

Tess de Quincey

Thinking Dance - Dancing Thought

In the beginning - is the body;
to be articulate - articulation starts in the body
the body-mind
the cellular movement, the dance of the unconscious luminates through everyone
and the dancer is a function of the space and of the energetics of exchange
a shared position that engages in and embraces a multiplicity of positioning.

The Japanese word for human being is *ningen*,
graphically leaning up against each other, supporting each other,
the concept that we are nothing alone;
we can't survive isolated in ourselves;
we may be autonomous but we are interdependent,
we come into being through each other.
I always thought this was embedded in Japanese thought,
reflecting something specifically Japanese
until I discovered that it was Aristotle who said the minimal unit is two.

Underlying principles such as this travel across centuries and
dance across continents and cultures.

So to go back to *ningen*
we need each other just to stand up
a point of contact
there is a touching
something happens there which embraces and defies gravity
in my own practice I am beginning see everything in terms of
being in dialogue
and I realise that my work is about creating environments of exchange

I equate being stimulated and challenged
with the space of asking questions
with being buffeted by extremities of different points of view
with an invitation to participate and to affect what is happening.

We have an exercise in Body Weather called "wind".
The image is that you are a plant in muddy ground with deep roots
you are plant, like a reed - with viscosity, juicy but holding emptiness.

Your base position is neutral standing
your partner gives stimulation into your body as wind
your body follows the point of entrance
and the length of the stimulation as far as it lasts - the feet aim
to maintain their roots into the ground,
and then you return to neutral standing
you don't add, don't embellish,
you just follow accurately the stimulation you receive
and the further out you go, the deeper you have to ground yourself
you can also give wind simultaneous to receiving wind.
But you can't refuse
you have to accept.

Acceptance is fundamental. Coexistence.
Plants coexisting.

If you are rooted in deep ground
you can swivel and withstand enormous resistance
and are able to weather tempestuous storms.
There is a Danish toy called a *tumling* - it's weighted at the base,
you push it over, it pops back up.
As opposed to being swept like a leaf in the wind -
you have the anchoring of a relationship by which
to be in conversation with your environment.
The *tumling* accepts and the conversation is
unhindered and moves around in energetic exchange.

The Indian tabla player departs, flying into swirls,
but can only take this freedom through simultaneously
knowing the exact position in the stretches,
the mathematics and the constancy of the baseline - grounded.
The freedom and independence of the improviser
is determined by the understanding and holding of the time
and the ground connection - and thereby the relation to the ensemble.

It seems to me, culture is about ground connection -
the way we stand up, and the way we fall down.

In Body Weather we try to train the subconscious listening of the body
training the instinctive responses
opening up the intuitive
training the intelligence of the body
to be articulate
to do what is necessary at any given time
and to optimise the stakes of the moment
I think this is the spirit of improvisation

to be able to respond
to raise the necessity
Merleau Ponty's "wild being"
to go in any given direction, in any way at any speed at any given moment
the freedom to understand and to articulate what needs to be done
between us.

And this is existing out there
in the zone in-between
which is the realm of our comings into being,
determined by our imagination.

The relationship between entities
the spaces in between
where all the magic, the agony and the ecstasy, all occurs.
The spaces whereby we each contribute to the conversation
and we all know when *something is happening*.

It's the space of relationship that is the energetic,
that is the movement, that is the change.

The Japanese also have an expression
which reflects centuries of living on unstable,
volcanic ground;
to change - without changing
again, the principle.
The integrity of a belief system
remains intact whilst adjusting to the moment.

We've created methods, strategies, structures, frameworks, categories
as cross pollinations of our wanderings
and meanderings over continents for 400,000 years
out of Africa.
The meeting of systems of our internal and external environments
and beyond that we've created systems of fear, systems of love.

How do we meet each other? How do we embrace difference and conflict?
And what of alienation and disempowerment?
How do we greet those from elsewhere?
A Swedish politician said that she sees culture
as being the ability to meet someone in the eye.
But the Japanese for example might not agree with that.
The eye is too direct.
The atmosphere of the body and its subconscious readings
provides the borderlines of negotiation.

Again the multiplicity of positioning
the sparks of contact which touch an underlying common nerve
and the language of the body travels in milli-seconds
a subcultural dance.

Where do intimacy and obscurity stand - and fall?
in comparison to the over-exposed, to the fascism of numbers,
I'm reminded of a very beautiful little book,
Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows*
Giacometti's search for truth of being - within a head
the Beckettian greys
the waiting
the hitting the concrete wall
the exquisite delicacy and nuancing of an infinitesimal shift
and the thuds and viperous lashes of irreverent, irrepressible humour.

There is a risk at stake
to explore, to discover, to remain open
to transform.

To use Min Tanaka's phrase,
I would propose a "love-affair with tradition",
emphasising instability -
dancing with beliefs as they manifest themselves;
dancing with death - the improvisation of an Argentinean tango
where the sensing of each step is a vivid,
tensile question and an echo to shadows.

We need to go up an octave.
We all need to take the risk to create the spaces
which hold extremities,
which question, which educate,
even in the smallest most intimate of ways.
Like a breathing. It's an issue
of survival,
of exchange - and of celebration.

This article was first published by Sydney Seminar for the Arts and Philosophy, *Ideas in Movement - About Dance*, 22 May 2005.

TESS DE QUINCEY (Australia) is a choreographer, performer, teacher and director. She was a dancer with Min Tanaka and his Mai-Juku Performance Company for six years. From 1988 her solo productions have toured extensively in Europe and Australia and in 2000 she formed her own dance-performance ensemble and collaborative network. She is director of the Triple Alice Forum and Laboratories which brings together cross-cultural interdisciplinary practices of artists, scientists and thinkers in relation to the Central Desert of Australia. Besides her improvisational work with musicians and visual artists, her main emphasis is on intercultural, site-specific and durational performances.