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THE SELF DANCING: FOUR STORIES OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN DANCERS

© Louise Zitzelsberger

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I dedicate this thesis to my mother and father
whose lives have framed my project.

Abstract

This thesis focused on the self as dancer explored through narrative and presented through constructed stories. Four dancers were interviewed, two from contemporary dance and two from the classical genre, in order to collect narratives of their career path. The interviews were videotaped and transcribed; the object of the analysis was the interview as text. Only those aspects of the self supported by language were explored in this study. Narrative analysis involved selecting and sequencing events and themes taken from the narratives and writing them into a story for each dancer. The dancers' words were used as much as possible in order to let a sense of how a dancer told about her life and work be present. However, the created stories represent my interpretations of the dancers' texts. Four unique paths to the role of professional dancer are presented.

Acknowledgements

A heartfelt thank-you is sent via these scant words to those who have made this project fulfilling in so many ways: to the five dancers who willingly shared their lives and their passion with me; to Dr. Orlick for his ongoing support; and to my committee members for enriching me with their perspectives. Thank-you to friends and family who have helped me most by letting me talk my way through to understanding.

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THE SELF DANCING: FOUR STORIES OF PROFESSIONAL DANCERS

Beginnings

Introduction

If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if “I” want to know “myself”, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I too must come to know my own story (McAdams, 1993, p.11)

In thinking about the content of the introduction to the project, I realized that I felt compelled to begin with some of my own history. It seemed to make sense for two reasons. For one, it did not seem in concordance with the spirit of this work to begin in abstraction. This work is idiographic; it deals with individual lives. As well, I am connected to a particular cultural narrative tradition that recognizes a sequential telling - to begin at the beginning. My topic and method have origins in my story.

Sport and dance have always been part of my life. My father, an active high school athlete, introduced me and my three siblings to different sports when we were young. We biked; cross country skied; played catch, soccer and hockey. My downhill ski initiation took place, of all places, in the prairies. Dance was not a part of either of my parents’ experience in a direct way. However, they were great classical music lovers. Saturday Afternoon at the Met (Metropolitan Opera House in New York) was on the radio as we were dropped off and picked up from hockey practices, ballet classes, jazz classes and so on.

My two sisters and I were enrolled in ballet. Our teacher had long, graying hair that was frizzy and straying. She wore gauzy ballet skirts. She seemed to me to be

somewhat disorganized but I do not know if that was true or whether my memory of her appearance attributes that characteristic to her person as well. Technically, she was not a good teacher which put me behind later but did not affect my growing love of dance. I was the only one of my siblings to continue in dance for many years. Every summer end my mother would ask me if I wanted to keep taking class, and every time I said, "Yes". There was something in dance that connected with who I was and which continued to connect as I grew.

When I was fifteen, we moved to Sherwood Park, just outside of Edmonton and I went to a "real" ballet school. Alberta Ballet School was a model of a traditional ballet environment. We feared and revered our teachers. Tears were a part of every class, either my own or a fellow student's. There were the teacher's pets - the ones who got the most attention, had the perfect bodies, were destined for the company and who we lesser mortals admired and resented.

But by working hard, I experienced progress and mastery. Being subject to high standards contributed a sense of pride - at least when I wasn't cringing with a sense of failure. And in the outer world, there was a sense of belonging to an elite club. I was not an ordinary high school student - I went to the city, an hour's bus ride, four nights a week after school and on Saturdays to dance. Our yearend recital coincided with high school graduation. Even though I was honoured by being asked to attend the dinner and dance by the valedictorian, I was much more concerned about my performance on the stage. We were dancing in a piece with the professional company!

When I finished high school, I left for Toronto to study at York University in the Dance Program. But I left York at the end of the second year. My reasons had nothing to

do with falling out of love with dance. I think it was more a glimpse of different realities. Up to that time, dance was a world where the rules seemed simple. If you worked hard, you could eventually do what you loved to do. But both in my dance classes and regular classes it seemed at that time that it was more a question of figuring out how to “play the game”; I became cynical about what I was really learning.

So I left. However, over the years, whenever I could, I took classes. I think that once you’ve had a passion for dance (which in truth I can only define in terms of my own experience), it does not leave you. Dance is a part of who I am; it helped define me. But what connected dance and myself in the first place? What did it give me? What sustained me? Why did dance make sense to me, make sense of me? I am interested in knowing how dance has played a part in “defining” others as well.

A focus on the dancer as a whole person has not been a prevalent one in the scholarly dance research. Using “dance” as a search term, PsychInfo (1988-August 1998) yielded 214 references. The largest topic groupings (ten or more references) were eating disorders, dance used as a therapeutic medium, dance education (children through to adults) and self concept/personality. The studies that dealt with the self concept/personality of professional dancers and those training to be professionals (for example, Bakker, 1988, 1991; Kalliopuska, 1989; Taylor, 1997) have relied on psychological tests, questionnaires and positivistic paradigms to study the topic.

A search for dance and narrative yielded two citations that related to dance as performance (four others used dance as a descriptor, e.g., the “dance” of qualitative inquiry). One of the two citations focused on life histories of striptease artists showing how they drew on two exemplars of deviance as an account for their selves. The other

was a life history of the author's mother that examined the place of dance in her life from a feminist perspective. There is room for more research and research grounded in different paradigms.

While it is the case that in the academic world there is a need for different perspectives on dance questions, I am also aware that there are personal reasons why I am interested in addressing this topic at this point. The first is hard to state as I am in the middle of living it. It is linked with my history. Simply put, however, it is because I am addressing questions related to identity at this time as a result of a number of major life events (and my responses) which have occurred over the past few years. The other is that these questions arise from my accumulated experience in dance and academia especially sport psychology, education and my exploration of research paradigms.

My academic sport psychology background has been heavily focused on mental skills related to excellence. As well, a large part of my practical experience during this period has been in helping athletes and other performers acquire and hone these skills to achieve higher levels of performance. Many of the courses I took in education focused on cognition. As interesting and valuable as such research can be, I personally did not want to do a "pick a group of achievers and see what tools help them be successful" study. It is not skills and strategies I am interested in.

A concern has been expressed in some of the sport psychology (Seagrave, 1992) and dance education (Van Dyke, 1992) literature that performance enhancement is being emphasized over personal enhancement in the training of performers.

It is widely conceded that higher education in the United States in general has been narrowing and focusing on job or career oriented skills while neglecting the

development of a broad cultural perspective; this is no doubt related to the growing emphasis on quantitative measurement throughout American society. The dance field lends itself easily to such a technical orientation. Young dancers are, by and large, athletes, hungry to move and increase their physical mastery, while dance teachers, who tend to rate themselves according to how professionally successful their students become, often concentrate on training the dancer rather than educating the person. Moreover, as dance grows increasingly competitive, there is diminishing incentive or rationale within the field for doing things differently (Van Dyke, 1992, p. 96).

I hope to address some of these concerns by exploring not what dancers do, think and feel related directly to performance, but the development of their selves as dancers and people. I am interested in that which relates to the self: beliefs, values, personal themes, personal philosophy – their genesis and development.

This focus fits into the broad area with which infant sport psychology first concerned itself – personology. Personality research was the dominant focus during the period of the 1950s to the 1970s. Interest centered mainly on trait theories although research centered in person-situation relationships began to inform the field towards the end of this period (Vanden Auweele, De Cuyper, Van Mele & Rzewnicki, 1993). The area of personality psychology, however, includes more than a focus on traits. McAdams (1994) outlines four approaches that explore questions related to understanding the whole person: a focus on intrapsychic mysteries, on interaction episodes, on interpretive structures and on interpersonal stories.

Those who understand humans in terms of intrapsychic mysteries focus on the unconscious, forgotten memories, and biological urges. Thus, dreams, fantasies and “the person’s relatively spontaneous and open-ended speech and writing, especially if these verbal productions involve some kind of creative effort” (McAdams, 1994, p. 11) are material used for interpretation. The psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Jung, for example, would fall into this tradition.

The second approach moves away from what is hidden, and thus cannot be studied objectively, to what is directly observable: a person can be understood when one is able to predict his or her behaviour in a particular situation. Three categories of personologists fall into this tradition: trait theorists, situationists and interactionists who focus on the person-environment interaction. The aim of all three is precise quantification of data through the use of self-report questionnaires, surveys and behavioural observation.

Cognition, rather than behaviour or the unconscious, is the focus of the third approach: interpretive structures. Personologists using this tradition aim to understand how a person sees his or her self and the world from the individual's perspective. Included in this approach is work by George Kelly (Personal Construct Psychology), Abraham Maslow (humanistic theory of personality) as well as those interested in schemas or scripts.

The final approach, interpersonal stories, focuses on how people make meaning of experience and incorporate that experience into a coherent story about their lives over time. The individual story is also situated within social and historical contexts.

Representatives of this approach include Henry Murray, Alfred Adler, Erik Erikson, Henry Tompkins and Dan McAdams.

Thus, answering questions about my life or about anyone's life can take a number of directions. The question is which one to choose, for as McAdam's (1994) states, while no one tradition is the best and all have had criticisms directed towards them, being singular in one's approach results in coherence and depth: "Mixing and matching makes for a muddle" (p. 788).

I have always loved stories. Growing up, when I was not playing defense in our impromptu street hockey games or at dance class, I was curled up in a chair reading. I have learned more important things from novels and biographies than from any textbook I have read, at least with regard to making sense of my life or another's.

Scholars from a number of traditions have discovered the potential of narrative for informing studies of human lives.

Recently, from all kinds of different theoretical perspectives in the human studies - the folklorist, the oral historian, the semiotician, the anthropologist, the political scientist, the psychoanalyst - there has been a convergence on the power of the metaphor of the story. It has become recognized as one of the central roots we have into the continuing quest for understanding human meaning (Plummer, 1995, p. 5).

In telling our stories, we make meaning of our lives. We create and feel a sense of continuity through "explaining" events with reference to the place in one's life reached at the time of the telling. There are many threads, some beginning in childhood, some entering in adolescence, some merging later, which have woven and come together for me to arrive at this project and the means I have chosen to explore it.

Intent of the Project

This study has both specific and background intentions associated with it. In order to succeed in the focused intent, certain details related to topic and method needed to be addressed. I was also interested in understanding more about the narrative approach as a potential way of investigating questions of interest related to performers and performance.

Specifics of the Study – Creating the Stories

I chose to interview four dancers, two from the contemporary discipline (Yvonne Coutts and Peggy Baker) and two from ballet (Vivian and Felicia, both pseudonyms). Four dancers were chosen to provide a variety of perspectives and yet allow for depth. I also conducted interviews with a friend of mine who is a former dancer and current choreographer. Her role in this study became one of dancer consultant, providing me with invaluable insights on the dance culture. I refer to her in the text as “CC” which represents “cultural consultant”.

As the contemporary dance culture is considered different from the classical, dancers from both genre were chosen. The term “contemporary” rather than “modern” dance is used in this thesis. It was explained to me by the CC that while modern is still used as a descriptor, it refers to a period of dance history (a period of development of definitive and personal movement styles – Graham, Limon, Cunningham etc.) rather than a representation of the current medium. In the text I use “dancer”, “narrator” or the dancer’s name to refer to the interviewee. I use “interpreter” or “I” to refer to myself.

My topic of interest was a focus on the self as dancer as explored through dancers’ narratives and presented through constructed stories. My use of the term “narrative” throughout this study is in its broadest sense – as prose text (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Plummer (1995) titled projects that do not attempt to capture a person's life in entirety but which focus on a specific issue, such as the process of interest in this study, a "topical life story" (p. 59). In the text, however, I use the term "life story". Although it refers to a life as a whole, for the purposes of this study, the literature pertaining to life stories also pertains to the topical life story as a subset of the bigger context. As well, the dancers' narratives were by no means limited to their dancing lives but drew in relevant experiences and insights from elsewhere. As Peggy Baker put it, dance was not an obsession but was a unifying force in her life. Thus, life and art were not always separate.

According to McAdams (1994), questionnaires are good for identifying traits, motives and schemas, whereas interviews help the researcher collect a different form of information related to a person's life.

To study whole persons, we cannot rely on logical positivist methods that isolate simple factors and trace their effects through statistical analysis. Such analysis aims for elucidating universals but effaces the intending individual. Whole human beings cannot be objectively described as though they were molecules. To approach this topic we need a metaphysics that embraces relativity and an epistemology that is simultaneously empirical, intersubjective and process-oriented (Flax, 1990). I propose that empathy and narrative are routes to imagining what is real in whole people in their world (Josselson, 1995, p. 29).

A natural way for people to talk about their lives is through narrative (Linde, 1993).

Through narratives people tell what their lives mean to them and how they have been able to make meaning of them. They are indicators of identity (McAdams, 1994). While I am

looking at one aspect of an individual's life, becoming a dancer, the narratives told show us something of the person herself. The interviews were videotaped and transcribed.

I have created a story for each narrator of how she came to be the dancer she is today. A story needed to be constructed in order to make the dancers' lives as text more readable. The order of an oral telling is not always sequential (Mishler, 1992). As well, issues were discussed in the interviews that had no relationship to the focus of the story and thus, were excluded in my constructed stories. Through a story the dancer is presented in a holistic rather than a fragmented manner and context is provided for the elucidation of themes. I have tried to show continuity where it seemed to be present in theme and to show the self that is expressed in the story of a life.

...the fundamental function of narrative in human is not to report a chronological sequence of events, but to signal a perspective on events and create a satisfying pattern of themes one has drawn from one's various social traditions. Semantically deciphering a narrative is only a superficial and relatively trivial task of a listener in the case of real narratives. The listener's main job is to recognize and respond to a perspective (attitude, values, beliefs) and a pattern within the context of its larger narrative, historical and social setting (Gee, 1991, 20)

The Narrative Approach to Sport and Dance Research

Moving away from the personal to the general, while a number of different disciplines have become interested in narrative (Plummer, 1995), its use in dance and sport research is still in its infancy. A search on SportDiscus (1949 - August 1998) yielded 59 references using "narrative" as a key word, ten using "life history" and nine using "life story". Sport sociology and history have been narrative's largest users because of its

acceptance in their parent disciplines. The most common usage as cited in Sportdiscus included examinations of media (written and visual) surrounding athletes or a sport, explorations of history (e.g., of a hockey league) and use of narrative (as opposed to questionnaire or test) to examine various topics (e.g., the experience of oriental martial arts by Western practitioners). Two references linked narrative and dance: one referred to narratives of a dance making process and the other on the representation of women in ballet narratives in the Romantic ballets.

Of the life history citations, half focused on narratives by physical education teachers regarding their careers. Andrew Sparkes (1993) and his colleague (Sparkes and Templin, 1992) have been proponents of the use of life history both as a means of better understanding social issues related to physical education teaching and as a means for teachers to understand their own life experiences and the impact they have as educators. Of the remaining citations, one referred to the deviant career of an unlicensed boxer, one on issues related to eating and body weight in the narrative of a gymnast, one on the role of play and leisure in the life history of a fiddler, one a narrative reflection and the final, a discussion of the use of narrative in sociological research in Finland. Finally, of the life story citations, only one was in article format – a narrative by a teacher implementing a new physical education program examined from a sociological perspective. The others were books on the sporting careers of a number of athletes.

Topics of concern to sport psychologists have great potential to be explored through narrative. For example, Denison's doctoral thesis (1994) focused on issues, personal and political, experienced in retirement from sport. He created a story to elucidate the process based to some extent on journals he kept throughout his retirement

and to some extent based in imagination. Although Denison's work was informed by sociology, he pointed out aspects of interest to both theoretical and applied sport psychologists with respect to the sport retirement process.

Moving back again to the personal, I am interested in narrative because I think it captures what I am most interested in, what excited me in the beginning about sport psychology and what got lost in the focus on skill based components of excellence. Narrative expresses that which is behind the skills and what is at the heart of individual excellence.

Framing the Project

This study has a number of premises at its foundation, some related to its theoretical underpinnings and some related to methodology. The first is that through a life story, identity can be expressed and understood to the person him or her self and to others. As Mishler (1986) stated, a person's story is a self-representation; everything acts to validate, confirm and express this identity.

... whatever else the story is about it is also a form of self-presentation, that is, a particular personal-social identity is being claimed; second, everything said functions to express, confirm and validate this claimed identity. The first assumption directs us to the content of the identity, to the ways it is expressed through various particulars of the account, and to the ways it represents cultural themes and values. The second supports our search for identity-relevant material throughout the account (p, 243).

Context and culture are considered an integral part of an individual's life story (Bruner, 1990; Mishler, 1992).

Second, contrary to the view of development as a series of commonly experienced sequential changes, some researchers consider development as an aleatoric process (Cohler, 1982; Mishler, 1992). That is, life can be seen as subject to “unpredictable changes and developmental discontinuities that simply can not be explained by previous development” (Cohler, 1982, p. 214). Narrative is suited to dealing with ambiguity and chaos (Mishler, 1986). It provides a way of dealing with individual experiences through integrating them into old stories or creating new ones that accommodate and make sense of complexity.

We strive to give our lives coherence not only in the stories we tell about ourselves but also in the way we tell them. Each of us has a private store, a mythology that operates much as the *Jukurrpa* (stories from the Dreaming of the Warlpiri Aborigines of Australia); it is generative and continuous, and we do not cease adding to it for as long as we live. Like the Warlpiri, and like Louisa (Louisa Rodgers Alger – McRae’s narrator), it is in the stories we tell about ourselves and our “tribe”, be it family or community, that we seek to unite separate domains of private and public self, the sacred and the profane, past and present, our feelings and thoughts, as well as to bring it consciousness all of those many things, unknowable but insistent, of which the self is, in part, constructed. Storymaking presents a genuinely clarifying means of pursuing these connections (McRae, 1994, p. 214).

Narrative is in this sense, “a representation of a process” (Josselson, 1995). Dancers’ narratives represent their perspectives only at the time of the telling; the creation of the life story continues until death.

Third, the individual is considered an active agent in the creation of his or her life and his or her own story (Mishler, 1992), acting as author, actor and narrator.

What characterizes human selfhood is the construction of a conceptual system that organizes, as it were, a “record” of agentive encounters with the world, a record that is related to the past (that is, “autobiographical memory”, so-called) but that is also extrapolated into the future-self with history and with possibility... While this “constructed” self system is inner, private, and suffused with affect, it also extends outward to the things and activities and places with which we become “ego-involved” (Bruner, 1990, p. 36).

In the sense of individual as the creator of the story, I acknowledge, as do others, that a life story may be based on fact but is a creative construction: “...a patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present and anticipated future” (McAdams, 1994, p. 12).

Fourth, narrative is a means by which individual experience can be configured and made meaningful and thus it fits well with idiographic research.

...idiographic studies are naturally affiliated to the concern for understanding meanings rather than the project of formulating causal laws. There is always a personal or indexical aspect to meanings even when an actor draws on a common understanding or a shared semantics of action (Smith, Harré & Van Langenhove, 1995, p. 59).

My choice of the idiographic is in part personal. Other research I have been involved in has focused on establishing themes common to a group regarding a particular topic: sixteen percent said this, eight out of the ten said this. While framing the data in terms of similarities and dissimilarities in responses of a group was appropriate to the

research aim, it left me feeling somewhat dissatisfied. There were many stories that did not have a place but yet communicated important information.

Fifth, in terms of defining narrative for analysis, two views are prevalent. One may look for instances of narrative within the interview text or the whole interview may be considered the narrative. In the first instance, narrative is considered only one of the “linguistic forms through which beliefs, underlying propositions about the world and communicative intentions are expressed” (Mishler, 1986a, p. 106). Using this definition, one of the research tasks is to identify narrative and non-narrative sections of the interview using established criteria. For example, using the Burkian pentad (1945), one would consider only those sections of text which contain a character(s), action, goals, settings and means to be a narrative.

Using the second definition, one assumes that all that is said has a place in the story, and thus, one task is to discover how parts of the story fit together. Mishler (1986a) calls this the “paradigmatic view of narrative” (p.148).

Investigators with a paradigmatic orientation tend to be relatively inattentive to the question of whether there are different types of narrative; nor do they specify components, features, or modes of connection that enter into narrative structure....The same neglect of this issue is found among analysts of interview narratives who hold a view of the whole interview as a “story”, such as Agar and Hobbs. When alternatively, narratives are regarded as one among other modes or strategies of “telling”, considerable emphasis is placed on specific features of narratives, how they vary among different types, and how they serve to distinguish narratives from other modes of discourse (Mishler, 1986a, p. 150)

I have chosen to look at the interview texts in their entirety as instances of narrative. Placing a focus on identifying sections of the text that adhere to established narrative criteria is not relevant to the intent of this study. As well, I chose to consider the whole interview as narrative because otherwise some of the insights and personal philosophies that have been learned from lived experience and yet which may not be directly discussed in relation to an event sequence may be overlooked. I considered them important to a life as a whole.

Sixth, I am not taking individual stories as representative of external reality as is the case, for example, in some anthropological research. The object of my interpretation is the narrative as text (Linde, 1993; Weisser, 1996). Only those aspects of the self supported by language (Linde, 1993) were explored in this study. Dancers' stories will not be seen as indicative of a typical way of being for all women dancers in a particular community. Neither am I looking outside dancers' stories for confirmation of the account of their lives: "The life story is an interpersonal construction, and the boundary surrounding it must be kept intact to preserve trust and facilitate the revelation of a personal mythology imbuing a life" (Kotre, 1984, p. 34). Nor am I looking for a hidden self.

Finally, the story is not made in the interview; it is being made all along. But the interaction with the audience brings out certain aspects of the story. I consider the version of the life story told to me a jointly produced discourse event (Mishler, 1986): "the speaker works to construct a text whose coherence can be appreciated and at the same time, the addressee works to reach some understanding of it as a coherent text and communicate that understanding" (Linde, 1993, p. 12). I have asked narrators to tell me

their stories - that context affected what was told. The interview content is a function of my questions, my responses, my interest, my demeanor and the questions, responses, interest and demeanor of the narrator. Even if an interview is “successful”, there is much that will not be told. But because we let others know who we are by the stories we tell about ourselves, something of the self will be told. However, although I acknowledge the primacy of our interaction in creating the interview text, exploring that interaction is not the main focus of my study. I am looking at the text as an “individually constructed phenomenon” not a “socially constructed” one (Linde, 1993, p. 12).

Process

With each new experience in our lives, we revise or re-write our stories to integrate the impact. Just as our lives are transformed in our narratives, so are the dancers’ narratives as they travel from the interview, through the transcription, through the analysis and emerge in their final form as story. Yet as in our personal stories, there is a thread of continuity that is carried through; something of the previous form remains.

This section focuses on the process from interview through to story. The interview process and procedure will be described in a general way; specifics regarding each dancer are included as an introduction to their stories. Details of the transcription process, the analysis and how the stories and themes were written follow. The role of the dancer consultant is explained.

The General Interview Process

The original conceptualization of the interview chosen for this project was that of collaboration between interviewer and interviewee. The intent was to move away from

the hierarchy of the traditional researcher/subject relationship to one in which the “action” between the interviewer and interviewee was truly “inter”. The interviewee in this case is seen to be an active participant in the process – “a kind of researcher in his/her own right, consulting repertoires of experience and orientations, linking fragments into patterns and offering ‘theoretically’ coherent descriptions, accounts and explanations” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 29). The titles, “interviewer” and “interviewee” may no longer apply as an aspect of collaboration suggests that each may ask questions of and refer comments to the other. I selected this perspective as it seemed to be in keeping with my topic and how I wanted to explore it. I was asking dancers to tell me of their lives; I did not want them to describe it within my limits, terms or framework. While I felt as if the interviews succeeded in the dancers playing an active part in the process, “collaboration” as I originally envisioned it came to be redefined.

My idea of collaboration was narrator and interpreter seeking to understand together. I had envisioned a mutual exchange. However, the nature of the topic allowed only occasionally for dialogue. I had asked each dancer to tell me her story of how she became a dancer, beginning at any point in her life. I explained that I had no set questions but would ask questions inspired by topics the dancers presented. While I did ask questions to clarify certain points and did discuss various topics, on the whole the interview needed to be centered on the dancer’s story as she wanted to tell it. Plummer (1995) addressed this issue in the following quote while also bringing up another aspect of the interview I needed to consider: expectations.

A structured interview is a crutch; it pushes the researcher into a well-defined role (sitting there with a questionnaire in one’s lap) and permits the relative

security of knowing both what to ask and what is likely to be heard in reply.

Without minimizing the many difficulties to which researchers and research books testify, it is a comparatively technical exercise.

This is not true of a life history interview, which has to be much more open and fluid. It is simply not what most people expect of an interview, so that it makes the task difficult at the outset; there are no clear prescriptions as to how the participant is expected to behave. Often the participant is expected to take the lead rather than merely responding to a series of cues given by the questionnaire. Furthermore, it is not like a simple conversation, an analogy that is sometimes made, for the researcher has to be too passive for that (p. 53).

Even though I had envisioned the narrator having the freedom to express what she would and communicated that, each dancer had her own expectation of what the interview process would be like: the role I was to play and conversely how she should act. Also an influence in the way the interviews went was the dancers' comfort in speaking about their lives in general. As well, my presence and the relationship the dancer and I established impacted on the atmosphere of the interviews.

With Yvonne Coutts, the first dancer I interviewed, I came closest to what I feel would be an equal relationship. We were similar in age, in certain experiences we had had and in our conclusions drawn from experience. I did not feel like the "interviewer" asking questions, nor did I feel relegated to the role of "audience". In our second and third interviews, we had more exchange; she asked me questions that related to my opinion on topics and to my personal life. I felt comfortable offering personal insights and experience. Yvonne had not reflected on her life in its entirety before. However, judging

by what she was willing to discuss and what she had explored through her choreography and her own consideration of personal experience, she had an interest in examining her life. At the beginning of our first interview, she mentioned that she thought this would be a good process for her. At the conclusion of the third, she told me how much she enjoyed the interviews.

I went into the interviews with Peggy Baker aware of her stature in the dance world and somewhat in awe of her presence. She has been interviewed many times in her life. She was comfortable talking about all aspects, from personal experiences to philosophical tenets that have evolved from experience. In our interviews I felt my role to be that of listener and recorder. There were few questions I could ask in part because of the thoroughness of her account but also because I felt that asking questions disrupted the flow of her story. However, I felt the genuine interest she had in sharing her life and her work with me; it was expressed in the excitement and completeness with which these were presented. Peggy Baker also mentioned that she felt that not enough was written about dance and dancers and that much knowledge from personal sources has been lost. I felt the interviews offered her another medium, aside from her choreography and teaching, in which her insights regarding dance could be passed on.

In my interview with my first ballet dancer, I felt an expectation to be the “audience”. She set up her “stage” placing me off to the side of the camera. While she openly shared many aspects of her life with me during the interview, she returned the transcripts with many sections taken out. I experienced both the private and public personas associated with this dancer.

Finally, Vivian was the youngest of the four and the least familiar with being interviewed. She expected me to ask questions. She freely gave her responses but rarely continued post-response to go, for example, into the next phase of her life. We followed this pattern for both interviews. Vivian was the most curious about seeing the interviews on tape. I had planned to send each dancer a copy of the interview tapes once the study was completed, however, in Vivian's case, I sent a copy after each of our interviews. Vivian, like Yvonne Coutts, told me in the beginning of our first interview that she felt this process would be an interesting one for her.

I made a note following my first interview with Peggy Baker on the nature of expectations. It is an obvious point but until my experience with this style of interviewing, I had not considered the flexibility I required. While I may have had a conceptualization of the ideal interview process, when it came to the doing, I needed to make adjustments for each individual taking into account my goals and their personal style and approach to the interview.

Reflecting on the interview process caused me to consider what constitutes a "successful" interview. Is it to be found in the quality of the data that emerges? The interview material was replete with insight and experience. Yet what emerged in the interviews can not be so easily separated from the affect of my presence, both in a positive and negative way. Was I able to create an atmosphere in which the dancers felt comfortable and motivated to speak? Did I influence their responses in such a way that they told me what I wanted to hear as opposed to what they believed? I believe I conveyed a willingness to listen. While I did ask questions, I encouraged and relied on the dancers to tell me of their lives.

The possibility of fabrication exists both in the remembering of events and in the telling. With respect to the source of our stories, Schacter (1996) summarized the characteristics of memory by saying that on the whole our memories are accurate.

“...autobiographical memories are complex constructions. But this does not mean that we live in a world of wholly fabricated, self serving fantasies. There are, in fact, good reasons to believe that our memories of the broad contours of our lives are fundamentally accurate” (p. 94).

Some researchers have made a distinction between autobiographical memory and life story memory (Robinson & Taylor, 1998). In an experiment to discover the relationship between the two, Robinson and Taylor found that people recalled vivid memories of events or people that had no place in their life stories. Conversely, in their life stories, they told about experiences that were not represented when asked to recall vivid memories.

Kotre (1995) described the remembering self as having two characteristics. The first is like a librarian with a concern for historical truth. The second is a creator of personal myth: “Not a falsehood but a comprehensive view of reality, a different kind of reality than a librarian knows. A myth is a story that speaks to the heart as well as the mind, seeking to generate conviction about what it thinks is true” (p. 116). In telling a life story, the intent is not adherence to factual truth.

The goal of my thesis was not biography; I was not interested in verifying details told to me. Also, according to the life history literature, “truth” about the past can be very difficult to discern. We interpret our past experiences in light of our present situation (Freeman, 1992; Kotre, 1984) so that a past event and its meaning in the present may not

have exact correspondence. For example, as a child I had an experience at a friend's farm. I had spent many happy hours on ponies, but finally had a chance to try a big horse. I had just put one foot in the stirrup and was in the process of swinging my leg across the saddle when the horse took off. I fell off. But I got back on and rode the horse. If after that time my life had been one in which I had many such experiences - having to dust myself off and get back in the saddle - I might "remember" that experience as how I have "always" responded to situations where I was "thrown off" instead of how I might have thought of it at the time - humiliating, painful, funny or as something of little consequence.

Thus, I accepted the dancers' stories as their perspective on their lives at the moment and what they told me as the life they wanted to share with me. They had an interest in being interviewed whether it was personal - a chance to review their lives to date (mentioned by Yvonne Coutts and Vivian) or in part public - to share insights from a wealth of experience (mentioned by Peggy Baker).

The experience of the narrator telling the story influences the nature of the interview. Older people are often considered the best storytellers in that they have had the most opportunity to retell their tales, improving on the delivery and adding insight with experience (McAdams, 1994). Thus, a multitude of factors combine to influence the resulting interview. An interview is as elusive as a dance performance - never can it be repeated in quite the same way.

Dancer Consultant

In order to ease my way into the interview style and topics of this project, I elicited the help of a good friend of mine who is a former dancer and current choreographer. We

first met each other at York University in the dance program and have maintained a friendship over the years and many changes in our lives. Our first meeting was on June 27, 1997. We followed the interview format I intended to use with all of the narrators. I explained the purpose of my project and asked her to tell me the story of her life as a dancer emphasizing important events, people and so on.

Although the interview allowed for a level of comfort as we knew each other very well, that knowledge also interfered with a full explication of the dancer's life. Much was left "publicly" unsaid. Between friends there is a knowledge of the other's history which is not necessary to reiterate each time contact is made except if needed as a reference (e.g., "Remember that time when I..."). Thus, in that much was left unsaid, the first interview frustrated me. I also found that our conversation turned away from the personal to the general. I began asking about topics related to dancers as a whole rather than about her life in particular, and although I did not realize it at the time, using her as a window into a world of which I am not a part.

In the first interview, she stated that she would feel more comfortable letting me see some of her work rather than talking about it. Thus, in the second interview we watched selections of her dancing and choreography on video which then opened up discussion. As I transcribed and read the second interview, the unassigned and unanticipated role that was developing for her in my project began to take shape. She was becoming, as I hinted at before, my "cultural contact".

Although dance has played a large part in my life, it is not an active part at the moment unless one considers this thesis a dance with words. I am a semi-insider – not completely unfamiliar with the world of dance, but not currently active. As I went

through the research process, there were questions I had about general topics (e.g., how the term ‘interpreter’ was defined). While I did address some of these questions with certain dancers, such a discussion was not always appropriate. It was helpful to have someone with whom I could discuss various issues in depth. Our third interview centered solely on general issues.

Within the text, I will designate her contributions by “CC” for “cultural contact”. It should be noted that like any other reference used in this study, her perspective is her own.

General Procedures

At my proposal seminar, a suggestion was made by a committee member that it would be more in keeping with subject matter of the project to contact potential narrators through the phone. The point raised was that as I was asking people to speak about something personal - their selves and their lives - a human contact rather than a paper contact would be preferable. However, I had already made initial contact with three of the four final narrators. I had sent a letter (see Appendix A) on University of Ottawa letterhead, my reasoning being that as I was asking professional people to speak with me, letterhead would ensure them to a certain degree of the legitimacy of my project - that I was not some crackpot looking to snoop into their lives. I had done some calligraphy on the envelopes bearing the letter to “humanize” my request. I also felt that when I called dancers to follow up on my request, my manner is such that it would not make them feel intimidated. As well, dancers have not been over-studied, in fact, quite the contrary, and I hoped that they would be intrigued and excited about participating. Peggy Baker and Felicia contacted me as soon as they received the letter. Yvonne Coutts was interested in

the study and had waited for my call to let me know she would participate. I was given the name of the fourth dancer, Vivian, by a friend of mine who works as a physiotherapist. She knew I was looking for another ballerina and had mentioned this to this dancer. Thus, when I called Vivian she was already familiar with my request.

In the first meeting with each dancer, prior to beginning the interview, I reminded her of my interest – her story of how she became a dancer including any experience or person that was important to her. I suggested she could begin at any point in her story. All elected to begin at the beginning. In the first interview I also made dancers aware of the consent form and asked for it to be signed.

All interviews were videotaped. Videotapes and computer files were labeled with a designation according to the order of interview. A list of the order of interviews is found in Appendix B. The first dancer I interviewed was titled D1 and so on. Until a dancer gave me permission to use her name, her identity was kept confidential. I made a video copy of each interview to use as a working copy. I kept the original in my office at the university and the working copy locked in a cabinet at home where I worked on the transcription.

In the planning of the project, it was thought that for the second interview, it would be interesting to have the dancers watch the first interview with me and make comments. I tried this only with Yvonne Coutts, the first dancer I interviewed. We watched our interview; I stopped the tape if I wanted to ask a question and asked her to do the same. It turned out to be a lengthy and tiring event as one hour and fifteen minutes of original tape took three hours to review. During the process, I began to feel uncomfortable - that I was imposing too much on Yvonne's time and body - it was hard to

sit that long and to concentrate that long. While some interesting information arose, I felt that it would be just as useful to make note of questions I had from the first interview and use them as part of the focus of the second interview. This was what I did with the other dancers.

Following each interview, I made notes of any impressions I had: the interview itself, the place the interview was held, connections to prior interviews or literature and so on. In all cases, prior to a subsequent meeting with each dancer, I reviewed previous transcript(s) and my notes. Once all of the interviews for a particular dancer were transcribed, I sent a copy for review. In the instructions I asked dancers to return the interviews with corrections made to any section they felt needed clarification, to notify me if they wished to remain anonymous and to eliminate any material they did not want used in the writing of the stories. Once stories were written, a draft was sent to each dancer except for Felicia (see Meetings with Felicia). I explained that the stories were to be considered my interpretations of the interview text and that I was interested in their feedback. I asked them to provide me with a written comment of their impressions. While the commentaries were not necessary in the sense of validation as the stories are interpretations (Riessman, 1993), I felt it important to request them out of respect for their participation in the project; I was also interested in their reactions. I have included each dancer's comments after her story. The originals of the commentaries as well as comments on the interview transcripts by the dancers can be found in Appendix E.

A general remark that needs to be made is in regard to my tremendous sense of appreciation of the dancers – for their initial and ongoing responses to participation in this study, for the care that they took in reading their transcripts and stories, for the insights

they shared with me, and for the love for and excitement of what they do that came out in their stories.

The Transcription Process

As my focus was on the interviews as text and in order to more easily analyze the interview material, I transcribed the spoken word into written. Having the interviews in video format greatly aided in the transcription procedure; a visual reference made text that was difficult to hear much more easy to understand.

In choosing a transcription procedure, I was guided by Edwards (1993). He stated that two properties desirable in transcripts include: (a) that they preserve the information necessary to the researcher in a way that captures the nature of the interaction and (b) that the conventions used to indicate tonation, tempo etc. are practical (e.g., easy to read, expandable for other purposes). The main focus of this project was to construct a story for each dancer. As mentioned previously, I was not interested in analyzing the created relationship between the dancer and I as demonstrated in the interviews. Nor was I interested in a linguistic analysis in terms of narrative – identifying text, for example, that conformed to particular criteria or looking for linguistic coherence. My choice of a transcription procedure was also guided by practicality. I sent transcripts back to dancers for their perusal. I wanted the text to be easy to read with a minimum of explanation regarding notation.

I transcribed the text using the conventions designated by Gumperz and Berenz (1993) (see Appendix C) with a number of exceptions. I designated a pause of any length with two dots (.). I chose to make this designation as when it came to writing the stories, at times I used quoted material referring to the same topic from a later reference. As such

I referred to the break in flow with the standard three dots (...). If I had used one dot (.) to refer to each half second of pause, for example, a one and a half second pause (...) would be confused with the designation indicating a break and then continuation in discussion of the same topic. Thus, I equated any length of pause with two dots (..). I designated curved brackets, (), to contain any reference to body language or auditory cues (e.g., laughter, intonation accompanying a section of speech). For text that was unintelligible, I used a question mark centered in curved brackets, (?). Square brackets were used to enclose any attending cues made by myself or the dancer, e.g., [umhm], that did not alter the rhythm or intent of the main speaker. As such, I embedded these attending cues within the text as opposed to parsing them on a separate line. The text was otherwise parsed into speaker turns arranged vertically.

Analysis and Creation

Here perhaps is the most common strategy for writing up life document research: get your subject's own words, come to really grasp them from the inside and then turn it yourself into a structured and coherent statement that uses the subject's words in places and the social scientist's in others but does not lose their authentic meaning (Plummer, 1983, p. 111).

The analysis and the writing can not be looked at separately as the one informed the other. Yvonne Coutt's story was the first written. The process I established to arrive at the story construction became the method I used in putting together all of the other stories. I wrote Vivian's second, Peggy Baker's third and Felicia's last.

In order to write the stories I followed Polkinghorne's suggestions (1995) for narrative analysis: place events in temporal order, identify which are contributors to the

general plot, identify possible connections between events and write the story. In the first interview and in Peggy Baker's case, the first and second interviews, dancers spoke about their lives from birth to the present. Subsequent interviews provided additional information that enriched the basic story told in the first and added new material.

I began by reading through the interviews and constructing an event timeline for a dancer (see Appendix D). I looked for events, the age, year or time of life in which they occurred, any information related to the context surrounding the events and potential themes. I recorded these events in the timeline in order of occurrence. Descriptions of events were not always told to me in order of occurrence nor were they always told in one sitting. I needed to sort through the interview text collecting all references to a particular event and integrating that material.

According to Linde (1993), life stories need a sequence in order for the reader to make interpretations. For example, "I was depressed, I had an accident" implies something different from "I had an accident, I was depressed". A temporal skeleton (Nelson, 1996) from which I wrote the stories was thus constructed for each dancer and became the "major structuring device" (Linde, 1993, p. 8) for the text. The dancers I interviewed all had Western backgrounds and told their stories in an essentially chronological fashion. I chose to maintain that particular story telling tradition for the final stories as well.

As well as noting events and when they occurred, I also began to look for potential themes. I defined "theme" according to Gee (1991) as that which gave the events in the temporal structure meaning. In one of her interviews, Peggy Baker spoke about a principle she learned as part of her theatre training. Some people see the stage as a neutral

place. In contrast, she always felt it held tremendous possibility that was realized when what happened in that space was given meaning; movement and speech were to be “endowed” with a history. One may look at life stories in a similar way. The events we are a part of are not merely a series of facts that we line up to create our story. We look at what part they play in the context of our personal history and in who we feel we are.

I followed the interpretive process described by Lavender (1995) to analyze the interview transcripts. Lavender contrasted two theories of interpretation applied to art: author-centered and viewer-centered. Those engaged in interpretation from an author-centered perspective feel that the true meaning of a work of art is what the author intended it to mean. Thus, the interpreter’s job is to discover this meaning. In the context of this study, this would translate into trying to figure out what a dancer’s life meant to her. Some of the assumptions regarding this viewpoint which are refuted by Lavender are not as applicable to a transcript analysis as they are to art; however, one that does apply is that the author-centred view supports the assumption that meaning is predetermined.

This is not to say that artists proceed in their work with no ideas or purposes in mind. They often do have very specific aims and motivations, although they do not *necessarily* have anything in mind other than to continue working. But even in cases in which an artist has a specific meaning or message in mind, a work of art, as it takes shape, tends to take on a life and character of its own as the artist engages with his or her materials, be they colours, musical tones, words or movements (Lavender, 1995, p. 27).

Meaning is created with each telling of a life story. It is also created in the interaction of the interview context.

Another assumption of this approach that is applicable is that the job of the interpreter is to discover the artist's meaning because it is the correct one.

But on her [the choreographer's] authority alone he cannot interpret as humorous a dance in which *he* detects no humour. Regardless of what Lisa might say (or wish) the work means, Marco's interpretation may be grounded only upon the manner in which he has experienced – through careful observation and reflection – its features and their interrelations (Lavender, 1995, p. 27).

This assumption introduces a second approach to interpretation – viewer-centered. This perspective is based on the idea that a work of art only means what it means to the viewer. Thus, in this case, my job in interpreting the dancers' narratives would be to discover what they mean to me.

...while viewer-centered theories of interpretation are correct in asserting that meaning cannot be entirely divorced from the feelings and associations of the individual viewer that may be triggered by the work, these theories err when they try to reduce interpretation to the mere articulation of these feelings and associations (Lavender, 1995, p. 28).

Lavender (1995) rejected both theories and proposed the following approach:

Artistic meaning is thus not something static that is embedded in works of art, waiting to be excavated by clever interpreters. Nor is it simply the individual viewer's idiosyncratic impression of the work. It is, rather, something personal in the sense that it is individually determined, yet "objective" in the sense that it is traceable to actual visible properties of the work. It follows that while no

interpretation can ever be “correct”, some may more seriously deserve credence than others (p, 20).

In the interviews, there appeared to be threads which were in existence in various forms throughout the life story and which kept being woven into the narrative. As an example, in going through Vivian’s transcripts there appeared to be a number of events throughout her telling of her life which seemed to suggest that she did not want to limit herself: in her early adolescence she left her first teacher because she did not want to be trapped into a specific style of dance, she chose to work for a company that has a wide ranging repertoire, she did not want to move up the ballet hierarchy as it would limit what she was able to dance and so on.

Once I had gone through the interview transcripts, completed the temporal skeleton and identified themes, I began to write the story. For the first draft, the one sent to dancers, I had written the story in two parts: one the core skeleton of events and the other part, a teasing out of the themes. It was a helpful step as I was able to see how themes first became introduced in the dancers’ lives and then developed over time. However, as this format was too repetitive, I merged the theme section with the core story making for a less wordy construction. This became the final version.

I went between transcript and story, transcript and themes, and story and themes in writing about each dancer’s life. In the constructed story, I provided transitions from one section of interview text to the next and filled in the gaps between blocks of interview text where needed. Where possible, I tried to include Dollard’s criteria for a good life history (Dollard in Polkinghorne, 1995). He suggested that it is important to provide information on context, the role that bodily dimensions play (e.g., weight and body shape is a factor in

acceptance as a dancer), the role of significant others, the person as an active agent in her life and to show the story as having a beginning, middle and end.

I referred to notes I had made throughout the process; one notebook captured impressions about the interviews and ideas I had when going through the transcripts. In another I collected ideas from various literature sources. Relevant notes were integrated and used in the stories: “In producing the story, the researcher draws on disciplinary expertise to interpret and make sense of responses and actions. Because the story is offered as a scholarly explanation and realistic depiction of a human episode, the researcher needs to include evidence and argument in support of the plausibility of the offered story (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 19).

One of the important decisions to be made in constructing the narrators’ stories was to decide on how much of the story the narrator herself would tell and how much input I would have. Plummer (1983) described a continuum which ranges from the subject’s “pure account” or the interview text presented as is to the sociologist’s “pure account” or a discussion of relevant sociological theory. I did look at various styles of presentation. Helpful in that regard was a book of interviews with American writer and poet, May Sarton (Ingersoll, 1991) which presented the selections in a number of formats. Peggy Baker had based one of her solo dance pieces on Sarton’s life and work; out of curiosity, I decided to seek out her work. Prior to this thesis, I had not heard of May Sarton nor had come across her writing.

I chose to let the narrator’s text prevail as much as possible; I wanted a sense of how the dancer told about her life and experiences to be present in the work. However,

the interpretations as presented through the story constructions are my own (Riessman, 1993).

Issues of editing and interpretation are issues of “intrusion” - how much the researcher changes the raw data (Plummer, 1983). In terms of editing the quotes, I have followed some of the suggestions of Stoller (1974) used in his writing of psychoanalytic life histories. First, if there is more than one discussion of the same material usually only one is used. Second, speech that is broken or stumbling is eliminated where it adds nothing. In cases where hesitation represents a searching for the best way to articulate an experience or insight, I have left those indicators in the quote. Third, remarks on the same topic are presented together, even if they come from different interviews or different places in the same interview (while continuing to respect the context surrounding them). In Vivian’s and Felicia’s case, names have been changed and data left out for the sake of confidentiality. Finally, some material has had to be removed for the sake of space limitations (anything irrelevant to the focus of the study). Lengths of the four stories vary. Length was based in part on the amount of data gathered in the interview but also in terms of what content was relevant to the constructed story.

I used the following notations in the quotations used in the stories: the dancers’ words are written in italics, my words are enclosed in square brackets, two dots (..) refer to a pause and three dots (...) refer to a linking of related material. I have eliminated all attending cues as they add nothing to the meaning of the quote and take away from the ease of reading. I have left my questions and comments in the text where they provide linguistic context for the interview discourse (Gumperz, 1992).

The Four Stories

The process for each dancer in terms of how they were contacted and the course of the interviews differed slightly. The specifics of each process preview the individual dancer's stories. Thus, the research process and the dancer's story are presented together. I have also presented the dancers' commentaries following their stories. I have arranged the stories with those of the two contemporary dancers first and those of the two classical dancers second.

Peggy Baker

Meetings with Peggy Baker

I knew Peggy Baker by reputation as one of Canada's contemporary dance icons. In early June 1997, I sent a letter to her outlining the study and asking if she would consider participating. She called me upon receipt of the letter and left a message expressing her interest in taking part. I remember my excitement of her agreement and also my appreciation of her professional manner. In her message, she indicated which days she would be available and as she would be out of town, to let her know by message which days would suit me. We arranged for the 22nd and 23rd of July. I did not actually speak in person with her until July 21st. She had just returned home from a tour. Her husband encouraged her to check her messages and she agreed even though she was tired. She called me after hearing my message confirming our meeting; she told me that I sounded so friendly, it was an easy call to make.

Prior to travelling to Toronto, I had contacted the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to see if they had produced any of Peggy Baker's choreography. I had not seen any complete performances of her work. The morning prior to our first interview I

was able to arrange for a screening of two productions featured on Sunday Arts and Entertainment which had highlighted some of Peggy Baker's work. The first focused on a duet by Mark Morris that she performed with Christopher House. It represented a period in her career when she was interested in presenting the body in an androgynous fashion. The second production centered on Peggy Baker's husband, Ahmed Hassan. He is a musician who has worked in the dance domain as an original composer for choreography and class accompanist. A portion of the video examined their professional and personal relationship.

All of my interviews with Peggy Baker have taken place at her home close to the University of Toronto. Seeing Peggy come up the street towards me as I myself was approaching her door for our first interview, I confess I was surprised that she was about the same height as myself. She has such a tremendous stage presence; I expected her to be taller. But when she began to talk, I realized that her presence comes through in her speech as much as it does when she moves.

She was direct and forthcoming. She knew where she wanted to sit for our interview and once she knew that I wanted her to speak freely of her life as a dancer, she needed no questions to encourage her. In our first interview we covered a span of her life from her childhood up until the late 1980s. We ended the interview after an hour and a half as she had another commitment. She lent me a master's thesis written about her teaching practice as well as two videos that featured her dancing: a special on Mark Morris which showed her dancing in one of his choreographies and a tape of featuring Peggy Baker dancing in Non Coupable, a piece choreographed by Paul André Fortier. The tape was a dance documentary which showed Susan MacPherson, the dancer who the

piece was originally created on, teaching the choreography to Peggy and then Peggy's performance of the piece. I used this material to get a sense of Peggy's work as a dancer and teacher.

I returned the next day. While the previous day's interview had followed a basically linear progression from childhood through her return to Toronto from New York, she told me that she could not follow such a linear mode for this second interview. She spoke about the origins of some of her interests in choreography and teaching and then about the development of her solo career. We traveled through time using her choreography as focal points. Again she spoke for approximately an hour and a half.

Peggy Baker was free again at the end of August. To this final interview I had brought a series of questions which emerged from the transcription of the previous interviews. We began the interview with these. We then sat in front of the television and she showed me sections of her choreography. I felt during this interview and through all of them, her desire to share in her excitement with dance – those moments of synergy and discovery. I was also conscious of a sense of the integrity with which she approaches her art. It is not so much the careful planning of detail, although that is present in her work as well, but that the intention behind her work speaks of commitment, respect and quality.

In January 1998 I sent her the transcripts of our interviews. She returned them to me a few weeks later. She had carefully gone through each page, correcting the spelling of names and the text in a few places where what she had wanted to say did not come across clearly. She initialed each page.

She returned the draft of her story in August with a short commentary. Her corrections were minor: she added a few words to clarify points, corrected the spelling of a name of one of her teachers and took out many of the extraneous words (e.g., “like”).

Peggy Baker – Dance Artist

Introduction.

When Peggy Baker was a child, she had a fantasy - inspired perhaps by the Shirley Temple movies she watched. A man with a briefcase would knock on the door of her family's home and announce to her mother that he was taking Peggy away; Peggy had been expecting him and now she was going to become an artist.

Peggy began our second interview by telling me that she was reading an autobiography by Jean Houston. There was an idea in the book she found beautiful. Jean Houston had taken the concept of fractals and related them to a person's life: *...how the same patterns.. get repeated at different times in your life in smaller and bigger versions. And I was thinking of that in relation to.. what we were talking about yesterday because.. I was almost giving myself the feeling that I just kept.. wanting to recreate my childhood. I was noticing that a lot of the things I liked doing were similar things to my childhood but actually I don't think they were looking back, I think that my childhood was looking forward.*

What was once a childhood fantasy has become a reality. There has been no single figure like the stranger with the briefcase who has whisked her away to realize her dream. The impact of the values Peggy was exposed to growing up and the role models and experiences she had serve as a backdrop for later experiences and the philosophies she has

developed around her dance. But it is Peggy Baker herself who is largely responsible for making her dreams come true.

Beginnings: Role models and values.

Dance was a part of Peggy's world from the very beginning; it surrounded her. Her mother was a dancer and dance teacher *who danced around the house, who also sang around the house*. Degas prints of dancers hung on the living room walls and ballerina posters hung in her bedroom. *I didn't discover it at some definite point. The images were always there.*

She and her five siblings were encouraged to take different lessons as children: piano and tap dancing for all of them (the boys included) and then as they grew older to focus on what interested them. McAdams (1994) suggested that in adolescence we begin working on the "ideological setting" for our life story. This consists of the values and beliefs that become our foundation and once established, does not alter much over the course of a life. Peggy was motivated by values that were part of the family atmosphere. The important thing as far as her parents were concerned was that the children were busy.

...my parents just really valued us doing something and investing our.. commitment, that was a really big part, if we started to do something, we had to follow through... also not quitting something before you finish it for sure and doing something the best that you can.

Peggy's interests centered on theatre and musical theatre. Dance was just for fun. She took tap at a local basement studio.

It was totally a neighbourhood thing and I used to like to wear my tap shoes to class and wear them home, just dance along. And I remember that I used to love, um, in

the fall, because it would be dark early because it was Edmonton and the street lights would be like stage lights. And so I had some fantasy fun with dancing, it was play fun.

An important childhood experience for her was the concerts that she put on with her siblings and cousins.

...we did a lot of little concerts we'd put on for our aunts and uncles. We always had a big Christmas concert with all the cousins and it was a very big deal, we'd always rehearse for, well, at least the day it was happening we'd be practicing all day and making our show. And I remember also doing performances in the front yard for neighbourhood mothers so it's probably before I went to school. I grew up also watching Shirley Temple movies and Fred Astaire movies and that kind of thing. So my idea of dancing was numbers and doing performances for other people. And that it was a special fun event.

Underlying the fun that came from the making and performing, values were also being taught about the significance of creating something for someone else.

...I guess all the performance things, like doing recitals and doing concerts for our parents and what not.. creating something to give - it's like a gift basically. That was usually what our parents wanted for Christmas was a concert (laughs). And they considered that to be a gift and so we all learned that to make something ourselves and to give it to another person is something important. And that things that we do ourselves are more significant to the other person and.. that they're more than the thing itself.

Performing was to be Peggy's choice of career...but not as a dancer. In junior high school, she stopped taking tap dancing. It was not fun anymore – the better dancers got to dance more than she did and she found it too competitive. She wanted to go into

the theatre. She won a scholarship in high school at an acting festival and decided to use the money to go to summer school in Drumheller, Alberta. It was a trip that represented two firsts: being away from home alone and a vision of womanhood unimagined.

*...I had taken the Greyhound bus and I'd never gone anywhere by myself before and I think I was out of grade ten but I was very inexperienced, I came from a big family so I wasn't used to doing **anything** on my own. It was always a big huge deal, a big caravan to go anywhere and there were always lots of people around to ask what to do next. And uh I got off the Greyhound bus and it seems to me there was supposed to be someone there from this drama school to meet me. I waited and waited and I looked through my things and I, "Ahhh", it was supposed to be the next day and I was **just**.. stricken, I was terrified. And I ended up calling long distance and I was in tears and my parents said, "Well use your money" because I had some spending money with me "Use your money to stay in a hotel, stay in **the** hotel there and we'll send you some money to the school". So I stayed in this hotel in this little tiny town and the washroom was down the hall and it was just, I was just.. I remember I don't even know if I put on my nightie or anything to go to bed, I just lay as stiff as a board and I was just so embarrassed also. So anyway that's the story about that. But at this drama school there was a woman teaching a movement class and the class was supposedly movement for actors but it was actually.. a very very fine professional dancer teaching Graham technique. It was Patricia Beatty.. from Toronto Dance Theatre and actually in those years, it was before Toronto Dance Theatre. She had just come back to Canada, she had graduated from Bennington College, she had danced in New York City with Pearl Lange, she was at the Graham school and then she came back to Toronto. She had a company called New*

*Dance Group of Canada, and she was 32 years old and I was sixteen. And I mention those ages only because I just worked with her again this year and she's now in her sixties and I'm in my forties. I reminded her that I had met her in Drumheller because she had forgotten where we had met and she said, "Oh, you were in Drumheller". She said, "That summer school took five years off my life" (laughs). She said, "The next year they replaced me with two teachers and that's not the first time I've been replaced by two teachers". So we reminisced about this drama school and can you imagine, she was teaching three classes a day to people who were not dancers. And they didn't even have dance clothes most of them. I remember the boys wore t-shirts and blue jeans to class and they thought that dancing was pretty silly. And uh.. but I can still remember, I still have images of her in this room where we took these classes, I was **completely** thunderstruck by her, I had never never seen a woman like her in my life. She was.. first of all, she was clearly an adult but she was not married and that was kind of surprising to me. Um and she was, she just had a **completely** different balance in her nature than most women I was acquainted with and she was really feisty and she was quick and demanding and she spoke.. in metaphors. And I remember doing pliés in second position and she opened her arms in some really big gesture and she said, "You're like the Emperor of China". I was just completely blown away by her and the things that she spoke about, the things that she cared about and the way that she looked when she was moving, it was a completely different image of a woman than I ever had. And I have to say she was an extremely beautiful woman.. very very long hair which she wore pulled back and sort of gathered at the nape of her neck but then part of it was loose also. It went down to her waist, it was thick, beautiful hair and she wore no makeup at all. She wore beautiful*

earrings from Israel or someplace like that, um, not like little clip on things that I was used to seeing and she was wearing Birkenstock sandals (laughs). She would wear these long sleeved leotards with the backs cut out and she was just a reed, thin as a reed. And then she wore these hipster sort of bell bottom pants over these leotards and she looked so beautiful. And it wasn't the kind of.. the look that women were supposed to have at that time, it wasn't fashionable, it wasn't what my school teachers looked like, it wasn't what people on t.v. or in magazines or anything else I had access to looked like. No one in my world looked like this person and I was just enamoured with her.

Peggy had had strong female role models in her life up to this point. With respect to her family, Peggy said *it was kind of set up in a way that a lot was expected of women. Both grandmothers were very strong women.* Her father's mother was the matriarch of a large extended family; she was the one everyone went to for advice. Her mother's mother was somewhat unconventional for her time: adventures in Europe, a late marriage and involvement in politics. Meeting Patricia Beatty, however, was out of the realm of the familiar; she had made enough of an impact on Peggy that after summer school Peggy began a correspondence that continued for some years. As if meeting such an alternate vision of woman was not monumental enough, through her, Peggy was introduced to a form of dance that completely engaged her.

I feel it was kind of a breakthrough for me when I met Patricia Beatty in this other world of language and you know I'm going to compare it with something really dramatic but you know when Helen Keller.. put the water together with the signing in her hands and just like that first day she learned 30 words or something, it was just like wooh (slaps bottom hand with top). It's just like you're in another universe or something. It

*was like when I came to modern dance, my life kind of fell, like a whole bunch of things just fell into focus. It's like when you get the key for some cryptic thing you're looking for and suddenly **bang** it's there and you see it and you just go, "Oh my god, I see this whole thing". Um so that's the level of excitement it held for me.*

Peggy had been exposed to lessons in tap and jazz and some ballet. She liked tap and jazz; they were fun. She had seen ballet performances with her mother but it was not something she was interested in. There was something, however, about contemporary dance that she connected to.

Contemporary dance evolved in part as a revolt against the formal structure of and restricted body use in ballet. Contemporary dance saw the body freed up and used in a much more natural way (Cass, 1993). Perhaps seeing Patricia Beatty dance, not so much started the same revolt in Peggy because she had already discarded tap and ballet in favour of theatre, but presented Peggy with a new way of moving which, on trial, felt right to her.

Peggy went home from drama school and told her parents about her encounter with Patricia Beatty and contemporary dance. Through her father's intervention – he was a professor in the education department at the University of Alberta – she joined Orchesis, a dance group at the university. She remembers it being an exciting experience. She was dancing with people who were older than she and who were doing something they loved to do. They did a lot of improvization and put on several shows – everyone working to make something together. The atmosphere of the group was completely different than the tap classes she was used to.

Even though she had had some incredible experiences with dance in her late high school years, she still decided that she would apply to the theatre program at the

University of Alberta and then after graduation, take dance. She was one of 12 students accepted into the program.

I got accepted into that and um, it was really exciting. It had a whole hierarchy among the students and maybe all university departments are like this, I don't know, where the second, third and fourth year students just seem to be so developed. And uh but it was exciting to be around them and in the first year we crewed a lot for their shows, we built sets for the shows and ran the lighting boards and did all the back stage work so it was a really really neat thing plus we were getting our very basic technique in acting.. what they called speech in those days and all the stagecraft stuff and theatre history and we also had a class called Theatre Design Aesthetics and it was taught by a woman named Gwen Keatley... she was another woman who really struck me, she wore these little short boots and she always wore trousers and she didn't sit in a chair, she sort of squatted on the floor with one knee up. I found her really exciting and she, always, one of her big things was that she wanted to be excited by what we were doing. She used the word "titillate", I remember in one of the classes, she wanted us to create something that would get her going. And I remember the first thing, I don't remember exactly what the project was that she gave us.. but I remember the thing I did in response, because we had to set up a tableau and it couldn't have any people in it, I wonder what she actually told us to do because.. um they're what we think of now as installations, we had to light them and we could have sound also. And it was in kind of a black box room where we had this class... And I remember the thing I made, I had these two stools that I brought in, one was a little higher than the other I think and I had a loaf of bread on one of them, it was this mouldy, mouldy bread and I had an alarm clock, an electric clock, plugged into this

bread. Then I had a metronome ticking but you couldn't see it and it was lit, it had this lighting (long laugh). Oh wow.

Theatre was fun, but during the year Peggy had a revelation: *sometime during that year I caught on, I don't even know how I did it anymore, I realized, "If I spend four years in this program I'm going to be 22, 23 years old when I start taking dance classes and I think it might be a little late. Maybe I should just leave right now"* (small laugh).

It was not an easy decision to leave; her teachers felt she was misleading herself and were disappointed.

Ironically I think my lowest mark was in dance. And I wondered about that later, I thought.. and you see this some times, I felt like my teacher wanted to put me down, my dancing teacher, for some reason, because I was totally naive and outspoken about the fact that I wanted to be a dancer and that I loved it and that I felt really good in it. I was clearly more experienced than most people there and for some reason she needed to just put a damper on me, maybe I was really obnoxious, I have no idea. I remember I had a really low mark in dancing and my profs were pointing this out to me.

Her parents supported her decision: *sort of the same idea as when I was a kid, you need to be doing things that are meaningful to you and if you want to do that, that's your choice.* She also had an agreement with her parents – that they would pay for the first year of university and after that, she would pay for it herself. She had been saving her money and had a summer job organized to be able to pay for her dancing. Her second big decision was more difficult for her parents to accept.

I had a boyfriend and um, he was someone who was in high school with me although he was older than me, and I really didn't know him in high school but I got to

*know him in my first year university and we were just madly in love with each other (laughs). He was a musician, he had dropped out of university in his second year in the music program and he joined the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, he was playing the trumpet, but my father was very concerned he had dropped out of university. It didn't look good to my dad. And uh, in retrospect I realize that what I was sharing with this person...well he was the one other person I had really connected with who had sort of similar dreams, um, he was an artist and that's what he was going to do with his life. He was a really gentle person and um, a really funny, intelligent person and those seem to be sort of the three things I find really attractive (small laugh). And at the end of first year university, I was nineteen years old and I worked through the summer and then I announced to my parents that Michael and I were getting married and we were going to move to Toronto. Well.. my poor parents, I have to say, they were so gracious because I'm sure behind closed doors they were going, "Oh my god, this is terrible, she's far too young and now they are moving away from home and what will they do". But we got married. He was 22 and I was 19 (small laugh). I think you've probably picked up from what I've told you so far that I never would have had the guts to go by myself. I didn't realize that at the time, I don't think I was consciously using him or anything like that. I think we were so excited both of us about what we could make of our lives and we were married for twelve years and he's still a **really** important person in my life. Although we were too young to be married and lots of difficulties ensued from that, so anyway.*

Becoming a dancer.

So, inexperienced and newly married Western girl comes to Toronto to begin living her dream of becoming an artist. Peggy took classes at Toronto Dance Theatre

(TDT), going from the two or three classes a week that she was used to, to two or three classes a day: *I was probably sore but I was.. just.. in heaven, I was absolutely in heaven.* Opposites made up Peggy's experience at TDT – the sublime to the graphic. She loved the ritual nature of her classes but felt uncomfortable about the imagery used to inspire the movement.

*It was a huge culture shock. It was, um, well, it was 1971 and they were all hippies (small laugh) and I was a totally straight, very inexperienced young person and I think I found it rather confusing. And also because of my theatre training I was taught to really embody everything and to move for a reason and with images that I kept alive through my actions. I remember for the first few months at theatre school, I don't know that we actually spoke in our acting class, it was all physical. And even later when I went to Herbert Bergof Studio in New York, we didn't get to talk for months and months. The acting exercises were all based on action and the necessity for action and finally when you could speak, it was because you **absolutely** had to speak. And um, anyway, I remember those classes being really upsetting for me, I would **really** get churned up emotionally, I was crying in a lot of classes because I found the material so upsetting. And I found the imagery they were using shocking and I was embarrassed a lot, like they would blatantly talk about lots of sexual things in classes. It was sort of over my head in a way in terms of.. using that as motivation or something like that for dancing. I found that really disturbing in a way. But then there was also a whole other aspect of it that was so tremendously exciting and there's a lot of ritual attached to Graham technique, the whole class as you know is very set, the order in which things happen and just even how the teacher walks in the room, everyone stands up and then when the teacher sits*

down, everyone sits down, they say, "And" and the first exercise begins, and once you've gotten out of beginners, the beginner's level or whatever you want to call it, to feel that you're part of this.. sort of practice. And now in retrospect, because I really think that dancing is my spiritual practice, I realize that that was established for me then. Whether I was taught that or just took that on, I'm not sure. But that's for me a huge part of what I'm doing. Actually some of my early responses, even though they were extremely emotional, I would say that they're still what I think about dancing. I want to be very clear in distinguishing between the sacred and the profane. Actually I would have to say I still don't want to present my body sexually as a dancer. So early on I was sort of upset by that and offended by that and now I just, it's just a choice that I made, that's not how I want people to be looking at me when I'm dancing and even if I'm talking about those issues as a dancer, I'm going to be talking about them in metaphor. It was very confrontational training.

Peggy's early experiences at TDT have helped shape personal philosophies of dance today. She considers her dance space as sacred space. Working alone in the studio, she brings a reverence and intensity to what she is working on. In return, through effort and persistence, breakthroughs and setbacks, it is the place where she experiences a personal evolution. Her experience has also greatly influenced how she has chosen to present her body on stage over the years and how she has approached issues surrounding gender and body image.

One of Peggy's teachers at TDT recognized her potential and wanted to accelerate her learning process.

...one of my teachers there took a particular liking to me and really, um, really

*pushed me and really expected a lot of me. His name is Peter Randazzo. He wanted me right away to go into more advanced classes and um, I'm sorry that that happened in a way, it's not what I would do if I saw a really talented student. Um, and it actually led to something, an event that was really important. He taught me a solo from one of his pieces of choreography to do at an open house. And I don't remember how long I'd been there, it was probably in my first or second year, but um.. I think it was probably unusual for somebody to be given this solo to do and anyway, be that as it may. I was doing this solo and I blanked. And I had never experienced anything like that before.. losing my place in a performance even though I'd been performing in front of people for my whole life. It was a very serious situation, I completely lost track of what I was doing and I improvized for maybe half a minute and then I **totally totally** had a panic attack and I just completely lost it. And it was, it was just one of the most awful things that had happened to me, I was just so shocked, I was so thrown out of my sense of reality by what had happened to me.. and I ran off the performance stage.. into the hallway, I was crying, I was just completely confused and disturbed and upset. And there were other things that had to still be performed that I was in and.. I can't remember if I went back out and I don't think that I did.. for that piece, I think there was a pause or an intermission or something and I felt so humiliated and um.. I remember the dance the next night and it was so awful and.. for a long time and even **now** if I get **really** nervous, or I don't even know if that's the word to use but I can sort of psych myself out because that happened to me. So it's interesting because I think it did two things. It made me realize.. this is **really serious stuff** and you go into a really serious.. state of mind, you have to take charge of yourself in a way that I never had to do before. And I also*

realized that you're really vulnerable when you're in that.. position and I was vulnerable and I had never tasted that before and it was really shocking. And uh...anyway, so that was like an early on thing so I had to deal with that, it was.. because all my teachers were there, it wasn't something that happened to me and you could go somewhere else so that took a lot of dealing with. And somehow.. I worked my way up again on my own, I knew I still wanted to dance. Maybe it was like having a scary accident if you are a rock climber or something or you know, I didn't lose my nerve completely but then I had a respect for it I never had before. I think that was really interesting.

Thus, with new esteem for the mountain she was on, Peggy carried on. She apprenticed for a year with TDT but realized there were some aspects of the experience that did not fit in with her ideas and values. For one, if you had a scholarship to apprentice, which she did, you could not take ballet class anywhere else which bothered her. She found that the values behind the work did not reflect hers and that some of the repertoire did not appeal to her.

Following a tour in Europe with the company, she decided to stay on and take summer school at The Place in England. While overseas, she received a phone call from a friend of hers who was studying at York but who had been taking classes at TDT on Saturdays. Andrea Smith told Peggy that she was planning a show in the fall with some of her colleagues at York and asked if she like to be a part. Peggy was thrilled. She was the only non "Yorkite" to be included in the show and the only dancer who did not have equal training in ballet and contemporary. Like her family performances and the shows she was part of with Orchesis, it was a collaborative effort.

And so we got together and made the show and it was really fun and I guess now

that I'm telling you this it makes me realize it's more what I experienced when I was a kid.. that we undertook this project together and we were going up to York University some days and TDT was giving us rehearsal space at night for free and we rented a space and I can't imagine how we could do that anymore but I guess it was cheap and the tickets were going to pay for it, we weren't paying for anything. We rented a theatre, a space at Bathurst St. Church. And we put on this concert and it was so wonderful, it was so much fun I just loved it.

Her colleagues loved it too, enough to agree to get together to put on another show even though the originator of the idea was moving to New York. Another show was created and Dancemakers was born. The name was Andrea's title for the first show but the group decided to keep it as the company name. Dancemakers continues today as one of Canada's foremost contemporary companies.

...we just started functioning as a resource for independent dancers in Toronto, well, actually independent choreographers. In those years, there was only Toronto Dance Theatre and the National Ballet of Canada and through the dancers who were coming out of York and Toronto Dance Theatre and York, Dancemakers sprouted up and 15 Dance Lab, Ballet Ys and then a couple of years later, Danny Grossman Company and then Desrosiers. Things were just popping up and it was a time of real growth and Toronto was so cheap, I remember it was so cheap in those years. I could work for a couple of months doing something and live off that for a year. I mean very frugally, but I never had more than a part time job and very part time, um.. it was just so easy, I remember my rent was \$85 dollars. Of course I shared a bathroom with the people who had the next door apartment but it just didn't seem to matter at all.

The philosophy behind the creation of the shows also informed the company classes.

...we were all really eager to have experiences outside Toronto Dance Theatre and York so we were taking summer schools in different places, like going to New York for a few weeks and taking workshops or something and then coming back and basically teaching everything from that workshop to other people. And it was really fun and it was a beautiful way of just learning everything you were being taught in a much deeper way and integrating it more. I can remember being in.. places like church halls, St. Andrew's Church and Bathurst Street Church, spending a couple of hours in the morning, with no musician, five or six of us, with coffee in styrofoam cups, sort of working our way through class. It was very wonderful I'd have to say, we did this for quite a few years.

After a time though, Peggy felt it important to get more training. She received a Canada Council grant that enabled her to stay and take class in New York for a year. In some ways this year was a good one, both at the time and with respect to her career, and in others, it was difficult.

Many dancers and teachers feel that ballet training provides an important technical foundation regardless of the style of dance one ultimately chooses to perform. Peggy began taking ballet class to give herself the base that she did not get from her early dance development. Unfortunately she did not have a teacher suited to her needs and badly injured her back – the worst injury she has ever had – and had to stop dancing for two or three months. The positive side of the injury was that she was able to reacquaint herself with her first performance love.

...I went back to my acting lessons and that was really wonderful. It was really great to sort of feel that other relationship to the stage and the theatre and to be remembering where some of my own strength was and I had a really marvelous teacher there, Katharine Sergava, she was an older woman, at that time she was in her sixties and I think she's still alive so she'd be well into her eighties by now. She had been a dancer in Ballet Russes and she had performed in Stanislavski's theatre company. That's why I chose her, because she had this dance and theatre background and she was magnificent, she was really really great. Those were good classes, they really made a difference for me even though it was kind of a frustrating year.

Another frustration in part was her time at the Graham School.

...things were kind of up and down at the Graham school because I was fingered as a student from Toronto Dance Theatre and they did not like that. That was during the years when they were getting really tight about the syllabus. They'd say, "You must be from Toronto" when you finished "turns around the back" with your head here (inclined down to front and right) instead of here (inclined down and more to the front). It was pretty awful. There was a lot of infighting going on even among the teachers in that school.

The school's concern with adhering to the original Graham style extended even to appearance. Peggy had cut her hair short; she thinks probably just to be different from all the other dancers with long hair: *Well, sometimes for a joke I say, if you can't change your life, change your hair.* But it caused a big hullabaloo at the school and caused her to lose the chance to audition for a student part in the company's production of a Graham piece, Primitive Mysteries.

The Canada Council grant was supposed to last a year, but Peggy realized that without extra money, she would not last in New York that long. She took a part time job to help pay expenses.

...I had a part time job in New York under the table, I was baking cakes for a restaurant.. Oh, and.. (laughs and looks sheepish) I lied to get that job. I, ah, I got this job because a friend of mine had come to my place for dinner and I had baked this dessert. My friend said, "That was fantastic and I work part time in the kitchen at this restaurant and they need people to make desserts there'. He said, "Would you be interested in coming into the kitchen, they have people who come in for three hours in the evening once or twice a week to bake". I actually felt very competent about doing that because I had a lot of recipes that I knew that I thought were really good and I was used to making them and so I didn't feel overwhelmed. But I went in and took some of my stuff in for the women who owned the restaurant to see. And she said to me, "How long have you been a baker?" And of course, I had changed my name to Baker when I got married. So I said, (laughs) "Six years" or whatever it was, "I've been a Baker for six years". I sort of took advantage of her poorly conceived question.

Even with her "illicitly" acquired job, Peggy still did not have enough money to stay in New York. She was given permission by the Canada Council to come back to Toronto early to do the spring performance by Dancemakers. She realized she had come a long way from the naïve nineteen year old who needed the support of her husband to bring her to Toronto in the first place. Her awareness of what dance meant to her and the values she wanted to demonstrate in her approach to dance and in her dancing had been developing - since childhood really – but it was back in Toronto after her time in New

York that she realized how much she had changed.

I do know that when I came back from New York and was taking classes again, I do know how much I had changed from being away and from being challenged more and bigger experiences and from seeing lots of performances. And being around people who were working really hard, it was a bigger community, a different community...I felt like I had more skills, I had more tools. And I had a little bit more self possession I think.. I've seen pictures of myself around that time and to me I can see I'm in a different place, I'm a different person and I have a different sense of being in my body and being in the work and uh.. and I think that was sort of when I started getting noticed as a dancer in Toronto also. There were a couple of dance writers who picked up on me and were really enthusiastic about me...And I remember getting a couple of reviews from those years, '77, '78, and the people who were writing thought I was a good dancer. There was just sort of a consensus, "I think I'm a dancer, even they think I'm a dancer. I'm a dancer". I wasn't worrying about it, but it just seemed I was a dancer. I hadn't ever thought I wouldn't become a dancer in fact from the time I decided I was going to do it, even when these things happened to shake me up.

Peggy was back in Toronto, back with Dancemakers and beginning to be seen as a dancer of note. A la Dancemakers fashion, in 1978 or 1979, she went to do a summer workshop with Jennifer Muller with the intention of coming back and teaching what she learned to other company members. Peggy had taken class with Jennifer Muller's company while in New York. As it turned out, Jennifer Muller's workshop ran back to back with a workshop with Lar Lubovitch. When living in New York, Peggy ushered for free at the Roundabout, a dance space, for the opportunity to see lots of performances. It

was there that she first saw Lar Lubovitch's company.

*...so you know I went away for the summer and uh, took the workshop with Jennifer's company and the students got to do a performance and everything. And they were clearly interested in me as a dancer and really encouraging of me and then Lar's company came and it was uhh.. completely overwhelming. It wasn't just good or fun or exciting, it was something that I never even dreamed that dancing could be. And it captured my values about the world so strongly and manifested them in a way I had never, never thought could be **spoken** in dance. One of the pieces we learned that really struck me was a dance called North Star and it was a dance where the men and women were dressed almost the same, they were all wearing navy blue tights and little pleated tunics, each tunic was different. They were sort of like Greek tunics, like the drawings of the constellations and you see the little Greek figures up there, it was like that. And the men and the women were all dressed the same in these midnight blue sort of pleated little tunics and tights and they were all joined together and they barely ever.. weren't joined together. And they made a huge amoebic shape, an ecstatic amoeba (laughs) and that broke into a quartet and then another quartet that was attached in different ways and then this solo figure appeared and did this really frenzied, bizarre dance that was rooted in one spot and went from this completely stopped action kind of frenzy into this really deep lush, sort of powerful movement. And then the central person from the big group part came out and everybody started reattaching. And I later learned that the dance was based, well the dance was called North Star and it was based on the notion of a body in space. Lar created one giant body out of all the dancers by joining them together and they each took on a different part of the body. The centre person was the spine, the*

*people beside him were the ribcage and people beside that were the arms and the legs and the feet. And so he choreographed on this big body and that made the dance. And the quartets were a quartet for the legs all based on choreography that would usually just be done on those parts of the body and that single figure was like the heart, the core of the nervous system or the brain. Um, but I totally got that on an unspoken level anyway and I loved seeing the men and women on stage together and that the way they danced wasn't differentiated, I loved that there was no.. girl/boy cute things going on, they represented a way of people interacting I **just loved**, I just loved seeing that. And I was completely bowled over by their abilities and the personalities of the people who were in the company. And um, I went home to Toronto and ahh.. I was a changed person. It was like going to Bali or something for five weeks and um, living in a different culture. I.. um, I was changed in a really deep way. Lar was a person who had dismissed all the boundaries between the different dance forms and he equally believed in jazz and ballet and ethnic dancing and go-go dancing and Cunningham technique and Martha Graham technique, he used all these things inside his work. And as he put it, "The war is over", that was his way. Well I came back to Toronto where the war was really in high gear and there was all this infighting going on and people weren't going to the National because they were modern dancers and people were still losing their scholarships at TDT if they had the nerve to take a ballet class and I realized it was so dumb.*

Back in Toronto, Peggy ended up taking over the directorship of Dancemakers. The company hired an artistic director who had created a lot of good work for the company, they were all looking forward to working with her but she suddenly resigned just before their first show. As Peggy had been acting as assistant director, leadership fell

to her. Dancemakers had changed from its early days, no longer was it a group of dancers meeting in church basements for class but a company partially supported by government grants. It was not a burden Peggy was happy with, but feeling a sense of responsibility, agreed to look after the company.

The next summer, Peggy returned to take Lar Lubovitch's workshop and once again had an amazing experience. And again returned to Toronto...although as it turned out, not for long.

When I came home in the fall, he [Lar Lubovitch] phoned me and he said, "I'm looking for a new woman to dance in my company and I'm going to have an audition and I want you to know because I want you to be there". I was really shocked that he had phoned me and I told him that I was the director of this company in Toronto and that I had responsibility and that I was.. really honoured he had phoned me but I couldn't think of going to the audition. And I was just heartbroken. When I hung up the phone, oh, I was just heartbroken and I tried to ask myself, um, "Is it really because you have this responsibility or are you scared?" Well, I knew I was scared and I had the responsibility but in my heart I knew I was just scared to have something that.. seemed.. beyond me. Well he phoned me back, I can't remember how many days it was after, and he said, "You don't need to audition, I think that I want you for my company but I want you to come and work for a day just to make sure that you're the dancer that I think you are" and again I told him I couldn't do it. But I was really confused and you know I thought, "I am so stupid" and I was torturing myself about how stupid I was, thinking things like "I'm not a good dancer anyhow blah, blah, blah". Well he called me a third time and he said to me, "Peggy, you think you have all these responsibilities to others but

you have a responsibility to yourself". He said, "You need to do this for yourself, I know that. The rehearsals start December 1st at one o'clock and this is the address of the studio and I'll see you there". It was a longer conversation than this but he basically he said to me, "You need to do this, I know you need to do this". So I moved to New York. And I think that I was a dancer when I went and I think by working in Lar's company I became an artist. And he, he's a very demanding person and he's a very talented inspired person and he's a person who brought something original to dance and he had a great, great company made of.. individual, magnificent dancers all very different from one another.

Becoming an artist.

It was a difficult first year. Doubts about not feeling good enough took time to dispel.

*...he made a really big investment in me because I was older than a lot of people in his company with much less experience and I had much less training, um, but he saw something there that he believed in and that he wanted and he worked tirelessly to get me doing what he wanted to see. And for the first year, the full first year I was there, I felt traumatized because I felt so.. much like I was not a peer of these people. Um, but I think over time I **became** a peer (small laugh) and that I became a really viable member of that company.*

Ballet, however, continued to haunt her.

I had to really get serious about my ballet training when I joined Lar's company because all his dancers had a lot of training in ballet and he did himself and he used a lot of.. um.. ballet vocabulary, even just the language of it to communicate what we were

going to be doing and I didn't understand what he was saying and plus I couldn't do some of the things he wanted to see. So at 28 when I joined his company, I'd start going to ballet every day and that was really hard, that was part of how hard that first year was. Because you know I arrived in New York City, "Who's the new person in class?", "She's in Lar's company", "That girl's in Lar's company?" because I was in ballet and I was obviously not (laughs), not very good at ballet. So that was one of those humbling things. I did that for quite a few years and I remember I was taking from Maggie Black and that's where all Lar's dancers went, to Maggie Black. She taught a couple of classes a day and after I'd been there for a few years, maybe two years or one and a half, I can't remember, she cut down, she was only teaching one class a day or something like this, and she made a list of the people who were welcome to come to this class and I was not on this list and needless to say, I was the only person from Lar's company that was not on this list. And that was a big deal for me, and it was kind of a big deal for Lar also that I could not take from Maggie who was his.. teacher of choice.

There were good things about her early days with the company. Lar Lubovitch treated his dancers as professionals. He felt they were the best judges of what kind of training they needed, how they warmed up for rehearsals, how they approached his work and how they presented themselves. He expected that they would figure out their dance problems and work on them until corrected. Peggy respected the values presented in his work: that males and females were not constantly given gender related roles, that many of his pieces were group pieces and not solo showcases, and that he was open to using whatever movement style suited a particular piece.

Peggy also felt that when she went to his company, she was a dancer. But with him, she became an artist.

*...it partly has to do with individuating, just becoming your own dancer not just one more dancer that does the same things. In one of the first rehearsals when I was there, he said to me about North Star, this piece where everyone is connected, he said, "As much as you need to feel a part of all the other people you are dancing with, you need to take a level of responsibility as if you are the **only** person on stage". Um.. also he, he would just push and push. He could get really um, sort of angry and disappointed when things weren't as good as he needed them to be and didn't have the really specific elements he was looking for and nothing else would make up for what those were and you just had to keep digging and digging until they came. And when he would let off, you would know you were there. But he could be really picky and really emotional about it. Um, I think also I became an artist there because the work was so good, it was great work. And I remember my father coming to those performances in New York City, because my dad loves jazz so he used the fact that I moved to New York as a nice double excuse (small laugh) to visit New York City. And um, my dad started to fall in love with dance when he saw those performances. They were **really really** good. And uh.. well working with the other people in that group, they were so developed. We got to choose where we wanted to take class although Lar could get.. disgruntled about that. I remember, well, near the end of my time in his company, he was very upset that I wasn't taking ballet, that I was taking modern. I mean, um, it was interesting because in a way why I eventually left were all sort of seeds he planted himself. Um because he insisted that we knew how to warm ourselves up, that we knew how to find stimulation in our*

training, we'd find ways of working on things, that we'd work until things were ready.

He needed to know that we were there not because it was a job, he needed to know that.

During her time in New York, Peggy also had the opportunity to work with other choreographers who she felt helped develop different aspects of her talent.

...it was more like the grass roots things I'd done in Toronto and I did them because I really believed in the person's work. And I think there were maybe three different choreographers I worked with when I was there. They were all very different from one another. I think because they were so different and they showed an interest in me in some aspect of my dancing, that was really um heartening to me and it also meant that I could expand on that aspect of my dancing through my working with them. So I know that had an impact on my development.

Over the years with Lar Lubovitch, Peggy accepted more responsibility within the company. He liked the way she taught his work and she became his rehearsal director. She was given more solos to do. At a certain point, he stopped coming on tours as often relying on Peggy and another dancer to handle direction. With these achievements Peggy had proved to herself that even though she once had worries about being a good enough dancer for Lar Lubovitch's company, she had succeeded in becoming good enough. However, these rewards of hard work had the effect of separating Peggy from the rest of the company: *the solos were things that some people were jealous of...and I also became an assistant to him and that also.. put an edge on things between me and other people in the company because they didn't necessarily want me telling them what to do. I don't blame them but you know, I had been given the responsibility.*

In the late eighties, Lar Lubovitch began changing his ideas of what he wanted to present on stage. It was a change Peggy did not feel comfortable with.

...it had more to do with the boy meets girl, ballet thing where the girls are pretty and the men are strong.. and I'm not interested in perpetuating that...and he couldn't use me that way either because I sort of didn't cooperate at a certain level. I didn't look like that, I didn't move like that.

With a certain amount of reluctance, Peggy left Lar Lubovitch in 1988. Her leave taking was not immediate; she stayed with the company for about three years after she started having misgivings. It was important for her to leave on good terms; there was much that he had given her. She decided to take a year to teach to discover and re-discover what was important to her regarding dance.

Along with her professional life, Peggy's personal life had also undergone some transformations while in New York. A few years after moving to New York, Peggy divorced her first husband. They had not been having an inspired relationship for some time – long distance and long periods apart. Peggy had needed Michael to go to Toronto back when she was nineteen, but she had wanted to go to New York on her own to know she could do it.

She met a choreographer - *a very extravagantly talented young man who had sort of a similar background to me, a smaller family, but the same kind of play with dance as a younger person* – and lived with him for six years. But around the time she decided to leave Lar Lubovitch, her relationship also broke up.

Into the midst of personal and professional upheaval came two people who have to this day continued to be important figures in her life. Both have helped her think of herself and dance differently.

...around the same time that Lar was sort of going off on a different track, I met Irene Dowd.. and I took an anatomy course from her. Actually I took the preparatory course from one of her protégés because you needed to have basic anatomy to take this workshop which I didn't have. And so I spent several months going several days a week going to class with one of her students and then I took this workshop with Irene. I think it was called Applied Anatomy for Dance Technique or something like that. And it was at a time when I was pretty critical of myself because I had been taking all these ballet classes and I had been booted out of Maggie's class and Lar was kind of down on me because I wasn't looking and doing things the way he was needing me to do at that time. And I took this person's class and didn't know quite what to expect but I had an instinct it was going to be important to me. And I went through a pretty radical transformation in these classes. And it basically had to do with a sense of awe that was inspired by the body, our bodies and about our individual bodies. And I went in there as someone who was used to criticizing.. what I did and there were things about my body I didn't like and that I didn't think worked properly and I also was used to the idea of being trained by saying, "Don't do this, don't do this, that's wrong, that's wrong, that's wrong". And came out with completely.. the reverse idea, being enamoured with my own body because I couldn't believe all the things it could do and all the hidden depths, and mysteries and secrets and abilities and innate abilities and also.. understanding why I did certain things and rejecting language that I had been brought up on in dance, like straight and square..

and understanding that not only were those things impossible, they were undesirable. And understanding I was working against myself because I believed that language and I was using it in my own head when I was dancing. And I just felt that she was giving me a whole new set of images of what my body was and what it was dancing and who I was dancing, I mean more of my flesh and blood person and not just.. a dramatic.. figure and not just a person who was trying to master all these technical ideas but more, much more of an integrated flesh and blood person. She became a really important teacher to me.. and I've been studying with her ever since then in a very.. intense way and we've done a lot of teaching together. All through my time in New York, I was teaching in Canada and when I started to know her quite well, probably by '86, I was bringing her with me to teach for the first week of wherever it was I was going to teach a workshop. And this was a year there was lots of money for training in Canada and companies and schools were able to get guest teacher money and so they were able to bring her for a week, if I was coming for four weeks. For example Irene would come for the first week and I would teach technique in the morning and she would do all of her work in the afternoon. So it would set this groundwork for me with the students. And now so much of her stuff is just integrated in the way that I teach, I still study with Irene and we still teach together, but you know ten years later I feel that it's at a new level of integration. So she was very important for me and through the new images of myself I regained my body and I regained.. my love and my joy in my own body and so that was really really important.

Irene Dowd helped Peggy dispel some of the myths she held about her own body and helped her redefine dance. Through Irene Dowd, she also altered what she was looking for – truth over perfection.

I made a decision early on that I wasn't going to go for perfection that I wanted to go for what I call "truth" and to let all those things, let all the imperfections, let them be there because they're part of the fabric of the whole thing and to not try and gloss them over. And to offer those as part of the whole picture.

[So personal truth or is it more universal?]

Well, I think, as an example of something universal. When I was on tour in Belgium a couple of years ago, I went to Bruges for a day and it's a very very beautiful city, it used to be the capital of Belgium and you may know this but the river that ran through the city basically dried up and the capital moved elsewhere so this city sort of stayed in its form that's six or seven hundred years old, well most of it's four hundred years old, but it's a very very old beautiful place. And I went to visit a convent there and in the grounds of this convent there was a big park that was like millefleurs, like those tapestries, that was just a carpet of flowers and these very tall thin trees, I don't know what kind of trees they were anymore, it was so beautiful and the carpet of flowers, little tiny daffodils, and different kinds of little... um little pink and blue and yellow flowers and they were just gorgeous, they were mostly about this high (holds index fingers about 8" apart). And dandelions were in there.. with all these other flowers and they weren't weeds. And it was so shocking to see all these flowers that they cultivate there sharing the place with the dandelions that were also there as integral parts of this whole.. place and it just hit me.. that we choose certain aspects and it's a little bit arbitrary, we just choose them and we say, "This has to go". And.. it was interesting to come back to Canada and to notice all the lawns that are perfectly groomed and the dandelions are all getting poisoned and pulled and.. I remember going back to my students and just saying, "Don't pick your

*dandelions. You don't need to. If there's something that's going on that's actually getting in the way, then that's fine, let's get rid of it but if you just pick away at every little thing.. you can just neutralize yourself so that you don't have room left to move, there's no space you can move into because it's all suddenly forbidden". And I think I was saying yesterday, about when I went to Irene, and the thing was, "No, don't do this, don't do this", it's like the dandelion thing, you're trying to pick all these things out instead of.. going for the things that are really important and just letting these other things be and a lot of times they're not, they're not intrusive and sometimes they're the thing that people will pick up on and just be moved by in some way. You know it's a little bit like these carpets, uh these Persian carpets [referring to the two carpets in the space in which we are speaking], they always leave a mistake in them and it's supposedly the place where the spirit enters in and I **totally** believe that.. about our performances. You don't have to manufacture that the mistake is going to be there and I'm sure they're working away on these carpets and "Whoops, there is the mistake" and they know now it's going to be complete. I don't think they say, "Okay, now it's time to flaw the work".*

The other important person in Peggy's life also had something to do with love, but not with work in a direct sense. Ahmed Hassan and Peggy had met one another in the late seventies. He had played as a musician in some of her classes, but they had been nothing more than passing acquaintances.

It was a time of huge transition in my life, I had an awful, awful break up with my boyfriend in New York, it was really kind of an emotional wipe out and um.. it happened right after I left the dance company, my whole life was, I was just sort of, I didn't have any bearings and it was um interesting to find myself in a state like that because all of my

*other decisions in my adult life have been based on what I wanted to do with my dancing. And I was at the point where I was so.. um.. confused about what I was going through.. I couldn't base anything on my career because everything had shattered so I was actually quite free. I think for many people that would put them in a really vulnerable state but for me it put me in a position of strength about my emotional needs and about **where** I wanted to be.. in that regard. And so this person I had known in passing for many many years and I became intensely involved.. like really.. in about four weeks (laughs). And I remember the day came that he was going to be leaving and it was like, "I'm so shocked", I realized, "Oh my god, I've become **really** attached to this person and I really want to see him again and I don't know what this means but I'm going to see this person again. And we were living in different cities and I knew he had MS, I really didn't know very much about it, that he was walking with a cane. And he had told me a lot about it but I.. I didn't know any disabled people very well. Um.. we had one family friend with Muscular Dystrophy, that was one of my mother's best friends. So that was the closest contact I'd had with someone that was disabled. Anyway he was also a single father at that time, he had a.. twelve year old girl. It was a big, big thing. A lot of my friends were quite concerned.*

Peggy met Ahmed just before she left for an exciting project. In 1990, she became part of Baryshnikov's first White Oak Dance Project. Along with six other dancers, she and Mikhail Baryshnikov performed in pieces by Mark Morris.

...it opened doors for me as well as being a really great experience, but more than the experience, I'd have to say, it gave me a kind of credibility that has been extremely useful (laughs). It also.. gave me, um.. a sense.. that I could function in a

situation on a really high level. That's been hard for me, actually, um.. to feel like I was going to be able to do.. things that were really advanced and had a lot of pressure attached to them. And um, you know I'm teaching these kids who are at the National Ballet School and I'm often wondering, if I would have been different, like what might have been different if I had gone to a school like that when I was their age and trained. Not that that was in my cards at all, because it absolutely wasn't, I was not attracted to ballet and my mother took me to see ballet a lot and she loved it, but I was not interested.

Over the years, Peggy had trained with a number of different teachers. She studied with people whose ideas attracted her and over time, built her own reputation. She did not go through a system such as at the National Ballet School of Canada where students are trained throughout their time with the school to be part of a high profile company. However, after the White Oak Dance Project, she was more able to accept that she had earned her position in the dance world.

Peggy eventually came to Toronto to be with Ahmed.

*...when I left New York I actually moved to Montréal and then I decided I wanted to be with Ahmed in Toronto. I moved to Montréal because I thought it would be an interesting place to work so I had made a choice based on my professional life to move there and now this was **totally** the first time in my life I had ever done something not.. for dancing.. but because it was something on a totally personal level. And it's interesting because it led me so much deeper with my own dancing. That's sort of when a lot of things started to unfold for me and a whole bunch of different things became available to me suddenly. And I think because of my.. relationship with him I started seeing my dancing really differently and myself really differently and I think that's when a lot of the*

picky and self centered things about dancing fell away, I couldn't go there at all. They just seemed so obscene to me in a way to even spending time worrying about them. It made me just want to get to the heart of the matter.

A new way of working.

Peggy had brought a gift back with her to Toronto from Mark Morris – a solo dance called Ten Suggestions that both she and Baryshnikov performed as part of the White Oak Dance Project. The music for the choreography was a piece of piano music, Bagatelles, Opus 5 by Alexander Tcherepin. Peggy needed to find a pianist. She called Henry Kucharzyk, a pianist friend who was too busy at the time to take on the piece. She also called her former husband, now a conductor and composer, for suggestions. She was given names of potential artists and she ended up selecting a young concert pianist, Andrew Burashko. They put on a performance of the piece; Peggy was happy about how it went and how he played. She then choreographed a piece to some Brahms waltzes and when she could afford to have live piano, she again asked Andrew Burashko to work with her.

...one thing led to another, we soon had three or four pieces, we got to know each other better, and he was becoming a little bit more.. uh interactive with me in our rehearsals. And at a certain point, I started getting really really excited about what was happening and he's not someone from the dance world, he's never been an accompanist, he's a concert pianist and when we first started working he was 23 years old. I went to him in, we had been working since '91 and in '93, maybe even in '92 because we did the first show of this program in '93, I went to him and I said, "I'd like to do a whole recital program with you". He said, "What do you mean?" And I said, "Well I'd like to have a

whole piano recital.. but it has dance, so the music would hold up whether I was there or not and it would be a complete performance". And he said, "Well, in that case, we need to use some important piano music" (laughs). So.. whoops! I mean he had played some good music with me. We'd been using good music but not necessarily important music and he knew as a centrepiece this concert had to have a major piece of piano repertoire. So he made a cassette of some things he was interested in working on and I think there were maybe five different things and one of them was a sonata by Prokofiev, one of his war sonatas written in the forties and it's 35 minutes long and it's one of the great pieces of twentieth century piano repertoire. And I fell in love with this piece of music. And it's just a monumentally big piece. I had never choreographed anything more than about 15 minutes long. And.. so taking this thing on was just.. uh.. wild, it was overwhelming, it was a huge amount of work. He.. did some really wonderful things with me, where he talked me through the score, I would go to his home and he was sitting at his piano with the score in front of him and he would talk me through every movement and while he was doing it he made me some work tapes so that I could go back and listen to him describing to me how everything was put together and also how he felt about it, like what kind of images it created for him, he gave me books to read um, about that time in history and about the influences in the music world at that time and a whole big sort of multi-layered picture started getting built around this piece of music. And so I would take these work tapes into the studio with me and I worked every single day.. for about three hours for four months.. and it was just a monumental effort. And when I finished, I felt like I had something really significant. And part way through the process I was reading a book my father had given me, which you might have read, called Creating Minds. In the chapter

on Picasso, there were these little tiny reproductions of studies for Guernica, his great master work. And it was a fallen horse.. that was in this tiny drawing and I was just stunned because it looked exactly like the shape I was making in this dance. Where I was also broken, my body was broken, I using my hands like this over on the floor and it reminded me of the hooves of this horse. And I just got really excited. Ahmed rolled across the street for me, I called him from the studio and I said, "Ahmed, I just got this brainwave and go across to the U of T bookstore and see if you can find anything on Guernica". And he found an entire book dedicated to it called Picasso's Guernica: History, Transformations, Meanings and all relating to this one painting. And at the time I was about half way through the first movement of this piece and um.. I got the book and there were so many images inside the painting and inside the studies of his painting.. that were.. completely parallel to what I was doing. There was this figure called the Falling Man.. in the painting where this figure is part way, he's, he's plunging down and his arms are reaching up which was exactly like this jump I was doing in which I sort of threw myself in the air and (claps her hands together) landed really hard on my butt on the stage. And I didn't want it to be an upward jump, I wanted the whole thing to just be a descent and there were lots of those parallels and I thought, "Oh this is fantastic". I had chosen to put the piano in the middle of the stage because I thought, "Well he can't be playing this music and be over on the side, like that would be ridiculous, he needs to be basically where he would be if he was playing this by himself" which left me with a twelve foot strip along the front of the stage and I was having a lot trouble coming to terms with this but when I saw.. the reproductions of this painting and I had seen it in New York City so my memory was getting thrown back to it, the scale of it

is just huge but it's completely two dimensional so it really helped me come to terms with this little narrow strip that I had.. and the scale of it, the size of the painting let me come to terms with how big the piece was. And then one of the compositional elements in the painting is called the central pyramid, the central triangle and it's in many many paintings where it goes up to a peak in the middle of the frame and I realized, "Oh my gosh, if I lay that down on the stage and the piano's here, I have these long diagonals I can work on". Which I don't know if I would come to if I hadn't been looking at this.. book. Plus I used the history, that, the historical event that prompted the.. creation of this painting to make a whole.. second section. I started playing off of it and because it was being created around the same time the music was being composed, it was resonating with a lot of the same energy that was pervasive in the world at that time and it just became quite an amazing thing. And my costume actually ended up being.. um elements of Guernica on a unitard. Actually the costume designer made a huge.. like mural, a cloth sort of appliqué of the whole painting and then she found a way of wrapping it around me to make it into a unitard. And there were little tiny strokes on the painting, these sort of scored in planes.. and the designer used yarn like you would hook a rug, so it was three dimensional and they ended up on my inner thighs and on my belly so it was really.. animalistic. I called the dance Brute. And one of the ideas that emerged for me while I was making it was.. there's a saying that man is a link.. between the brutes and the angels and so I was.. wanting to look at that. Anyway, it became.. really exciting to be able to bounce off of all these other forms and I find myself doing that more and more. Since that time I have used the theoretical writings of Kandinsky, who was also a painter, to create a dance. I think it wasn't that successful as a piece of

work but the process of it was really really good for me and it also helped me understand.. what kind of balance I wanted with Andrew. Because actually since he's brought me that Prokofiev, he's chosen all the music I've used. Well he's given me, he's brought music to me that I've chosen from but they're all things he's interested in playing.

Peggy and Andrew Burashko have since collaborated on many pieces together. As an instrument, she has found the piano wide ranging enough to complement her dance ideas. The piano has become an active member of the onstage performance.

I find that the piano is a beautiful complement to human form. That it's big enough.. to hold that much scope.. the kind of scope that we feel in a single person. A lot of instruments don't feel like that for me, they don't feel like they could hold a whole lifetime. And I, I hate to say, it sounds like I'm arrogant or thoughtless because I know people dedicate their whole lifetime to say, the flute for example, but somehow for dancing.. like the idea you can have a whole piano recital, I think that represents the idea that the piano can hold our interest for that long, that it has a range, that it can go to very very different places. That's been very exciting to feel that it's a challenging partner to have on stage with me. And that I have to live up to it's scale and that it's big enough to reflect what we all can feel as the scope of our lives which is very, very broad. Where it's placed on the stage is so interesting because for that Mark Morris piece, the piano's in the pit, and then for my Brahm's Waltzes it's behind the scrim and then the next thing I made were some Brahm's intermezzi that I call Her Heart that I made for my mother and the piano takes the upstage right corner and then for the Prokofiev it's right in the centre and since then I've made other dances where it's on the diagonal and where

it's on one side of the centre and I'm on the other and then we, oh, I have this set of John Cage pieces that I just love where the piano makes a slow crossover during the three pieces. It starts out on stage right and I'm on stage left and then I leave the stage altogether and Andrew plays a solo with the piano centre stage and then he's here and and I'm on this side for the last one (reversed positions from the first section). And that gives me so much pleasure (said with joy) for the audience to see the piano as moving through space. I think that it's really fun and beautiful. In the middle one, he stands up without the bench, the bench is off stage and he plays the inside of the piano. So it's quite beautiful. And at the end of the last one actually, this one based on Ophelia, I'm.. kind of washed up on the floor against the piano bench and he was playing with his back to me and he closes the keyboard lid and he stands up and closes the piano and then he walks off the stage and it's a very dramatic moment and you know his leather shoes are like click clacking on the floor. We hear him leaving and then the curtain comes in, it's very very dramatic. And so I'm having this great time and I feel a wholeness working with Andrew and my excitement at working with piano repertoire and the kind of focus that it's brought to what I'm doing has just been so exciting and unexpected, it's not what I thought I'd do, I didn't know what I was going to do with solo dancing, but it made itself known through a series of.. they seem like.. they're just by chance and yet.. um.. it's hard to say, you know it's really hard to say.

On her return to Toronto, Peggy did not know what shape her performing career would take. Her experiences working on Brute - the quality of work by the pianist, the coalescing of sources that inspired her choreography, the various aspects of the piece fitting together to make the whole greater than the parts and the excitement of that

process - became for Peggy the way she wanted to work. She could use dance to explore her ideas and values. She could work with other professionals, Andrew Burashko and Marc Parent, her lighting designer, who bring their own expertise to her ideas and who together could produce quality work.

I'll keep doing other little things but this has sort of emerged as.. a situation in which I can really accomplish so many of my goals. I feel like the audience sees so much of what I believe in by the involvement of those two other mediums with the level of integrity that Andrew and Marc bring to them.

Exploring gender issues.

Peggy has had a series of important figures in her life, beginning in childhood but continuing through her career. Most have been women, but their gender was not the important part of what they relayed. They showed Peggy visions of womanhood that were alternatives to the traditional roles thought appropriate for women. Some of them taught her important values about her art. After she left Lar Lubovitch's company, Peggy spent a year redefining what her ideas related to dance were. She discovered that issues concerning gender had become important to her.

I started to discover.. what some of those things were and a lot of them had to do with.. gender, a lot of them had to do with.. where the gender lines cross and open, and what's particular...to women who are dancing, how women who are dancing have to contribute to the image of women in our culture at this time in history and I think there's just a huge need for new, more realistic, more meaningful images of women and I think that dance is a really strong medium for that because it's um, you're using your own body which is an expression of gender. I'm really interested in the whole gender thing

and I find the issues really exciting and I want to.. uh.. I want to see what kinds of issues can be brought to the stage and what the woman who's dancing them, where she can go physically to bring those things out. What I ended up doing in the last six or seven years, is sort of spanning the broad spectrum from really androgynous just really human where I block out my gender completely and where there have definitely been comments of confusion there and I found that exciting that some people who are writing about the work got caught up in the dilemma about that and so they had to question themselves and raise it as a question and then I moved through to very opposite extremes of working with.. characters like Ophelia for example, from Shakespeare that are very recognizable, that the dilemma they found themselves in was ignited because of their sexuality not just their gender and all the issues around the role their sexuality had created for them, the hierarchy of whatever their reality was.

With respect to gender, Peggy was interested in exploring two things: what she could say about gender issues using dance and her body as a medium and what women have to offer through movement to dance. In 1993, she created a piece called Her Heart which she dedicated to her mother. In talking about teaching the piece to another dancer, she described a quality that characterized the beauty that women exhibit when doing a task well and without self-consciousness.

...one of the things that she [the dancer Peggy was teaching the piece to] was really surprised about and it came up very strongly in working with her.. was that this dance looks on one level like beautiful movement to beautiful music and therefore the dancer looks beautiful. And I realized in the first couple of rehearsals this was what her idea was and.. I had to explain to her.. that for one thing the dance is about someone..

*who gave her life over.. to something else completely, to the service of her husband and their children. So, when she does things, maybe it looks beautiful when she's doing it and we go (pretends to be watching someone) and we appreciate it **but** she's not thinking, "I'm so beautiful" or "I do this so beautifully" and I actually remember an aunt of mine saying to me about my mother.. how wonderful it was just to watch her fold the laundry. She said, "The way she uses her hands is just so beautiful". So that's more of what I wanted to accomplish with this dance is to show the beauty that's achieved in a person when they're **not** conscious about what they look like, but they're just doing the thing that they do and they do it with care, and attention and love and not for their own aggrandizement, it's completely on a different level. And I think that not just about the dance, about my mother, I really think that about **dancing**, that it can become more beautiful when it's less self conscious, when it's more the way a musician moves, a really good musician, the way they move, which is totally in service of the rhythm and the dynamic and.. expression that they want to embody in the music and then, the grace of their body is so authentic...the dancing will still be conscious and you have to be very conscious of what your choices are, but it doesn't have to be... self centred, it doesn't have to be narcissistic or pompous or conceited.. you don't have to show off. For some reason, people really go for that, on a certain level they find that exciting and I think it can be, but I'm interested in a certain kind of dancing and again this idea that I'm not trying to do everything. I identify a kind of realm where I feel.. I'm most closely aligned in my nature and I can bring out those qualities and those aspects very fully in my body. And they have to do with the power of movement when it's not being used to seduce and overpower and impress and.. bully. I think it's a completely different thing and that's*

*what I want to look at and that's what I think women have to offer, I think that we have a realm of movement that's usually expressed by the way that we care for children or the way we handle food and tend the garden but I think that it can also be expressed imagistically or in metaphor through dancing, they're the very same kinds of things. And I think that's very beautiful to see and I think what dancing has looked like, Western dancing for a very long time...is what men have wanted women to look like and it's been men who have been teaching these women and telling them.. how to walk and how to behave and what's beautiful and what's not beautiful.. from Louis 14th to Cecchetti to Balanchine to Baryshnikov and they're all telling us what's beautiful. And they're not women and they don't have the same values **and** it's interesting you know in Canada, in the modern dance world, women have started every company and they are not in charge anymore. There are very very few women in charge. You know, a woman started Les Grands Ballets, a woman started The National Ballet of Canada, a woman started.. The Royal Winnipeg, um.. same thing with all these modern dance companies. Toronto Dance Theatre was developed from Patricia Beatty's company, Dancemakers, Ballet Ys, like Le Groupe de la Place Royale with Jeanne Renaud and.. men take over. They have a kind of credibility and a kind of force and a kind of charm that a lot of people find irresistible and very convincing and their values.. are overwhelming us, even in the dance world and I find it really annoying. Because they have something important to say but we're overwhelmed by it and I think that women have so many important things to say, and they're different.*

Peggy Baker is speaking about a situation which was in evidence in the early twentieth century and continues to be experienced today: "In general it was quite rare for

dance critics of the time of Levinson [who wrote about Isadora Duncan among others] to break away from the basic idea that in art women become and embody, men create” (Sayers, 1993, p. 176). Perhaps part of the blame can be directed toward values learned through dance teaching. Stinson (1993) wrote that traditional dance education has a different impact on men and women. Women begin usually dance at a much younger age than men and are taught to be silent and obedient. Thus, young women do not learn to have a voice: “Dancers typically learn to reproduce what they receive, not to critique or create” (p. 134). The tale is different for men.

Most males in our society begin dance training later, at late adolescence or even early adulthood, when they developed some sense of individual identity and “voice”. To a young man, dance training may seem comparable to military training in that the necessary obedience is a rite of passage but not a permanent state. Once he is good enough, he will then have the power to tell others what to do, to reconceptualize what he has learned, to create art and not just reproduce it. This differential impact of dance training may contribute to the differences that are observed in leadership in the dance field... Despite the preponderance of women in dance, it seems clear that traditional dance pedagogy in many ways embraces the values of a male-dominated society, such as separation and competition. The goal is individual achievement – being “on top” – with little emphasis on community and caring, values more often regarded as feminine (Gilligan, 1982) (Stinson, 1993, p. 134-135).

Through her choreography, Peggy is working to redress the balance that she feels is weighted too heavily on the male side at least in terms of positions of power and

creativity. She is in a position to present her own choreography - she has been able to establish credibility in the dance world - and thus, can explore those she considers important.

The teacher.

Peggy has a whole other career as a teacher. She has taught in New York and throughout Canada and abroad. She was director of dance from 1991-1994 at the Contemporary Arts Summer Institute at Simon Fraser University. She is the first artist-in-residence at the National Ballet School which is currently her prime teaching focus.

...it's absolutely how I earn my money, I have to do it. Because I can earn my living that way and I do it quite well and it has been on occasion and actually is the thing I do the very best... Um.. I think that it's a really important activity for dancers to engage in because I think you end up articulating.. things that have functioned more at an unconscious level a lot of the time and you start to discover by putting things into words really what your point of view is because as you're working away, you kind of take it for granted, it feels almost neutral. Like, "Oh of course" that's just how you do things, because that's how you're functioning. But as you are working with your students and you see things that you don't want and you do want.. in a whole host of areas, you start getting this picture of what you hold to be true, not just for yourself but in a greater sense. And you start to see what it is you have to bring to the form, the art form of dance, and where your realm is.. in it.

She brings the same quality to her teaching as she does to her choreography. But at this point in her life, she is concerned about not being able to bring all she can to it.

And I'm having to make some really hard decisions now about what things I'm going to be following through because if I keep working with all of these different things to the same extent, the same depth that I am now, I simply don't have enough time to do them in a way that's really satisfying. And to do them well because that's what I mean by satisfying (said quietly). And in the past couple of years that's become frustrating and also just plain scary to me. Because I.. I'm very unnerved by not doing things well. I basically know, for example, getting ready for performance I know what to expect of myself and I want to be you know within a few degrees of that very high level of expectation and usually I can sustain that but occasionally I haven't accomplished what I know I'm capable of. I think because I was trying to do too many things and I just couldn't juggle that many balls...I know right now that the thing I have to give the most attention to is my own training and my own rehearsal and my own performance. And those three things right there that's a full time job. It's even more than full time, it's a huge job.. and then I have a whole other career or parallel career as a teacher and.. it doesn't even just involve me it involves my relationship with one of my teachers, Irene Dowd and that's...been.. really hard because for the first time next year I'm not going to do a major project with her and it was a really hard decision to make and it was really upsetting to her but.. it just hits a scary moment where I feel like I know that I lost myself emotionally a couple of times this year and I just knew it was because I was completely exhausted and I actually sort of tasted the.. potential for crashing, burning out or crashing, I thought I felt how I could one day, just not be able to go on. And also because teaching is sort of like a performance in itself, it's not like you can just go in and sit at.. a computer alone and just work. There's all these other people and their

expectations and their needs and they're right there and you've got a certain amount of time to fulfil those needs. So it's your students, what they're all wanting and the person who's employing you if there is such a person, if it's not your own project, it's a whole hierarchy of responsibility inside that training.. system and you're one teacher that this person's going to have and you have a very specific role to play in their training and you can't waste their time. It's a lot of pressure... But when you're a person with me and my siblings' leanings you're always trying to do really well, you don't usually disappoint people and so you end up with every person you've ever worked for is still calling you up, so ten years ago thirty people were calling me up and now sixty people are calling me (small laugh). But I'm starting to compile a list of names for when people call and I have to tell them, "I can't take on anything else but I can recommend some really good people to you". And that feels better than just saying either "Yes" and knowing, "Oh my god, now I'm going to have to work through that weekend and do that workshop with those figure skaters or those synchronized swimmers". You know and it becomes figure skaters and synchronized swimmers too, pursuits that I don't have any direct attachment to but somehow, I've had some relationship with them, they really liked what happened, they got something out of it and I know I could make some little tiny contribution there but then I'm thinking, it's such a small contribution that I'm making to them and yet what it takes for me to set aside that time and do that much preparation and spend that whole weekend.. doing that instead of doing something with my family or.

[Or working on your own things.]

Or working on my own things, exactly. And it's interesting, my dad is always sending me all of these psychology articles from the Times, the New York Times, the Science section

every Thursday he pulls them out.. you probably get the same sections (we laugh).

Anyway he sends this stuff to me and there was one article there about how positive experiences stay with you longer than negative ones, for example, you can have a really hard.. week at work, it's total overload time and then you do one really wonderful thing on the weekend and you're totally.. back on track. And I just thought it was so interesting that human nature is ready to.. get turned around, that we'll **hold** on to positive things longer. And in some ways, the reason I'm telling you this is because sometimes I don't give myself the chance for me to have that, sometimes I'm offering it to all these other people and I'm not getting it myself. And even though they had a blast at whatever this workshop was, I go home and I'm just more tired than I was on Monday and now it's Sunday night and I have to start all over on Monday and I didn't ever get that blast off myself. And uh.. well I'm identifying now that I need that. And it's funny, last summer, I think I was at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival and I remember my friends, they were all going hiking and what not and playing tennis during the day, the lighting designer and pianist. And I was, "Oh I can't go, you know I can't wear myself out on performance day" and on the last day I felt, "This is so stupid". "Why am I so worried I'm going to use up my energy?" And I went swimming in a lake and I.. made a little flower wreath for my hair (we laugh). I just did these things that were really fun and then I went and I had a really strong performance and I thought I had been dumb. I sort of wore myself out all week thinking I couldn't have any fun because then I won't have any energy. It was so silly. So I'm learning. Basically I'm learning to keep doing things to actually feed myself and they don't have to be just resting up for the work. And now I hear an echo of myself talking earlier about you know planning my sleep and planning

my eating around the dancing. So you have to balance all those things for sure. But then you do those things and you just have to say, "Whatever happens, happens. I did sleep. I did eat. I slept well, I ate a good breakfast, I don't have to just sit still all day long until my show".

Peggy made an analogy between having a number of plants on a shelf and her life. The plants grow and even though the number does not change, at some point there is not enough room on the shelf for all of them. Plants do not grow, however, without care. Peggy has paid attention to the many different levels on which she lives her life.

...I feel like different threads.. are getting picked up and actually this thing about thread is an image I use with my students a lot. In terms of interpretation and how to develop a role and I talk about the different strata we investigate and the first one is just learning the steps. And then the second strata might be drawing connections between different steps.. like noticing that the arms in this one movement are repeated.. but with a variation or this turn becomes a jump, just making connections between all the things. So that's the first step to just draw the threads between all these different steps and then we look at the spacing and start to build a sense of the space through the floor pattern, like through the floor up to start sort of building something three dimensional. And then attaching metaphors or first attaching images to different movements to create the dynamic that you're looking for and then aligning those images with bigger metaphors that speak about the piece or about parts of the piece. You want to keep drawing all these threads so that as you come to every movement you might get pulled by one of these threads to one of these different strata and so during the performance you're moving through this sort of ocean thing, all these different depths. They don't have a hierarchy,

it's not like the higher up you get, the more superficial, the lower, the more profound. They all have truth in whatever their element is, and you can, you move freely among all these different strata during the performance. And that's how you create during the performance. So you don't just try to keep perfecting the steps, that's actually the superficial level where the people are being pulled by their boats on their water skis which is where you learn, those are the steps and ya of course, the water has a surface and the surface of the water is the steps, how high the waves are and how far off the ripples travel, those are the steps, but where they come from and what the whole mass is moving and all the details about what's going on and that's all sort of getting threaded together and then I see that in my life and that's when I was saying I didn't feel like I was trying to relive my childhood, I'm making more and more connections about good and bad things that happened in my childhood. Or not even good and bad but upsetting things and things that made me happy.

The wheel turns.

In early adulthood, the life story continues to be revised and rewritten as we deal with changes in our lives. In midlife, from ages 40 to 65 years, we begin to create a “generativity script” (McAdams, 1994). We begin to look at what it is of ourselves that we will leave for those who come behind. Peggy Baker has begun that process of concern for what she would like to contribute.

Dance is an elusive art; once a piece is performed, it will never be danced in the same way again. While video and dance notation help in keeping records, they lose a dimension in the transcription and can not capture all that a dancer passes on to another. The dance community is also in flux; careers only last a certain amount of time and many

dancers, particularly in the contemporary community, do not stay their whole career with one company. Peggy feels a responsibility to the art form in general in terms of continuity and also with respect to her own work.

...my early work at TDT and even Orchesis gave me a view of dance that already seemed to incorporate taking class, improvising, making dances, performing dances, teaching.. that seemed to be what dancing was to me. I hadn't made any hard distinctions...And it's interesting now because when I'm asked for my profession I put dance artist usually or if I'm going to put it in short form, I'll put dancer. To me that still incorporates all those ideas. I think that's important about it because it's handed on. I think it's important that people don't do just one thing because otherwise I think that too much gets lost between generations. And the dance generations turn around so quickly. I mean for sure ten years is a generation. And I've been gone from New York for eight years and it's verging on that ten year threshold and I know fewer and fewer people. Where when I left.. I knew every single person in class. When one new person came in, I recognized it was a new person. And now I don't know who these people are, I don't know where they danced and where they trained, nothing. And I only knew that within a certain circle of dancers in New York. There's many many circles and they don't all interlock. But from while I was there, very few of those people are still dancing or they're really high up I would say. If they're still in those companies, they're now the assistant to Merce Cunningham or a rehearsal director for American Ballet. They're very very established people but the big pool of the grass roots people, I don't know those people anymore. Very few of them.

She speaks about being part of the chain that continues to keep choreography alive.

I think it was really important for her [Susan Macpherson teaching Non Coupable by Paul André Fortier to Peggy] to.. pass something on. And I feel really proud and happy that I have something of hers, because it always mentions her in my program, that it was made for her and so a little legacy of her work, because part of the tragedy of dancing is you spend your life doing it and five years later dancers in your own city didn't ever see you or don't even know who you are. So ten years later there are countless dancers who don't even know who she is or that she ever was the dancer that she was and it's just heartbreaking. And it's hard to lose your identity in that sense so this piece is in a way partly keeping it...going, is a thread for her into another generation. She was one of my teachers.

She has also begun to pass on some of her own choreography.

I'm teaching another friend.. this dance I made for my mother which is called Her Heart which is to some Brahm's intermezzi and this has been a wonderful thing because it's a whole.. new relationship that I have with this friend. I've performed with her before but I never.. coached her in anything so I feel like I'm passing on so much information and she's a teacher and so I know it'll go on.

Throughout her life, Peggy has encountered people who have impacted her development as a dancer. Now, through her teaching and her performance, she is the one in the position of becoming a role model.

A unifying force.

The previous sections have explored how Peggy has come to present herself as a

dancer and some of the issues she is interested in examining through dance. Her conscientiousness regarding the passing on of knowledge and tradition through teaching and performance is a principle she holds. There is another important philosophy behind her work that she speaks about in our interviews: the sense of dance for her as a spiritual practice.

This concept is one that permeates my interviews with Peggy; she refers to it both directly and indirectly when speaking about her development as a dancer. In describing Sanctum, a dance and music performance created by herself and her husband, Ahmed Hassan, she defined what she means by spiritual practice.

We made a piece called Sanctum.. which had to do with a sense of.. spiritual practice that we both have about our work. And in that one, he's on a carpet, this carpet (laughs) [under our feet] which is upstage left and I'm in my own space but downstage right, so they're these two little islands but mine just has sticks lying on the floor that show where the corners are. And on one side there's two sticks across the place where the opening is. And we don't ever acknowledge each other. He's sitting on his carpet cross-legged with these various instruments around him that he plays and they're all made of wood and clay.. or they're like bean pods. He plays a beautiful air drum, he plays little shakers, he plays a didgeridoo, a kind of a gourd he plays like a didgeridoo and he also passes a kind of a brush on it and he has these pods that are all on strings that he does things with. And I'm dancing in my space and I made it right after Martha Graham's death, actually I think that she's one of the people that.. brought.. spirituality back into.. concert dance. I think that really wasn't there for a long time and pieces like Primitive Mysteries and with many many others, she really created a whole kind of

sacred.. sense about the use of the body. So it was after her death and around the time.. a couple of.. really key people in my life who died of AIDS right around that same time so we played with two ideas there. One of them was a sacred sort of space that we create through practicing.. something.. that we care about. It doesn't have to be art, it could be mothering.. or anything but you bring your full attention, your full commitment to a thing.

In speaking again about Sanctum, Peggy said, it refers to being in a sacred space and I guess that's what I feel about the space that I go into to dance. I want to bring a sense of respect to the place and to the action that's going to take place there and I understand that it sort of leads me to a kind of depth of knowledge very incrementally (small laugh), it's a really, really slow process...but the whole fact of, in a way of your life revolving around that thing, it directs a lot of your actions, it directs.. a lot of other behaviour. So you're not just thinking about it while you're doing it actually you're preparing for it with your sleep and with your food and so it becomes not an obsession I would say. It's more like a unifying force in your life. And that's what I find it to be for me, it's a place that provides a lot of lessons for other aspects of my life because it's something that I know very well. I will have encountered a lot of different levels of reward and difficulty inside that. So that functions as a kind of example. And in a lot of ways I wish I could bring the patience and endurance that I have in my dancing to other things.

Since 1990, Peggy has been working with Andrew Burashko, pianist and Marc Parent, lighting designer, but much of her creative time in the studio is alone time. She felt that even though dance as spiritual practice has roots in her experience of dance with

Patricia Beatty and in her Graham classes at Toronto Dance Theatre, part of why dance is developing so strongly for her in the way of the spiritual is because she is so much alone.

I'm just really loving being in the studio by myself and just working away, in privacy and solitude. And finding out.. what it's like to make something out of nothing, and what it's like to push past limits of comfort in terms of how long your interest and energy are sustained and to make a real commitment to the thing, to look very deeply.

For Peggy, it is in dance is where she truly learns.

I guess I have kind of a love/hate thing with performing (laughs), it's not my favourite part of dancing. And at one point I felt like it was the payment that I made in order to be able to spend all my time dancing (laughs, I laugh). And I think maybe that is true on a certain level. And that goes back to the question, I don't know how many minutes ago that was, about spiritual practice because my deeper need about dance has to do with my personal.. I don't even know if growth is the right word. Well maybe it is or discovery or development or evolution I guess is the proper word there. But.. I accomplish that much more in other aspects of my dance life [than in performing].

Peggy's personal sense of the sacred as she described it comes within her training and creative times. Connected to this is an experience that goes beyond the personal to the mythic that she encounters in art generally.

I just know for myself when it [getting something meaningful from seeing an artistic creation] happens it's like a kind of food and it just keeps nourishing for so long and there's just nothing else like it. And I feel that's a spiritual dimension and that we are longing for some communication on that level. I think sometimes even when we feel the form something comes together. A lot of movies are like that, all those really great

French movies from the seventies and whatnot. There is a story there, a little story that is kind of neat, but somehow the way everything was put together sort of brought mythic proportions to this, or it's like a template, this structure becomes like a template, you can reflect all these little details on this bigger scale that we recognize that is like a human pattern or something, a form of human experience that we're connecting with and I feel like those templates or forms really exist in music and dance and painting and poetry and they're just sort of deeply satisfying...And I think there's a spiritual element in there, I don't think it's devoid of that whatsoever. Lar Lubovitch who I danced for for many years called it, "Awe". I love that word, "Awe".

She explained more about the idea of template allowing for the mythic aspects of the dance to emerge in talking about Non Coupable. This was a choreography created by Paul André Fortier and although his intent was not to deal with the decision a woman must make in terms of bearing a child or not, when she was in the dance and when I as a woman watched it on video, this issue was what presented itself.

And you'll know from the film that Paul-André's not talking about that as a choreographer.. and the other people all talk about that and I'm talking about it now with you but in fact working on the dance is nothing about that. But you have to confront it being in the dance and you have to confront it looking at the dance but the structure of it, the template I was talking about earlier, that's what he makes. He makes that template, he creates the structure for those images to unfold.

In the quote that opened Peggy's story she mentioned the idea that there are patterns that keep being repeated in our lives, that there were experiences and values from her childhood that she kept appreciating and coming to understand as her life is continuing

to progress. Transposing the idea of the template as the gateway to the mythic to a personal level, perhaps the templates that were in place in Peggy's early life have given her a framework within which she was able to create her life in the way she has.

Comments on the Story

Louise,

I continue to be horrified by the way I speak and I have relieved the text of several hundred uses of "like", "kind of", "sort of" without diminishing the spontaneous rhythm of thoughts coming into shape.

There is quite a jump from being a student and young professional to reaching the heart of my artistic life. I found it interesting to see the context you placed things in and have countless other thoughts that could be added from this time of greater wisdom.

I took the liberty of making a copy of this draft so that I might have a record of some of these ideas put into words. Please tell me if you have any misgivings of my possessing your work.

Wishing you success with this project.

Yvonne Coutts

Meetings with Yvonne Coutts

Yvonne Coutts is a contemporary dancer and choreographer in her early thirties. She has had her work reviewed in Dance Connections and in 1994 won a North American award for her choreography. I sent a letter to Yvonne in June 1997 describing the study and asking if she would consider participating. When I made the follow-up call, she said she was interested and we arranged for the first interview.

All three of the interviews with Yvonne were held in one of the offices at the University of Ottawa. I had given the choice of meeting place to Yvonne (at the studio, her home, the university etc.) and the university is where she felt she would like to meet.

I was fortunate in that prior to the first interview, the company Yvonne performs with was presenting a program at the National Arts Centre. One of her choreographed works, which we later spoke about extensively, was showcased. She also danced in works by other choreographers. It gave me a sense of familiarity to have both seen her works and what she looked like when she arrived for the first interview especially as it was my first.

We had our initial interview on July 9, 1997. I felt very much at ease with Yvonne; a feeling of meeting of equals that grew through the interviews. I was aware, however, that I was the “researcher” which carries the responsibility of keeping the interview going. Our first interview came to a natural conclusion around the time she needed to leave for class. I asked her at the end whether she felt comfortable about showing me some of her choreography and she agreed.

To our second meeting, ten days after the first, I brought questions I had noted down during the transcription of the first interview. Together we watched the first interview; I paused the tape at a number of points and asked questions. As mentioned previously, this exercise was energy and time consuming although interesting detail was added regarding some of the previously discussed events.

As in the first interview, I felt very comfortable with Yvonne. Part of my comfort was a result of Yvonne’s manner; she was very open and showed a genuine interest in exploring her life. I also personally identified with some of the main issues, especially the

dynamic of passivity versus activity, that were a part of her life and her choreography at the moment.

In this second interview, we exchanged more. I felt excited at times, that we were working to understand issues of importance. I felt pleased when she asked me a question about my hair colour, that she was able to see me as a person outside of the bounds of the project.

The third time we met, August 12, 1997, was to look at two pieces of work she choreographed; a solo she danced and a solo which was performed by another female dancer. She also brought in three books, two of which acted as sources of inspiration for her works: Mark Rothko 1903-1970 (The Tate Gallery, 1987) and Chroma: A book of colour - June '93 (Jarman, 1994). The other, The Way of Woman: Awakening the Perennial Female (Luke, 1995) related to one of the issues we spoke about in the second interview; an issue which both of us felt relevant to our lives and selves. She kindly lent all three to me.

We watched each dance separately, speaking in between about the piece just viewed. Where appropriate, I commented on and questioned topics that had arisen in the earlier interviews. As in the second, our exchange was more of a balanced event, both asking questions and responding. Yvonne ended the interview by telling me how enjoyable this had been for her. I told her it had been for me too.

The company Yvonne dances with was performing a work-in-progress on October 24, 1997. I appreciated the willingness of Yvonne to put time into my project and share aspects of her dancing. I wanted to show that appreciation by supporting her work. She noticed me there and we exchanged a smile.

I finished transcribing all three interviews by the end of October. I dropped them off at the dance studio on November 7, 1997. By chance, Yvonne was there so we talked briefly about the last performance and the upcoming one she was working on. I asked her to read through the interviews and call me so we could arrange a meeting meet to talk about the interviews. I went again towards the end of November to see Yvonne perform, this time dancing her own choreography.

In December I came across an interview with Trisha Brown, an American dancer and choreographer (Brown, 1996) which focused mainly on her work up to 1978. What excited me was the similarity of some of the elements used in her pieces and those used by Yvonne in the two solos we watched. The context in which the elements were used was different and thus, the message was different, but the fact that both had explored similar ideas was interesting. I made a copy and sent it to her.

In June of 1998, I volunteered at the Canada Dance Festival. I had an opportunity to see the piece that I had originally seen just prior to meeting Yvonne for the first time. It was being presented as a finished work. It seemed appropriate to have my connection to Yvonne framed by two performances of the same choreography by her and that that there was evolution in both the choreography and our relationship during that period.

We spoke again in August. She had read my telling of her story and arranged to drop it off for me. During the writing process I had come across an article by Stinson (1993) which I thought she would be interested in as well as a book by Vigier (1994). I told her I would lend them to her when I had finished my writing. She only made one small change to the story – correcting the name of a company I had misspelled.

Yvonne Coutts – Dancer and Choreographer

Introduction.

Intimate Animus (1998) began with the buzz of a fluorescent light. Within the open frame of a large cube, harshly illuminated, stood Little Yellow Suzie bedecked in bright yellow shoes, dress and hair. She spoke to us in words and movement from the cube, chapters of her story opening and closing with the flick of a switch.

Yvonne Coutts, the choreographer, said that Suzie brings to the stage some of the contrasts she has been thinking about: cowardice and courage, passivity and activity. She has framed the piece in contrasts. During and in Suzie's monologue, darkness and lightness alternated. Suzie moved from her bright cartoon-like world in the beginning of the piece to the more somber world of "reality". She moved from solitude to interaction. When we go beyond Suzie's message, which is to a large extent autobiography in movement, to autobiography in words - the interview text - the sense of Yvonne's story told to me in the present is one of confronting contrasts that have roots in the past.

Possibility.

Yvonne Coutts is both a dancer and a choreographer. Both threads have been present from very early days.

Well I can start by saying, I always, I always loved dancing.

"Always" begins at the age of five. Yvonne's mother enrolled her in Highland dance classes in the local community league. Her parents saw dance as a recreational activity; they were *not really arts people*. Going to performances was not something they were interested in. So her early conception of dance was what she saw on television: *I remember watching all those silly Saturday afternoon programs all the time, you know,*

like Dick Clark and um, American Bandstand with those popular dancers and then watching Solid Gold and all those cheezy jazz dancers. Ballet and contemporary dance she did not see until she was in her teens.

After her year of Highland, she started taking Hawaiian dance which she stayed with for the next 10 years of her life. Dance for Yvonne Coutts was not a venue for the expression of romantic ideals, which it is for many young girls, perhaps because she had no experience with formal styles. The ballet, especially the Romantic works, can offer to some a tempting mythology - visions of women as princesses or ethereal creatures, light and beautiful as feathers, escorted and adored by handsome men and tales of love, passion and tragedy (Sayers, 1993). Hawaiian on the other hand may have kept her more grounded to the pleasure of movement for its own sake: *I don't think it was really anything about pretending to be in a fairy tale or pretending to be something else. I think for me I just really liked to move.*

Liking to move also put her on the sports field: *I was a tom boy. But at the same time I had this little dancing thing going on so one night I'd be at lacrosse practice and the next night I'd be at dance...I don't remember it being weird or anything. Maybe, I don't know if I would have told the guys that I did dancing. You know I don't think the worlds kind of met that much.*

Reflecting back to that time, while the two activities may have seemed worlds apart, they each engaged aspects of Yvonne's self she sees today as important for a sense of completeness.

It's like personal things crossing over into work things, I've been thinking a lot about male side, female side...stuff, issues all around, psyche, body, active, passive, all

that and I just find it curious that at that time it manifested itself so physically that I needed really to be doing both. Hawaiian dancing seems to be so womanly, round and curvy and lacrosse is so male, it's quite aggressive... Somehow it seemed like a good balance, I needed to engage both sides. And interesting as I got older I can see points where I wish I could have engaged kind of the male side, or what I see as my male side, more physically actively.. I don't know. I felt like it got, I have a tendency to get more passive. I shouldn't philosophize but that's my tendency. So I think sometimes, by not wanting to be aggressive - just activating it in sports where it's not anything about artistic expression, anything that I see as more expansive, open. I think I miss that sometimes, that maybe that would have, would be beneficial to me to stay active in a sport where you just go (makes a strong gesture with her right hand - pointing in a forward direction)...it's more about just.. going... if there is any kind of criticism that will continue to pop up in my mind about myself and it's that one. "Oh come on", like "Just pull it together", you know, "Decide", "Go, do it" and I feel like it's always more "Just act upon this, you know, don't let everything have to come to you".

As well as Yvonne's assertive side, also being engaged during this early time was the urge to create.

Even when I was a little kid.. and at these little schools taking jazz, I was always into making up dances almost more than I was into performing. So if there was a group of us I would make things and they would perform them... It's funny, I never really thought about it until a couple of years ago and suddenly it hit me.. these, you know we'd have these little basement shows...

After years of playing lacrosse on the PeeWee and Bantam Leagues, around the time of junior high Yvonne became too old to play on the boys' league. She gave up her "masculine" pursuit. Dance continued. In grade 10, Hawaiian was replaced by a more advanced night class in jazz at Grant MacEwan, a community college - but it was never considered as a career option. For one thing, her body, she had decided, was not a dance body.

It was always just because I liked to move but...it really was more of a.. uh.. fun thing because I was.. kind of a chubby kid so.. you know, there was never really a thought I could ever be a dancer because I was too chubby. I'd already made that connection.

But part of that decision was also connected to the type of dance she had been exposed to and how that related to her self-image apart from her body image.

I think I never considered myself to be very funky and those jazz dancers seemed so like so out there...I liked to move but I hadn't really seen how that could be put into anything until I saw the modern stuff.

In the last years of high school, dance classes gave way to drama classes, but after a time, Yvonne realized they were not a performance replacement that suited her.

...there was something about words in that form, I always forgot my lines. And it wasn't natural, like I was always very nervous to perform...I think the nervousness just seeped the lines out of me. They just disappeared.

Words retained their power in her thoughts of becoming a high school English teacher. And now, even though that dream has been replaced, Yvonne has maintained a relationship with language, using words and movement to convey the messages in her dance pieces.

In her last year of high school, Yvonne had an experience, the first of a series of “flukes”, that changed the place dance would have in her life. Suddenly, dance became a possible option after all.

This is something neat, I have these little flukes that happened and by.. just a real fluke I got a mark in Math 30 that I thought was too low because I had a pretty good average. So I repeated Math 30 before I finished. And the teacher got ill and we had a substitute. And this guy, he was a young kind of athletic guy and I ended up talking with him and he was going to Grant MacEwan the next year in dance. He told me they had this program where you could be accepted as an adult without.. having you know any formal ballet or training. And suddenly this little light went on and I thought “Oh”, you know. And I looked at him and he didn’t seem to be the person I would expect would be taking university or college dance. You know he was a smaller person and I don’t know, it just suddenly seemed like maybe it was possible.

Any dancer’s body is linked to his or her identity. The body is the voice, so how and what is communicated is in some ways an expression of the dancer. In another sense, what the body can and can not do plays a role in creating identity; for example, someone good at throwing might become a discus thrower or a baseball pitcher. For Yvonne, her perception of her body influenced what she thought she might be.

In sport, discounting to a certain extent the artistic sports, function is the only prerogative. It does not really matter what you look like under your goalie pads and helmet as long as you get the job done. However, in dance, how you look does matter because it is part of the message. Dealing with feelings about the body is an ongoing consideration.

Thus, a dance career was not an option for Yvonne, at least not until she met someone with a body she did not consider a dance body who was going to study dance at college. Possibility was born. Fate again intervened in her acceptance into the program.

And again another fluke was that the person who was head of the program at that time, you know, she had studied with Hanya Holm and was in Hanya Holm's group. So she was very much in the modern school, the freer form and she would look at people and she.. she really didn't care if we had any formal training. She looked for coordination.. she looked for you know movement kind of natural ability. They devised this preparatory year where before the program started you would just take ballet, modern and electives to prepare you for the program. So as it turned out, luckily enough she was there, so I got in. A group of us got in and actually a number of people are still dancing in Toronto and in Vancouver. Ya, that's kind of how it all.. started.

Student, not dancer.

Yvonne's formal dance training began her first year at Grant MacEwan at the age of eighteen. She gravitated towards contemporary dance because of its similarities to Hawaiian and knowledge of her body in movement.

I think it had something to do with taking the Hawaiian at the beginning because Hawaiian is so much about flow and about your hips...it's about the body.. moving sequentially, not opposing gravity but letting gravity take you and somehow I think that has influence. I think also, maybe it's just even body things, I was never a loose person. I remember taking gymnastics and not being able to touch my toes and I was only twelve. So.. I think those kind of things maybe.. it led towards.. I just liked to move. I always liked going out dancing, that kind of dancing, but I didn't like things that made me feel

regimented or stiff or held, I think I was naturally a bit of a holder anyway. So the release of dance was to let go...

After her two years in the formal part of the program, Yvonne had the opportunity to spend the summer performing for a group formed by one of her teachers, Brian Webb. While she was at the college, Brian Webb had gone to CalArts to complete a master's degree in choreography. On his return, he asked Yvonne to dance with his group and then continue studying with him the following year.

He convinced me he would be teaching next year, he just did his masters in choreography and had all these composition ideas and exercises and things and convinced me to stay another year and just try to do tons of composition work. And uh, that's what I did. It was the best year I had.

A year of performing provided Yvonne with an opportunity to increase her confidence in her art form.

I was kind of at a loss for what I should do next year.. I wasn't ready to go to dance but loved.. still composition and making stuff...that summer was very good for that... I know that fourth year at Grant MacEwan really gave me a much better confidence than I had the year before...I think being there longer [an extra year].. maybe I just felt like I could be who I wanted to be. Some people work better when they're the underdog, some people work better when you know.. they're.. I think somehow I felt a little stronger...it allowed me to just sort of just ground out a little bit.. not to worry so much.

Learning to become a good dancer goes beyond the physical process. Certainly, one goal of a performance is completion of the piece in a physical sense: to remember

everything and to be in control of one's body on the stage - pointing one's toes in all the right places. But to be able to impart a message beyond the simple beauty of the body moving in space, the dancer needs to be able to transform the movement. In the early learning stages at Grant MacEwan, Yvonne's criteria for success centered on what she calls *surface dancing*.

I think at that time, I know at that time it was a lot about learn the material and dance it well. And I can really see that at that point.

[So technically more than-]

Ya technically and know where you're looking.. like know where the focus is. Um I feel a bit more surface dancing I would say at that point. Ya, that's changed a lot.

[So you were connecting more to the actual movement than like bringing something of yourself out?]

Ya, I would think that. I would think that, probably at that time I did have a natural sense of.. everyone has their own sense of interpretation but I wasn't so aware of what my options were as an interpreter. So I would pretty much learn it and do it like him [Brian Webb]. Ya. It was that whole thing - "do it well", whatever well was.

[Was that your own personal standard?]

Ya I think so.

[So how did you know when something was done well?]

If I didn't blank, or screw up or trip or something then it was okay. Sometimes you have a sense of when it feels right, even though often when you would feel good, it may not be the best show. Um, ya, I think it was more that.. if I didn't get so nervous.

Yvonne's performance focus today is less on physically completing the movement

and more on being able to connect to the piece itself and the other dancers - a dimension that comes with experience. For Yvonne, there is also a movement away from the gross to the meaning that can be conveyed in the subtleties of interpretation.

I want to, it's funny, I say I want to dance.. it's more I want to interpret. Now I really want to.. to do that, to make, I'm really excited now about the idea of.. being in something and choosing and finding a way into their world and what is that about and like little tiny nuances that make these huge differences and if people notice that. All that thing. Now I feel so excited about that whole process. Much.. I mean you still struggle with that getting it right thing when you're learning it. But beyond that, that there's this huge world of dance that's so tiny. This huge world of dance that's so tiny. Because it's all these little tiny things that we don't think make much difference but make.. like little tiny things little um, just you know ways of doing gestures, or holding your head or where your eyes are.. all those little.. how you feel, how you don't feel.

[Ya. So bringing yourself more into it.]

And trusting your choices and trusting enough to say I'm going to make this choice without asking and then and risk being told, no that's not it.

A beginning dancer would find it difficult to make these choices.

I asked Yvonne whether she was beginning to feel like a dancer or whether she would have identified herself as a dancer at that point.

I don't think so. I think I would have still said.. I study dance. I definitely had a bit of, a little, I would say, hang-up because I was a bigger person still. I had it in my mind that dancers had to be.. this weight.. this size.. you know I knew how I thought a dancer looked and I didn't look that way. And definitely I knew I was a student, but just

my whole body um you know, I was fleshier than what I imagined dancers should be and not as muscular. So I was always kind of qualifying and I've been qualify.. I'd say even up to two years ago, even still, I'll not say I'm a dancer because I'm scared the person will look, "You're a dancer?". But it's my own self saying it. So I wouldn't have said it then. I might have said I studied dance...or I'd say I was a choreographer and feel I could get away with it (laughs). But something about that's important. It is important to me.

Yvonne did speak about how feelings about her body have modified over the years. She has come to accept personal limitations: *...there's things you're not going to be able to do and that's life. You just.. you work well.. and.. that's what you work with. Rather than continually fight it.* Also, instead of berating herself for not being able to do something and bringing that to how she defines herself, she tries to focus her energy to more positive ends: *In the end, of course, you want to have the ability to move your body as freely and as versatile.. you know be as versatile as you can. So now I can say, "Yes I want to have the ability, yes I want to work hard to achieve those things" so that I can use them and I can't and I can choose. But not because I can't do one of them, I'm not an artist. Now that's clear.. so definitely over time.*

It is interesting that for Yvonne less favourable feelings about her body are present in stillness but not in action. The body that stands still is open for criticism, the body that moves imparts understanding. Identifying herself as a dancer was not only connected to her perception of her body but also what she felt she could and could not do in terms of what dancers "should" be able to do.

...when it came down to standing still, and you know.. to do développées, lift your leg high, dadada, that's where a real negative side of me would kind of jump up and bash me down, "Oh you're not a dancer, you can't lift your leg past there".. you know, an attack which still happens...

Everything changed for Yvonne, however, when she moved: *I always had the sense there was something natural about moving that when I got to just move, in space, I was fine. There's just.. there.. I've always known there's been some kind of thing I can't even explain that I just understand something when I'm moving.*

When Yvonne Coutts dances, she comprehends “something” which she experiences on a non-verbal level. In creating her pieces, she has often added verbal language to movement so that she will be understood. But she is becoming interested in letting the audience experience pure movement without the verbal accompaniment – not only trusting that her body is acceptable to her as a dancer's body but also that it will convey the message that she wants it to convey as a choreographer.

*...that's a funny thing too with dance and with movement is that you have to trust.. a lot, that if I made this movement, if I go in the studio and I improvise and I make this movement, that that is the.. vocabulary. I don't on top of that have to write a paragraph and tell you you what it's about. That's writing, that's not dance. That's not movement. So.. I just spoke with Davida.. Monk, who was in Le Groupe and she, it was, it's beautiful.. she said that if you, and I don't know if she read it or thought it, if you think that there is no equivalent for movement, you can't take a piece of a phrase and write down what it is, that **that** is all that it is. You know.. it's absence of English language. And you think, ya, ya, ya, that has to be what says it and I don't know.. it may*

seem obvious but somehow it's not obvious.. but you start creating and having to produce your work and send out media stuff and all that and it starts to become like you're defining it all in words which can be okay but when you're in the studio, you have to trust that you can define-

[What you want to say-]

Ya in movement.

[In your language, in your body.]

And I think I can sometimes tend to overanalyze and intellectualize.. I like words so...sometimes I don't trust it's enough.. the body.

[The English teacher coming back! (we laugh) So that's sort of where you're moving-]

It's.. ya.

[Is getting movement to be able to let movement say everything without having to.. is that sort of where you see yourself going.. I'm not sure if I-]

Well I definitely want.. this is what I've decided in this next year is.. uh ya just in this next year, I want to.. spend a lot of time creating, but time that I'm in the studio I want to spend on movement and really try not to hear words. And it's you know.. maybe it'll be an arbitrary block that part of my frame, but just stick with space, well, not even space because I can get trapped up in space too, but stick with the body.. the vocabulary. Which feels stronger right now, so it's a good time right now. But then once that's maybe more established, I could allow, because I like that.. playing with words. I think that it's something.. but maybe.. I know.. letting them be separate, rather than saying the same thing because they're not the same thing.

Yvonne Coutts also talks about relinquishing her words because of her intent to move towards her pieces being less autobiographical. Movement is more abstract. I asked her why she felt it was important to get to pure movement.

Uh, I think it's just a feeling but I think it has to do with the autobiographical thing that because movement is less um.. less obvious than words that will somehow not open up the world, to not being so uh, I think when I hear the words, I really sense it's me but when I see movement without words, you wouldn't necessarily connect. So I think that's part of it. And I think I'm feeling more comfortable with my physical vocabulary and my sense of moving right now. So it's a good time for me to explore that.

These passages are interesting in that I am asking originally about a period in the past, the time at Grant MacEwan, but the past is brought into the present. There has been an evolution in terms of accepting the body and what it means in terms of being an artist, and yet, those feelings of inadequacy coexist with acceptance. The body, movement and the message are inter-related. As a dancer and as a choreographer, one trusts that each is conveying what is to be conveyed. For Yvonne, that is an on-going process.

New moves.

In 1987, while Yvonne was at Grant MacEwan, she saw two performances, which she connected with and led to her coming to Ottawa.

Anyway after the fourth year I ended up coming to Le Groupe and it was funny because I really hadn't heard of the company before and the thing that brought me there was that Michael Montenaro was the summer school choreographer. And I had just seen his piece in Edmonton and that was really exciting for me. I thought, "This is really interesting" ...and I saw O Vertigo too and that too blew me away. It was just like,

"Wow!"...there was something so magical and so connected to my way of moving because it wasn't about lines and shapes and uh.. I don't know, it was so.. kinesthetically involving.. like I wanted to move seeing that....So anyway, that brought me to Ottawa.. the summer school. And Peter Boneham was the teacher and there was a theatre aspect as well.. Tom Stroud and Michael Montanaro was the choreographer... "Oh my goodness". I came to do that and it was just like it was supposed to happen.

During the period of the summer school, another chance encounter forwarded her identity as a choreographer.

And what happened, another flukey little thing happened, I didn't realize but this woman, Maria Formolo, she dances in Edmonton. Well she was in Le Groupe at the beginning. You see I didn't know that. But then.. for some reason, she was in Ottawa and it ended up that Peter and her were speaking one day and Peter mentioned my name and she said, "Oh yes I know her from there". And then said to him, "Do you know she choreographs?" because I had just been working on this solo in Edmonton. He said, "No" but he's always really interested in young choreographers. So he came to me and asked and I said, "Oh ya", and he wanted to see something. So I showed him a video and he seemed like he was interested.. in that side. Anyway, we just, it connected really well.

January 1988 saw Yvonne in Ottawa apprenticing with the company. This was a time of change for Le Groupe de la Place Royale. They were altering their identity moving away from a traditional performance company, showing finished works, towards a venue for "works in progress". The dance lab, as it became known, gave choreographers, within and external to the company, a chance to show their pieces as they grew and gave

the dance audience an opportunity to become part of the dance creation. The audience was both able to see the creative process in action and was able to contribute by providing feedback. For the dancers, it made performance a much more prevalent part of their schedule. Typically much effort is spent on learning a piece and rehearsal; the actual opportunities for performance are small in comparison. Like her year with Brian Webb, Yvonne was plunged again into a period of active performing: *...you were performing every other weekend. Even if it was just a small audience, it's just the idea of continually performing, learning to deal with those moments.*

A dancer left the company in the fall of 1989 and Yvonne joined as a full member: *it was just all so lucky.* She remained with the company from 1989 to 1993, for five seasons. In the first year, she was a dancer by day, choreographer by night. New to the city, the demands of her personal life were small. She had the time and the desire to be in the studio at night, playing with movement. The second year offered more choreographic opportunities. She describes the second year as one of the best years she spent with the company.

I would say generally in the years that I've been there, there has always been.. great people but that particular year there was just something so right... everyone was so creative and not only creative, but really excited about being creative. And we would work together, stay after and painted things, it was such a collective. It was so exciting you know because not only were we excited to perform other people's work that came in, you know, beautiful performers, they were.. beautiful, but also when it came down to doing other people's work you know everyone was just as excited about dancing in someone else's work as doing your work.. they were excited about being in yours so it

was just.. one of those magical times.. just the right group of people came together. So it allows you to have a real nice freedom...I know I explored in those years in a much freer way that I had before in different things.. much more theatrical which was great for me because I just didn't think that way and actually it opened up quite a nice area which I didn't know existed.. a lighter kind of theatricality came out and it was good for me to discover that...

Choreographers have different ways of working and different ways of working on different projects. Some like to plan the piece alone without dancers and fit them in at the end. Some like to bring in a basic frame and then try ideas out on dancers. Some like to let dancers improvise, having them playing a major role in the creative process. At Le Groupe, Yvonne, through the encouragement of the Artistic Director, was able to expand the way she created work.

...he thought there were really good ideas but it was too much like something he had seen before, too much like class and to just find different ways of exploring to find what it is you need to say.. say what you need to say. Ya, so he really kind of drove the point home and he made me explore and improvise, where before I always set things so improvisation brings a whole other...you know.. world to you that you can also reconstruct and develop.

I asked whether it took confidence to be able to improvise rather than always set things. Yvonne carried her answer beyond the studio walls and provided a metaphor for her life in the past few years.

Ya, it's funny you know. They both take a certain kind of confidence and place to be because I can really feel how I would.. there's times over the past six years where I

felt super free to improvise and then a couple years later where I really felt things were maybe getting away from me.. personally and dance wise. And suddenly you need to set everything. I feel like you can really see those correlations to those.. well just how it manifests itself in your work. You know the personal.. your own personal stuff that you're going through.

[So if you look back on your.. your whole life up to now you can see where you've been really set and then you've been able to develop and grow and be creative and improvise and then you realize things are going too crazy and you have to get-]

Ya, you have to come back or you suddenly feel.. like with improvising it's a great thing because you do take a lot of richness from your dancer's creativity which is important. That's the thing I don't think they are only machines.. they have creativity. But there also comes a point where you go, "I don't see my voice anymore". I see how I've initiated these creative outlets but I need to see more of my own way of moving within that.

In Yvonne's interviews, one has a sense of movement from places of security where she could be herself and create with freedom, to places of solitude and unhappiness where creation was born of struggle, and the journey back to security. There is a sense of process, of coming to understand what is needed in order to work well and to be happy. (As I write this, I wonder if, in terms of creation, both these experiences are needed - struggles and comfort; the cliché of the creation being born out of pain.)

One of the times where Yvonne felt comfortable was her last year at Grant MacEwan. She spoke of her fourth year as an important one in helping to break some of her fear of performing in large spaces as she was required to perform often. But also, her

greater confidence had to do with feelings of personal security.

We spoke about this again in the second interview and it seemed like there were two situations where Yvonne felt comfortable with her self and her work. One she describes in this way: *I think sometimes I like being in my own learning process, I like being the one no one expects anything of.* In the first interview, she called this “being the underdog” although this was a term she did not feel quite described the feeling. The second, which describes her time at Grant MacEwan, was when she felt as follows: *I like being in the situation that I can kind of, not teach, but I can offer things that I know from experience. I think sometimes too just in the learning thing again, we hit a point where we need to share, to kind of make a wholeness of where we're at you know and it's not a time of learning, it's a time of giving...* Both of these situations are comfortable for Yvonne because they are times when she feels she is able to be herself. Talking about Grant MacEwan again, she says, *I could just let go with a certain kind of self consciousness again. I think that is always there for me.*

Confronting conflict.

While Yvonne felt like being at Le Groupe was timely: *the right timing, the best place for me to be just for my own growth*, after five seasons both she and the director felt it was time for her to leave. As it turned out, she had a busy year planned presenting her own work as an independent choreographer. She was asked to create a solo for the Canada Dance Festival in 1994, she had a few smaller engagements like Dance for a Small Stage in Toronto and she redid a piece of hers on the dance students at Grant MacEwan. She also was surprised with the news that she had won the North American Choreography Award from the Bonnie Bird Choreography Fund: *Out of the blue I got this phone call in*

the morning, "You won", right from Bonnie Bird. I was so shocked and surprised, "Is this a joke?" (laughs) . The award provides choreographers with the opportunity to spend a month in London, designing a piece for the dancers at the Laban Centre. So for Yvonne it was to be a really strange couple of years, like 93, 94, because these really good things happened.

However, while Yvonne's career was moving in exciting directions, as a successful young independent choreographer, her personal adjustment to success was not as expedient. She was leaving behind a supportive environment and thus, was on her own, facing the pressure of expectation. Those years represent difficult and lonely times for Yvonne.

...but as it turns out it was quite a hard year. That was quite a difficult one. Ya, and the Dance Festival for 94, making that solo for that year was just.. it was the hardest experience I think I had ever had in the studio. And uh.. I think I wasn't used to being alone so much with being in the company and you know it's that time when personal things go into your work. Like just your own.. all the struggles you have as a person and then working on your own as well, it just magnifies everything. Ya, that was a tough year. Wasn't happy with the um.. well I was having a hard time with the process of the solo and I was also working on the group piece which some part of it was right but I think I was.. I just think I got really caught up in this, "Ohh I'm being produced.. this has to be incredible". And it just kind of "Ehh" (squashes thumb into palm). And ya, you know that's life but...so many good things were happening but at that point, the pressure was anti-creative.

[Was this a time where you felt, ‘Here I am, I’ve made it’ so people were expecting a lot from you?]

Right, it was the expectation thing.. got in my way. And it's almost embarrassing to admit it.. it's hard for me to admit it. Because somehow it seems like weakness, it seems weak, you know, there's all that stuff I thought about it a lot. And it was uncomfortable for me to say that happened but at the same time that's normal. But sure I had a lot of thoughts about getting out of this because I was so miserable and it was making me almost.. ill. You know I'd just get so, there was no one else to take it out on except myself. So.. that was difficult. And uh.. so I went to England... that was really hard too. I think I was struggling a lot with all this alone time.. I just wasn't used to that. And I think as a person I struggle with that. And so like I said it just magnified it.. the place that I was working in, the Laban Centre, was located in this very dark area of London, very grey, raining. Ugh it was just so weighted and.. heavy.

Within and outside of dance, being alone is something she has struggled with. I was one of those people where growing up I was never alone.. I was always involved with things or when I came home from school my mom was always there.. my mom and dad.. we always did stuff together.. that kind of thing.. childhood. So when you get to the age where you know everybody should be cool about being by themselves sometimes.. I was not cool about it. I mean there's lots of people like that who always have to fill up their time so.. but my tendency was to.. I would get really depressed. I don't think depressed is the word.. it's sad.. just sad. So um.. which is another reason why the blue is interesting [we were talking about a solo, Now. In Blue.] ..blue with blue but uh ya it would just make me sad. And sometimes I would uh.. sometimes I would struggle a little

bit with panic.. I'd get like acute panic.. from nowhere. And.. it's always worse when you're alone.. if it happens.. it usually happens when you're alone. But I also think it's related to not being used to alone. So anyway. I think there was just some needing to get comfortable.. to be by yourself.. not alot of noise and.. it's okay (laughs).

Yvonne's solo for the 1994 Canada Dance Festival was created out of this difficult period of her life. Loneliness and the burden of expectation were not the best creative partners, especially considering Yvonne's enjoyment of collaboration, and yet they ended up being catalysts in an exploration that went beyond the stage. In the studio, no ideas would come or those that did she would destroy. Yvonne experienced frustration over the inability to meet the expectation, wanting to move, seize the moment and not being able to...however, eventually the inability became the ability.

...I was so stuck that I would just go into the studio and literally just stand there frozen for like an hour, couldn't do a thing, move and then just kill it all in my head, just tear it apart and leave, go home and be miserable... and that happened for weeks... so finally I just started writing text about the feeling of standing there and not being able to move. And go into, "Why can't I move?" and "What does this have to do with passivity and not being able to be active?".. and that got the action going. And then you know I took a little bit from a group piece I had done before, something that I really liked that was also about this idea of action in relation to passivity. So they were these one minute Chopin Preludes, very fast piano and I just wanted the movement to be just as.. fast and intense and fill up one minute without any thoughts. You just had to be active and uh just kind of, it all started to come together. I feel really good about that particular piece because it feels really honest you know for the time. Ya, so that was good...the difficulty

of the process eventually fed into what the solo came to be about.

In the original solo, which I did not see (I saw a version on video which had a different stage set-up), but which Yvonne likes the best, a large black square is hung horizontally from the ceiling at approximately shoulder level. Yvonne loves the work of Mark Rothko (1903-1970), an American artist whose work inspired certain aspects of the piece. As a very simple description, his paintings are large squares of colour, not solid colour - generally a few colours dividing the canvas unequally in horizontal bands. For Yvonne, the shape invokes the active, masculine side.

I'm into the squares. I think it has something to do with.. you know what I was saying about masculine and feminine I don't know, something about the squares is satisfying for me maybe because it engages like that (gestures with her right hand twice from the forehead out directly in front of her in a very straight direct line).

I find it interesting in that while Rothko's paintings are large squares, the colours within are not linearly demarked from each other but interact: the defined container, the communal inside.

Not only Rothko's paintings, but his words gave Yvonne something which helped her create the work in a bigger sense. Rothko co-authored a statement concerning his beliefs as a reaction to a review of a show of work of his and a colleague's (Clearwater, 1987, p. 68). The reviewer found the works confusing and inexplicable. Rothko (and colleague) wrote:

1. To use art is an adventure into an unknown world, which can be explored only by those willing to take risks.
2. This world of the imagination is fancy-free and violently opposed to common

sense.

3. It is our function as artists to make the spectator see the world our way - not his way.

These words have continued to give Yvonne the courage to stay true to her own vision and process.

Around the horizontal square are blue Christmas lights. Black and blue are the colours of the piece, inspired by two Rothko paintings using this colour scheme. The Christmas lights represent a striking image of childhood for Yvonne. She grew up in a city where the dark winter nights come early and last long.

That's one thing I always remember about Edmonton is that at Christmas time there is all this snow when people put their lights on, it's so vibrant against the black so it reminded me somehow and there's one house that had this incredible blue and I really liked that blue and they were so straight I thought it was so.. nice... and I liked the idea that it's so tacky. I mean why would anybody use Christmas lights.. come on, it's really tacky. Ya but maybe in a different concept.. context they may be completely transformed and become really beautiful.

When she danced within the blue, she played with the paradox of blue being associated with calm and yet she filled every second with physical, fast paced movement - action without being burdened with consideration of consequences, fleeting time to make the most of before there is no more time.

Not only is the square linked with mental attributes - directed, assertive - it is also linked with the physical. In part of the dance Yvonne encircles with her hand those parts of her body that are problematic for her as a woman, those that relate to body image and

sexuality. She talks to me *of this idea of having to be so flat and square*. A square is two-dimensional, flat and angular. It is masculine. Women... Yvonne Coutts... is not, she is curved and yet feels like she should be flat, more hard edged.

Passivity is linked with the feminine; activity is linked with the masculine - not in gender but in psyche. The solo was born out of imbalance in those two aspects of self Yvonne considers important. When she was growing up, playing lacrosse and doing Hawaiian dance, that balance was present. However, while still searching for the active, now through her choreography and personal research, Yvonne has come to appreciate that passivity can also be considered in a positive sense: *I read a great book on it by a Jungian psychologist, a woman, I can't remember her name right now, but uh, it was written when she was um I think over 60 and it has this great chapter on passiveness of women in a very positive way and that we often see it as a negative aspect instead of appreciating its.. thoughtfulness and its kind of taking everything into perspective rather than just saying you have to act without considering.*

Thus, Yvonne found a way to get through her dark period through using the process she was experiencing as the message in her work.

I think the solo.. got through, got me through it...and I made this piece [the group piece for the Laban Center in London] that.. I still kind of shudder at (laughs). But you know, it was okay. It received fine reviews in the Time Out magazine. Like it was fine, it actually was received quite well, but just on my own level, I just didn't like it. I just didn't feel right about it. I knew I had to make something. But now looking back you go, well you know that's life. If you're a choreographer, you going to have to work through those times like that. You know Peter always makes that comment that a painter can

paint 5000 little things before he gets to this masterpiece and none of those 5000 are seen by anyone, they're in a studio. But for us and the way the whole producing thing is going, every little thing you make has to be seen if you want to keep in the, in the circle. And that's absurd. How can you ex.. you know, you can't expect every thing to be like the one that a lot of people maybe liked. Because then it implies no growth and in growth there's always going to be little hiccups or else it's a little too smooth to think that it's growth. It's just funny. I find it odd in thinking about that, that you have to come to accept more what it's.. what was happening at that time and pass through it. And you learn to live through it.

More than “learning to live through it”, Yvonne has come to understand what works for her to create well. When Yvonne described her “best” years, in contrast to these dark ones, they were the times when she was in an environment where she felt connected. She had been at Grant MacEwan for four years, knew the routines, the studio, the people, and knew herself in that environment. At Le Groupe, she felt the same. These were places of personal security and they were also the places that Yvonne was best able to engage in creative risk. While some people would thrive being thrust into independence and expectation, for Yvonne it was, not counterproductive, as she did create work during this time, but not optimal in a holistic sense. The irony is that being alone came from what would be considered “success”; it ended up with Yvonne re-evaluating what success on her terms meant.

And I think all of that led to my coming back to Le Groupe. And I moved to Montreal for a year and.. I don't know it really.. it just really forced me to ask myself what I expected and wanted from dance and my career. And had always kind of made up

this.. thing that I want to be a dancer/choreographer so I'll move to Montreal because that's where there's a lot of choreographers that I like. When I got there, I realized, actually.. I'm not sure that that's true (we laugh). Not that I still don't like lots of them but that I don't think I want to go on tour and I'm not sure I want to be performing in big places and um.. it was true I didn't, not now anyway. So it was good.. I had to go all the way out there to come back.

[The whole process of finding out what's really comfortable for you.]

Ya, ya. And I knew I had to quit, like I was now starting to avoid creating because of all those things that happened. And I knew I had to get to a place that maybe I felt a little safer. And I think that's okay and allow myself to get through this or else it was just going to stay in limbo. So part of my coming back to Le Groupe was the fact that I would have time to create without this.. certain kind of pressure. The first three weeks was difficult but it was work and it got me back to this point of just creating. And so it's been very, I think, necessary, just to get back to this place again about actually getting excited about an idea and feeling confident enough to say I can do it.

[Ya. So that fits in kind of with what you were talking about before that idea even with your work.. just going out on a limb and then realizing you have to back up to a place of safety again to be able to go..

Right.

[Before going out again.]

And you know not everyone has to do that. Finally I'm at the point where instead of criticizing myself and saying, "Oh you big baby, like you know get out there" and putting yourself on the board with all those other people you think are fantastic. And you

go.. "That's really like life then", "Are you them?", "No", it's so obvious but it's not.

When you're living it, it's not. You've got to just kind of..

[I guess it's a bit like you were talking about getting drawn into that stereotype of who, like how you think your body should be.]

Right.

[Or how you think you should be as a choreographer.]

Right.

[Or a..a person even [ya]..confident, directive and know what your life is..direction is going to be.

Ya and everyone has to come to it.. their own way and I think eventually that's just another thing.. with just getting.. older, you know, you start to settle down a bit and realize there's different ways of doing things.

[Umhm, you don't have to be that way.]

No. Ya, and the most important thing is once you've found your own.. place, your path or at least even a little indication [I laugh], it actually brings.. greater things, you know.. a greater sense of whatever.. calm or well being or I don't know, that sounds pretty corny. Just that it's right.

The idea of the person as autonomous and goal-directed is a Western, modern one and one which may not be relevant to women: "Feminist critics have argued that this theory of the individualized self is impossible to apply to women's experience of the self" (Linde, 1993, p. 102). In speaking about Chodorow's psychological theory – that a woman's role as caretaker of children in all known cultures determines a difference in self definition between men and women – Linde added:

Therefore, girls have the example of their mothers in relation to themselves as a model of how to be, while boys must move away from their primary relations in order to enter into the world of men. Because of this, women form their understanding of self much more as based on relations with others and much less as being based on distinguishability of the self from others, while for men it is just the opposite (p. 103-104).

Yvonne's conflicts are rooted in a difficulty facing women artists of the current age.

Here we encounter if only indirectly, one of the central conflicts in recent sexual/political theory: the debate over the "correct" attitude feminists should take toward traditional conceptions of gender difference (e.g., the belief that women are fundamentally instinctive rather than reflective, closer to and more open about their emotional life than men, innately drawn to tactile involvement rather than visual, analytical detachment, and always determined to render their experience holistically rather than dissect it into fragments). Should feminists set out to demonstrate that these presumably natural differences are nothing but patriarchal prejudices? Or should they turn the inherited hierarchy on its head, celebrating the very characteristics that patriarchy has traditionally denigrated (instinctual modes of knowing, intimacy, fullness of feeling, oneness with nature, etc.) (Copeland, 1993, p. 147).

Some of Yvonne's growth over the past few years has been being able to feel more comfortable on her own. And some of it comes, at least the realization of it comes, within the contexts of our interviews.

In the first interview, Yvonne talks about her time at Le Groupe, working with the other choreographers, as an exciting period, as one of her best years. I bring it up in the second interview, asking her if that is the epitome of how she likes to work. She says, *Ya, ya. Ya, because I hear myself say that, and sometimes I still wish I could find that again. Because it is was that thing about staying after, nobody was hesitant to hang out to seven and work on things, to you know, to do it and hash it out and come in on the weekend and you know everybody was so excited. Of course there was a little, there 's always little bits of not friction, but everybody was doing their own work, but ya, supported and excited. Ya and I do like that.*

She brings the topic up again at the end of the second interview.

I still feel very happy with being at Le Groupe right now and happy with interpreting and working in a group. You know I think you touched on something which I never really thought of before which was this idea of the collective and how much I did like working in that group. It's neat that you brought that up because I never really.. kind of connected that. But that's very true... It makes me realize that if I were to try to do this, I might would involve two or three other people as a support system, I think that's what I would need. Not necessarily dancers.

Yvonne refers to it again towards the end of our third interview.

I was going to tell you you know like about the last talk we had.. you.. we mentioned about working in the lab and how I liked working when there was a group of us. It was really neat that you brought that up because I really thought about it and I might have mentioned it again too.. but uh the next day I wrote a little card to Harold [one of the choreographers she worked with in the first collective at Le Groupe] and a

day later I just got a postcard from him.. from Scotland. It was one of those (she brings her index and middle fingers of her right hand together) [I cross my hands in front of me moving in opposite directions] [I laugh]. But uh no it really got me thinking about in the future that I would rather start a group of people working together than start working by myself. That was neat.

According to McAdams (1993), all stories related to human existence are about one of two major themes: power and intimacy. Stories of those with a motivation toward power focus on strength, achievement, isolation and having an impact on the world. Those with an intimacy motivation show a preference in their stories for connection to others.

In Yvonne's story, these two themes seem to be in conflict. First there is the desire to make an impact on the world - to create something which speaks to others. There is the image she holds of people she sees as doing that - confident, assertive, direct and independent. But against that image is the understanding that collaboration with others is an optimal way to work and being alone does not bring happiness for her. Yvonne's story then is one where these two themes meet.

Connection, for Yvonne, is important not only in her personal and working environments but also in her place of performance - on stage. Over the course of her career, Yvonne has had bad experiences with performance anxiety, to the extent where, at one point, she considered abandoning performing altogether and concentrating on choreography.

...there's just something about all these eyes watching that can just send me, it's like, I don't know what it is, it doesn't send me somewhere, it just grabs all my

concentration. You know I get hyper aware of it and then I.. it's hard for me to stay concentrated. Because along with the nervousness that's already got everything.. really pumping which already increases awareness plus those eyes.. it sometimes just gets a little too, too much.

I wondered if it had to do with fear of exposure; her answer implied that connection with the audience, a connection which she actively created, was partly important in keeping anxiety at bay.

I find it happens less when I'm performing my own work.. a solo of my own I feel a lot stronger. But then I devise things within the solo, like I find it really hard to not see the audience, that's something that will make me blank for sure so I keep the house lights up 10% when I do my own work so I can see. I do a lot of things where I speak to them so I feel they're there. So it's not quite a vacuum of space. Something about that...I also prefer intimate spaces. I think it's the exchange thing again. It seems like.. like smaller numbers, duets and trios and solos.. I feel like they've worked, I have felt better in them somehow and maybe it's the connection thing again, the connection on stage is more intense and then also slightly more with the audience too. Because generally those smaller pieces are in smaller spaces.

Thus, Yvonne is looking for ways to create connection: through discarding her stereotype of success and realizing that on stage and in life she works best when she feels a connection to others. In her life on stage she has found a way to create connection through how she designs a piece. She is interested in creating a similar design for her life off the stage.

Found.

I saw a version of Intimate Animus (1998), a year ago, just before I met Yvonne for the first time. It was being presented at the National Arts Centre as a preview for the 1998 Canada Dance Festival (June 5-13). It was shown at the festival as a finished piece. Yvonne used her continued love of language, words and movement, to have Little Yellow Suzie tell us about the contrasts in her (both Yvonne's and Suzie's) life.

*...when I started the piece I was working with cowardice and courage. So coward.. yellow.. coward.. yellowbelly, yellowbelly came to be. I didn't want to say coward.. cowardice.. I wanted to abstract it. So the first part I kind of wanted to introduce.. yellow. So it's funny with that stuff.. it's like that just kind of came up.. like "Suzie.. little yellow Suzie".. it was like it just was there.. it just comes and then I just had to think about introducing the colour and relate that colour to yellowbelly... I wanted to get in this thing about a woman.. and that also.. I don't know, I had this sense about it being a little bit lighter and primary colour and primary being yellow, red and blue and primary being number one like it's **the** colour. I liked all that. And then red and blue I wanted to bring in, violet.. And I kind of like this idea.. it's.. her skin is violet and "Roses are red.. violets are blue" so her skin is violet.. she's blue because she's a coward.. like I kept making all these little relationships. But yellow is more akin to red than blue so actually being a coward she has to go the full spectrum to red which is passion, you know... The other thing was the violet part was because I thought of the colour of courage is more purple. I thought about the Purple..*

[Heart I think.]

Like I was thinking all those obvious things. So it was interesting to me.. that the

cowardice colour imposes a version of the courage colour on to her skin too. So that was interesting.

[Cause really cowardice is absence of courage.. or you know..]

Her finding it. So. And I like this idea.. the last one when she dies she blanches so it's completely white...but it's still.. the death part is related to a colour which I thought was kind of neat.

[So was this the time you were dealing with femaleness and.. passivity.]

Right. Because I feel like at that time.. my feeling of being a coward was related to my inability to muster up action and uh and.. I'm a woman like.. so I was just kind of acknowledging.. those things. And then it was this thing of in the first part she's very kind of.. she talks but she's always positioning herself.. in space.. finding where she is. And then the last part is all action, no speaking.. and I really just like that last line because it's also that thing about silence.. the true silence of peace.. being golden but silence of being passive is yellow. That's what made sense for me.. I'm quiet but that's because I'm.. too like big of a chickenshit.. I'm not saying anything. But I would rather be quiet because I...(puts hands in front of her like something has been settled)

[Because you're peaceful.]

I know why.. I've decided it.. it's not like something's got me.

Yvonne would rather choose to be quiet than feel that there is something that stops her from speaking out. She **has** been able to choose, and speak, at least in one of her languages. The issues, at least in this form, have been given voice.

In the earlier version I saw and this most recent, Little Yellow Suzie confronted us with the meaning of what it is to be female, passive, silent, a coward. But the second part

of the piece, created for Suzie and a group of dancers, now seemed to bring a resolution which I did not feel the first time I saw the piece. Suzie seemed to accept the contrasts as a backdrop for her interactions rather than a foreground. Yvonne said the piece now feels complete. I have the feeling that like the fourth year at Grant MacEwan, the first years at Le Groupe and in her return to Le Group, Yvonne once again is in a place of personal safety. She has been able to find her *own place* and it has as much to do with her inner environment as with her outer.

Comments on the Story

Notes on the Interviews

As I spoke with Louise in these interviews, I found myself gaining perspective on the different phases of my career (and my life to some degree). In reading over her interpretation of the interviews, it provided me with clarity and a surprisingly positive response occurred. In areas where I had previously held feelings of failure and guilt, there instead arose some resolution (or closure).

When I first agreed to engage in these interviews, I was definitely interested but also somewhat embarrassed. I continued to gather these insecure and unworthy feelings about my occupation and career. In some way by discussing the details and allowing each passage to unfold one after another, I discovered a quiet acceptance. This was quite unexpected. Thank-you Louise.

Felicia

Meetings with Felicia

I was only granted one interview with Felicia. Unfortunately this interview was the least productive in the sense of material to write her story. There were, however, aspects

of the interview that made it worthwhile to include in this project.

I had chosen Felicia because of her stature in one of Canada's dance companies. She called me upon receipt of my letter to express her interest in having an interview. We agreed on a date in early August as she was touring until that point.

I conducted the interview at her home, a beautiful little place in an affluent neighbourhood. The décor was elegant but comfortable. Felicia was still feeling somewhat sick from a bout of the flu and lay on the couch to conduct the interview. She arranged the seating so that the camera shot focused on her.

We had a good interview in the sense that she was open about many aspects of her past and present experience. However, when she had returned the transcript of the interview to me, she had taken out major sections of text. Some of the deleted sections included comments about personalities in the dance world that she preferred to keep confidential. Other deleted sections included fragmented stories in which meaning was not easily discernible. In each of the interview transcripts for all dancers, there were instances of incomplete sentences or improper grammar, either my own or the dancer's, yet the sense of the story was clear. A number of Felicia's stories, however, were difficult to understand. They had beginnings but no sense of direction or completion. Thus, in comparison to the other three dancers, Felicia's interview yielded the least usable material.

I debated for some time about how to include Felicia's story. I felt it was important in that her basic story describes a journey to success in the ballet world different from Vivian's and much different from that of the two contemporary dancers. Her interview was of interest in a methodological sense in that it demonstrated the many faces we show to different people. I said earlier that I saw a glimpse of both the public and

private Felicia, but perhaps I should say I saw only a public and less public view.

When she returned her interview transcripts, she gave me permission to use her name and those sections of the transcripts she had not crossed out. However, I did not feel comfortable using her real name as I felt it would restrict what I felt I could say about her path. I felt it was important to point out how her story related to some of the issues raised in the literature regarding ballet training. I felt fortunate to have selected her because of that link. Yet, I did not want to send her story back to her as I have written it and to publish it in association with her name. In crossing out sections of her transcript, she indicated that she wanted to be seen in a certain light. I felt I must respect that image. Therefore, while I have used those sections of text that she gave me permission for, I changed references that might suggest who she is. As I did not send her story back to her, no commentary from her is included. However, I have followed her story with a brief commentary on the ballet culture.

Felicia – Classical Ballerina

Felicia's parents wanted to put her youthful exuberance to good use and enrolled her at an early age in different lessons: piano, gymnastics and ballet.

Because of my energy, I was driving them nuts! I asked my mom, "Why?" [why ballet?] And she said, "You were bouncing off the walls.. we had to use up some of the extra energy".

Felicia liked piano, took it for five years, but found the teacher boring. She did not like gymnastics. The instructor was the kind who thought that yelling helped students learn; she did not agree. Her ballet teacher, however, she liked.

...my ballet teacher was one of the loveliest teachers I know because she let me be Felicia.

Letting her be Felicia meant that while learning technique was important, also important was learning how to dance with a personal sense of style.

*I think it was one thing that was just there. I don't know if that was rooted in my ballet teacher who let me have the freedom in the world to do whatever I wanted and the arms were too like this or whatever and the shoulders weren't down enough but it was still, "Beautiful", it had the **dance**. Like I saw this little girl...two summers ago and she had huge hands.. long things totally out of proportion (laughs) and beautiful body and.. she was doing this step.. I wish I could show you.. she was so cute doing this step (makes a pose with her wrists crossed). And all I knew was that she had the dance in her. She needed a lot of refinement.. but she knew what dance was. The other girls were just mimicking.. she **just** felt it.*

Felicia started with her teacher when she was eight. By the age of ten, she was already taking five classes a week. She had a natural aptitude. Becoming a ballerina was not something she decided however.

I just loved it. I never decided...it wasn't this striving goal of "I'd love to be a ballerina".. I never said that line. I don't know why. If it was going to happen, it was going to happen, if it wasn't.. I don't think I realized what would happen if I wasn't a dancer.. I never had the opportunity to reflect on that feeling.. I didn't dream. I just did.

Felicia's teacher heard about the training school associated with her current company, that it taught both academics and dance: *...they hold auditions all across Canada and I went to Vancouver auditioned there and made it to their summer course*

which was a four week course in July and made it for their September [program]. She never went home again, except for vacations.

It was an *honour* to be accepted into the school. Hundreds of students audition and only 12 are chosen. Felicia never felt she went to the school because her parents put pressure on her to go in the first place or to stay once there.

I think from seeing other people.. going through the school like myself, I know that I never had to prove anything to my parents. And I think, I mean I've seen a lot of students where they had to go to the school because their parents wanted them to...I remember growing up, from age 13 to 18 in the school and there were times I'd go home for holidays and I would cry and I would tell them, "I don't want to go back". Because at the time, the style was very English, British and the style I was used to was about as laid back as it could possibly be. There were no affectations compared to the dry sense of English mannerisms. I remember my mother saying, "Well you don't have to go back, you can stay here". And I'd cry again because I knew the school was the only place that could offer me what I needed.. but emotionally speaking I wasn't having to prove anything to my parents. Although you don't realize at 13, you go there, if it works, "Fine", if it doesn't, "Great". The result is that you have such a healthy mentality that you're never trying to prove to your parents and I know that made me a more confident child, not ever having to prove myself to my parents.

The hard part about being at the school at first was that suddenly she was with lots of other dancers who were as good at she was. Homesickness, however, was not the problem.

...It was great. Nobody had to tell me what to do.. I could do exactly what I wanted.. nobody screaming to, "Pick this up" (laughs)...the mentality of a thirteen year old.

With time, however, her parents have become more important: *The older I got, the more I miss my parents. It's very strange. Independence disappears the older you become.*

The hard part about being at the school that continued was the way the students were treated by some of the teachers.

...it was actually the experience from grade 8 to grade 12...and we talk about this...it was basically hell...the school now is so different. It's very positive and constructive. I don't see the kids as so hard on themselves, so insecure. They made us very insecure...only a couple of teachers I know kept me there... a lot of love for us. Other teachers.. absolutely none.

Felicia's experience is typical of that encountered in many ballet institutions; one in which negative comments are a common teaching tool (Gordon, 1983; Van Dyke, 1992). There has been much criticism regarding the philosophies that inform ballet training and which persist in the professional world (Gordon, 1983; Kirkland, 1986; Van Dyke, 1992). A concern raised by Van Dyke (1992) deals with the timing of identity formation and ballet training particularly with regard to young women.

In modern America, dance classes are part of growing up for most middle-class girls and ballet, much more available than modern dance, is the prevalent influence. Many of those who go on to become professional are hooked at an early age, before they have developed any sense of self-awareness, and they grow up in

dance, adopting the values of the field as their own. It is those values which teach that it is good to be obedient and silent, good not to question authority or to have ideas which might conflict with what one is being asked to do. This kind of thinking produces followers, and is at odds with originality, critical thought, creativity, and artistry, effectively keeping many dancers out of leadership positions (p. 121).

The rationale behind these methods of training is that it prepares dancers for the climate of the professional world: “dancers in professional companies are encouraged to remain both physically and emotionally at a prepubescent stage of development – children who will obediently do what they are told and fit into structures created by others” (Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones and Van Dyke, 1990, p.20).

There is growing awareness by some dance educators of the negative aspects of the traditional training methods and a move to make changes. Since her appointment as Director of the National Ballet School of Canada, Mavis Staines has altered the face of training (Adams, 1997; Kain, 1997; Staines, 1997). There is an emphasis on fitting the training to the individual and in teaching subjects (e.g., anatomy, contemporary dance, composition) that help developing dancers gain a greater control of their own bodies and develop their creative potentials as well as a recognition of their emotional development and needs (Staines, 1997). However, as Stinson (1993) pointed out, for those who have grown up personally and dancewise and acquired values in a system that taught silence and obedience, it can be difficult to find the courage to be critical.

While Felicia found the training atmosphere difficult at times, she persevered. During the time she was writing her exams for school, she auditioned for the company.

She was accepted and at the end of her teens, began as a member of the corps de ballet. She has experienced continuity in philosophy and training and has moved up within the company hierarchy from an early age.

As a company member, she had to relearn what her first teacher had encouraged her to develop and what she lost by being at the school. The school training was based on the Cecchetti syllabus that Felicia felt *makes you into a robot*. She understood that structure was important, that putting your arms in a certain position meant putting your arms in a certain position but also important was the meaning behind the movement.

You know what my problem was.. when I joined the company I had no expression in my face. When I danced, my coach would say, "You know, you can do a lot more like "He" (gestures away with right hand) "Love" (gestures back to her heart) and I'd be.. I must have been feeling a lot inside but you put up this wall because no matter how angry you were... you can, you weren't allowed to express yourself. So that took I would say a good four or five years before I began to fully express myself as an artist.

She quickly moved up the ranks, becoming a second soloist a year after joining the company. Two years later she became first soloist after winning a medal at a prestigious international ballet competition.

...I was in the senior category and I remember I had made it to the third round which took three weeks and I remember seeing all these [dancers] and they were phenomenal, technically and artistically. I think I was just in awe of what I was seeing. And as far as confidence was concerned, I don't think I had a lot because I had not been trained like them. But I do remember saying to myself that when I went out for the last round I didn't think of myself winning.. that's not even why I went there.. it was for the

experience. I just remember going out there thinking just be Felicia, listen to the music and really do what you feel. Because you are not going to be pulling off pirouettes like that, you're not going to have balances, you're not going to have that kind of steely technique they have. So I went out there and I enjoyed it and I remember hearing the music which really.. uh I think kind of prevailed in the whole thing and kept me going from beginning to end. In the end, my partner and I both had a medal and I was in shock, not so much with my partner because he was a technical whiz. I think that one of the main reasons I won was because of the individual aspect.

After returning to Canada, Felicia decided to leave the company as it had just been taken over by an artistic director whose vision did not match hers. She joined another company but after a year, she wanted to come back home. She enjoyed the travelling but being on tour for six months out of a year, living out of suitcases and hotels was not how she wanted to spend her life.

I don't know why at 21 because most 21 year olds want to go and party. I don't know.. I've always been like that.. my nature.

Felicia has been with her current company since her return. She has seen many changes in directorship. Artistic Directors can exhibit tremendous control over what a company does for choreography, how they do it and how dancers are treated. She liked one in particular: *I think he just let me be me.. very much like my teacher. He didn't do any of the (makes a prodding gesture with her left hand).. he just let me be me.*

The ballets Felicia enjoys are the classics: Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty and so on; she considers herself a lyrical dancer. She spoke of the importance of having the emotional maturity appropriate for the role one plays in order to bring the most to a piece.

She mentioned Romeo and Juliet as a recent pleasure because she felt she could appreciate all of Juliet's emotions.

I think I can feel.. everything that Juliet would have felt. She felt love for the first time.. I know what that feels like.. to experience.. anger in my life.

Dance for her continues to be a challenge: being able to bring new emotional experience to a role and in part because the body keeps you *humble*. *Your balance suddenly is off or you can not do a turn that you've been doing for weeks. There's so much to learn...it's unbelievable what's involved. It's not like writing a letter where you just keep writing the same.. the body's different. It's more expressions and so many different styles.*

Felicia's path from ballet class as a child to ballerina with one of Canada's major ballet companies has been one of natural evolution. At an early age, she found something she liked, was good at and continues to pursue. Her ongoing challenge is found within dance itself; she is not interested in working with another company or having to move. Felicia has arrived at a place she wants to maintain both in terms of her career and her personal life; she has achieved a certain status in the company and has created a home.

Commentary – The Ballet Culture and a Definition of Self

Reading through Felicia's story, it struck me that she often referred in her interview to the fact that she was allowed to be "Felicia" and which is an element she attributes to her success and yet, she is in a position where, to some extent, being an individual is denied. As Van Dyke (1992) stated: "In a sense, the ballet ethic can be viewed as a systematic removal of individuality by teaching for conformity to an imposed ideal" (p. 114-115).

Her most frequently danced roles are those created on other people and which have long histories to which she must be faithful. Vivian, in fact, chose not to join the company Felicia is a member of because she was concerned that she would become a number – just another dancer. Reflecting on the differences between ballet and contemporary dance, I wondered if perhaps the literature on the self may add some insight. Contemporary dance has been built on choice and celebrates individuality. In a personal statement, Anahi Galante compares the two forms:

(Talking about modern dance technique) You can do the same drop but you will do it one way and the male dancer next to you will drop differently. The female dancer next to you will also be different and still be herself. So there is room to be yourself, male or female, but there is a recognition of the uniqueness of your nature and your body, and definitely the recognition that you can build up an identity. In ballet denial is so important that you can't build up an identity. The fact that modern dance has more insight allows you to be yourself, discovering that everything is valid, every part of your body is important. And you can mobilize your body from wherever you want. I think modern dance is wider in every direction possible (Vigier, 1994, p.174).

Perhaps the notion of the autonomous individual - a Western notion, which we prize (Bamberg, 1991) and which has described contemporary dance - may not be applicable to ballet. Many other cultures do not focus on the individual; selfhood is described in connection to a community (Bamberg, 1991). Ballet, in some companies more than others, celebrates membership.

The loves and sorrows of classical ballet are filtered through centuries of an established and still evolving movement hierarchy. And while creativity certainly operates within the ballet genre to keep it alive, it nevertheless operates in relation to an established hierarchy of movement. Creativity in ballet operates out of a set of principles - physical, psychological, historical and aesthetic. The rules are sometimes broken, but this reminds us that they are there. Even when ballet is not representing anything, it still conforms generally to the attenuated aspirational lines and lived-body attitudes embedded in the classical technique. The courage that the classical dancer illustrates is the courage to be as a part - the courage to be a participant in a larger whole, in universals, collectives, and essences... (Fraleigh, 1987, p.xxxv).

As a future direction, it might be interesting to look more closely at the literature on the self as defined by community in terms of the types of values imparted culturally and the nature of membership to see how it relates to traditional ballet culture. In suggesting this look at the literature, I am not disagreeing with the view that aspects of ballet training are detrimental to the education of the whole person – I have personally experienced that training – yet perhaps there may be something of benefit we may discover.

Vivian

Meetings with Vivian

A friend of mine, a physiotherapist who works with dancers, put me in touch with Vivian. She was expecting my call. We set a time for the first interview and I mailed her a copy of the letter I had sent the other dancers to provide her with more information on the study.

I chose Vivian as her pseudonym because of its association for me with vivacity and enthusiasm. These were qualities which came across when speaking with her. Vivian was the youngest of the dancers; she was in her late twenties. She had been dancing with her ballet company for five years.

On the day before our first interview was scheduled, Vivian called me to tell me she had just broken the long bone of her fifth metatarsal and had her foot in a cast. She had gone in to take class on her day off, landed badly from a jump and injured her foot. We laughed about the consequence of not taking rest days in a later interview! She seemed to be in good spirits about her injury; she felt it would give her time to concentrate on some of her other interests.

Both interviews with Vivian were held in her home, a walkup apartment decorated with strong colours - a deep green living room with red velvet couch. The first was held on October 16, the second on November 10. As with the other dancers, questions from the first interviews opened the second. At the end of the second interview, she lent me a tape of a company performance in which she was featured. It also showed two works from the company's choreographic workshop. She danced in one piece and had choreographed the other. In December 1997, I stopped by her apartment to return her tape and give her copies of the interview transcripts. She had expressed an interest in watching the videotaped interviews. I had intended to give all of the dancers copies of the tapes once the thesis had been submitted; however, because of her interest, I gave her a copy following each of our interviews.

She returned the interview transcripts with name corrections and expressed to me her wish to remain anonymous. She was not concerned with having her name published.

However, she felt that as she had not asked the people she named in her narrative for consent to have their name published, it would be better for all to remain anonymous. The draft of her story was returned with a short commentary. She had made minor changes to her story; she took out some of the “likes”, a few phrases that referred to other people and added a few words to clarify certain sections.

She called to confirm that I had received the returned story and to let me know how she is doing. She has been back dancing full-time since January; in fact, she said that the first piece she rehearsed since her return was almost all on pointe so there was no chance to ease back into her training. I told her I would send a copy of the thesis to her once it was completed.

Vivian – Contemporary Classical Dancer

Introduction.

If not for her sister’s knock knees, Vivian might not have become a dancer. A doctor recommended that Pamela take ballet to straighten her legs and Vivian, the curious younger sister, wanted to be a part of what her sister was doing. A love of dance for both has led to a career in dance for both - little sister following in big sister’s footsteps.

Acquiring information.

Stories of Vivian’s early experiences in dance center around her teachers. She was fortunate in learning from those who were able to offer what she needed at different times in her development. Her first teacher helped Vivian build a strong physical foundation and also helped nurture a love of performance. Her second teacher helped Vivian believe that by building on that foundation she could be a dancer. Bloom (1985), in his research on

the development of talented individuals in a number of fields, highlighted the importance of having the appropriate teacher for each of the phases of learning.

Vivian began in a basement studio, a place that amazes her now by how small it was.

...it seems like dance has been part of my life since a very young age, I started when I was five And I sort of fell in love with it right from the beginning...I started with this teacher, she's so good for young children. And she got us moving in a way that was really...natural and uh, just to get an appreciation for music, just to get the musicality, just the basic things for movement and dance...She wanted to teach us that dance was enjoyable.. the most important thing for her when she was teaching.. was just to have fun....she was just a really amazing lady and I think.. to this day I still have memories of things she would say to us or just little exercises or the way she would say things.

Vivian remembered a little dot being put on a student's left foot to distinguish it from the right. She remembered her teacher carrying a fly swatter in class pretending to swat at body parts that were out of place. She remembered the song and dance routines that were taught and often performed. Aside from teaching musicality and movement in a fun, non-competitive atmosphere, Vivian's first teacher made performance an integral part of the early dance experience.

...she would make us sing, she would make us.. just do everything. Like we would do little recitals in hospitals and old folks homes and stuff like that. Whenever we had a chance we would do stuff like this...we did lots of performances on stage and we would do competitions, like festivals. And that was great, it just gave you lots of chance to be on stage and it's a different world being on stage than being in the studio. So we spent a

lot of time.. performing and that's what I really grew to love because it was just like you felt you could express yourself and just this wonderful way of getting through to these people in the audience.

Vivian's enjoyment of being on stage had nothing to do with her being a "spot light kid". She described herself as being a little shy as a child and not liking to have her photograph taken. The world on the stage was a comfortable one for her because she came to know it at an early age: *I started so young on stage, it was a good feeling to be out there. This was my time you know.*

It was a place that offered a number of things she continues to find important in her dance experience: a challenge, a means of expression, an opportunity to give something of herself that others can connect to, a place to be herself.

...it's just a great feeling to be on stage. You give it your all and you're working hard but you're giving something also like you feel like there's something else out there that you're performing to. And it can be a completely empty audience but you feel...there's something beyond the stage, there's something that's making you want to perform and it's more just the drive to...to be out there and showing your.. self, it's not like a.. it's a very subtle thing because it's not like showing "Ahhh!" (opens her arms and presents herself), showing everything you can do. But it's more just like let yourself enjoy it, let yourself free.

After five years of classes, Vivian became more earnest about her endeavour and had even more opportunities to perform.

...at that age I was taking one or two classes a week but I got more serious when I was about ten. That's when I started "Okay, I've got to do work now". It was very..

concentrated at that point. So we did exams which.. was a lot of work to be put into it. And I started right when I began to do festivals and competitions and stuff.

Many ballet schools use an established curriculum for teaching students. Two of the most common are the Royal Academy of Dancing (RAD) system (British) and the Cecchetti method (Russian). The curriculum specifies a movement repertoire particular to the system and what should be taught at various levels. Students must pass a practical exam before moving to a more advanced level.

After a number of years in the RAD system and going through the exams, Vivian decided that having to move within the guidelines of a certain structure was not for her. She found it physically limiting and a restriction of the development of her identity as a dancer.

...in RAD I felt like they were telling us "This was one way to do it" and there's so many approaches to dance and I didn't want to get stuck in the.. really narrow minded route. I wanted to explore the different ways you could allow yourself to move and not have so much of a structure. And I think it was the best time for me to move on because.. I didn't feel fulfilled with RAD. I felt like it was almost too structured that it wouldn't let you.. move. I feel that RAD is a very good base.. for anyone but um, it doesn't let you develop your own personality, it's, it's making everyone uniform and uh for me that's not the best system. You have to be able to give a little bit of self input and that's a really important part of the whole thing is to develop your personality and be able to show, be able to be confident.

A dislike of physical limitations is something she holds to this day: *I like to move. Like to actually enjoy the space and feel the space around me...like I almost feel trapped*

when I'm in a certain squared off area...I like to move to the full, like to the end of the movement I feel it's possible to do.

At the same time as Vivian was feeling that she needed to make some changes, her teacher also perceived that Vivian needed something else. She suggested to her that it was time to move on. Thus, Vivian left her first teacher having developed a love of dance and a growing love of performance as a means of expression and communication.

Into Vivian's life came a second important figure in her dance career. Her sister had been taking class from a former ballet mistress at Ballet BC and Vivian also began with her. As an independent teacher, she gave her own class, not one based on a formal structure, which suited Vivian. Up until this point, Vivian had gone along in dance without a particular goal.

It was just such a part of my life at that time and I just couldn't think of stopping it at that point. I was just going to continue, see where it was going to go. I never really had.. had a focus like "I'm going to be a professional dancer", that was never really a goal for me, it just sort of happened (small laugh).

In the sport literature, the pre-teens (11-12 years of age) are a time when dropout from sport is at its highest in part because of competing interests (Brustad, 1993; Roberts, 1993). It was an important time for Vivian to have a teacher who could push her and help her believe in her abilities.

...she gave me so much, I feel like she's been a big part of who I am today... She just had this great personality. She just encouraged you so much but she also made you work for it, made you want to work for it. And uh it was that push I needed at the time and because she really saw talent in me right away and she said, "I want to really see the

challenges we could meet and see if I can develop her into a certain type of"...she wanted to give me all this.. information...I think we went through a lot together. Those were the years that I really felt a huge change in me myself and these are also the years the ages I was [teenage years]...She was really hard on me. I can't say it was an easy process. But it was really good that I had that push at that time because otherwise I would be.. either.. really lazy like I wouldn't have gone to where I wanted to go or.. I would have just.. I would have gone a different route....I think it was just a transition period. I mean things were going to change and it's just she was there and she was the right person for me at the time. It just helped me along the right road. You know it could have been a different person who might have turned me off dance completely or you know.. it happened to work out. What she gave me really stuck with me and it's something I'll continue to hear.. no matter where I go I have so much respect for her and for her as a person. Like she gave me so much information as a student....And also I think I was old enough to really uh.. to understand what dance was and to understand what I wanted to do. At that point I knew that I could get.. I could become a professional and I knew that it was just a matter of working really hard and I had to.. I had to find the right place for myself.

Finding the right place for herself seems to be something that Vivian was good at as was getting the most out of the places she was in at the time. During this period, her teenage years, she was able to be committed to dance but not consumed by dance.

I had quite a bit of friends at school. But it's weird, my time at school I basically spent with my friends at school but outside of that.. I spent a lot of time with my dance friends. Dance was a very big part of my life. I mean I would go home, do my homework, go to dance, go home, it would be 10:30, 11:00 when I got home and I would

be just dead. So I didn't have a lot of time after that. I guess.. I guess some people though I was like a real.. bun head (laughs)..but uh I think.. I did feel like I had the time to do what I wanted to do. I mean my dance friends were really close friends and I had maybe four really close friends. So I wasn't like.. I didn't have this huge group of people but I think.. the people that I hung around with at school were quite active people also. They also had a lot going on in their lives...they were all very sportive people...My time was mostly devoted to dance. And I had to be at that point if I wanted to be. I'm glad it worked out.. and I did have fun too. I didn't totally absorb myself (laughs) because I felt like when I was at dance, I was at dance, but when I wasn't.. that's uh it was a completely different world and I didn't want to be too consumed with the whole thing.

Right from early days Vivian seemed to be determined to absorb as much as she could from any source. She used the word “information” often in her interviews. She liked the competitions she was in under her first teacher because the adjudicators offered suggestions. She took opportunities to learn from visiting teachers. She has sought out audience members for what they could teach her from their perspective of watching not doing. She has sat in the audience trying to watch the company with objective eyes. She has tried choreography as a way to further explore her creativity and also to see a dancer's point of view from a choreographer's viewpoint. Her search for information has been an active ongoing quest.

At the age of fifteen, Vivian went to Banff for the first time to the dance summer school. Like many teenagers, she looked forward to it as a chance to be on her own: *I went through summers in Banff, I.. had always wanted to go.. like somewhere and just*

away from your parents. Like it's nice to just.. do it for yourself. So I spent a summer in Banff and it was great, like it really changed me and I got so much from it.

During her first summer at Banff, she was in the training program.

...we did performances we had like jazz and modern. It was just like being in a.. dormitory, like a summer camp basically. There's all different age groups and all different levels. I was there with a couple of really good friends and we had such a good time.

In the second summer at Banff, she was to go again into the training program, but they needed another dancer in the professional section. She, along with another dancer, was asked to be part of that group.

...it was really exciting. There was only two of us and it was a really neat experience.. like my first sort of touch with a professional structure. Like it was sort of a small company only people came from all over the place and it wasn't just professional dancers, it was just a mixture of people. And then the second two, the next two times I was in the professional program. It was great because it was people from all over the place who had come together in a short period of time to create a company and to present shows with new works. It was all creations and stuff that hadn't been done that much before. And it was very, it was very hard work like we had crazy hours. But just being in Banff area is so amazing.. it gives you so much inspiration like you're in the mountains.. you're on this campus with all different artists, like you're surrounded by musicians, by theatre people, opera people, writers, photographers, like every sort of artist is there together. Like we were there over a six week period so some people would come, some people would leave, you meet so many different people. It was amazing.

Her experience in the four seasons at Banff was important because it gave Vivian a vision of what she hoped her future in dance would be: artists working together creating something new.

...it sort of made me realize that this was what I really wanted to do and that if a company could be like that sort of situation then that's what I would want to do and it just sort of gave me a taste of what it would be like.

Vivian has gone on to fulfil some of those hopes - the company she dances with currently allows her an opportunity to dance in a variety of styles, to work closely with choreographers and to collaborate with her peers.

Returning to the time of her late teens Vivian had once again reached a point where she felt she needed to move on. She felt that resources in her city could no longer offer her what she needed to grow. High school was completed and there was a teacher in another part of the country who was recommended to her.

So I left just for the summer, for a summer course, not knowing what. My mom was just like, "Okay she's leaving forever" you know and for me it didn't feel like that at all, it was just like going for the summer, seeing what was going to happen. And ya, I stayed for the year, I've been [here] for the past six or seven years.

Following her summer course at the school, a training centre for a major Canadian company, Vivian was accepted into the regular program where she stayed for a year and a half. She arrived at a time when the school was undergoing a major transition - a number of teachers were let go after a change in directorship and the students were affected by the climate.

...it was sort of a difficult year because the school was going through this big

transition like there was a lot of the old teachers I had a chance to work with over the summer and then there was this big changeover of directors in the school and it changed a lot of things in the school. It was a hard year.. I was like, "I came at the wrong time" (laughs) but I mean things like that happen and I was aware of stuff like that, like it happened once before in [city of birth], I had a similar situation where I just had to continue with what I thought was right and at that time I just wanted to keep dancing and I felt like I could get a lot.. a lot from these teachers who were leaving.

Vivian explained how she was able to keep her focus on what was important to her.

Ya it was just kind of a strange year. But I still got a lot out of being in that school, I mean it's, there's always problems I'm sure wherever you go but, but it gave me, I had already a solid base to begin so that was good that I had other point of views so I was taking what I needed from the school but not you know taking like every word for you know what it was, I was sort of choosing what I needed for myself to improve...It's more just a drive within yourself that you know that you have to get through it, you know it's not the end of the world, this happens all the time and it's one of the unfortunate things but it comes with any any sort of...anything not just the arts. Um but it's actually good to go through that too. It's eye opening and it makes you aware of things that maybe aren't so great and maybe just you have to be pretty sure of yourself and to be.. for me, I like just.. I don't know how I got through it, I said like, "I need to continue, I need to do something", I knew where I wanted to go but I wanted to do with involving me.. with involving the right things. Like I had to uh.. how can I say it.. like I took the things I needed to take from each situation and I just tried to make the best out of it.

Because I mean the things.. weren't always great but you had to look at what you could get from it anyway because you knew that otherwise it would be a waste of time and I didn't want to waste three years. It could have gotten to the point where I just wouldn't want to dance because of these situ.. these issues. But I'm like, "I don't want this to affect me" and like I blocked a lot of things because.. I knew that.. this would affect me, this would prevent me from getting where I wanted to. That was just my way of dealing with it.

Becoming a professional.

Getting a job in dance involves some good fortune. Getting a job you like also involves knowing what you want. Vivian knew what type of working atmosphere she wanted – her experience at Banff identified that. She also wanted to be in a place where she had space to be herself. She chose her current company (and luckily it chose her!) for the reason that it was a company open to a wider range of choreographic possibilities and body shape and size.

I went through sort of a year where I was auditioning all over the place, I went to New York and did some auditions there, I auditioned in a couple of places in Canada, um...but it just seemed to be the place I wanted to be at the time. I did a lot of research into like what companies were doing, their repertoire, what style of company, the number of dancers there was. For me I didn't want to go to [another major Canadian company] because I didn't want to be another number, I wanted to be my own person and it sort of seemed easier here because it was a smaller company and we were doing different styles and it was, it just seemed what I wanted to do more. I went to many different auditions and some of them were cattle call, we call them cattle call auditions

where it's like 100, 200 dancers and they split us up into two groups right away and it's basically body type that they're looking for or where you're from.. I'm like, "How do they even know that you can dance?" For me, I prefer to go see the company, take a class with the company and see how they work as a unit so you can get an idea if you'd fit into the group or not. It's not always possible, it's, for me it's a better way of finding out where you want to be... You can't, part of the career as a dancer is sort of just being at the right place at the right time. And it works for some people and not for others and it's also having the confidence in yourself that you can do.. whatever you have offered to you. And having a choice it's not always everyone has, like not everyone has a choice of.. where they want to.. go or what they get accepted to but it's great when you can say that, "Yes, this is what I want to do". There's so few jobs in Canada as it is...

Vivan started in her first professional job. Her sister had already been dancing with the company for a year and a half; Vivian had had a chance to see what the company was like. Also when she was at the training school, she had danced in the Nutcracker with the company.

When one joins a company, different processes are experienced. First of all, one enters, a stranger, into a functioning group. Acceptance, making friends, finding one's place are all things that have to happen.

You just feel like everyone's always judging you and that you're, you're always being.. criticized. You always have to.. live up to what they expect you to be and until they actually, until they feel comfortable with you, you feel like there's an ongoing thing, you feel like you have to live up to what they expect you to be because it's like this is why they've hired you in the first place and they haven't seen what you can do.. with your full

potential until.. but it's a vicious circle because you can't show them what they want to see until they give you a chance to do those roles. So it's like you have to show them that you're capable of doing these things in your own way through class.. or just through your own confidence. It's always a test, like it's always, they're testing you all the time...some people treat you like that [like the lowest in the hierarchy] and it's not great because you feel like shit, I mean it's normal I suppose but you don't notice it as much any more [when you've been accepted].. like if you're in the company, people will respect what you have to give. I mean it's not always everybody gets along but it's a company where everybody seems to be able to work together. And uh.. like the first ya.. you're always being tested even with between people in the company for the first year or two because they don't know who you are and they're sort of threatened in a way but when they see you perform or see you do certain roles then they have respect for you. I mean it's just a matter of showing who you are. That's the scariest thing, opening up but it's necessary.

As well as making the transition from outsider to insider, when joining a company for the first time, one also must make a transition from student to professional. Vivian was fortunate in that she was able to experience some of that process while she was at Banff.

...there's a lot of things you have to go through.. mentally.. to change over because as a student you feel.. you don't ever feel like you're ready to be in a company. But as a company member you realize you'll never be ready. If you wait forever to be.. to physically feel your best...it's not going to happen. It's taking that one step, and that's how you grow is being in the company, getting away from that whole student atmosphere. It changes you...you work so hard as a student. And some of it is actually.. you feel a bit

free from that in a way. But it's a different level. And you feel like it's.. you're approached differently, you're approached as an adult not as a child...all of my student life, things were like.. you're forced to work hard because people are on my case, they're just giving you all this information, you're absorbing it but when you get to a company level, you're on your own. They don't care.. but I find the people I've been working with, that's who have been pushing me a lot and that's.. I mean we sort of support each other and it's sort of a whole group thing now. You don't get the same attention as you did as students and it.. it's good because you have to like think for yourself, you have to like develop your own.. quality and further yourself.

Vivian mentioned at different times that she was *following in her sister's footsteps*...and she has. Her sister began dancing first; Vivian was curious and began as well. Her sister changed teachers, Vivian did too. Her sister went to another city to study dance. Vivian went to the same place. Her sister joined a major Canadian company, Vivian joined the same company a year and a half later. However, in speaking of her years growing up, there is no sense of competition with her sister.

...we grew up and sort of had the same interests. I danced with her basically since I was really young, um we never felt that competitive thing between us, we knew we were more supportive of one another, we knew we were at different levels, different stages of what we wanted to do so it wasn't like we were ever really like the same level, we were different ages too so it felt like we had gone already our separate ways.

Throughout her story, Vivian described a determinedness to do well that would not have lasted if it did not originate within; dance provided a challenge to her which she enjoyed. Yet while there may have been no competition, at some point, Vivian - being the

one who was following not leading - had to make it clear to others that she was different from her sister. Vivian wanted to join her company because of the values the company promoted including individuality amongst the dancers – they did not all look the same physically nor had similar qualities to offer dancewise. Yet, it was also the company her sister belonged to, so in some sense was the most difficult place for her to establish her own identity as a professional.

I felt like I was following in her footsteps but I wanted to be my own individual person. I didn't want anyone to treat me like Pamela's sister and I thought, that's one thing that really worried me when I joined the company, I made it quite clear to [the artistic director] if I join the company that I wanted to be treated as an individual. I know I'm related to Pamela and it's hard not to associate me with her but I'm a different person and I.. I dance completely differently from her. And I just wanted to be acknowledged for myself and so that was a bit difficult because I thought, "Okay this is a test to see if I will be categorized into that.

As it turned out, the artistic director was able to separate talent from blood and treated Vivian as a professional with her own worth.

Vivian also decided to separate herself from her sister in terms of living arrangements. The first year she was with the company, they lived together. While it was good on one hand to be with someone familiar in a strange city and new job, after the first year, Vivian felt she needed to move.

...we were both pursuing the same career and it was.. I don't know for me it was hard. For her, it didn't seem to bother her but maybe because she was older and she was

the first one, I was the one who felt like I was following her, for me I needed to separate myself.

Vivian has been living separately from her sister for a few years. Pamela in fact has left the company and is now living overseas.

The quest continues.

For the past five years, Vivian has been a corps dancer. Companies differ somewhat with respect to the type of creative input they allow the dancers. Vivian's company, while still based on a hierarchical structure (from the ranks of corps dancer up to principal), exemplifies some movement away from the traditional autocratic system. Any dancer may have an opportunity to take the lead role in a piece; choice is made more on fit with a particular choreography than status in the company. This company also is more eclectic in its range of repertoire. However, Vivian has been required to dance in roles that have been created on other people or those that are familiar character roles such as the Swan Queen in Swan Lake. Thus, often her creativity is limited to what she can add within a very small margin for individuality. Her challenge is experienced largely through technical mastery of the material. Vivian mentioned that in certain choreography she feels like a robot, programming herself to do the movement. However, she finds ways to cope with those roles.

...there was one piece we were doing on tour that wasn't particularly my favourite and uh you notice that people pay money to have a ticket and see these shows and you have to try to bring something across. And there's always something to develop in different pieces, you say like, "Well I want to work more technically here, I want to bring this across" and it's sort of like exploring the piece, you have to make it interesting for

yourself and in that way it gives you different things to think about out there...I think it's one way to keep going because you have to be interested in what you're doing and if you're not it really shows.

Dancers differ on how much creative input they like to have. Vivian said she liked working with choreographers on new material because there was generally more opportunity to be a part of the creative process. One of her favorite choreographers asked the company to do some improvisational work both in the creative process and on stage. She loved it but said that other dancers felt very self conscious about it and were happier doing something that was already created. She liked contemporary pieces more than the classics as they offer more of an opportunity to bring something of herself into the roles.

She has been playing with choreography, giving herself another outlet for her creativity, another source of knowledge. While she is not certain whether it will be something she will continue in seriousness, her experiences provided her with new “information”: a new way to be creative, a different kind of feedback.

We did a choreographic workshop and it's sort of been.. in the company for a long time in the history... that they've had a workshop where the dancers are able to create something and.. I was a little bit like nervous to get involved in that because I'm not a choreographer but once I got over that and was just like able to say, “Heh, this is another way for me to create. This gets me into a different of view”...I don't think I would ever do this in my post dancing career but.. I can't really say right now if I would or not but.. it's something that just gives you a lot of confidence.. it's just a great way to explore and let your.. let your creative energy.. flow. It really gives you a lot and I just like to see how much information comes out and how much.. you can learn a lot from, as

even from like a dancer point of view because you're working with all these different choreographers and each one has a different way of.. working to see how.. you would.. put yourself in that situation and how, like you know as a dancer, how you want to be treated but when you're a choreographer it makes.. a completely different thing and just seeing how you can...be on the other side and uh.. work with the dancers how you think it's.. how you always wanted to work.

Unlike many dancers who would imagine success as climbing the company hierarchical ladder, Vivian defined her future success differently. She was not certain she would like to be a principal dancer.

I never really said I want to be a principal dancer; that's not one of my goals. Like for me, if I'm happy dancing, that's more important to me than like what level...I don't feel like they dance as much or do the same type of work. I don't know. Like there's a.. lot of couples in the company that they have to find other work, they have to do guesting and stuff to keep themselves going throughout the year because they just do the pas de deux, they just do the classical works and they have to do the more contemporary works but they don't get the variety because they're hired for one specific purpose and I don't want to be classified as this type of dancer you know. I want to be able to adjust to different styles and different choreographers. That gives me much more as a dancer too.

Vivian is looking for an opportunity and working environment which will allow her to express herself as she wishes.

...I always wanted to, to be.. able to move around. Like for me, I'm not going to want to stay here all my life. I want to experience different forms of dance, different

experiences in dance so.. I definitely at one point in my career I want to move to Europe or move to a different area just to see what it's like, just experience a different form of life over there and uh, I don't know. More important, more important for me is not the status of who you are. It's just what you get from it...I want to be in a situation where I'm not controlled.. by a certain being like I don't want to be under somebody else's control for, you know that's, when I have the input to create, to just say my point of view, be involved in a collaborative group effort type of thing, like if there was a company that gave us the chance to really express ourselves and not have this atmosphere where you're working for one person, that you're working together to produce something, I think that would be one thing I would.. strive for. But that's hard to find.

The current ballet climate in Canada is such that it is almost impossible for a dancer to succeed in ballet as an independent outside of one of the established companies; those that have left have been ostracized (Merle Adams, dance educator, personal communication, 1997). Thus, the individual ballet dancer is limited to working within a system and has little choice but to accept a company's standards and conditions. As well, "who" is considered excellent in the ballet world is under the control of company directors. While Vivian is happy with her place in the company as it allows her a greater range of pieces to dance, it is really the only option available to her – she has to make the best of where she is because she has no direct control over promotion - like any job; however, in dance there are few opportunities to switch to a different company and even less to start an independent business.

Vivian has stayed in dance as there has always been something new she can discover: *Ballet has just always been something that I felt has always given me a*

challenge, has always, like you never feel like you've reached the point, "Well I've learnt everything", there's always so much to learn. Even the most perfect technical dancer can grow. For me, ballet's sort of pushed me more than other forms of dance and I sort of grew attached to it that way.

But beyond ballet is the rest of the world.

I've never really been afraid to try new things or.. like I've always been interested in seeing what adventures there are in certain situations, when we're on tour and stuff, it's so great, I love to explore and um try things like mountain climbing and outdoorsy things like that, I really enjoy that...I guess it's part of me yeh...I definitely know that I want to go into something else after this because.. um I've always been keeping myself busy with other things outside of dance and I don't feel that "this is my life" . I feel that I'm a human being, a person first and then I'm a dancer and I always look at it like that. That that isn't my whole life and that if something, well.. this (referring to her foot in a cast) is just temporary hopefully (we laugh) but if something happened that made me stop dancing, I wouldn't be...like I would be able to continue. It is always a huge transition for a dancer to, well you know I'm sure, to like go on to something else because it has been such part of your life for so long and you almost don't know what to do but like there's great things to keep you going. For me, I want to completely change, like do something completely different.

When ballet no longer offers a challenge for Vivian, she will look elsewhere for a new one. Vivian spoke about wanting to broaden her dance experience by working with a different company. She mentioned looking to dance in Europe as a possibility. Perhaps she will follow a familiar path and join her sister in Spain.

Comments on the Story

Louise,

It has been really interesting for me to reflect a little on my life. When you are absorbed in a busy schedule with all your thoughts and energy focused on what is to come – it is good to step back every once in a while and put your life in perspective. It is sometimes strange to hear myself speak and for my ideas to be written on paper – it has told me a lot about myself. I hope that this was interesting for you and that you got something out of our interviews. Thank-you for letting me share with you my passion for dance and what it means to me. Good luck with everything!

The Dancing Self - A Brief Discussion of a Connected Topic

The focus of this thesis was on development of the self as a dancer or in other words, dancers talking about becoming dancers. But dancers also addressed the dancing self. I will only be exploring this topic within the context of the thesis data; it is a thesis on its own. Two main issues emerged: the first relates to what it is that dancers show of themselves when dancing and why it is difficult to discuss what they show. The second is a redirecting of the question onto what dancers learn about themselves through dancing.

During the practice of a movement sequence in one of the contemporary classes I took while working on this thesis, our teacher asked us, “If you were wearing a mask, how would you show the audience who you were through your movement?” Although this was an issue that some of the dancers spoke about in their interviews, I was forced to confront it for myself. I realized it is very difficult to explain what it is that is shown. First of all, I became aware that I do not think about **how** I move. I move the way I move. I

do not think about adopting a style of movement, trying to copy someone else's way of moving because I like it. The cultural contact also mentioned the unconscious aspect of expression – that identity is communicated but not in a way of which one is aware. Part of how I move has to do with my body: my weight and how it is distributed, the length of my limbs, my degree of flexibility, my energy and my ability. It relates to how I relate to a particular movement; does it “feel” like me? There are also restrictions in the movement itself; I need to work within those limits. In ballet, sometimes the dancer is even more challenged through the movement in having to play a particular character.

In the first interview with Vivian, when she spoke about acceptance into the company, she said that she did not want to be thought of as Pamela's sister but as a dancer in her own right as she danced completely differently. In the second interview I asked if she could describe the difference in their two styles. She described her sister's style and personality as aggressive, headstrong and someone who likes to be the centre of attention. But she found it difficult to explain what it was of her personality that came across when she danced. She knew she was a lyrical dancer. She knew she was a big mover which reflected her spirit generally. She knew she was a person who liked to work with other dancers, enjoying the input and the collaboration. She knew that her style had changed over the years, but what the changes were, she could not say. She acknowledged that in part the difficulty in describing her style was because in some of the pieces she danced, she had limited opportunity to add much of herself. Reflecting on her interviews, I wondered if perhaps one place where individuality was expressed was in the images she selected to add meaning to the movement and the way she prepared for a role which added a personal touch that was subtly different than another dancer's. She also made mention that the

challenge in ballet was being able to put the choreographer's vision onto her body (as it is the dancer's job is to express this vision) but to find a way to make it feel like her own.

Felicia had mentioned on four occasions during her interview that one of her teachers and a particular artistic director had let her be "Felicia" when she danced. I was curious as to what that meant. She mentioned she was a lyrical dancer and did not like playing "cute" roles. She said *one cannot describe one's soul*. For her, whatever came through came from the essence of her person and was indescribable in words.

Peggy Baker and Yvonne Coutts are somewhat different in that they create their own works. Thus, even if some of the issues that are explored and presented in their choreography may not be autobiographical, they are issues that arise from their "inner worlds" (CC) and as a result, tell something about who they are.

I began to wonder, however, about the nature of the question. Can I consider my physical self as a separate entity? Does it not define me as much as my words do...whether I like my body or not (leading of course into issues of body image)? By extension, if distinctiveness is a characteristic of self (Linde, 1993), then how I move is a description of me as I move differently than others. Perhaps trying to describe what it is of self that comes out through dancing is a redundancy. However, most of us are illiterate with regard to the language of the body. I rely on words to understand the topic at a conscious and communicable level – the level of explicit knowledge (Coros, 1992).

I found it interesting that neither of the ballet dancers made direct reference to body image whereas Yvonne Coutts, Peggy Baker and the CC did. Feelings regarding the body expressed by the dancers were linked in part to the language that has been prevalent in their dance education. Peggy Baker said she was *used to being trained by saying*,

“Don’t do this, don’t do this, that’s wrong, that’s wrong, that’s wrong”. Yvonne Coutts said, You look in the mirror all day long, you’re constantly being told most of the time, “It’s not quite right, a little more of this, a little more of that” which even though you’re not saying it’s wrong, a little more of this means you’re not doing enough in the first place. The CC stated:

I think that’s what’s so hard for dancers...I mean, you know, you come from a much stronger ballet background than I did, it’s constantly what is wrong with what, you don’t hear much good. And especially young adolescent women in this society, they have enough trouble in a normal adolescent world but in an atmosphere like a ballet school, where they’re being told their bodies have to be a certain way, they’re being told they have to be pretty to look at...if artistic expression is an expression of beauty you’re constantly being judged on what you look like, not necessarily if you are thin or not but on what you’re expressing and how that appears to an outsider. It’s so wrapped up in what you are as a person.

Even though these remarks should be taken as criticism of the “instrument”, Yvonne Coutts explained that they are internalized as criticism of the self. Negative language becomes the language that the dancer uses to herself according to Peggy Baker. The CC as well described to me her awareness of this internalization directed at one’s self.

...from time to time I take the company class and the ballet classes that I take, people for some reason always talk about how out of shape they are, they, people are very shy to show off, or not even to show off, people are shy just to practice a correction that the teacher’s giving them because it’s sort of stopping the class and everybody’s looking at them and they don’t want to use up everybody’s time. Also people are very

quick to be negative about themselves. You know the teacher will say something like, even if the teacher says something positive and they'll say something like, "Wait til I try to pirouette". It's always, what's the word - self effacing. I'm not expressing it very well, but I've been really noticing it in the last few months. Why are people who are perhaps not like this outside the dance studio, like this in the dance studio? People are always self critical. I guess it's because we're striving for something that is sort of beyond humanly physical, you're trying to make your body be a certain way that naturally it isn't, organically it's not. So it's easier to, there's this sort of nervousness, people are always laughing in dance classes and I think it has to do with a nervous self consciousness.

Thus, criticism is understood as criticism of the self which cycles back to the body/self and how the two are connected. Peggy Baker stated:

...in a sense in dancing, your body ends up representing you, it becomes a metaphor for you. And that's what I think is one of the great difficulties in dance and one of the great dangers because dance can become, it can seem like it's a display of bodies and it's not, the bodies are a medium for something else. And when we get caught up in them.. and they become the end in themselves, I think that it's big trouble. It's big trouble for the audience and it's big trouble for the dancer and for their whole psyche.

The body may be the medium, but others may also understand it as the message.

I mentioned in the introduction to this section that there was also a different question that could be asked about the self in dance; the previous section deals with the public or communicative aspect of dance, this section refers to the private aspect. What

does dancing teach a dancer about herself as opposed to what her dancing shows others about her?

Yvonne Coutts referred to an “understanding” she experienced while dancing. Some of the descriptors she used are common to what is known about peak experience: a sense of being present in the moment and feeling a connection to the activity (Berger & McInman, 1993). But she also mentioned a feeling that something is being communicated to her in the dance that she understands on a level that is not intellectual, that she can relate to a shape in an expressive way.

In our second interview, I asked her if she could try and explain what she meant by “understanding” even though she said she could not explain. Together we tried to explore what it meant.

Ya it's funny eh.. I can't.. it's.. the reason that it's hard to explain is because it's, I don't know.. it's not all the time it's like it's after a certain amount of time. And it's that thing that's so incredible about dance.. you know there's this timeline line like you're very present.. in what you're doing and there's not.. outside thoughts going in and what's something that I think is really the essence of dancing like that's the ongoing.. never ending process of how you get to the place where there's not all this, you know it's probably a whole lifetime thing, but that's what so beautiful about dance is that one second in time that will never be repeated. That's why I have trouble with dance video. But um. So anyway. There's certain times...I don't know, it's like something.. I used to call it memories, like sense memory, movement connectiony thing, I don't know how to describe it. But there's something that happens in your body sometimes when you're moving, or dancing or doing a certain movement that you, that I have this sense and it's

not even too intellectual, it's really more a sense of this has happened before or I know something about that shape.. even though it can be an abstract shape that is.. or I can relate to it in an express.. expressive way. Somehow this has been felt before or there's something about the connection between that movement, your space and your body in space and time that seems very.. it really says something. And I feel.. it's like you feel it saying something without it even, you're not trying but suddenly it's speaking and it's really just about the physicality and that you're there and you're very aware. I don't know if that makes sense.

[So it's like you were saying before, like you're really focused in a moment and so there's nothing else that's existing, that's part of that.]

Ya, that's part of that for sure.

[And then-]

And suddenly it feels so, it really feels like you're just speaking, like I'm expressing in words to you now and that's what's happening in.. in the dance and there's no crossover of I'm trying to say "this". It's just being said and I'm understanding it. It's so apparent.. in the feeling that there's an understanding. Even though I probably couldn't say this means this. But there's something-

[Ya and you're speaking-]

And it's right.

[And it doesn't.. you said it doesn't happen all the time.]

No.

[Do you know when it happens or is it just a magical kind of thing that-]

I think it is a bit of a magical thing. I mean I think that.. that is where like I was

saying this process that you get to a point where those magical moments or magical times aren't just times but they are.. it is a certain uh.. way of bringing yourself to that state. So that you can be there. That's what I think a beautiful artist is about, you know when I think of people I'm so moved by, is like they're.. they've gotten to that world and they get there, they, not even that they know how to get there but they allow themselves to be there and it happens now. And I think for some people it just happens for them and other people you work into it.

[Is that a goal in what you're doing, is that a goal for when you dance?]

Ya, I think I think that's something that helped me get out of the nervousness, is when I started to become aware... that I felt those things, and that's why that duet was so powerful for me when I got a little teary [speaking about a moment in the interview when she was talking about a duet created by a choreographer she considers very special] and I probably will again, is that that happened and that state of being became stronger than the nervousness. And that was.. so then you go okay, well this is, this is you know this is what's right and the nervousness is just a surface thing. It's just all that extra energy that you have to.. that you have to redirect into that state which then becomes stronger which then you can take it like as power, a strong kind of power. So ya.. there's definitely.. a hope of mine to find.. that.. state more and more often, not be afraid it and uh, see where it would take you.

[So by understanding it's almost like you're getting to the essence of something.]

Right, right.

[Umhm, letting that come out.]

Ya, and just.. it's all kind of.. it's risky, right, because you can let that get to the

essence and you then you discover things about yourself, maybe things that are hidden, maybe things that are going to be happening, and you know, just how to let that all come out and not get overwhelmed by it. I don't know, just.. I think I went far away from the original question.

The dance experience is not easily put into words. Coros (1992) focused on her experience dancing a traditional Greek folk dance and the process she went through in trying to put what she felt in the dancing into explicit knowledge. She described three levels of knowledge of the dance that she arrived at through this process. The knowledge one has from one's own experience of dancing she felt was tacit knowledge. Her experience was that she could not express that knowledge by talking about it but she did understand the meaning of the experience on some level. The experience was then transformed in the following two levels. Coros translated her feeling in dance into word pictures, phrases arrayed spatially to try and capture her experience. This she considered implicit knowledge. It was shareable through reading but not explicitly developed. Finally through meta-reflecting on the word pictures, she was able to share in discourse and written form her experience. However, she was clear that at this last level, what was shared was her reflection about her dance experience, not her original dance experience. That experience remained embodied, prereflective and nonlinguistic.

In my conversation with Yvonne, we identified some of the qualities of her experience in dance: the sense of being in a moment that will never be repeated, a sense of relationship with the movement, a self understanding that might occur, a sense of timelessness...but there is much more to be understood made difficult by the nature of the knowledge.

Peggy Baker also described an experience of feeling a shape so resonate with energy that she was affected emotionally.

*I remember one of my first dance classes at Toronto Dance Theatre.. we were doing this, this stepping phrase coming across the floor with Amelia Itcush, she was the teacher and it was, we had our feet flexed and we were doing these kind of digging movements with our feet and she said um, "It's like you have a blade on your heel". And I found that to be so exciting and other people were like (expression of puzzlement), they totally didn't get it and they thought it was weird like why would you have a blade on your heel. But somehow.. I was getting that already, so when she said it, when she put it in words, it was like I **knew**, I **knew** I had understood her because I could see it in her body, I could feel it in my own body, I knew what she meant by digging, you know to dig with your foot and I um, I love how modern dance connects us with the natural world again, and how it plays with gravity and playing with archetypal.. shapes and I mean a lot of the modern dance forms are like yoga asanas to me. You put yourself in a shape and the shape itself resonates with a certain kind of energy and.. and I think that's why I was so emotional as a young dancer because I **felt** those shapes so strongly. And sometimes I didn't know what they were, or I wasn't, I didn't have enough experience to handle them or.. they were such a powerful feeling I was overwhelmed by them for a moment...I think that's partly why dance is so engaging because it's very elusive and you know when you get it, it's the culmination of so many different aspects that are **all coming together**.. in the same moment and it's just, it's transporting, it's magical and really you go to another sort of realm. And I've experienced that as a student in class, as a teacher, in the rehearsal hall, on the stage.. even speaking to people about my work,*

I've experienced how things sort of coalesce. And then something else I think just about modern dance, is that I feel I understand it. Like there's some, it's like a language.. or a kind of... it's like an abstract language that I get, I get it, I get the balance of it. I find the shapes inside it so beautiful.

My understanding of Yvonne's and Peggy's descriptions is perhaps best presented through an example, albeit a very self evident one: I stand with my arms above my head and slowly open them out to the side, creating two arcs in space and stop them when they are at shoulder level. As I open my arms, I tilt my head up and direct my gaze to the sky. The movement is an obviously spiritual one and in performing it, I may feel a sense of expansiveness, an awakening of a personal sense of the divine etc.. In a similar vein, Peggy Baker mentioned how dance has become for her a spiritual practice. During her times alone in the studio, she said dance *leads her to a kind of depth of knowledge, very incrementally*. Fraleigh (1987) explained a similar experience in learning modern dance:

Throughout the German school, dance was a means toward self knowledge – not a disclosure of personality but a construction of it, not self expression as self indulgence, but a creation of self in expressive action that moves one beyond the confines of self. I began to grasp the idea of “becoming” through dancing, which was later reinforced by my study of existential humanism and its view that human beings create who they are through their actions and choices (p.xxii).

There may also be something in the structure of a choreography that allows for the experience of self knowledge. Peggy Baker spoke about the idea that a choreographer creates a template out of which images and meaning may emerge that have not been consciously put into the dance. Choreography is often an intuitive practice (CC, 1997).

Peggy was speaking about Non Coupable, a piece by Paul André Fortier, which, at least to some women (Peggy, myself, her sister, the original dancer), evoked images surrounding the decision to bear children. The piece was disturbing – the dancer is blindfolded and tied up and carries a large rock throughout the piece representing the child. Peggy learned the piece from the dancer it was originally created for. She felt the dance came to represent this dancer's inner world. The dancer was forced to face herself in the dance as I was forced to face myself when watching it. This sense of self discovery connects up with something Yvonne Coutts said in her discussion of the understanding she gets when dancing – that “you get to the essence and you then discover things about yourself, maybe things that are hidden, maybe things that are going to be happening”.

Thus, dance seems to involve an interactive practice with regard to the self. It provides a medium for the dancer to learn about herself and it provides a medium for something of the self to be communicated.

Endings

Criteria of Goodness

Traditional positivist criteria are not applicable for narrative studies (Stivers, 1993). When assessing the goodness of a narrative, historical truth is not considered an issue as narratives are re-interpretations of past experience (Freeman, 1992). As well, life stories are rewritten over the course of a lifetime to integrate new experience (McAdams, 1994).

Some narrative proponents suggest that criteria used should be that used to assess fictional literature: plausability, coherence (Riessman, 1993), evocativeness or a good plot

(Phillips, 1994). The dancers' stories as presented in this thesis are not fictional in the sense that they were based solely in my imagination. While I have presented an interpretation of dancers' narratives, I have attempted to include their voices. I have not altered the "facts" of their stories (e.g., settings, ages when events occurred). However, as Stivers (1993) explained, fact and interpretation do not represent a dichotomy but exist on a continuum. The difficulty in establishing criteria for this study is highlighted by Eichberg (1994).

What was and remains interesting in this traditional modern biographism is the form of discourse placing itself somewhere between historiography and fictional literature. Biographical language is wavering between narrative and analytical elements. By feeling himself into the life of another person or by writing one's own memories, the author goes a third way between scientific analysis and fictional story telling (p. 107).

This thesis is a "third way"; it falls somewhere in the middle of Stiver's spectrum.

Thus, as an interpretive study, how can it be judged? Interpretive pluralism refers to the concept that "the visible properties of some works of art elicit several plausible interpretations" (Lavender, 1995, p. 29). Different viewers may experience a work of art in different ways and may each be able to support their interpretation. As those interpretations of the features of the art are based on a reading informed by personal and cultural history as well as aesthetic values, no interpretation can be wrong (Smith, 1990). As well, Lavender pointed out that some works of art "defy interpretive closure" (p. 30). The job of the interpreter is to persuade the reader that his or her interpretation has merit through reference to the work.

Each interpreter of the work must endeavor to create the conditions under which others may come to see the work as the interpreter does. Thus the aim of the interpretation is not to give reasons why “X is Y” as those of the author-centered persuasion would have it. Nor is the aim of the 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, 30).

However, no matter how persuasive, the account is not put forth as a definitive one (Stivers, 1993). She argued for “believability not certitude, for enlargement of understanding rather than control” (p. 425).

The reader of this thesis does not have the interview transcripts in entirety to examine whether my interpretation relates back to the interview text as a whole. However, I have presented the dancers’ narratives of events or perspectives in their own words and have tried to provide the context surrounding quotes. As well, I have derived themes from my interpretation of the dancers’ text; that text via the quotes is presented in the thesis.

The audience may read his or her own interpretation into the dancers’ words. I have distinguished the dancers’ words from mine by the use of italics to indicate their quotes. The original data are also available for examination upon request. As for what I excluded from the interview text, the purpose of this study was not to interview dancers and present their interviews as an unedited collection but rather to highlight themes I felt were important in dancers’ lives.

A Thrown Stone

Another perspective on the goodness of the study deals with its relevance in a personal sense as well as within an academic community. In thinking about this issue, I remembered an analogy I used in my comprehensive paper – the image of ripples expanding out from a stone thrown in a still pond. The question of what can be considered worthwhile as research begins at an individual level and extends out into the world of knowledge.

What do I consider a worthwhile piece of research whether my own or another's? In reading a study, I may hope to learn something new, I may want to confirm something I have been thinking about or I may hope to generate new ideas and make connections to other things I know. This is the intrapersonal level at which research has an impact; I hope to educate myself.

One outcome of completing the processes involved in masters' and doctoral studies is the creation of knowledge that is packaged in the thesis. Part of this educational process should also be oriented toward "training" the student to be a skilled researcher. I chose a narrative approach because of its fit with my topic, but I chose my topic partly out of interest and partly because I knew that using this approach would challenge me. I felt comfortable with statistically based studies and qualitative studies based in paradigmatic analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). In moving to the other end of the continuum, I was entering foreign territory.

This research brought to me a host of issues I had not previously confronted in any rigorous way: how much the interviewee should be part of the process, who should be the narrator, how much of the dancer's narratives I should include...every aspect challenged

me. I went to sections of the library I had never visited before: literary theory, feminist writings, history, anthropology and sociology. While I have much to learn about the narrative approach, I feel I now have another perspective available for exploring issues.

With respect to what I learned from the dancers, I thank them for helping me answer my personal questions that inspired the study – why I connected with dance and the place it has played in shaping who I am. Through their words, they helped me articulate answers: that understanding does not have to be intellectual, it can be intuitive and to acknowledge that understanding as valid; that when I dance, I can **feel** beauty – a kinesthetic not a visual sensation; and that dance is a way for me of connecting to the purely physical and the spiritual. The CC said to me that dance is the only thing in her life that provides sustenance on all levels: emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual. This is also true for me.

For the dancers who participated, I believe that the process of speaking about their careers was interesting to them and gave them a chance to reflect in a way they normally would not have occasion to. As Stivers (1993) said, “We find identity and meaning as a result of the stories we tell about ourselves or that others tell about us” (p. 412). I hope that in my telling of their stories they have learned something about themselves.

Staying on the level of the individual, I assume that someone reading my study will have somewhat similar goals to my own – he or she hopes to learn something new and so on. However, I can not anticipate what someone will learn from what I present. Each person will read this thesis informed by their own experience, interest in the topic, knowledge base and set of beliefs about theory and method. However, the value of personal stories is that they often speak of universal truths. As Denison (1994) stated:

...although each of us is a universal singular, we are also social beings who belong to the same world and share certain truths. Thus, my stories may speak for millions of other men in the world of competitive running, as well as dancers, business people, or anyone else living and working in a highly competitive, achievement oriented, context. In other words, I see overlaps between our experiences as human beings (p. 29).

Extending out from the individual to different knowledge communities, I feel this study has something to offer particularly to existing dance and sport research. Beginning with dance, outside of a few biographies and media coverage, there has been little written on Canadian dancers or on dance education. The bulk of research is grounded in the United States. Second, as Peggy Baker mentioned, a wealth of knowledge and insight held by dancers is often lost. If dancers do not teach, or are not encouraged to speak or write about what they have learned, that information is lost. While some of that knowledge needs to be passed on physically through movement, there is a need to record what is known in a textual form. Texts endure longer, can be reproduced and can reach more people than performance. Third, with respect to the psychological research on professional dancers concerning the self, the focus has been on the mechanistic and static self (Gergen & Gergen, 1988) not the self as a whole. Studies have been grounded in psychological tests and questionnaires. Thus, they provide one way of looking at a self, but there is room for others. Finally, as Van Dyke (1992) pointed out, there is a continuing emphasis on performance in dance education as a priority over an education that also takes into account emotional and intellectual needs of students. The “whole”

dancer is not always considered. This study has attempted to consider the dancer in a more holistic way.

As a research alternative, life stories or that which focus on an aspect of a life, have not been widely used. The greatest support comes from sport sociology and sport history as life stories are accepted in their parent disciplines as valid ways of exploring certain topics. Sport psychology, however, is still very influenced by cognitive psychology with its emphasis on skill. Narrative provides another way of understanding a performer's experience.

Plummer (1983) discussed a number of areas where life history research may make a contribution. Substantively it is able to capture the subjective reality of a person, a sense of wholeness with regard to personal history and relationship to social history, and the process, ambiguity and change that characterize a life. Life histories can be used on their own but also as an adjunct to other methods – as a means to explore a topic in order to focus it, to complement objectivism with subjectivism and to help bridge a link between theory and experience. It is in this latter sense, relating the general to the specific, that Plummer advocates the use of life history as a teaching tool. Writing about personal experience has also been promoted in physical education (Sparkes, 1993; Sparkes & Templin, 1992) and dance education (Stinson, 1993) in that being able to situate oneself in personal and social history can aid in more self-aware teaching. Finally, Plummer suggested that life history research reorients the researcher to the participant as a human being as opposed to an object of study or a category. In a political sense, as Plummer speaks from the perspective of a sociologist, this type of research provides a means for those who are often not heard to have a voice.

Bruner (1990) stated that “perhaps the single most universal thing about human experience is the phenomenon of ‘Self’ and we know that education is crucial to its formation” (p. 35). Presenting the dancers’ stories has contributed to my self knowledge and I think to the self knowledge of the dancers. As there is “instructional potential in single lives” (Stivers, 1993, p. 413), the stories will hopefully contribute to the knowledge of others. With respect to physical education instruction, but applicable in other realms, Sparkes (1993) outlined the benefits of hearing others’ stories.

This (being able to make connections between personal troubles and social issues) is particularly so when student teachers are given the opportunity to read and analyze the life histories of other PE teachers who are of different generations, at different stages of their careers, and have different life experiences. They are able to see aspects of their future in the past experiences of others and in so doing are able to locate their own sense of self and aspire to different visions of the future as dimly lit problems are illuminated so that they can be challenged and transcended (Sparkes, 1993, p. 114)

Future Directions

Where to go from here? Throughout the process of putting together this thesis, a number of ideas for further research emerged. With respect to dance, the “understanding” that dancers experience while dancing would be interesting to explore; a challenge would be to determine the way tacit, felt knowledge could be made explicit. With respect to dance education, there has been no extensive look at the major training schools in Canada in terms of curriculum, actual and realized, particularly with respect to the types of values being taught through training. I did try to arrange an interview with Dominique Dumais,

an emerging ballet choreographer – unusual in that she is a ballet choreographer and a woman. Although she expressed interest, she was unfortunately too busy at the time. It would be interesting to examine her experiences next to those of the two choreographers of this study.

With respect to sport psychology, the narrative approach adds another “tool” for examining questions of interest. For example, another perspective on sport retirement would be to examine life stories of athletes before and after this event to see how their stories are rewritten. As well, most explorations of retirement have been conducted close to the time it occurred. It would be interesting to interview athletes in their later adulthood in the context of generativity (McAdams, 1993) – how does what they accomplished in sport or did not accomplish figure into what they consider their legacies to be? Finally, we have a growing picture of the skill sets and knowledge of elite athletes, yet we know little detail about what they learn about themselves (e.g., values, intentions, motivations) through the years involved in their sport.

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Appendix A

Dear (Dancer):

I am working on a PhD thesis at the University of Ottawa. Although my PhD will be in Education and my academic background is largely in sport psychology (performance excellence), my roots and interests are in dance.

I am interested in understanding how people who achieve excellence in their field, in this case, yourself, become the people they are. What events, set-backs, triumphs, people etc. play a role in how our selves are formed? Rather than use a rigid set of questions, I am interested in your story told in your words of how you came to be who you are today as a dancer. I will present your edited story along with life stories from three other dancers in my thesis write-up.

To provide you with enough time to tell about your life as a dancer, I anticipate that this process would take at least two interviews. These will be arranged at your convenience in terms of time and place. I would like to videotape the interviews so that you can have a copy of your life story as you have told it to me. I will transcribe the interviews onto paper to make it easier for me to work with them. I will ask you to read through the transcripts to ensure that your words are captured as you would like them to be. I will ask your permission to use any quotes from the interviews. If you would like to be an anonymous narrator, I will eliminate any reference to you, other people, places etc. in the transcripts. At any time I will be happy to discuss any questions you may have about the process.

Unfortunately I can't offer any financial compensation. Through the interview you will have a forum to reflect on your life which will be captured on video. You will also be making an important contribution to the small, but growing body of dance research and to research on excellence.

I recognize that you are a busy person, but I am hoping that you will be available in August, during your summer break, to meet with me. I will contact you shortly after your receipt of this letter or you are welcome to phone me (collect) at 613-746-5725. The best time to find me at home is early morning before 9:00 am or in the evening. I hope we will have a chance to work together!

Best wishes,

Louise Zitzelsberger

Appendix B

Interview Order

<u>Date of Interview (1997)</u>	<u>Dancer</u>	<u>Number of Single Spaced Pages</u>
June 27	CC	26
July 9	Yvonne Coutts	24
July 19	Yvonne Coutts	25
July 22	Peggy Baker	29
July 23	Peggy Baker	28
August 9	Felicia	26
August 12	Yvonne Coutts	20
August 13	CC	24
August 28	Peggy Baker	27
October 16	Vivian	23
November 10	Vivian	26
December 18	CC	10

Appendix C

Transcription Conventions

The following transcription conventions adapted from those suggested by Gumperz and Berenz (1993) were used:

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Significance</u>
.	Final fall
/	Slight fall indicating more can be said (temporary closure)
?	Final rise
-	Truncation
..	All pauses
=	Overlap and latching of speaker utterances
::	Lengthened segment
bold	Bolder text to indicate prominence
[]	Attending cues (listener) within speaker's text (no disruption of speaker)
()	Nonlexical phenomena, vocal and nonvocal, that interrupt the lexical stretch
(?)	Unintelligible speech
(?essence)	A good guess at an unclear word

Appendix D

Event TimelinesYvonne Coutts

Age	Events – general/specific	Context	Themes
5 yrs	Began Highland dancing – 1 yr	Parents weren't arts people	
6 yrs	Switched to Hawaiian for 10 yrs	Loved to move	Had masculine and feminine sides
Up to junior high	Played lacrosse in boys' league		engaged
Childhood	Basement shows – budding choreographer		Interested in making dance
Grade 10	Began jazz at Grant MacEwan	Dance was for fun	Felt she had a chubby body – not a dance body so couldn't be a dancer
High school	Began drama and then stopped	Uncomfortable about words in that form	
	Thought about being English teacher	Connection to language	Uses verbal and movement language in pieces/likes words
Grade 12	Substitute teacher got her thinking about dance	Teacher didn't have dance body, possibility born	First lucky fluke that happened re: dance
18 yrs	Entered program at Grant MacEwan	Director at time wasn't looking for entrants with formal training	Second fluke
	Stayed in program 4 years-prep yr/2 yr program/stayed for year to work with Brian Webb	4 th yr-did lots of choreographic exercises/lots of performing-helped break her nervousness a bit	A "best" year – felt she could be herself

22 yrs	Came to Le Groupe for summer school	Saw 2 company performances which excited her – one of the choreographers was going to be at Le Groupe	
	Director of Le Groupe discovered she did choreography	Director happened to meet with a choreographer from out west who used to be in Le G/knew Mauve	Another fluke
1988	Came back to Le G to apprentice	Lots of performing experience	
1989-93	Joined company as dancer		
	2 nd yr – great collaborative choreographic experience		Likes working with others
1994	Left company to do independent work	Piece for Canada Dance Festival/Bonnie Bird award	Difficult year – alone, lots of expectations/Passive-active – theme for dance piece
	Spent 1 yr in Montreal	Evaluated career goals	Didn't want to travel, do big shows
Present	Back at Le G		Discovered what she needs to create/live happily

Peggy Baker

Age	Events – General/specific	Context	Theme
Childhood	Took tap, jazz, piano	Mother dancer- danced and sang around house/Degas prints/dance was always there 6 kids – she is 2 nd /oldest girl Parental values-kids should be busy Performing-big Christmas show with cousins/shows on lawn for neighbourhood mothers Watched Shirley Temple/Fred Astaire	
Grade 7/8	Stopped taking tap	Too competitive- took fun out	
Grade 10	Used scholarship to go to Provincial Drama Seminar -arrived day early -met Patricia Beatty	First time alone away Patricia Beatty-made huge impression on her/different image of woman	NB role model
Late high school	Danced with Orchesis – U of A dance group	Exciting-dancing with older, more experienced dancers, collaborative – making dance together	Collaborative experience
University	Accepted into Theatre Program at UofA-learned stagecraft/met Gwen Keatley-nb woman	Thought she would do degree and then take dance	NB role model
	Dropped out after 1 yr-realized that if she was going to dance, had to do it	Big deal for the dept-teachers thought she was making bad choice	

19 yrs	Got married to musician-met at UofA, also dropped out, with Edmonton Symphony Orch/had similar dreams, wanted to be artists	Father concerned that he had left university	
1971-76	Moved to Toronto-began at TDT	Ritual of Graham class – dance as spiritual practice born/ values of others hard for her to deal with	Dance as spiritual practice
	Was pushed by one teacher – given solo and blanked-taught her important lesson/had to find it in her to continue	Dance a serious pursuit/when dancing very vulnerable/realized the seriousness of what she was doing	
1974-75	Apprentice for TDT	Did not like restrictions of scholarship, values or repertoire	
1975	Asked by friend from York to be in show-Dancemakers born	Collaborative, sharing learning	Collaborative experience
1976-77	NY-went to train more-Graham school/acting lessons/cut hair lost chance to dance in Primitive Mysteries/ saw Lar Lubovitch's company	Injury so took acting from another nb woman/ Baker story	Saw LL-a way of dancing she connected with
1977-78	Back to Toronto	Being to be recognized as dancer by reviewers/gave her credibility being away/she recognized it changed her	

1977-80	Had to take on directorship of Dancemakers	Director suddenly abdicated-as assistant had to take over	
1980	Called by Lar L. to join company	Had to decide between responsibility to Dancemakers and to self- career	NB role model
1981-88	With Lar L.	Became an artist/became his assistant/solo dancer	
1989	Decided to leave Lar	Change in direction by Lar away from what she wanted	
	Break up with choreographer boyfriend		
	Met Irene Dowd	At nb time-kicked out of Maggie Black's ballet class/dissatisfied with Lar	NB role model
	Took year to teach, decide her view		
1989	Became seriously involved with Ahmed/first time in life made decision related to personal life		
Fall 1990	White Oak Project	Gave her a credibility/sense of belief in self	
1990	First solo show		
1991	Beginning of relationship with Andrew Burashko		Collaborative and working in her own way
1991	Sanctum with Ahmed		Dance as spiritual practice
1993	Her Heart		The beauty and authenticity in unconscious movement

1993	Geometry of a Circle with Ahmed		
1994	Brute		Integration
1997	Strand		Profound nature of basic elements in life

Felicia

Age	Event – general and specific	Context	Theme
8 yrs	Began ballet	Parent put her in – lots of energy/piano and gymnastics/ parents never pushed her	First teacher let her be “Felicia”- saw she had the “dance”
10 yrs	More serious – 5 classes per week	Already felt like a dancer-never decided	
13 yrs	Accepted in residential ballet school after summer school	Not homesick – liked being away from home/ school very British	
13 –18 yrs	At school	Some teachers very negative/ Cecchetti – made her feel like a robot	Supressed her emotive ability
18 yrs	Auditionned and was accepted into company	Writing school exams	
19 yrs	Second soloist		Had to relearn how to be herself
21 yrs	International ballet competition- won silver	Listening to music and being herself a key to success	Being herself
	First soloist		
22 yrs	Left for US company	Didn’t like new artistic director	
22 yrs	Returned to company	Didn’t like always being on tour – likes a home	
	New Artistic Director		Let her be herself dancing
1987	Became principal dancer		

Vivian

Age	Events – general/specific	Context	Themes
5 yrs	Began taking ballet	Sister started first because of knock knees/she wanted to try/loved it from beginning/basement teacher	Teacher helped develop a love of being on stage
10 yrs	Took more classes/wk, doing festivals, competitions, exams	Teacher taught using RAD method	
12-13 yrs	Switched to another teacher	Found RAD too restricting	Going after what she needed
	New teacher n.b. figure in her life	Encouraged and pushed her/helped her believe in her potential	
Childhood/teens	Took lots of summer schools/workshops	Experience with many different teachers/styles	Likes variety
15 yrs	First summer at Banff	Training program/had fun	
16 yrs	Second summer at Banff-asked to join the professional program	Group of dancers from all over working to produce new works	Gave her a sense of a working atmosphere she liked
Post high school	Went to summer school at company training school	Left for summer, never went back	
	Accepted into school – stayed for 1 and ½ years	Difficult period – new management, teachers let out, dancers stuck in middle	Got what she could out of the time- didn't want to waste it
	Auditioned different places	Knew what she wanted – didn't want to be a number	
Twenties	Auditioned for current company – accepted	Adjustment from student to pro/ acceptance into company	Liked variety in body types, dance styles

	Sister already dancing in company	Concerned that she would not be seen as an individual	Following in sister's footsteps
	Lived with sister 1 yr	Good because in new place – moved out to be separate	
	Trying choreography		Likes new challenges
1997	Injury		

Appendix E

Correspondence from Dancers – Comments on Transcripts and Stories

Dear Louise

Thank you for all your hard work and also for your time on this interview and for in the place of what it takes to really love one's profession

There were a lot of paragraphs that I thought were pretty irrelevant for what I intended so I hope you don't mind me taking away some of my silly stories.

Thanks

Best of luck

(Received with Felicia's returned interview transcripts)

(Received with Peggy Baker's
returned interview transcripts)

Louise,

I enjoyed going through all
of this. My language is really
terrible and many of my
corrections were just to get rid
of "like" "sort of" and
hemming & hawing. I couldn't find
the name when I looked back
through but just make sure the
spelling re: the founder of Le
Groupe de la Place Royale is
Jeanne Renaud. I perform in

Montreal with Paul Andre Fortin ^{p.2}
(Reggie Ba)

March 19-21 at C'Azora. I have a
single performance in Toronto May 1st.

I may be at the Ottawa Festival in June,
but I haven't heard for sure.

Best wishes on this project.

XX 

(Returned with Vivian's
interview transcripts)

I have checked through these interviews and made some marks on your papers. I crossed out things that I would rather you left out and names. The rest seems fine. I would rather remain anonymous if that's o.k. with you. I have also made a couple of corrections on your story (mostly just the quotes, I hope this is alright with you). I know it has been a while since we spoke last but my life has been a little bit crazy as usual. Take care, I hope all is well with you.

* please note; I would like if it were possible to change all the names through the interviews.

P.
Received from
Peppy Baker -
Comments on
the story.

I took the liberty of
making a copy of this draft
so that I might have a
record of some of these
ideas put into words. Please
tell me if you have
misgivings of my possessing
your work.

Sending you love & strength
in seeing your mother through
her difficulties.

Warmly,

Jim

Aug 25 '98

Course,

I continue to be horrified by the
way I speak, I have relieved the
text of several hundred uses of
"like" "kind of" "sort of", without
diminishing the spontaneous rhythm of
thoughts coming into shape.

over →

pg. 2
(Peggy Baker)



There is quite a jump from being a student & young professional to reaching the heart of my artistic life. I found it very interesting to see the context you placed things in and have countless other thoughts that could be added from this time of greater wonder.



The Easter Seal Society
Ontario

The sender of this card is a friend and supporter
of The Easter Seal Society - helping kids
with physical disabilities and their families.

© UNIQUE WARES
901 CONSUMERS ROAD,
WILLOWDALE, ONT. M2J 1P3

with, you

project

UBK 123-0

Notes on the Interviews.

Sept. 4. 98

As I spoke with Louise in these interviews, I found myself gaining perspective on the different phases of my career. (and my life to some degree.) In reading over her interpretation of the interviews, it provided me with clarity, and a surprisingly positive response occurred. In areas where I had previously held feelings of failure and guilt, there instead arose some resolution (or closure)

When I first agreed to engage in these interviews, I was definitely interested, but also somewhat embarrassed. I continued to gather these insecure and unworthy feeling about my occupation & career. In some way by discussing the details and allowing each passage to unfold one after another, I discovered a quiet acceptance. This was quite unexpected. Thank you Louise.

Yvonne Coutts.

Received from
Vivian - Comment
on the Story

Louise,

It has been really interesting for me to reflect a little on my life. When you are absorbed in a busy schedule with all your thoughts and energy focused on what is to come it is good to step back every once in a while and put your life in perspective. It is sometimes strange to hear myself speak and for my ideas to be written on paper - it has told me a lot about myself. I hope that this was interesting for you and that you got something out of our interviews. ~~Thank~~ Thank you for letting me share with you my passion for dance and what it means to me. Good luck with everything!