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Mirrors and dance culture : modes response to the dancer's self image

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**Mirrors and Dance Culture: Modes of
Response to the Dancer's Self Image**

A Thesis

Presented to

**The Faculty of the Department of Theatre Arts
San Jose State University**

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement of the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Kathleen White

August 1999

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Abstract

Mirrors and Dance Culture: Modes of Response To

The Dancer's Self Image

By Kathleen White

The purpose of this thesis is to propose a rethinking of the present-day culture's presuppositions--mainly; that the older dancer does not still has value. These current assumptions do not make the older dancer more "acquiescent". Therefore, we ask the question, What is too old for a dancer? If the current dance culture can appreciate the older dancer's interpretive and expressive value, which is evident in the mature dancer today, then the "naturalization" of the older dancer, albeit a conscious one, will open up a dialog that will expand and redefine "value" and provide a new perspective on the mature dancer's contribution.

Acknowledgments

Age and Dance culture began when *I* too was approaching that certain age and the conflicts associated with dance and age. This thesis was accomplished with the help of friends. First, all of the dance faculty: Janet Van Swoll, Janie Scott, Annette Macdonald, Mina Garman, Fred Mathews and Gary Masters. Their support for five years was never ending. To my Graduate Coordinator, Dr. Karl Toepfer, whose advice and assistance was always helpful. And especially to Sally, my editor, I could not have done it without you. To a special friend, Jeff Nerney, my mentor who cleared the path for this process which led to my scholastic achievements.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The self-image of the dancer is strongly defined by the historically all-pervasive and exacting image of youth and physical beauty. Challenges to these culturally determined images (e.g. western dance philosophy) are extremely different for any dancer to acknowledge, let alone face. The dancer's response to changes in self-image confront the dancer's dilemma: age. To outline the discourse on the "final years" of a dancer, it is necessary to consider dance culture assumptions covertly held and at times, overtly spoken—that the older dancer does not still have a message. But what does "final years" mean? What is hidden within the phrase? The literature dealing with the problems associated with age and dance is not extensive. Walter Sorrel and Lincoln Kirstein among others, have written books of dance, and although giving a thoughtful and sensitive perspective on dance, have also implied, in a definitive way, that dancers must conciliate the age process. This burdened phrase might mean: by teaching or coaching, the dancer accepts a "mourning like" stage which in itself can affirm one's self, thereby delaying the inevitable. In many other articles and treatises the subject of aging has simply not been addressed. As Gay Morris states in the book, Moving Words,

Although dance research has long been devoted to more than ballet, recent studies in movement ranging from parades and pageants to wedding rituals and strip shows suggest that dance scholars are pushing far beyond traditional western definitions

of theatre dance. Wherever the borders of dance are drawn, they must be open and flexible rather than rigid and closed in order to cope the with “shifting ground” of a postmodern world. (Morris, 1996, p. 2)

If the age issue is examined, it is a “mourning” service, like the symposium at the University of Lausanne,

Death-the word hung there for three days, in that, by “transitions” is also meant the transition from life to death. It’s as if dancers with their finely-tuned, far too quickly aging bodies anticipate death in their last exit from the stage—as a final performance. (Weber, 1995, p. 48)

The dancer’s accomplishment is parallel with many other vocations in terms of the amount of dedication, hard work, determination, sacrifice and sheer persistence. It is also fulfilling a dream vision, of expressing oneself through movement and music. As time passes, it becomes necessary to transcend and defy the culture that says unkindly, stay forever young.

The most important question in the dancer’s life is reflected on the stage. Who am I? What is my message? We look at our bodies as the most public, private mirror of the self, and age defines our body/image. The dancer is a cognizant object to herself and others. Self-perception by the dancer is judgmental, strong, and powerful. Essentially, the concept of one’s own body is a matter of body image with degrees of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Schilder, in The Image and Appearance of the Human Body, wrote, “The image of the human body means the picture of our own body which we form in our

minds, that is to say, the way the body appears to ourselves". (Schilder, 1935, p. 126)

Warren Gorman in discussing body image, says it,
...has been formed by the interaction of the perceptual pool with the experiential pool. The perceptual pool consists of our present and past sensory experiences, and the experiential pool consists of the experiences, affects and memories. The body image modified by the new precepts and the new experience. (Gorman, 1969, p.224)

The body-image concept can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and there are many diverse schools of contemporary thought, such as those promulgated by the works of William James, C.H. Cooley, and G.H. Mead.

James developed the concept of the Empirical Self, or me, which is defined as "the sum total of all a person can call his or her own". (James, 1890, p. 126) In appreciation of self, we may look at the self in its widest sense. James divided these themes into its constituents; (1) the feelings and the emotions they arouse (2) self-feeling and the actions to which they influence (3) self-seeking and self-preservation. These constituents of the self may further divide into three categories: material-self, social-self and spiritual-self.

He concluded,

The body is the most innermost, the material-self in each of us; and certain parts of the body seem more intimately us than the rest. The individualized self, which I believe to be the only thing properly called self, is a part of the content of the world experienced. The world experienced otherwise called the 'field of consciousness' comes at all

times with our body as its center, center of vision, center of action, center of interest. Where the body is, is 'here'; when the body acts is 'now'; what the body touches is 'this'; all other things are 'there' and 'then' and 'that'. These words of emphasized position imply a systematization of things with reference to a focus action and interest which lies in the body, and the systematization is not so instinctive that no developed or active experience exists for us all expect in the ordered form. (James, 1890, p.128)

The social-self consists of those qualities of self recognized by others.

James adds,

We are not only gregarious animals, liking to be in sight of our fellows, but we have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and favorably, by our kind. Properly speaking, a man has many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him on their mind. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups. A man's fame, good or bad, and his honor or dishonor, are names for his social selves. (James, 1890, p.129)

The spiritual-self is defined as an 'inner self' consisting of an individual's thoughts, dispositions and moral judgments.

James notes,

The spiritual-self may be considered in various ways. We may divide it into faculties by isolating them one from another. This is an abstract way of dealing with consciousness, in which, as it actually presents itself, a plurality of such faculties are always to be simultaneously found; or may insist on a concrete view, and then the spiritual-self in us will be either the entire 'segment' of the personal

consciousness, or the present 'segment' or 'section' of that stream accordingly as we take a broader or narrow view--but whether we take it abstractly or concretely, our considering the spiritual at all is an outwardlooking point of view, and of our having become able to think of it subjectively as such to think of ourselves as thinkers. (James, 1890, p.130)

In comparison to James, Cooley and Mead conclude that the symbolic interactions of an individual's social interactions are important in the self definitions. To them, self is an extensive 'social construction' brought about through language exchanges with others. Cooley's position examines the "looking-glass self": reflections on our appearance, motives, deeds, and character. In Cooley's words, 'a self-idea' consists of three components:

- the imagination of our appearance to the other person;
- the imagination of the person's judgment of the appearance;
- and some sort of resulting self-feeling, such as pride or shame.

This internalization of the others' opinions about self is a crucial detail in Cooley's findings.

Mead added further to the themes of Cooley by suggesting the use language has in social interaction. She states,

We appear as selves in our conduct in so far as we ourselves take the attitude that others take toward us. We take the role of what may be called the 'generalized' other. And in doing this we appear as social object, as selves. Further, within the concept of the generalized other, the person comes to adopt a more generalized group of significant perspectives on the self. (Cleveland, 1968, p.70)

In Cooley and Mead, we can understand the discipline of contemporary thoughts in terms of the self. If the body-image “looking-glass self” referred to is a useful frame of reference for many contemporary scholars, then body image can safely be defined as an idea based on reports of consciousness, unconscious awareness and one’s own body perceptions: past and present. Many scholars have observed that the visual sphere is predominant in the formation of the body image, but all the other senses play a role as well. In the formation of the body image, the hearing sense was noted as a factor along with taste and smell; all of which can have an emotional accompaniment. The senses that receive signals from outside the body add impetus from its interior, and culminate in the total body image. Goffman states that,

...the body image is the body schema and is the inner picture or model which one forms in one’s mind of one’s body...thought out in the course of life, and which one carries (about) unwittingly. It is ‘a kind of mental diagram.’ For Scott the term body schema essentially refers to the unity of outer and inner experience. It is more or less a conscious integration from its surface (outward) to the limits of the cosmos.

(Goffman, 1973, p. 109)

Examination by dancers of their perceptions of self-awareness in the daily class and when the dancer engages in self-reflection in the mirror, is an unspoken dialogue. Repetitive self-reflection of a looking-glass self becomes a reality for the dancer. This means that the physical body (physiognomy) is idealized in the inner monologue. Is the looking-glass self an illusion? Constant reevaluation provides the telemetric assessment of the dancer’s professional (body) self. The cognitive self, then, is always the projected

imagined reactions of others. This career-long development of a creative special-self culminates in an intensive and total identification.

In every phase of life, and at every stage of life, one establishes a sense of identity. The re-establishment of that sense of self to a dancer becomes especially crucial when she goes through the elements of aging, the dancer's dilemma. To help during this crucial period, the performing arts unions in New York, founded Career Transitions for Dancers (CTFD) in 1998. It has assisted many people in their career transitions, while at the same time allowing them to maintain their sense of identity in a new life role. Kathleen Haigney, whose career spanned twenty years, said,

I was in deep mourning over the loss of the career that defined my identity; the vehicle that expressed my specialness, my dancing. This mourning is a natural and necessary step in the process of expanding my view of self which becomes the seed for a new career. (Haigney, 1995, p. 4)

Stanley E. Greben M.D., a part of the team of Toronto Dancer Transition, a group also associated with career transitions issues, concurs,

It's painful to give up a dance career. Career transitions occur at various times for most of us during a lifetime, but the dancer faces a career change at an earlier age, sometimes with minimal academic background, perhaps with an injury, and with little or no cash set aside to make the transition easily. One of the inner battles to be faced by a dancer is the recovery from the loss of costumes, make-up, and lights that is no longer there to create the specialness of the dancer. Offstage, the performer is not quite sure that he/she can compete on any level with others. (Greben, 1985, p.78)

The mature artist's sense of self in the world of dance can be different from when she or he was younger. Can he or she be displaced and discarded for the modern young virtuoso? Is the 'virtuosity' of today defined and judged only by agility and body image? How does the modern virtuosity preferred by today's culture affect the perceptions of dance and dancers? What about the expressive value of older dancers? When is a dancer "old" or "too old?" When did it change? In the eighties, we saw twelve pirouettes, and asked for more. The agile young body can do the twelve pirouettes expected. The younger body can do all the acrobatics. Does this make dance somehow better?

For example, in the past--in the 1960s, Margot Fonteyn was never considered a 'virtuoso', yet she danced to the age of fifty-one. She was considered a dramatist and dancer, the dance culture accepted her. Now, in the 1990s, we can begin to understand these perceptions of self in which the looking-glass self and dance culture, especially, have affected the artist. Experience constitutes a great part of one's full awareness. The experiences and intensity of life help to heighten the artistic capacities and aesthetics.

For more examples, we can look at the "mourning code" of the mature dancer's self-image through interviews with both women and men. By conducting interviews with mature dancers, we can understand how the profiles of the self and dance culture perceptions affect the aging artist. (See Appendix) The re-establishment of that sense of self to a dancer becomes especially crucial when she goes through the elements of aging: the dancer's dominant dilemma. And we can see how it comes about that dance culture appears to perceive older bodies as expressive of understanding qualities and of diminished value.

Chapter 2

Historical Evidence

In order to gain a perspective, it is necessary to give the historical evidence as well as to address the notable exceptions. David Vaughan (archivist for the Merce Cunningham Foundation) points out humorously,

Anyone who has attempted to work in the field of dance scholarship knows how exasperatingly difficult it is to research the history even of contemporary dance companies, let alone those of the past. How often, for example, do we find programs, posters, and flyers for dancer performances which give only the day of the month, not the year, when they took place? Dancers themselves, notoriously have short memories for such things; they may remember choreography in detail after many years; but when asked when a certain performance took place, have only the vaguest recollection. One often finds oneself in the position of knowing more about certain aspects of a dancer's career than the dancer himself. The reason is obvious: the very nature of dancing makes its practitioners concerned with the present and the future rather than the past, the opposite of the historian's preoccupation. (Vaughan, 1997, p. 15)

Dancers who have challenged the aging process, never stopped dancing and never looked back. The following profiles include the exceptional dancers Merce Cunningham (1919-), Margot Fonteyn (1919-1991), and Martha Graham (1894-1991).

Merce Cunningham, an American modern dancer and choreographer, was the leader of the avant-garde movement in dance. In his native Centralia, Washington, he studied folk, tap, and ballroom dance. In the late 1930's, he studied ballet and he met John Cage, a composer, in Seattle, Washington. John Cage was the major force in the avant-garde movement in music. In 1938, the two artists formed what was to be a long and productive association. From 1939 to 1945, Cunningham was a soloist for Martha Graham's company. Rejecting the literary and psychological themes of Graham, he established his own company in 1953. James Klosty explains this evolution,

It began in the early 1950's when he undertook not to startle or scandalize, but to discover a way of working comfortably with his personal vision. But the ideas were not shared by his compatriots in the dance world. In fact, Cunningham's ideas were antithetical to the aesthetic of Martha Graham, in which company Cunningham had begun. (Klosty, 1975, p. 11)

He treated movement as its own subject matter. His choreography utilized "chance" technique, wherein selected movements were given a sequence by a random method. This technique, based on the kinetics of the body, was unconstrained by the rhythm or melody of the music. Among his many works in this style were Suite by Chance (1952) with the first electronic modern dance score, How to Pass. Kick. Fall and Run (1965), and Canfield (1969). Cunningham collaborated with Charles Atlas, filmmaker, on three original works for video: West Beth (1974), Blue Studio: Five Segments (1975), and Fractions I and II (1978). In the late 1990's, Cunningham was extremely busy working on two books about his work, countless films and videos, classes,

and workshop at the Merce Cunningham Studio. In 1993, at 74, he was inducted into the Hall of Fame at the National Museum of Dance in Saratoga Springs, New York. Cunningham's "chance" technique is a philosophical choice, a potent tool--the play of bodies in space and time.

When I choreograph a piece by tossing pennies--by chance, that is--I am finding my resource in the play, which is not the product of my will but which is an energy and a law which I too obey. But the feeling I have when I compose in this way, is that I am in touch with a natural resource far greater than my own personal inventiveness could ever be, much more universally human than the particular habits of my own practice, and organically rising out of common pools of motor impulses. (Klosty, 1975, p. 45)

It seems that Cunningham stayed in the moment, by tossing pennies randomly; that there would be no perceptions by which the free will was frozen; that time had only one dimension--the present. Cunningham was a private person. Interviews with him and articles about him contain information about his dancing, his ways of working and his theories, but little about his own affairs. Carolyn Brown wrote,

Few of the people I've known have grown so profoundly as Merce, despite his unchanging need for seclusion and his refusal to reveal any more about himself than that which he willingly offers. One must always meet him on his terms; anything else is an encroachment on territorial rights to privacy. (Mazo, 1977, p.34)

Carolyn Brown goes on to describe Merce's enormous presence, He communicates the energy, passion and a deadly serious personal discipline which can kindle into fire. We used to think that dancer's

performing years were numbered, but even they are being extended for longer and longer periods; Galina Ulanova was still dancing at fifty; Merce and Margot Fonteyn are still dancing at fifty-four; Martha Graham didn't stop until she was almost eighty. Though there are physical limitations on the performing life of a dancer, there is nothing to prevent him from continuing to choreograph. (Mazo, 1977, p.35)

As Joseph Mazo wrote about the Balanchine-Cunningham commissioning by Lincoln Kirstein in 1947,

The commissioning of a modern choreographer to make a work for a ballet troupe is exactly the sort of imaginative venture one might expect from Balanchine and Kirstein; they later found that the work was interesting and pretty, but it had little virtuosity interest and was not particularly interesting for ballet-trained dancers to do...without acrobatic virtuosity based on four centuries of logical exercise, a dancer cannot hope to attract the mass public. Kirstein is an acute observer of dance and art, and he was certainly correct in his assessment of Cunningham's ability to attract a mass public, but his patrician bias toward ballet led him to disregard the choreographer's dances in high virtuosity. (Mazo, 1977, p.45)

In 1985, Nancy Dalva Vreeland, tried to move into the mind of Cunningham with a question,

What is your role as a dancer now? Will you talk about performance as I have--well, almost all my life--then it's part of what I do, or a great deal of what I do. So isn't not doing it possible--it certainly is--since I perform less than I did years ago--but at the time

it's so much a part of me that I continue to do it, at the same time I can see perfectly well I don't have to. Somebody else can do it. (Vreeland, 1985, p. 86)

It would seem that Merce was dancing out his more mature years on stage. In 1976, when Cunningham was 57, a critic explained,

The Events are arranged to allow for not so much an evening of dances as the experience of dance. He opens and closes every performance with a solo. He looks like a winged serpent of mythology, tall and slender with an arched back, a grizzled head and an impervious demeanor. He created vivid images and performs with yoga-like tranquillity, relaxing into a pose without revealing tension. He reclines on the floor holding his back up off the ground yet appearing as normal as though we lying down; or sits on a chair with one foot six inches off the floor, musing. (Hodgson, 1976, p.76)

As Nancy Dalva Vreeland noted from an article in DanceInk.,

When Cunningham is in a dance, it tends, to be 'about' him; his presence evoked metaphor, story, and association. By instinct, by position, and by the circumstance of his age, he plays a role. He is neither a young dancer, pretending for sake of a role to be young, nor an old dancer for sake of the spotlight to be young. Cunningham has become his own subject no matter what he does, the mere fact of doing it is dramatic, his very presence a memento mori. Increasingly, as the years passed, Cunningham has cast himself as odd-man out. At least fifteen years ago, he began to set himself apart from the company,

often taking the role of on-stage director, genially scurrying about disposing his dancers. (Vreeland, 1995, p. 2)

Ms. Vreeland added about his 1981 performance, Gallopade,

Ostensibly a children's romp, he cannot keep up and the dancers play without him. The dance, one of several portrait-of-artist, can be read as the story of dancing life, telling, what it is like to dance and showing what Cunningham's dances will look like without him. There are five dancers in Quartet (1982) and Cunningham is clearly the one uncouncted. This work finds its parallels in many ballets in which a figure is representing the young. In the 1991 spring season at City Center, it was David Kulick (a young dancer) who separated him from Helen Barrow (another young dancer). When Cunningham stands between Kulick and Barrow and waves his arms in protest, your heart breaks for him. He is on-stage with four dancers, but he is 'alone'. Cunningham uses the age-young contrast to different effects in Pictures (1984) (Vreeland, 1995, p. 3)

Again Ms. Vreeland,

Cunningham enters the scene upstage, part way through the dance, but he lets us know that he stands as its figurative center; at the end, he stands alone on the stage with a company dancer Patricia Lent, holding her in his arms, so they suggest a Pieta. Will she die, the image asks, grow old and stop dancing (here the same thing as dying), leave him (like Carolyn Brown, Sandra Neels, Viola Farber, Valda Setterfield, Karolc Armitage, Meg Harper and all the others)? Will she leave him

and carry on? After you've seen Pictures a few times the dance builds toward the final moment.(Vreeland, 1995, p.5)

As a dancer/choreographer, Merce Cunningham had a different sense of the "mourning" self. He didn't celebrate his birthday. There was little information about his process on aging. However, Cunningham's intention was to examine the processes of the dance world, including the age process, by dancing solos expressing a stigma or source of estrangement and melancholy, (his "standing alone") into his art. Mazo wrote in 1977,

Whatever choice is offered, he abides by the rules he has made and tries it out. And whatever influences us--television, random numbers, our bodies-affects--are part of his dancing-making. When a juxtaposition of events, or a surprising shape, or an odd encounter of rhythms create a moment of humor, he enjoys it. (Mazo, 1977, p.34)

Margot Fonteyn was born in Surry, England in 1919 as Margaret Hookum. She was only four years old when she made her stage debut under the teaching of Mrs. Bosustow's Academy. During her years in Shanghai, (her father was transferred to China) she abandoned ballet for a little while. After her return to England, she resumed her dance training. 1934, she joined the Sadler's Wells Ballet (later to be the Royal Ballet) where she made her first solo appearance in The Haunted Ballroom. By 1940, she was prima ballerina of the company where she developed into one the of greatest ballerinas of the 20th century. Technical proficiency, emotional expressiveness, and musical sensitivity characterized her dancing. Her most famous role was Aurora in the

Sleeping Beauty , which she danced from 1939 to 1976. She became president of the Royal Academy of Dancing in 1954. In 1954, she married Roberto Arias, a Panamanian Ambassador who was later shot and remained paralyzed for the rest of his life. She was devoted to him. In 1956, she was made Dame of the British Empire.

In 1961, Royal ballet director Dame Ninette De Valois asked Fonteyn to meet, and possibly to dance with, Rudolf Nureyev. Nureyev, had recently defected from the Kirov Ballet Company in the USSR, where he was a principal dancer. Fonteyn responded, “Don’t you think I am too old?” She had often expressed her disgust of old ballerinas dancing with young men. Despite that initial ironic remark, she extended her performing years by dancing with Nureyev. Why did the dance culture, and the critics as well, accept her? She still had an esthetically appealing stage presence. And the stress of ‘virtuosity’ was just beginning in the dance culture. Fonteyn’s emotional expressiveness and the verisimilitude of her characterizations struck the audience. In the twentieth century, there were few partnerships that were so truly magical as that of Fonteyn and Nureyev. Both had similar training and style. Her lyrical and dramatic talents combined with his fire resulted in a perfect match which was received with great acclaim. Fonteyn was forty-three and Nureyev was twenty-four.

Keith Money pointed out,

As the years progressed, Fonteyn was able to pare away more and more from her roles to reveal more and more of the character’s essence, both

technically and dramatically. In the repertory of roles created for her by Fredrick Ashton, we can see a symbiotic relationship at work between choreographer and artist: in shaping her talent, he was also inspired by it. There was no excessive bravura (Fonteyn was never a virtuoso), but the life of the dance and the life of the role were a thrilling presence on stage: her Aurora blossomed from a shy, young princess to a radiant bride; her Odette grieved and her Odile enchanted, and we understood the truth of the character and of the dance. (Money, 1974, p. 66)

In 1971, the critical reviews still revealed her as an enigmatic presence on stage,

It is a gift as well as a defiance: she does not age, she is younger... To play Princess Aurora since 1939 and to give the impression of not yet having completely absorbed it; to maintain intact the calculated perfect arabesque or developpe; to blossom onstage as a flower, not cut but with its roots well planted...to present the simplicity of Sleeping Beauty with the velvety smile of a frightened faun; to be completely sure and yet completely naïve beside a partner who is at the height of his form and audacity--this is what the prima ballerina assoluta offered us at the Palais des Sports on Sunday evening. (Money, 1974, p.98)

Money continued,

Incredible Margot Fonteyn!, at 52 years of age remains the great prima ballerina assoluta of contemporary ballet; in a class of her own, with her technique and her intelligence. To dance the part of the Princess Aurora as she does at Palais des Sport is part prodigious, partly

miraculous. Making pirouettes, balancing in a way that defies all the laws of physics, she drops thirty years to become instantly the heroine of Tchaikovsky and Perrault as no one else could. Margot Fonteyn is not a declining star who still looks young, she is young with a inner fire that dazzles afresh each time she appears. Her Sleeping Beauty is a masterpiece of recreation. With her favorite partner Rudolf Nureyev, she is simply marvelous. If only she could be eternal. (Money, 1974, p. 99)

In a New York Times article, Fonteyn said,

Of course, I am aware that many people think I should have stopped dancing by now, and I agree with them; on the other hand, there are also many who seem glad that I continue, and they have no need to say so if they don't mean it. So I just go from day to day, not worrying too much and remembering one of my mother's sayings when I was very small, "What's for dinner today, mummy?" I would ask, and she would reply enigmatically, wait and see when the time comes. (O'Connell, 1972, p. D3)

In 1972, she echoed her mother's advice,

I only think of what I must do tomorrow--that I must dance Swan Lake, that I must dance Sleeping Beauty. I go from day to day.

I don't clutter up my mind, concentrating more and more on what has to be done, I feel I must work continually harder...I suspect I'll go on dancing until I can't any more. But, I assure you, I don't think about it. I only think about doing things well. (O'Connell, 1972, p. D3)

She was still dancing at 56. In 1979, the Royal Ballet granted Fonteyn the rare title of prima ballerina assoluta.

Martha Graham was an American dancer, choreographer, and teacher for fifty years. She retired as a dancer in 1970 when she was seventy-seven years old. Her personal voyage of discovery led her to a style of movement that eventually became a life for thousands of others. It was not a conscious decision. She said, "I feel that it is a burden and a fearful thing and I have to endure." (Graham, 1991, p. 122)

Martha Graham was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on May 11, 1894. Her father was a doctor. In 1908, the family moved to Santa Barbara, California. Graham saw a performance by Ruth St-Denis and knew that she wanted to be dancer. From Martha Graham's Blood Memory,

I went to the theatre, the Mason Opera House, with a dark dress and a hat that my father had bought for me. He pinned a corsage of violets to my gray dress and that night my fate was sealed. The curtain parted.

The audience was still. Miss Ruth was doing a program that included her famous solos: The Cobra, Radha, and Nautch. Also on the program was her famous dance Egypta. (Graham, 1991, p. 56)

From 1913-1920, she studied theatre and dance at the School of Expression. She graduated in 1916. After high school she joined the Denishawn School and company in Los Angeles, where she danced Xochtil, and met the composer Louis Horst. In 1923, she and Horst left the company. She gave her first concert at the 48th Street Theatre in New York City in 1926.

I danced solos to music of Schumann, Debussy, Ravel and others. Louis Horst was my accompanist. I did many dances, and everything I did was influenced by Denishawn. There was an audience. They came because I was such a curiosity—a woman who could do her own work. (Graham, 1991, p. 90)

Her pieces dealt with social problems. She made most of her own costumes and her sets were minimal. In 1936, she voiced her anger at Germany, and refused to go to the Olympic Games in Berlin. “How could I dance in Nazi Germany?” In 1938, she was invited to the White House by Mrs. Roosevelt for an event she had created, “American Document” about American Independence and Abraham Lincoln. “I danced for the Roosevelts in a little garden that was filled with flowers.” (Graham, 1991, p. 98)

In time Merce Cunningham and Erick Hawkins joined her company. In the 1940’s, she created several important pieces, such as Letter to the World and Appalachian Spring. Her ballets had motifs, including topics dealing with mythology, such as Cave of the Heart and Night Journey.

By 1944, she had stepped over the first half of her century and had a crisis, an incident related in Notebooks, involving the creation of Herodiade.

When the designer Isamu Noguchi made the set, he made a beautiful arrangement on one side which was a mirror. When you look into a mirror, what do you see? Do you see only what you want to see?

...if you are being introspective, you endeavor to arrive at the truth.

(Ross, 1973, p. 87)

Graham chose an aging woman; however, conscious or unconscious, she had begun to look at the process.

"The crisis was not so much...the fear of the artist in an empty studio when starting a dance as fear against which she had not prepared."
(Graham, 1991. p. 120)

In 1948, when she was fifty-four, she married Erick Hawkins. "Erick danced with my company, and gradually we had a very deep affair." After eight years of living together, she said, "Erick decided we should marry. I didn't want to but he did. During our ninth year it all fell apart. It shows-- never try to hold on to anything." (Graham, 1991, p. 125)

In 1968, at the age of seventy-four, she danced a role in Acrobats of God. At this time, however, she began to doubt her ability to dance as well as she wished. In Cortege of Eagles, it was painfully clear that Martha had to stop. In Notebooks, she said, "I wonder that I had stayed too long." (Ross, 1973, p. 177)

In the spring of 1969, Graham appeared on the stage at the City Center in New York for the last time. She had choreographed a piece for herself that she was able to perform. Unfortunately, the public was not interested in seeing only dances Graham could still perform.

In 1970, she was to be honored at the Academy Opera House in New York. While waiting backstage, Martha began to feel the electricity of the stage, she was drawing together all the strength and performing presence she had for what the audience thought was to be her last performance. In her speech, she said she wanted to appear with her company in the spring. The audience howled with laughter as she announced that she would retire in her own time and when the time came, no one would know about it. Graham's enjoyment at being in the spotlight again, was obvious. She refused to speak from notes because

she was so vain, enough so as not to wear glasses in order to read. Once offstage, a performer has a way of being forgotten. It was oblivion that Graham dreaded. Time would make its claim even on her, she would dance no longer despite her fierce desire to do so.(McDonagh, 1973, p. 86)

Later McDonagh would note,

Problems were mounting. Her performances were a question of chance. Unsurprisingly, she was physically unable to take the rigors of the full-evening of Clytemnestra, and therefore it was retired from active repertory. Her other appearances often produced a trained dancer's body that to a great degree had drained away. Balance became a teetering approximation and the swift rise from the floor, which formerly had been there, was missing. (McDonagh, 1973, p. 125)

He further added,

Graham's attitude was an expression of vain megalomania that had always been in evidence but that now was dominating more and more both her own feelings and her relations. She was interested in herself in the present. Because she was strong, she could keep everything under control as long as she was around. What happened afterward did not matter. When the great dances that she had created no longer served as vehicles for herself as a performer, she dismissed them and went on to create new work in which she could have a performing role. (McDonagh, 1973, p. 127)

Relinquishing a role did not come easily for her. She had no interest in the works of others as well. Her art was a personal one that was not easily shared. When she lost interest in one dance she created another.

The Brooklyn Academy of Music again invited the company to appear but with the stipulation that the repertory include precisely those works that Graham did not want revived, because there was no chance that she, Graham, could perform them. Sadly, the company decided to force the issue of retirement. The dancer and directors of the company upheld the decision: Graham's works without Graham. Graham did not set foot in the studio for four years, although, she maintained minimal contact with her dancers and administrators by telephone. Graham called the press and announced that she would allow her dances to represent her. And her contribution would be as artist director.

It took years for Graham to accept the fact that her performing years were over. A known admirer told her,

Martha you are a goddess. You must admit your mortality. Her response, "That it is difficult when you see yourself as a goddess and behave like one. In the end, I don't want it anymore, I don't want to. Or at least I won't." (McDonagh, 1973, p. 233)

Don McDonagh noted,

Her life has been one of headlong forward movement, not allowing her to relax. Even now, approaching seventy as well as reviving her masterpiece, full-length Clyemnestra, she obviously was not interested in the nostalgic backward look. She was still driving herself forward. (McDonagh, 1973, p. 234)

In 1970, she stopped dancing. Then she had to face some very hard years of depression and health problems before she began to create again.

A dancer, more than any human being, dies two deaths: first, the physical when the powerfully trained body will no longer respond as you would wish. I never choreographed what I could not do. I changed steps in Medea and other ballets to accommodate the change.

But I knew, and it haunted me. I only want to dance. Without dancing, I wished to die, the last time I danced Cortege of Eagles, I was seventy-six years old. I did not plan to stop dancing that night. (McDonagh, 1973, p. 245)

Martha Graham was volatile but from out of her own reactions, she tapped her inner-self and transformed that self into expressive dance images. Time was Martha's enemy, because she always thought of herself as a dancer not as a choreographer. She realized that she had a certain responsibility to maintain her legacy. She challenged the NEA in a statement made in 1983 when she was almost, ninety.

They had not been the real reasons for the decision against my company. To me, it appears that I have been discriminated against because of my age and that there may have been a bias at the Dance Panel of the NEA. (Vreeland, 1983, p.34)

Cunningham, Fonteyn and Graham were exceptions. Each of them had their own sense of "mourning" in terms of the aging processes. Cunningham stood "alone" in his dance; his birthdays not celebrated. Margot Fonteyn

rarely looked at the issue. Martha Graham's attitude prevented her letting go. However, all of them had the sense of "This is what I do, I must". (Graham, 1991, p. 120)

All of them maintained their expressive power and value for many years: I am a dancer. They all, however, took different strategies in terms of the aging process. We saw the aspects of the self; material, social, and spiritual, in this chapter. For example, we observed the aging Cunningham who, while performing, subliminally exposed the idea that his age alienated and estranged him from his dancers, thus reinforcing his perception that age made him stand "alone." His "mourning" was his response to his dance limitations; this aging social-self presented itself on stage in Cunningham's later pieces. It was made evident by his separating himself at a self-imposed distance from the company's dancers.

Fonteyn continued dancing as long as she displayed the skill and charismatic presence she possessed in her youth. She had a spiritual-self in which her dispositions and individual thoughts did not change with age. Her "inner-self" didn't ask the question of age. Age brought her a deeper understanding of the roles played, and the techniques she employed in dances portrayed no sense of being old or being older.

Graham tried to disguise her age or to pretend that she wasn't old by preserving her youth through dance. The material-self exhibits those qualities of self recognized by others. Graham's refusal to give up performing at the age of seventy shows that in her mind her character and her dancing still had expressive value. This strategy was successful for her until the company voted her out.

We continue to struggle with the question: When is a dancer “old” or “too old”? Did the choices made by these exceptional dancers help the dance culture to value the older dancer? We have witnessed these three honored on stage for their great longevity. If one can see more evidence the expressive value of the mature dancer, perhaps we can begin to understand and appreciate that expressive value of the mature dancer.

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Chapter 3

The Mature Dancer and Interpretation

Many in today's dance culture (critics, viewers, dancers, teachers) lack the interpretive skills necessary to make meaningful responses to what audiences see on stage. These skills of description, analysis, interpretation and judgment are difficult to teach. For the teacher, the description of the visible features of a dance and what gives value to that dance can be misinterpreted by the student and vice versa. For example, a simple gesture can have more expressive power than twelve pirouettes or virtuoso, acrobatic choreography. Currently dancers learn dance by doing, not by watching. The dancer doesn't reflect on what the movements mean. Instead, he or she is primarily involved in the doing of and conquest of virtuosity. Consequently the viewer loses sight of the function and meaning of the dance, and dwells instead on what it does for the performer. As a result, dance culture associates value with high virtuosity. And dance teachers safely assume that is what audiences want. In dance schools, we are learning virtuoso skills. As a consequence, movement skills are distanced from any emotional value or meaning. If dance teachers can't articulate meanings and 'values' in their choreography, then they are unable to teach them.

In the present age, acrobatic stunts determine the career potential for the young body. Audiences are assumed to want higher jumps, bigger leaps, and the younger bodies that can achieve them. The excitement of today's choreography is based on dancing that demands the young body. It has meaning, but for whom? There is little imagination in twelve pirouettes.

There is no doubt that youthfulness is linked to physical agility, to virtuosity. But is dance a question of technical proficiency or esoteric proficiency? Is there any virtuosity in the older body, or are we asking the wrong question?

With this emphasis on virtuosity, the discrimination against older bodies becomes especially evident in the ballet world. Ballet dancers not only start their stage careers earlier, but also stop earlier. Regrettably, ballet has become an exclusive art for the young at their peak physical strength. Assuming that technical proficiency is wanted and expected in today's dance culture, virtuosity it seems has a new meaning.

Every ballet lover over forty has witnessed this new direction in age-discrimination. Up until now choreographers/artistic leaders seem to have taken this change more or less for granted. What can one do against this insatiable hunger for active excitement as proof of our existence? Nobody will deny anymore that dance has grown into an artistic-variant sport, executed by such young body-minds that one in fact cannot expect them to realize what they are supposed to master artistically on stage. Neither schools nor companies show any evident intention to stop this tendency by which they emphasize how instead of what should be transformed into art. By lack of clear artistic goals, technical minutia becomes more important, even dominates, as last straws to snatch at. Only a few choreographers until now have shown an outspoken awareness of the possible effects of this technocracy in the long run. Amongst them are Hans van Manen, Mats Ek, William Forsythe and Jiri Kylian: the European Quartet. What they share is their understanding of history. They are even provoked by the hate/love relationship between Clio and Terpsichore. In the creative interaction between dancers and choreographers, which in fact is the core of

choreography, dancers have always found themselves in the position of tools, easily victimized as mechanisms of competition. Only the psychologically strongest can break through the impersonal barriers, the physical chains of the conditions of their chosen art form. They are always in the weaker position delivering their potential talents, both physical and mental via choreography and audiences who find themselves in a much more fortunate role, on the other side of the line. All involved parties function in the run for energy extremes, in the big race for more, higher, faster, better, younger. For what, for whom, to what end? How and where are these international standards of technocracy created and fostered? (Schaik, 1991, p. 18)

In the education of the young dancer, Lavender states, The concepts of interpretation and perception are often difficult to grasp. Interpretation is tied to the philosophically slippery term "meaning." There is little consensus among theorists, artists, critics, and educators on what "interpretation" actually is, or how to go about doing it. This uncertainty in the students causes some of them to grow nervously silent when faced with questions about "meaning" in dances. Once silenced, of course, students are more likely to accept at face value the interpretive arguments of others rather than to develop their own aesthetic perspectives. (Lavender, 1995, p. 25)

Interpretive pluralism is an outgrowth of artistic ambiguity. Some student critics are taken aback when confronted with ambiguity in art, believing it to be a sign of artistic failure. These students frequently argue that 'good' works of art are those which deliver one rather than several "messages", this notion, of course, has its roots in the belief that art is a mode of direct communication from the artist to audience, and

the interpretation is a matter of developing an accurate linguistic analog for the work; of explaining what the artist is 'telling' us. It is important for teachers to make clear to their students that many works of art are 'multi-stable phenomena' that simply defy interpretive closure. Equally important to make clear is the fact that agreement among the interpreters is neither necessarily required nor particularly desirable. That members of a critical community may share a view is not evidence of the reasonableness of that view. Moreover, the absence of agreement among interpreters is not a sign that interpretation has gone awry, or that the work under review is itself flawed. (Lavender, 1995, p. 30)

There are various aspects or visible resources he observes:

...A particular work may receive more or less emphasis in different critics' interpretations of that work. The spatial pathways of the movements in a dance, for example, may play a central role in one critic's interpretation, but seem inconsequential to another critic who regards, say, the bound and direct movement of the dancers as key to understanding the work. Each interpreter of the work must endeavor to create the conditions under which others must come to see the work as the interpreter does. Thus the aim of interpretation is not to give the reason why "X is Y" as those of the author-centered persuasion would have it. Nor is the aim of interpretation merely to report that "X is Y to me ", as those of the subjectivist view would have it. Instead, the aim of interpretation is verbally to demonstrate by referring back to the work itself--why X both can and ought to be seen as Y. (Lavender, 1995, p. 26)

The consensus, as Larry Lavender states:

Interpretation is a purposive "doing" rather than a passive automatic or un-intelligent mental activity. Our efforts to interpret a dance begin in the movement of direct apprehension of the visible properties of the dance. We must reflect upon and describe these properties and interrelations, in order to formulate plausible interpretations of the work's meaning and/or significance that will deepen other's experience of the work. To receive a genuine and complete education in dance, students must learn to approach the work of criticism in general and interpretation specifically, as seriously and intensely as they approach the work of mastering dance technique and of creating dances. (Lavender, 1995, p. 27)

Today's dancing involves moving, disposition, breath, and blood circulation: physical objectives. However we encounter it, actively or passively, the dance is kept alive by its fleeting aspect. This temporality supports the mourning code in the dancer's self image. The dancer's notion of time echoes this spirit. Do we have an image of mature dancers that can inspire confidence in performance? Do we have any older dancers that exhibit expressive power like Margot Fonteyn did in the 1960's and 1970s?

Meanwhile dance on stage had developed itself more and more into a contest of extremes: among others the extremes of energy--the keyword of contemporary society. This trend leads irreversibly in one direction: the sight of decay on stage is not accepted anymore, nor is it treated as something very precious or special. Few exceptional examples, like Cunningham or Nureyev, confirm this rule. The first one exploits and emphasizes his physical decay, (Cunningham stands alone) the second

simply denies it. (e.g. Martha Graham). So a strange paradox arises: although most choreography is about human behavior faced with temporality, they do not permit the dancers themselves to age. They are allowed to grow mentally, in the exploitation of their experiences, but physically they find themselves in a cul-de-sac. (Schaik, 1991. p. 18)

Slowly, in Europe, a far-reaching consideration has been revealed in terms of the viewpoint on the aging dancer, and some choreographers are beginning to question the artistic pulse in terms of ageism. In a Dutch magazine, Jiri Kylian, founder of Nederlands Dans Theatre says,

The care for aging dancers should not be left to politics and society alone: it also belongs to the responsibilities of the art itself. In this respect, international ballet leaders have a duty to educate their audiences too. Only these choreographers/artistic leaders may contribute to the emancipation of their art, who respectfully regard and exploit Time as an 'intimate stranger' of the realisers of their works. (Schaik, 1991, p. 17)

Kylian is the founder of Nederlands Dans Theater 3, a project in which older dancers are spotlighted. This new expressionism is slowly attacking the face of today's cultivated convention of dance and elevated beauty. As Eva van Schaik points out, these deficiencies in dance started in the Seventies,

In the illusion of dance, which supposes to offer a sensation of joy, beauty and dramatic suspense, the Wuppertal Dance Theatre struck a profound chord resulting in frustrations, feelings of isolation and the longing for affection. But also the all-dominating notion that history is not something behind us--but within us--and that we have to admit decay, ugliness and frustration, as the other side of same medal. Forty-

five years after 1945 it achieved many outlets: from Bausch, Fabre to Butoh as its most outspoken exponents. Instead of emphasizing the omnipotence of man, [sic] as was often the case in triumphant ballet, the omnipotence of man was stressed in the Seventies and Eighties. By allowing ugliness and the painful process of maturation into the domain of sublimed beauty, Pandora's Box was opened. It introduced the idea that dancers are not just utensils but, in essence, the surplus value of dance. In their vulnerability they are also humans, with a history of their own, by which the most temporary art creates its own history. (Schaik, 1991, p.19)

She goes on to say that the

"time bound creations" depend on the quality of the work and on the dancers. Every new dance reveals this give and take on their own changing attitudes toward aging. Dancing may be regarded as a confirmation of physical functioning: for the dancer as well as for the spectator the act of moving involves heartbeat, breath and blood circulation; meanwhile we all experience, either actively or passively, that dance is kept alive by its temporality. (Schaik, 1991, p. 20)

However, the "mourning code" shows itself at the closing,

That may be one of the reasons why some choreographers retreated to other disciplines, thus creating work which will surely survive their time bound dance creations. There can never be enough attention paid to the sad social position ("mourning" code) of dancers at the end of their careers and a lot more about their perspectives in social resettlement. (Schaik, 1991. p. 20)

Schaik also points out, as long as creators

...of ballet do not take responsibility for the tools by which they themselves are able to realize their personal artistic aspiration, craft, experience and wisdom of life, the emancipation of the ballet dancer from instrumentalism will remain a Utopia. (Schaik, 1991, p. 17)

Chapter 4

That Certain Age

Chapter four examines post-modern companies of today which deal with the aging dancer. One, the Nederlands Dans Theatre 3, (NDT 3) is a small company that is specifically designed to create new works for dancers over 40. The company is enjoying only modest success in the United States. European dance critic, Jochen Schmidt did research on Asian dance vis a vis the European ideal of the youthful dancer, and his examinations may lead us to a new dance aesthetic. He found that, "Age doesn't play a central role in Asian dance. The maturity and dignity of the older dancer counterbalances the freshness and innocence of youth." (Schmidt, 1994, p. 13)

The Japanese dancer Kazuo Ohno, born in 1906, was already over seventy when he was discovered "by the western public" and because of his age became a kind of cult figure. Schmidt adds, Not just in Japan but also in India, the western observer is repeatedly forced to throw out the standard aesthetic conceptions and recognize them as prejudices. (Schmidt, 1994, p.13)

Gary Chryst, one of the performers in Nederlands Dans Theatre, believes that "U.S. audience's interests are too youth-oriented to sustain a company like NDT 3." (Horowitz, 1997, p. 3) Even though the company provides a whole new context in which to view American dance and theatre within the U.S., this present day perspective of Chryst's has value in coming to terms with Generation X 's thinking.

Choreographer and Artistic Director, Jiri Kylian, founded NDT 3 in 1991 for dancers over forty. Kylian's idea was to give dancers, who find themselves in the "autumn of their careers" new encouragement and new tools to enable

them to share with the world their experiences in a very specific mix of dance. In addition to the original NDT 1, there is NDT 2 (a youth company) and now NDT 3. NDT 3 is a small company, albeit successful. The company consists of founding members, Sabine Kupferberg, 44, Gary Chryst, 48, Martine van Hamel, 52, and Gerard Lemaitre, 61, "Who all feel blessed by the unexpected opportunity." (Fisher, 1995, D1)

Perhaps the Nederlands Dans Theater 3, who toured the United States in 1994, will change the aesthetic perception of older dancers. As Schmidt, points out, ... (An) attitude is gaining ground that firm bodies and nimbleness isn't everything, and that a re-assessment of interpretive values has begun. NTD 3 Director Jiri Kylian concurs. NDT 3 gives older dancers the chance to prolong their careers beyond the usually clearly defined zenith. The company has taken up this idea and choreographed new works for a handful of older NDT 3 dancers. The foundation has acquired a significance that has strengthened the exemplary quality of his undertaking. Perhaps less of a model for the establishment of other, similar projects, still the idea can act as encouragement for ballet, choreographers and dancers themselves postpone the end of a dancing career by a fair number of years. So, when the new evaluation of age in dance has been going on for a while and attained a qualitative relevance, dance will be in need of new roles and new pieces. Only when it's the same in dance and as in drama, where there aren't just young lovers but also funny old people and fat heroes--both in reasonable quantities--will there be a real change in dance, and the hyped-up craze for youth defused. But it's not just the engagement of a few prominent choreographers that will bring this about. First there has to be a change in the minds of the

audience and those responsible for dance, before the struggle for the maturity of the dancer and not just the dancer can be won. (Schmidt, 1994, p. 14)

Kepferberg was coping with life after dance the way many dancers do: teaching and coaching. Basically, she missed dancing. Chryst, who left the Joffrey Ballet company at 29, cites in a Los Angeles Times article,

If you're over 30, you are over the hill. As an actor-dancer he was performing in a Broadway musical, when Kylian approached Chryst to join the company. At this age, Chryst says, You are able to give more than before. We're not as defensive as we were when we were younger. I guess we have more respect for each other too. I think I enjoy it more now. Not all the time--when it hurts, it hurts, and you get tired. But with all your experience you try to chip away at the extra baggage you have, you try to get to the basic truth of how it is to perform. (Fisher, 1995, p. D1)

Van Hamel performed for years with American Ballet Theatre. She began to choreograph and formed a small company of her own, the New Amsterdam Ballet which exists on a project-by-project basis. "I feel I've added something to my way of moving at NDT 3, I have gone in other directions." (Fisher, 1995, p. D1)

Lemaitre also retired from the stage, hoped to get funds from the French government to show that mature dancers still have a message. In 1996, they still were not interested.

When Jiri Kylian was asked if Nederlands Dans Theatre 3 is an exception or a new trend? He responded,

I tell you, the whole thing carries a bit of a danger and that is that it might encourage older dancers to carry on the wrong way--you know, still pretending to be teenagers. This is not the message I would like to carry into the dance world. The message I want to send is that there is wonderful use for

older dancers, mature dancers who have something very specific to say. It's not enough just to have the idea--you need the choreographers to act as a driving force. It's the task for us to enable the dancers to stand on the stage in their own right, in their own age not pretending anything else. (Fisher, 1995, p. D2)

Kylian had spent time with aboriginal communities in Australia and later incorporated some of their dance movement in his work. "You could see the generations together there, all ages dance; absolutely everybody slightly mobile will get up and dance. Obviously that rubbed off on me when it came to creating this company. However, there is rumor in the dance world that I am starting a new company NDT 4: That will be for the really dead ones!" (Fisher, 1995, p. D1)

Kylian offers his thoughts on the audience's negative reactions to older dancers, A dancer has to be like an empty vase, in which the most beautiful flowers can flourish and grow. It may be sweet on the tongue, at first. Nevertheless, the longer one thinks about its implications, the more acid the after taste. (Schaik, 1991, p. 17)

Gerard Lemaitre, as artistic leader-coordinator-dancer of the unique NDT 3, which is in his own words "a small company of 'ex-dancers', responded to Kylian's vase analogy,

In our joy over beautiful bouquets we are prepared--more or less conditioned- to accept that ballet flowers wither, even though they are beautifully arranged: we just love their temporal visualization of spiritual beauty in physical strength. However, much more difficult to accept is the fact that the vases too are not able to withstand the craqueleur of porcelain, the cracks in their glaze. The merciless moment arrives, even before they are forty years old: they will be thrown away, like worn out utensils, out-of-service

instruments. Every dancer who wants to be honest with himself knows better than anybody else that nothing reveals more about age than his dancing on stage. Consequently nothing is as pitiable as a dancer who does not take his own age into account when he enters the stage...he or she becomes a caricature of the image he or she is supposed to present, caught by the subtle but cruel difference between presence and present. (Schaik, 1991, p. 17)

NDT 3 has created new principles in dance in terms of education and has demonstrated to audiences and patrons that the long held belief of retirement in the late 30's is out of date. Lois Horowitz concurs,

Due to the level of artistry and competence NDT 3 exudes, they are sending a wave of influence throughout the international community of dancers past 40, regardless of whether you see them or not. It's a trickle-down effect. NDT 3 has also set a standard by commissioning world-renowned choreographers such as Bejart, Carolyn Carlson, Mat EK, Martha Clark and Jennifer Muller to create new works for them. There have always been plenty of choreographers over 40, but how many of them cast dancers over 40 (beside themselves)? Utilizing both the modern and classical ballet techniques of these mature dancers, and basing their choreography on wider subject matter than could or would be set on younger dancers, has yielded grand results. There is a special depth of interpretation, of choreography, a richness in technique that goes beyond the speed and line of younger dancers, and a performing bravura which is manifest in both the face and body, that only the very experienced dancer can bring to a work. (Horowitz, 1997, p. 5)

Nederlands Dans Theatre 3 repertory pieces is entitled Double You, a solo specifically choreographed for Gary Chryst by Jiri Kylian. It premiered successfully in October 1994. The origins of the piece came about while NDT 3 was on tour in Japan. Kylian faxed Chryst asking what made him tick? What were his loves? His

greatest fear, Why does he dance? Many of the thoughts that came to Chryst's mind had words beginning with the letter "W" such as wait, wall, was, weep, weird, when, whether, whole, wild, wise, womb, wonder, and worry; there are seventy-seven listed in the program—hence, the word play of the title. The choreographer and dancer discovered it should be much broader than just about his dancing, but about Chryst's life and the friends he had lost over the years.

B. Jennings (dance critic) reviewed the solo in 1994, Premiere Double You is a tour de force in homage to Gary Chryst's artistry and ability to explore his living instrument. The curtains of the Majestic stage are parted as Chryst begins the work. He imparts his life force into the space and is "mounted" by the muses of polyrhythm, high drama and control. He uses that control to turn a page on a new chapter of his performing career. Chryst has a lot of power between his legs, localized as 'nuts'. His earlier career challenges would stress his use of this sexual prowess/animal magnetism in spectacular jumps. You could swallow your tongue from the excitement of watching him jump. Now, he chooses to be terrestrial; but exploring the abyss of unknown cues and landscapes of further maturity. (Jennings, 1995, p.14)

Another review,

The piece begins with Chryst controlling the opening of the curtain. Whether it's moving up or apart: it is only when he is ready, that we are allowed to enter. As the bright, bare stage comes into full view there are two large pendulums swinging across it, marking time. Chryst begins a precarious walk on an imaginary straight line, but he is having difficulty keeping his balance. He adjusts by tapping body parts with his hands, even slapping his head as if trying to wake himself up. As he moves his sanctum, he's shaking,

but he pulls himself together with determination. When he does a series of shrinking movements that are almost butch-like in their distortion, the metaphor for growing older is clear, but Chryst will have none of it. He twice goes into a slow motion backwards fall facing upstage, so that as he waves his arms endearing, almost pleading, over his head, it is towards the audience. He is running only from time, he has proven he can conquer the rest. The pendulums slow. He pulls the curtain down. When I first saw the new piece that premiered in 1994 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, many words beginning with 'W' were listed under the title in the program. Many such words come to mind. (Horowitz, 1997, p. 6)

Kylian's choreography is in demand by major companies throughout the world: American Ballet Theatre, The Limon Company, The Joffrey Ballet and the San Francisco Ballet all perform his works.

I think our task as choreographers is to search the extremities of our souls, Kylian says, "The search for what we are and what we want to say should be as expansive as possible. All three companies are constantly working on new creations. It's interesting to see how each inspires the other." (Reiter, 1995, p.19)

Companies like Nederlands Dans Theatre 3 make us optimistic about the future of dance as a reminder of the power of mature expressiveness. Due to decreased government funding, grants from the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) are not easily obtainable, especially for the establishment of new companies. What if in contrast, one wants to keep dancing but no company like Nederlands Dans Theatre 3 exists, which supports the idea that the older dancer has value. Then the question of an aging dancer will continue to haunt in terms of self expression and self image.

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Chapter 5

Conclusions

Perception is not always reality. If one can see that older dancers , even though perhaps performing less strenuously, have more to give dramatically, have more expressive value, and have more confidence on stage than younger dancers, then perhaps perception will change. The mature dancer arrives at a new developmental stage with limitless years of experience that enable the older body to handle a greater assortment of styles with more complex insight into characterization and with a greater mix of phrasing, dynamics, and pacing. We are inviting or challenging dance culture to examine the older body, to appreciate its overall experiential and expressive power. Technical "virtuosity" should not be all that dance can be.

The "mourning" code too has somehow collaborated with this notion that the youthful dancer is somehow more expressive and has a more esoteric body. The "mourning" or "sad" dancer is a picture of a constructed idea of what an older dancer should be. Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham dramatized the "mourning" code by distancing themselves from others in the company. They stood apart from the young because there is no connection to the young dancers--they were older and alone. Even though they were still attached to the group, as long as the older dancer is isolated, the "mourning" code prevails. The mourning people are sad because they are losing their physical agility. This disapproval from culture hasn't been challenged and most dancers subscribe to it. Thus, dance has confined itself to this young agile virtuosity. The norm of dance culture is a community of youthful bodies. And

present-day dance functions in order to idealize, for society in general, an intensely close relationship between youthfulness and physical virtuosity.

The only advantage youth has over age is physiological. Or is it? These perceptions are established and sustained by dance culture. The existing socially constructed ideas are nourished by today's dance culture through positive perceptions of the able body and the youthful looking self. Examples from Chapter 2 show that Cunningham, Fonteyn and Graham cooperated with this concept as well: a youthful dancer is somehow more significant and has somehow a more powerful body.

Fonteyn, Graham and Cunningham displayed a willingness to dance at all costs. They enjoyed long dancing careers. Age brought a deeper understanding of the roles they played and the techniques they employed. As the years went on, each made visible a "mourning code". Their inability to maintain their physical vitality and agility was manifest in the dances they portrayed. Cunningham and Graham distanced themselves from the company. "Standing alone" reinforced the "mourning" principal. Fonteyn maintained her looks and had a youthful looking image on stage. Criticism from dance culture about their qualifications to represent the young undermined the dance culture by confining dance to the young agile virtuosity.

Rules about what a dancer and a dance should look like, about who may dance and who is "too old" is the first challenge. The norm of dance culture must take some responsibility for the over-used ideology that dance favors the young body. Companies such as the Paris Opera Ballet which have strict codes that force the dancers to leave the company at forty, reward the youthful physiognomic aesthetic identity of the dancer and discard the value of the mature dancer. On the other hand, Nederlands Dans Theatre 3 is naturalizing

the older dancers by making them more acceptable. Initiated by Jiri Kylian, director of NTD 3, all the dancers are over forty. NTD 3 expresses the aesthetics of experience with continually evolving awareness of other cultures.

Are we doomed to accept the rule that a dancer's life is forgotten after the age of forty? Or are we open to the new perspective, to destroy the cliché, and so free ourselves and benefit from the older dancer's value? Sadly, dance culture has choreographed itself into a struggle of obscure admiration for the high, higher, big, bigger, fast, faster generation. The older dancer's virtuosity is mixed with maturity, love for dancing and self-definition. Putting oneself "on the line" on the stage shows that the older self-image is willing to take artistic risks.

As James notes, "The more mature sense of self is not buffeted about by potentially transit or disparate views of significant others: balanced self-respect has stable ways of thinking about the image of self that cannot be upset by passing phrases of praise or blame." (James, 1890, p. 128)

In conclusion, our truths and ideals are based on a youth-oriented society that regards beauty as the unshared sanctuary of the young. Ageism saturates dance culture in which the dancer has to accept the undefended aspects of age. The media continues to bombard us with advertising for cosmetic surgery, hair coloring, anti-wrinkle creams, pills, mixtures of brews, tonics and diet programs that appear to make it possible to maintain our youthful attractiveness and agility forever. Trepidation at the thought of a decline in health, energy and proficiency, makes one ill-equipped to accept lost youth and blinds one to the realities of the past years. Youth is the time when the growing process turns us into ourselves, when narcissism and insecurity are joined. The external world is a mirror in which one is always

seeking reflection. The state of our mental and emotional health depends largely on what comes back from that mirror. One is ready to do, to be, whatever we think it takes to attract favorable attention, especially from our peers. Repeated self-reflection in the dancer's daily class is somehow a romantic inner soliloquy; practicing some form of personal public relations, putting forth an image or series of images, that will bring approval. More than anything else we want to belong, to conform, to be accepted. Achieving character, developing a self concept, is reflected in attitudes toward others and in learning from these examinations, one perceives the reactions one gets from others. We have stored away inner resources to enable one to enjoy our own company, and create a new life with strength and stability. A positive self-concept is when one's outer appearance is a reflection of an inner radiance, new consciousness and empowerment.

During the development of this thesis, the following questions have arisen which are presented as suggestions for further study; What are the aesthetics of the mature dancer's expressivity in performance? What are the changes taking place in older bodies? Are there changes that keep the older dancer away from performing? What are the conditions of the physiognomy of the mature dancers in their fifty's or/and sixty's. Is dance culture understanding of movement deeper than that portrayed by the younger dancer? Can the World Wide Web contribute in terms of performance values and expand this knowledge to include the mature dancer?

Does the norm of the society or the dance culture take responsibility for the older dancer's image? Dance culture has its own codes in terms of the expressiveness of the dancers. Evidence of dance performance suggests that the dance culture prefer young bodies. Can we allow the older dancer to focus

on mature expressivity which brings value? If one has the opportunity to watch a performance by a company such as Netherlands Dans Theatre 3, there will be a new understanding or re-evaluation of the older dancer. One's perceptions might change the theorization of relationship between body and age and thus dance culture will also change. Responsibility lies with the dance culture itself. To deny the older artist participation is to deny audiences the full power and pleasure of artists who have ripened and fully developed their expressiveness and grace.

Appendix

Voices of "mourning code"

A series of questions was developed that encompassed the training and performing life of dancers who are no longer actively performing. The questions were devised around issues of self worth as perceived through dancers' critical analysis of themselves in the mirror, their perception of how others look at them, their reasons for beginning and continuing to dance, why they stopped dancing, and what they now do. Through conclusions of successive interviews with older dancers and theorizing from them, we may see and perhaps understand the "mourning code." We can also see how processing the aging passage can manifest itself into a new self while processing the aging passage. It is a nostalgic process, looking back to the past when the self was accepted as a youthful and agile dancer.

Responses:

Note: Not all responses are included and not every subject's response to each question is included.

When you first participated in dance of any kind: at what age were you and where were you living at the time?

I started dancing when I was 7 years old in Springfield Mass.

I hoped that my parents could see that I was a dancer when I danced around the living room. I was 7 or 8 years old.

I was 7 or 8 years old in Oakland, CA. I took ballet but I hated it. So my mother took me to another studio to study tap.

I started when I was 3 years old. At 10, I got a scholarship with Joffrey Ballet Company in Atlanta, Georgia.

I took ballet against my will at 10. At 16, I got into Musical Theatre in high school at San Jose, Ca.

I started classical ballet when I was 7 years old in the Philippines.

Gail A. Hall expressed that,

An ideal stage performance combines both earthly and ethereal qualities. A dancer affects a precarious balance between rigidity, control, precision, and strength, together with grace, poise, lyricism and romantic style. (Hall, 1977, p. 195)

The formal dance classroom is faithfully attended every day. It is in the classroom that the dancer acquires and refines basic technical skills. Unlike other forms of dancing which stem from the natural movements of the human body, ballet is not natural; it is contrived in order to achieve a very special style of movement. However, any of the formal dance classrooms (i.e. jazz, tap, and modern) are the same in terms of acquisition and refinement.

What type of dance did you do?

My mother found out that this lady was giving classes to kids and I started going with my girlfriend on Friday afternoons in Springfield, Mass.

I started to take jazz classes in high school in Saratoga, CA.

I saw the movie Red Shoes, I had to dance. This was 1952, or '53. I immediately started taking formal ballet classes.

I got a full scholarship with San Francisco Ballet school. I was thirteen.

The dancer experiences dance not only as a mode of action, but a way of being. It is well recognized that the development of self always involves a conceptualized audience with which an individual imagines how she appears to others; formulates a judgment of the fantasized; and subsequently reacts to that judgment. However, as Gail Hall precisely points out, "Not enough attention has been devoted to observing the development of self through interaction with a real audience and real mirrors." (Hall, 1977, p. 196) Central to the dancer is creating and maintaining her or his specialized self. This involvement has a social dimension in that the cognition of self and the imagined reaction of others indirectly affect her self-observation. In guiding herself with the mirror, the dancer directly becomes an object to herself. The looking glass self becomes a reality: by reacting to that image and literally interacting with herself in the mirror. As Gail Hall states, from the moment a dancer enters the studio, a dialogue begins between the mirror and herself.

Each action that the dancer engages in is instantly evaluated with either disdain or approval and subsequent behavior is adapted accordingly. This is a reflexive or telemetric process and the action and reflection appear to occur concurrently. The dancer cognitively maintains an idealized vision of a "perfect" performance. This image of perfection is formulated and refined over a long period of time. Together with a comparative self-scrutiny, throughout many years of such intense observation, she is in continual reassessment of the self. (Hall, 1977, p. 200)

What have been the affects of your looking-glass experiences with the mirrors in class?

I don't remember my experiences with the mirrors in class.

I'm so used to mirrors because of class. Especially when you're in those early training years. You're always checking yourself to see if you're doing what the teacher is doing. It's a tool you're using. In fact, you get so dependent on it that when you start performing, some teachers would say 'okay, turn around and do it away from the mirror'. Wow, you can't function without the mirror. There are a lot of changes you go through using the mirror. It's kind of scary.

It's different now. I look at myself and think. I have great technique but I'm a fat slob.

In every studio you know there are the skinny mirrors because every mirror has a level of distortion. It's a way of seeking approval from yourself and from others. You get to know the fat mirrors and skinny mirrors. I love seeing what I saw in the mirrors when I was at the top of my game. I'm still looking, but I'm not getting the same feedback.

It's funny. In the company and the school, you are always striving to be perfect. Now, the perfection ideal is not my first priority.

Each teacher must deal with the pressure from society and the demand of her own voice that she should be "doing" instead of "teaching." "Those who can, do; these who cannot, teach" can give clarity to understanding this "teach-or-do" problem. Beverly Kalinin points out,

First, we must recognize that in dance the traditional interpretation of the word "doing" is analogous with that of "performing." Yet, performing for others is not the source of one's creative and spiritual satisfaction. Only the essence of the performance truly rewards us, that is, the act of dancing, the "doing". This 'doing' must exist for the private edification of the dance, not for public approval. It is often spontaneous, not planned. And, ironically, what is more, the pleasure of 'doing' may occur during the act of teaching. So, let

us not be frustrated by the sloppy blending of terms that confuse and deceive regarding true dance needs. She adds further, let us give the 'doing' and the 'teaching' equal importance in our lives, for each benefits us in its way; and we will continue to be in a state of grace. (Kalinin, 1988, p. 56)

In what way do you substitute the “thrill” of performing with something else?

I was ready to teach after my marriage broke up. I have been teaching since 1971 in the Bay Area, in private studios and schools. Teaching gives me a thrill now instead of performing; in fact I do not like to perform anymore too much pressure and energy. I think it could be more gratifying in the end to put people on stage and watch them do your choreography than being up there performing yourself, which to me is torture.

I taught jazz at a ballet studio. I was trying to make money so I could keep dancing. Classes are expensive.

I knew that I was too short for a professional career. I am creative and I can pass my experiences on to others. I get a thrill from teaching students who want to learn.

I have my own ballet school. I love the children and choreographing. I am doing Nutcracker with my school, I can pass my experiences to them.

“There are dancers who exhibit anorexic/bulimia characteristics such as the distortion of the body image, preoccupation with excessive leanness and self-abusive behavior which have ruinous physical, psychological and financial effects.” (Howse & Hancock, 1992, p.55)

The practice of bulimia may prevent sizable gains in body weight, however it is not an effective method of long-term weight loss. Many dancers view their bodies in the mirror as distorted and disproportionate.

Did you have any problems with weight gain?

I am not naturally a skinny person. I wanted to look like those hot dancers. Actually I probably looked fine, but I just started stressing about it. It was easy. It's no big deal. It's so easy to do and no one knows. There's no sign. What a revelation! I can eat whatever I want (...and then vomit). It'll help me to lose weight. It just snowballed, I did it for seven years, bulimia and dancing went hand-in-hand for me. I had choreographers tell me, you have the job if you lose drop ten pounds.

I didn't have a problem with my weight, but weight is a big issue in ballet.

Justin Howse and Shirley Hancock point out that,

Most dancers are not anatomically perfect for dance; there will be physical limitations and constraints which play a part in preventing the development of a perfect technique. The commonest anatomical cause of potential problems and injuries is the limitation of the turn-out (external rotation) of the hips. (Howse & Hancock, 1992, p. 65)

There are many reasons why dancers sustain injuries. Lack of technical knowledge, poor teaching, non-application of correct technique, temperature, the floor and environmental causes (i.e. inadequate facilities).

Have you had any injuries, serious or otherwise, due to dance?

The body is not willing like it used to be. After my back injury, it was never the same. Because my body didn't recover until about fifteen years later. I adapted my technique to fit my body, because I don't have a great stretch and a great back.

In a workshop in college I did something to the tendon below my knee, so I couldn't do any plies, it would snap and burn. I remember coming up crying to my parents, it was the end of the world.

Six years ago, I had back surgery. I was demonstrating flea hops and I slipped; fractured my back. I thought it was the end.

I broke a bone in my foot while I was choreographing. The doctor put pins inside to hold it. It has not been the same since.

I broke my fifth metatarsal and sprained an ankle in Bejart's company.

Many dancers don't always stop dancing because of physical injuries.

With age, technique can slowly slip away. Aging and the loss of technique can result in post-performance depression and can become the dancer's reality.

Have you had any health issues due to dance?

I have always been moody. In the mid 1980's, it intensified. In 1989, after returning from a twenty-month stay in Asia, I sought counseling. It was then that I was diagnosed as clinically depressed.

The life span of a dancer is short. I can't really say that I ever thought I'd be dancing this long. But I never really thought about it. I just thought that when the time came to quit I would know. Because I have no desire to be a choreographer. I don't really have any strong reason to stay in the business when my performing career is over. I need to do something else with my life; what it is, I don't know yet. But I need to have something that is as gratifying, and hopefully more financially secure.

My whole identity was being a dancer, for so long. I remember the first time I got paid. Okay, I'm getting paid. I am a professional dancer. And I felt really excited. And that's who I am. You got paid to do what you loved. The hard part was I was too old for it. I never thought about it. I thought I was always going to do this. I never thought about what would happen when I reached 30 and started going to auditions standing next to 18 year-olds. I didn't feel good. I didn't want to be a professional old dancer. I felt terrified, mad, sad. Acceptance of self, that was hard to go thorough. I'm almost 40. I take my two ballet classes and I'm fine about it. I'm not going to be performing anywhere. I'm just there for the joy of it and for me. I fit in there. And motherhood gave me a purpose again. It felt good to be a mom. Boom, you're a mom. I take care of my babies and my husband. I am an at-home mom. It gives me another whole focus.

The worst thing about it, what really sucks, is that the physicality of the human being naturally goes into decline as you age; and for women, your childbearing years go at the same time. You're pushing both envelopes as much as you can your childbearing years and performing years. That's a dilemma I find perplexing.

I chose a career where child-bearing is practically non-existent. The clock ticks twice as fast for a dancer. A dancer has a span of possibly 10-12 years in which to really enjoy her art and be at the height of her career. For a dancer to have a child and take a year off is certainly a risk. I have no children.

On weekends, I go to the zoo. I love to take pictures, especially of the big cats. Now, ballet offends me. It is now all about virtuosity, artistry doesn't seem to exist. Yet, I still love teaching ballet.

As Lilo Weber states, "Dancer's art, which takes its toll on the body like no other, requires a physique which is oblivious of the demands being made on it, a body which expresses the human condition and which is and remains youthful, defying both gravity and mortality." (Weber, 1995. p. 46)

Is your acceptance of self just as gratifying and fulfilling to you when you were performing?

I feel like I'm pushing myself; and I shouldn't be pushing myself so hard to keep dancing, basically because my body hurts a lot. Why? Because that's what you've always done.

I think about aging as maturity vs. old. This is a natural process, my glass is half full not half empty. You have to have a positive outlook.

I am not happy about turning 40. However, I think I look pretty good for 40. I don't delude myself. I'm not looking for something that's not there.

It is true that ballet is about the young. I still get those pangs to dance without responsibilities, and just dance.

The World Wide Web

As the world becomes more global, technical communication becomes a universal necessity throughout the world. Dance too can stay alive via the World Wide Web. The Internet was formed in the late 1960s by the U.S. military as a working communications network during the cold war. It is a global network of computers which allows us to communicate freely and exchange information with each other. The World-Wide Web (WWW), is a product of the need to share information quickly. Simply, the Web is an Internet-based computer network that allows a user on one computer to access information stored on another computer via the world-wide network. The WWW is based on the principal of readership.

The Internet Society put it this way,

The Internet has revolutionized the computer communications world like nothing before. The invention of the telegraph, telephone, radio, and the computer set the stage for this unprecedented integration of capabilities. The Internet is at once a world broadcasting capability, a mechanism for information dissemination and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals and their computers without regard for geographic location. The Internet represents one of the most successful examples of the benefits of sustained investment and commitment to research and the development of the information infrastructure. Beginning with the early research in packet switching, the government, industry and academia have been partners in evolving

and deploying this exciting new technology. (www.isoc.org/internet-history, p. 1)

A documentary filmmaker, Doug Block, revealed his thoughts on the phenomenon,

...It reflects our navel-gazing, media saturated, everyone-can-be-a-celebrity culture, but it also vividly illustrates people's need to connect to others at a time when the institutions, rituals and communities that previously connected us are disappearing. (O'Connell, 1998, p. D3)

There are thousands of web pages, and there are many search engines in which the documents are stored. In the dance category there are numerous web sites, for example:

- DancePage Directory
(www.emporium.turnpike.net/~dpd/index.hm)
- B.A.D. (www.bayareadance.com)
- Merce Cunningham (www.merce.org)
- DanceArt (www.danceart.com)
- Dance Magazine (www.dancemagazine.com)
- Infinity Dance Company (www.debris.com/Axis)
- Nederlands Dans Theatre
(www.euronet.nl/users/cadi/index.html).

In order for opinions and discussions on dance to be kept alive, the expansive growth of communication in the world has allowed the World Wide Web to become a powerful tool to convey information about dance throughout the world.

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The WWW(World Wide Web) allows the older dancer to communicate with older dancers throughout the world, and this communication can bring a sense of community to older dancers as well as enable them to break away from the isolation and alienation via on-line experiences.

One of the major attributes of a web site is its importance as a communicative medium allowing for dialogue opportunities among older dancers. It can open new doors, a means to chat openly, to display performances, and to learn about other dance cultures. The message can be transmitted in seconds.

One can still make a voice after dance. The transition period need not be as prolonged, painful, or frustrating as it has been for many in the past. Dancers have intelligence and self-reliance, are self-motivated, creative, and hard working. If the interest still remains with dance, the recovery from the loss of the performing self can be self-affirming.

In these web sites, the content allows the participant a new role. By being interactive with older bodies via E-mail or any interactive hyper-realistic environment, such as QuickTime (video) dances or performances can be communicated. And so this new awareness can be acknowledged and accepted. So the older body is no longer confined to teaching, or to a non-functioning role within the dance culture. It opens up options to dancers and can create a wide range of opportunities. The Web is a new performance element in which the older dancer still can participate in the dance culture. Perhaps, a new perception of the dance will arise and reshape today's dance culture norm: one that accepts the expressive authority of older dancers.

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