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The dancing self exposed : autobiography in dance performance

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The dancing self exposed: Autobiography in dance performance

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THE DANCING SELF EXPOSED:
AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN DANCE PERFORMANCE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Theatre Arts
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
David J. Popalisky
May, 1993

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ABSTRACT

THE DANCING SELF EXPOSED: AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN DANCE PERFORMANCE

by David J. Popalisky

This thesis addresses the nature of autobiography as manifested in postmodern dance by looking directly at choreographer's work employing this strategy. It examines the self as portrayed through language, juxtaposed with the self displayed through the dancing body. The signifying characteristics by which autobiography in dance performance is recognized are categorized for investigation. They include the tension between language and movement and the dancing body as an autobiographical statement.

The autobiographical nature of the modern dance pioneers' choreography provides an historical context for analysis of the work of Remy Charlip, Johanna Boyce and Bill T. Jones among others working in this genre since the nineteen seventies. This research suggests that the objectified self is deconstructed in performance through associations with larger groups and through devices the expand the self in time. It also questions a fundamental assumption of postmodernism that one's life and art are the same.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

"I think they should have a good story to tell and they should be an interesting person" (Jones, B. T. 1992).

Dancer/choreographer Bill T. Jones' admonition to performer/choreographers who integrate autobiographical material into their dances applies to any theatrical venture that hopes to achieve success. The second half of this prescription, though, points to the performer of the story, who must project to his or her audience a vitality, an authenticity, and a charisma that maintains interest. For choreography that strategically utilizes autobiographical material as subject matter, the focus on the performer as much as on the performer's story becomes critical. The self as portrayed through language, juxtaposed with the self displayed through the dancing body, is the subject of this thesis.

By looking directly at the work of artists who employ this strategy, this thesis proposes to establish what is the nature of autobiography as manifested in dance, referred to here as "autobiography in dance performance." Amanda Smith writes in Dance Magazine in 1985:

With the increasing use of verbal text in dance, a more prominent place has been taken by direct, unadulterated autobiography, especially among avant-garde artists (50).

Significant use of autobiographical material in dance performance emerged in the seventies and surged in the eighties, although the critical appraisal of exactly what constitutes this phenomenon has lagged behind. What are the signifying characteristics by which autobiography in dance performance is recognized? How does verbal delivery of autobiographical text juxtaposed with a movement text, and other theatrical elements, convey, layer, or extend meaning? How is the self represented through dance performance? Is the concept of the self being deconstructed by a diffusion of an identifiable locus of the self or a verifiable authenticity of the self being presented? Is the self being expanded through association with group entities or devices altering the perception of the self in time? How does the conscious treatment of the self as subject matter in autobiography in dance performance affect the critical concern about "self-indulgence"? Amanda Smith's article "Autobiography and the Avant-Garde" admirably opens up this subject for discussion, but in four pages only scratches the surface of analysis.

To achieve a definition of autobiography in dance performance requires a definition of the three key terms: autobiography, dance, and performance. Autobiography, the biography of oneself, narrated by oneself, necessarily implies an editing process, a selection of some events for

inclusion over others, that reflects the point of view of the narrator. Literary autobiography presents a model that informs this analysis of autobiography in dance performance, and is the form chosen by the pioneers of modern dance to expose their lives behind their art, although, in dance performance, where other elements integrate with language, the editing process can limit considerably the amount of autobiographical material. Thus for the sake of this analysis, any snippet of personal information, whether a real event, a dream, or an improvisatory private reflection signifies autobiographical material.

A definition of dance presents many pitfalls especially in the context of the postmodern dance aesthetic which has attempted to expand definitions of dance. For the purpose of this investigation, dance is simply that movement enacted with consciousness of the primary components of motion: space, time, and energy. Murray Louis, in reference to scratching one's head, summed it up succinctly. "Dancing is basically sensing the nature of any motion. . . . The gesture can be interpreted as scratching the head. The dancer sensed it and performed it as motion, and as such he was dancing" (32).

Performance is the enactment within a specific duration of time, and in a specific place designated for viewing, whether a theatre or an arbitrary street corner, a single or

series of events or activities that utilize the body, the voice, movement, and any other theatrical convention such as music accompaniment, costume or decor. These events are premeditated, even if for only a moment, and therefore by definition encompass a well-rehearsed dance, or the spontaneous decision to frame an improvisational activity in time. In other words, the performer is conscious that he or she is performing.

By featuring the self in a theatrical performance, setting autobiography in dance performance reinforces both the notion that life is a performance and the concept of autobiography. An autobiography represents a consciousness of the past and an evolving self in the context of the settings, the events, and most importantly, the other people in one's life that define the self. The self performs in variable ways in settings such as one's home or city, in response to events both positive and negative such as a broken family, and with people from family members to authority figures such as teachers or bosses. The genre of autobiography in dance performance brings these realities to the foreground for the audience.

Autobiography in dance performance as defined here dates to the early seventies, although its historical antecedents are part of this investigation. Nonetheless, a dance based symbolically or in loose reference to personal

experience does not strictly constitute autobiography in dance performance. Dances that suggest autobiographical content such as Jeux (1913) by Nijinsky, cited by Smith as an early veiled representative of this genre, or Absence (1989) by Bill T. Jones, choreographed the year after Arnie Zane died of AIDS-related lymphoma, represent work related to this investigation, but of secondary importance.

Therefore, except for the four pioneers in modern dance discussed in chapter two, works of this nature are outside the scope of this thesis. The concern here focuses on how narrative autobiographical text figures in the dance performance context. Works based in symbolic reference to personal experience leave more interpretive room for the audience, than when presented with a coherent block of personal narrative to integrate with a movement text and other theatrical elements. Also, this investigation limits itself to choreography within the modern and postmodern stylistic conventions (seventies to the present), and to work created by American choreographers.

Critical mention of the strategy of using personal material as subject matter in conjunction with choreography began in the early 1980's. Anna Kisselgoff notes that:

Narrative and personal recollections, albeit fragmentary and nonlinear, are back. Those who profess an interest in Asian religions, concentrate on the self. Psychology may yet return under another guise (Kisselgoff 1981).

Both Remy Charlip and Bill T. Jones profess to having been influenced by meditation, a practice with which Asian religions question the individuality of the self. Kisslegoff also notes that the state of postmodern dance at this time has generated a new virtuoso dancer to accommodate the intricate timing and patterns that predominate. "This virtuosity has also created a new anonymous dancer."

Curiously, this phenomenon has developed in tandem with the increase of autobiography in dance performance throughout the eighties. While Kisselgoff simply notices the emergence of "personal recollections" as one of many new developments characterizing postmodern dance, Arlene Croce focuses negatively on this "emphasis on personalities" that she associates with Bill T. Jones and Johanna Boyce, among others. After commenting on the lack of skilled dancing displayed by many of these postmodern dance artists she notes:

But if a reaction to the older rational and progressive (if minimalistic) methods of movement was inevitable, shouldn't the reaction have been back toward dancing rather than further away from it? The new generation has converted the perennial avant-garde crisis into an opportunity for personal manifestos (Croce, 98).

She reveals a clear prejudice toward technical dancing, apparently unwilling to extend acceptance of a rationale for choosing pedestrian movement, a rationale Johanna Boyce might offer her. Perhaps, though, her repugnance with what

she labels "New Narcissicism" encourages her unwillingness to notice the virtuosity mentioned by Kisselgoff. Nonetheless her criticism accurately points to a reduced facility to elicit meaning through pure movement when in conjunction with verbal text.

Amanda Smith's article points to some of the literary conventions utilized by artists working in autobiography in dance performance, especially Johanna Boyce's facility with language. She continues by outlining the controversial aspects of using autobiographical material:

Those who deplore the presence of clearly personal material maintain that the highest form of artistic creation comes from the imagination. On the other hand, those who condone the use of autobiography ask what is a better place for an artist to look for material than in his own life? There is a third view: Whose business is it other than the artist's how he or she creates - and what he or she creates with (Smith, Amanda, 50).

This inquiry certainly condones the use of autobiographical material; the issue of self-indulgence will be addressed later. Rather, the question is how successful this strategy communicates essential human truths.

Now approximately ten years after critical mention began, and as autobiography in dance performance has matured, spread, and on some levels expanded into new forms, a better vantage point exists to look analytically and critically at the work up to this point. Artists also have had time to refine and better understand their use of

autobiography in dance performance. Bill T. Jones, for example, working in this genre since the mid seventies, is now receiving international acclaim for his more recent work, in part the fruit of his commitment to this strategy of performance. And despite critical disagreement it has struck a cord with audiences, a fact which Croce finds incredulous:

And this reactionary trend, barely two years old, has probably gained postmodern dance a greater following than two decades of earnest experimentation. These people are stars, already (Croce, 98).

Among both choreographers and audiences the appeal of personal revelation in performance has proliferated to where in the San Francisco Bay Area showcase performances abound in autobiographical dances. Bill T. Jones says that his work is "a commitment to humankind" (Jones, B. T. 1992), as opposed to principles of art. Why does the frank disclosure of private lives resonate with audiences more readily today? Has the sexual revolution of the sixties created such a fixation on this aspect of selfhood that audiences demand some acknowledgement of one's sexuality in the work? How does the work of Remy Charlip, Johanna Boyce, and Bill T. Jones, among others, tell us about ourselves as they tell us about themselves in performance?

Analyzing autobiography within a dance performance context compels a look at the shifting nature of

autobiography in literature in recent years. John Haegert, writing in Modern Fiction Studies, establishes a new classification, "autobiography as fiction," to describe the new approach adopted by some writers to the autobiographical form. Haegert opens by citing Sartre's philosophical argument that "to endow one's existence with the finality of a completed artifact, signifies a denial of life. One must be either inside or outside--one cannot be both" (Haegert, 621). He then argues, using the example of Frank Conroy's 1967 autobiographical narrative Stop-time, that a number of current writers have rejected the retrospective nature of autobiography, which according to Sartre inherently embraces a denial of life, the living moment. Instead they have adopted a "narrative medium more closely attuned to the casual, indeterminate, open ended rhythms of everyday life" (622). Conroy's Stop-time presents its author-hero in "a constant self invention at the moment and of the moment" (625). Haegert further points out:

the two voices are almost constantly at play--voices that correspond to the two temporal orders of the book: time in its fragmentary and spontaneous immediacy as it is apprehended moment by moment; and time as a continuous and meaningful flow when it is viewed in retrospect (626).

Temporal modes and dual voices directly relate to how autobiography in dance performance exists in the work of the above mentioned artists, with Bill T. Jones' Perfect Courage (1990) as a prime example. The living in the moment, not

only through verbal texts, but through the dancing body, serves to question Sartre's contention that one cannot be inside and outside at the same moment.

The two temporal voices utilized in Stop-time reappear in theatre in the work of Spalding Gray, as different selves operating independently to fashion and perform the theatrical event. William W. Demastes examines the emergence and evolution of Gray's career in "Spalding Gray's Swimming to Cambodia and the Evolution of an Ironic Presence." He defines three Gray personalities involved in his work:

Gray the "observer of events" who works in nearly reportorial fashion to uncover the system's shortcomings; Gray the artist offering a critical perspective on the system; Gray the naive performer who appears fully incorporated into the system and is unaware of the ironies introduced into his presentation by the artist Gray (Demastes, 86).

Gray's naive performer both reflects his comfortable middle class heritage, and adopts a "manic-y-paranoid" persona as a means to render himself "harmless and disarming, enabling him to draw the audience into the monologue" (88). In Jones' autobiographical dances, the critical artist self that shapes the work often becomes the confrontational performing self, reflecting his life as an outsider in society. But he also frequently performs with a bare chest, manipulating audience fascination with nudity and his blackness. In autobiography in dance performance multiple voices also occur when choreographers author works built from the life

experience of others. Both Remy Charlip and Johanna Boyce have created works from and for other dancers to perform.

Earlier in his essay Demastes accepts Herbert Blau's conditional appraisal of self-exposure in theatre:

It is not mere authenticity we're talking about, the self-indulgent spillover of existential sincerity; rather it must be a critical act as well, exegetical, an urgency in the mode of performance" (Blau, 42).

Blau clarifies the concern about self-indulgence by pointing to the need to question the nature of selfhood in performance as validation for extensive treatment of the self as subject. This "exegetical" process should elicit a critical perspective on the relationship of the self to society. Although "self-indulgence" often appears as a boundary, arbitrarily designated by critics, past which an artist must not go in order to maintain an acceptable aesthetic distance, the artist must share in this designation. Autobiography in dance performance questions this boundary, and at the very least stretches it to encompass a wider arena of respectability. Even though artists use devices to distance material, audiences for autobiography in dance performance must be willing to enter an emotionally vulnerable place. Performers in this genre reveal the often poignant moments defining their lives; as witnesses the audience inevitably does this also which amplifies the solitary aspect of selfhood.

The concept of the self as represented in performance has shifted over time. Autobiography in dance performance is a historically defined phenomenon. Numerous autobiographical allusions frequent the choreographic work of the modern dance pioneers Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn and Martha Graham. Also Graham's Letter to the World (1940) experimented with "the tying of real and imaginary lives of the New England poetess Emily Dickenson" (Stodelle, 113). Therefore, to create a historical context for this analysis, the second chapter looks at the work of the above significant artists, but since they were reluctant to put their "selves" directly into performance, it draws on their written autobiographies to establish parallels with the work of contemporary artists.

Modern dance, an art defined by individuals, has long been the location for explorations of the self. Isadora Duncan's entire life exemplifies the self in relation to society, as does Graham's Heretic (1929). Instead of the inner psychological self, depicted through mythic or exotic characters, contemporary artists like Boyce, Jones, and Joe Goode externalize that struggle through language, and therefore enter the political arena more explicitly. Sexual preference becomes a political agenda.

Merce Cunningham's rejection, around 1950, of expressionistic dance and objectification of movement for

its own sake¹ provided the break from the all-pervasive identification of the performer with his or her character, no matter how abstracted. The Zen philosophy that John Cage added to Cunningham's aesthetic fostered this detachment from the performing self, allowing emphasis on the movement itself. Around twenty years later autobiography in dance performance began to emerge in a context that allowed the self, as subject, to be considered as impersonal material, and allowed the performer to express no emotional involvement with movement. Yet typically, the pendulum began to swing the other way, so that by the mid-eighties Roger Copeland states:

The renewal of interest in narrative and emotional expressivity, coupled with a new commitment to collaboration on the part of choreographers, composers, and visual artists - all adds up to a new 'theatricality' (Copeland, 178).

Thus with the return of emotional involvement to dance theatre, artists are also better able to artistically distance something as immediate as their own lives. Thus Trisha Brown, a generational offspring of Cunningham and a key figure in the Judson Church group, can weave a personal story while impersonally challenging the physical limitations of her dancing body. Lucas Hoving, contrary to Cunningham, lives life passionately, completely in the moment, unable to distance himself in performance; therefore he chooses to edit sensitive material. What Lucas Hoving

considers taboo Bill T. Jones and Johanna Boyce automatically gravitate toward.

The sources of this form stem from, as has been mentioned, autobiographical allusions in abstract dances that occur throughout the history of modern dance. Acceptance of talking dancers grew out of the pioneering work of Anna Halprin, the Happenings of the fifties, the Judson Church choreographers, and its later offshoot the Grand Union. The historical context of autobiography in dance performance, from the mid-seventies to the present, assumes the breakthroughs in minimalism, objectification of pedestrian movement, and the formalist, non-theatrical biases that characterize the birth of postmodern dance.² Another fundamental tenet of the twentieth century avant-garde, the blurred distinction between life and art, underscores all of autobiography in dance performance. Murray Louis makes an important point:

Some artists are going backward towards life penetrations and some toward art encounters; and in doing so they are using the one same sensory and perceptive system they possess. The body. Is it life or is it art (32)?

The movement text generated by the dancing body represents an autobiographical statement in the present. In some instances, as in Growing Up In Public, created from the life of and performed by Lucas Hoving, the dancer's historical dancing body also serves as source for verbal text.

The cultural, social, and sexual revolutions of the sixties comprise the coming of age period for choreographers Boyce and Jones, and influence directly their work. This time of individual exploration and personal freedom, combined with the empowerment of a successful anti-war movement, reinforced a belief in the power and importance of individual voices bonded together. The feminist movement, and the gay rights movement of the early seventies grew out of this period, which Boyce and Jones respectively represent in their choreographic work. The "me" generation of the seventies, in some ways a contradictory thrust to the group dynamics, social upheaval and idealistic causes, on another level, finds some young artists turning to the personal story as reflective of the collective experience. The more recent multicultural emphasis has encouraged artists of color to speak profoundly from their aesthetic and cultural heritage in a larger arena. Bill T. Jones' clearly reaches beyond traditional black dance audiences.

In consideration of all these shifting historical contexts, this thesis looks directly at the artist's work to draw conclusions as to what comprises autobiography in dance performance. Videotaped performances are the primary source material, supplemented with additional viewing of some works in live performance. The primary artists discussed here are Remy Charlip, Lucas Hoving, Johanna Boyce, and Bill T.

Jones. One chapter looks briefly at individual works by Twyla Tharp, Trisha Brown, Moses Pendleton, Ishmael Houston Jones, and Joe Goode to establish a range and perspective for considering the above artists' work in autobiography in dance performance.

Secondly, information from interviews with each of the primary artists, concerning the issues of concern to autobiography in dance performance, assist in understanding 1) their rationale for utilizing autobiographical material in dance performance; and 2) the many layered contexts in which these artists create their work. Are these contexts stable or shifting, clearly defined or diffuse, as in the case with the black dance aesthetic? Whether Jones' work can be considered within that aesthetic proves difficult to answer because the aesthetic itself resists definition.

The signifying practices that identify autobiography in dance performance fall into the following categories of investigation:

- 1) Language in tension with movement
- 2) Vulnerability of the self in performance
- 3) Dancing body as an autobiographical statement
- 4) Authorship
- 5) Temporal modes
- 6) Authenticity of autobiographical material

How these different categories of information manifest in each artists work will be treated individually. Several points need mentioning here. The use of language, a more accessible source of information than abstract movement

creates an interesting tension for conveying meaning in a dance. As a consequence, musical accompaniment is not pronounced in autobiography in dance performance, but rather plays an incidental role in most works investigated here, because the language often constitutes the score. As previously mentioned, the dancing body, more profoundly than the use of a present temporal voice, counters Sartre's denial of life perspective on autobiography. Another question difficult to answer concerns the degree to which the body itself, or the style or dynamics of the dancing, make an autobiographical statement.

Paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould discusses the purely abstract and conceptual draw of authentic objects such as real dinosaur bones as opposed to plaster cast. More germane to this discussion, he notes, "We also respect an authenticity of place. Genuine objects out of context and milieu may foster intrigue, but rarely inspiration" (10). But in autobiography in dance performance the "place" is the transformative act of performance as well as its setting, and alters the notion of authenticity in performance. An authentic performance presence sometimes necessitates or allows stretching the truth, to achieve Jones' call for a compelling story. Simultaneously the act of performance encourages audience belief in the authenticity of narrative. One limitation of this research method is the degree to

which the observer can verifiably know what amount of autobiographical material presented is historically accurate compared with what is true to the necessities of performance. Although the interviews and research of these artists' lives does support the preponderance of autobiographical material as based in historical fact.

This investigation of autobiography in dance performance suggests several other relevant concerns. The first concerns the performance setting mentioned above. Most of the works discussed here occur within an intimate performance space, or in the closeup medium of film; this suggests that the form necessitates such a setting to achieve its full communicative power and meaning. Larger spaces diminish the gestural and facial nuances that color personal revelation.

The second concern raises the question of whether members of marginalized populations, outsiders, are embracing this form as a means of establishing and validating their existence in society. If so, how do they represent and relate to these populations, whether based on race or sexual orientation, and is this representation a fluid relationship? Bill T. Jones' high-flying middle-eighties, before the death of Arnie Zane from complications of AIDS, coincides with his reduced use of personal material and the opportunity to create for larger venues.

The onset of AIDS interrupted Jones' forward momentum, as it has for the dance community at large. Art and life again blur as the incomprehensibility of premature death ignites and inspires choreographic works (and art in all fields), that both tenderly pay tribute to loved ones, and attack an inactive and judgmental society. The consequences of AIDS has generated oral history projects in New York and San Francisco to record, in their own words, the lives and perspectives of dance artists afflicted with AIDS, or other life threatening diseases. This body-centered disease has affected deeply the creative output of choreographers who both live and create with their body.

Finally, while obvious that the self defines itself through relationship to and interaction with others, and society at large, what categories of others are favored in autobiography in dance performance? Parents and siblings comprise one group imposed upon the self and therefore are subject for reevaluation throughout life. In contrast, lovers, partners in life, are chosen and present a different type of tension to the ongoing definition of the self. If autobiography in dance performance limits itself to these significant categories of others in relationship to the self, as the evidence for this thesis suggests, how does this limit the potential for exploring the self in this genre? Whether using autobiography in dance performance as a

vehicle for self healing or for political confrontation,
these artists engage in this process in a public forum.

NOTES

¹ See Susan Foster, Reading Dancing:bodies and subjects in contemporary american dance. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 167-185.

² See Roger Copeland, "Postmodern Dance/Postmodern Architecture/ Postmodernism." Performing Arts Journal 7, no. 1: (1983), 27-43.

Chapter Two

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE PIONEERS OF MODERN DANCE

In her 1990 autobiography, Blood Memory, Martha Graham says "movement never lies" (Graham, 122). While some may challenge this statement, it does point to the body, which through movement imparts information to an outside observer, whether a teacher watching a student, or an audience member watching a performing artist. The body functions as the source of this information, a revelation about the self in motion, an open book of sorts, or an autobiographical statement made, whether consciously or unconsciously, by the individual in question. From this perspective Martha Graham sized up the students, fans, and patrons with whom she interacted in her long public career.

From theatre to radio to dance, the autobiographical statement has emerged in the last twenty years, or approximately following the Judson Church group of choreographers' repudiation of the aesthetics of traditional modern dance in the sixties. This chapter explores the historical context of this explosion of autobiography as it applies to dance. By historically locating the appearance of autobiography in dance performance in the seventies, the question of the antecedents of this phenomenon as

demonstrated by the pioneers of the American modern dance presents itself.

While the purpose of this chapter is to probe for the outright or nuanced exceptions to the rule, the modern dance choreographers of the first half of the twentieth century did not frankly address through language or otherwise, autobiographical material in their choice of subject matter for their choreography. Rather, they wrote autobiographies, the traditional manner to further expose the private self behind the public persona. While others could have been included, I have chosen the autobiographies of Isadora Duncan (My Life, 1928), Ruth St. Denis (An Unfinished Life, 1939), Ted Shawn (One Thousand and One Night Stands, 1960), and Martha Graham (Blood Memory, 1990), for investigation and comparison of the issues that colored, and defined their lives. This historical foundation will create a background for investigating the motives, strategies, and issues of contemporary choreographers utilizing autobiographical material in their creative work.

The lives of these four artists overlapped and interconnected personally and professionally. Isadora Duncan led this quartet in breaking new ground for dance at the end of the nineteenth century, but in fact Ruth St. Denis's emergence as an innovative force trailed by only several years; their careers developed virtually simultaneously,

although with next to no personal interaction, at least as they admit to in their autobiographies. Ruth St. Denis does mention seeing Isadora Duncan in performance and coming away with a profound respect for her artistry; "It is difficult to find words with which to pay tribute to the indescribable genius of Isadora" (St. Denis, 117). Yet she felt that they were pursuing similar goals by separate artistic paths (St. Denis, 92). During a trip to California in 1917 Isadora Duncan refers somewhat disdainfully to her imitators who "had become all saccharine and sweet syrup, promulgating the 'harmonious and beautiful!' but omitting anything sterner" (Duncan, 339), a reference John Martin notes could partially be aimed at the work of Denishawn (Martin, John, 150). The second phase of Ruth St. Denis' creative life transpired as the wife and partner of Ted Shawn, under the shifting organizational structure of Denishawn, both an instructional and performing entity. Martha Graham emerged from her artistic incubation period with Denishawn and specifically as the protege of Ted Shawn (his claim), to begin her solo and company career during Denishawn's final years. Her professional career far outlasted the other three, though, ending with her death in 1991. Although Martha Graham's creative life overlaps both early modern and contemporary postmodern dance, her sensibility, and most significant artistic output, belongs to the pre-Judson Church era. Her

treatment in Blood Memory of the issues in her life stand out as both source and contrast to the changing views around her, although her writing style evokes some of the new strategies of performance, a point developed later.

Therefore, as these artists shared lives and times, what are the dominant issues that concerned them? How were these issues expressed or not expressed in their art? How did their written autobiographies function as commentary on or adjuncts to their choreographic work? While impossible to completely answer these questions, investigated here are those issues that resonate today. How do they treat these issues, with what degree of honesty and frankness do they address their lives? And what circumstances, or cultural codes, were they living and working within that circumscribed or defined this treatment, both in their art and written autobiographies? To answer these questions, primary emphasis is on the autobiographies themselves, how these artists ultimately stated their case. Secondly, various other authors, outside commentators on the art and personal lives of these artists in question, provide insights. For the most part, these other commentators, such as Agnes DeMille, Walter Terry, and John Martin, were contemporaries drawing as much from personal experience with these artists as from researched material.

Four categories of discussion serve to organize the

relevant material discussed by Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, and Martha Graham as it pertains to a broader discussion of autobiographical material in dance. First, their choice of subject matter for their choreography sheds light on their times, and individual strategies for answering the expressive call within. Second, the question of love and sexuality profoundly interacts with these artists' creative lives. Third, their perceptions of the body, their own and others, as the primary instrument of their art, and the manner in which it is displayed in performance, concerned these artists as it does choreographers today. Fourth, their beliefs, experiences, and writing style either designate them as contrary to, as in the case of Ruth St. Denis, or antecedents to the present phenomenon of exploring autobiographical issues in dance performance. Though separate areas of discussion, these categories continuously overlap and intersect.

The forces of change exemplified by the lives and art of these four artists not only established what Ruth St. Denis refers to as an American ballet, but also contributed to the social and cultural transformations occurring around the turn of the century. Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis definitely helped to shape a new and more serious appraisal of dance in America and Europe, in addition to challenging conventions of behavior for respectable women, which many

felt they were not. Yet, in spite of being extraordinarily powerful personalities, they looked outside of themselves for thematic materials for their dances. For Ruth St. Denis this urge predominated, although Martha Graham draws closer and closer to home in her abstract dances that chart the emotional "graph of her heart." The principles of Ancient Greece for Isadora Duncan, and the mystical origins of the cultures of India and Egypt for Ruth St. Denis, represent exotic source material, through which they express their personal vision of life, and draw society's attention to their revolutionary sensibility of the dance as art. Despite being unique individual artists they expressed their affinity with the period through their attraction to the other.¹

Early on Isadora Duncan clarified her interests in dancing. "My ideas on the dance were to express the feelings and emotions of humanity. I was not at all interested in fairies" (Duncan, 36). She named Rousseau, Whitman, and Nietzsche as her only dance masters, and emphasized her unquenchable thirst for any historical information on the dance (80). Duncan wished to express the human soul through dance, and these masters represented her guides. Significantly, one of Whitman's culminating poems was his "Song of Myself." In the art of the Greeks, which Isadora first experienced as a girl, and later suffused herself with

in the museums of London and Paris, she found a philosophy of dancing that matched her own in its respect for, and celebration of, the beauty of the human body. This attraction to the Greeks served Duncan by associating her revolutionary perspective on dancing and woman's role in society to the wellspring of Western civilization. She strategically chose to identify herself with the historical emergence of the individual in relation to society, as articulated in Greek tragedy. Her connection of her art and her individuality as a woman to the pseudo-mythical self of the Greeks breaks important ground for exploration of the self through dance performance.

Nonetheless, despite her somewhat rhetorical embrace of the Greek soul, from the ancient Greeks she drew her classic tunic costume, which allowed new freedom for movement of the body, and consequently she struck a mortal blow at the linchpin of the Victorian dress code for women, the corset.² Duncan also enhanced respect for her art of dancing by choosing music of the great composers, such as Beethoven and Chopin, for inspiration to move from her "central spring of all movement:"

After many months, when I had learned to concentrate all my force to this one Centre I found that thereafter when I listened to music the rays and vibrations of the music streamed to this one fount of light within me - there they reflected in the Spiritual Vision not the brain's mirror, but the soul's, and from this vision I could express them in Dance (75).

Isadora Duncan's movement vocabulary drew from "natural" movements such as walking, skipping, running, and jumping, in her "attempt to relate all movements to the specific experiences out of which they grew" (Martin, John, 140), experiences of everyday life. In this vocabulary choice she shares a sensibility with the pedestrian movement aesthetic of the sixties, but in another important aspect she comes closer to the current exposition of autobiographical dance. Isadora Duncan often essentially improvised her dances, and in that spontaneity imbued herself with the present moment, or the topical issue of the day. An early example was her gala performance that closed her first season in Budapest where she noted, "I had the idea, after the programme . . . to bring on the stage a simple Hungarian Gypsy Orchestra and dance the songs of the gypsies. . . . A sweet melody, full of passion, longing, tears, adoration" (Duncan, 104). Later, after an unconscious premonition of her children's deaths in a vision of children's coffins along the road, she asked her accompanist to play the Funeral March of Chopin at the close of the program, a selection she had never danced to before (264). That experience unnerved them both, yet typifies Isadora's willingness to respond to the moment no matter what the mood. Finally, Isadora displayed an ability to capture the political limelight without capitulating to political

correctness. In support of the Allies in World War I, "at the end of each performance I danced the 'Marseillaise' with the entire audience standing. This did not prevent me from giving my concerts of Wagner's music, . . . all intelligent people will agree that the boycotting of German Artists during the War was unjust and stupid" (334).

Ruth St. Denis shared Isadora's gift for improvisation, but utilized it more from necessity, due to her faulty memory, rather than trying to capture the moment. The early choreographic works of St. Denis drew directly for their inspiration, content, and form from Oriental influences, specifically India and Egypt. Her dances Radha (1906), Cobra (1906), Yogi (1908), and Egypta (1910) all look to exotic foreign cultures to represent her deep spiritual quest and agitation. By presenting herself in different scenarios of human unification with a supreme being, she evoked the spiritual sensibility she claimed to know as a child (St. Denis, 7). Quite opposite to any tendency to celebrate Ruthie Dennis directly in her dances, she exposed and lived her personal inner search in the various goddesses she impersonated. In fact, she noted several times the stark contrast her white-haired and plain street appearance made to her theatrical stage personas.

In elaborating on the rides through Brooklyn she took on the bike she received as a gift from Stanford White, her

early friend and financial backer, Ruth St. Denis described how they nourished her three-part nature:

my body which must dance or pedal or walk; my sense of external beauty, which must find release through nature or art; my spiritual consciousness, which must steadily grow, though with changing forms, in order to nourish the other two (29).

This tension between her three selves³ found release through dancing primarily for her spiritual and artistic urges, while her youthful sensual development remained stunted, as will be discussed later. But a closer look at her interpretation of Radha conveys her understanding of its unifying power also:

To be sure, in those days I was unconsciously obeying an inward impulse and did not stop to analyze or separate my actions. But without any question I was at that time a kind of dancing ritualist. The intensities of my spiritual life had found a focus of action . . . I longed to translate into rhythmic patterns a spiritual significance (57).

This physical/spiritual union through dance that Ruth St. Denis succeeded so well at, explains precisely why she caused people to reevaluate dance as an art form. Referring to the same dance, she says "the mood to me is all, and inevitably manifests its own pattern" (57); a mood that conveys not the pedestrian person of Ruth St. Denis, but rather her inner reality. In attempting to become one with the godhead she in essence erases her self from the stage, yet in another sense she becomes a new autobiographical self in performance. Her delight in her later German reviews that

discussed her art from an impersonal point of view, highlighting the dance as art, underscores the importance of this goal of loss of self (91).

A later work under the auspices of Denishawn that continues this spiritual thread in her life is Ishtar, prepared for the second Mayer-sponsored tour in 1923. Here Ruth St. Denis portrays a goddess once again, but this time a fertility and love goddess from ancient Babylonia. This new mixture of a physical persona to her spiritual entity reflects both her sexual maturity, but also and more importantly, the tragic perspective she has of her love relationship to Ted Shawn. After Ishtar (St. Denis) has drawn her lover Tammuz (Shawn), the embodiment of spring, up to earth, and enjoyed the summer, they later perform their Love/Death dance. Of her marriage to both Ted and Denishawn, Ruth St. Denis speaks in terms of the extended abortion of her personal artistic/spiritual journey--love of another equals death of her art. Shawn also felt the need to create and tour a solo show. This tension in their lives points to the extent to which they identified with their work as representative of their different selves. It foreshadows the contemporary concern over whether autobiographical dance necessitates the solo form, or whether group dance can also make autobiographical statements. St. Denis' innovation of the music visualizations "with its impersonal emphasis on

form" (213), and ultimate emphasis on group movements and formations, represents a further example of her reduction of the personal in performance.

In founding Denishawn both Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis desired to emphasize American substance, although St. Denis admits that Ted expressed a deeper concern for American themes (181). While Shawn also developed a large repertoire celebrating exotic places, from his Spanish dances to his Spear Dance-Japanesque (1921), his American dances represent an important shift toward addressing at least the historical context and culture in which he lived. His Invocation to the Thunderbird (1923) and Feather of the Dawn (1923) both address American Indian material, that while closer to home, still exalted the other in the American culture. But his Crapshooter (1923) for Charles Weidman, and Boston Fancy 1854 (1923) directly address the Yankee tradition from which he came:

Boston Fancy-1854, a stylization of New England square dances performed by four couples, embodied in miniature the atmosphere of a typical New England party in the year my grandmother was married. I copied one costume from a dress in my grandmother's trousseau (Shawn, 157).

This work, which for the first time exposes a fragment of the real Ted Shawn, bridges his earlier creations with Denishawn, and his later dances for his all-male troupe of the thirties. In his autobiography, Ted Shawn includes a review from London that clarifies the rationale behind his

thematic choices for this group:

Choosing the subjects for his compositions from three sources--Primitive, Labor, and Religious--Shawn has succeeded in hitting upon a trailblazing style of dance presentation for men which is both artistically important and entirely free from the purple tints which usually hover about male dancing (262).

These dances culminated the main thrust of Shawn's career, that being to disprove his college roommate who told him men don't dance (11). His zeal to prove the legitimacy of men in dance came to fruition at this time, and had the added impetus that Shawn, having separated from Ruth St. Denis, now pursued life as a homosexual.

With intimate working exposure to both Shawn and St. Denis, Martha Graham both extended and rebelled from her artistic parents. She extended the theme of American subject matter through a greater abstraction of its essence and less reliance on theatrical trappings. American themes for dances represent a drift toward autobiography to the extent that they associates her with her own culture. In Frontier (1935), Graham explored not only the aspect of the wide open western spaces, the seed of which she identified as her cross country train ride as a girl, but the point of view of a woman alone in the wilderness, certainly reflective of her pioneering dance making in the thirties. In this celebration of the open spaces and forces of nature, she harkens back to both St. Denis and Duncan who claim the elements of nature,

sea, land, wind, and sky among their important rhythmic sources. American Document premiered three years later in 1938, and was the first dance to include Erick Hawkins. It voiced a patriotic chorus of episodes, to snippets of American political history, songs, and poetry. While there is no explicit link to Graham's personal life, this uplifting and inclusive dance theme may have signified Graham's growing sense of acceptance and achievement in the larger dance and art world of New York.

None of the dances in Graham's repertoire directly admit to autobiographical significance, yet more than a few suggest a direct relationship to events in her life. Of Heretic (1929) Bessie Schonberg, one of the dancers said:

It was percussive in quality, and searing, as Martha put herself against a wall of resistance--the chorus of dancers. Of course it could be interpreted as Martha, herself, against tradition. . . . It was a pleading figure against a hostile figure. . . . I think no other dance quite represented her personal statement with such power (Horosko, 28).

Many other dances followed this early example, including Appalachian Spring (1944) and Judith (1950), which in creation and performance reflected the vicissitudes of her love relationship with Erick Hawkins, of which more will be said later. Many attribute the story of the Bronte sisters in Deaths and Entrances (1943) as a thin veil for Martha's exposition of her relationship with her two sisters. The dance's characters echo her relationship with Erick, and in

her first encounter with the Dark Beloved (Erick) Martha falls flat on her back. Martha countered to critics that "sudden perceptions of love can be ridiculous, and certainly they are awesome. One does fall down at the feet of the beloved object" (DeMille, 252). Nonetheless, Graham later denies, in an interview with Anna Kisselgoff, that this work is a mirror of her family (252). She loved to keep her dances mysterious. This simple desire for mystery draws a dividing line between the choreographers exploring personal themes in the first half of the century, and those today who use autobiography in performance to reveal themselves more explicitly as artists. Symbolic devices which in the hands of Graham or St. Denis held a mysterious importance, shift to photographs and language as symbols that focus the attention on the self, rather than refract that attention in any number of possible directions.

Star autobiographies often allow the public in on the tantalizing details of the author's sex and love life. With these three women dance stars this basically holds true, although while Isadora Duncan couched and justified her romantic excesses in the name of art, Ruth St. Denis spent more time emphasizing her lack of sexual entanglements. Martha Graham wrote a more straightforward offering of perspectives on love with few sordid personal details. An almost total absence of a discussion of love and sex in Ted

Shawn's autobiography possibly indicates reasons why he may have avoided the subject.

Perhaps as initial apology for what is to follow, Isadora Duncan immediately links love and art in what again foreshadows a more contemporary view:

I have sometimes been asked whether I consider love higher than art, and I have replied that I cannot separate them, for the artist is the only lover, he alone has the pure vision of beauty, and love is the vision of the soul when it is permitted to gaze upon immortal beauty (Duncan, 5).

With this perspective she indulged herself in her love affairs, as not only an extension of her artistic yearning, but as a wellspring for her dance of the human soul. Later in life, though, she preached more specifically:

Especially do I resent the conclusion formed by so many women that, after the age of forty, a dignified life should exclude all love-making. Ah, how wrong this is! . . . now I close over my lover as the sea over a bold swimmer, enclosing, swirling, encircling him in waves of cloud and fire (356, 357).

Ruth St. Denis shares the romantic nature of Duncan, but her Protestant upbringing and cerebral nature precluded any early loss of virginity. In fact, her constant restatement of the innocence of her early romantic encounters underscores her almost neurotic preoccupation with sex. In fact, with one early "companion" during her first European tour, she alludes to a secret wish that someone would overrule her:

Thus all my growing desires were wrapped about with inhibitions. Possibly, however, I might have broken

through this attitude of mind had I not been plunged so deeply into my work, and had Hans been a more importunate lover (St. Denis, 102).

As one possessed of an innate sensuality, Ruth St. Denis fended off the advances of men such as Stanford White and David Belasco, yet it is her reaction to Rodin's seductions that clearly delineate her from Isadora. St. Denis lost respect for this great artist, calling him an "ordinary French sensualist," while Duncan, who also attracted and arrested the sculptor's roving caresses states, "What a pity! How often I have regretted this lost divine chance of giving my virginity to the Great God Pan himself, to the Mighty Rodin" (Duncan, 91). Therefore, in an age when a good woman was chaste, and a fallen woman was considered lost forever,⁴ Ruth St. Denis clung to her ideal of balance in love, so much so that by the end of her autobiography she proposes a Science of Love. To organize her idea she again turns to the Hindu culture:

Shiva and Parvati, the divine man and the divine woman, here represent the dual creative principle, the eternal love rhythm which is going on in the unseen causative realms of being from eternity. Here is love, ecstasy, beauty (St. Denis, 381).

Though Ruth St. Denis seems consumed with some final resolution of the subject in her own life, Martha Graham succinctly states her opinion, "To this day, I never ask people about their religion, whether it's politics--which is a religion--or sex, which is also a religion" (Graham, 37).

Curiously, at Graham's first casual reference to having spent the night with a boyfriend during the period of her performing with the Greenwich Village Follies, she becomes spontaneously aware of her need to pursue her own art (Graham, 103). Later, though, upon a challenge from Joseph Campbell to commit herself fully to love, Graham responds, "If I were to take that step I would lose my art" (DeMille, 239), which echoes exactly the sentiments of Ruth St. Denis concerning the intrusion of complete love on one's art. The fullness of her loving, sexual relationship with Erick Hawkins in the forties influenced Graham's work to become all the more sensual, explicit, and alive (237). Quite the contrary, Ruth St. Denis referred to her creative work in association with Ted Shawn as second rate, and divorced from her deep spiritual roots. Isadora Duncan similarly encountered constant conflicts between her art and love relationships, the most salient example being the stress with her first major love, Gordon Craig. He protests "Why do you want to go on stage and wave your arms about? Why don't you stay at home and sharpen my lead pencils?" (Duncan, 185).

On the subject of marriage, though, these three artists shared a common aversion to this symbol of bondage for women. Nevertheless, they all three succumbed to it, and with generally disastrous consequences, despite strong personal convictions that they would never be thus ensnared.

How and why they became married, though, further conveys their individual relationships to the prevailing morals of the times. Isadora had long since cast aside any moral concerns with two children out of wedlock by two different men. When she succumbed to marriage to the young Russian peasant poet, Serge Essenine, in 1922, it allowed him, her latest lover, to be permitted into America on her upcoming tour (Terry 1963, 69). Practical decision though it was, it turned out disastrous, as his drinking and larcenous habits ruined this tour, and taxed her good will for the several years they remained married.

Ruth St. Denis married Ted Shawn on August 13, 1914, after only knowing him for about four months. Ruth's mother interfered with most of her potential relationships, and Ted Shawn attributes the possibility of their marriage to her mistake in letting them tour together unchaperoned that previous spring (Shawn, 37). Shawn points to their mutual interests in spiritual concerns as their bond, while St. Denis writes about Ted's insistent letters demanding an answer to his proposal. He doesn't mention his earnestness, perhaps not wanting to highlight the subservient relationship to which he yoked himself. Finally bowing to the concern for respectability, and as a safeguard to her image in her young adoring public's eyes, she capitulated (St. Denis, 165). She wore no ring, refused to include

"obey" in the marriage vows, and demanded that the marriage remain secret. From that point on, her autobiography continually questions this choice, despite proclaiming a sincere love for Ted Shawn. A letter she wrote to Shawn while he was in the Army clearly articulated their skewed relationship:

Darling, when you reach that point when you realize that your destiny is to serve me and my career, subordinate to me at all times and in all ways, you will finally reach some happiness (Terry 1976, 91).

Terry adds that Ruth St. Denis engaged in extramarital affairs that further debilitated the spirit of Ted Shawn.

Martha Graham's long standing love and work relationship with Louis Horst failed to fully satisfy her need for love because he refused to divorce his wife. Again choosing brevity, Martha Graham summed up her very different love and marriage with Erick Hawkins:

Erick danced with my company, and gradually we had a very deep love affair. After eight years of living together, Erick decided we should marry. I didn't want to but I did it. During that ninth year it all fell apart. It shows. Never try to hold on to anything (Graham, 174)

Perhaps all three needed to actually experience marriage to prove themselves right. They all trusted personal experience, and marriage represented something they had not tried.

Two of Graham's dances express most clearly the ups and downs of her love affair with Hawkins, Appalachian Spring

and Judith. The first composed early in their affair in 1944, represented a time of peace, security, and confidence. Martha Graham says of the dance, "Appalachian Spring is essentially a dance of place. You choose a piece of land, part of the house goes up. You dedicate it. The questioning spirit is there and the sense of establishing roots" (231). Still alert to possible tremors, her love was taking root. Agnes DeMille calls the dance a love letter, a pledge of her devotion to Erick (DeMille 261). This expression of her personal life abstracted through dance reappears with a dark fury in Judith. First performed in January, 1950, not much more than a year after their marriage, this dance depicted a woman who slays her lover with a nail to the head, and dramatized the marital struggle building between Erick and Martha (DeMille, 284-5). Also, as was the case with Shawn and St. Denis, Erick's desire for acceptance and acclaim as an artist of equal stature played significantly into their discord.

The duets that Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis performed with Denishawn did not as immediately reflect their marital harmony or lack of it. Although they both claimed (to Walter Terry) that early in their relationship their sex life was excellent, the duets they did then were not significantly different in their emotional overtones as their final dance Idyll (1929), a love duet performed for fans at Lewisohn

Stadium in New York, after they had separated as husband and wife.

Another work where Martha Graham expressed her conception of women was El Penitente in 1940. "Every woman has that quality of being a virgin, of being the temptress-prostitute, of being the mother. I feel that these, more than anything, are the common life of all women (Graham, 26). The experience of motherhood, though, separated Martha Graham and Ruth St. Denis and from Isadora Duncan. Like everything else Duncan plunged into pregnancy and birth three times, even though she railed against the physical abuse of her first experience, "this maddening, joy giving, pain-giving mystery. How long and torturous the hours" (Duncan, 192). Yet she delighted in motherhood, and never fully recovered from her children's death by drowning in 1913. Ruth St. Denis so treasured the vehicle of her expression, her beautiful body, that she held up consummating her marriage for two months until confirmed in the surety of her contraceptive methods (Terry 1976, 61). Martha Graham, according to DeMille, furiously suffered her infrequent menstrual periods, feeling this biologic intrusion an affront to her independence. She did, though, allow herself to fantasize about having children in her next life in a letter to her therapist, Mrs. Wilkes, dated July 16, 1951:

that I would have children. I think I could never say that before. I never could release myself to become the most simple and elemental instrument of life. . . . I had to be in control or govern even against nature (Graham, 192).

Ted Shawn did desire to have children, and Ruth's denial of this desire contributed to his private turmoil. He proudly accepted his nickname around Denishawn, Papa Shawn, symbolic of his patriarchal inclinations toward his students, substitute children for both him and his wife. Shawn, who according to interviews with Walter Terry, entered into marriage a virgin, remained faithful while St. Denis repeatedly had flings. By the end, Shawn decided no woman would humiliate him again. Their ultimate break came when they both fell in love with the same man and Shawn won out (Terry 1976, 129). Earlier, both he and Ruth had met in London with Havelock Ellis, the author of The Psychology of Sex. Ellis, a homosexual, perhaps first legitimized this sexual orientation for Shawn:

He recalled that he was attracted to handsome men, to the male body, to the Greek ideal. He believed in male-male love but he also believed equally strongly in family. The two in his mind, were not antithetical. The Greeks of antiquity had accepted this (13).

Shawn divulged this information in the seventies, a period of greater openness and acceptance of homosexuality. Within this changed societal value structure postmodern choreographers have greater freedom to discuss the sexuality of the self in performance, a freedom not felt by Shawn, or

as will be seen, Lucas Hoving.

Of course one's view of sexuality is directly associated with one's views about the body. Ted Shawn's many theatrical costumes often left his torso and legs bare, mimicking the practice costume of the day, a bathing suit. Denishawn primarily performed in the vaudeville environment, which demanded theatricality to maintain popular appeal, and where skin has always sold. Yet Shawn's use of the exposed body parallels the strategies of some current choreographers, especially Bill T. Jones, who use nudity or partial nudity for various statements about the body. That nudity also concerned the German modern dance movement as a statement of "a modern, liberated identity 'in the age of mechanical reproduction,'"⁵ Shawn may or may not have been aware of. He had not been in Germany, and doesn't speak of the German modern dance, until he later tours there in 1930.

The Death of Adonis (1923) was Shawn's most explicit use of nudity in performance. Naked, in full body white make-up and only a white fig leaf, he premiered this plastic dance at the Mariaden art colony in upstate New York, in 1923, for an invited audience. The cook at this art colony had triggered concern about its propriety. Shawn discussed his rage at a cook jeopardizing its premiere, rather than offering any aesthetic discussion of nudity in dance. He comments, "Slowly I began to visibly breathe, to move with

the continuing fluidity that I devised, a brand new dance technique" (Shawn, 147). Consumed with his place in dance history, Shawn often needed to highlight his innovations, and perhaps missed an opportunity here for a more compelling contribution to aesthetic theory. That same evening Ruth St. Denis introduced the dance with a discussion of art and mental attitudes, and no mention of nudity, although Shawn reports that she did. Nonetheless, Ruth St. Denis skirts around the issue in her writing:

The whole question of nudity in the dance bristles with difficulties and yet contains overtones and implications relating to the human personality that need more space and time to develop than I am able to command here. From my artistic point of view nudity is the most expensive form of ballet (St. Denis, 235).

She, who had posed nude as a young woman, reduces the issue to one of artistic economics.

Nudity or partial nudity, something which Martha Graham experimented with only briefly in her early career (DeMille, 87), represents for this group mainly a way to present the beauty of the body rather than any larger political or social statement, as in Germany of that time or today in America. John Martin says of Isadora:

Isadora acknowledged the whole body and made no reservations as to ugly or inexpressive parts. Why she wore any costume at all is a matter of conjecture. . . . But whether she wore much or little, with her was born the principle of costuming . . . namely that the dancer is essentially a nude figure upon which is placed the minimum of costume required to obtain a desired theatrical effect (135).

Brief comments by Isadora on the lovely and appropriately full bodies of the female singers at Bayreuth, and Ted Shawn on his ongoing need to diet, indicate an awareness of their exposed self on stage and their attitudes toward this exposure. Isadora invites acceptance for her own occasionally overweight form, and Shawn bows to his private need to appear athletic and masculine.

Basically, though, they all viewed the body as the ultimate instrument of expression of the universal soul, eliminating any need for language or specific reference to the subjective self. But in this understanding they key into the centrality of the dancing body as an autobiographical statement whether intentional or not. Recall Ruth St. Denis' view of herself as a ritual dancer. Later, in discussing her idea for a temple for integration of her artistic and spiritual creative impulses, she states, "Since the language of the temple was to be the language of art in its totality the body became the beginning and final instrument of expression" (St. Denis, 338). Isadora Duncan adds, "the body becomes transparent and is a medium for the mind and spirit" (Duncan, 165) and about Martha Graham's Primitive Mysteries, where she impersonates the Virgin, DeMille states, "But Martha had the rare, the nearly unique gift to fuse the outer manifestation with the inner concept: the word made flesh. Simply she was" (182). This total immersion of the

self in the performance persona was part of what set up the sixties revolt against traditional modern dance, a revolt that resulted in the foregrounding of the movement itself over the performance of that movement. Nonetheless, in the development of autobiography in dance performance the authenticity of the act of performance has returned as a compelling concern.

Therefore these artists in performing their work were totally enveloped, or immersed, in their bodies, not disassociated in their display of them. In this period, autobiography in performance expressed itself as simply powerful, fully alive, energized performers, and in that sense they told a truth about themselves. In answer to her own concerns about the challenge of writing the truth about herself, Isadora Duncan preceded Graham's "movement never lies" by proclaiming "My art is just an effort to express the truth of my Being in gesture and movement" (Duncan, 3). Much later in life, in a 1984 interview, Graham goes further and perhaps reflects some new perspectives in the eighties:

As a dancer, you take that body and you train it, almost like a little animal--you discipline it, care for it, feed it, and you adore it. It's a symbol of your life; it is your life (DeMille, 372).

Her statement supports the view that the body in performance, assumed as dancing by these artists, is a living, present autobiography, although, the problem remains as to how to differentiate the body from the dance in

reading the autobiographical statement. For Graham, though, it harkens back to her intense struggle to remain on stage, despite the frailty of old age. In answer to those pleading with her to stop her personal torture in performance, she replies, "I would die if I stopped. I cannot go on without dancing. You all know that" (373). Elderly dancers, more than youthful ones, clearly exhibit the autobiographical self of the moment, more in what they can't do, or in performance of movement with arthritis wrecked extremities (Merce Cunningham's feet), than in what they can still perform.⁶

Up till now this discussion has focused on the relationship between these three artists' lives and work, and issues that recur in contemporary use of autobiographical material in dance. Interesting to note, though, is their stylistic approach to their written autobiographies. Isadora Duncan chose a tell-all approach as it pertained to her romantic sense of herself and her art. All of her excesses merely expressed her being. "Nietzsche says, 'Woman is mirror,' and I have only reflected and reacted to the people and forces that have seized me" (Duncan, 323). Certainly she left out details, despite implying her willingness to offer more, with her suggestion that twenty volumes would be necessary. But My Life best served Isadora Duncan, I feel, as an opportunity to discuss

the tragedy of her children's death in a conclusive manner. This event clearly colored her recollections and her passionate statement of ideals, written some fourteen years after their death.

For Ruth St. Denis, An Unfinished Life also told all, but here about her inner struggle between her three selves, the physical, artistic, and spiritual. What is unfinished, apparently, is the further manifestation of the spiritual in art, where she focused creative work at the time of her writing in the late thirties. She manifests the spiritual detachment from the mundane aspects of life, by the way she often describes herself in the third person when describing her choreography, as in Radha "She now rose. . . . She danced on the balls of her feet" (St. Denis, 70). Ted Shawn, far more than Ruth St. Denis or Isadora Duncan focused on the place and process of performance. He included many anecdotes about performance experiences that enrich our understanding of the nature of being a touring dancer in the teens and twenties of this century. From unknowingly costuming himself with poison ivy for a portrayal of Pan, to dressing and making up in an empty swimming pool in Santa Fe, his story is funny, to such an extent that he perhaps diminishes a more serious appraisal of his genuine contributions. In exposing the external performing self, though, he doesn't feel compelled to express the inner

creative impulse to any great degree, nor does he tell us any intentional implications in leaving primarily the performance record to represent him.

Martha Graham's Blood Memory, completed in 1991, follows a general chronological development that repeatedly flowers into offbeat stories, short theoretical offerings, and sharp witticisms. This makes for enjoyable reading, and parallels strategies used by some current performers who tell their stories in a loose, nonlinear improvisational manner in performance. This approach of shifting from autobiographical facts to private thoughts or opinions, serves to distance the material from the one delivering it, whether Graham or other artists today, and brings up the question of authorship.

Contemporary performers like Bill T. Jones and Johanna Boyce, of the current generation are rebelling themselves against some of the dictums of the Judson era innovators, yet the Judson group helped allow this distanced attitude toward the self to evolve. Merce Cunningham's work with chance choreography and Yvonne Rainer's free sharing of Trio A choreography represented a clear attempt to disclaim authorship of their work, thereby focusing attention on the work itself, and not the creator or performer of it.⁷ Isadora's statement, "I also then dreamed of finding a first movement from which would be born a series of movements

without my volition, but as the unconscious reaction of the primary movement" (Duncan, 77), echoes the Zen detachment sought by Cunningham in the act of creation. In contrast both Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis repeatedly claimed authorship for new techniques, ideas, and records, to the extent that Shawn felt compelled to defend himself: "I am not egotistic about my achievements in the field of dance" (Shawn, 287). By the time of writing their autobiographies they both suffered somewhat from feeling like forgotten pioneers, which indeed they were. Autobiography in general assumes a known identity of the author, yet autobiography in dance performance challenges this assumption, as will be seen in the work of Remy Charlip and Johanna Boyce.

In closing, here are some specific statements by each of these artists that put them in a specific tension and relationship to autobiographical material in dance performance. Isadora Duncan, after all her examples linking her illustrious dance career and the circuitous events in her life, concludes with this summation:

How find the truth? If I were a writer, and had written of my life twenty novels or so, it would be nearer the truth. And then after I had written these novels, I should have to write the story of the Artist, which would be a story quite apart from the others (Duncan, 323).

Though she couldn't separate love and art, she could life and art, therefore disassociating herself from the current blurring of life and art in the second half of the twentieth

century. Her statement aside, though, her life experience represented an early example of this blurring, as indicated by examples cited in this paper.

Ruth St. Denis found her writing process a chance to consider the effects of her theatrical career:

My circumstances and destiny have caused me to live a theatrical life--a life of art and of the stage, but underneath the confusion, success, and failure of a full life I have often wondered, and am now wondering, what influence this experience has had upon my inner consciousness, and upon the inner consciousness of any stage person (St. Denis, 276).

Though she imbued herself totally in her personification of Oriental goddesses, St. Denis clearly rejects the autobiographical self as an appropriate subject for dance:

We should interpret the rich beauties of the spirit in a manner which removes us, first as human beings and then as artists, from the limitations of our circumscribed lives (328).

And therefore, when she issued her call to young dancers two pages later, "Dare to dance your own dance . . . speak your own voice" (330), she is not proposing autobiographical statements, but merely urging them to investigate the "certain ageless qualities," beyond the self, to make their mark in dance.

Though Ted Shawn's work, especially his creations for his men dancers, demonstrated, as has been shown, a leaning toward autobiographical statements, he aligned himself with Ruth St. Denis when he stated:

I assured her that a dancer has to consider his body

with detachment as a sculptor does clay that he models, or a painter a canvas he brushes. I explained that the dancer, as artist, does not identify with projected creations though both they and he use and inhabit the same body (Shawn, 224).

Late twentieth century' artists do identify with their creations precisely because they inhabit the same body; the artist performing and the artist's life are one and the same. In the first half of the twentieth century dance achieved a higher value by associating with spiritual and heroic subject matter, perceived as more universally important than the individual self. Therefore Duncan, St. Denis, Shawn, and Graham looked to the traditional mode of written autobiographies for exposing their lives. Instead postmodern dance has achieved value with the self exposed and demystified. Therefore the attitude and mode of telling one's story through autobiographical statements in dance is an unstable phenomenon over time.

The pioneers discussed here simply didn't conceive of their work as autobiographical, although from a contemporary perspective, in some ways it was. In contrast, Martha Graham did understand the possibility of creating an openly autobiographical work, yet her fear of loss of control or artistic appropriateness restrained her. In writing to her therapist in the years following her breakup with Hawkins, she discussed her urge to create a work directly addressing their breakup:

I flung out my arms and said, "Why not call this new dance . . . I salute my love". . . . Perhaps it will take the form of writing it out . . . it could even be the letter that I must write to Erick someday. . . . I would hope that if it can be done without embarrassment of unnecessary revealment that it could become a work (Graham, 195-6).

Her desire to incorporate such intimate, personal feelings came into tension with her involuntary bond to the process of making dances, "Perhaps the need to project it forth in terms I can understand, dancing or stage work, the pattern of so many years, is needed" (196). Her pattern of exploring the self vicariously through different abstract and concrete characters resisted this new urge. Martha Graham, the artist who summered away from New York, for a period of anonymity, didn't want or perhaps have the courage for this kind of self revelation, though she understood the potential. Including these letters in her autobiography some forty years later, was probably, in her mind, risky enough.

Martha Graham's reluctance underscores the courage of contemporary artists who put themselves, their sexuality, and their art on the line. Current autobiographical statements in dance performance seek to reveal a personal experience, or point of view in the present, isolating fragments or periods of the life in question, rather than alluding to an all pervasive spiritual/physical union that Ruth St. Denis so desperately sought after, but never fully achieved. Some kindred tendencies do exist between these two

groups of creative artists, working two generations apart, if not common understanding or perspectives. And as previously noted, the distance with which contemporary artists view their lives, bodies, and selves in performance, comes as their inheritance from the Judson generation, as does their ability to soften the emotional bonding of performer and subject matter, something Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn and Martha Graham were never able to do. Finally, in a world where mass communication and air travel have shrunk the world, and diminished differences between cultures, perhaps the exotic and unique reside in the distinctness of each individual's life, rather than legends of long ago and far away.

NOTES

¹ Isadora Duncan read at this time the popular text on ancient Greece by Johann Joachim Winckelmann, "Journey to Athens."

² The loose fitting tunic adopted by Duncan bears close resemblance to costumes that became popular in ballet performances of the late eighteenth century through approximately 1820. This revolutionary and Napoleonic period in France also looked back to ancient Greece and Rome to gain credibility through association with their republican ideals.

³ The three part nature, while utilized in numerous systems of human analysis, quite possibly reflects Ruth St. Denis' influence from the theories of Françoise Delsarte who elaborated on a triple division of the human being - the intellectual, the emotional, and the physical. Isadora Duncan and Ted Shawn also had early exposure to the theories of Delsarte which were very popular in a variety of bastardized forms in the late 19th century.

⁴ See Kevin J. Mumford, "'Lost Manhood' Found," Journal of the History of Sexuality, Vol 3, (July 1992): 39.

⁵ For a full discussion of German Nackttanz, see Karl Toepfer, "Nudity and Modernity in German Dance, 1910 - 1930," Journal of the History of Sexuality, Vol 3, (July 1992): 58-108.

⁶ While I never saw Martha Graham dance, I have seen both Merce Cunningham and Daniel Nagrin dance in their advanced years. The grimace of Nagrin's pained smile, and Cunningham's hobbling on arthritic feet, spoke volumes about their past extreme use of their bodies in dance, and their current tenacity to remain performing.

⁷ See Sally Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers--postmodern dance (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), 40 -56.

Chapter Three

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS SERVICE

When Remy Charlip's Growing Up In Public, an autobiographical dance for Lucas Hoving, premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in October of 1984, Anna Kisselgoff wrote in the New York Times, "The humanist in Mr. Hoving emerges full force" (Kisselgoff 1984). In this work, repeated often since its premiere, Remy Charlip has tapped the rich store of diverse experiences that comprise the life of Lucas Hoving and as a result dramatically affected Hoving's life. "It has made a big change in my life, I can now do a performance along with teaching. A program makes money you know" (Hoving 1992). Lucas Hoving made this admission during a December, 1992, interview, in San Francisco, which despite noting the obvious and important financial concerns, expressed a gratitude for Remy Charlip and the dance that brought him back to the stage at the age of seventy-two. Lucas Hoving's performing life spans nearly seven decades and in creating Growing Up In Public, which synthesizes and dramatizes his life, Remy Charlip has done an immense service, not only for Lucas Hoving, but for the dance and artistic community at large.

In the eighties, with the postmodern dance movement

fully established, Growing Up In Public celebrates the man who made significant contributions as a performer to choreographers such as Martha Graham, Kurt Jooss, and Jose Limon. Despite his remarkable career, Hoving remains an unassuming and accessible artist. The ultimate tribute to his generosity throughout his career as performer, company director, and teacher was the September, 1991, Talking Dance Project in San Francisco, Lucas Hoving: A Life in Dance, where numerous peers shared their gratitude in words and performance for Hoving's inspiration in their lives. Anna Kisselgoff's "humanist" label accurately describes this generous-spirited dance artist, for Lucas Hoving's career epitomizes a full expression of life through dance, openness and encouragement of other's exploration, and ultimately, service to the art of dance.¹

When someone performs a service it implies the notion of giving, yet inevitably one also receives from the process of sharing. Remy Charlip spoke of the creation of Growing Up In Public in a December, 1992, interview. "I felt it like a service and I'm very interested in service, in helping other people get to something" (Charlip 1992).² For Lucas Hoving, who admits to not enjoying choreographing, calling it "agony to me" (Hoving 1992), Remy Charlip helped him get to something as a performer, the mode of self expression most familiar to Hoving. "I am a performer, I have always been a

performer" (Hoving 1992). Yet Remy Charlip recognizes and encourages the bidirectional interpersonal experience of service:

On the other hand there were times in the piece where I got a lot out of it. Like that moment in the piece where he says; 'I get the picture, men don't dance.' I myself have experienced that, where people put me down as a dancer, put me down as an artist, or as a gay person, or as a Jew, or as anything. . . . No, you can't be what you want to be, you have to do what I tell you to do (Charlip 1992).

Therefore this process of creating autobiographical dance as conceived by Remy Charlip provides an opportunity for acknowledgement of the process of self-becoming for both creator and performer. Scheduled for a premiere in early 1993 in the Bay Area Dance Series, Charlip is working with wheelchair-bound, political activist, and writer Niel Marcus on a similar work incorporating movement and language that intends to give a new voice and forum of expression to Marcus. From the stories elicited from Marcus, Charlip delightedly related the discovery of their common ancestry in the 19th century cultural center of Vilna in Lithuania. This new work furthers the process of autobiography in dance performance that Charlip pursued in Growing Up In Public, and represents an extension of the concept of autobiography as service. More importantly, though, Charlip is again authoring an autobiographical dance out of someone else's life experience. Later this chapter explores some of the implications of authorship as it relates to autobiography in

dance performance and specifically the works of Remy Charlip discussed here.

Related to the issue of service is the project, LEGACY - ORAL HISTORY PROJECT based in San Francisco and originated by Jeff Friedman. Similar to an archival project in New York City, LEGACY preserves personal and artistic legacies of individuals in the Bay Area dance community who are at risk of death from old age or premature death from AIDS or other life-threatening illnesses. In this service to the dance community, the individuals and their families, Friedman noted an experience similar to Remy Charlip's in November, 1990:

My experience of doing the interviews has been, coming in with the point of view that its gonna be very therapeutic for the subject, but it often ends up being therapeutic for me too. I get a lot out of doing these interviews. Certainly I get closer to the people that I do it with (Friedman).

Charlip is genuinely interested in "hearing how someone came to be who they are against a lot of resistance" (Charlip 1992) and this also applies to himself. In 1977 he created Glowworm which utilizes abstract movement, sign language, and ultimately spoken language, to explore his relationships to his father and mother from the perspective of his childhood in Brooklyn. He continues to perform and develop this dance and other earlier dances because:

there's still something in it for me when I do them, that is I get something from doing them. One of the reasons that I do dances at all is to get some sort

of feedback from other people . . . I like to tell my own stories because I like to hear other people's stories and encourage other people to tell their own stories. That interests me (Charlip 1992).

The performance experience Charlip describes with Glowworm exemplifies how autobiography in dance performance can act as service to oneself, to foster the ongoing process of self discovery and self healing, processes which typify Charlip's approach to life.

This chapter investigates the choreographic strategies used to create both Glowworm and Growing Up In Public, and the issues raised concerning autobiography in dance performance, such as: the tension between language and movement; the dancing body as an autobiographical statement, here especially concerning an older performer; vulnerability as it relates to personal revelations, such as one's sexuality and parental relationships; and finally the question of authorship. The intention is to establish how they succeed as dance performances while simultaneously representing acts of service.

Remy Charlip grew up in Brooklyn, New York in the thirties, the son of a housepainter father with a drinking problem, and a mother who wrote poetry. The family had a sufficient collection of popular and classical recordings that Remy as a child enjoyed dancing to. Dancing represented a fun and free activity. When he trained at the Metropolitan Opera Ballet and later had to deal with company directors

and the business of the dance world, he found the fun considerably circumscribed. He came of age as a dancer with Merce Cunningham's first company for ten years. At the time of leaving the company Cunningham called him a "ham," which Charlip felt indicated that Cunningham could only tolerate one "ham" in the company, himself. He later founded the Paper Bag Players, authored and illustrated numerous children's books, and according to Anna Kisselgoff "has been a mainstay of the dance avant-garde since the 1950's" (Kisselgoff 1984). Much of his work in these different mediums has attempted to recapture the freedom of spirit he found in dance as a child.

Personal freedom implies a sense of wholeness or focus, subjects which Remy Charlip incorporated into two of his earlier solos. He called Meditation, first performed in 1966, and later shown at the Judson Church, "an emotional biography," which typified all his solos which "have to do with where I am or where I was at the moment" (Charlip 1992). Before Me Peaceful (circa 1967) dealt with "my interest in various healing aspects, as I was thinking about the kinds of healing I was doing with myself" (Charlip 1992). Remy Charlip's use of the solo dance form to focus on the self concurs with many examples of autobiography in dance performance, yet examples in the work of Johanna Boyce and others illustrate that it is not exclusively so. Another

aspect of freedom, that of letting go, Charlip took to new artistic heights in his AIR MAIL DANCES. Different performers, who either received as gifts or commissioned these dances, built the dances in terms of transitions, timing, and spatial organization from a series of sketched shapes, for one or more bodies, that Charlip sent them through the mail. When asked by Nancy Stark Smith whether he liked all the final results, Charlip replied:

If I'm going to leave the rules that free, I have to really also be willing to accept what I might consider an uninteresting version of that script. I mean, is it important for me at this point in my life, to tell people what to do and see my vision enacted? I've done that enough (Smith, Nancy Stark).

Glowworm extends Charlip's preoccupation for exploring the self through the solo form by going beyond an abstract emotional statement to include specific stories from his childhood. The inspiration for the dance grew out of his work for the Theatre of the Deaf, where he created several works based on company member's personal stories. Coincidentally Glowworm originally told all its stories through sign language, and only with the suggestion of Producer Nancy Mason during the filming of the dance by WGBH in Boston for Frames of Reference, did Charlip narrate these stories verbally in the form of a voiceover. (All references to Glowworm are based on this performance on videocassette) Here the dance occurs on a set that incorporates giant replicas of objects normally found on a desk top, borrowed

in fact from the Boston Children's Museum exhibit called "The Giant's Desk" (Charlip 1992). A telephone sits stage right, a coffee cup with pencils and pens, and a pair of sunglasses and keys rest respectively upstage and downstage left. Upstage center is a large double picture frame with pictures of a boy, one slightly younger than the other. Quite simply the set serves to dwarf Charlip as he enters from upstage left with a run. He stops near center stage and lays down, only to get up again and lay down a second time. Even these full body level changes appear small and childlike in comparison to the oversized set, which contrasts in scale with Charlip's normal body size. A third level of scale appears when Charlip begins to "speak" sign language with his hands and arm gestures. The signing, compressed in space, reads like a dance within a dance. Contrasted to the larger body movement, its quick and precise dynamics signifies the insistent urgency of the story being told. Though abstract to the uninitiated observer, it reads as a language. The voiceover states:

In my father's house I hid under the bed because I shot my friend in the eye. My father was beating me. "You touch me again, [pause] I'll kill you." He never touched me again.

Therefore, just as the sign language necessarily utilizes a concise and clear code of gestural signification, Charlip has pared down the verbal language to express a multilayered emotional circumstance, with inappropriate actions and

serious consequences on the part of both Charlip and his father. Representing the story Charlip simply mimes the action of hiding under the bed. This pantomimic approach repeats throughout the dance, as in a hand chop to the leg when he notes that he cut his leg, followed by a limp downstage. And later when Remy Charlip sings the pop tune associated with the title Glowworm, he lays down and wiggles just as the song encourages the glowworm to do. This simple choice of movement variety to accompany the story is deceptive. First, it allows the viewer to focus greater attention to both the rhythmic and spatial complexity of the signing and the story it tells, audible through the voiceover. Second, it allows Charlip to represent accurately his shift from impersonating himself, to later impersonating his father. He falls downstage reaching and struggling, then slowly rises again, as we learn that his mother was crying because his father, drunk, had slipped and fallen on the steps. While this action illustrates the story, it also allows Charlip to identify with his father, who already has been designated as a threatening presence in his life. As a vehicle for self healing, then, Glowworm provides Charlip the opportunity to express simultaneously his truth, painful as it must be, and to see sympathetically that truth from his father's perspective. Also the minimum of complex full body movement, that is movement that articulates different

limbs in relation to the torso, renders Charlip a whole entity, a normal body or person, in abnormal circumstances, the giant world of adults, that he doesn't understand,³ yet must interact with:

We must all move to a different place away from his
drunken housepainter friends. . . . Yes, I will
help. . . . We moved to a different place . . . I
lost all my friends.

This normal body shape and movements, rising, falling, rolling, rise above mere pedestrian movement because he incorporates hand flutters and head shakes in between the sign language. These simple qualitative movements that suggest the unconsciously nervous, though playful, antics of children, are rendered more significant as a contrast to the precision of the sign language. Yet, in maintaining simple large body movement, the middle level of the three tiered interrelationship of scale, Charlip sustains its visual power in the dance. This harmony of scale, and the added information of language represents a successful blend of different elements, or symbolically a wholeness of the individual looking back on unresolved and complex memories of youth. Glowworm doesn't attempt a larger critique of society, but rather offers a glimpse into one troubled childhood from an adult trying to achieve equilibrium. Charlip explained the significance of the title that associates himself with a worm, indicative of his feeling of inadequacy, yet a worm that also glows, therefore

encouraging himself to shine, survive despite obstacles (Charlip 1992).

Since the production of this video, Remy Charlip has incorporated the spoken text into the live performance of Glowworm, but interestingly, in the video performance he chooses to sing live the short excerpt of the song Glowworm. With this single instance linking the source of the language and the movement, Charlip reinforces his identification with the glowworm. This example points to a fundamental issue in autobiography in dance performance; the tension between language and movement that defines their relative values of expressivity and readability by the audience. Often, the immediacy of language overshadows the power of the congruent movement to speak as persuasively to the audience, rendering movement to a supporting role in eliciting meaning. Language comprehension, a left brain activity, generally is more developed in our culture than movement comprehension, a combination of kinesthetic response and familiarity with the subtleties of spatial, rhythmic, and dynamic factors. Therefore choreographers working in this genre need to pay special attention to this problem if they intend the dancing body to communicate on an equal status.

In the example cited above, Charlip's wiggling body serves not only to illustrate the story, but to balance the language with kinetically invigorating movement, so much so,

that it distorts the voice's delivery of the song. Therefore the movement imposes itself upon the language and forces an equal appraisal. Remy Charlip does this even more effectively in a preceding section when he does a succession of full body turns in place, each time stopping to face the audience and say a word in sign language. In a broken, rhythmic fashion allowing for a turn between each word, the voice over delivers the sentence; "When I was a little boy I used to love to dance in my living room." Here Charlip balances perfectly the pattern of information between movement and language--word, turn, word, turn,--through the sixteen words in the sentence. This repetition focuses the audience on the adult man turning, highlighting the dual temporal modes of a present dancer referring to a past (childhood) dancer. The body is rooted in the present, more so, than other elements of human existence such as memory or emotional feeling states. Dance, by pushing the limits of the moving body, focuses attention on the body to a greater degree than the other performing arts. Simultaneous statements of a present dancing body conjoined with spoken text referring to a past self characterizes autobiography in dance performance, which therefore represents a unique opportunity to both establish the self and broaden its presentation through time.

Remy Charlip's treatment of language and movement in

Glowworm balances these two expressive mediums through use of repetition (turns, and full body rising and falling) and through a visually and rhythmically quick changing movement quality (wiggling). This video performance presents the opportunity to consider the difference between live spoken text and recorded spoken text. During the voiceover delivery, the language is assimilated and blended with the movement information relatively effortlessly by a viewer because in addition to the strategic choices previously noted, it emanates from two different sources. When Charlip delivers the song live, though, this blending process becomes a problem of untangling the two elements (voice score and movement) emanating from a single source. This problem in legibility emphasizes the need for balancing movement and text as evidenced in Glowworm.

Remy Charlip mentioned that the photographs in the set were the only elements he had constructed for this production (Charlip 1992). Use of photographs is a device used frequently in autobiography in dance performance, as Arlene Croce notes in 1982, "the showing of family album photographs has become a convention" (Croce, 98). While not a innovative addition, the photographs chosen are appropriate to Glowworm's topic. One shows Charlip as a boy around ten and the second depicts his bar mitzvah. Youthful innocence juxtaposed with the Jewish rite of passage from

boyhood to manhood. Glowworm concludes with the camera closing in on the photos as Charlip backs upstage and off. Charlip's costume, a jacket with shimmering silver pieces on the front and rainbow colored sleeves, with simple dark pants, includes artifacts from his childhood, such as whistles and a skate key (Charlip). While photos, representations of a former, younger self, lend a historical relevance to the performing self, the artifacts act as talismans, actual relics of another time that potentially hold a spiritual significance. In this case, they seem to serve the performer more than the audience in meaning, as the dance text does not bring up these particular items. This concurs with Remy Charlip's aesthetic of creating and performing dances to get something personally from them, as much as to share something with the audience.

In Glowworm Remy Charlip exposes sensitive issues, especially the beating by his father:

It was a difficult thing because I was telling strangers that my father beat me, and it brought up a lot of things for me in relationship to my father. I felt as though I was still working it out, and there were several times that actually I got into physical trouble because of it . . . I felt that my father was trying to stop me from doing it actually. For instance, I hurt my back before a performance once (Charlip 1992).

Here again, autobiography in dance performance acts as a self healing service to the evolving non-performing self. To lighten the tone of the work Charlip included incidents that

Kisselgoff notes "made the hilarious and the tragic often seem one and the same" (Kisselgoff 1984). After informing us that his mother came home one day and told him that she had lost his dog, he adds "I thought maybe she was going to lose me . . . I was very worried." While to a boy the loss of a dog would be earth-shattering, Charlip's statement here is funny. In Glowworm Remy Charlip tries to capture the playfulness of dance again, through returning to childhood innocence; simultaneously he exposes and revisits troubling episodes. The juxtaposing of innocence with loss of innocence perhaps reflects his adult need to balance his present self's degree of personal security with the less secure perceptions of the past. Though Charlip admits to having sexual experiences as a child (Charlip 1992) he leaves them out of Glowworm. The implications of this choice is touched upon in relation to his work Growing Up In Public.

In proposing and creating Growing Up In Public for Lucas Hoving, Remy Charlip brought Hoving to a place he might never have gone, not only the genre of autobiography in dance performance, but also the celebration of his life achievement in dance. He also brought Hoving back to the stage, where he had no intention of returning after retiring from performance in 1971. Once back, in the vehicle of Growing Up In Public, he hasn't left again. In fact, at the

age of eighty, he admitted to having ten minutes prepared of a new work, his own this time, a kind of sequel to Growing Up In Public (Hoving 1992). Charlip noted that he gained an appreciation for the process of aging by working with Lucas Hoving; Hoving's steadfastness and genuine artistry through the years impressed him, as did Hoving's dancing:

I'm so amazed that he hobbles to the performance on a cane and then he gets on stage and he does these incredible things. What I think is fascinating is to see an older person move. We joke. I say I stand in one place and wave my arms around a lot and Lucas calls it two feet on the floor dancing (Charlip 1992).

Growing Up In Public utilizes movement born out of and appropriate to Lucas Hoving's older body. This differentiates Hoving from Martha Graham's unwillingness to tone down the physicality of her roles at the end of her performing career. Hoving's dancing (all references to Growing Up In Public are based on the videotaped performance at the Talking Dance Project Lucas Hoving: A Life In Dance, Theatre Artaud, San Francisco, September 3, 1991, also viewed live by this author) reveals the limitations of age, the lack of flexibility, the carefulness in movement. Yet several bursts of passionate dancing also reveal the inner strength and drive to triumph over the body in performance. In this way the dancing body becomes an autobiographical statement for Lucas Hoving based upon a real appraisal of his capacities. Related to this is Jeff Friedman's thought

concerning dancing about and in the era of AIDS. "The body centered nature of dance is a very compelling medium to make work about deterioration of the body" (Friedman). As the dancing body reveals the person dancing, this autobiographical statement merits closer scrutiny when connected to autobiographical text. Before the era of talking dancers, John Martin touched on this in 1936: "Any theory of dance that attempts to make use of the body as an instrument of pure design is doomed to failure, for the body is of all possible instruments the least removable from the associations of experience" (Martin, John, 92). And Lucas Hoving stated in the 1988 video produced at Stanford University, Touching the Souls, "in dance you work with the essence of the person" (Stanford University). He later clarified:

One particularly sees this through improvisation when it is spontaneous, not planned. Proof is with people I've known for ten years . . . when I finally get to know who they are. . . . Their dancing is them (Hoving 1992).

The autobiographical nature of the body in dance performance, while present in all cases (in all dance for that matter), plays a varying degree of importance dependent on such factors as the use of nudity, the degree of technical dancing employed, whether based on ability or stylistic choices, and the age of the performer. In Growing Up In Public it plays a significant role for several

reasons. First, seeing the eighty year old Hoving kneeling on stage as the lights come up generates considerable respect that this performer is there at all. The viewer readily accepts the predominantly understated dancing, which indicates the former grand sweep and power of the younger Hoving. Yet when he explodes into a stamping, thigh slapping, short excerpt from Jose Limon's There is a Time the fullness of this movement leaps out with all the force of a dancer in his prime. Catching the viewer offguard, this excerpt underscores the presence of a masterful performer telling his story, as opposed to a quaint, elderly man rambling on. Second, Lucas Hoving's obvious age renders believable and magical the historical retrospective he narrates, that begins before World War I, touches the major forces in twentieth century modern dance, and concludes with a reference to the dance which has brought him to this moment. Modern dance history, embodied in Hoving, speaks and dances in the present, and it makes a compelling performance. The insular subject matter, which primarily concerns Hoving's career in modern dance, may be considered a limitation of the general appeal of Growing Up In Public, although it is when Hoving goes beyond this circumscribed area that this work achieves a more universal validity.

A brief sketch of Lucas Hoving's life follows; for an in-depth treatment see the Talking Dance Project video

previously cited. Born in Groningen, Holland, son of a butcher, and with a mother that apparently suffered from rheumatism, he lived for the first few years of his life next door to his family's home, because his mother's health prohibited her from tending to a young child. He learned to play the piano as a boy and got his first job as an accompanist at a dance studio, the owner of whom had studied with Mary Wigman. He started his dance career with this unnamed dancer, continued with his own choreography for night clubs and parties, and after one year studying with Kurt Jooss in England, entered his company in 1939. He performed in The Green Table (1932) for the early years of World War II, then worked with Martha Graham briefly before returning to Holland to fight in the Dutch army. Returning to New York after the war, he joined Jose Limon's fledgling company with whom he danced for fourteen years, performing in all his early masterpieces, most significantly The Moor's Pavane (1949). In the sixties he presented his own choreography on tour with his company, which followed earlier tours of a duet concert he and his wife Lavinia Nielsen created in the fifties. In Icarus (1964), his most famous dance of this period, Lucas Hoving expressed his empathy with Icarus' love for the sun and desire for things beyond one's reach. This represents the closest Hoving came to an autobiographical dance statement prior to Growing Up

In Public. Finally he disbanded his company in 1971 and retired from the stage, eventually landing in San Francisco as a permanent resident in 1981. He returned to the stage in Growing Up In Public in 1984. Describing his approach to dance and life, Lucas Hoving summed himself up: "I feel I am totally involved, my whole being, my living, my thinking, my psychic things in my work" (Hoving 1992).

In comparison to Glowworm, Remy Charlip directed Lucas Hoving to intersperse the movement episodes of Growing Up In Public with text and vice versa. Only one section includes full body movement while Hoving also narrates. In that section he describes his favorite moment on stage, from the period of working with Limon, as standing still as Christ in The Traitor (1954). First, he delivers this statement standing still, then while continuing to speak descriptively of the action, he mimes the pulling of a cloth and wrapping of his body, followed by an indication of being crowned with thorns with open splayed hands placed at his ears and facing behind him. Finally he stops, pauses, and notes "and then he kissed me." Standing still once again he concludes the episode by describing his capture. By inserting the action between the two moments of standing, he heightens the tension, also reflected in his voice, and recaptures the drama of this dance. Otherwise the movement always precedes or follows a spoken section except for the fairly constant

use of the hands. Hoving's large and supple hands accompany much of the story from the clenched fists in the stamping section, to the hand wringing of the United States official refusing Hoving a chance to join the U.S. Army, to the gentle rubbing of fingers in upturned hands when he speaks of his fascination with hands. The opening section of the dance merely develops his miming of playing the piano, first as a child discovering the instrument, then at a lesson, and finally accompanying dance class with roving eyes and supple upper body, as his hands dance animatedly at the keys. This exercise in minimalism serves thematically to link his childhood into his dancing years. Generally, though, the separation of movement and text in time allows each to speak clearly, and despite the greater percentage of text than movement, because of the issue of Hoving's age cited above, the movement does not read as of secondary importance in Growing Up In Public.

The dance section cited earlier, a phrase of percussive hand clapping, thigh slapping, and rhythmic stamping as Hoving sidesteps across the stage stands out as the most dramatic section of the dance. It follows immediately after he relates a story of sharing a beautiful summer day in the French countryside, just after the invasion force he accompanied had landed, with a dead horse. The uniqueness of this story is that here Hoving expresses a powerful moment

in his life, not directly related to his dance career:

I feel my dance 'A Time to Speak' [the source of this dance excerpt from There Is A Time by Jose Limon] is very much a dance of anger. 'Speak up.' I had been in London during the bombings. I knew it was all wrong, but somehow or other that horse, I remember that so well. Why the horse, that beautiful creature (Hoving 1992)?

By juxtaposing this energized dance of anger with the succinct story that captured Hoving's revulsion with the war, Charlip and Hoving touch an essential nerve, that of life and death. Despite the wonder of Hoving's illustrious career, this moment of immediacy to the issue of lost voice, lost life represents the climax of Growing Up In Public. In this retrospective autobiographical work, Hoving as subject and performer confronts his own mortality here. On stage as an old man, he is speaking, yet necessarily his own impending "lost voice" must haunt him. This image of the dead horse riveted him in World War II; its absurdity but unmistakable reality unnerves him still. Interestingly, the horse story gave Hoving trouble in establishing the correct rhythm of delivery. Charlip directed Hoving to "actually see the dead horse on the floor and react to it" (Charlip 1992). Concerning the tension between language and movement Charlip noted a need to "get to the reality of the situation, so that the timing, the rhythm, and the movement came out of a feeling of what actually was happening at the moment" (Charlip 1992). This process of recalling the past and

reliving it, essentially a Method acting approach, calls into question the authenticity of the performing self. Just as an actor creates a character, performers can and to some extent do create themselves in reliving their lives onstage, though, in the eclectic assemblage of postmodern performance, the authenticity of the moment and its placement in the context of performance supercedes in importance the absolute authenticity of the source. Partially because of the difficulty of establishing a distinct and authentic real life self, the performance statement about the self becomes the self. In that context, and in that moment, it is true. In this case, Charlip uses a Method approach to assist Hoving in performing intensely emotional material based in his real life experience. Hoving reflected on the remarkable period of the war:

Yah, that was an incredible time anyway. If you happen to live like I do, very much participating in and experiencing it. Of course the war was one high point after the other or low point, whatever the hell, nothing smooth. So often I think how ridiculous it is that horrible time, the war, became a very high point in my life even on a negative side . . . I grew a lot during that time (Hoving 1992).

Curiously this period and section of the dance have opposed tendencies. To perform this section Hoving needs to create it anew, but the period itself represents a kind of destruction of the self: divorce from his dancing; loss of privacy in the army; and finally the poignant memory of the loss of life, animal rather than human, underscoring the

reality.

Growing Up In Public reveals Hoving's vulnerability in this section as it does in another moment not related to his dance career. Very early in the dance he notes, "I overheard some neighbors talk . . . she became ill after he was born, you know . . . after I was born she became ill" and then, in the most enraged tone of voice in the entire dance, "that's a lie." Her illness did define his relationship to his mother, and more:

I was in a way being punished. It's one of those great unknown things, really what happened to us. In a way it formed my character, it shaped me what I am. It was very hard for me to live next door and not live with my own family (Hoving 1992).

Interestingly, moments before these lines in the dance he mimics her frail body rising from a horizontal position on the bed to standing where he assists her in walking to the kitchen. Here the elderly Hoving conveys someone in ill health and also reveals his own psychological frailty concerning his vital relationship to his mother. The issue, though, gets left unresolved, just apparently as it stands in his life, yet the personal pain readily communicates. Near the end of the work, Hoving recites a dream that first tormented him with beings crawling on his body and a voice that said "this is your life," followed by a beam of light with a voice that said "this is your dancing, follow it." Hoving clearly differentiates the two and except for the two

instances cited, shares only his professional dancing career in Growing Up In Public. Coincidentally these most vulnerable subjects register as the most powerful moments in the work. In their relative conciseness, coupled with telling movement phrases, they don't beg for sympathy, but rather contextualize the performer. Hoving we learn more about, with aspects of the humanity behind his public persona. With these brief glimpses into his personal suffering Growing Up In Public accommodates Herbert Blau's call for critical exegesis of the self. Hoving's forthright personal statement, albeit essentially apolitical, and located as it is, not in one socio-political time frame, but spanning most of the twentieth century and its myriad of social, political, and cultural upheavals, traces a life both tragic and glorious, vulnerable yet enduring.

The context in which both Charlip and Hoving grew up explains to a large extent why they both avoid any mention of their sexuality in these two works. Quite simply, as they both admit (Charlip 1992, Hoving 1992), they grew up in a time when sexuality was not discussed. As far as sharing this subject in performance, Hoving said:

I feel I would be forcing it. To say in public, 'Oh I've slept with a man, I've slept with a woman.' I wonder if I will ever get to that point, it might just happen (Hoving 1992).

And Charlip recalled authentic fears that performers of his generation had concerning openness about one's

homosexuality. A paddy wagon regularly waited outside a popular gay bar in the New York City of the 1950's (Charlip 1992). These men share the sensibility that informed Martha Graham's reluctance to discuss openly in performance her relationship with Erick Hawkins. Yet Hoving's line in Growing Up In Public, "OK, OK, I got your message. . . . Men don't dance!" speaks with multiple meanings, considering the implications of a man in dance in the first half of the twentieth century, that of assumed homosexuality, a stereotype quite often based in fact, that Ted Shawn nonetheless battled against for a lifetime. Hoving's career, though, stands as irrefutable fact that men do dance, regardless of their sexuality.⁴ The issue of one's sexuality becomes central to some of the work in autobiography in dance performance that exists in the period after the sixties' cultural and sexual revolutions that spurred the women's and gay men's movements. For younger choreographers, sexuality as a performance issue becomes an opportunity to make a political and personal statement. For those of an earlier generation like Charlip and Hoving, it's a private issue in a public time. Alwin Nikolais said as much in 1985, "I've always abhorred the idea of male and female as opposed, as if we were all walking around in heat. Modern society forces you to be a sexual object rather than a person" (Dunning 1985).

Finally, both Growing Up In Public and Glowworm illustrate a characteristic of autobiography in dance performance, the fluid nature of the specific content from performance to performance. And this characteristic points to the question of authorship as demonstrated in Growing Up In Public. First, recall the definition that Haegert gives to "autobiography as fiction:"

a kind of generic no-man's land inhabited by authors who are uneasy with the end-determined structure of autobiography but who are nonetheless resolved to treat the self as a literary subject worthy of sustained exploration and significant form (Haegert, 623).

By substituting "dance subject" for "literary subject" the above definition describes the fluid nature of these two dance works. Both Charlip and Hoving mention that these dances have continued to evolve and change over time. Recalling Remy Charlip's service to himself by finding something new in performing old works, it follows that these new discoveries will influence the work, certainly the nuanced performance, and more specifically the inclusion or subtraction of material. Charlip noted that he was rethinking the whole issue of child abuse currently, and therefore questioning the way he portrays his experience of this issue in Glowworm (Charlip 1992). Because tending to the maintenance of Growing Up In Public has become more the responsibility of Lucas Hoving, he has edited material because "it didn't sit well, I can't say it, I've got to

change it" (Hoving 1992). This rationale reflects a craftsmanship approach to the work as does his contention that the performance setting clearly affects the performance:

Because it's so personal and I've changed it very much. Sometimes I do it on a stage as a real theatrical thing and sometimes I just do it in a gymnasium, and that changes it very much (Hoving 1992).

Earlier in the history of Growing Up In Public Remy Charlip did contribute to the editing of the completed work:

As Lucas has been changing, it has changed . . . we change it together. The issue of what sounds better, which is easier to say 'When I was three years old or four years old.' What difference does it make really (Charlip 1992)?

Therefore absolute accuracy of subject matter ranks as a secondary concern to whether the performer, the material, and the specific circumstance of performance all converge for a committed performance.⁵ Also Charlip's statement points to the continued aging of Hoving. Excerpts of the work are included in Touching the Souls and here a somewhat younger (4 years) and spryer Hoving give a different and more full treatment to several movement sections, such as when he demonstrates the exercises he has seen the dancers perform while accompanying his first dance classes. The unconscious changes introduced by further aging added to the conscious choices introduced by personal preference all contribute to the fluid nature of autobiography in dance

performance.

In Contact Quarterly - dance journal (Spring/Summer 88), an article discussing the creation of Growing Up In Public lists Remy Charlip as the conceiver and director of the work. He opened the process with a letter:

Dear Lucas, here is an outline for how Growing Up In Public might go, and as a way of getting into the material. . . . Some came from things you've written or said. Some I made up, just as a way of suggesting the kind of things it could include. Change anything. (Charlip, 1988)

He then included a series of statements with a blank intended for Lucas Hoving to fill in such as, "My mother said I had _____ and was _____." Typically postmodern, Hoving refers to this creative process at the end of Growing Up In Public. Charlip noted that in organizing the material in the work, he followed, not a strict chronological order, but an emotional order. Though not mentioned by Roger Copeland in his 1985 article on theatrical dance, Growing Up In Public serves as a prime example of his "new theatricality," cited in the introduction. Charlip was drawn to work with the raw material of Hoving the person and the artist, yet he "wanted it to be his [Hoving's] piece, and I learned a lot about putting something together from other people's material" (Charlip 1992). Later, in introducing the work at the Talking Dance Project performance he described himself as the midhusband for the work. This open approach to the creative process continued the aesthetic that Charlip

had earlier articulated in his AIRMAIL DANCES. In serving as a facilitator in the creation of new work based on another person's raw material, Charlip's reputation is nonetheless on the line, but he states:

It was an experiment. . . . I want to be thought of well by whoever judges these things, but I've done enough work that is considered good both by myself and other people, that I can now look at everything as an experiment. . . . Experiments fail. The only time something becomes successful is when you stop failing (Charlip 1992).

Charlip's willingness to fail stems in part from his identity as a dancer/choreographer with effacement of the self; by giving away control of his work he defines himself.

This attitude also reflects a distancing from the work on the part of Charlip, for while his name is associated with the work, the personal impact belongs to Hoving. Interestingly Hoving also distances himself from the original work:

Of course Growing Up In Public is mainly Remy Charlip. It was his idea . . . of course you keep exchanging ideas and all that, but that is really Remy Charlip and Remy and I are very different people (Hoving 1992).

Perhaps this perspective originally helped Lucas Hoving to perform his life in Growing Up In Public, just as a dancer performs another's choreography which only emerges through the dancer's body, although here the "choreography" was his life. Over the years of performing it, though, Lucas Hoving has taken ownership, resulting in the responsibility of

changing the work as necessary, as has been noted. But more importantly, Hoving has embraced this new form and process. His new work "shows the work it takes to find out who I am, what I am, and why I am, and that might be something that is worth sharing with people" (Hoving 1992). This evolution of a desire to share, and expose the process of creation of selfhood as it has manifested in his life, represents the culmination of service rendered to Lucas Hoving by Remy Charlip. And likewise, Remy Charlip's experience with Hoving and Growing Up In Public led him to undertake the current project with Niel Marcus. Autobiography in dance performance, through the intimate, and undeniably personal, form of the living, dancing and talking body, forwards the human urge to explore the self, in the hotbed of performance, and especially intensified in the twentieth century after the influence of Freud. While valid for a performer of any age, it becomes especially compelling with someone like Lucas Hoving who has scaled down and adapted his medium, dance, to continue telling his story.

NOTES

¹ Hoving exemplified this attitude toward service in a story he shared about working with Charles Wiedman in a dance by Pauline Koner early in his career. Since Weidman was known to drink, and often showed up at rehearsals too inebriated to work, Koner and Hoving took turns visiting Weidman several hours before rehearsal time to insure he came sober to the working session, and therefore facilitated the process of making the dance (Hoving 1992).

² Remy Charlip was instrumental in producing the benefit performance STEPS for the Parachute Fund of San Francisco in the Fall of 1990. The Parachute Fund supports members of the dance community with financial obligations as the need arises, especially for those afflicted with AIDS.

³ Remy Charlip remarked in our interview that they were kept in the dark about family decisions and the darker realities that possibly precipitated them.

⁴ For an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of the attraction of a dance career for gay men see Judith Lynne Hanna, Dance Sex and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 136-143.

⁵ Josh Kornbluth, a monologist based in San Francisco, performed in 1992 his autobiographical monologue Red Diaper Baby in San Francisco and New York. At a meeting in late 1992, he responded to my question about the authenticity of his material by stating that it all comes from real events, but he has altered or fictionalized the material to some extent for maximum dramatic effect.

Chapter Four

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS PERSONAL POLITICAL STATEMENT

In the work of Johanna Boyce, largely created and presented in the 1980's in New York and the East coast, her personal experiences, both past and current, become not only subject matter, but an impetus for political commentary on society at large. In a roundtable discussion on "Movement and Gender" with Carol Martin, Ann Daly and Bill T. Jones, published in the Drama Review (Winter, 1988), Boyce emphatically states:

I see things I dislike and I react against them. I think a lot of my art comes out of that. It's kind of retaliatory. I really get fed up with a certain way of viewing women, and so I want to present or explore for myself other variations on that (Boyce et al., 1988, 92).

This political aesthetic pervades her work, which critic Amanda Smith refers to in Dance Magazine: "In her full evening Incidents (in coming of age) (1982), Boyce again connected the personal and the political. Here she explained what the Vietnam War had meant to her as she grew into adolescence" (50). While Johanna Boyce's work in autobiography in dance performance represents a distinctly personal and political statement, it also incorporates and extends aspects of autobiography as service. Specifically two related dances, Ties That Bind (1984) and Ties That Bind

- Part Two (1985), serve not only the performers in giving voice and legitimacy to their alternative sexual orientation as lesbians, but also serve women and the feminist movement as strong statements challenging the status quo. Both these works were constructed from the life histories of the performers, just as Remy Charlip constructed Growing Up In Public from Lucas Hoving's life. Here also delicate source material emerged that both threatened and energized the work as a whole. But just as Hoving expressed gratitude for Charlip's efforts, Boyce likewise reports that both the performers and audience members continue to express their appreciation that these two dances raised the issues that they did (Boyce 1992).

Johanna Boyce has rendered, though, a larger service to women by presenting alternative representations of how women can exist in society. Her perceptions of her mother's "homebound" status with limited options as a housewife and mother, during Johanna Boyce's childhood in the fifties and sixties, influenced significantly Boyce's urge to utilize her wider expressive opportunities:

She was very limited in the role of what she perceived she could do and be for herself. . . . It became a personal crusade for me to say 'Women do not need to be just one way, there are a myriad of ways that we can view ourselves.' It felt very important to get out on stage as a political act, that it is okay to explore these things, not only okay, but necessary . . . to affirm that in a way that can move people, and not just didactically (Boyce 1992).

Recalling the political overtones of some early modern dancers, Johanna Boyce believes in the power of art and performance to effect change, although here the issues are sexual politics and women consciously and explicitly identifying with women, rather than the downtrodden masses. As political statements her work intends to achieve a result beyond simple artistic commentary. Rather, it challenges the status quo of gender relationships. Boyce's approach to this goal leads back to her autobiographical sources. "The power situation . . . I chose the ways I knew--which can be equally as manipulative, in a way. It is to expose and to reveal oneself in such a way as to have a striking honesty" (Boyce et al., 1988, 91). Her mother's life experience propelled her to use dance performance to make societal commentary in reaction to that experience. Outward directed, her response contrasts markedly with how Lucas Hoving and Remy Charlip relate through performance to the relationship between themselves and their mothers. While perhaps sharing in some of the political naivete of the period, it reflects Boyce's youth and maturity in the politically charged sixties, when quite often the personal was political; the war protester often also dodged the draft. As she notes, "things that concern me or have an urgency for me, that's what gets distilled in the work" (Boyce 1992). This distillation expands beyond a personal self healing to a

concern for all women, both mothers and daughters, and characterizes the blurring of life and art found in much of postmodern performance.

Therefore, from the climate of the sixties, the work of Johanna Boyce inherits not only the political activism, but the opportunity to focus that activism on the specific issues of women, newly identified as a minority group, suffering discrimination and inequities in society at large. Boyce definitely aligned herself with the feminist cause:

I wanted it to be accessible or immediate . . . in a feminist position that I wanted it to be personal and have ramifications beyond the person. One's own story was as important as a king's or emperor's story . . . we each have important values to tell each other and we just need to find ways to say it and hear it (Boyce 1992).

While Boyce's political aesthetic springs from her mother's experience, she perhaps assumes too broadly that her mother is representative of all women. Her occasionally vague or too inclusive statements made in interviews reflects a tendency to blur distinctions. Boyce's intent, though, is to validate a woman's perspective by giving it voice.

Just as Bill T. Jones' aesthetic grows out of the more fluid and facile interpersonal communication of the African American culture, Johanna Boyce wants to foster interpersonal sharing, emotional sharing, through the construct of performance, between audience and performer. She felt propelled in this direction because of the

extremity of the artistic consequences of Yvonne Rainer's credo "No to theatricality, no to emotion." Eschewing the barrenness of "empty intellectual rigor," she felt as an audience member that she "wanted to be touched, to be moved, but not in the bombastic manner of opera or ballet" (Boyce 1992). This attitude characterizes the first generation to inherit the expanded aesthetic boundaries of the Judson Church innovators, the second wave of postmodernism, if you will, that Roger Copeland in 1985 dubbed the "new theatricality." Anna Kisselgoff pointed in 1981 to similar trends:

Because the boundaries were so stretched in the 1960's, they have lots of room. Surprisingly, many now find congenial the mainstream's concern with narrative and theatrical production values. . . . Formalist concerns remain central but there is a new swing toward overt expression of emotion (Kisselgoff 1981).

While Johanna Boyce's work definitely fits this trend, she challenges emotional barriers in terms of textual material, although she rarely pushes beyond a minimalist, pedestrian, and understated dance movement style. This reluctance to infuse and balance her passionate stories with more dynamically charged movement weakens their effectiveness to achieve her goals as stated above. While her Longings to Realize (1983) suffers the most from this assertion, the two Ties That Bind stand as exceptions that validate her movement aesthetic.

Autobiography in dance performance comprises a large percentage of Johanna Boyce's repertoire. She has pursued this genre with her own material and with the personal stories of others, and as a consequence of her greater affiliation with this genre she has been singled out as one of the innovators (Croce) (Smith, Amanda).¹ Influenced by personal familial experiences, among others, Boyce gravitated toward this form and received early and important recognition for her experiments in pushing the limits of self exploration in performance. Having just graduated from Middlebury College, she arrived in New York in April, 1978, and produced her first concert in July of the same year, which caught the eye of the curator of the Kitchen, Eric Bogosian, who invited her to perform. Her work's positive reception encouraged her to continue pursuing this new and unspecified genre of autobiography in dance performance through the mid-eighties, which Boyce noted came naturally to her (Boyce 1992). As source material more concrete than the general appraisal of her mother's life, for Incidents (in coming of age) Boyce drew on cassette audio tapes that were sent by her brother in Vietnam. Some of them portrayed a censored version of the war for the general family, mentioning volleyball, mosquitoes, and things being "a little rough," and others, sent to another brother, graphically described rapes, killing, and the carnage

associated with Vietnam viewed from hindsight. Therefore the artifacts utilized in autobiography in dance performance have evolved from a costume by Ted Shawn based on a real dress from an ancestor's trousseau, to personal photos and affects used by Charlip, to taped family correspondence that, despite its edited nature, was never intended for use in a performance context. The personal nature of the artifact incorporated apparently helps the choreographer to shape these works more than they resonate on their own within the work.

Once again this chapter investigates how Johanna Boyce's choreographic strategies interact with the key issues of autobiography in dance performance: the tension between language and movement; vulnerability as it relates to personal revelations, with sexuality now prominent; the presentation of the dancing body as an autobiographical statement, directly addressed in Ties That Bind - Part Two; the question of authorship; and finally the issue of temporal modes, illustrated through multiple story lines inhabiting one work. Following consideration of these categories of investigation in relation to her dances is a discussion in greater detail of Ties That Bind and Ties That Bind - Part Two as significant examples of autobiography as personal political statement.

Johanna Boyce grew up in Broderville, Vermont in the

fifties and sixties as has been mentioned. Her father served as president for the Experiment in International Living, which trained people for the Peace Corps and exposed the young Boyce to numerous foreigners. She noted that this occasioned frequent opportunities to attempt non-verbal conversation with non-English speaking students. The family also travelled a lot, another factor which sensitized her to the fact that there was more than one way of doing things in many aspects of life. At Middlebury College, according to Boyce a "white bread school in Vermont," she wanted to attend ballet classes, but due to her body's weight she was prohibited from doing so. In response she began her own classes with others similarly rejected and found early sponsorship in the Art and Theatre Departments. The Art Department milieu exposed her to conceptual art, and the attack on aesthetic rules by dance artists such as Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Trisha Brown, which Boyce referred to as "the fallout from New York City in the country" (Boyce 1992). Ultimately the popularity of her classes and impromptu performances forced the Dance Program to accept her contingent of students and she completed a Music degree with an emphasis in Dance. From there she quickly moved to New York City and immediately began her professional choreographic career.

In Johanna Boyce's work in autobiography in dance

performance the spoken word, in her opinion, "was more specific, it grounded the movement in something" (Boyce 1992). Boyce skillfully manipulates language to create a multidimensional world of issues and feelings, often blending in time several stories at once in addition to the movement text. She employs this strategy in her early work "Only, connect" (circa 1980) and later in both Ties That Bind. Amanda Smith notes: "The skill with which she dovetailed the two strands of her narrative would have done a fiction writer proud" (50). Her brother's graphic description of gunning down fisherman in Incidents (in coming of age) and the admission of incest by the woman speaking in the voice over for the opening section of With Longings to Realize immediately connect with the audience by specifying transgressions of normal moral behavior. Despite these powerful texts, Boyce believed that "either one [movement or language] without the other could not exist, it needed the complexity of both to really communicate" (Boyce 1992). She elaborated in our interview on her theory of how movement and language worked together:

I felt the story was being told simultaneously in movement and in words. You have two lines of communication going, the visual and the auditory. They can either coexist or contraindicate what's being told. So the person can say one thing and their body is saying another thing (Boyce 1992).

Johanna Boyce's predominant movement style reflects her early exposure to minimalist and pedestrian movement modes.

The dynamics remain understated with an infrequent use of any full body extension. She builds her movement phrases through repetition of simple walks, runs, jumps, skips, and falls, with relaxed arm gestures. This conscious choice of movement vocabulary resulted from her contention that "the movement needed to come out of the real lifeness of the story" (Boyce 1992). In the roundtable discussion cited earlier, Boyce reveals her steadfastness in this aesthetic but also an inability or unwillingness to acknowledge that the performance experience alters significantly the "real lifeness" of the movement:

MARTIN: But still there's the fact that performance itself is duplicitous. You are yourself and not yourself simultaneously on the stage, because what you are displaying is apart from or aside from what we normally do in daily life.

BOYCE: Initially I was working with the idea of ordinary, moment-to-moment feelings in improvisation. The things I did outside the theatre I was able to bring inside the theatre and organize them in such a way that the space and time maybe was more intense an experience, but it was not too terribly different from what my normal experience of life was. . . . In a manner of being, and in the style of being-in-the-world. So that if you had an itch you might scratch it. You were trying to be aware of yourself in as normal a situation as possible, so you wouldn't have that theatricality (Boyce et al., 1988, 92).

Boyce avoids confronting the question of the duplicitous nature of the performance context in this interview.

Although, she correctly calls her approach a style, for surely by the late seventies and early eighties pedestrian

movement was as much a style as traditional modern dance or ballet, a style that evoked non-dance dance. With movement she expresses a desire to avoid theatricality, although concerning the performance experience and therefore the choice of subject matter she felt the urge to utilize theatrical, or emotional material to "move the audience" (Boyce 1992). Amanda Smith points to another concern in her appraisal of "Only, connect". "Boyce spoke matter-of-factly, and her movement was task oriented enough to distance the teller from the tale, to give an objectivity that avoided sentimentality" (50). Where does this concern for sentimentality come from; could it be the very ordinariness of life on stage that Boyce is striving for in movement, but clearly challenging in text? Or perhaps the concern comes from the intimate revelations of a virtually unknown artist, as was Boyce in comparison to the extended and established careers of Lucas Hoving and Remy Charlip.

In a 1982 Studies Project performance with Simone Forti, Johanna Boyce exhibited this same task oriented approach to a performed excerpt from Incidents (in coming of age) (all references from the St. Marks Church videotape of this performance). She and two partners handle several different props during the performance. The first appears to be several grapefruit that they roll to each other while standing and lying on the ground, or toss in the air to

themselves or to each other. Tea cups are exchanged for the grapefruit and the unaccented passing of these new props continues uninterrupted with an occasional sipping gesture thrown in. Finally they simply walk in different geometric patterns in the confined space. Throughout, the tone remains subdued with only an occasional extra effort to stop a rolling ball, which Boyce alludes to post-performance as, "the spontaneity of the props in the moment . . . with set situations that are too difficult to do and so the performers don't know what will happen." Although the difficulty factor in this performance appeared quite low as the effort expended to respond to the "spontaneity" of the props never broke the almost stern composure of the performers. All the while Boyce provocatively contrasts her mother's talk of sorority gatherings and dinner parties, with her brother's reflections on Vietnam, a verbal text that clearly dominates the dance's meaning. The ongoingness of the abstract movement does occupy the audience while they digest the disturbing nature of the text, yet almost as a monotonous desensitizing element rather than an equalling expressive medium of communication. The complexity of the movement text dissolves into oneness because the minimal dynamic variation and the chosen performance demeanor erase the relatively full use of space, levels, and prop manipulation. Therefore while the story remains compelling,

as well as the other theatrical effects used, such as photographs of Boyce as a child and later of her brother in Vietnam (Amanda Smith notes these effects but interestingly doesn't mention movement in her discussion of this work), an imbalance between movement and language weakens the overall power of Incidents (in coming of age). Despite Amanda Smith's contention otherwise, the task-oriented approach, which creates this imbalance, highlights the potential sentimentality of the work because the exposed family stories are not supported by an equally compelling movement text. The source of the text coming from the soundscore contributes to this imbalance by rendering it impossible to adequately connect the source of the personal anecdotes to any one person.

This use of multiple nonspeaking performers with an overdubbed text occurs again in With Longings to Realize, (all references based on the Dance Theatre Workshop videotape of this performance) with similar consequences and several exceptions. The group of dancers distract from the concern for the individual in the stories. The four sections of this dance offer four different story lines, four accompanying solos for Boyce, followed by group dances. While Boyce dances solo to the text which refers each time to a single female's experience, the third person perspective utilized here diminishes the autobiographical

nature of the work. Yet the solo dance connected to the text forces the audience to wonder if the subject in the story is not the performer onstage. This construct encourages the audience's willingness to believe in the authenticity of the story, but the various verbal texts' frank differences in subject matter contradict the personal connection to Boyce. The opening revelation of the daughter's shame at her attraction to and incestuous relationship with her father hooks the audience, which Smith suggests, typifies Boyce's daring and expertise at drawing in the viewer through language. Refreshing, though, is the dynamic passing and dancing with sticks in the third section. Here the story is a series of reflections of a confused woman who has survived the death of a companion. Phrased vaguely it could be her mother or a female lover, about which Boyce reflected; "I think it was to suggest the generalism of love, that we can have a feeling for many different relationships . . . it doesn't really matter who the other is" (Boyce 1992). Pointing to the notion of definition of the self through relationship to others Boyce locates in the self the sense of loss of love and companionship. While this story has an attractive murkiness to it that never coalesces, Boyce's solo that accompanies it gradually builds into a quartet of dancers who all carry a stick or baton. The energized passing, tossing, and stillness with elongated forms created

by the batons provide a heightened physical moment that suggests danger, of dropped batons or accidentally swatted dancers,--a suspense not created in Incidents (in coming of age)--that compliments by accentuating the dashed life of the numbed and confused subject. Love is energy, loss of that energy is traumatic. Here Boyce mutually supports the two mediums of expression, language and movement, in autobiography in dance performance.

Unfortunately this example of mutual support stands alone and the general nature of this evening length work is summed up in another story, which chronicles an ordinary girl's upbringing while her parents remain convinced of her specialness. The voiceover drones, "the idea of being someone who did things appealed to me . . . I made decorator balls . . . not sure what people would do with them, but it felt good making them," while Johanna Boyce and another dancer put some small balls out on a dimly lit stage. Moments later they collect them again. While the audience is left unsure what to make of this collage of repetitious and low energy movement phrases and alternately provocative and mundane stories, it probably felt good making them and possibly furthered Johanna Boyce's understanding of her issues.

Two issues of relevance to autobiography in dance performance surface in Incidents (in coming of age) and With

Longings to Realize: 1) a group dance integrated with an individual's story; and 2) voiceover text versus live spoken text. Concerning these two works of Johanna Boyce it remains an open question whether a group dance can persuasively enhance the meaning of an individual's story. Often it diffuses the concern for the individual, yet as indicated by the exception in the third section of With Longings to Realize, the movement dynamics play a decisive role in engaging the audience's full kinesthetic and intellectual interaction rather than simply eliciting empathy or revulsion. These works question whether autobiography in dance performance necessitates a solo dancer.

Merce Cunningham and John Cage pioneered the disassociation of movement and music to highlight the independent statement of each medium and as both movement and music are nonliteral forms of communication, the audience has to individually integrate them to find meaning or simply accept the value of their standing alone together. But with the accessibility of language and its multilayered meanings, the equation between movement text and verbal text/score in these two works by Johanna Boyce tilt toward language. With these intimate stories, testimony to Boyce's desire to move the audience and expand the story's relevance beyond the personal, the movement text should, it seems, heighten the story's effect through its own power and

appropriateness. One reason for questioning the effectiveness of a group dance to achieve this end is that in the two Ties That Bind the direct link between individual dancer and individual story communicates far more persuasively, as will be shown later. In the same way the voiceover texts do not elicit the same degree of interest in the performer onstage as when the dancer also speaks, again demonstrated in the two Ties That Bind. In contrast, recalling Glowworm, both the live sign language told in movement and the solo performer contributed to the voiceover's effectiveness, yet similarly the focus intensifies on the performer when Charlip speaks live.

The extent to which Johanna Boyce exposes herself and her performers in the genre of autobiography in dance performance far exceeds that of either Remy Charlip or Lucas Hoving. This exposure relates intimately to the sexual preferences and preoccupations of the self in question. As opposed to the era of Hoving and Charlip, in the eighties sexuality defines the self on a fundamental level, and extrapolations about a person's lifestyle, politics etc., can be deduced from knowing their sexual orientation. Interestingly though, and based on an incomplete viewing of all of Johanna Boyce's works, she does not reveal definitively her own sexual preference. The dance "Only, connect" tells a story about a lost lover, but both Amanda

Smith's review and Boyce's mention of the work in our interview failed to mention this lover's gender. In Calf Woman (1987) (all references are from the Danspace videotape of this performance) Boyce appears with a baby, who is costumed in a red and white striped jumpsuit similar to her own, in contrast with her women dancers in white who receive the child from Boyce, pass her around a circle, and then back to Boyce. Boyce reveals herself as a mother, a presentation of one of many conceptions of women.

In the postmodern dance context in which Johanna Boyce created, this willingness to expose her normalcy and in some ways unspectacular life represents a kind of vulnerability. With Incidents (in coming of age), she wanted to share women's experience of witnessing the Vietnam war, her mother's, and her own as sister to a war hero. "Women's role as caretakers did not receive the same kind of glory" (Boyce 1992). The revelation of her mother's insipid suburban housewife concerns and her own interactions with a high school guidance counselor link her to mainstream upper-middle class America, and simultaneously validate and ennoble their role of caretakers.

Boyce risks the most with frank discussion of lesbian sexuality in Ties That Bind - Part Two. The use of autobiographical material to address homosexual love also characterizes other artists' work such as Bill T. Jones and

Tim Miller. Moving from the general assumption that "sexuality . . . suffuses dance" (Hanna, 242), Boyce in this work zeros in on the specific lesbian sexual orientation of the two dancers in question. An in-depth discussion of Ties That Bind - Part Two follows, though worth noting here is how these performers conceived of the audience:

Almost everyone I worked with always felt the audience as hostile voyeurs and it was part of my work with them to convince them otherwise, to help them with their own anxiety about bringing such confidential, personal material to someone who may or may not care about it . . . my belief in the importance of people saying what is important to them and sticking one's neck out . . . particularly for the women who talked about their lesbianism (Boyce 1992).

Boyce extends her conviction about self-revelation to her performers and commits them to autobiographical sharing because she believes in the importance of the process. Personal vulnerability then functions as a hurdle to overcome for a greater political good, rather than a door to be left unopened because of cultural upbringing. Boyce foregrounds lesbianism to contradict stereotypes of women. In contrast to homosexuality, in the mid-eighties the lesbian subculture as exhibited here doesn't suffer the consequences of free sexuality represented by AIDS. For Boyce the consequences are more personal, similar to Remy Charlip's rethinking the inclusion of his father's beating of him as a boy. Boyce states, "In retrospect there are things I might not have shared had I known more about what

those things meant to me" (Boyce 1992).

Considering physical revelation of the body, Boyce doesn't overtly utilize nudity in her works of autobiography in dance performance. In one work though, Women, Water, and a Waltz, (1987), Boyce deftly mixes a soothing sound--water pouring from one plastic tumbler to another, a nourishing, sensual image with dresses that expose one breast, and minimal movement in space, slow turns and changes of level, that allow the dancers to intertwine and share their repetitive pouring of the lifeblood of the planet--water. Simply stated and absent of overt political overtones she underlines many of her political aspirations to present positive, validating, and harmonious images of women.

The political, personal statements Boyce shapes in her work again subjugate absolute veracity for effectiveness in performance. This circumstance appears significantly in Ties That Bind - Part Two and links the issues of authorship and authenticity of textual material. Johanna Boyce believes "that everything I did was essentially, basically, and fundamentally true . . . some instances where something might be told a little differently" (Boyce 1992). The process of creating the two Ties That Bind incorporated taped interviews with the performers where Boyce "had difficulty in trying to find in their own words what I was looking for . . . to make it come from an expression that

felt real to them" (Boyce 1992). Therefore Boyce reflects her greater involvement in the subject matter than Charlip exhibited in Growing Up In Public. Whether inspired by or simply utilizing the circumstances of her performer's lives, Boyce has an agenda she intends to pursue. To illustrate her view on this matter, she mentioned a particular line, "I will not bow down to what Nelson Rockefeller thinks is beautiful," spoken by Jennifer Miller as she stands on the shoulders of her partner Susan Seizer in Ties That Bind - Part Two. (All references to the two Ties That Bind are based on the Dance Theatre Workshop - Winter Events performance videotape) This particular line, which stuck out as forced in the dance where the language flowed effortlessly, apparently nearly destroyed the work because both performers were radical lesbians who wanted to make a broader statement that essentially indicted all "men." Boyce disagreed; "I felt that was too general and I could not stand behind my work if that was there" (Boyce 1992). The collaborators struggled to find a phrase that was "essentially true," but with which everyone could feel supportive and comfortable. Therefore the alteration of the language resulted from the choreographer's need to make her authentic statement rather than the performer's. Even though Boyce speaks through the bodies and life stories of others here, she definitely identifies with the work as her own.

Again the truth resides less in actual authenticity of fact than in the need, as in Growing Up In Public, for both performer and choreographer to feel comfortable and convincing in performance. Nonetheless, the delivery of the Rockefeller line reads less authentically in performance and divergent from the logic of the rest of the text, reflecting the controversy behind it. This example contradicts the notion of definition of the self through relationship to others; rather, it exemplifies a declaration of defiance of male definition of beauty for women.

Johanna Boyce's use of improvised movement also connects the question of authenticity with the issue of authorship. In her own solo work, she often improvised the movement:

The words were set but the movement was not. I would improvise the movement. That allowed me to make it more spontaneous in response to the nuances of how I might have been feeling that day . . . I found it helped with different spaces of performance. I could connect to it emotionally and make it more real for the space (Boyce 1992).

Boyce's strategy for solos allowed an openness to her emotional and physical present self that produced, she felt, a more authentic movement text from her dancing body. Once again the performing space affects the nature of autobiography in dance performance when author and performer are the same person. Whereas all dances need to be technically adjusted to the size and shape of a performing

space, with autobiography in dance performance the approach and attitude toward the performance itself alters due to the immediacy of the self-revelatory subject matter. Again emphasizing authorship in her works created from other dancers's material, she set the movement for them (Boyce 1992), denying her performers the same opportunity for spontaneous authenticity in movement.² Though her willingness to employ improvisation in all cases varies, Johanna Boyce concurs with Lucas Hoving's belief that improvised dancing reveals the true person, or the person of the moment.

Carol Martin in the introduction to the roundtable discussion on Movement and Gender writes:

the body and the movement texts it creates are both the progenitors and signifiers of meaning. As the dancer plies her or his way through physical structures, s/he creates narratives of time, space, shape, and weight. In the work of Johanna Boyce and Bill T. Jones . . . the shadows from which those who have been left out are trying to emerge, are being danced ever more clearly (Boyce et al., 1988, 84).

The existence of Jennifer Miller's beard precedes its sensitive personal treatment in Ties That Bind - Part Two, yet within the work it stands out as a clear signifier of difference. How Boyce artistically works through this body statement will be discussed in the context of the work as a whole. Johanna Boyce also explores age difference as indicated by the body when she passes around her baby in Calf Woman, which refers back to her circumstance as a

mother and also to the inarticulate yet extremely vital movement of a baby. Embodied in Lucas Hoving on stage is not only the elderly man, but the present dancer. In contrast, Boyce extrapolates her baby's physical statement by building her succeeding solo on the random gestures and clumsy weight discoveries that characterize a baby seeking physical mastery in the first year of life. By focusing our attention on the movement vocabulary of a baby she highlights the level of refinement an adult in motion exhibits, even in a pedestrian movement style.

Johanna Boyce experienced in college a rejection from ballet class because of her body type, a body self-image she often admits to in interviews, "Traditional dance training never looked good on me because I was too heavy" (Goldberg, 41). This experience of rejection mirrored the circumscribed possibilities she observed in her mother's life. Unlike her mother, though, she reacted against this restriction: "So I started doing things that were more appropriate to a heavy male body. Simple things like stamping or jumping up and down. . . . Since I didn't fit into the mainline, I decided to produce my own work" (41). Her body type propelled her in a direction away from traditional dance training, but she continues:

I think it's my own personal obsession to enlarge the way I see women moving. I've always wanted to subvert a certain way of looking at women and the easiest way is to use really unusual body types.

Costuming also brings different focuses (46). Although what remains unclear is why she rarely uses a more intense dynamic range even with simpler movements, for enlarging the way women move should include all possibilities along the continuum of dynamic energy. While Boyce refers to the movement in Kinescope (1982) as "very athletic" (Boyce et al., 1988, 88) and Jack Anderson writes of Garden (1981) "movement was unbelievably rough and combative" (Anderson), infrequent examples occur in the works of autobiography in dance performance discussed here. In fact, it appears that Boyce chose to react against traditional Western female ways of moving, which she labels as ballet (Boyce et al., 1988, 88) by emphasizing through language the political and emotional aspects of women's struggle as more primary than physical expansiveness.

Johanna Boyce supported a view of the autobiographical nature of the body in performance, here the costumed body, in our interview:

The way a person comes out on the stage with their tutus, or their aerobic clothes up to their hiplines, dancing to love music with their partners. . . . That reveals enormous amounts about the artist (Boyce 1992).

In stereotypical ways this is true as certain things generally hold true for most ballet dancers, yet this information doesn't compare to learning the specifics of difficult moments in life that tend to come up in

autobiography in dance performance. An autobiographical text that accompanies the autobiographical statement of a performing body reinforces that statement by pointing to the performer. The mention of incest that opens Longings to Realize sheds light on Boyce's choice of bear costumes for two men who waltz through the space in the succeeding group section. Amanda Smith writes, "two waltzing men wearing bear heads and jockey shorts has elements of sexual threat" (51), because it focuses the attention on the men's sexually driven lower bodies. This reverses the traditional misogynist portrayal of women as the sexual temptress, but at the same time the waltzing bear reference diminishes any real male threat by associating with the image of a ferocious beast tamed as a circus animal. The men waltzing become laughable.

While the present dancing body recedes somewhat to the background in many of Johanna Boyce's autobiographical works, the contrary and additional meaning elicited from the dance in the two Ties That Bind works as a constant reminder of a third story being told through movement in the present. Besides this movement text, though, Boyce uses multiple stories in both the above mentioned works and in "Only connect". While these stories predominantly relate events and experiences from the past, they do occasionally address the present, as when the two performers introduce one

another to the audience in Ties That Bind - Part Two. Although Boyce utilizes the multiple temporal modes less persuasively than Bill T. Jones or even Lucas Hoving as present dancer in the context of past dancer, her multiple stories, by focussing the viewer on two developing lines of action from the past, suggests the possibility of being in two places at one time. When these story lines intersect it focuses the performance moment. Intersections occur in the past, such as when the performers in Ties That Bind - Part Two acknowledge that their grandmothers probably met once for the shooting of an episode of "Marcus Welby M.D.." More compelling are intersections that bring the two performers' stories together in the present, such as when Miller, one of the dancers, casually remarks that "people seem to wonder a lot about what women do in bed," followed by joint laughter and a roll downstage in a head to crotch formation. Ties That Bind - Part Two concludes with the two performers, projecting into the future about their summer plans to become a two women travelling circus medicine show, while enacting in the present mimed juggling.

A closer look at the two Ties That Bind emphasizes the deftness of Johanna Boyce's work in autobiography in dance performance more so than her other works. In both works she utilizes pared down language to forward the dual stories told by the two female performers in each dance.³ She

provides enough information about the performers to contextualize the more prominent movement text that links the performers to the present. The first Ties That Bind (1984) discusses the performers' relationships to their siblings and parents, a category of others that recurs as a foil for defining the self in autobiography in dance performance. What makes this somewhat obvious point interesting here is that simultaneously they define the relationship between themselves as they move and speak together in performance. In contrast to some of her earlier works, in both Ties That Bind, the dancers speak their own lines about themselves. This immediate connection between language text and dancer increases interest in both, challenging the viewer to not only assimilate the information provided vocally, but to question that information based on how the two dancers interact. Boyce's movement aesthetic remains essentially pedestrian in these works, yet here, because of the just mentioned integration, it appropriately serves her intention to give voice to these women's points of view.

Ties That Bind begins by sharing where the two dancers are in age relationship to their sisters, one several years younger and the other several years older. One spent much of her toddler years at home with her father while the other spent a lot of time in a day care center. The dancers share

each others weight in an alternately supportive and rough fashion, which leads up to one slapping the buttocks of the other. A child in infancy depends on support from others and here Boyce mimics this through weight sharing. The sometimes violent nature, though, points to the significant wounds suffered when this need is inappropriately fulfilled, and curiously, neither performer mentions the traditional nurturer, the mother, in this context. The fanny slap of course suggests any child's disciplining, yet in performance the dancer who delivered the blow lets a smile cross her lips which renders the gesture ambiguous and connotes rather a sexual relationship between the performers as adults. This slap signifies the first clear example where the present movement text colors and in part overrides the verbal stories that run parallel thematically but never intersect directly. The inflection and body focus when text is spoken, often directly aimed at each other, and sometimes randomly directed to the audience, creates a critical interdependence between the seemingly independent stories. These performers need to talk to each other just as their stories indicate other emotional needs. Another instance occurs when Boyce has one deliver the line "I broke two front teeth in an accident" followed by her partner's retort thrust close into the first dancer's face, "I have great teeth, my father is a dentist." The tone recalls the taunting of sibling rivalry

although again the movement suggests more; directly following that statement one pins the other to the ground as if wrestling. Again it suggests both the surface level of sisters fighting and lovers playing or quarrelling. From this position the dancer on top unzips the back of the leotard of the one underneath, then as she turns to rise the other reaches to pull her sweatpants down from behind. By offering multiple layers of meaning here, Boyce presents the multiple options available to the adult woman. She implies that we are formed by our family experiences, yet as adults we can choose whom we want to interact with and to what degree. These sexually suggestive acts are playful, not mean as sibling rivalry would indicate. The subject matter shifts to parental relationships as one dancer describes a birthday party where she received the same number of candles on her cake as her sister because her father felt no one was special. She then states that her father didn't ever like her just as her partner pushes her over. While the push perhaps overstates the point, the inclusion of this childhood particular highlights Boyce's opposite aesthetic; everyone is special and deserves recognition. Once again Johanna Boyce brings to center stage the ordinary life and simple concerns of her subject. In performance, the spotlight shone on this mundane yet touching detail reflects the larger reality of the potential for hurtful actions and

the immensity of emotional deprivation in our modern lives. Boyce focuses the audience gaze on the ordinary through the extraordinary multiple modes of communication. She presents her dancers as both victims, in the sense that we all suffer the circumstances of our parental upbringing, and as conscious adults, encouraging audience consciousness about the loved ones in their own lives. Whether they be children, lesbian daughters, or perhaps even unresponsive fathers, the consequences of failing to connect interpersonally, whether intentional or not, are painful.

In Ties That Bind, Boyce's choreography integrates abstract movement with occasional instances of miming the story, as when one dancer extends one arms vertically upward and the other diagonally downward to describe how she moved the clock's hands ahead to shorten the time for her dreaded piano practice. Another instance has the second dancer chase the first in a large circle as she discusses how her younger sister was always on her heels. This large spatial and animated action fulfills a need for dynamic contrast lacking in some other works by Boyce. Otherwise the dancers perform their lifts and gestures matter of factly, with occasionally longer spaces between speaking to enhance the value of the movement. Ties That Bind ends with the dancers acknowledging their independent selves, as told in the narrative. They walk upstage arm in arm, then separate to leave on opposite

sides of the stage. This concluding sequence foreshadowed a final image used by Lar Lubovitch in the second movement of his Concerto 622, where the two male dancers part similarly after a gentle and supportive pure movement duet which became a prominent statement of positive male love in the age of AIDS, yet left ambiguous the relationship between the male partners. Though Johanna Boyce's dancers never directly state in language their relationship, her multilayered mix of movement and language texts explicitly presents two women in control of their choices even as they recount the emotional holes in their youth.

In the opening to Ties That Bind - Part Two Boyce immediately departs from a constant of the predecessor dance by having the two performers, Jennifer Miller and Susan Seizer, introduce each other to the audience. The work therefore exists in the present, with their experience onstage now part of the audience experience. The casual introduction links everyone present together in a common experience and this lays the groundwork for Boyce's expressed intention to render through the performance the two lesbian lovers, one bearded, as acceptable as people and women, and to dismantle any inclination to label them as outsiders. "I felt that if I could select moments from each of the women's histories that anybody could empathize with, people would come to understand their position" (Goldberg,

48). Having commenced by telling their mutual story, how they met in contact improvisation class, Seizer and Miller proceed to partner each other in a relaxed low key fashion, representative of the internal sense connection characteristic of contact improvisation, more than an externally visual event. They tell of each other's astrology signs, ostensibly an indicator of character and personality, and also a fashionable eighties introductory singles' line. Therefore Boyce prepares us to learn more about their intimate life together by the very casualness with which we meet them.

Once again sparse in quantity, the delivery of the verbal text ranges from present to past tense, culminating in the future as noted earlier. They begin by telling their mutual story, revert to individual details, carefully link them up not only thematically but through mention of the probable meeting of grandmothers, and finally return to their story in the present. This easy shift of temporal modes mimics a personal conversation, again aimed at making the lives of Jennifer and Susan more accessible.

As Ties That Bind - Part Two unfolds the movement aesthetic matches that of the first; but here the partnering nuances, from a caress of a cheek to Jennifer standing on Susan's shoulders during the previously mentioned Nelson Rockefeller episode, act as signifiers that deepen and

extend the verbal text rather than render ambiguous its meaning as in Ties That Bind. Miming the action occurs frequently, from imitating the juggling act of their two-women circus to the aimless stumbling in space as they discuss an experience of hallucination. Several times the dance humorously comments on the text as when Jennifer notes her origins in Hartford, Connecticut, "the insurance capital of the world," while Susan holds her precariously balanced in a diagonal lean. While the dynamic range remains relatively even despite several leapfrogs over each other's backs, Boyce here uses simple physical statements to create a wide dramatic range of emotion:

Someone would be jumping over another's back,
telling a story while going about their daily work -
all of a sudden it would be a moving moment that
would come out of the blue (Boyce 1992).

The most significant example occurs as Susan approaches Jennifer, who stands upstage facing the audience, and offers her a genuine hug. During her walk and hug Susan reveals her original feelings of strangeness toward Jennifer's beard, feelings which she notes evolved into appreciation. This moment evokes Susan's transformation, Jennifer's life of humiliation, and invites the audience to enlarge their acceptance of the other, by connecting the inevitable reaction to Jennifer's beard to a hug, the simplest expression of human concern for another.

In Ties That Bind - Part Two, Boyce addresses the

irrefutable fact of Jennifer's beard, a significant autobiographical statement of the body, and deftly weaves this signifier of difference with the larger statement of the performer's lesbian love relationship. In doing so, she challenges traditional notions of feminine beauty and behavior. The political stance proposed in this work also encourages a personal transformation on the part of the audience. Boyce describes her own initial reaction:

I couldn't figure out if she was male or female or both. I really was quite confused by her persona . . . I felt an instinctive queasiness almost, in not being able to identify it. . . . Part of my desire in the piece is to humanize, to personalize her choice around that and to explain that it came from a series of experiences in her past that made her choose to do what she wanted, that the electrolysis had been so humiliating and people's perceptions of her made her all the more adamant to be who she was. I felt it was important to soften the deliberateness of her acts . . . by seeing her vulnerability, her sadness about wishing to be accepted (Boyce 1992).

Several points derive from this statement. First, the self is defined by a background of choices, second, the confusion of gender preceded the question of sexual orientation in Boyce's experience, and finally, presenting an outsider for acceptance necessitates a softening of both the outsider's hard shell, and the observer's perception of the shell, rather than the person behind it.

The discussion of her beard occurs after several minutes have passed in the dance which allows time for the audience to go beyond the initial "queasiness" that Boyce

herself felt. Then as Miller mentions her traumatic experience of electrolysis as a teenager Seizer has her by the legs with her face near the floor. Exemplifying movement text interrupting vocals, Seizer rolls Miller's body so that her face and chin press into the floor, distorting Miller's voice. Metaphorically, in an apparently uncomfortable movement, Boyce shows Miller trying to erase the reality of facial hair simultaneous with the verbal introduction of the painful process of electrolysis.

With this dance, Miller's life experience becomes central to Johanna Boyce's choreography. Boyce uses this overlap of life and art to challenge preconceptions and encourage altered perceptions of the other. Boyce apparently hopes to affect both the audience and Miller, who perhaps gained greater self-acceptance for having shared her life in this public forum. Boyce succeeds here not only because she presents Miller's story but because she links it with the reality that someone can and does love Jennifer for more than her externally different self. Miller's experience becomes humanized when she later discusses attending to her dying mother, "mother let it [her beard] grow, she was too sick to do anything about it."

The dance moves on to the issue of lesbianism. Boyce again demonstrates her facility with language as she has Susan mention, "went to live with Jill, older at 23. Mom

upset just as much about me leaving home as me being a ____" just before Jennifer tells of her Jewish parents conversion to the Quaker faith. Boyce leaves the obvious unspoken, as understatement, since the incomplete sentence could easily end with queer, a derogatory reference to outsider status as well as reference to homosexuality. While Seizer chooses her different sexual orientation, Miller's parents merely trade the traditionally ostracized Jewish faith for the equally offbeat Quaker faith. Again examples of people making choices to define their lives.

Boyce has the two dancers mock Seizer's parent's reaction to her coming out, a marked difference from both Remy Charlip's and Lucas Hoving's sympathetic portrayal of their parents in their dances. She juxtaposes in time Miller's loss of her mother through death with Seizer's parents' loss of their innocent daughter. Their intolerance and surprise are rendered as helplessness. The dancers continue their partnering here with Seizer diving into Miller's arms, and then emerging to caress Miller's chin while stating, "Dad, you better shave, it's a fancy restaurant. That's a lot rougher than I'm used to." The humor underscores multiple points: the reference to her just announced lesbianism, as a woman's cheeks would be softer; the more immediate reference back to Miller's beard, which nonetheless is softer than a man's late afternoon stubble;

and finally the performance reality of one woman actually stroking another woman's chin.

Ties That Bind - Part Two draws towards conclusion with the dancers impersonating a hallucination occasioned by Miller's mother's sickness. They employ quirky off-balance shapes, roll over each other, and both speak simultaneously before a run evolves into a spinning lift. It ends with them looking eye to eye, embracing with a kiss of each other's neck, and falling to the floor teasing one another. This display of affection pushes the limits of self involvement within the work, but sets up the final and juiciest topic, of what women do in bed together. Provocatively they jump up, do a quick lift with a crotch hold, and end back on the floor with faces at each other's crotch level. From here they share the answer, "we do pretty much what everyone else does, it depends more about who you are than whether you are gay or straight." Referring to this line, Carol Martin criticizes, "However, it's unsettling for Boyce to celebrate democracy by emphasizing sameness" (Boyce 1988, 84). Martins distorts the point as this analysis suggests that Boyce de-emphasizes the sexual act (orgasm is possible for both heterosexual and homosexual couples) while emphasizing the humanity of those who have chosen a different sexual orientation. Even though Martin feels Miller's beard was a handicap to Boyce, it provides a clear autobiographical

statement of difference, that Ties That Bind - Part Two turns into a opportunity for democratic acceptance. Recalling Johanna Boyce's source of inspiration in her mother's limited options, she continually emphasizes choices, as not only possible in the construction of the self but as essential to the workings of a democracy. For the two performers and women in general all options are valid and here they present an expression of love and acceptance for one another. Boyce's political call for society at large to follow suit emerges from the personal experience of Jennifer Miller and Susan Seizer.

Therefore Johanna Boyce utilizes autobiography in dance performance to serve the interests of the outsider in society by both thrusting their reality into public view in performance and by humanizing them, fleshing out society's stereotypical conception of them in the process. As demonstrated by the work of Johanna Boyce (and Bill T. Jones as will be seen) autobiography in dance performance apparently locates the outsider within society. The fine line of how much and how intimate personal autobiographical information to incorporate in performance varies from artist to artist. Boyce clarifies her perspective by emphasizing "to what end are you the artist trying to get to" (Boyce 1992). She questions those who "have an ax to grind, who try to use the audience to get approval for their view, who

haven't worked through an issue: that gives autobiography a bad name" (Boyce 1992). Boyce's sensitivity to the quality of work in this genre may reflect criticism such as the above that she has received. Arlene Croce quickly dismissed the entire trend in the early eighties and Johanna Boyce's work with it. Though she includes Boyce in the group working in this diffuse genre at the time she doesn't comment specifically on her work (Croce, 96). Yet the volume of Johanna Boyce's work and the sustained critical and audience response she received over a period of about eight years merits the further analysis provided here.

By the time of Boyce's participation in the roundtable discussion moderated by Carole Martin she had become a mother:

There's something about bearing a child that really freed me up to feel myself in a way that was different from feeling myself observed, in the way that I felt defined by the masculine gaze for a lot of my experience (Boyce et al., 1988, 100).

She doesn't elaborate on the nature of this freedom but perhaps it includes freedom from the need to be so reactive to the world around her. In reacting to her mother's experience, to her own rejection from dance class, and to feminist concerns of the last fifteen years, Boyce produced some provocative work, although in her quickness to react, her work may not have always been completely thought through. "Part of me feels a little abashed at what I've

done" (Boyce 1992). Boundaries for exposing intimacy, then, are fluid over time, both within one life, and from generation to generation; Johanna Boyce questions what she has already revealed and Lucas Hoving considers revealing more at the end of his life. Currently Boyce has taken herself out of dancemaking and works as a psychotherapist in Vermont. At present, in what she calls an "incubation period free of the seduction of the art world" (Boyce 1992), she expects to make dances again. This decision to leave dance to recharge signifies a commitment to life as art and her current work as a psychotherapist probably touches on the same issues she addressed through autobiography in dance performance during the eighties--personal and political choices that define the self. As society in the nineties reconsiders new outbursts of racism and sexism among other issues that supposedly were solved in the sixties and seventies, the works of Johanna Boyce point to how life might be and exemplify Judith Lynne Hanna's conclusion:

Many choreographers explicitly recognize the importance of the messages their images purvey, especially when society is in a state of flux. Many performers are aware that what has been historically constructed can be politically reconstructed (Hanna, 250).

NOTES

¹ Worth mentioning here is the potential cross fertilization of ideas and strategies between Boyce and Charlip, with whom she shared a concert at St. Marks Church, and Boyce and Bill T. Jones through Arnie Zane with whom she collaborated on Garden in 1981, also at St. Marks Church.

² In claiming authorship for these works created out of other dancers' lives, Boyce further separates herself from the aesthetic of Yvonne Rainer, and others of her generation, who readily shared her Trio A choreography.

³ In comparison to the pared down language used by Boyce here, and Remy Charlip in Glowworm, Spalding Gray stuffs his performance of Monster in a Box, the film, with language. His movements in this work, gesticulating and forward leanings extend to occasional walking in a tightly framed set. While this represents an extension for him of body movement, as in past works he has remained predominantly sitting, the language's fullness fills the performing space. In autobiographical in dance performance, as exemplified by these two works of Johanna Boyce, the movement text allows, in fact almost requires, a more sparse offering of language text to allow the viewer to take in this more subtle form of communication.

Chapter Five

THE TREND--CHANGE IN FOCUS

In the early eighties the first critical discussion of autobiographical material in dance performance appeared. At that time, choreographers such as Bill T. Jones and Johanna Boyce, among others, had created repeatedly in this genre. Additional individual autobiographical dances by other choreographers began to generate critical recognition of a new direction within postmodern dance. The negative reaction of Arlene Croce and the more thoughtful and favorable article by Amanda Smith point to the growth of the trend to not only incorporate autobiographical material in dance performance, but to locate the autobiographical self as the central subject of the dances.

In a February 14, 1993 conversation with Joe Goode, a San Francisco based dancer/choreographer who has built numerous works around his own life, he commented that almost every concert one attends in the early nineties draws to some degree on autobiographical material. He noted, with the presentation of the self sufficiently opened up, young artists are no longer satisfied with just making dance about steps manipulated through formal concerns. Just as the second wave of postmodernists, including Jones, Boyce and

Goode, drew on the expanded territory of dance pioneered by the Judson Church generation, choreographers in the nineties objectify the creative and performance self as a possible, and in Goode's opinion, obligatory filter for their work.

Much of the current work in autobiography in dance performance focuses on the body as the ultimate autobiographical statement, a phenomenon that directly reflects the onslaught of AIDS in the eighties and the number of consciously HIV positive working choreographers.¹ This chapter looks briefly at the following works that indicate a change in focus from featuring the dance and the art of dancemaking, from an autobiographical perspective, to a preoccupation with the historical self of the creator/performer, to the focus on the dancer and the dancing body: The Bix Pieces (1971) by Twyla Tharp; Accumulation (1971) With Talking (1973) Plus Watermotor (1977) by Trisha Brown; Moses Pendleton Presents Moses Pendleton (1982) by Moses Pendleton; Relatives (1989) by Ishmael Houston Jones; and a work in progress Convenience Boy (1993) by Joe Goode. This cursory analysis illustrates how they interface with the issues of concern to autobiography in dance performance as outlined in the previous chapters.

Twyla Tharp's The Bix Pieces (all references based on a 1973 performance created for Camera 3, WCBS - TV Series

produced by Merril Brockway) is a dance in three sections that integrates her casual movement style of quirky hip shakes, shoulder wiggles, intricate footwork and occasional extended balletic lines, with language. An actress (Marian Hailey) speaks the text of Tharp, unselfconsciously impersonating her. This choice immediately focusses more attention on the unfolding movement than on the text because Hailey really serves as a narrator to the immediacy of the dance. Yet Tharp's choice of delivering text with a non-dancing live performer, rather than with an overdub, represents a unique approach. As Susan Leigh Foster points out; "of Tharp's early period, The Bix Pieces is undoubtedly the most striking and the most reflexive" (211). The text discusses her early tap training and later lists a glossary of ballet terms, both reflections of Tharp's dancing life, but for the most part we learn about the complexity of making this dance. Tharp emphasizes the difficulty of any physical training humorously in her opening solo for The Bix Pieces. She dances, mixing in tap steps with everything else, while also twirling a clear plastic baton, then she drops it, and another is thrown to her. She continues to wiggle and shake and nonchalantly drops five batons in succession, occasionally having to dodge them falling from her tosses. The singer accompanying croons, "Hey folks you should come to Arkansas, makes no difference what your

problem may be." Now a mature dancer, enacting the repeated missed catches of her youthful baton twirling practice, Tharp emphasizes process--just keep on going. Her tuxedo top and minishorts point to being on display in a costume both formal and that shows a lot of leg. This costume, mimicked by the other female dancers, and her casual dancing style, that multiplies in complexity with the following small group dances, both invites this attention and dismisses its concerns. All the dancers express a private sensuality and disrespect for any one formal style of organizing movement. A hip shake, an arabesque, a few shuffle ball changes, a pirouette all culminate in some slinky weight sharing partnering work.

In the second section, as the dancers continue their unending flow of movement variation, the narrator, speaking for Tharp, first tells us:

I hated to tap dance when I was a kid. But The Bix Pieces is about remembering. . . . my tap lessons, my ballet lessons, my baton-twirling lessons. . . . My father died this spring and this dance was to commemorate the time when he was young.

Susan Foster correctly notes a balance between movement and language:

The words do not reduce the movement to mere illustration for there is always far too much activity occurring at any given moment to permit a one-to-one identification (211).

Later in the section she connects the death of her father to the birth of her son in the same year. Tharp introduces this

autobiographical information matter of factly as a reflection or another layer of the process of making art. "All things can be profoundly and indivisibly related, exactly and not at all the same." While the dance is primarily about revealing her philosophy and process of making a dance Tharp acknowledges the concurrent events in life that color this process.

In the final section she reshuffles the dance's movement vocabulary; "Nothing new has been added. Much has been forgotten. And it is all different again." She accepts that life and art overlap and coexist. "It seems to me that art is a question of emphasis." In The Bix Pieces she emphasizes the dance: the steps, rhythm, movement phrases and their integration. Tharp choreographed The Bix Pieces in the early postmodern period where decoding a dance to reveal its superstructure and makeup was the content more than any referential commentary. This process of revealing the performance's inner workings, begun by the Judson Church experimentation, in which Twyla Tharp participated in the mid-sixties, and continued improvisationally with the Grand Union, also pointed to the creator(s) of the dances. The logical next step was to begin to decode them as artists, people in society with a unique compulsion to investigate that society. This emphasis on the artist as subject matter grows over time but in The Bix Pieces, according to Foster:

Tharp here suggests a complex vision of artistic creation. She implies that when she choreographs, she is first and foremost involved in making a dance, not in expressing herself. But she also intimates that dances are suffused with the feelings of those who make and perform them and that such feelings are best shown and observed indirectly, peripherally to the main subject of the dance, the movement itself (212).

Framed within the personal context of death and new life Tharp asks the question, "Can anything be new, original, private?" Yet she asks this question in the midst of complexity. The dance allows the performers to choose from options to solve the dance problem, not improvisation, as the resolution is set, but different possibilities to utilize from start to finish, options practiced during thousands of rehearsals. Therefore, though built of the same movement material, every performance differs in detail, yet Tharp risks little in what she reveals about her personal life. In contrast Johanna Boyce's aesthetic, developed after this time, celebrates the ordinary life with minimal movement complexity and the maximum of personal exposure. While some have accused Tharp of being overly and arbitrarily complex the reverse criticism weighs against Johanna Boyce and questions whether private autobiographical material is enough to generate sustained interest.

Trisha Brown's Accumulation With Talking Plus Watermotor (all references based on a 1986 performance co-produced by Alive From Off Center and KCET-TV) first

performed as one work in 1977 shares a number of similarities with The Bix Pieces. Trisha Brown also embraces complex and difficult movement and simultaneously with the verbal text sheds light on the genesis of the work itself. Here Brown dances solo throughout, which directs the viewer's attention to her as a person, but more directly to her as a moving body. After Tharp's initial solo, The Bix Pieces remains a series of small group dances, another factor that diminishes the emphasis on her as subject matter. Trisha Brown also has developed a highly individual movement style, ongoing and fluid similar to Tharp but with extended lines of the legs and arms that conform less directly to the ballet lexicon, often with a curved or twisted upper torso. And her performance aesthetic exudes a matter of fact, workaday attitude, casual but less emphatically than Tharp. In Accumulation With Talking Plus Watermotor, Brown's lanky body moves with quirky impulses and many focal shifts that draw her body around itself and back again, all within the limited spatial context of approximately the range of her own extensions.

As she performs the opening signature movement phrase of rotating the right fist with her thumb extended, Brown begins to tell us when and why she began to talk while doing Accumulation; at a lecture in France she found herself liking the challenge and the ability to keep track of

talking and dancing at the same time. Throughout the performance Brown intersperses between talking sections, movement alone, a back leg flip, a change of facing, or a big jump. Although she never stops moving, this strategy of breaking the two overlapping texts reminds the viewer of the importance of the technical mastery of accumulating phrases that repeat and extend the movement text. Built with a formal organization, it evolves into a visual and rhythmic diversity that remains engaging. She further reveals herself as someone who delights in challenge when she confesses to becoming too good at this feat and so added another story to be told concurrently with the first, just as Johanna Boyce interlaced two stories in several of her works. Labelled A and B Brown develops one story about a request to give a graduation lecture with another that describes a meeting at an airport and an ensuing conversation. As the ultimate statement of pushing her limits she concludes with the story of her lecture:

I thought it improper to receive an award in bare feet--I did not want them to think I was the Jerry Lewis of modern dance. So I performed in four inch wedges.

Rather than intimate personal revelations, Brown's old fashioned sense of appropriate behavior, wearing, in this case ridiculous shoes, when receiving a reward, represents a humorous example of performance context affecting performance choices. She then proceeds to collapse on the

floor in laughter. While not as unusual as she suggests, Foster points to Brown's mastery of separating the mediums of language and movement in this work which:

produces the highly unusual effect of a talking person and a moving person existing simultaneously at the site of the same body. . . .This autonomy of all the mediums of performance. . . .creates for the viewer an autonomy as well (183-4).

The problem or opportunity for the audience to knit together the independent modes of expression provided from the solo performer recalls the circumstances in Glowworm when Remy Charlip briefly sings live the title song while he wiggles on the floor. Brown's presentation of language and movement as independent validates both equally.

Another characteristic of Accumulation With Talking Plus Watermotor that typifies autobiography in dance performance is her use of shifting temporal modes. On the video at the start of the performance three words are written, "Start, Started, Starting." Then the opening camera shot shows Brown's feet, synonymous with dancing, and the bottom of her white bellbottoms. This written cue sets up the dynamic tension between the present commentary on the dance and the stories of past performances, all juxtaposed with the live dancing and apparent breathing of Brown. The closing frame alters this order slightly with "Stop, Stopping, Stopped," accurately reflecting the temporal reality of the end of the dance. Whether contrived or

accidental, she highlights the difficulty of the task she has set for herself in the present when she says: "A, I forget, B, on the contrary, A, got it, remember this."

While Trisha Brown dances solo here she does so in community. This video performance downplays any potential privacy of personal material by having members of her dance company appear entering the studio in the background to the performance frame about midway through the performance. The ambient sound of a city street below contributes to this informal setting. Again a comparison to the aesthetic of Johanna Boyce is fitting; whereas Boyce presents normalcy and low dynamics as valid performance material, Brown presents high dynamics and extraordinary physical and verbal mastery in a normal studio low key setting. Therefore she proposes this performance complexity as normal for her, part of her workday, what makes her tick. That she attains this heightened state during performance, followed by the crash to the floor at the end, recalls Lucas Hoving physically rising above his age limitations for a short period in the performance of Growing Up In Public. Also while Hoving presents an extensive history of his career in dance, Trisha Brown gives a history of the dance being performed, in short a microcosm of the fluid, evolving entity of her life; the dance has been performed to music, silence, her verbal text, and has ranged from five to fifty-five minutes, all which

conjure up various distinct experiences.

As with The Bix Pieces, Trisha Brown treads through safe territory concerning vulnerable personal issues and therefore the authenticity of her statements is not brought into question. Rather she displays herself as a dancer, one dancing now, one who has danced in the past. The difficulty of the movement and its intricate formal construction reveal Trisha Brown as someone who delights in both mental and physical challenges. The preponderance of abstract movement and the absence of miming the story in both of these dances underscores the point that the movement is the message. As the genre of autobiography in dance performance evolves into the eighties, it reflects less this early postmodern trend of treating the self as part of the creative process and more the exposed self as valid material for artistic investigation.

Moses Pendleton Presents Moses Pendleton, a performance designed exclusively for television (all references based on the performance produced and written by Lucy Hilman for ABC Enterprises, Fort Worth Productions Inc.), and a birthday present to himself, "I've always had a fantasy to rehearse a major motion picture," revolves around both his life and thoughts as a dancer and darker revelations of his family's history. He opens the work with W.B. Yeats question "How can we know the dancer from the dance," which strikes at the

heart of the problem of the body as a autobiographical statement, a statement which we read through movement in a performance setting. Whereas Trisha Brown and Twyla Tharp showed us the dance Pendleton shows us the person behind the dancer. As Amanda Smith correctly states:

Much of the power of the piece comes from the central fact that when Pendleton was twelve, his father [committed] suicide one summer day in the middle of 'haymaking season.' Pendleton and his five siblings watched his mother disintegrate into madness and die four to five years after that from cancer' (52).

This production serves Pendleton in much the same way that Glowworm served Remy Charlip, as an opportunity to integrate troubling personal history into the present and heal emotional wounds through the vehicle of dance performance. The birthday reference at the beginning and the actual party at the end would normally suggest a celebration with friends. Pendleton presents instead a work of solitary reflection; though shaped by the circumstances of his parents' deaths, he alone remains to pull meaning and balance out of his life. In the end two friends dressed like him come to the party, suggesting a past, present, and future self that all share the same history and future. He wears a black overcoat and bowler hat as he peers from outside through a window into a parlor of his white Victorian house in Connecticut, foreshadowing the subject of death through costume and the "metaphor for any artist using

his own life, or house, for material" (Smith, Amanda, 52). He renders all this opening material a dream state when the video changes to Pendleton waking up in bed. Supposedly we now see the waking, working Pendleton.

In this section the pace becomes zany, he rises from bed and approaches a mirror as a swell of symphonic music underscores his thoughts "they'll see a dancer who dances in this life, everything reflects what he is." A series of tasks unfold, brushing of teeth, fixing the record, stoking the stove, a quick series of tendues for the right and left foot at the top of the stairs. Life and his art of dance integrate in daily chores. He heightens the normal animation of a dancer by speeding up the film of his descent and return up the stairs for a forgotten item. Pendleton further presents himself as dancer by stating; "Part of this man's life is being involved with Pilobolus," followed by a clip of him dancing the man from Momix. In this clip he is in white, the opposite of his earlier dark coat, he is in a downspot surrounded by darkness, to music of an upbeat rap song, he moves upstage to the limit of the light and returns for a lively sit down dance. As one of several dance performance sequences in Moses Pendleton Presents Moses Pendleton, this clip features him as more than just a dancer, but as a soloist performing the illusive man in white. Many associations here suggest life, the dance of

life although circumscribed by darkness, death. Directly following this clip the camera shows the black coat and hat on a door, no longer a dream.

Pendleton puts them on, walks to the camera and states: "By going further back than the dance I somehow feel deep down that if I knew more about my ancestors I'd know more about myself." It is after climbing the stairs to the attic and opening a briefcase of old photos that he reveals his father's suicide and mother's premature death which left him and his five siblings orphans. The use of photographs, a frequently used device in autobiography in dance performance, points to the importance of external image that concerns all performers. While to some degree one's image is the self, Pendleton uses the common strategy of photographs to ask us to look deeper and to serve his own need to know himself more fully. Photos of relatives, through their physical resemblance and shared facial expressions, also underline the physical connection between generations. Our bodies carry our ancestral autobiography as well as the present one.

Pendleton concludes this section by twirling a globe as he comments that "one gets a sense of balance when things are in motion," pointing to movement and balance as basic phenomena of a living body. Later he incorporates another instance of the body as autobiographical self in recalling

how a broken leg earlier in life destroyed his plans to pursue a cross country skiing career. With another solo clip showing Pendleton challenge himself to accomplish everything physically possible while remaining poised on one leg, built around the injured leg acting up, he talks to his leg. "If you break again and shatter another of my careers I'm going to saw you off and throw you away. But that's the humor, I can't get rid of my leg." A leg injury inspires a dance; in this work which explores personal history he reveals body history. The suggestion of doing violence to himself echoes the choice taken by his father. Suicide is first and foremost violence to one's body.

The absurdity of this violent act done "in the middle of hay season" recalls the absurdity of the dead horse that so transfixed Lucas Hoving in life and in performance. The poignancy of these brushes with death become life affirming with the juxtaposition of the dancing body. This compelling performance of Moses Pendleton openly investigates the sense of loss without parents in childhood just as a compelling aspect of Growing Up In Public finds Lucas Hoving hinting at the importance of a similar loss experience in his early youth.

Pendleton comments on the house being like a costume on him, "my best costume it affects the imagination." He chooses to locate this performance piece in his house, an

obvious metaphor for the self, but the further association with a costume recalls the transformative process of performance, the act of performing and the place of performance. The white house echoes the white costume of the man from Momix where a performing self is exposed. This calls into question the authenticity of the self if one accepts the transformation of a heightened self in performance. Just like Trisha Brown maximizing her physical potential in performance, Pendleton inserts fast forward climbing up and down stairs, a suggestion of emotional ups and downs, or different levels of the self. Fundamentally the body is the home of the self. Pendleton calls it the greatest toy we have, a statement that perhaps holds more true for a dancer because his or her accumulated experiences of the body reflect a heightened body awareness and potential to inhabit extreme zones of physical activity. Once displayed in performance this heightened body experience reflects back to a heightened self awareness of the performer. Amanda Smith sums up; "It is a work about dance as a life sustaining activity, and it implies that dance is a metaphor for life itself" (53).

Ishmael Houston Jones' Relatives also investigates ancestry and was created exclusively for television (all references based on the performance for Alive From Off Center produced by John Ligon at KTCA-TV, Minneapolis, MN).

Drawn apparently by the trend to discuss personal origins through autobiography in dance performance, Jones's work suffers from lack of anything of consequence to share and an aesthetic slackness that is downright bland. He incorporates a variety of images in this video performance: a opening shot of him in a lifevest and jumping in the front yard of a slightly disheveled one story home; his mother dyeing eggs; apparently an exploding building behind Jones walking down a road. Yet they never build into a cohesive statement beyond the look of a home movie which comprises the bulk of the narrative. Ishmael Houston Jones begins his discussion by telling us how his mother got him to eat eggs by dyeing them. Then he moves to a table of people, apparently relatives at a family reunion, and picks up his mother and slings her over his back to move her back into the primary performance frame in front of the house. Understandably uncomfortable on camera in this lackluster performance work, his mother Alice complains about gaining weight. The presentation of his mother in the work itself furthers the parental references in language and photographs that have been explored so far, something that Bill T. Jones repeats to far greater effect in Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land. The excitement builds with this repartee between them.

Jones: This is my Mom.
Alice: Hi.

Jones: Give me a couple of minutes [as he moves away from her out of the camera's eye].

Alice: For what?

Jones: Oh I don't know, I just thought I would start dancing and you can start talking now.

This bland conversation perfectly sets up the ensuing indistinctive dancing by Jones. Similar to anybody disco dancing it doesn't present shape, dynamics or rhythm in any recognizable pattern to generate a readable movement text. From this point on Alice provides most of the narrative in a perfunctory delivery, though with some personal charm as an elderly African American woman. Beyond his dancing in the background her performance lacks any aesthetic shaping. She touches on some relatives, Jones father, and a story about young Ishmael lost in a store telling someone angrily "My Mommy lost me." This text lacks the dramatic tension that many of Johanna Boyce's verbal texts offer as support to her presentation of low dynamics of the ordinary life in performance.

The title Relatives suggests the possibility of making connections between or within generations but Jones undercuts this possibility with the choice of frequent camera shots that show his body dancing in and out of the frame juxtaposed with shots of his mother dying eggs often cut off at the shoulders. The fragmented bodies do concur with the fragmented work as a whole, a good example of the potential for self-indulgence occasioned by

autobiography in dance performance. An overdub of an inarticulate pseudo-intellectual discussion accompanied the opening images of the video after which Ishmael Houston Jones notes "I worry about prettiness." Perhaps his intention was to present himself as an abstract moving body in the context of family specifics, but certainly "nothing pretty" exists in this work worthy of serious attention.

Joe Goode's Convenience Boy premiered in Chicago in late February of 1993. On September 14, 1992, several excerpts from this work in progress were presented for "The Body Betrayed" at Theatre Artaud in San Francisco, a production of The Talking Dance Project (all references based on this performance). The language spoken by Goode in this work directly addresses the body as the location of selfhood. Also, in a city whose artistic community has suffered dramatic consequences from AIDS, this work confronts the body as locus of sexuality and desire, something the other works discussed in this chapter do not address. Sitting relaxed but erect in a chair, alone and slowly moving his focus from side to side, Goode lets these words drool slowly out of his mouth. "I am a body. I live in a body. This is my territory. I am embodied. I am a fever. Is my body unwanted, unclean." His manner of speaking accentuates the physical mechanism of speech by slowing the enunciation of each word. This represents a different

approach of connecting language with movement, here the speech mechanism, than previously discussed. In a lecture that followed this excerpt, he explained how he was having his dancers experiment with transferring water from one mouth to another as a disturbing image in the context of AIDS where exchange of body fluids can mean death. It is an image that borders on disgusting and also speaks of ultimate trust. A short group movement excerpt had four dancers moving first in two duets and then in a closer quartet with fluid weight sharing reminiscent of contact improvisation. It is difficult to draw conclusions from this short excerpt disjointed by other performances and discussions. Later in the evening he developed his opening commentary, this time located in the first few rows of the audience on a small raised platform. As he slowly peeled off his clothes down to boxer shorts he spoke: "I have a body. I am a body. Desire. I am embodied. Contextualize desire through the personal me. I want to take your society and go throw it away." At the end he places tape on his lips, symbolic of being shut up. The confrontational nature of this material has political ramifications; it combats the forces of the religious right, which as recently as 1992 played a significant role in the removal of the John Froemeyer as head of the NEA. Later, in our conversation, Goode revealed how Convenience Boy evolved into an exploration of the world of young male hustlers who

exist on the fringe of society for the sexual convenience of those disposed to pay for their services. Goode explained that the work as a whole considered our throw away culture, from food wrappers, to our families, to our home cities which consequently renders our bodies our permanent home. Yet for these hustlers even their bodies are not their own as they are asked to act out various fantasies with their bodies. Joe Goode felt that he could represent their extreme world in a small way but since it was not his story, at some point, they must tell it themselves. While understanding the limitations of incorporating into performance a group as unpredictable as members of this subculture, Goode has considered having several of them in the work. His plan, though, reverses Johanna Boyce's strategy of creating autobiography in dance performance out of someone else's life experience. She built the verbal text for her two Ties That Bind from interviews that she elicited from her performers.² Goode instead plans to have his hustlers interview him and his company so as to not exploit them any more than they already have been. Employed also by Bill T. Jones in Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land the live interview strategy highlights the present tense of unfolding autobiography, although in this example discussed in the next chapter, it compresses the simultaneous movement text to the body language of the two participants.

The dances discussed here comprise only a fraction of the examples of autobiography in dance performance that make up the evolving trend of artists blurring life and art in performance. Nuances of autobiography in dance performance pervade the current dance showcase scene, although this subject matter no longer shocks or captivates audiences as it did ten years ago. The self has become a vehicle for more universal statements. Some of the major artists, such as Bill T. Jones, who spawned this genre have moved beyond an exclusive concern with the self in performance. His Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land exemplifies an exploration of larger concerns, presented in an evening length work for a large performing space, concerns that nonetheless exist in this expanded territory of the objectified self. Within this larger framework it occasionally returns to intimate expressions of selfhood and extracts meaning through the exposed self.

NOTES

¹ Jeff Friedman related the strategy of a friend who states his HIV positive status in all his grant proposals. "He gets all his grants" laughed Jeff. His friend's rationale that's been thought through is that he is not manipulating his status, but offering a truth--because of his HIV status his work has a specific perspective and is worth funding.

² Commenting on his own concern for authenticity of performance material Joe Goode commented in our conversation that "I for one play fast and loose with the authenticity of the autobiographical self--because I don't think my life is all that interesting. And I feel theatre must be compelling to grip the audience."

Chapter Six

TELLING ONE'S STORY--SHARING INFORMATION

Almost impossible
the gentle precision of a construction crane
twenty stories high

you say we are not thoughtful, but angry.
Poor anger - tearing at a pillow,
another scream in the nursery
Why argue?
Yes, we are angry (Zimmer 1989, 40)

These lines from Bill T. Jones' poem Union Square, April 1985 capture the vital essence of the man and his work. Bill T. Jones, a dancer/choreographer who began work in the early seventies in partnership with Arnie Zane, emerged on the international scene by the early eighties. He created works within the context of the postmodern aesthetic. The crane's "gentle precision" reflects his fascination with clean lines, and the formal principles of creating movement in space and time. "Anger" exists as a consistent subtext throughout his choreographic career; yet in the more recent work, Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land (1990), Jones aims to heal the alienation fostered by anger by questioning the nature of faith (Jones, B.T. 1992). "You say we are not thoughtful" refers to the dominant white culture that perceives the external anger of the marginalized black or gay man but not the thoughtful

internal consciousness that fuels that anger. "Yes, we are angry" indicates his acceptance of the role of spokesperson willing to take the personal and political risks. "Why argue?" concludes Jones. Instead, as one angered yet illuminated by experience, he has chosen to craft his story --the issues, answers and hopes of an outsider--through dance.

Union Square, the context of Jones' poem, is a park of the people, situated at the intersection of Broadway and 14th street in Manhattan, a park of artists, stretching from the upper edge of the lower east side performance scene to the dance studios in the teens and twenties. "New luxury housing, a sad intrusion on the perfect air" (Zimmer 1989, 40). The power structure once again encroaches upon the open space, the precious unfilled realm of the imagination that artists, poets, and dancers, mine and fashion into works of art, reflections of our culture as much as the "upended crate of glass and steel" reflects the dominance of its neighboring skyscrapers.

Jones told Elizabeth Zimmer in 1984 "my world is a place to fit into. Black people want to bring things to a more interpersonal level immediately. They want to talk about you and me" (Zimmer 1984, 58). Jones reveals his world in performance by inserting autobiographical material into his choreography which utilizes an athletic, kinetically

explosive movement vocabulary:

I'm not a formalist. Where they would reduce and remove themselves from their work, I've often put myself smack in the middle of my work . . . and there is a reason for that. It's a commitment to human kind, information about humankind, more than information about art (Jones, B.T. 1992).

His drawing on personal sources as subject matter for insertion into his work has fluctuated over time, yet his use of this strategy has paralleled and significantly contributed to autobiography in dance performance as it emerged in the seventies and proliferated in postmodern dance during the eighties.

As has been previously mentioned, a fundamental tenet of postmodern is the blurring of life and art. In the case of Bill T. Jones, whose life and work clearly exemplify this condition, it is a conscious act. During our interview at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, in June, 1992, Bill T. Jones responded to how he fit in this context by emphasizing, "some of us more so than others because we've made it that way." As Jones' reputation has grown to international proportions and with the circumstances of Arnie Zane's death from AIDS in March, 1988, Jones has been inundated with requests for interviews:

So I feel I have been telling my story. . . . I've told it to writers in England and Germany and the U.S. But is that art or not? It is the way in which I understand my life and what it means in the world. My art and life are not clearly defined. . . . This is a performance. It is also information sharing like oral history (Jones, B. T. 1992).

Just as Jones understands an interview in a college housing complex on a late summer night as a performance, the early raw solos that he performed arose directly from his life experience as a black man in a white articulated society. His collaborative duets with Arnie proclaimed their loving homosexual relationships. The subsequent loss of his lover and creative partner to AIDS informs Untitled (1989). Finally, his mother testifying to the Lord in the more recent work Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land points to the importance and meaning of family in his life, and to his mother as the paradigm of faith upon which this dance rests. Burt Supree, dance editor of the Village Voice, said recently:

We've never had to deal with losing people on this scale. Bill T. Jones brought one of his dancers [Damian Acquavella, who died last June] onstage though he was too weak to walk. That mixing of art and life seemed somehow repellent--it was messy. It was also gutsy. It was grandstanding, but so what (Zimmer 1989, 40)?

A further consideration of how AIDS has influenced the context in which Jones creates will follow later.

Based on this author's investigation of autobiography in dance performance, Bill T. Jones' multiple works in this genre exemplify the best integration of language and movement into compelling whole statements of consequence to the world in which he and we live. His African American cultural heritage figures prominently in his success,

especially the importance of storytelling. Steeped in this traditional mode of passing on information from childhood, Jones' work reflects techniques and notions about storytelling that he learned in his youth. He learned the power of the performed telling of the story from his father:

It [storytelling] had a very profound place in our household. My father was a great storyteller. I think it must have been years before I figured out that certain stories he told us were not true because they were so vivid (Jones, B. T. 1992).

He learned about his family's history and his parents' courtship through stories. Bill T. Jones explained that his parents personalized the Biblical stories they transmitted orally by, for example, referring to "Brother Job." The personal resonance of this story in Jones's life returns as a key aspect of Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land. Finally, having grown up predominantly in the North, he came to understand racial tensions prevalent in the South through stories told by his mother:

hearing her tell about other experiences about us and them, when we lived down there, this happened to my mother, this happened to my sister, they did this to us, and so on. It was all stories" (Jones, B. T. 1992).

These three categories of information, family history, religious faith, and the realities of race relations, as translated through his life, permeate and enrich the work of Bill T. Jones.

The multiple ways that Bill T. Jones incorporates

stories in his work reveal personal information about him over and above any autobiographical information contained therein. His method has ranged from improvisational performance of personal history, as in the Fish Story from Perfect Courage (1990), that discusses his and Arnie's participation in the funeral for his niece, to the danced telling of a repetitively structured cautionary tale, both dark and authentic, learned from his grandmother:

It is a quality story, it is Jungian even. It has dignity, it is simple direct. It was perfect. I had access to it, it was mine, my grandmother had given it to me (Jones, B. T. 1992).

This idea of ownership of a story through experience reflects his heritage, the autobiographical context of knowing a story influences the nature of its performance. Jones' interest in the strategy of integrating dance and stories remained connected to his personal history as opposed to Johanna Boyce who also created works from the life histories of others. "My stories were the one's I trusted the most, I knew the most. I was not a playwright (Jones, B. T. 1992). For various reasons which are discussed later, in the early eighties Jones moved away from a regular use of this strategy, although two points are relevant here. First, as his world became larger he worried about unintentionally exposing family members through this process, and second, as his interest and opportunities to "make dances" for others besides himself increased, he had

less interest in expanding the storytelling strategy for a group (Jones, B. T. 1992). The concern and relationship to his family continually interfaces in the life and work of Bill T. Jones. He also differentiates himself from Johanna Boyce with his move toward dynamically rich pure choreography, beautifully exemplified in D-Man in the Waters, while continuing in other works to use extensive autobiographical language in performance. Boyce instead maintained her commitment to pedestrian movement and dynamics until she finally interrupted her dance career. Jones also blends stories based in reality with imagined stories as in Sisyphus (1980); he relates a genuine experience of himself as a seven year old charged with the disposal of a dead skunk and then builds to an projected future self, in a nursing home, facing a leg amputation.

Jones' objective in telling his story is to give voice to his life experience, to reveal as a homosexual black man the thoughtfulness behind the anger and alienation embedded in a life estranged from the mainstream. In 21 (1983), he constructs formal relationships between named shapes and stories that begin with his brother Boot, a black gambler in the fifties and end with Jones in Amsterdam, feeling the urge to return home:

The desire to come home was to be able to find my voice and here I was literally speaking and the way I was trying to find my voice was to tell my story (Jones, B. T. 1992).

Performance artist Laurie Carlos's keynote speech to the symposium "Black Avant-Garde Art and The Concept of a Black Aesthetic: expanding definitions, breaking boundaries" held at Stanford University in April, 1992, related her parallel experience to Jones:

I kept trying to find out what my voice was about and who else was speaking my language and where were those people and how it was I was going to bring that to a very powerful form called theatre.

Carlos, an original cast member in For Colored Girls The Rainbow Ain't Enough, also worked with the Urban Bush Women around the same time that Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane created Rotary Action (1982). In this dance an exchange of language punctuates individual solos and a boisterous duet of intimate lifts and playful give and take of control. Zane and Jones both challenge one another to speak and then undercut the power of language in the face the moving body:

Zane: Make a speech.

Jones: Make a statement.

Zane: Okay, its my turn to begin.

Jones: Let me introduce you.

Zane: Waiting.

Jones: Let's see. To hell with effect, . . . look at that action? Got it?

Zane: Look at that.

Jones: Look at that (Zimmer 1989, 70).

In Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land Jones' strategic use of storytelling evolves toward overlapping contexts of personal history, social history and religious yearning into which he embeds multiple stories,² which are energized by the performer's personal history and

strengthened by historical weight, such as when he uses Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech:

Uncle Tom's Cabin started with a big story which was Harriet Beecher Stowe's story and then that story I had a feeling about and I had my own stories that ran counter to it and through it. I tried to tell those stories through many people or suggest those stories, suggest the issue of faith and what it meant. My mother is a story. You realize she is my mother and you fill in the blanks. How did he become who he is and so on? Because I don't want to tell you but you can make the connection (Jones, B. T. 1992).

Here Bill T. Jones alludes to the recurring category of parents as significant in shaping the self found in autobiography in dance performance.

As an artist, Jones represents several overlapping outsider groups, that of homosexuals and African Americans. He shares the strategy of "telling his story" as a means of voicing his perspective from this unique vantage point with Johanna Boyce, who intends to speak for the feminist cause. The most genuine and powerful work in autobiography in dance performance often communicates an unheard perspective from outside the mainstream, voices that nonetheless represent segments of the American public. When artists build dance performance out of their own and others personal narratives with the intention, or at least the awareness, of speaking to issues larger than the self, it calls into question the locus of the self. In the context of the blurring of art and life, where does the individual self end and those segments

of the greater society, of which the self is representative of and speaking for, begin?

While this analysis of the life and work of Bill T. Jones doesn't purport to answer this question definitively, it does further clarify the nature of the question. This chapter investigates how Bill T. Jones' choreographic strategies interact with the key issues of autobiography in dance performance: the tension between language and movement; vulnerability as it relates to personal revelations, with sexuality now balanced with racial and artistic identity; the presentation of the dancing body as an autobiographical statement, informed by Jones' use of partial and full nudity; and finally Jones' use of shifting temporal modes as a device to emphasize the present moment of performance. Bill T. Jones' work minimally addresses the question of authorship because, as has been noted, he focusses on his own stories. The works created prior to 1987 sufficiently indicate Jones' tendencies concerning these categories of investigation. Three works created since Zane's death, Untitled (1989), a dance film, Perfect Courage (1990), and Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land (1990), deserve more detailed attention partially due to their richly nuanced relation to the fact of Zane's passing. The first two represent excellent examples of the potential for autobiography in dance performance; Untitled

explores the anguish and helplessness of a minimally contained rage, and Perfect Courage pursues the life enhancing, transformative effect of surviving personal loss through death. The third exemplifies a tendency toward a more universal expansion of autobiography in dance performance.

Bill T. Jones creative period from the early seventies to the present exists within the historical context of postmodern dance, a fact he shares with Johanna Boyce. Jones exploration of the creative process during performance, a critical aspect of the postmodern dance aesthetic, receives a special treatment. His early exposure to contact improvisation served as a starting point for movement ideas.³ The free wheeling improvisational performance style of The Grand Union, which incorporated language, play acting, dance and extensive use of props, validated utilizing performance as an experimental vehicle to arrive artistically at new places. But Jones uses improvisation to explore himself rather than abstract art:

Sometimes its right for you but not right for a critic. It might be "Oh it was so rambling," but for you it just took that long to get to another place. I did a lot of mine [improvisation] in performance. I know that's an aesthetic judgement I made or did not make. . . . You want process, you watched the Grand Union's process, you watched the Judson Church's process, well this is my process. Can you deal with all the emotion in it and how personal it is and how much you have to deal with me as opposed to ideas about art (Jones, B. T. 1992).

While certainly risking accusations of self-indulgence, Jones challenges the critically circumscribed area deemed acceptable. Disagreements between artists and critics are endemic to dance, as they are to all the arts, but the physical presence of the self in dance performance makes them particularly charged. The title for Remy Charlip's dance for Lucas Hoving came from a comment Hoving made in Dance Perspectives in 1969:

The trouble is we're doing part of our growing up in public and we know it just as well as they [critics] do [or do they]. Anyway they should 'cause they're doing the same thing.

Jones' acknowledged a sensitivity to overindulgence when asked about other's work in autobiography in dance performance:

A lot of it I don't like and it makes me wonder 'Oh my God is that what I do?' . . . Probably sometimes I've been very bad. And I also want to feel that they [someone performing autobiographical material] are in some way being brave and generous. . . . I've got to feel that there is some risk here, that this has come through some kind of fire to be done (Jones, B. T. 1992).

Jones took risks in his passionate "extremely insane" early solos and his collaborations with Arnie Zane which contributed to the evolution of postmodern dance. He embraced process, risked critique of self-indulgence and in the spotlight of performance lived his life on stage. Already on display as a bi-racial, gay couple in the seventies, Jones and Zane pushed in performance their

personal reality, "a continent of two," in a proactive statement of identity that invited criticism. But Jones' placement within the postmodern world, though critical, perhaps figures less prominently than his personal history, and the various social and cultural contexts he has lived and worked within.

Born in 1952, tenth in a family of twelve, Bill T. Jones grew up in a family of migrant workers who travelled from their home base in Florida to the upstate counties of New York. As children Bill and his sister Rhodessa were outcasts in their family, in the sense that as thoughtful daydreamers, they got lost in the shuffle of a family of fourteen, and consequently contributed less efficiently to the family's livelihood of picking fruits and vegetables. Bill loved to listen to his sister's stories in the fields.⁴ In the skits and dances the children made up during their idle hours, Bill, a brainy kid, also showed an awareness of how to perform. "I knew what it meant to hold an audience" (Zimmer 1984, 60).

Later when the family located permanently in Steuben County in upstate New York, Bill T. Jones grew up in a predominantly white community and found himself generally the only black in his grade school classes. He excelled in athletics and in theatre developing close friendships with his classmates in the process. This early experience as an

outsider left him somewhat uncertain about his racial identity:

I was very confused. That was one of the things that I set out to rediscover in my years as an adult. What is my blackness? What is my racial identity? . . . When my father made that decision that he wanted to be a black Yankee in about 1955 and offer his kids everything that the white man had up north, in some ways he denied us the identity that one gets from living in a black community (Jones, B. T. 1990).

Jones then explains his negotiation of the predicament of relating simultaneously to his white friends, "steeped in a lot of racist points of view," and the other black, poor migrant children that would arrive in great numbers in the fall. "It was difficult, but I think that's one reason I'm able to negotiate the art world today" (Jones, B. T. 1990).

His family's unique circumstances forced the importance of family on Jones, exacerbating the normal tensions between parents and children ready to leave the home. The sixties environment encouraged Bill and his younger siblings to extend their relationships to different kinds of people and "question the primacy of the family as the end all . . . we made friends with people from different classes and different backgrounds . . . my mother in particular didn't trust it" (Jones, B. T. 1992). Nonetheless, Jones's work repeatedly integrates his family as part of his story, and here I include Arnie Zane within the concept of family during the duration of their relationship. In fact, during

this period, due in part to Zane's unwillingness to compromise, Jones was estranged to a degree from his biological family. Of the dances mentioned so far, 21, Sisyphus, Rotary Action, Untitled, Perfect Courage, Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land, and Everybody Works (1975) all either talk about family members or include them in performance. Jones utilizes his family as an extended and enlarged self to make his statements. "There is something about sitting down with people who have known you all of your life, people who have the same kind of marginalized view of the world" (Jones, B. T. 1992). Therefore for Jones internal family tensions mirror the tension he feels with society and the logic of their incorporation into his work stems from the essential degree that they are the man. How Bill T. Jones identified himself reflects this reality:

For the first 18 to 20 years I felt first and foremost like a Jones, then I felt like a black person, then I felt like an American. Later I became Arnie Zane's lover, then a Jones, then an artist, then an American (Jones, B. T. 1992).

Jones culminated this discussion with his conception of himself in the present (June, 1992). "Now I am a man, an artist, a black man, I am a Jones, I am an American" (Jones, B. T. 1992). Since Zane's death and in conjunction with Jones' expanded visibility and stature he describes himself as more independent, less attached to the constraints or

definition of others. Worth noting here is Jones precise language, in this case the repetitive structure that clearly lines up items in relief for consideration.

Jones' working relationship with Zane served to further his extraordinary experience, inviting ostracism from the black culture without guaranteeing acceptance from the white culture. Jones' life circumstances call to mind the confusion among scholars and critics as to what is black dance. The 1983 Dance Black America Conference and Symposium posed this question for small group discussion among critics, scholars, and artists. Black researcher Joe Nash summed up the difficulties surrounding this issue:

We had trouble trying to articulate what is the nature of the Black aesthetic, because the variables were so great. Is it something that only a person who has been trained in the Black experience can come to grips with? To what extent is it a choreographic work that might deal with a social issue utilizing Black expressions or just using expressions based upon the technique they are familiar with (Dixon-Stowell, 37-38)?

Bill T. Jones speaking in the fall of 1990, still expresses exasperation with the black dance label that circumscribes a dance's relevance:

I hate it when you make a piece that has a Black voice. People say that it is about being Black, but is Shakespeare about being white? Is any art that's made by a white person about being white, yes and no. Well, I demand the same" (Jones, B. T. 1990).

Both the Symposium's dilemma and Jones' frustration are examples of Berndt Ostendorf's thesis in Black Literature in

White America:

This book proposes that the conflict ridden nature and ambivalent interpretability of black culture is the structural imprint left on its grammar by a long history of race and class contradictions (10).

In a discussion on the difference between oral and literate cultures he notes that oral cultures such as the African American emphasize dramatic, inclusive and instantaneous interpretation of a culture's circumstances as opposed to the delayed and individualistic analysis within literary cultures. Nonetheless an oral culture "never expands greatly beyond the horizon of the present collective," whereas literary cultures allow an individual to broaden their horizons, but also present dangers:

The liberation of the individual from mythical or ritual shackles is matched by the dangers of alienation (both from his tradition and his group) and class stratification" (28).

Bill T. Jones, who is extending this oral tradition through dance performance, also demands the right to now speak first as "a man, an artist," yet his confused feelings about what is his black heritage are justifiably rooted in that same cultural heritage.

Jones met Zane in 1971 at SUNY Binghamton to study theatre and dance, while also on a track team scholarship. He relates, "I fell in love with a man. My sexuality was organized by the relationship" (Zimmer 1989, 16). Typical of his willingness to be out front with his life and address

difficult situations, he confronted his jock buddies with this fact, who according to Rhodessa, "really loved Bill, these guys had to regroup, you saw people learning" (Jones, R.). This urging of people to reexamine their value system is something Bill T. Jones does with his dance as well. Along with Lois Welk and Jill Becker, Jones and Zane founded the American Dance Asylum, in Binghampton in 1974. In this cooperative space, Jones created his solos of which Everybody Works (also a group dance) was typical.

Jones begins this dance (all references based on a 1977 performance video of the New York Dance Festival by Johannes Holub) standing on a soapbox dressed in a dark suit and tie facing diagonally downstage, a path marked with two wide white stripes and intersected with a matching set on the other diagonal. To a country fiddle tune he gestures with his arms and holds up groups of fingers as if he were preaching on a soap box. But the box turns out to be two boxes, like high heeled shoes, on which he advances toward center stage. The dance proceeds with Jones discarding the shoes and ultimately all his clothes down to white boxer shorts. Jones frequently repeats a circular run centered on stage, and intersperses leaps and occasional assemble' landings accompanied by contorted grimaces. Several times he steps out of the dance and advances to speak to the audience (inaudible on video) in alternately aggressive and comic

tones, again working the crowd like a preacher, encouraging them to clap and once yelling "remember Sammy Davis." Earlier upon audience laughter, he abruptly stiffened upright. In addition to holding up fingers, he calls out a series of numbers that he later identified as his social security number. His strategic use of repetition, of movement motifs, and several phrases like, "When I was a little boy I received a little doll;" his haranguing the audience; and his disrobing in process are techniques that recur in his work. Just as Spalding Gray uses multiple personas to draw viewers into his work, Jones demonstrates here and elsewhere in his autobiographical dance performances, a critical artist self that shapes the work which often transforms into a confrontational performing self, fueled by his life experience out of society's mainstream. Jones frequently performs seminude, generally without a shirt, a recurring strategy to lure in the audience and hook their attention. As a man of well sculpted musculature who moves with pristine grace, he manipulates his predominantly white spectator's fascination with his blackness, the otherness of his beauty (enhanced by the costume choice of white boxer shorts). His duets with Zane, a white man, further highlighted this inviting presentation of the exposed body. Everybody Works concludes with a story about his going to Florida to visit his elderly aunts. When

one of them tells the twelve-year-old Jones, "I hope you're not going to marry a white girl like you're brother did, because if you do, you can't come down here and visit us anymore." Jones responds near the end of the dance "if I love her I'll marry her anyway. Auntie, I love you." The final "I love you" is repeated several times as if to challenge the racial and social restrictive boundaries on conceptions of marriage, which he cleverly locates in the South, a place of limited options from which his family left for that very reason.

In the mid to late seventies Jones also created the duets with Zane that accentuated their differences in race, body size, and style which first brought them attention; these culminated in the trio of duets Blauvelt Mountain (1980), Valley Cottage (1981), and Rotary Action (1981). These duets were significant for their daring lifts, outgrowths of their contact improvisation background, and expressive of the love and trust in their relationship. Burt Supree writes:

Without proclaiming intimacies, the facts of their relationship were put on stage in the play of weight and balance, of aggression and dependency. As gay men, they didn't flaunt a lifestyle, they didn't make a programmatic call to arms or plea for understanding, . . . They simply refused to pretend or apologize (Supree).

Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane moved to Valley Cottage in late 1979, only one hour from Manhattan. This location

closer to the center of the dance scene corresponded to their burgeoning international recognition. In 1982 they began their company and in these middle years they developed large scale works in collaboration with other major names in the fast paced and chic art scene. Secret Pastures (1984) included visuals by Keith Haring, costumes by Willie Smith, and music by Peter Gordon. At this time, Jones' work in collaboration with Zane, veered away from the autobiographical and toward grand spectacle. While perhaps still an outsider in the culture at large, Bill T. Jones clearly had arrived in the dance world with commissions from Alvin Ailey and back to back premieres at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1983 and 1984. In an interview with Barry Laine, Jones admits "there is a need now to be one step removed from personal experience" (Laine, 25).

This change in his choreographic interests supports the contention that marginalized individuals are more readily drawn to the strategic use of autobiographical material in dance, as a means of validating their outsider status. The high-flying middle period for Jones coincides with his reduced use of personal material, although his dances still generated political overtones. The 1985 Holzer Duet . . . Truisms, matches Lawrence Goldhuber, described as "an improbably large man," white, in white shirt and tie, with Jones, clad only in black tights. With Jones perched on the

shoulders and rolling off the legs of Goldhuber, this dance presents a multitude of unconventional juxtapositions: white man with black man; semi-naked with business attire; huge ungainly body with a lithe muscled body. With Jenny Holzer's semi-anarchic, politically charged phrases as accompaniment to the dancing, both Jones' characteristic choreography and tap dance routines for Goldhuber, further accentuate the contradictions offered the audience to integrate as best they can. Nonetheless, critical and social acceptance within the dance world empowered Jones to explore provocative territory without necessitating always putting the ultimate statement of the self on the line.

The onset of AIDS, though, interrupted this forward momentum, as it has for the dance community at large. Bill T. Jones lost his partner in life and art in March, 1988; both before and since this date, Arnie's illness and death has colored Jones' output. Art and life again blur as the incomprehensibility of premature death reignites the anger, questions the nature of faith, and occasions grief in Jones' recent choreographic work:

There's no morality in the universe; there is no fairness. I've always tried to address the ugliest feelings--like feelings of oppression--and tried to transform them. I'm filled with anger and awareness of mortality and I want that to show (Supree).

Based exclusively in pure movement, the following three dances are outside the context of this discussion, but Red

Room (1987), Absence (1989), and D-Man in the Water (1989) all respond to the havoc AIDS has wreaked on Bill T. Jones.

As previously mentioned, in New York and San Francisco oral history projects record, in their own words, the lives and perspectives of dance artists afflicted with AIDS, or other life-threatening diseases. Arnie Zane participated in New York. Who could be more marginalized than someone facing death from a disease socially decreed reprehensible? These autobiographical interviews, though not in performance, support the premise about marginalized individuals embracing the autobiographical form. In fact, these artists have freely chosen to record their lives and consequently have confronted their circumstances. Bill T. Jones as the survivor of a lover who died from AIDS must confront his own potential HIV positive status. He joins this newly marginalized population.

With this in depth understanding of Bill T. Jones' personal history and the multiple social and cultural contexts that inform his work, an analysis of how his work interfaces with the categories of concern to autobiography in dance performance can be addressed. He utilizes two primary approaches to balancing the value of language in movement: first, he will intersperse significant sequences of choreography with sparse displays of language; second, he will present a continuous flow of both language and movement

that balance each other because the lack of any significant pauses necessitates a reading of both mediums. Again this is a conscious decision on his part:

You are trying oftentimes to hear them [the stories] through my wiggling, my flailing body, so you are reading what my body's doing and you're trying to read the story at the same time (Jones, B. T. 1992).

As a dancer Jones charismatic dance style and athletic body are important assets in maintaining attention to the flow of movement. In both approaches Jones utilizes his rich vocal tone and practiced storytelling techniques that both abstract and enrich the verbal delivery. Primary among these is repetition of either full or partial phrases. He uses this strategy in 21, Fish Story and Everybody Works. In this last work occurs a rare instance of his distorting the delivery of a phrase, heard once already, which clarifies only for the word "white." "When I was a little boy, 1, 4, 3, 8, I received a little white doll." Later, in reference to his aunts' admonishment not to marry a white girl, he utters only the "wh" sound to emphasize the racial overtones of their statement. This technique of leaving pregnant pauses recurs in Fish Story. Jones' language rarely follows a straight prose style, more typical of Johanna Boyce and Moses Pendleton. Jones shapes language into discrete units much the way he shapes the movement. Everybody Works, 21, and Rotary Action all represent examples of interspersing generous amounts of movement in between verbal information.

Fish Story and segments of Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land exhibit the approach of an ongoing flow of movement and language and will be discussed in the context of those works.

While Jones admits to improvising his story dances, his facility at etching shapes and phrases into rhythmic components, with interspersed held moments, render his dancing readable and compelling while remaining abstract. He compares his approach to a jazz musician who just feels when to start and stop a musical phrase (Jones, B. T. 1992). Jones mixes full body movements such as leaps, forward rolls that finish in a precarious balance on the tops of his feet, side to side jumps and smooth runs, with frequent use of hand gestures and held, poignant facial expressions. While extended movement phrases that continue to move through space are rare in his works of autobiography in dance performance, he does employ them in Rotary Action (all references based on the Alive From Off Center production of Rotary Action produced by John Schott). The above mentioned movement vocabulary all occur here as he dances full out to Peter Gordon's driving saxophone composition. To a smokey piano score, Zane also dances a solo, slightly less gymnastic, that employs a quirky compilation of gestures and jumps. Both, though, exude an absolute abandon and delight in moving. When they pause to speak to address one another,

they speak in elliptical phrases that point to the depth of understanding that lovers share:

Jones: You know, you're taking a lot of liberties.

Zane: What do you mean?

Jones: You're creating a fantasy for us. Its yours, not mine. My job is to join in and help you create your fantasy.

Zane: One more play, OK? What's this one gonna be about?

Jones: This one's gonna be about separation.

Zane: What do you mean separation?

Jones: I mean the fear of separation. Are you ready?

Their duet follows, to an upbeat love song with the ironically prophetic refrain "Baby, please don't go." They dart around, over and under each other with each taking turns holding the other, Zane grabbing the legs of Jones in a handstand, Jones supporting Zane in an "old usually heterosexual jitterbug move in which partners hold hands and swing under their arms (Hanna, 235). The camera frequently closes in on their faces that exude complete joy in the process of dancing together. "The performers have often said that they want to make art that puts people on the spot, entertaining but provocative about racism, sexism, and sexuality" (235).

Despite Jones dynamically strong movement vocabulary and formal constructions, as demonstrated in Everybody Works where he utilizes the simple repetitive circular traveling to dissect the diagonal lines painted on the floor, he understands the power of language:

Oftentimes the language overshadows the movement. I

went to more and more austere ways of making the movement, more and more sculptural, more and more objective, repetition, stillness, that kind of stark presentation of a visual picture. It's very difficult to compete with a story that has characters, and sex and violence (Jones, B. T. 1992).

The structure of 21, which first presents twenty-one shapes, then presents them a second time with numbers, then a third time with numbers and names, and then continues to link them improvisationally with stories and movement, consciously attempts to feature the dancing body first and then build language upon it. The use of spoken numbers that occurs in almost all the works under discussion here represents another device Jones utilizes to abstract the language and therefore better prepare the viewer to read the abstract movement. In Everybody Works, Jones presents the impersonal numerical statement of self, one's social security number, both gesturally, with fingers held up in succession, and verbally; simultaneously his gradually disrobing body presents a very personal and present self.

Numbers therefore help to balance the two mediums of language and movement in the work of Bill T. Jones and also serve to distance the viewer from the personal nature of the spoken material, something which Jones also attempts in his style of verbal delivery:

One way in which one uses stories most effectively I think is to report them distanced enough . . . you tell the story and the way in which you tell it and what you don't say, people know a lot about how you

feel (Jones, B. T. 1992).

A further discussion of Jones' awareness of the need to frame and distance autobiographical material follows a consideration of Untitled and Perfect Courage. This concern, though, points to the degree of vulnerability he experiences in performance.

In both Everybody Works and IO (1981), Jones reacts abruptly to audience laughter. Though he coaxes the audience into his point of view, he expresses his control by quickly responding to their reactions. In the bow for Everybody Works, he runs back and forth in a display that almost asks for more of the applause that is ringing for his performance. His concluding line in the dance, "I love you", directed to his aunts at first, can be interpreted as also referring to the audience during the third, fourth and fifth repetition. In autobiography in dance performance, the level of personal exposure which Jones pushes with his frequent use of partial nudity, puts one in a precarious relationship to one's audience. Jones' life experience of negotiating white society contributes to this curious relationship:

I also felt that oftentimes the solos would be sexual. There's this kind of come-on, where you fix on someone in the audience and you flirt with them. You come on, then you turn angry and vicious. . . . You know: you're the black man--you take off your shirt. . . . You know what they're all thinking, 'Oh, I bet you have a dick down to your knees.' Now work that (Boyce, et al., 1988, 90).

He demonstrates this in Everybody Works when he grabs his

crotch and momentarily looks directly at one part of the audience.⁵

Despite this conscious manipulation of audiences for his solos, in his duet work with Zane, Bill T. Jones readily revealed intimate details about their life together. And Bill T. Jones often went too far for Arnie Zane, perhaps reflecting the difference between their respective culture's willingness to share intimate details. Rhodessa Jones relates, "Bill didn't give a damn. Arnie would freak out and say, 'Bill! Why did you say that on stage?' and Bill would say, 'Arnie, forget about it, I'm sorry Arnie, it came out'" (Jones, R.). By choosing the dance world to express his sexual identity he follows in a tradition that Judith Lynne Hanna outlines in Dance, Sex, and Gender:

On the fringe of society and receptive to the unconventional, the art world offers them (homosexuals) an opportunity to express an aesthetic sensibility that is emotional and erotic, an insulation from a rejecting society, an avenue of courtship, and an arena in which to deal with homosexual concerns (Hanna, 136).

Furthermore, Jones has said that he felt the pressure of the audience's gaze, "Perform for us. Show us your body" (Boyce et al., 1988, 89). Jones identified with the feelings of women experiencing the male gaze, and yet as previously mentioned, he manipulates this tension with the audience to his advantage. With the stage representing a place for being watched, it becomes a feminized place of transformation

(89). Thus Jones' and Zane's use of the performance setting to publicize their relationship represents a validating experience, and a confrontational stance from a position of weakness. Displaying onstage what they are in life forces the audience to either accept or reject their sexual preferences, yet there is no denying that homosexual love exists between these two men. Jones quotes Arnie Zane's statement of their perspective on this display. "This is the world we'd like to see. Well instead of showing the abuses, [reference to Pina Bausch] now show us the world you want us to see" (85). Jones does not clearly articulate in performance the nature of his creative partnership with Zane, a perhaps telling omission. As Jones first encouraged Zane to begin dancing, reinforced by the fact that Jones stands out as the stronger dancer of the two, one can assume Jones as the primary choreographic contributor. Zane, an artist and photographer, contributed his formal approach to arranging space. Also, Jones continues to refer to Zane as the significant partner of his life that catalyzed his freedom for self expression (Jones, B. T. 1992). Nonetheless, how they shared control is left vague and is one reason why Rotary Action is the only pure collaboration of Jones and Zane dealt with in this thesis.

The significant difference between Rotary Action, for example, and Boyce's Ties That Bind is that Zane and Jones

express their love explicitly through their dancing together. They don't simply challenge conventions through language, or acting out illicit acts on stage, but are physically intimate in a dance context acceptable for heterosexual couples, yet up until this time not so for homosexual couples. This intimacy is blended with strong, dynamic movement often typical of men dancing together in an asexual context. Also the racial difference between Jones and Zane, and Jones and his early audience, the white downtown art crowd, renders his societal commentary more rich, more complex and less monothematic than Boyce's agenda to legitimize lesbian relationships. How Jones confronts both his own mortality and his vulnerable psychic state in the aftermath of Zane's death is addressed later.

Examples of Bill T. Jones awareness and stress on the dancing body as an autobiographical statement have already been cited as they are pervasive in his work. Rotary Action stands as the most graphic display of the satisfaction of his love for Zane and serves as a direct contrast to Untitled, which explores the extremity of his physical and emotional disorientation over the loss of Zane. Dance improvisation, which exemplifies the autobiographical present statement of the body, is the primary mode employed by Jones in his works within autobiography in dance performance. He further aligns this with improvisational

language. Jones' use of partial nudity recurs consistently in his work, as has been mentioned, serving to fixate the audience gaze on the performing self as much as on the movement designs. His use of full nudity in Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land is discussed in the context of that work. Jones' willingness to expose his body extends to the printed medium as evidenced in the shirtless photo used for the cover of The New York Times Arts and Leisure section in November of 1990. He also served as a human canvas for the body painting of graffiti artist Kieth Haring shown in photographs in Elizabeth Zimmer's Body Against Body. Having explored racial and sexual identity through autobiography in dance performance, Jones appears to be gravitating toward the less individually specific concern of gender identity. In his 1990 interview with Terry Gross, he indicates his interest in trying to figure out what it means to be a man, to "understand the macho side of things," which is consistent with his 1992 conception of himself first as a man.

Jones spoke of his ability to spontaneously create autobiography in dance performance:

I could do it now if I had to. It would build out of this conversation, where I'm at today, where I was at, where I think I'm going. I could do it right now. That's my joy, my gift, and my burden (Jones, B. T. 1992).

Jones lives very consciously in his body in the present

moment. The present serves as the vantage point for his work which constantly shifts temporal modes. He juxtaposes allusions to past events with statements in the present tense generally directed at the audience. In Everybody Works, after a movement phrase that includes a run, leap and a roll, he interjects, "I can't even do a Jesse," presumably referring to Jesse Owens. These past and future tense stories represent the performance subject and, consistent with the postmodern aesthetic, the present tense asides serve to reveal the process, to remind the audience that they are active participants in this performance. Jones also employs imagined time as shown in 21 and Sisyphus. In 21 he tells of a Sunday in 1946, six years before he was born yet based on family hearsay, when his brother Boot left for the North with a migrant caravan. Of Sisyphus he says:

Sisyphus was built on the structure "I took a walk." They went from reality, to present, to projected future. I was playing with a lot of ways of telling stories at that time and part of it was fiction (Jones, B. T. 1992).

Jones' projection of his self out in time forwards and backwards represent another way in which the self becomes less focused in the process of exploration through autobiography in dance performance. The authenticity of a story doesn't restrict Jones because his sources generally root in the personal. "I do like to have a story that rings true and has an impact. Very personal stories have the

strongest impact to me" (Jones, B. T. 1992).

Rhodesa Jones appraises her brother's artistic philosophy: "Bill is always talking about examining things all the time. Where are we at, where are we gonna go, and how are we gonna get there. You know its really important to him" (Jones, R.). Again this philosophy represents an extension of an African American oral tradition of which Ostendorf comments:

Due to their dramatistic nature oral cultures have a different sense of past and present; indeed they seem to operate in a perpetual present and incorporate all that is functional for everyday survival in a finite, but ever present province of customs, beliefs, and ritual (Ostendorf 27).

Jones artistic statements, though based in the present, are clearly looking toward the future in the hope and belief that a better one exists. Extraordinarily aware of his finite world, Jones also sees the finiteness of a society that has lost touch with its values. The survival at issue here is greater than just his own as an African American. In looking more thoroughly at Untitled and the Fish Story from Perfect Courage, we see first an example of his personal struggle for emotional survival, then an example of how his personal struggle interfaces with a family crisis. Finally Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land challenges the general society to accept the responsibility to confront its own crisis of faith in humanity.

Before continuing, though, the most significant

autobiographical statement made by Bill T. Jones needs to be stressed. Five years after Arnie Zane's death, Jones still bills the company as Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane & Co. in tribute to the partnership that shaped his life:

The whole world for me, is 'Before Arnie and After Arnie.' In a world of cursory, superficial interactions, this was one of mythic proportions. Have I recovered from his death? I hope never to (Stearns).

As more time passes since Zane's death, this choice also serves to inform new audiences about the sources of the choreographer, information that nuances the reception of his work in the post Arnie era. "I want history to serve him well. It did take two people to make Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane a company" (Dunning 1990).

Untitled (all references from the 1989 film produced for *Alive from Off Center* by John Schott) begins with a camera pan up Jones' body to a closeup of his face. Then, framed full body, he advances several steps in profile to the camera and deliberately stamps to a parallel first position. He begins a series of pecking, slicing, and pressing gestures involving his arms and the upper body while the choreography limits his movement in space to a few strongly executed lunges. The camera occasionally closes in, once in particular to a tight frame of Jones' grimacing face matched with a tense cross armed slicing move. This movement insinuates someone forced to do violence to another against

his will, who involuntarily psyches up for the act. The movements suggest karate in both their attack, clipped held moments, and the angry keyed up facial expressions.

Accompanying this opening section, a voiceover of Arnie Zane narrates a dream from the 3rd of March (could this be the March of his death?), describing sleeping in a tent with several others. He awakens to look outside and see advancing toward him a huge pile of burning logs in a fireplace, then a bulldozer moving toward him. He begins to run for cover and then wakes up from the dream. Jones stops dancing at this moment, turns to the camera downstage, and advances, again with a disturbed confrontational expression. The film presents him in front of a diffuse white backdrop. He says, "You said 'A system in collapse is a system moving forward,'" continuing with "Do you remember Bill Katz, Rhodessa, . . . Willie," a litany of names of artists they worked with, family, and friends. Behind him hazy photographs of the people named fade in and out. During this constant repeating "Do you remember ____?" Jones' face and tone of voice shift from softness, to tender smile, to a charged volume again. Finally he repeats his opening statement, "You said, 'A system in collapse . . .'," two more times, closing his eyes the second time as if trying to believe this philosophical point of view that serves as little comfort for his anger and grief.

Then Jones turns and looks upstage where a downspot appears revealing a film clip of a crisp, young Zane in a brief stationary phrase. As Jones advances toward Zane, he peels off his leotard. Zane, before dissolving into thin air, finishes by turning diagonally to face Jones, and plants his hands firmly at his waist, a man in control. This vision underscores Jones' struggle to maintain control in this dance. Jones steps into the light to initiate a longer, expansive series of phrases that cover space, use extended side leaps, and wear a less strained face. Finally he returns to the opening movement phrases in place, yet sped up this time, not so clipped and held. The choreography now appears to move him, to buffet his body, leaving him a tormented man in anguish. Zane has continued his dream story, this time about he and Jones moving into a new apartment with construction going on next door. He notices a workman, "shirt off, very beautiful;" at that moment the film shows us a closeup of Jones' chest in a characteristic sinewy undulation. Some scaffolding falls and pins the workman beneath it. While Zane turns away, others go to the man's rescue and Zane's final comment is "he didn't appear to be hurt badly." Jones stops dancing to look upstage, then he puts his hands to his head.

To the accompaniment of lush opera music, Jones begins to dance with softer movements: side to side feet stepping,

a closeup of hands softly closing, a circular hip roll after a leap that stops just short of a forward roll. He goes to the floor to a balance on his left leg and arm, a precarious shape to hold. Throughout his breathing is very apparent against the singing. He claps overhead, slaps the floor, lays on his back, rolls and then up for a turn and several side to side hops--as if he is trying to rid himself of something. The song ends and Jones speaks again, "I think we're alone now, there doesn't seem to be anybody around. He repeats this first phrase and then reminisces about their home in Valley Cottage, dressing rooms around the world and other intimate details of his life with Zane. Jones starts to dress now, adding a black, frumpy felt hat, a scarf, an overcoat and glasses. As he repeats "I think we are alone now," he starts to beat his chest loudly, once, twice, "I think," beat, beat, "Do you remember," beat, beat, in a slow rhythm that lingers until Jones softens his hand, lowers it and concludes staring straight out. Jones, in glasses, looks clearly at his new reality, coat and scarf serve as protection against the climate of aloneness. The "we" in his final "I think we are alone now" is Jones and his own heart as death has stopped Zane's forever.

The entire film realizes Jones' nightmare. Untitled comments on the relativity of "to be hurt badly," from Zane's nightmare. The film suggests that symbolically Jones

is the wounded workman in Zane's dream. Jones reveals in his dancing someone shaken to his emotional foundation, fighting to maintain control and barely succeeding. The medium of film freezes Untitled's statement in time. But its form again utilizes the dual temporal modes. Zane narrates a past event, characteristically non-linear for a dream, although when Jones speaks he questions Zane in the present. Talking to Zane's spirit, or thinking aloud to himself, he reveals the inner anguish of the present moment by referring to past statements and people, to what has been lost. His warm tone when mentioning Willie (Smith) and his pause mentioning Keith (Haring) underline this point, as these two also have succumbed to AIDS. The two selves of artist and performer here emphasize vulnerability. Jones, the artist, positions himself at the outset in a place of strength and anger, though fragile and tense. Then after the remembering, the forced digestion of Zane's philosophical perspective and the brief vision of his beloved, healthy, sparing partner Zane, he reveals a deteriorating ability to hold back the pain. Finally, he metaphorically bundles up against the loneliness ahead, not stoic or triumphant but at least minimally protected by acceptance of the irrefutable fact of death. As the viewer witnesses the performer Jones transform himself beyond denial and anger, we share in the ultimate life affirming experience of going through change. Watching Jones

provides a model for personal transformation.

As Jones advances to the vision of Zane, he again uses the strategy of physical exposure, like a fighter throwing off his robe to go back into the ring, but his lover/adversary dissolves, cannot be conjured up for long. This undressing invites the audience to look and see more, but serves as a challenge, "Look closer, but look and listen well."

Again verbal repetition of phrases distances the intimacy of the moment, rendering this list of friends less poignant, more methodical. Here also is a rare instance of Jones' use of the photo montage. And Zane's description of the beautiful workman, matter of factly refers to their homosexuality, just as a heterosexual man might casually refer to the attractiveness of a woman while telling a story.

The closeup camera shots overemphasize an important point concerning the performance space and its relation to autobiography in dance performance. This form needs intimacy. Film definitely provides that as did the close quarters of the McKenna Theatre in San Francisco where Jones performed Perfect Courage in the fall of 1990. Jones' de-emphasis of the autobiographical aspect of his work after achieving larger performing spaces reinforces this fact. Too large a space swallows up the gesture, and the facial

nuances that color the autobiographical information. Jones uses another distancing factor in this film. He flashes parts of Zane's story across the film in a digital display; the technological rendering of a deeply human story.

The live performance of Bill T. Jones in Perfect Courage (all references based on the Cultural Odyssey video of Perfect Courage), a collaboration with his sister Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor, even more explicitly articulates the formal definitions of autobiography in dance performance. The full evening work consists of eight sections beginning with the Dance of the Benches which finds Bill T. Jones, Rhodessa Jones, and Idris Ackamoor dressed in stylish white outfits and seated in slightly aggressive poses on plane white benches. The three collaborators/performers moved with their benches held firmly to their behinds into a variety of stage designs. Symbolic of the sticky situations we sometimes find ourselves in, this amusing rearrangement of the stage's flesh and wood architecture serves to remind us that often those situations, like the benches, involve the support systems in our lives--friends, family, lovers. Among several other sections, Perfect Courage includes one extended performed story, about some memory of crisis, from each of the performer's lives. All deserve extended discussion, but the focus here is on Bill T. Jones' Fish Story. Not surprisingly

his story concerns a death, although not Arnie Zane's, rather his six-year-old niece who fell from a third story window in San Francisco, while Jones and Zane were visiting. The Fish Story, originally performed around 1980 (Jones, B. T. 1992), responds to the death of its subject, Jones' niece. Inserting it again into Perfect Courage, Bill T. Jones now processes the pain and mystery of death from a profound place of experience.

Still seated he begins with a side to side wiggle pulsing up his torso that soon brings him to his feet. With this life sustaining pulse established, he opens his monologue:

One, the only constant is change I said to my oldest brother the other day. One, two, one, seventeen years ago, last week or the last hour. Three, right this very moment, four, I move constantly. Five, you watch, listen, understand, dismiss, reconsider.

Thus immediately he establishes that the time frame for this piece will be a shifting one. Secondly, he defines the performance situation, he moving, we watching and taking in information. Here the performing voice predominates and in a softer mode than in Untitled. The artist self, who integrates many of Jones' ongoing themes of the outsider's relationship to society, superimposes on the performer self. Jones improvises his delivery of the story, subtly changing the text to relate to the nightly change in audience and the immediacy of the moment. He integrates "I hear a baby

crying" immediately after one does in the audience. Yet he deftly touches on all his key issues while progressing through the story.

In short, he and Arnie are staying with Rhodessa and her twelve-year-old daughter when they hear the news. Then he details the comic/tragic throwing of the little girl's ashes into the San Francisco Bay, with all the various faith representatives present: fundamentalist, Zen Buddhist, and Hari Krisna represented by he and Arnie. This confused ritual of a funeral signifies the questioning of faith that has occurred in Jones' family and that coalesces in an artistic act of faith in Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land. Fish Story culminates with Jones observing a golden skinned, well developed man striding down the beach who in one smooth reach and toss throws a partially disemboweled barracuda back into the sea. This throwing of the remnants of death into the waves and wind that continually rush back on shore provides a metaphor for the mingling of life and death, and the courage it takes to face that proximity without flinching.

Throughout Jones maintains an up tempo shifting of weight, side to side, peppered with tightly formed turns. His body undulates constantly simulating the movements of a fish in distress, which only occasionally he contrasts with soft edged pauses, or a slowly gesturing arm. The ongoing

movement here represents Jones' second approach to balancing language and movement.

Jones brilliantly leads the audience to fill in the blanks of his narrative. He first describes Zane as a white, Jewish homosexual. Then he says, "Bill T., his friend, black, working class, homo _____, one, (laughter) sexual, two, you watch." A warm audience, they accept him for what he is, yet his deft pause allows everyone to recall and realize acceptance wasn't always and isn't everywhere so. Later he recounts that his mother has lit a candle at the cathedral. "I think it is for me, (laughter), I think she thinks that I could die, I think she is right, we could all _____." Here he addresses his own mortality, and just as the six-year-old's death brought the fragility of life home to his family, he now reminds the audience of their own potential death, and in pointing to the solitary nature of death he encourages conscious living in community. Finally he alludes to his own life circumstances for the past several years when he quotes the Buddhist monk, "Death is about letting go." He repeats this several times while only gently swinging a weighted arm, as if arrested in his thought process.

Jones uses repetition throughout for key phrases: the only constant is change; you watch; I move constantly. His movement vocabulary essentially repeats several motifs over

and over. In Fish Story he again adds abstract numbers, also repeated, that serve as impersonal pegs upon which the personal narrative hangs. Numbers recur again in Idris Ackamoor's story where Bill T. and Rhodessa punctuate the narrative by counting backwards from one hundred.

Autobiography in dance performance as seen in Untitled and Perfect Courage shares the immediacy of performance with Spalding Gray's work in the theatre. The indeterminacy of performance contradicts the refined, perfect perspective of traditional autobiography. But while Gray essentially sits and talks, Jones dances and talks. The dancing highlights an important distancing factor, because Jones' clean, athletic, and abstract dancing style differentiates him from the ordinary audience member. He is in control therefore, of our attention, as he says, "You watch." Concerning the need for distance Jones says, "There is always an attempt to distance, to use material that was felt at the gut level, but somehow distanced, so that it wouldn't be an indulgence" (Smith, Amanda, 52). Thus the artist also senses the boundary of self-indulgence, often more readily articulated by critics. How successfully an artist achieves this distance defines the level of intimacy possible. Rhodessa Jones feels critics who label something self-indulgent perhaps aren't fully aware of a culture; she says:

So what is self-indulgence? Does that mean you are getting nervous, you're tired of listening to it.

You've come to an art performance . . . For me as a creative artist there aren't a whole lot of rules" (Jones, R.).

Therefore the rules that define the boundary ultimately lie in the artist hands, although the critic and observer are free to judge that choice with their reaction to the work. Intimacy implies vulnerability; in performance that means both the performer and the audience. Audience vulnerability stems from their own reflection on their selfhood, a potentially troubling process. When emotionally vulnerable we reconsider our values, our courage, our strengths, and our pain, in short we sense our humanness. Bill T. Jones goes through all of this in his autobiographical dance performances, while achieving through the conventions discussed, enough separation to communicate the human condition and still allow the audience the opportunity to integrate emotion with analysis of not only the performance, but their own lives.

Jones therefore largely achieves the critical exegesis called for by Herbert Blau, because he succeeds at framing and distancing the autobiographical material that he presents in performance. As a living embodiment of so many marginalized groups in society, he speaks from an excellent vantage point for creating critical art of consequence. Jones does not slip into a solipsistic reverie, rather he constantly makes connections between the audience and the

performer, between past and present, between his values and the audience's values.

Deborah Jowitt closes her review of Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land in the Village Voice with "You liked Bill T. Jones the man? Now see BILL T. JONES the world." (References based on the video performance of Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and the Dance in America documentary of the same work.) How does this work of worldly dimension utilize and expand the genre of autobiography in dance performance as defined in this thesis? This massive three hour spectacle, to a score by the Julius Hemphill Sextet, presents a succession of stories that put the question of faith in tension with circumstances of alienation. After first portraying Uncle Tom's story in dance and narration, it gets rewound in motion and ends a second time with him standing up for his rights and being struck down for it, a true experience for too many young black males in America. Next "Eliza on the Ice" contemporizes her crisis with a fragmented and multiracial succession of Elizas who question their faith. The third section which includes "A Prayer" and "Faith," bringing Jones' mother Estella and a different local preacher into each performance, returns to an intimate scale and most concerns this discussion. Finally "The Promised Land" swells

again adding up to forty local performers who all ultimately dance in the nude, challenging their personal inhibitions and a community's willingness to embrace this compelling work. Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land brings art into tension with morality and religious faith on an individual and societal level. Laurie Carlos pointed to this same tension in discussing how black churches don't want to risk sponsoring her brand of theatre, which she feels speaks directly to the black experience. Jones spoke of this tension in the Dance in America documentary: "we were taught that Christ turned the other cheek and also that we should never let someone put a foot on you, especially a white person." But according to Jennifer Dunning, the scope of this work necessitated an artist familiar to living with contradictions. "It could only have come out of that long collaboration, which took differences of class, race and sexuality and turned them into art" (Dunning 1990).

Jones inserts two solos into this work for himself. First he performs his unique brand of effusive torso rippling and quick, agile weight shifts, that ever catlike never relax in intensity, while the preacher recites the story of Job. The theme of personal loss pervades Jones' dancing which even the uninitiated viewer can glean from seeing the date of death recorded in Arnie Zane's program biography (from a performance in January, 1991, in Berkeley,

CA). Again Jones performs shirtless which resonates as the preacher recites "naked from the womb, naked will I return." Following this Jones goes to sit down and ask the preacher a series of tough questions. "Is war evil? Is adultery evil? Is homosexuality evil?" While not a movement section beyond Jones' somewhat aggressive leans toward the preacher, this section highlights autobiography in the present as each new preacher either does or doesn't rise to the occasion of impressing a unorthodox captive audience. Regarding their spontaneous answers, Jones remarked:

Some would hem and haw and not commit themselves. Some of them had not digested their material. In other words they were being brought in as a moral authority into this arena and they were not really equipped. Then there were those persons who were just blazing and intelligent, they had lived with these questions every hour of the day . . . had great humility and style, fierce and very gentle (Jones, B. T. 1992).

With this interview performance technique, Jones presents an opportunity for these preachers to challenge his beliefs and wrestle in the moment over critical questions; in short, he forces a commitment to be made and stated in front of an audience as to what one believes.

At the Berkeley performance, Estella Jones' testified and sang the spiritual "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." (Her performance apparently alternates with the Job section). Simultaneously Jones danced similarly to his Job solo although here fully clothed. Again this autobiography

of the moment pits his mother's prayers for her son, the audience, the world (at that performance she prayed for the soldiers in the Iraqi war) against Jones' equally present dancing body. Guy Martin, writing in Esquire, captures the eloquence of this combination:

Jones himself dances as his gravelly voiced mother, Estella Jones, sings a gospel prayer a capella. It takes a moment, watching this elegant thing happen, to realize that this is a black man dancing to his mother's song, that this is the family that has survived (Martin, Guy).

Jones has come full circle with his mother:

The first theatrical experience I ever had was watching my mother pray on Christmas morning, . . . where she would start quietly and, through repetition, end up totally in a sweat, . . . screaming at the top of her lungs. It was a cathartic experience (Boyce et al., 1988, 89).

In two explicit instances Jones draws on his performers' life stories to enhance his larger statement. The first finds Heidi Latsky reciting her own text, what Jowitt calls "one of the evening's most touching images," about her crisis of faith as a Jewish woman. But her text juxtaposes to the Sojourner Truth poem, "Ain't I a Woman," which provides the primary accompaniment to the "Eliza" section and therefore serves the larger story rather than focusing on her as an individual. Similarly during the "Last Supper" scene, actor R. Justice Allen draws on his own experience with drugs, murder, and fifteen years in prison to inform his rap song "Beat Box." In a smaller context he

would be the focus but in this scene of multiple dancers playing a rhythmic and gymnastic version of musical chairs around the huge table his punctuated vocals blend into a larger fabric of activity. These two examples recall Joe Goode's thoughts that the objectified self now acts as a window to more universal concerns.

The final section of the evening, "The Promised Land," brings on the additional forty performers and necessarily becomes more messy and group orientated. With this many dancers broad strokes of choreography stand out, such as groups racing in screaming from opposite sides of the stage and embracing, mashing, clinging to one another in a compressed center. Starting with Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream Speech" recited backwards, the stage transforms from a scene of happy, clapping onlookers to a central, spirited solo dance competition to the tense introduction of the first nude figure, Arthur Aviles. Bill T. Jones questions the status of society's estranged populations in this section. In the spring 1990 premiere of The Promised Land in Minneapolis, the nudity Jones used to signify society's outcasts caused a sensation, timed as it was in the middle of the conservative debate to reauthorize the NEA. Jones asks, "Who are naked people? Is it a black woman, a gay man, someone who knows he has AIDS, an old person, a fat person? Whom I choose to show naked first sets up the

pariah syndrome" (LeFevre, 13). Jones noted that the nudity isn't supposed to be a simplistic call to innocence but something again based in the present experience that forces a reaction:

I wanted people to have a metaphorical and actual experience of watching their perceptions change. Let's assume they fixate on the naked person as a person who is the other. Suddenly everybody is the other. What was that transformation like. . . . Where are they now in thinking about the other? It is a fantasy that marginal people like myself have. What if my lifestyle were the norm? (Jones, B. T. 1992).

Beyond this challenge to the world, Jones interprets this large group of naked people as a metaphor of commonality. And "the body is a metaphor, a beautiful, powerful one and its a frightening one because the body is where death is" (Jones, B. T. 1992). The movement for the entire cast naked onstage includes wild running, sitting on the floor and slapping the stage, and an exchanging of places like a giant deck of cards getting shuffled. Finally it settles down as the nudity over time becomes less shocking. With a soft glow of stage light the cast begins a hymnlike chant and invites acceptance from the audience. Jones reminds them that they also are naked on certain levels. He encourages reaching out in nakedness rather than pulling back behind clothes and bolted doors. "If the stage is a place for transformation and for making metaphors speak, well I'm presenting a huge one. . . . It's a huge gamble and an act of faith for me"

(Jones, B. T. 1992). After an extraordinary life of struggle, achievement, loss and renewal, Bill T. Jones wants to affirm life:

All our values are going down the drain. Nothing matters. But I think I'm finding my faith. Something about making a choice. Do I live or do I die? Well I'm going to live and it's going to be a meaningful, affirmative experience (Dunning 1990).

In conclusion this analysis of the career of Bill T. Jones and his use of autobiography in dance performance points to the difficulty in establishing any clear notion of what is the self. Bill T. Jones' work extends the self out into an imagined future time as does Johanna Boyce end to Ties That Bind - Part Two. He presents the self as locus for the identity of larger groups, whether they be family or societal. He utilizes the self as a pivotal point for epic statements as in Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land. With the essential self even more elusive after this analysis of the modes of autobiography in dance performance, the self has become a myth deconstructed through objectification in performance. Even though language often overpowers the movement in the specific instance, the dancing body at least offers a distinct definition of individuality. And yet even that becomes blurred in scenes such as what concludes Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land.

The choreographers/dancers investigated here

intentionally incorporate their lives into their dance performance. But if one accepts performance as a transformative act, it therefore creates an independent authentic performance self. This reality then potentially conflicts with the historical reality that these artists are open to altering for the sake of a compelling performance. The distinction between an historical self and a performance self contradicts the assumption that life and art are the same. It recalls Carol Martin's critique of Johanna Boyce's refusal to accept the duplicitious nature of performance. The words blur and overlap, chosen in this thesis to refer to the mixed zones of life and art, accurately represent the nature of this distinction. While these different realities are theoretically distinct, in practice this distinction blurs and overlaps in multiple ways as evidenced by this thesis.

When autobiography in dance performance takes on political ramifications as in the work of Boyce, Goode and Jones, the many layered contexts from which the artist generates his or her work becomes critical. Are these contexts clearly defined or diffuse, as in the case with the black dance aesthetic? Whether Jones' work can be considered within that aesthetic proves difficult to answer because the aesthetic itself resists definition. Also, how do these contexts shift over time and effect the nature of the

artists relationship to them? Lucas Hoving's age, and reconsideration of what degree of honesty about his sexuality to incorporate in performance exemplifies the fluid nature of the contextualized self. Finally, for members of marginalized populations drawn to autobiography in dance performance as a validating strategy through the mode of performance, how does this change when those individuals reach the kind of exposure and acceptance in the mainstream as has occurred for Bill T. Jones? Will they still be compelled to represent those minority populations or, rather, be compelled to absolve themselves of their differences and attempt more universal statements? The example of Bill T. Jones supports this premise.

The key categories of other that define the self explored in the evidence for this thesis are limited to the nuclear family and life partners. Exceptions do exist, though, most specifically the peers and mentors that comprise a bulk of the narrative for Growing Up In Public, and the lists of friends and collaborators listed in Untitled. While cognizant of other categories, so far, these artists working in autobiography in dance performance haven't chosen to make them primary in their work, representing a limitation of this form's potential for exegesis of the self in performance. Bill T. Jones and Joe Goode's embrace of the interview device with representatives

from new categories signals a potential new direction for autobiography in dance performance to integrate more fully those categories of other left minimally discussed up to now. Any new strategy such as this one still must grapple with the problem of how to balance movement with language for conveyance of meaning.

If in 1993 autobiography in dance performance has percolated down to a state of inoffensive prevalence throughout the country rather than located in a handful of avant-garde venues, then where does this leave the issue of what is personal self-indulgence on stage? Bill T. Jones consciously uses the self as a vehicle for his artistic statements and possesses the choreographic craft to do this successfully. The many choreographers today utilizing autobiographical material may or may not share Jones' choreographic gifts or discretion. But the work investigated here and the theoretical framework outlined in this thesis both clarify and widen the arena for evaluation of new work in autobiography in dance performance. Self-indulgence will remain an ongoing topic for investigation as long as artists focus on the self in performance. It serves as an interesting mirror for a society caught between an historical self-image based in the Puritan work ethic, and equally based in consumer gratification. Is personal exposure of an artist's

commodities--his ideas, feelings, experiences and hopes-- more or less self-indulgent? Art hopefully communicates and in so doing changes us. Bill T. Jones constantly pursues this goal, yet he realizes it is a step by step process. Rhodessa Jones recalled that Bill once said in an interview, "If we can't share love, let's at least share information" (Jones, R.).

NOTES

¹ See Tobi Tobias, "Pressing Forward," New York, 22 (3 April, 1989): 82.

² See Dance In America, Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land, produced and directed by Mischa Scorer. 1 hour. Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane and Co., 1991, videocassette.

³ In Cynthia J. Novack, "Looking at Movement as Culture: Contact Improvisation to Disco," The Drama Review Vol. 3 No. (Winter 1988): 114., the author notes that by the early eighties "contact improvisation was treated by many as simply another dance technique.

⁴ In our interview in November, 1990, Rhodessa Jones reiterated that storytelling was a way of life in the black culture, and she recalled that in the Jones clan their grandmother reigned supreme.

⁵ Jones admits to having mellowed in regard to confronting the audience. "Now I do it only to let them know there is no suspension of disbelief here: "Oh he's talking to us, so we can't sit back passively (Jones, B. T. 1992).

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