

Space for dance and other concepts

Elizabeth Wood

Volume 6, Number 3, Spring 1990

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/9781ac>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Le Centre de diffusion 3D

ISSN

0821-9222 (print)

1923-2551 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Wood, E. (1990). Space for dance and other concepts. *Espace Sculpture*, 6(3), 19–20.

SPACE FOR DANCE AND OTHER CONCEPTS

Elizabeth Wood

satisfaire aux règlements municipaux, et de vêtements spéciaux pour protéger les danseurs qui, par exemple, évoluent sur le ciment. Mais il existe quantité de sites possibles et ce, tout à fait gratuitement! Et le public, qui est constitué d'une foule très disparate de curieux, devient un tout nouveau public pour la danse. S'il reste parfois perplexe, il n'en est pas moins enchanté de l'occasion qui lui est offerte de cotoyer ces... athlétiques idoles!

Certes, l'espace où l'on aura dansé ne sera jamais plus le même, ni pour le danseur, ni pour le spectateur. Et peut-être que tout ce qu'il faut à l'imagination des chorégraphes d'aujourd'hui pour projeter, faire jaillir les danseurs hors des "petites boîtes" traditionnelles, se retrouve dans la vision proposée par Jeannie et Spider Robinson dans leur oeuvre de fiction intitulée *Stardance*: la danse transmise par hologramme dans la gravité zéro de l'espace infini. ♦

see only specific parts of what is happening. And much of the creative process can happen in the editing room, without the dancers.

Dancing in the streets is still a viable alternative. Have you ever noticed how small is the range of acceptable behavior in public? And dancing is the least expected activity in airports, shopping markets and bank lobbies. Special clothing and permits are usually required to protect dancers from cement and city bylaws. But what a range of dramatic settings are available for free! And the audience is a wide sampling of curious passersby. These are fresh, new publics for new dance, sometimes perplexed and often delighted with the chance to brush elbows with these athletic idols. The danced-in space will never quite be the same for those who danced and those who watched.

And perhaps all that is necessary for the choreographers' imaginations to spring their humanized dancers out of little boxes is the vision of Jeannie and Spider Robinson in the work of speculative fiction *Stardance*: holograph-transmitted dancing in the zero gravity of outer space. ♦

Dena Davida, dancer, choreographer and educator, founded *Tangente Danse Actuelle* in 1980. Coinciding with the organization's tenth anniversary, *Tangente* will open its first permanent, legal, made-for-dance project (space) this coming winter in Montreal. The challenge for Dena Davida, for *Tangente*, and for contemporary dance in general, however, is not confined to issues concerning physical space, not limited to providing concrete structures in which contemporary dance may be presented. And *Tangente's* artistic director is well aware of this reality as she continues her obdurate, "mission"-like commitment to contemporary dance: creating, teaching, and diffusing dance. It is through the latter in particular, however, that her work extends beyond the realm of physical space. As she curates programs of contemporary dance, Dena Davida works toward the building of new *psychological* spaces... new-found attitudes which will elicit the systematic disolution of the constricting walls of bias and misconception that have tended to surround dance. The language of dance is, after all, the actual embodiment of movement itself, and as these new "attitudinal spaces" evolve and change (along with the physical spaces inhabited by dance) the very walls of misconception will continue to crumble, as elsewhere dividing walls once believed to be permanent have begun to disintegrate. The following excerpts are extracted from an interview with Dena Davida which took place in early January, 1990.

«... People rarely think about spaces, about moving in them... We have limited our physical behaviour to such numbing kinds of activities as walking through a maze every morning. Dance enlivens a space. It makes people think and feel differently about it because they are seeing in the space an unusual activity. Sometimes this even gets them to reflect about public behaviour.

The most interesting experiment I have done was with my students in Sherbrooke metro one day. I gave them an hour, divided into three sections, the first section devoted to simply engaging in normal metro activity. They then began to explore the range of what is "allowed": walking in turnstiles, up and down the ramps, moving in certain spaces...mostly walking, sometimes running or walking fast, etc. I asked them to begin, in a gradual way, to modify their behaviour, so that it was an exaggeration of what is normally done. That was the

uncomfortable zone for them, when the people began to react with discomfort, were worried sometimes, wondered if the students were ill or disturbed, or possibly violent. Sometimes the aberration was slight, but just enough to be disturbing. And in the third part of the hour, they were to dance in the metro, and that was again more comfortable, because people realized that they were dancing, they were artists. Although street dancing isn't current, playing music in the metro is, so they're already familiar with that role for the artist. And then the dancers (or the movers) became very relaxed and began to explore those spaces which were very unusual, the ramps, the stairs, and the shapes at the end, the energy, the dynamics. They were very, very creative and very excited. Also about having an audience, what I call a "found audience"; people happening upon dance, the majority of whom don't walk into dance theatres to watch it. The reaction varies from person to person. A number of people recognize it as dance and say, well isn't this delightful that this is happening, and stop and watch and enjoy. Those who don't identify it as dance and are uncomfortable until they understand will either ask someone what's happening, or they'll eventually figure it out. And others will inevitably walk by as if they haven't seen it... because they are busy, or don't want to acknowledge it for any number of reasons. The students are often delighted by that type of an audience... an innocent audience.

Dance overlaps with visual arts, in the area of shape and space particularly, but dance is a time art and that also makes a differ-



Performance de Dena Davida et Daniel Godbout au Parc Lafontaine. 1983. Photo : Ormsby Ford.

ence... it's ephemeral. Words from visual art like subjective and figurative keep coming up. Dancing is figurative because the human body is the basic component... so can you have non-figurative dance? I believe dance training's purpose is to extend the range of what we already do. I felt that I was best at a very direct kind of communicating with the public - bone to bone and muscle to muscle - rather than passing through some kind of psychological, emotional complex to reach them with a character which I would create. I found that the gesture of the body, being not at all abstract for me, being something very concrete (...I move in front of you...) was the kind of communicating that was the strongest, the most urgent, the most direct. In contact improvisation we will often say that the dancer just observes the space. **The dance already exists in the space and we enter and fulfill that dance already existing.** Perhaps it's a way of moving away from classical dance, which is structured with its five positions and tight geometric code, and inside the instrument which is the body... and actually letting the nervous system drive the gesture. It is a more humble way of working. John Cage, Rauschenberg, that whole group of people found

a lot of origins in oriental thought. Humility wasn't what they were searching for - they were searching for other sources and a different kind of exploration than classical - but the result is a de-emphasis of the artist genius, the super-being. Because of its abstract qualities (and because there is an instrument being played in both cases) **dance is often said to be very close to music... The difference with dance, of course, is that the player is the instrument...** we grow up with the instrument, it is not outside ourselves. Dancing to music is the usual view of teaching dance at most universities... and even Labanotation (one of the basic theories applied to dance) is based on a Western musical score: moving through beats, through time. As soon as you have an unusual framework that is musical for dance, Labanotation is nearly impossible... it can't be written. What is most interesting for the present and the future of the arts (and the world, to extend the metaphor) is that simultaneously there is a re-defining of cultures and artforms and a consolidating of what is dance, versus music, versus visual arts ... and then comes this very promiscuous interfacing between ideas, artforms and cultures...

Tangente Danse Actuel was a very simple need for space for dance. Literally, space for dance. The artist-run space network served as the model of a kind of facility for community development of an artform and its interaction with the community. And I really took that model into dance. *Tangente* is a service organization, if you like. Presenting dance has become a vehicle for me, just creating a space that doesn't exist for dancers. It's why I created structures, thematic series: *Le Corps Politique*; *Moment'Homme*; *Sa Geste*; *Mue-Danse*. These attempted to focus on certain issues in dance rather than on gestures and dancing, to focus the attention of the public and the choreographers on issues. *Sa Geste*, for example, is about dancing by women, and why that is particular; *Moment'Homme* shows how dances by men might be particular. *Mue-Danse* is about the fusion of the visual arts and dance; *Le Corps Politique* about dancing that is socially engaged. Reflecting the definite resur-

gence of interest in signs and symbols and structure and meaning through language and words, the series *Porte-Parole* (*Tangente*, January 1990) is about the confronting of the body and the word. And the confrontations are as varied as most modern theory. Words in dream-like sequences, for instance, create a sound-score that supports a dancing image in one case; another work incorporates (with three separate performer/voices) a text of Samuel Beckett. In one piece, dancers actually utter or speak words. In yet another, the words become an almost sensical (not non-sensical) musical score that happens at the same time as the dancer is moving, the voices voicing with the same kinds of rhythms and intensities... different ways that words and bodies are woven into images together». ♦

Peasant Pas de Deux.

Exemple de "Labanotation". 1989-1990.

Conception : Nancy Nadeau, étudiante de maîtrise en sciences de l'informatique. Département d'informatique et de recherche opérationnelle. Université de Montréal. Professeure : Rose-Marie Lèbe-Néron.



12



7 - 8



2 - 3



1 - 2

