto.

Preparing the Body to Feel and Communicate

Oct.31, 2007

Three weeks into the process of preparing for a show. Her body is kicking into gear. She feels she can start to connect more to the space and her sensations and extend her energy through her torso, gaze and limbs. She feels a process of fine tuning going on both physically and energetically.

Nov.30, 2007

Getting ready for performance tomorrow and preparing her body to be aware with lots of physical energy and sensory awareness. She prepares mentally, physically and spiritually. For the last two weeks, she has taken either a dance or yoga class everyday to align her body and balance out her strength. In addition, she has been rehearsing three days a week for roughly three hours each time. She has been staying away from heavy, filling and fattening foods that tire her out (minimal sugar and deep fried foods). She has been reviewing the choreography in her mind and the feelings and textures she wants to communicate and she also visualizes as though she is watching herself as an audience member and she captures the feeling of what she wants to see as both an observer and herself dancing so that she can transfer those feelings to the performance experience itself. As an outside observer of herself, she wants to feel included in the experience of vulnerability and fulfilled aesthetically, affectively and spiritually. It requires that she dance with a feeling of openness, vulnerability and flowing energy that is responsive to the space, the music and the people around. All of this needs to happen while being really clear and fluid with her movement.

She also went for acupuncture. She feels like she is more liquid after acupuncture – more visceral, her senses are more alive, aware and lubricated. She doesn't feel as stunted, rusty or dry as before the session. Breathing takes on a new meaning. It feels more nourishing, water is more hydrating. It makes her dancing feel more in the moment, instinctual and personal but also less emotionally stagnant. It allows her to feel more energetically open, freer and more playful even if the piece is about death.

When I asked my informants how they prepared their bodies to communicate sensation and affect, many responded that some kind of transformation needed to take

place from analysing the world to experiencing it. However, most informants also felt that this transformation was really about returning to a natural state of being. Some felt this transformation happened right before going on stage or even on stage and for others that transformation happened throughout the day or days before a performance. Having a ritual of some kind came up as being an important way of making a transformation. Food was an important factor as well as rehearsal. Many of my informants used meditation, visual art and poetry to open them up to “being in the moment”. Body work such as massage, yoga, Mitzvah technique and acupuncture were all utilized as ways of fine tuning the body as an instrument for communication and affective dialogue. Visualization is also a technique that most of my informants spoke of utilizing to prepare themselves to be in the moment.

Returning to a Natural State of Being

Most of my informants also felt that “being in the moment” is a natural state to be in but we are often socialized not to be “in the moment” and taught how not to sense, to affect and be affected by others. So, really learning to “be in the moment” is actually about stripping away these impeding socialized layers and re-learning how to be in a natural state of experiencing life.

Along with the view that “being in the moment” was a natural state of being, many informants also spoke about “the self” as being an internal place of honesty about “being in the moment”. For Nicole, the inner core of one’s self is always the same.

It's the same as when you are a child. But outer layers transform people based on experiences of life. Like a tree with rings – the inner core is always the same unless something dramatic happens to it like it gets chopped to the core due to some outside source. When great dancers are truly honestly expressing their inner most feelings, they are getting at the core of themselves. It is easy to express outer layers of self.

Graham also feels it is completely natural to be affected because that is part of our basic human/animal nature,

it's our basic nature, close to our most primitive being. We are unaffected when layers cover our natural response. It is intuitive to recognize a visceral response or affect. In fact, it's necessary for survival. Curiosity, joy and sexual attraction all happen to you or affect you, you can't manufacture these feelings. We register affect and then make decisions that shape the direction of our lives. But, people don't feel because emotions and intuitive responses get blocked. Being affected is also reflected in other animal species such as with the hair standing on end of a dog. This is basically the same as humans getting goose bumps.

For Graham, liberation and emancipation of the self are associated with being in this natural affective state of “being in the moment”.

I feel as though I have freed myself and uncensored myself. In this state, I am completely realized, my own person. It is required that you be yourself in the moment and not second guess yourself in order to affect others. The most affecting work occurs when you see dancers remove all that is unnecessary. It makes the dancers very vulnerable. The dancer, in this state, is free from social expectation and constraint. It's like flying. It's not about searching for something, it's what you are, just there, you can't help it, just there in a naked state. We clothe ourselves with the unnecessary. We need to step out of the garments which carefully constrain us. Being in the moment, our true selves emerge. It's about energy.

According to Barbara,

performance is about self expression and at the same time completely forgetting yourself. [One] needs to feel like things are real not acted. It's about taking things off, not putting things on. There is an openness to it. The “self” is fluid and mysterious, not a solid state.

Preparing the Body to be Open

Barbara prepares herself to be open affectively in a multitude of ways. Her pre-performance needs vary depending on the kind of performance she is doing (i.e. improvisation or set choreography).

With release technique [improvisation], Stephanie Skura talks a lot about energy and expression in an abstract way. She uses quotations by beat poets and substitutes the word “dance” for “write” for example, instead of “don’t write, just express” she would say “don’t dance, just express”. This gets you out of form and out of categorical experiences into new possibilities. I have pre-performance rituals that help me to get my energy in the right place for it to happen. These include: being really specific about food (good foods are sushi, bland and easy to digest and eating at 5PM and no later then 6PM for an 8PM show), going for a walk outside, drinking tea (which is warming), interact with the public and someone I don’t know and saying mantras to help to get focussed (these mantras came from Marc Boivin). They are, “find the oppositional pull”, “have the curiosity of a child”, abandon yourself to the movement.” [Barbara generally picks one or two of the mantras and cycles through them pre-performance]. I also sometimes look at beat poetry and I would look at Antoni Tapies paintings before performing improvisation.

Barbara also spoke about using her imagination and certain visual stimuli to transform herself into an affective zone: “when I’m getting ready to perform, I check out what is beyond the walls of the theatre. It doesn’t happen on its own, I need to actively see to sense what is out there, or excite my imagination when I am performing.” Barbara does this to forget about herself, to get out of her head and her ego.

the world is so big and I’m so small in comparison. It has to do with energy. Stephanie Skura has an exercise where you think of yourself and see other people who are dancing as pure energy. It’s about feeling connected to the energy around that connects us all.

Some techniques Trish uses to get into her body are Mitzvah technique and deep tissue massage. For Trish, because dancers work at being in their bodies, they feel more than most. Quoting Trish,

You feel a lot when in the body. You feel pain more than most people as well as joy more than most people. But, you also learn how to handle sensation. Dancers can manage pain and keep it in check if they need to for example due to performances. There is a resilience there.

In recounting her recent experience of preparing to perform *Bella* by Danny Grossman in outdoor spaces, Meredith spoke of conjuring up certain images. For example, she would imagine Marc Chagall paintings “which are whimsical and the colours are dreamy”. In particular, she would look at the Chagall that inspired the piece *Bella* which portrays men and women floating in the sky upside down. As well as taking in this visual imagery, Meredith allowed herself to feel transformed by opening her body to the experience of the space around her.

I was performing this piece [*Bella*] outside recently so I would sit on the horse [a large prop which the dancers manoeuvre themselves on and off of in incredible ways] and take in the landscape. It’s so grand and beautiful. I feel myself opening up so that I can be moved and moving. I am moved by the music and my partner, the connection with other people and the feeling that you are about to step into the feeling of memories and joy of watching others do this piece in the past – that sense of greatness – you owe it to the work.

The costume was also an important element to being affected. Meredith walked through the field in her costume amongst the audience before the performance to get into the feeling of her character. Generally speaking, Meredith gets into her costume five minutes before the top of the show in order to get into the right frame of mind.

Visualization

For many informants, visualization is an invaluable tool in pre-performance preparation. It is a tool that allows dancers to really internalize the work so that during performance they can let go of details such as notes and technique and really be in the moment. It is also used by some dancers to master the choreography, to help infuse the movement with certain qualities and to set certain performance intentions.

The double awareness involved in visualization indicates a sort of spectrality in the following quote by pioneering dancer and choreographer Doris Humphrey:

every moment is consumed in making every move in my dances as finished as possible – or in thinking of them. Early in the morning I begin seeing a figure, myself, dancing on a stage, and I, the onlooker, am always above and at a distance from it. Quite often, as it is going through the sequence of a dance, it will do a new gesture, and if this pleases the onlooker, the figure will do it over and over, quite obligingly, in fact with considerable satisfaction. But this is a tiring process, my bones ache and I want the dancer to let me rest. But she won't. She fades into a mist temporarily, and then begins again on some other dance, quite amazingly bright and strong. And this goes on all day – day after day on subways, on buses, anywhere, an absolute slavery. (Humphrey, in Blackmer 1989:47)

So, there is a dialogue between spectral experience and the self in that moment. The body and the mind come together. This same kind of dual experience of imagining with feeling was experienced by Meredith when working on Danny Grossman's work *Triptych*; Meredith would sit and listen over and over again and imagine movements without marking them physically, just listening and visualizing. Sometimes Meredith does not even imagine the steps; she just remembers the feelings that are associated with

part of the music or connects with the feelings of movements. Nicole also explained the same kind of experience in relation to the moment before performance.

my mind is completely blank and I just trust that the steps are there. It just becomes about what I'm feeling. I visualize the performing, either a flash of me coming out or doing something difficult and then I go out onto stage.

According to Danielle Baskerville,¹⁹ "I visualize before performing. I visualize what the sensations of the piece I will be performing feel like [in association with the music]."

Paul prepares for performance through

rehearsal, video work, creative visualization, I had to picture it in my head going well - the spacing, what the story is. Because there is so much that can go wrong. In my head if I trip then I have to go over the movement again because I realize I could trip there.

Paul continues to visualize the work until he gets it right including the steps as well a feeling that he wants to exude:

I think about the movement and the music and the corrections and it physically going right. I actually think of my body as [one of] those people you create on a computer screen. I try to visualize the lights and the wings and the props and my interaction with others on stage... I think of my body parts, now I have to be here, now there, not about energy coming out of limbs. I try to keep it as calm as possible, I don't try to fire it up, I just go easy.

For most of my informants, preparing oneself to be a clear and articulate communicator is more than something that happens pre-performance. Rather, it is a part of working towards a way of being and engaging with the world

¹⁹ Danielle Baskerville is currently a dancer and a teacher. She has been dancing professionally for 13 years.

Communication of Sensation and Affect

How does affect get communicated? This question appears to be rather uncharted territory. Teresa Brennan argues that this may be because current modes of biological and scientific thought generally have no clear explanation for how affect is transmitted (Brennan, 2004). This may explain the lack of literature on the subject and an unwillingness to even acknowledge its occurrence. Part of Brennan's argument has to do with observing the prevalence of an individualistic way of thinking about the body in much of psychological theory which views a healthy body as contained affectively and energetically (2004). Brennan points out that there are other worldviews and cultures that do not perceive the body to be affectively contained. For example, Ochoa's work in Cuba demonstrates the experience of affective communication. In his research, he found that affects caused by the presence of the dead were sensed as "fluttering turns of the stomach, in goose bumps behind... [his informants] arms, and in barely perceptible sensations in... [his informants] chest..." (Ochoa 2004:483). My exploration into the communication of sensation and affect suggests, for the most part, that our bodies are not contained. Indeed, our bodies seem to be porous and receptive to affective non-verbal communication.

Brennan suggests that when two or more people come together, a transmission of affective energy is shared and the energies combine to create something uniquely shared. My informants also felt that combining of energies through sensory

awareness came not only from people, but also from the music, the space, the costumes, the choreography, imagination and memory. These relationships to the music, costumes, choreography and space, etc. are all developed in the pre-performance preparation. These relationships are then fully realized in the moment of performance and thus, have an improvised quality.

I will begin this section by discussing the element of improvisation that occurs when “being in the moment”. I will then explore how imagination and memory can evoke affect. This is an interesting issue because it suggests that affect can be conjured up in the present by somewhat removing oneself from the present. Some of my informants felt strongly that the body should be more of a conduit for experiencing the present and that to “try” to do anything beyond just being was almost a kind of dishonesty or betrayal to the task of performing. Other informants used imagery quite extensively, in combination with just being connected to sensory awareness in the moment, to infuse movement with a uniqueness and aliveness. In this zone of communication, time, space and music were experienced in unique and powerful ways. The final discussion in this chapter will look at communal moments of affectivity experienced by my informants.

Improvisation and “Being in the Moment”

Based on my research, affect has to do with improvisation, instinct and the unknown; in other words, “being in the moment”. If expression of these qualities is based on what one is experiencing in the moment, then the performer needs to exist in this realm of the moment to express it. For Paul, if something is not expressed in the

moment of experience, then the expression loses its significance and becomes an after thought and no longer as interesting, dynamic and surprising.

Barbara, who does a lot of improvising, finds that affect and sensation can drastically alter the choices you make. She also experiences a high level of intensity when she is truly “being in the space” which is less accessible when performing more structured work.

There is a beat poetry background to the improvisation I do. It's chaotic, about energy... the result can be more extreme [than performing more choreographed work] in terms of what's happening. Often when improvising, my heart is leading. Something is literally leading me around by the centre of my chest – like, I have nothing to do with it. It's like as if someone grabbed you inside and is propelling you through space... a phantom hand. The hand can be subtle, maybe about connecting to energy. So, it's a sign I'm just really connected. It happens in performance and happens more often in improvisation. It's harder when there is a set structure.

I asked Barbara if she was aware of what allows this to happen and she responded that there are multiple factors that could create this affective response including:

“concentration, awareness of space, music [especially live music], how the day is going, how I feel, and the audience.” Nicole describes that “being in the moment”

is like walking into the ocean and being open to a wave washing over you. I don't wait for it, I recognize it and let it happen – I'm open to the experience. I'm active in that I open myself, but sometimes it is unexpected. When I'm performing I know it's going to happen. Then I use that wave as fuel for energy to put out to the audience. I open myself just to the point where the wave could overwhelm me, but never beyond that.

According to Meredith, you have to bring yourself into the role and the piece, otherwise you won't affect others. So, for Meredith, as an artist she blends the feelings she is affected by with her own self-instinct to affect others. She blends what she is feeling in

her own body, what she is hearing, the presence of other people (for example her partner) with her own personality. But, according to Meredith “it all occurs in the moment and is not pre-planned but, rather, improvised.

Memory and Imagination Evoking Affect or the Body as a Conduit?

Nov.14, 2007

Sometimes she uses her imagination to evoke affect. She thinks of the prairies to have a sense of width. Or the forest if she wants to tap into a vitality that is wet, fresh, and has a bigger sense of time and no attachment to life and death being bad or good, it's all part of the same thing.

Nov.30, 2007

She thinks of opening her cheekbones, widening and breathing the music into her blood and muscles, expanding her chest and widening the space around her, while intensifying and fine tuning her focus with energetic intention coming from her limbs, torso, gaze, body direction, movement direction and oppositional pull in her body – it feels like all of this creates intensity in the space around her and in the interpretation of the music.

How do our own memories, experiences and imaginations influence how we register affect? There seem to be ways of evoking affect that come from internal sources of imagery and memory. The images and memories seem to be triggers to an affective response that combines with the sensory experiences of the moment. Phenomenologist Edmund Husserl believed that the “sensuous data” (Husserl 1948:74 in Throop 2005:502) that we feel during pre-objective awareness developed through memory of experience. In his formulation, past experiences inform consciousness which is in turn what gives form to the pre-objective experience (Throop 2005). In other words, the body can originate

affect to some degree through memory in combination with the visceral way in which one is affected in the moment. Peggy spoke about the importance of memory in evoking feelings during her performances. Memories in this case could include past images associated with the choreography and the music. Quoting Peggy,

Because I want immediately to be able to go into a feeling and when I say feeling, it includes all of the clumsy meanings of that word in terms of intuition, sensation, emotion - I want to go into a kind of synthesis of those and memory is a really big part of it. The body memory, the familiarity – it wants to be as immediate as recognizing your friend's face before their name or before anything else. If we just run into somebody in a strange city but we've had some kind of a close connection with them at some other time, before we remember all the things that happened between us, before we remember what year it took place, maybe even before we remember their name, we get an immediate recognition feeling about them. And that's the kind of recognition I like to have inside the choreography where it's not important to be able to name it anymore.

According to Blackmer, there is a relationship between imagery, memory and affect. In fact, the allegorical image is an important tool: "it is now generally acknowledged that the psyche can affect matter." (Blackmer 1989:69) Furthermore, an observer can also affectively sense the dancer feeling the image (Blackmer 1989).

... [I]t is useful to remember the extraordinary potency of the psyche to animate the body... An image – spark from the psychological end of the matter – psyche spectrum, streaking to the opposite pole, can activate a sensation which is perceived in the body, kinaesthetically, as clearly as the pain of a ballet teacher's pinch... image, too, has the power to awaken a hitherto dark corridor of communication between mind and muscle, and image contributes not only physical awareness but quality of movement. (Blackmer 1989:69)

Imagery communicates in a flash, it is very quick. Images produce an excitement and a liveliness both physical and psychological. "It is as if a drop of water of life had caused something to burst into flower, into consciousness." (Blackmer 1989:70). Image brings

colour and meaning to experience. That colour and meaning make the sensation of the image memorable

...which even after can be remembered and reproduced... This, it seems to me, is thought on a pre intellectual level, where pictures rather than words represent what is not yet fully conscious... Listen with your cheekbones. ... [T]hese images convey to the body a specific kinaesthetic sensation plus a subtle, inexpressible quality... (Blackmer 1989:70-71). In training, this image and countless others are combined to create a larger physical sensation... The dancer learns to remember...the accumulation and this becomes the physical portrait of a dancer and the message of the dance. (Blackmer 1989:71, 76)

Peggy spoke about using imagery to explore movement and think about it in a precise way. With every moment of the choreography, she goes through an exercise of replacing step names with action words with guttural sounds with imagery. But the goal is to drop that thinking at some point when preparing for performance and just identify with the sensations that those images and guttural feelings created. Sean spoke about a similar process of transforming analysis into feeling through imagery. According to Sean,

I trust my feelings and know I will get there [being in the moment]. As soon as I analyze things, I'm out of it. I can't plan it when I'm performing because I can't think during performance, I have to think before hand, when I'm planning. It starts as a thought and it turns into what it feels like. I internally feel things ahead of time so that when the time comes to dance, the feeling is there when it's needed. Sometimes when I internalize the sense or intent of a movement, the movement becomes easier. Sometimes, I just have to muscle my way through it because it is really hard. It's hardest for me to be on stage when I'm not moving. For example, in one piece, I'm sitting in a café and the everyday sensation still needs to happen. I am aware of the back of my head and my hands, etc. Feeling the back of my head draws energy there and awareness there. That gets communicated. Peggy Baker talks about sunlight hitting parts of her body and her body radiates under it. Graham McKelvie talks about wind moving across the skin. It makes me happy to think of that. In one piece, I imagine the wind hitting my back while I'm dancing and it reminds me of my body. It gives me goose bumps – like my skin is off of me and not contained. Like my container is bigger

and there is extra light and stuff between my internals and skin. This makes me feel bigger and lighter on stage. This technique of feeling the wind or sunlight is part of projecting. You can see that with people who walk into a room, it's not ego, they are just feeling and being in their bodies. Another image which helps with the wind image comes from release technique. The image is of lying in a hammock and rocking in the wind.

Although an affective experience is shared and transmitted in a performance situation, the affective responses will be personal. Sasha Ivanochko in her role as a choreographer talks about the transmission of images,

one thing that I say to people who do my work is that they can have whatever experience they want inside so long as they can also give an outer vibration of what I want. I don't expect the audience to understand or necessarily feel what I'm feeling [...]. I am the first one to say that my work is better because it has to do with the quality of the performer's interpretation. The images that we use, or however we work inside, I think it is translated, but, for example, I really doubt that you see the same colour of green that I see.

Margie Gillis has learned through experience and trial and error that people will apply information they gather from a performance differently.

One woman who came backstage burst into tears because I was short. [When she watched me perform] she saw someone who was overcoming her difficulties of being a tall person. [...] What she didn't get was that I am overcoming what I am overcoming. She applied overcoming to herself with her own particulars. However, what we were both doing was overcoming. Her subject matter of what she has to overcome and my subject matter of what I have to overcome are not necessarily the same thing. But, fundamental neuromuscular overcoming and transforming was accomplished. That is the magic, the basic fundamental magic.

Memory and imagination can be affective. However, according to Brennan, the experiences of affect caused by memory and imagination can take one away from living and being affected by the moment: "what stands in the way of the reconnection ... of sensations and feelings are ... memories and fantasies that trap energy in their repressions

and fixations in visual images. It is these that make us pause.” (Brennan 2004:148) One of my questions throughout this research has been, can one conjure up being in an affective zone and, further to that, prolong being in that zone through imagination and memory? When I asked Trish if sensation and affect could be consciously prolonged, her answer was:

No, you allow feelings to come and move through you. You are a witness to these feelings. Listening to feelings keeps you there [in the moment]. Listening to feelings of the body keeps you in the zone. The same is true of the music, the dancers around you, the audience and the space [you listen to all of those elements to be affected by them.] The space is powerful. [Performance] space was always big regardless of the actual size. There was a magnetic field that you felt when you entered the stage.

Trish’s explanation of the “zone” seems to indicate that her body was receptive to energy around her and that outer energy mingled with her internal feelings of intensity.

However, the role of imagination and memory in affective experiences seems to be more complex. Imagination and memory were important factors for most of my informants.

Danielle, like so many of my informants, seemed to combine using certain evocative images to actively create an affective response as well as open herself to having an affective response based on her experiences in the moment. According to Danielle,

I really think of my skeleton moving when I dance. It becomes the impetus for movement and then the air around me. I also imagine I have a spine in front of my body, an energetic spine. It’s a vertical spine and there is definitely some fire in there. It’s not empty but, rather, thick and moveable. This frontal spine is in great contrast to my limbs which feel longer than they are – I don’t feel their limits or ends in space. The visceral spine fluctuates but is also a source of constancy which is a source of freedom. My motivations are not emotional always but visceral and sensual.

This process for Danielle is really unconscious, the feelings just come. The music and the movement vocabulary are also very important for Danielle, more so than what the piece is about. “Sometimes I feel like a vessel for the music and vocabulary so I need to be empty. The vocabulary can dictate if I need to be empty. Sometimes it’s the opposite and the dance presence contradicts the music to create the message.”

Barbara spoke of the different kinds of imagery she uses depending on the kind of dancing she is doing. According to Barbara,

Release work seems to me to be very Zen and more about sensations based on certain imagery creating a movement quality (like “moss”, “sponginess”, “marionette strings or ear strings”, “bones are sponges”, “sternum is a nest of sea sponges”, “hips are valley spaces opening”). All these images are about getting into good alignment. In Yoga, *prana* (vital energy and breathe) you are moving energy up through the torso. Kundalini Yoga and Graham technique have the same idea. The bounces (the first exercise in a Graham class) are about warming up the base of the torso and then with the breathings [you start to let the energy rise in the torso]. But with release technique, energy comes up through you from the floor or anywhere else like the walls through an arm, etc.

Through the course of these interviews, one of the most moving experiences occurred during the interviews themselves. I learned that sitting and talking about affect often brought people into positive feelings of intensity in their bodies through the memory of dance imagery. Meredith spoke about a dancer friend of hers “who had a crazy energy when she danced especially in performance. I really could feel her. She was a really shy person but totally in the moment, so exciting to watch. Her movement looked instinctual.” The memory of watching her friend dance and how it felt to watch her brought tears to Meredith’s eyes. This memory also provoked tears because of the memory that Meredith chose this life course of dance due to the affective impact of her

friend's dancing. This highlights how the memory of sensations from watching others dance can be very powerful and life altering. "She was very real for me." As a result, Meredith could see pursuing dancing as a possibility for herself. Hypocognitive and pre-objective experience can be life changing and open up new life potential.

Nenagh Leigh is a choreographer who believes that 'being' is the message and that when performing, the audience perceives what the performer feels. Nenagh was getting chills from moments of my feeling through moving. The following is an experience I had of a structured improvisation rehearsal with Nina. During this improvisation, memory affected me in the moment and Nenagh responded to those feelings.

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What is so incredible is that I can't hide a thing from Nina. She feels everything that I do. I can't pretend to be in my body and feeling my body. So, when I feel a stretch through my body and it feels good, it feels good for her watching. If I feel nothing, she feels nothing. The movements just look like gestures unless they are infused with feeling and intention, then they become alive to both myself and Nina. When I collapsed into fetal position, I felt really human and tired. I came from a big stretched out reach, and I needed to just go into a position of rest, warmth, comfort. I stayed there just feeling human and feeling grief about my Mom passing away about one month ago. My connection to a shirt on the floor triggered a memory of her clothes, in particular her sweater which still smelled of her sweat even after she had died. I felt that memory of deep grief when I was reaching to that sweater and I allowed it to wash over me as I lay there. It washed over me for some time. When I felt ready, I came onto my knees and just looked at the shirt. I felt an immense connection to its imagined ulterior identity as my Mother's garment. Time and space expanded to make room for the dense feeling of loss in that moment.

My imagination in combination with my physical memories of affect in relation to grieving brought me into a realm of intense feeling and Nenagh felt all of that. She asked me what it felt like; I told her I felt my body but felt inhuman at the beginning of the

improvisation. However, towards the middle and end, I felt very human in relation to that shirt. She saw all of that unfold. To her, that was the story, that is the “being” that she wants to make accessible to an audience. For her, everything is connected – that is, all energy both material and non-material. The past, present and future is just a construct that we use to relate ourselves to life and living. Our bodies are connected to our brains; there is no separation between the two. So, what comes out of our bodies is of value and not to be ignored. Our perceptions and sensations of things create connections to the world around us – creating being and life. As a result of this philosophy, Nenagh is interested in pretty much everything because she doesn’t have a moral judgement about energy. She feels the story that unfolds as energy is released or expressed. But, to her, that is the story, it doesn’t become some other kind of literal narrative, it’s just feeling the energy story. Nenagh is intensely interested in living and watching/feeling “being” and existence.

I can imagine scenarios where certain ways of remembering or imagining might distract one from the present. However, after considering all of the experiences my informants shared with me, I’m not sure memory and imagery can really exist outside of being in the present. There may be a continuum of experience whereby memory and imagery align more or less with being in the present.

Alternative Sense of Time, Space and Music

As we get closer to qualities of anticipation, improvisation and intuition through our grasping of micro geographies and moments of affect, we gain proximity with ‘bare life’ and our perception is “stretched and intensified, widened and condensed.” (Thrift 2008:186)

This quote articulates how in affective moments, sensory experiences are felt in unique ways. Many of my informants shared with me how their experiences of time, space and music changed during moments of intense affectivity. In performance situations, there are often multi-directional communications of affect. All of the varying sources of energy that are affecting the dancer such as experiential time, space, music and lighting are communicating something through the dancer, through the choreography and also directly to the audience.

Time came up a number of times with my informants as being experienced in varying ways during performance. As mentioned earlier, Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) theorized that when pre-objective experience occurs, consciousness is completely immersed in “the felt flow of duration” (Throop 2005:502). Again, the task of talking and writing about experiencing the flow of time or duration is a difficult one because it can only exist in the realm of reflection, changed by analysis. None the less, the experiences have great beauty and potential in impacting the realm of sensory possibilities.

According to Graham, Susie and Danielle, music relates to time and the expression of music through a dancer can create a temporal shift. If the expression is of a long musical note, time can feel lengthened. This was the case for Danielle who explained,

the love duet in Maelstrom feels very intense. [When dancing this piece, Danielle feels she is in an open vessel state of being] The first time we come together and hold hands, I had a sensation that time was going by so slowly. Our fingers coming together took like an hour. I felt it everywhere, almost like I didn't have a body or my body was connected to everything: the ground, the air, Darryl [her partner]. My body was in continuity with the moment and energy around, one

state of being. This is an example where I was very affected by the music and the vocabulary. Being in that state (to be affected and to affect) gives a clarity and possibility to the vocabulary and the music that can't be found in another way.

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She just did class with Susie Burpee who talked today about jumping and leaping. Susie spoke about how jumping combined with music in the right way can give the appearance of lengthening and expanding time – making it more intense and suspenseful for the dancer and the audience. The music is integral to expanding the moment of experience through dancing. You could really see it when it worked in class today – you could feel that suspending or lengthening in time.

Our way of understanding time is so structured. When I feel like I experience time outside of our imposed structure it is a powerful and unusual feeling. It seems that moments of intense affectivity can change how time feels, slowing it down and lengthening its relationship to the body. For Peggy, the experience of time related to how the music and rhythm were felt. Quoting Peggy,

I like to feel rather than hear the music, I want to feel it in my body and with my body and a lot of what is going on in my head when I'm performing is just the rhythm. Actually, it's almost like a bird flying. There are moments where the wings stop flapping and it's just cruising like that almost like there is no sound anymore, it's just a... I guess suspensions feel like that and long moments of stillness. It isn't a feeling of stopping or controlling; stillness and suspension feel completely effortless. I talk about felt time a lot, because it's simply not metronome time, not even the time that's inside the music because it's more like as you feel the music you want to have more of almost a conversational rapport with the music and not try to be on top of it doing the things on the notes. I think this is also why I really love working with live music, it's because there's much more malleability in terms of time. And really great musicians don't play anything even remotely like metronome time. It's so pushed and pulled and things can slow down or speed up over long sequences, it's real time. It's experiential time and it's a complete warp compared to the clock time that we live our lives by.

Barbara has an intensely affective relationship with space and preferred to think of affectivity as “being in space” versus “being in the moment”. In the following quote, she describes an early experience of “being in space”.

When I was at the STDT [School of Toronto Dance Theatre] in first year at 8:30AM with Suzette Sherman teaching in studio C, part way through the floor work, between exercises, I finally realized how high the ceilings were. Light was coming in through the windows and I had an epiphany about space. The reality came and hit me that I was having a physical and visceral experience of being in space...there was no mental noise. It was a Zen moment of feeling my body in space without intellect getting in the way.

Danielle also spoke about how she senses the space around her during performance and how she funnels the affects of the space through her body to communicate them. Her description of her body connecting to the space around her brings to mind Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian man*.

I think of connecting to the geography around me and connecting through extending energy out of my limbs. I think of the concrete geography of the room I'm in (this idea comes from David Earle) but it's too limiting to just think of the room. I feel an energetic connection to the space which is infused with other sensations. The word 'energetic' seems to effortful here, instead 'continuity' with the space makes more sense. If it feels effortful, it has a clear end point. So, things end up feeling contained even when attempting to do the opposite (like energetically connecting to things).

Having looked at how my informants relate to time and space while performing. I will now turn to focus more specifically at the dialogic relationship between performer and audience member.

Communal Moments of Affect

I felt that one way of understanding this dialogic relationship between performer and audience member was to discuss with my informants experiences they have had of being affected as an audience member for a dance performance. As an audience member, certain pieces that really moved Nicole in terms of physical affect were *Triptych* by Danny Grossman and *Miserere* by David Earle. With *Triptych* she felt a disturbing feeling that manifested itself physically like a pulling down of her esophagus. Watching that piece gave her a sick feeling, but she felt she had to stay to experience it. Her hands get cold watching the piece. According to Nicole,

it's such a painful and disturbing piece. The piece talks about homelessness and humans being willing to admit the human capacity to render other humans inhuman. The dancers peel away their homeless clothing and underneath, they are human too. The piece applies to all those that are seen as inhuman (homosexuals, killers). We are not so civilized to exclude so many as inhuman. The piece itself has minimal movement. There are no counts, just soft music and then really dramatic moments in the score. The dancers have to respond exactly at the right time or else the piece loses its significance.

Miserere by David Earle which Nicole saw on video, affects her with a vibrant heat feeling in her chest. Assuming that affect could not be communicated across TV screens and through photographs, I was surprised that Nicole was so affected physically by watching *Miserere* on video. I now realize that my assumptions about TV and photographs being barriers to affective experiences were wrong. I now recognize that I've only ever seen on TV one of my favourite dance pieces by Alvin Ailey. Watching this piece gave me chills and a feeling of wanting to cry with joy every time I watched it. I used to watch it every day before school to prepare myself spiritually for the challenges of the day. It gave me hope and a goal, a dream and a role model for how to live with

spirit, vitality and generosity. I think I found the piece so moving because it was part of a celebration of Alvin Ailey's life after he passed away in 1989. To me, his dances represent struggle and freedom and a respect for diverse bodies.

According to Sean, affect gets stronger with use. "You see that with audiences – the more they see and process, the more affected they get." For example, when Sean sees musical theatre, at first he isn't affected at all and then after about 20 minutes, the pathway opens to be affected.

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She recently had the experience performing with a blindfold in Annunciation by David Earle. She felt incredibly vulnerable because she could see through the fabric of the blindfold with only about 15% of her vision and even less when she was in the light. At times, she was not sure of where she was on the stage. This forced her to rely on muscle memory to know how far to travel as well as changes in the light and the sound coming from the musicians to sense where she was on stage. After performing this piece, one dancer approached her and said that because of the blindfold, he really felt the vulnerability she was experiencing.

As an audience member, Nicole has observed that when the performer(s) are carrying out incredible physical or spiritual feats it puts her at the edge of her seat. If she can relate to the challenging dynamics of the situation the performer is in, that challenge then gets communicated to her as an audience member. In concert with Nicole's views, Graham explains other elements that allow affect to be communicated and communal. These elements include: music, physical striving, being engaged in the work as a performer and a respect for humanity. For Graham,

music and musicality are really important and don't need to be taken literally. But music creates a life span for dance. The soundscape or music suggests a narrative and also has a beginning and an end creating a shape with context and understanding. The component parts of a piece such as movement, music and

theme all need to be specific to an idea which has an aliveness to it. The music is the engine for movement and creates the affect of being driven (in any way you want to interpret) which gives the piece a morality because it is not arbitrary but relates to human experience. The music and the dancer have a relationship and this relationship is involving for the audience because it creates understanding and meaning.

Brennan has also recognized the potential for rhythm to unify two or more people in an affective exchange (2004). Rhythm can establish and enhance a "...sense of collective purpose and a common understanding (Brennan 2004:70). Rhythm can unite participants and observers of a dance performance through the transmission of complex affects. The rhythm comes from a soundscape as well as from the movement itself. In the work of David Earle the moment before one moves, is very important in creating a framework for uniting the dancers with the music. This subtle rhythmic emphasis also creates a unifying sense of anticipation and instinct in the movement.

Physical Striving, according to Graham is perceived when a dancer is dancing full out. Breathing also has a role in affectivity both physiologically and symbolically. According to Graham,

the audience can feel the breath and see the sweat of the dancer. The audience responds human to human. The breath rises and falls and that signifies more. Breathing in is literally inspiration. Breathing out is expiration, to expire, to die. Breathing creates a life narrative; breathing alone affirms the experience of life. Dancing is about aliveness even if the piece is about death. The audience sees their capacity for aliveness in the dancer and responds to it, or is affected by it.

Further to physical striving, a person is engaging when he is engaged. So, if it requires all of his attention, it will be engaging. There is a morality or meaning when the whole of one's being is applied to the moment. It makes art essential because there is no arbitrary layering on top. The piece *Sacra [Conversazione]* by David Earle is about the passing of a life and it is involving

for the audience because that's all there is in life when you come right down to it. The audience sees their own mortality reflected in this piece.

Three of my informants have performed Earle's *Sacra Conversazione*. They spoke about how physically and emotionally intense it is and how it requires a tremendous amount of energy and skill to perform the piece. Two informants talked about the experience of beginning the piece and not knowing how they were going to get through it. But, as the piece goes on, they explained, the dancers feel a connection to each other and the music and they feel part of a community that is all going through the same experience of grief. They feel their energy rise as a result of this feeling of community and they can then all get through the piece and feel energized at the end of it. At the end of *Sacra*, the audience response has always affected Graham and been a signal that a life affirming and community experience was just shared. Quoting Graham,

the response (usually standing ovation and two or three curtain calls) is based on recognition that "we" (the audience and the dancers) have shared something important. It's an undeniable sense of completeness and a humble blessing. It's the opposite of ego. It's a reminder that you are part of a community. Feelings help us create a community, if we didn't feel we wouldn't care and our species thrives on caring as well as visceral communication which creates community. As a group when we communicate feeling, it amplifies our human community.

Feelings are not extravagant. They are essential to the building blocks of communication. Good art will take us to the edge of something that can't be named. As a community we ensure ourselves a future. Some things are too big to encompass personally and can only be understood through community (for example, mortality). Community engenders hope and faith because as a group you can at least describe the outside boundary of what can't be named. Good dancing creates faith in community and a desire to continue living. With restriction comes emancipation. If there is no restriction, no emancipation, and nothing matters.

There may be factors that make shared affect seem more or less intense depending on the interactive dynamics of the situation (Brennan 2004). For example, Eddie Kastrau²⁰ experienced the intensity of sharing an experience with an audience in Cuba.

When we did *Endangered Species* in Cuba, it was 1991, the Soviet Union had just fallen, Castro was still there in his element, but things were getting really hard there because the Soviet Union wasn't providing the support they used to and people were really poor, we saw bread lines. And you couldn't even go to restaurants. We ate every meal in the hotel I think because the restaurants didn't have much food. So, when we performed *Endangered Species* [by Danny Grossman], they were so quiet throughout; you could definitely feel the energy. There wasn't a peep in the house; they were so attentive. When it was over, we stood as a clump facing the audience. It [the clump] represents humanity; there are soldiers, the general and a family. The general makes the soldiers attack the family. But in the end we stand as a united human group and we just face the audience. Danny [Grossman] says that is a statement [to the audience] of "now you take it and do with it what you need." Audiences usually rush into an uproar, but this audience didn't, they were just still, very eerie. Someone started to applaud but it took 15-20 seconds and then they did rhythmic applause where they were all in unison, we didn't have enough bows for the applause, so that's when you know that there has been a sharing of affect.

Julia spoke about her affective experience with both *Sacra* and *Endangered Species* and why the pieces impact her as an audience member.

Sometimes it can be music, certain chords, certain minor chords like the beginning of David Earle's Mozart Requiem [*Sacra*]. Every time I see that I start balling my eyes out it's partly the music and partly the imagery. It's partly knowing where the imagery comes from and probably certain personal memories of my own. Every time I see, and how many thousands of times have I seen it, Danny Grossman's *Endangered Species*, I ball my eyes out. It's partly the music, it's partly the imagery of it is so true, it's so real. I'd say that the thing that most often puts me into that state of being just about to burst into tears or the hairs standing on the back of my neck is actual physical images like *Endangered Species* dancers running across the stage screaming like they are on fire. It's that very thing that does it to me. That is the beauty and power of dancing that it can evoke such strong sensations.

²⁰ Eddie Kastrau started dancing professionally at 15 years of age and is now 45 years old.

For many of my informants, being on stage with an audience allows one to communicate more comfortably, because the stage is a safe place to be vulnerable and share without interruption or reprise. According to Sean,

in performance, I felt I could translate steps into meaningful dancing. When you are performing, you are communicating. I could never move just for the steps, I need intent. So, with an audience there, I turn physicality into intention. I'm much more comfortable when on stage because I finally get to communicate.

Sean like Eddie and Paul also spoke about how performing gives him energy.

In rehearsals when people are watching I like it because it helps me develop what I want to say. When people are watching there is a dialogue which makes me more conscious of the possibilities. I pick up on the energy of the observer and read what they are giving off, even if it's just their energy, I am affected by it.

That some of my informants spoke of receiving energy from performing seems to relate to Brennan's point that our bodies are penetrable by energy. Whether that energy is sound waves or light frequencies, this energy can and does penetrate our bodies. This porousness is another way in which it seems dance communicates.

The origin of transmitted affects is social in that these affects do not only arise within a particular person but also come from without. They come via an interaction with other people and an environment. But they have a physiological impact. By the transmission of affect, I mean simply that the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another. (Brennan, 2004:3)

According to Brennan, bodies are not primarily repositories of knowledge and originators but, rather, receivers and transmitters of messages; "the human being [is] a receiver and interpreter of feelings, affects, attentive energy." (Brennan 2004:87) Suzette

Sherman²¹ feels this dialogue of energy differently depending on whether she is in performance, class or rehearsal because all have different stimulus.

I feel a lot which is my gift and my curse. When I am dancing I really feel an exchange of energy with the people I'm around. I really feel the audience and the other dancers in performance. On the flip side, when I'm teaching and it seems that a person doesn't care, I feel that a lot too. It's about energy which is a non-verbal exchange. As dancers, we know so much physically – I'm affected by interpersonal dynamics, visual stimulus and energetic stimulus. When we perform with the string quartet, there is a double impact. The energies of the musicians and the dancers come together to impact the audience.

Those involved in a communal moment of affectivity as either an audience member or a performer will have their own triggers to particular feelings depending on their own previous experiences. In other words, one person's feelings do not become another's. As a result, feelings of affect will be diverse in a performance situation. However, even though affective experiences of a performance may differ, it seems clear from the experiences of my informants that an overall affective experience can also be shared. This sharing of affect may become more possible when people can affectively resonate with the dance performance independent of specific meaning. As Massumi has pointed out,

...depending on the circumstances, [affect] goes up and down gently like a tide, or maybe storms and crests like a wave... It's because this is all attached to the movements of the body that it can't be reduced to emotion. It's not just subjective, which is not to say that there is nothing subjective in it. (Massumi in Shouse 2005:2)

For many of my informants who spoke of communal affectivity, it seems a barrier came down. I think also the practice of being affected must be about barriers coming

²¹ Suzette Sherman is currently a dancer and a teacher. She has been dancing professionally for 30 years.

down so that we, as dancers, feel our connections to webs of energy that are constantly changing. We feel in the moment or in space and allow ourselves to be affected by those feelings. We consciously do this but it is still a spontaneous experience. According to Barbara,

it strikes me that as a performer in order to feel, often I have to consciously direct my attention there- away from thinking whereas, for an audience member feeling happens more spontaneously or it doesn't. Feeling somehow connects me to the present moment--it's like a pathway there from thinking- awareness- consciousness- feeling-dissolving of ego and then from there it can be very tricky paradoxical and mysterious. Like David [Earle] says sometimes an absence of feeling but sometimes so much feeling like I can feel things that other people feel, somehow the wall comes down.

Eddie explained his relationship to the audience when performing as being dialogic on an energetic level.

I feel there is energy coming towards me. It feels kind of like a wave. I feel I have to match it when I'm on stage. Put as much back as I feel from them. And actually sometimes when I'm in a performance when the audience isn't into it, (Friday night crowd wants to have a good time sometimes they're not ready for a piece about death or when we were in Beijing, [the audience is used to extreme acrobatics and we weren't doing that, so they were not too enthusiastic]) I couldn't feel any energy from the audience, and then you have to make it up and you have to just dance for yourself. But, most times I feel energy coming from the audience.

Danielle spoke of the idea of sharing time with those present in terms of sharing an affective experience. However, although she also feels there is a dialogic relationship with the audience, she is not conscious of it. For Danielle,

there are new feelings in those moments of performing. Beyond what's experienced or articulated it's about bringing people to the same moment of consciousness. Feelings after that are expressed of anger or happiness and these feelings are by-products of the moment shared. During the act of performing there is a coming together without constant dialogue or interpretation of the

moment that has just past. The interpretation is important but there is a different resonance if that coming together was able to happen on a less mental but more visceral level. This is an extremely specific task so the preparation required to do this is also specific. All the work that needs to happen in daily life is constantly about exploring that visceral coming together. It's not solitary; it is infinitely to do with affect - very much about being affected and affecting others. I'm not conscious of that dialogue of energy with the audience.

As a performer, Nicole hopes and believes that what she is feeling gets communicated and resonates with people watching. Nicole was in a piece about sexual assault which was very disturbing to dance. She felt disturbed watching herself on video. She got a sinking sick feeling when she was dancing in the piece.

I knew it went well when I felt sick afterwards. Others told me that they felt sick watching it. So, I think feelings get across. When I am watching dance, at times you can tell that a dancer is thinking about dinner. A lot of dancers don't realize how easy it is to communicate feelings. For example, even semi-conscious or unintended feelings get communicated like when a costume is too tight or uncomfortable, it shows to the audience.

Returning to Brian Massumi, affect is about the body's ability to be affected and to affect others. In this chapter it is clear that affecting others opens one to being personally affected and visa versa. The communication of affect during dance performance allows both performers and audience to feel communal moments of affectivity. These moments are visceral and, for my informants, they relate to a sense of being human and how we connect to the world and others.

The Politics of Sensation and Affect

[N]ow all kinds of corporate and state institutions are trying to formulate bodies of knowledge of these realms which are both systematic and portable, knowledge's of complex affective states of becoming, 'regimes of feeling' which are bound to be constitutive of new political practices. It therefore becomes incumbent on those forces which regard these developments as rather worrying – and indeed as likely to produce a new kind of velvet dictatorship – to produce their own analyses and political agendas. (Thrift 2008:188)

As I have been reflecting on sensation and affect, I have been struck by the number of times during my own life when I've been told what I should be feeling and sensing. I also can not ignore that certain sensations and affects have been imposed. This realization coupled with reading the research of Throop and Ochoa have brought me to the disturbing realization that I have perhaps not fully experienced the spectrum of affective and sensory possibilities. Brennan (2004) and Massumi (Shouse 2005) have also both opened my eyes to the reasons for this narrowing of possibility. Some of my informants have also had important insights into how the body's range of affective and sensory experiences might be narrowed. In one case, resisting this narrowing was done consciously as a kind of embodied politic. In other cases, resistance to this narrowing was embodied through dance but was not consciously political. Still in all cases, dance provides a place to explore a wider spectrum of affective and sensory possibilities. The potential that resides within affect or "being in the moment" is viewed by Massumi as a site for hope and freedom. After exploring affect in relation to dance, I couldn't agree more. I see an honesty about our humanity reflected in moments of affect. Affectivity can be freeing on an individual level and inclusive on a communal level.

Desire for Diversity

According to Brennan, based on an association between individualism and objectivity, it would seem healthy individuals like objects are meant to be unaffected thereby encouraging people to feel less (Brennan 2004).

[Individualism] gives rise to a particular understanding of objectivity that is coincident with it, based on the notion that the objective is in some way free of affect. Once this notion is accepted, then the affect, as a vehicle connecting individuals to one another and the environment, and for that matter connecting the mind or cognition to bodily processes, ceases to be a proper object of study. (Brennan 2004:19)

When I spoke earlier of the imposition of certain sensations and affects, in part, I was referring to a pressure to be self-contained and cognitively oriented. Brennan points out that along with the idea that self-containment is considered to be a good characteristic, cognitive abilities are seen to determine agency more than emotional or affective engagement (2004). However, this preference for unaffected individuals misses an exploration of the potential for collectives to be greater than the sum of their parts and more inventive than individuals acting on their own (Brennan 2004). None of my informants felt contained affectively or energetically. In fact, they would not be fulfilling their role as an artist if they were self-contained and unaffected by sensory awareness.

According to Graham, people who turn up their noses at visceral intuitive responses, because they think they are above basic animal experience, think their minds are bigger than emotion but always to their folly because emotion can not be helped, it's necessary for survival. For Graham,

something can not be moral if there is no necessity for it. Art is always necessary. So, you will have a visceral response because it is necessary. If there is no necessity, it is about an endless experience of distraction as opposed to vital experience or intercourse with an idea.

When one is presented with the affects of others and the images of others, it inspires new possibilities for dreaming. I am trying to pay attention to the pathways of sensation in my own body and the bodies of my informants. My hope is that greater attention will expand my knowledge of the body. But, more significantly, dance is a realm in which affective energy can be unblocked and communicated in the moment without analysis, extending our range of possible affects beyond the knowable. The urgent relevance for widening the spectrum of affective and sensory possibilities lies with the need for diversity of experience in making life sustainable. Quoting Brennan,

individual human organisms depend like other organic life on the diversity of the whole biosphere. The nascent learning of human bodily codes takes place in this context and should extend to knowledge of how those codes intersect with those of other living things in a mutually sustaining endeavour. (Brennan 2004:162)

Through the course of this research, I have been thinking about how the benefits of diversity relate to sensation-diversity. If brain development is based on what one experiences, removing sensations from those experiences could possibly create a frighteningly un-stimulating mono-tone experience resulting in a shift in brain development and sensory awareness. The impact of removing certain sense experiences would be to remove sense-diversity, literally transforming one's sensory rhizomatic map. The experience of visiting a restaurant chain strikes me as an example of a narrowing of sense-diversity (foods and environments being produced based on specific formulas).

This same controlling of sense experience can be found in the media and politics where political attitudes are, in part, “conditioned by intense autonomic bodily reactions.” (Thrift 2008:182) Thrift and Massumi both talk about the role of the media in utilizing affect to draw people in and incite intense affective bodily reactions. For example, Ronald Regan’s transmission of confidence translated into “capturable life potential; ...a particular emotional expression and becoming – conscious of one’s side-perceived vitality.” (Massumi 2002:41) Within this context, there is an increasing pressure for political presentation to conform to media norms of presentation whereby credibility is measured by what one evokes (Thrift 2008:184). This measurement is guided by affective norms which people are encouraged to conform to so that the “benefits” of our capitalist system²² can be felt.

Thrift posits that affect is becoming a technology of governance due to its seemingly successful use in the media and politics (Thrift 2008:184). Foucault and Agamben both point out how biopolitics are a large part of western modes of power; this increasingly visible arena of affect is a micro-biopolitical realm (Thrift 2008). Debates about the body having agency or being passive seem to presume the body exists in some kind of vacuum. However, based on the research of this project, I can see no such vacuum. Rather, the body seems to be an interface of constant reaction and response to energy. The humanness that comes through in the way one chooses to transition from one movement to the next, the expression of darkness and light and being allowed to see people’s (dance performers) faults all came up in the interviews as important elements in

²² By “our capitalist system”, I am referring to current neo-liberal capitalism or turbo-capitalism (Luttwak 1999) which seems out of balance with diversity and sustainability.

having a shared communal moment of affect. “Vulnerability remains not only unthought-of but potentially un-thinkable within much current work on the body within Anglo-American social science.” (Thrift 2008:239)

Embodied Politic: Freedom and Openness Within the Body

Embodiment needs to include vulnerability, passivity, suffering, fatigue, hunger, insecurity and insignificance. It is a denial of humanity to only consider people as active and exuding positive energy and fitness. Meredith has observed that fatigue can be used as a way of sensing the body more and being in a more affective state, “sometimes you can feel movement when you are more tired. Tiredness lends itself to vulnerability or openness which is hard to tap into sometimes.”

The idea of controlling affect draws me back to my interview with Trish and her statement that freedom within is sustaining, but capitalism is not sustaining. Trish has consciously enveloped her politics within her body and her movement. For her, freedom to be affected in diverse and communal ways is political in a physiological way and a great threat to current hegemony. According to Trish Beatty, “fitness is armour not sensation. Fitness is different than being in your body and sensing. One needs to support vulnerability.” Trish feels that people want to get out of their bodies because they hurt or because they don’t think they fit an ideal for example they feel too short or fat.

You need to celebrate how [the body] feels when you [dance]. If you move too quickly, sensation and affect won’t get communicated. But, if you move slowly enough to communicate your feelings, then the audience gets inspired to live their own lives and create – they go home and create pottery or paintings. With ballet

or dance that moves too fast for people to feel, they just want dancers' autographs at the end. It's about freedom not achievement. Speed in movement is close to hysteria. It hides how you feel. Slowness communicates.

When Trish entered the stage she wanted to exude a presence that demonstrated her embodied politics as a feminist.

I was a woman and that's not a fault – This insistence I had – stop fooling around you guys, let's get serious [directed to the audience]. My politics were in my body. Martha Graham was making it beautiful for us to acknowledge the darkest parts of us. But, I wanted to take that darkness somewhere. You have to take your own experience seriously before an audience is going to. [She wanted to be taken seriously as a woman on stage, set an example of female power in the body] I craved intensity. Kids turn to crime when they crave intensity because it's the only thing that feels intense enough – they should be artists.

Many dancers avoid communicating feeling. They don't want people to know what they're feeling. Really they are starved for it and the result is they become sentimental but it's always controlled – they don't want to show that control – it's like they don't want to show the roots of a flower. People are so scared of chaos but there is so much between control and chaos. Actually, chaos is a construct. People should do what they like – but after preschool they can't.

Trish's views seem to reflect the lack of encouragement to being open to receiving affective charges in Euro-American culture. According to Spinoza, we are open to “controlled flexibility” but not affective receptivity (Thrift 2008). For both Spinoza and Deleuze the political imperative for a model of affect is

to widen the potential number of interactions a living thing can enter into, to widen the margin of ‘play’, and, like all living things, but to a greater degree, increasing the number of transforms of the effects of one sensory mode into another. (Thrift 2008:191)

According to Sean, dance has allowed him to widen his potential for living.

I need things to express. Dance became an outlet as a young person – dance helped me develop. Many young gay people have difficulty developing a sense of who they are because they are culturally unable to step into categories. So, [dance] class was a big outlet for development.

Dance has also widened Nicole's potential. She shared with me an inspiring memory of talking with Margie Gillis:

I asked her a question "everything has a category, but I don't have one. I have to jump from one to another when it is convenient. But you don't have one either, so what do you do?" Margie answered, I made my own box. No one else fits into it because I'm my own category. There are always people who are threatened by that, by you being comfortable with yourself, but eventually those people will become like a pebble with a soft edge in a stream.

Dance has allowed both Sean and Nicole to exist outside of culturally constructed categories. Neither expressed their dancing as a political outlet. However, on some level, they are both resisting a narrowing of experience. Through these and other experiences of my informants, I have come to see the communication of sensation and affect as a kind of politics of hope.

Hope in Affect

Although Thrift is hopeful that notions of affect will allow for many positive social and political possibilities, he argues that

[...] we still lack a politics of emotional liberty or hope which can be both productive and not so attached to Euro-American individualism that it simply reproduces the assumptions of the West in what it strives for: a kind of free to do what one likes, goal oriented selfishness which actually flies in the face of all the evidence that human individuals...only exist as faint traces in much larger and more extensive circuits of social relation. (Thrift 2008:198)

After completing my research, it appears there is a space for hope and liberty to live in the communication of sensation and affect. One of the ways that hope and affect

are connected, as explained by Massumi and reinforced by the views of my informants, is through “being in the moment”. Hope and affect are also connected through the body. Adding to this, another way that hope and affect are powerfully connected is through the idea that affect is shared and that the communication of sensation and affect provides hope precisely in its ability to inspire communal affectivity.

Massumi uses the word “affect” in place of “hope”. Hope, in Masumi’s articulation of the concept is better not to be associated with goal oriented future success; teleporting oneself out of the present and into the future with utopian optimism or pessimism leads to paralysis and actually diminishes the space for hope creating hopelessness.

[...] if hope is separated from concepts of optimism and pessimism, from a wishful projection of success or even some kind of a rational calculation of outcomes, then I think it starts to be interesting – because it places it in the present. (Massumi in Shouse 2005:1)

For Massumi, affectivity offers potential because there is an element of manoeuvrability in the uncertainty of the present or “the moment” as experienced by my informants (Massumi in Shouse 2005). Massumi believes that affect is about “being in the moment” more intensely. Again, based on the experiences of my informants, this registers as an essential element to the performance scenario and dancing as a form of expression and communication more generally.

Returning to the body, Massumi identifies embodied freedom as another way in which affect offers hope and potential. Through the expansion or the limbering up (as

Massumi puts it) of our affective experiences, we also expand our potential for freedom and hope.

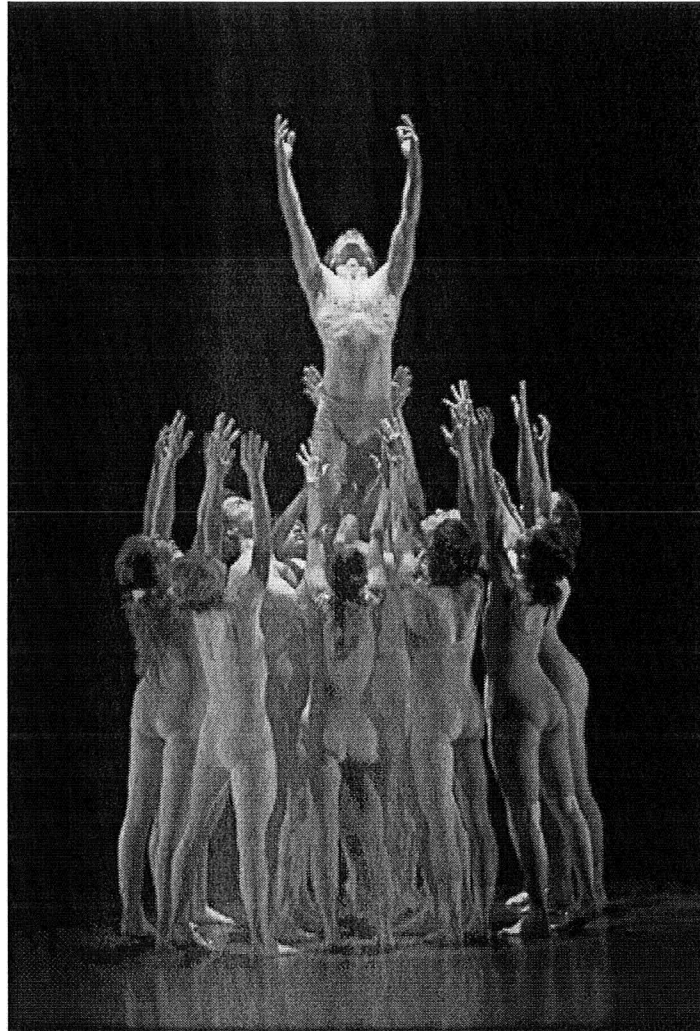
Our degree of freedom at any one time corresponds to how much of our experiential 'depth' we can access towards a next step – how intensely we are living and moving. Once again, it's all about the openness of situations and how we can live that openness. ...The way we live it is always entirely embodied, and that is never entirely personal. (Massumi in Shouse 2005:2)

Massumi's views, once again, seem to relate directly to how Trish conceives of freedom.

For Trish, embodiment is political. Trish spoke about the difference between the freedom sought in capitalism which is not sustainable and rooted in addiction and the freedom found "within" the body through a connection to sensation which is sustainable.

This idea that capitalism and addiction work together draws me back to the feeling that there is a need for a diversity of sensations and affects that are uncertain and spontaneous so that our sensory awareness widens and doesn't narrow. Predictability of sensations such as certain atmospheric sounds (for example, in department stores) and certain smells, tastes and colours (for example, in chain restaurants) as well as addiction to certain feelings (such as the effects of sugar and caffeine) work well under a neo-liberal economy but have very little to do with embodied freedom. Thus, freedom within the body to be affected in diverse and communal ways is political and is a threat to current hegemony in a physiological way.

As my informants have shown, affectivity is shared; it takes people out of isolation and creates a heightened sense of connection with other people as well as with time and or space. These connections are not formulaic. Rather, they are spontaneous and diverse; they are experienced through engaging with affect.



Dancetheatre David Earle performing David Earle's *Miserere* (Launer 2008).

Opening Up Possibilities

As mentioned in the preface, this thesis has been framed by the intensely visceral experience of grieving. For that reason, I will reiterate how that intense experience has informed my understanding of visceral affect through sharing one of those intense moments near my Mother's passing. Five days before my Mom passed away, she could barely stand up anymore but she managed to get to the piano. She played a piece by Mendelssohn from *Songs Without Words*. A world of sensation without words is now where she resided. She played this piece a lot as I was growing up. It was a piece that her father had also played. The music transported her right back into her healthy body and she played it almost flawlessly. She stopped after striking some dissonant chords and she explained that Mendelssohn was experimenting with dissonant chords. She played them again and commented about how good it felt to play the chords; they had a visceral affect on her body and my own. There was a darkness and lightness that when played together was profound. This experience taught me that we have developed a verbal language around anger and happiness, darkness and light but when you put those feelings together it creates a complexity inside simplicity and gives you new possibilities that we struggle to verbally articulate yet can more readily articulate through music and dance.

This thesis points to a way of recovering knowledge about how affect can be non-verbally communicated and shared and is not simply self-contained. Many informants supported the view that people are naturally able to communicate affect and be affected. However, we develop blockages to feeling and slowly we are affected less and less and

affect others less and less. My informants felt that affectivity can be re-learned and strengthened through an awareness of transparency and honesty about affect.

Affective energy is blocked, according to some informants, by self-image. As soon as they think of themselves or feel insecurities during performance they are no longer open to experience. Brennan articulates this process of self-image taking one away from the moment of affectivity. Quoting Brennan,

the energy that escapes service in the name of fixation is misdirected in the affective drives: it is directed away from the living paths it otherwise follows naturally toward the constructed pathways of subjectivity, pathways built around inertia and lack. (Brennan 2004:148)

On that note, I don't wish to cloud this writing with an ending full of redundancy that might actually take away from the beauty and power of affect and its spontaneity. In fact, I'd rather not think of this as an ending which is why I have chosen to call this chapter "Opening Up Possibilities". Certainly, the results of this research seem to indicate a beginning or an opening up of possibilities. Taking my cue from the content of this work and the honesty and transparency that affect demands, I find myself returning to the idea of affectivity being a two way experience. As Peggy pointed out, just as a performance is completed by the audience, so it is here that the reader will ultimately be the one to complete this project through imagination and a willingness to explore.

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