



Elizabeth Waterhouse

Body- Biographies

Our Life Stories in Dance

Hilary Cartwright, Christine Kono,
Chris Lechner, and Marcus Schulkind

[transcript]

Elizabeth Waterhouse
Body-Biographies

The series is edited by Gabriele Brandstetter and Gabriele Klein.

Elizabeth Waterhouse, born in 1979, is a professor of Ballet at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts and an associate researcher at the Institute of Theatre Studies at the University of Bern. She was a member of the Swiss National Science Foundation project “Auto_Bio_Graphy as Performance: A Field of Dance Historiographic Innovation” (2020–2024). Her research focuses on life stories, dance ethnography, embodiment, and the choreography of William Forsythe.

Elizabeth Waterhouse

Body-Biographies

Our Life Stories in Dance. Hilary Cartwright, Christine Kono, Chris Lechner, and Marcus Schulkind

[transcript]

This open-access publication was produced with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation for the project “Auto_Bio_Graphy as Performance: A Field of Dance Historiographic Innovation” (2020–2024).

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available online at <https://dnb.dnb.de>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons License BY 4.0. For the full license terms, please visit the URL <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Creative Commons license terms for re-use do not apply to any content (such as graphs, figures, photos, excerpts, etc.) not original to the Open Access publication and further permission may be required from the rights holder. The obligation to research and clear permission lies solely with the party re-using the material.

2026 © Elizabeth Waterhouse

transcript Verlag | Hermannstraße 26 | D-33602 Bielefeld | live@transcript-verlag.de

Cover concept: Kordula Röckenhaus

Cover illustration: Marcus Schulkind teaching at Green Street Studios in Cambridge, Massachusettes, USA, circa 2016. Photo © Peter Schweizer.

Printing: Druckhaus Bechstein GmbH, Wetzlar

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839477595>

Print-ISBN: 978-3-8376-8174-1 | PDF-ISBN: 978-3-8394-7759-5

ISSN of series: 2747-3120 | eISSN of series: 2747-3139

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

She who knows she cannot speak of them without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story, also knows that she cannot make a gesture without activating the to-and-fro movement of life.

—Trinh T. Minh-Ha¹

¹ Minh-Ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red*, 76.

Contents

List of Illustrations	9
Acknowledgements	11
Introduction	15

Part I – Theoretical Context

Chapter 1: Life Stories as Sources for Dance Scholarship	31
Auto/Biography Studies	33
Auto_Bio_Graphy and Dance	39
Life Story Research	48
Life Review: Training, Aging, and Injury	55
Summary	59
Chapter 2: Body-Biographies: A Novel Methodology for Body-Reflexive and Participatory Dance Research	61
Outline of Body-Biography Methodology	63
Background: Interview Research	66
Making This Book	78
Theoretical Interpretation	87
Summary	100
Interlude: Autobiographical Gestures	103

Part II – Body-Biographies

Chapter 3: Christine Kono	123
Introduction	123

Life Stories	128
Dancing <i>Wabi-Sabi</i>	172
Chapter 4: Marcus Schulkind	179
Introduction	179
Schulkind's Teaching	184
Life Stories	187
Chapter 5: Hilary Cartwright	233
Introduction	233
Practicing Yoga Narada® with Cartwright	241
Life Stories	243
Chapter 6: Chris Lechner	293
Introduction	293
Lechner's Teaching	299
Life Stories	302
Conclusion: Writing Embodied History	339
Content and Challenges	344
Writing Process	347
Scale: The Small Registers of Interconnected Lives	352
The Case Studies: Domains of Further Research	354
Broader Methodological Horizons	357
Bibliography	361
Appendix	381

List of Illustrations

Figure 1:	Holding a photo of myself. The headband suggests that I am growing out my bangs, around the age of seven, circa 1986. Location is the swing set of Albany Academy for Girls in upstate New York. I am wearing my school uniform for gym class.	103
Figure 2:	Dancing in the center, on a makeshift dance studio on a basketball court. On the back of the photo is written "Age 12. David Otto's Summer Dance Program."	109
Figure 3:	Dancing in <i>Aporia</i> (2014) a performance installation at the Athens School of Visual Art created with Christine Kono, Dimitris Kraniotis, and Stéphane Vernier.	119
Figure 1:	Interview between Elizabeth Waterhouse (left) and Christine Kono (right) on November 10, 2022, in Freiform Atelier Bern.	124
Figures 2 + 3:	Christine Kono at the Pennsylvania Ballet Company (1966). Kono remembers this moment to be after the accident when she broke her metatarsal as she was returning to dancing on pointe.	137
Figure 4:	Dimitrios Kraniotis (left) dancing with Christine Kono (right). <i>Impromptus</i> (2009).	160
Figure 1:	Marcus Schulkind teaching ballet at Green Street Studios, circa 2016.	183
Figure 2:	Marcus Schulkind (left) and Liz Waterhouse (right) on March 18, 2023, at Schulkind's office in Brookline, Massachusetts.	187
Figure 3:	Marcus Schulkind at the Boston Conservatory on September 6, 1989, days before his company debut in Boston.	217
Figure 1:	A candid shot of Hilary Cartwright lunching with friends in Aspen, Colorado, USA.	234
Figure 2:	Hilary Cartwright demonstrating during a teacher-training lesson on Zoom, November 16, 2020.	235
Figure 3:	Liz Waterhouse (left) and Hilary Cartwright (right) during an interview at akarStudios in Bern on April 20, 2023.	241
Figure 4:	Hilary Cartwright performing in the installation <i>Movement as Flowing of Time</i> by artist Carlos Bunga, at the Bombas Gens Centre of Art in Valencia, Spain. Performance on Friday July 7, 2023.	269

Figure 5:	Hilary Cartwright in Studio Kinétique, Paris, in 2018. Behind her are two Gyrotonic towers.	280
Figure 1:	Liz Waterhouse and Chris Lechner rehearsing <i>Tangled</i> at Bern Schloss Holligen (2019).	296
Figure 2:	Chris Lechner demonstrating during a dance class on Zoom, May 24, 2023.	297
Figure 3:	The fascial qualities of the body in a gesture. Chris Lechner performing in Bern (2019).	308
Figure 4:	A grainy photocopy of Chris Lechner leaping (1982). Hamburg Ballet, <i>Fourth Mahler</i> by John Neumeier.	315

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people for their contributions to this research—especially my interview partners and my academic colleagues at the University of Bern. This book was developed during my postdoctoral research at the University of Bern Institute of Theatre Studies within the project “Auto_Bio_Graphy as Performance: A Field of Dance Historiographic Innovation,” which was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (2020–2024). The plural investigations of this team of dance scholars—David Castillo, Claudio Richard, Nadja Rothenburger, Christina Thurner, Julia Wehren, and myself—yielded fruitful discussion, text-sharing, and publication synergy. Christina Thurner nurtured the focus of this book by encouraging me to study the embodied components of life-narratives and to draw on my network to find significant protagonists; she was also a careful reader of early chapters. Julia Wehren and I had many valuable conversations comparing oral history and ethnographic interview methods. Nadja Rothenburger’s reading suggestions and comments on early life-writing sketches benefitted my study greatly. David Castillo and Claudio Richard both worked diligently on the interview transcriptions—a highly time-consuming endeavor, at times tedious and harsh on the ears—for which I am thankful. Last but certainly not least, I am also indebted to Jacqueline Devincenti at the Institute of Theatre Studies for her meticulous assistance with project administration.

For her careful reading and judicious feedback on the first complete draft of the manuscript, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Karen Eliot. Her peer review was instrumental in galvanizing the revisions that defined the manuscript’s final tone and arguments. I am also thankful for her archival assistance in searching for undated records in Marcus Schulkind’s personal archive of newspaper clippings. For their input and discussions of early drafts, I warmly acknowledge Jeff Friedman and James Leach. Thank you both for giving this book momentum and shaping its scholarly direction.

Another important reader has been my trusted editor, Graeme Currie, who added clarity and precision to my manuscript and made the process of editing musical and delightful. His encouragements to “go deeper” also came at precisely the right time.

Numerous colleagues offered helpful remarks on tricky areas of my research. Claire Vionnet enriched my work with discussions of (auto-)ethnography and intimacy. With Nathalie Rozanes, I had impactful dialogues on autotheory and scriptwriting. I benefitted from discussions with my students at the University of Bern in seminars on oral history and dance ethnography, as well as with Anna Raisich, Sebastian Sommer, and the participants of the group “Ethnographic Working Methods in Dance and Theater Studies.” Lucia Ruprecht offered insightful comments on dancers’ pain and injury. Susanne Franco and Marina Nordera gave pointed insights into the intersection of dance historiography, memory, and embodiment. Emma Murray’s comments on an early draft of Chris Lechner’s body-biography helped me refine the practice-rich sections for readability. Finally, discussions with Ronja Römmelt about her forthcoming doctoral research shaped the direction of the methodology chapter presented here.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Swiss Archive for the Performing Arts for their collaboration in archiving my interview recordings within their oral history collection. I am also thankful to Elmar Fulda and Isaac Spencer at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts for granting me the flexibility to complete the final revisions of this manuscript.

Dimitrios Kraniotis and Karin Minger danced with me in the margins of this project. Kraniotis generously hosted my exchanges with Christine Kono, while Karin Minger was my partner for the Yoga Narada® teacher training I undertook with Hilary Cartwright. Thank you both for supporting the practice-led side of this research.

My partner, Lennart Dohms, kept my spirits lifted in the darkest times of writing, affirming that this book would leave a meaningful trace by documenting the lives of a handful of master teachers who might otherwise have been forgotten. My parents, Laura and Jon Waterhouse, were also very supportive, including passing on materials from my childhood that they had collected and preserved for decades.

Lastly, and most significantly, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Hilary Cartwright, Christine Kono, Chris Lechner, and Marcus Schulkind for their inspiration and wisdom. I am profoundly thankful for my years of study with you, which have given me some of the happiest moments of my life and have been vital sites of self-discovery. Thank you also for trusting my vision throughout the long and arduous work of editing your life stories into written dialogues.

While developing this book, I questioned how to best name my teachers’ contributions to the body-biographies in Part II. I contemplated listing them as co-authors or contributors, given their enormous role in developing the ideas presented here, in interviews and cooperative editing processes. Often I felt like I was the mediator and facilitator of a knowledge that was much greater than my own—or any one of us. Yet for my part, assigning myself the position of editor did not properly reflect the significant responsibility I bore for conceiving, curating,

recording, transcribing, drafting, fact-checking, and revising; moreover, the book is very much a product of my own life story as the individual who brought these people and scholarly materials together. In the absence of a perfect solution, I chose to place their names prominently in the title line and my own as the author. With this, I also take full responsibility for any errors. Throughout this writing, I have strived to present our cooperation transparently, illustrating how the published result reflects these varied roles and collaborative efforts.

This book is dedicated to my many teachers and mentors, only four of whom could be spotlighted here.

Introduction

This book inaugurates the research field of body-biography, introducing a scholarly framework for life story inquiry in dance studies and giving it substance through case studies with dancers. The endeavor is interwoven with reflection on my memories of becoming a dancer, a dance scholar, and a teacher of dance. It brings the personal into the foreground in the form of an autobiographical project that records the life stories of four of my dance teachers: Hilary Cartwright, Christine Kono, Chris Lechner, and Marcus Schulkind (born between 1943 and 1963 in England, America, and Myanmar). These four important but lesser-known dance artists have dedicated their lives to the art of movement transmission, choreography, performance, and healing. Their stories tell of the pleasures as well as the challenges of leading lives as body workers and artists in the West, enumerating the bodily and kinesthetic experiences that constitute the dancers' professional practices and their senses of self.

This book is equally a heartfelt contribution to my dance teachers' legacies and a scholarly reflection on dancers' autobiographies and new methodological approaches in dance studies. Contextualizing these life stories within an interdisciplinary research format, I bring theoretical writing on autobiography studies and dance history research into conversation with debates in interview research and ethnography; in doing so, I demonstrate how case studies from the field of dance—rich examples of dancing lives—may take on a broader value. *Body-Biographies: Our Life Stories in Dance* substantiates the complex demands of interpreting and publishing dancers' life story interviews: the care work involved in this sensitive participatory research, and the theoretical challenges of inscribing embodied history. Zooming out from the personal, I critically reflect on my methodology and its interpretative potential and findings, to discuss matters of embodiment, memory, identity, and knowledge.

This project, conceived during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed me to reconnect to teachers whose work had faced significant disruptions, awakening a mutual longing for renewed exchange and shared reflection on our profession. At the time of writing, my teacher “Hilary” is eighty-two, “Christine” is seventy-eight, “Chris” is sixty-two, and “Marcus” is seventy-seven years old. In recent years they have

battled cancer, survived a heart attack, moved around on two replaced hips and one replaced knee, suffered from a painfully pinched nerve, and had cataract surgeries in four eyes. Meanwhile, as I worked on this book, my own body has changed too—a bruised rib, a ruptured tendon in my left ankle, tingling in my right arm, white hairs, painful periods, some hot flashes, a mild scoliosis—small but persistent reminders of aging as a dance scholar in my mid-forties. And yet, despite these physical realities of our changing bodies, our lives continue. Cartwright, Lechner, and Schulkind are still teaching actively. Kono, now retired, continues to research movement and participate in weekly improvisation sessions in a dance studio with her partner. Witnessing both the precarity of our aging bodies and the vitality of our lives, writing this book rekindled these meaningful teacher-student relationships, merging academic intent with personal motives.

Responding to the intricate challenges of researching human bodies as culturally and historically constructed individualities, my writing investigates the potential of the invented term “body-biography” for dance studies and dance historiography. Body-biographies are extended processes of live review between dancers and dance scholars that generate knowledge, oral history, archival records, and scholarly publication. Some of this knowledge remains nonverbal and private; however, the publication process leaves a lasting trace through which significant aspects of this embodied storytelling become sharable with a wider public. This participatory, cooperative, and sensual research stands in contrast to other approaches to studying dance: distant dance history writing referencing primary and secondary textual sources; glossy artist interviews published without in-depth writing contextualizing their production; and oral history interviews that limit conversation to a sit-down question-and-answer format, missing the opportunity to document the “dance” of the interview. Against the backdrop of these approaches, I immersed myself in an autobiographical project, interviewing dance artists whose teaching practices had impacted me personally. I pursued a body-reflexive form of life story research aimed at inscribing scholarly knowledge and fostering my own development as a dance teacher. I listened to my collaborators’ interests and stakes in this cooperative project, attending to their concerns while developing my perspective as a dance scholar. In activities of live review, my dance teachers and I mutually reflected on the past and changes that we have observed within the dance profession. I also took the opportunity to dance again with them and to rethink the past, sharing my memories of their pedagogical practices and asking questions about their own journeys of becoming dancers and dance teachers.

My life as a dancer, combined with my education in dance studies and ethnography, had prepared me with many skills to work as a meticulous, systematic, and creative biographer eager for kinesthetic life review. Scholar Karen O’Reilly encapsulates how the methodology of ethnography is a powerful form of inquiry,

enabling the researcher to theoretically interpret and narrate sensitive encounters. She writes:

Ethnography is a practice that: evolves in design as the study progresses; involves direct and sustained contact with human beings, in the context of their daily lives, over a prolonged period of time; draws on a family of methods, usually including participant observation and conversation; respects the complexity of the social world; and therefore, tells rich, sensitive and credible stories.¹

The specific way that I practice ethnography for this book, merging it with interviewing and life-writing, I present in detail in Chapter 2. Drawing on the practice of “participant observation” and debates on “writing culture,” my way of practicing ethnography is to learn relationally and respectfully—from and with dancers, and through my own body—by interacting in the context of my narrators’ everyday lives and dance activities.² I try to understand my research agenda through building longstanding relationships with dance artists that allow me to learn about their lives: to observe, question, participate, document, interview, interpret, write and co-write, evaluate, and edit. Ethnographic inquiry has trained me well for the ethical and self-reflexive negotiations involved in writing about living persons, their fleshy experiences, and my participatory encounters with their lifeworlds. Dancing has prepared me to observe, empathize, listen, and move with others. While the research around which this book is built was ostensibly focused on my dance teachers’ body-biographies, it was also entangled with my own life story. This intensified the reflexivity of the undertaking: offering me a richer understanding of my own life by necessitating critical review of my life phases, turning points, and memories of being and becoming a dancer. In this sense, my research design is similar to projects in the self-reflexive genre of autoethnography research, a term that I withhold because of the theoretical anchoring of this study in dance studies, rather than cultural studies.³

My artistic biography—born upstate in New York in 1979, resisting a career in ballet before discovering science and modern dance, then becoming a dance scholar after a career as a professional dancer in Germany—becomes an explicit object of reflection in the middle of this book, in the section “Interlude: Autobiographical

1 O'Reilly, *Ethnographic Methods*, 11.

2 These arguments are substantiated in my conclusion. Unlike positivist approaches to working with ethnography, my understanding has been inspired by recent practice and debates in anthropology. As two examples, see the discussion in Ingold, *Making*, 2–6 as well as the pivotal text, Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*.

3 See Adams, Ellis, and Jones, “Autoethnography”; Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, *Handbook of Autoethnography*; Bochner and Ellis, *Evocative Autoethnography*; Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*; Reed-Danahay, *Auto/Ethnography*.

Gestures.” Because of my mobility as an artist who has resided in America, Germany, and Switzerland, the dance teachers featured in this study had each decisively shaped my transnational career path yet had never worked with one another.⁴ As a collection, our body-biographies therefore do not represent a common cultural group, epoch, or dance style—as a case study or micro-history—yet they are still significant portals onto dance history. They offer insight into what dance scholar Karen Eliot calls “embodied history”: dancers’ memories of developing their bodily capacities while learning to dance, perform, choreograph, and teach, as well as narratives marked by these competences, informing how they perceived and remembered events within their communities. Body-biographies reveal not only these professional dimensions of dance history, but also the interwoven aesthetic and cultural currents that constitute embodiment, enriching our understanding of dance historiography from the perspective of the persons and bodies who shaped it.⁵

I chose the four dancers featured here because of their impact on my understanding of dancing and my sense of self—also my appreciation for their exceptional ability to articulate what bodies feel and can do. They are not prominent figures in the Western canon of professional dancers and choreographers. Their names may therefore be unfamiliar to the reader. Giving ample space for their individual voices, each one of these artists is introduced in the opening pages of their body-biography chapters (Chapters 3–6)—providing basic biographic data and specifying their migratory paths—alongside the history of our relationship. Born between 1943 and 1963 in England, Myanmar, and the United States, they hold American, British, and German nationalities and currently reside between Switzerland, the United States, France, Spain, and Germany. My scholarly decision to consider lifelines crossing national and aesthetic borders from these significant but lesser-known artists allows new perspectives of the past and overlooked voices to contribute to our comprehension of dance history. Their lives exemplify the rich exchange of dance culture across national boundaries, illuminating tales of migration and aesthetic transfer.

Each of these dance artists has left a substantial trace in the bodies of their students—in the form of their students’ dance practices and sensorimotor knowledge. My research considers my teachers’ life stories as well as the traces they have left in me: in the form of skills, memories, and habits of analyzing movement—also modes of emotionally and sensually feeling my body in connection

4 They had some existing ties. Cartwright had received acupuncture once from Schulkind when she was teaching the Boston Ballet around two decades ago. Schulkind had in fact suggested I study with her, after I had moved to Europe. Lechner remembered meeting Kono and her partner Dimitris Kraniotis in Greece, but Kono could not remember it.

5 Eliot, *Dancing Lives*, 6. See also 43 in Chapter 1 and the conclusion for further elaboration.

and rhythm with others. For this study, I observantly participated in “Hilary,” “Marcus,” “Chris,” and “Christine’s” current practices as teachers and dance artists. I reflected also on the dance documents my teachers have written, collected, and left behind. Cartwright is herself an accomplished writer on dance, with her own memoir.⁶ Schulkind, who worked extensively as a choreographer, deposited his performance archive of choreographic video recordings in the New York Performing Arts Library and maintained a personal archive of newspaper clippings. All four have made websites that provide narratives about their lived histories, highlighting their artistic as well as their pedagogical work.⁷ That said, the teaching practice of these influential pedagogues is only scantily documented, a gap that I also wished to fill through this life review project.

While for the purpose of this introduction I highlight these artists’ relationship to me as teachers, the four dance artists showcased here have taken on a variety of roles in the dance and somatic professions: as dancers, dance teachers, yoga teachers, choreographers, company directors, rehearsal directors, and more. They represent many dance styles: ballet and modern, *Tanztheater*, release techniques, and contemporary dance. Their life stories therefore show us the interweaving roles of dancers’ labor that are united through the mobile and changing “container” of their bodies as cultural workers. New evidence of these dispersions in multiple styles, techniques, and forms is also relevant for our understanding of dance history, illustrating the way dancers assemble personal pedagogical practices, their bodies integrating a layered “bricolage” of sundry influences.⁸

This project deliberately merged personal and academic registers, believing that rapport was essential for body-biographies to be theoretically revealing—of not only career highlights and nostalgic memories of youth, but also the troubles and challenges of bodily life. Rapport between interviewer and interviewee is known to be critical to the production of oral history, enabling us to ethically produce stories that shape our understanding of the past.⁹ Rapport is also critical for the publication phase, in which shaping transcripts into public life-writing requires considerable patience to negotiate the stakes of self-presentation. I was therefore conscious to choose teachers with whom I had the social bonds in place to navigate a collaborative and possibly confrontational process of life review and life-writing for publication. Despite our age differences and their authority as seasoned teachers,

6 Cartwright, *Dancing for a Living*.

7 References to these are found in their individual body-biographies as well as in the Bibliography.

8 Bales and Netti-Fiol, *The Body Eclectic*, 2–3.

9 Yow, “Interviewing Techniques and Strategies,” 157. Discussion of rapport also is implicated with the ethics of interviewing. Yow, “Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research.”

my relationships with Cartwright, Kono, Lechner, and Schulkind provided mutual, horizontal exchange. As pedagogues, they had not shown hierarchical, untouchable authority.¹⁰ Rather, I could dialogue with them and ask intimate questions—usually on the record.¹¹ This is not to make light of the power asymmetries arising from our age differences or my authority as a scholar with a university grant, a doctorate, and an audio recorder to capture their words. My reputation as a Forsythe dancer also signaled my values as an artist involved in experimental choreographic projects. But overall, I used my embodied know-how as a resource: insisting, with questioning prompts when necessary, that the body would not go unsaid, or implied, as it might within “sit-down” conventions of oral history narration, or even casual dancer talk.

While I empathize with all four of these artists physically, it is interesting that they all have bodies that look and move differently than mine (and each other’s)—perhaps this is even part of my attraction to learning from them. They share a common verbal wit, as well as compassion and generosity. Part of their “auras” as teachers are their energetic capacities in the classroom. Their reputations are built upon their power to help others to learn and the care they take of each and every student in the dance studio. I was aware of the benefit of having interlocutors who were verbally confident and self-aware in their discussions of what they have observed, done, and experienced. These protagonists’ rhetorical skills of interpersonal communication and metaphor make them highly articulate speakers to report back on dance practices and history. They are also self-critical and value the ethics of telling the truth within relationships. It was to my advantage that they possess great extroverted energy and a strikingly powerful sense of humor when leading groups. All these qualities meant that I benefitted greatly from their collaboration, bringing their rich ideas into dialogue and then print.

For other scholars or dancers contemplating a project of researching their own dance lineage, I wish to highlight the advantage of not only making interviews but also defining a common publication project, in which we “shared authority”—borrowing the adage from oral history scholar Michael Frisch—to bring life stories into print.¹² My teachers were curious about what the process of research would be and what form the final text representing these conversations would take; overall they seemed very open to what other dancers and dance scholars might draw from it all. I too valued exploring new terrain, having previously used

10 The authoritarian pedagogical legacy in Western stage dance remained strong even at the end of the twentieth century. Reviewing this theoretically and from sundry sources, see Lakes, “The Messages behind the Methods.”

11 My speakers did not initiate discussion of sex and sexuality in their private lives as important for telling their life stories in dance. While an interesting component of embodied history, I respected this boundary.

12 See Frisch, *A Shared Authority*.

biographical interviews only as background for semi-structured interviews about dancer expertise.¹³ Moreover, despite being close to my teachers, I had never taken the time to listen to their life stories at length—discussing, for example, childhood or wider topics such as aging and injury. Conversely, they did not know much about my past or my work as a dance scholar. Therefore, this project formalized and deepened our prior discussions. Not only a nice stroll “down memory lane,” our conversations involving mutual life review were heartfelt and probing intergenerational exchanges about bodily values, dance careers, dance history, and its protagonists.¹⁴

Aging, injury, and career inflection points are highlighted in these stories, told not to create hero myths but rather to reflect upon lived experiences of the dance profession and leave stories that younger generations of dancers might learn from. I was interested in these artists’ kinesthetic knowledge, honed by the multiple roles they have taken within the dance profession—aspects that also are often compartmentalized within our study of dance practices and history. I did not know what narrative techniques my narrators would use to link or signal ruptures and transitions between their life phases, nor which roles or themes they would foreground in their career narratives. Having selected two men and two women, three White artists and one Asian, I was curious how their gendered and racial identities would reflect different positions and perspectives as artists. I was also interested in their distinctions between personal and professional activities, and how their bodies might conflate or distinguish between the two. These matters are elaborated upon individually in Part II of this research, presented in the four body-biography chapters.

While teachers occupy a vitally important position in the dance field, contexts of dance education are still undercharted in dance history, in contrast to canonical choreographic works, authors (choreographers), stars, and techniques.¹⁵ This opportunity to reflect on dance history more from the perspective of day-to-day classroom studio practices and relationships underlying the networks of choreographic production interested me. As did, of course, the embodiment of these practices, for I believe, like dance oral history scholar Sanja Andus L’Hotellier,

13 I exploratively undertook two life story interviews while researching my PhD dissertation, but because of limited time with the dancers, chose other interview approaches more suited to my research questions. See Waterhouse, *Processing Choreography*, 38–41.

14 For discussion of life review, see Summerfield, “Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice,” 11.

15 Some exceptions to this include: Bales and Nettle-Fiol, *The Body Eclectic*; Diehl and Lampert, *Dance Techniques 2010: Tanzplan Germany*; Warren, *The Art of Teaching Ballet*. See also the oral history project on the Bennington Summer School 1978–1979 at the Columbia Center for Oral History. L’Hotellier, “The Bennington Summer School of the Dance Oral History Project, 1978–1979.”

that “recovering the sensibility of a dancer will offer a new perspective for a more intimate approach to dance history.”¹⁶

Without further ado, these protagonists are again (in order of appearance in this book): Christine Kono, an American dancer born in 1947 who worked in ballet, modern dance, and Tanztheater contexts; Marcus Schulkind, an American modern dancer and choreographer born in 1948; Hilary Cartwright, a British ballet dancer born in 1943; and Chris Lechner, a German dancer born in 1963, who transitioned from ballet to the contemporary dance field. Detailed introductions to their positions in dance history and seminal high points in their careers are provided in the opening pages of each of their individual body-biographies.

*

The interdisciplinary framework that I develop in this research blends dance studies analysis and historiography with auto/biography studies, life story research, oral history, ethnographic methodology, and embodiment studies. The terminology I have used thus far in this introduction, such as “body-biographies,” “life stories,” “auto/biography,” “life review,” and “oral history,” will be unpacked thoroughly in Chapter 1. My methodological concerns regarding how this study designed the interviews and negotiated the ethics of cooperation and authorship of written representations of life story narratives are detailed in Chapter 2. The research questions motivating the project include: How can life story research be grounded, theorized, and adapted for the purpose of dance studies and dance historiography, particularly regarding the embodied dimensions of becoming and narrating a self? What are the specific benefits and challenges of body-biography as an approach to dance scholarship, and how do these build upon existing techniques of interviewing and life-writing? How might my observation skills as a dancer, as well as my reservoir of embodied skills and memories, enable me to sensitively and theoretically support dancers’ life story narratives and inscribe these in print? Can my autobiography, in pieces and fragments, become written through the lives of others, and can others’ life stories become written through our life review as *our* body-biographies?

Current dance studies research is newly attending to the potential of dancers’ autobiographies for dance historiography—considering sources written, performed, and spoken. This research is advancing how these personal testimonies might be more productively interwoven into dance studies scholarship. There is new attention to giving dancers’ voices greater prominence in historical accounts, while exploring the historian’s role in contextualizing and interpreting these positions.

16 L’Hotellier, 25.

Recent dance historiography has advanced new storytelling and self-reflexive writing techniques, involving the researcher's affective and critical encounters with sources, while engaging with theories of praxeology, intersectionality, postcolonialism, gender studies, and critical race theory to speculatively re-imagine and rewrite our understanding of the past. Recognizing the methodological potential for collaboration between dance artists and dance scholars, in his article "(Re)Making Dance History Together" (2022), dance historian Timmy De Laet imagines new processes of dance historiography, such as working in partnership with dance artists and their practice-based methodologies to write about the recent past.¹⁷ I will review these theoretical currents in the subsequent chapter, situating my own approach of cooperative life review within this exciting field of dance studies scholarship.¹⁸

My research of body-biographies explores how telling, dancing, and writing life stories are intertwined modes of self-formation and self-presentation—not uncovering an essential self but revealing processes that articulate self-understanding. Here I build upon dance scholar Christina Thurner's research into performative aspects of dancers' autobiographies under the umbrella of "autobiography as performance."¹⁹ I view dancers' life story narratives as forms of creative self-reflection. People rarely portray a static self. Rather, in their life stories they may expose the frictions, subversions, and inventive ways that we present ourselves for and with others: telling stories that rehash the past. Life stories, as I shall account for in Chapter 1, change over time—depending on the moment of telling and the imagined audience. For this reason, I favor the term "life stories" in the plural, rather than the singular form customary in academic usage. There is an "autobiographical promise," according to autobiography scholar Philippe Lejeune, by which the reader conventionally assumes a writer will tell a "true" story about his or her life.²⁰ Autobiographical imagination seems, especially for dancers, to entail self-exploration and empowerment, as well as imaginatively contesting narrative norms. To clarify this point, I do not view autobiographical testimony as the "real" history around which a work of art should be contextualized. Nor should autobiography be disregarded as fabulation: inaccurate and frequently self-aggrandizing. In other words, I understand dancers' autobiographies as a discourse in relation to other accounts of history and memory, in relation to other

17 De Laet, "(Re)Making Dance History Together. Working Towards a Collaborative Historiography of Dance."

18 These remarks I substantiate more fully with references in Chapter 1, in the subsection: "Auto_Bio_Graphy as Dance." Some key influences are: Carter, *Rethinking Dance History*; Eliot, *Dancing Lives*; Ruprecht, "Tanzhistoriografie"; Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*.

19 Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 20–24, 79–93. Translation by the author.

20 Initially called the "autobiographical pact" but subsequently revised. Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, 120–22. Missinne, "Autobiographical Pact."

artistic practices; in short, autobiographies are the fashioning and storying of embodied memories in a manner that is deeply revealing for historiography as well as other anthropological concerns regarding how persons, bodies, and meanings are mutually constituted and individual-collective.

Foregrounding reflection on dancing bodies—recording testimony on embodiment and examining interconnected bodies—is the intention of the concept that titles and begins this book: *body-biographies*. The body is well known as a vitally important but difficult register for study in the social sciences and humanities.²¹ In contrast to prior scholarship universalizing and objectifying “the body” as a material, the term “embodiment” is preferred by scholars who view bodies as singular-plural and epistemologically constitutive of personhood and subjectivity.²² While the testimony in this book will contribute further to this understanding, I decided not to call the book “embodied biographies.” This choice reflects that this relatively new term—growing more prominent in discourses especially since the 1990s—is foreign to many dance practitioners, especially dance elders; only Lechner used it during our interviews. In contrast to the scholarly concept of “embodied biographies” the term “body-biography” helped me to invite dance artists to share stories that illustrate how they have come to understand and labor with their bodies. The simpler title affirmed their authority on these matters. My dance teachers’ life stories present their own bodily terms and representations; they share aesthetic judgments about bodies in their cultural communities, while also discussing norms and experiences of discipline and power. As we shall see, my invitation allowed for the frictions, ambiguities, contradictions, and multiplicities of embodiment to be narrated: lived bodies, dancing bodies, teaching bodies, choreographed bodies, traveling bodies, aging bodies, as well as sick and injured bodies. These embodied matters are reflected upon in greater detail in Part II and the conclusion.

While dance scholars excel in this theoretical domain of describing and interpreting performing and dancing bodies, we too lament the challenges: our bodies’ ephemeral acts, the persistence of dualities and stereotypes, and bodies’ resistance to articulation and generalization.²³ Dance scholarship has written extensively on moving bodies, showing bodies’ socio-cultural, political, and

21 This literature is vast. Highlighting relevant texts that have impacted my view, from sociology, anthropology, and gender studies, see: Blackman, *The Body*; Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies*; Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Mascia-Lees, *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*; Mol, *The Body Multiple*; Shilling, “Embodiment”; Williams and Bendelow, *The Lived Body*.

22 See Mascia-Lees, *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, 2.

23 Scholarly writing on dance that impacted my review includes: Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*; Desmond, *Meaning in Motion*; Ness, “Being a Body in a Cultural Way”; Foster, *Corporealities*; Foster, “Dancing Bodies”; Foster, “Choreographing History.”

historical formations while contemplating their power and discursive resistance. Using emplaced life story interviews as a method to generatively and cooperatively produce life story narratives, within the freshly invented and named framework of body-biography, I opened an energetic space for learning dialogically about dancers' (em)bodied experiences. Body-biography jumps with alliteration into a *poiesis* of telling us about bodies. It proposes an explorative, experimental, effervescent, and cooperatively written biography, intimately reviewing bodily praxis.

This project was conceived to rethink how I have honed my own body and movement understanding as a dancer—to contribute this perspective to the field of dance studies. I hopefully make very clear through this research that I do not espouse “dance” or even “the body” as universal ideas, across space and history; quite the contrary: Dancing bodies are constructed and intersubjective cultural formations, involving organic (and as the example of hip prosthesis makes very evident, also inorganic) bodily materialities. Bodies are nexuses. Studying my cohort of teachers, I make my changing body—this living material sitting here, shaped by norms and transformed through practices, always acting and reacting, shifting between me-ness and other-ness—into a tool for inquiring about dance practices in the present and recent past. I was interested to use my biography as a litmus test to reflect on how embodied experience becomes a “source” for dance scholarship. This involved critically addressing the difficulties in homing in on embodied experience as a scholar—with my body and its registers as a test—showing what may be glossed over in narrative conventions for life stories and obscured by scholarly writing that omits attention to this micro-scale.

Conscientiously reaching out to a broad readership, this book is composed as a composite of different poetic and theoretical articulations—scholarly writing, edited life story interviews, movement descriptions, and my own life-writing. The order that I have chosen for the chapters focuses on the interdisciplinary theoretical foundations and methodology first (Part I), before examining my case studies of four dancers' lives (Part II). Artists and scholars from neighboring fields might read this book in reverse or nonlinearly: for example, by diving straight into a dancer's body-biography, then shifting back and forth between the neighboring theoretical materials and stories from my other protagonists. I imagine that doctoral students in dance studies might be drawn directly to the methods chapter of this book (Chapter 2); this section was written with my own seminars in mind, given the shortage of materials available for students that describe how dance interview research is conducted. At the start of each chapter, I provide orientation that should allow these different readerships to make their way through this volume, and at the end of each, I restate my conclusions in compact scholarly language. I follow conventions of academic writing throughout to expansively cite the diverse texts and other media that impacted my thinking: academic books, interviews, digital content on the internet, and documents or photographs that I have studied in

my teachers' personal archives. Footnotes also expound on the dance terminology and dance artists referenced in our conversations—recognizing that this embodied knowledge, circulating mouth-to-mouth or body-to-body, has not all been reflected in peer-reviewed dance scholarship.

The linear progression of this book is as follows: Part I develops the theoretical framework of my research. In “Chapter 1: Life Stories as Sources for Dance Scholarship,” I position this study within the broader discourse on “life story” and “auto/biography” research, as well as recent developments in “auto_bio_graphy” research in dance studies, clarifying my terms and exploring the potential and challenges of interpreting life stories as sources for the study of dance. In “Chapter 2: Body-Biographies: A Novel Methodology for Body-Reflexive and Participatory Dance Research” I critically examine the methodology invented for this embodied research of life stories, situating my approach in relation to other examples of interview research and publishing oral history. Between Part I and Part II of this book, I shift tone with the section “Interlude: Autobiographical Gestures.” This chapter sketches my own life stories and illuminates the troubles and themes of body-biography from a personal perspective.

Part II is composed of my case studies. The body-biographies of my teachers span: “Chapter 3: Christine Kono,” “Chapter 4: Marcus Schulkind,” “Chapter 5: Hilary Cartwright,” and “Chapter 6: Chris Lechner.” Alternating male and female narrators, and moving from two American to two European perspectives, these stories are introduced with materials substantiating our relationships and key narrative themes within the discussions. For the last chapter, “Conclusion: Writing Embodied History,” I return to a scholarly tone to reflect on how body-biographies devise a proactive and participatory approach to recording embodied history, creating sensual sources that enable dancers and dance scholars to rethink the past.

Lastly, I write this book at a time in which the global study of dance warrants careful framing of one's habitus and cultural framework. My writing reflects my perspective as a White, female, Italian-American dancer and dance scholar, working at the University of Bern and writing at the crossroads of German and English-speaking dance studies. My research focuses on a small case study of protagonists whose lives interlace with my own biography as a professional dancer that has lived and worked across major cities in America and Europe. My claims are predominantly explorative, not generalizing. By studying Western subjectivity and personhood via the contextualization of very personal stories, I examine how self-portrayal and narrative conventions are constructed in particular contexts of socio-cultural, historical, and aesthetic living bodies. This exploratory research cannot, however, speak for life stories for and by members of minorities; nor can this research yield refined arguments based on cross-cultural investigation. I sincerely hope for other scholars to augment and diversify what I have commenced in the way that my singular life and scholarly background could enable. I hope my efforts

to speak loudly, as a composite of five persons, will be understood as a vocal effort to encourage others to respond, not as seeking to dominate or to inappropriately generalize about dance identity.

Everyone has stories to tell about their lives and bodies. The scholarly value of these narratives is here put to the test for persons whose life stories commonly are given purpose, meaning, and continuity through dancing.

Part I – Theoretical Context

Chapter 1: Life Stories as Sources for Dance Scholarship

According to linguist Charlotte Linde, life stories are indispensable social interactions that enable people to “exist in a social world with a comfortable sense of being a good, socially proper, and stable person.”¹ Life stories answer the invitation: Please tell me the story of your life. They perform existential and moral work, whether they are orated speeches or told casually off the cuff.² In contrast to a carefully worded autobiography, in which narratives are retrospectively selected, and wordings are inalterable after going to print, life stories emerge in situated, ongoing social interaction and continue to change throughout one’s life. As Linde’s work *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (1993) brings into clarity, life stories are “created, negotiated, and exchanged” throughout a person’s lifetime of social interactions.³ They are fashioned by listening to others’ stories and composing one’s own tales: in dialogue. In this way, they are seldom long, unbroken monologs, but more commonly expressions of dialogic social performance—open and incomplete—and rendered for a particular audience. These very important findings of autobiography research, which have also been reflected upon by other scholars, have only recently been introduced into dance studies research.⁴

Dancers’ life stories have great potential as sources for dance scholarship, as I shall argue and develop over the course of this chapter. But this distinct form of autobiographical testimony also poses theoretical and methodological challenges—from how to access and record these narratives, to how to publish and analyze them. Organizing an interdisciplinary framework for dancer life story research, this book cultivates this emerging research domain by exemplifying how life stories may contribute theoretically to the study of dance and redefine *who* leaves

1 Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence*, 3.

2 Here I paraphrase Ken Plummer. See Plummer, “The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research,” 404.

3 Linde, *Life Stories*, 3. (emphasis mine)

4 For example, in the writing of historian Volker Depkat. See Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 36–38.

traces for future scholars to encounter. The main research questions guiding this inquiry are the following:

1. How can dancers' life stories generate knowledge, including self-knowledge and scholarly knowledge of dance practice and dance history?
2. What makes life stories truthful in terms of factual content, or in terms of the meanings, lessons, and values they convey?
3. How do narrative conventions shape the ways dancers tell their life stories?
4. What can we learn from dancers' embodied storytelling: how they move, perform, and enact their life-narratives?
5. How do dancers' life stories reveal constitutive experiences and negotiations of embodiment, thereby giving insight into embodied history and body politics?

This chapter begins my engagement with these questions by reviewing key theoretical precedents in auto/biographical and life story research, and outlining debates for how to produce, interpret, critique, and publish life stories. Building on this, the heart of this book (Part II) presents a case study of four body-reflexive life stories—body-biographies—that provide new examples of this exploratory form of scholarly writing.

In this chapter, I will examine diverse theoretical landmarks, from dance oral history to the *testimonio* genre, to clarify my premises about the distinctions between life stories and other related auto/biographical genres; by doing so, I motivate and frame the leading term of this study, the neologism *body-biographies*. Responding to difficulties I had in telling my own life story as well as addressing undertheorized aspects of life story research, I invented the term body-biography to name research into the *embodied* aspects of dancer life-story narratives. Please tell me the story of your life—with reference to your body—serves as a reminder to bring bodies conscientiously into our dimensions of self-narration, not necessarily as material objects, but also as sensual subjects, being, and becoming. Body-biographies offer scholars sources for investigating the role of embodiment in dancers' self-understanding and its influence on life story performance. I questioned how dancers' body-biographies might decenter or resist traditional androcentric notions of autobiography, or even propose alternatives. Furthermore, I sought to understand how my awareness of my own bodily movements could guide both the rigor and care work involved in eliciting my dance teachers' life stories.

In this chapter, I will provide a theoretical scaffolding to elevate my scholarly interests and arguments. First, I orient my research within the vast and growing multidisciplinary field of "auto/biography" studies, and then the smaller but booming field of "auto_bio_graphy" research in dance studies. In the third section, I clarify my research focus by reviewing current cases and debates in life story research. The fourth and final section of this chapter concludes by considering

the subject of “life review,” focusing on themes particular to interviewing elders; I introduce the specific dance narrators chosen for this project and define important themes emerging from this selection. In synthesis, these sections support the argument that dancers’ life stories—self-narratives revealing dimensions of embodiment, produced from and through aesthetic and social performance—must be understood as dynamic narratives that enable the scholar to explore the meanings and values of a life constituted through the art of dancing.

Auto/Biography Studies

The idiom *auto/biography* is an umbrella term that marks the contemporary fluidity and multiplicity of autobiography and biographical life narratives. Theoretical attention to these fascinating sources—extending from written texts to oral accounts and aesthetic expression—has grown considerably since the 1980s, such that the field is currently recognized as a substantial, transdisciplinary, and global domain of scholarship.⁵ The wide scope of this inquiry extends from literary studies and the social sciences, via neuroscience and psychology, linguistics, and gender studies, to the arts—including dance. This scholarship has led to a more complex view of narrated lives across cultures and throughout human history. Scholars have examined their specificity as texts, while also undertaking expanded readings of their multimodal components. Varying terminologies within these inquiries canvass a range of investigations of self/*auto*, life/*bios*, and description/*graphy*: including life stories, life histories, life-writing, memoirs, testimonio, *écrivain*, self-narratives, ego documents, biographical interviews, ethnographic autobiography, autoethnography, autofictions, and autotheory, to name just a few.⁶

As this long list makes clear, modes of auto/biographical inquiry vary appreciably in their authorship (collective or singular) and practices (methodology) of creation. Because of this breadth, one encompassing definition is impossible. Instead, one must consider interweaving discourses, mediums, and markets. The field of auto/biography studies has developed by critically revising canons and careful theoretical exploration of the individual life narratives within. My study of

5 For an overview, see Chansky and Hipchen, *The Routledge Auto/Biography Studies Reader*; Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*.

6 In general, see Plummer, “The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research”; Chansky and Hipchen, *The Routledge Auto/Biography Studies Reader*. I review life stories in detail in this introduction. On autotheory, see Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*. For a survey also of autofiction, see Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*. On autoethnography, see Reed-Danahay, *Auto/Ethnography*. For a concise yet rigorous introduction to many of these genres, see also Marcus, *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction*.

body-biographies is part of this meaningful new literature, working with sensitive regard for the personal and the phenomenon of dancing bodies. Like the scholarship to which I refer in this section, my writing aims to further decenter the androcentric canon of autobiography and contribute to critical dance scholarship that explores autobiographical modes of personhood, self-reflection, and embodied narration. In my research, therefore, I open an autobiographical space in which tensions exist between prior conventional cultural scripts, on one hand, and dance-specific conventions for telling one's life story, on the other. Reviewing these, for readers unfamiliar with these debates in auto/biography studies, will enable more nuanced reading of the life stories that follow.

A primary narrative characteristic of traditional androcentric life-writing and life stories is *coherence*: that autobiographical narratives come together credibly around a central protagonist. Coherence, Charlotte Linde writes, is twofold. On the one hand, it is a textual property: that the sub-elements of a narrative relate sensibly to each other, for example, in their sequence and contingency. Coherence is also negotiated socially. Linde describes it as “a cooperative achievement of the speaker and the addressee.”⁷ The specific cultural and personal values of the narrator and interviewer therefore impact how coherence becomes structured through negotiation. The relevance of this coherence for dancers' life stories will be examined from multiple angles throughout this study.

Writing in the *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction* (2018), historian Volker Depkat similarly observes how the common understanding of autobiography revolves around the coherence of the self: “as a retrospective narrative in prose about a lived life, focusing on the story of the author's own personality.” Depkat stresses that this convention is, however, “deeply indebted to the Enlightenment concept of the autonomous individual, its unique individuality, and its quest to find a place in society.”⁸ According to this tradition, an autobiography typically focuses on the author's whole life—retelling landmark events chronologically in time, with enough detail to be interesting and plausible. Moreover, the narrative is unified through the authority of the central protagonist and their (typically White and male) voice, speaking strongly in the first person. The plot is structured lucidly according to self-centered actions and descriptions of others that show mastery of one's rhetoric and coherence of ideology. The central subject articulates through one voice, one speaking I; their stories totalize a personal and world view.⁹ Confessions may also feature in such narratives, whether religious or secular in form.¹⁰ Lastly, the narrator is conscious of their place in history and can describe their importance within

7 Linde, *Life Stories*, 12. See also 16–19.

8 Depkat, “History,” 73.

9 Smith, “The Impact of Critical Theory on the Study of Autobiography,” 84–86.

10 Marcus, *Autobiography*, 9–24.

it.¹¹ These Western conventions are not universal, but they are strong normative underpinnings of the autobiographical genre.¹²

In contrast to the autobiographical literature of the Enlightenment and Romantic eras, critical studies of auto/biographies today focus on the multiplicity of diverse styles and topoi of “life-writing,” a more open concept widely used today in the fields of literature and cultural studies.¹³ Scholars investigate the distinct ways that authors perform and write expressions of the self—whether coherent and unified, composite and fluid, or even incoherent, divided, or fragmentary. The anchor of the androcentric self—unified and singular—may be split, decentered, and qualified. The self is conceived to be created and performed through autobiographical self-narration. Earlier autobiographic conventions, such as centering upon public success and evaluating or aggrandizing one’s place in history, have given way to different tones of introspection and questioning private/public boundaries.

One abundant source of innovation in this field has been women’s writings. Women do not write, as Virginia Woolf memorably put it, like men using the “essentialist” autobiographical ‘I,’ that Woolf describes as “honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding.”¹⁴ Sidonie Smith, in her extensive research on women’s autobiography and feminist theoretical perspectives, has interpreted the diverse narratives, poetics, and performativity of women’s writings. Relationality is one characteristic of this writing. Exploring the work of Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein, Smith interprets how these authors’ writing interweaves positions—times, persons, and things—to dispel a central protagonist and create “multiplicity of voices from the margins.”¹⁵ Women’s writing has also highlighted aspects of embodiment, privacy, and intimacy.¹⁶ In *Women’s Autobiography* (1980), Estelle C. Jelinek considers that women may, in contrast to men, pursue and expose in their writing “a self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding.”¹⁷ Highlighting that women’s autobiographical writing troubles the central androcentric features of coherence, Sidone Smith summarizes that for women, the “conception of individuality may not motivate the most informed

11 Misch, “Conception and Origin of Autobiography,” 16.

12 For an exploration of the intersection of anthropology and autobiography, see Okely and Callaway, *Anthropology and Autobiography*.

13 See Marcus, *Autobiography*, 1–8.

14 Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 150. I cite Woolf’s punctuation in this edition rather than the version with the colon given in: Smith, “The Impact of Critical Theory on the Study of Autobiography,” 85.

15 Smith, “The Impact of Critical Theory on the Study of Autobiography,” 88.

16 Further examined in Smith and Watson, *Woman, Autobiography, Theory*.

17 Jelinek, *Women’s Autobiography*, 15.

reading of women's autobiographical texts."¹⁸ These matters of embodiment, intimacy, and relationality, as well as the interweaving of public aesthetic work and private bodily lives, even the borders of inside and outside the human body, will all be explored in the body-biographies that follow.

While the cutting edge of auto/biography studies today works to dispel earlier genre claims of male and female difference, these ideas are part of the conventions of storytelling from which dancer autobiographies may be interpreted.¹⁹ Building on critical feminist scholarship, from the early 1980s into the 1990s, more recent authors have destabilized and called into question the ideology of the essential self "that privileges individuality and separateness over connectedness."²⁰ Prior claims differentiating male and female writing have now themselves been overturned, in favor of more precise theoretical explorations of engendered acts of resistance and self-creation.²¹ What I wish to highlight from this short review is the manner in which life stories emerge in response to the normative conventions within the narrator's lifeworld. They reflect the shifting identities and norms of self-presentation that *change* over the course of narrators' lives and thus often expose these inherent societal *and* personal shifts. In this research, I sought to open a space for producing and interpreting dancers' life stories. I wished to create a platform that critically and creatively considered alternatives to androcentric autobiographical conventions. To this end, I aimed to host dialogues of mutual life review that permitted incoherences and aesthetic expressions—valuing the body and embodied aspects of the self that themselves have been disregarded and are difficult to narrate. Working with four narrators, I highlighted relationality in the research process and offered an alternative format of publishing dialogues rather than monologues.

*

To round out this discussion, I would like to foreground a few further points regarding the troubles and credibility of autobiographical reflection—both written and as oral history. Firstly, the lexical authority granted to the written word does not mean that oral autobiographical testimony has less value for the scholar or is less credible. Autobiography scholar Rolf Haubl observes that in contrast to oral autobiographical sources, written sources allow the author greater control and scope for rationalization. Comparing the two, Haubl notes: "As the spontaneity diminishes, so do the logical breaks and grammatical inaccuracies that are typical

18 Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, 12.

19 See the discussion in Smith and Watson, "Introduction," 8–16.

20 Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, 12.

21 See the discussion in Smith and Watson, "Introduction," 8–16.

of oral storytelling and often allow an insight into latent processes, strong emotions and unwelcome thoughts that are shooting off the page.”²² Because of this performative rawness, oral testimony may reveal dilemmas and contradictions among values when telling personal stories: For example, when stories reveal embarrassing, shameful, or contradictory themes that may discredit the image of the self that the narrator wishes to present. In such instances, a scholar may use this evidence of discontinuity itself to interpret the morals and values of a person’s lifeworld. Oral testimony may furthermore reveal signatures of vulnerable registers, when written control would lead to the erasure or omission of such testimony. Often these are present in the form of pauses, unanswered questions, and gaps in narrative. Oral historian Luisa Passerini has shown how: “silences and other ruptures point to aspects of experience not fully mediated by group interpretation of past events.”²³ Such gaps may meaningfully outline dreams, fears, disassociations, repression, submissions, censorship, etc.

Secondly, a frequent focus in autobiographical writing is narrating turning points and life transitions—we will discover this by example within the body-biographies that follow. Sociologist Norman Denzin describes these meaningful events as “epiphanies” that become strong narrative points for retelling the past retrospectively. In addition to positive revelations and opportunities, they may include the “sting” of painful memories, especially from childhood, in the form of lessons carried through one’s life.²⁴ Narrators may also focus on relating key turning points where life-changing decisions were made or events with irreversible consequences occurred. For dancers, these might take the form of artistic revelations. They may also include crises, migration, family-planning decisions, changes of employment status, injury, and other matters of health. Significant political events will also fall in this category. Turning points, epiphanies, and their narrations enable people to describe and rationalize the values behind the decisions that shape the course of their lives. These stories will often link past and present; narrators may even suggest alternative lifelines or decisions that might have been—for better or for worse. These are key moments for readers to learn about an individual’s major life themes and their socio-historical context. Many examples from the body-biographies will illustrate this further.

A final point of importance in auto/biography studies is credibility and truth. This has been a widely discussed topic in critical autobiography studies, particularly

22 Haubl, “Autobiographisches Erzählen,” 336. Translation by the author.

23 Smith, “Popular Memory and Oral Narratives,” 98 (reviewing Passerini, “Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism.”) On fragmentation and recursion, see Friedman, “Spiraling Desire,” 82–89.

24 Denzin, *Interpretive Autoethnography*, 28.

regarding discernment of the relationship of autobiography to fiction.²⁵ The line between fact and fiction in autobiography is often clarified by the author's intent in naming their genre (i.e. as memoir, autobiography, life story, etc.). One of the most widely cited theories of autobiography is Philippe Lejeune's, involving his concept of the "autobiographical pact."²⁶ According to Lejeune, the author makes a commitment in autobiographical writing to tell the truth, a promise that sways how the reader interprets the story—as real, not fiction. While not legal, this moral commitment nonetheless influences how people read and appreciate autobiographies.²⁷

But is it true? Not only are autobiographies artful, but today we have a richer understanding of how retrospective memories themselves become complex narrative constructions, blending individual and collective recollections. Memories may be told truthfully, and yet not be true.²⁸ Oral historian Alessandro Portelli sums it up in *What Makes Oral History Different* (1981):

But what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators' effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context.²⁹

Therefore, even when protagonists narrate with sincere intent, memories are fragile and creatively shaped in the present. Memory is subjective and must be interpreted through this understanding. Given current scholarly interest in the subjective aspects of meaning through life-narration, truth-telling evaluation may be backgrounded in scholarship favoring critical examination of *how* life stories are narrated.³⁰ To this end, Laura Marcus emphasizes that autobiography "asks of its

25 See, for example, Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," 27. Marcus, *Autobiography*, 110–122.

26 Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, 3–30. This popular theory was developed and revised throughout his life, see the discussion in: Missinne, "Autobiographical Pact."

27 Missinne, "Autobiographical Pact," 24.

28 The expansive literature on memory studies is beyond my scope here. On memory, see Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 78–105; Nordera and Franco, *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Memory*. See also, the website of the project "Mnemedance – Memory in Motion. Re-Membering Dance History," <https://phaidra.cab.unipd.it/o:449891>, last accessed November 21, 2024.

29 Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 69.

30 For example, Charlotte Linde does not focus on facticity. See Linde, *Life Stories*, 14–15. See also Summerfield, "Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice."

readers that they be open to the complexities of truth.”³¹ I will end here with this invitation, and turn now to recent dance studies scholarship.

Auto_Bio_Graphy and Dance

In contrast to the auto/biography studies boom of the 1980s, dancers’ autobiographical materials have only recently received due scholarly attention.³² Outside of dance studies, reception was delayed by the prevailing logocentrism, as well as the first canon, which focused on men’s writing and professions.³³ The current boom within dance studies reflects the provocative manner in which interpreting dancers’ autobiographical sources develops epistemological and ontological debates on dance, discursivity, and method. It is also driven by experimental artworks choreographing reenactment, life review, and representations of dancers’ identity, some examples of which I will identify below.³⁴ This interplay between written and performative sources, as well as theory and practice, positively informs the field.

Of course, life-writing by dancers dates back much further, to memoirs by dance stars of the nineteenth century, such as the publications by Lola Montez (1851) and Margitta Roséri (1891).³⁵ Dance scholar Gabriele Brandstetter, in her handbook article “Autobiography in/as Dance” (2018), highlights the complex performativity of dancers’ life narratives, which appear not only as written memoirs but also as dance solos in the modernist period. Brandstetter observes that these dance artists, entwining self-presentation and authorship, stage the dialogue of subjectivity, self-invention, and identity commonly reflected upon in written autobiography.³⁶ She also discerns that by the twenty-first century, these self-narratives in dance performance are increasingly intermedial and tension-ridden: revealing the limits

31 Marcus, *Autobiography*, 4.

32 In addition to work by my colleagues Christina Thurner, Nadja Rothenburger, and Julia Wehren and others cited in this section, further dance scholarship includes: Albright, “Auto-Body Stories”; Hardt, “Mit biographischen Quellen arbeiten”; Thoms, “Martha Graham’s Haunting Body”; Wortelkamp, “Namen und Geschichten.”

33 Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 16–20.

34 Providing in-depth analysis of artistic examples in Germany and Switzerland, see in particular Rothenburger, *Autochoreografie im Zeitgeschehen*. As three important indications of this within this broader literature, see: Franco, *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*; Ruprecht, “Tanzhistoriografie”; Wehren, *Körper als Archiv in Bewegung*. In Germany, this development is related to cultural funding from Tanzfondes Erbe for such projects (2011–2019). Ruprecht, “Tanzhistoriografie,” 369.

35 See Thurner’s list of references organized by author and chronologically. Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 227–34.

36 Brandstetter, “Autobiography in/as Dance.”

of self-knowledge and even the multiplicity of performing a self. As testament to this growing performative work, recent performances with autobiographical dimensions that linger in my memory include: Saša Asentić's *My Private Bio-Politics* (2007); Jérôme Bel's *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* (2005); William Forsythe's *You Made Me a Monster* (2005); *Becky, Jodi and John* (2007) by Becky Hilton, John Jasperse, and Jodi Melnik; Martin Nachbar's *Repeater – Dance Piece with Father* (2007); Xavier Le Roy's *Product of Circumstances* (1999); Meg Stuart's *Hunter* (2014); and Ann Liv Young's *Michael* (2005).³⁷

The dance studies project "Auto_Bio_Graphy as Performance. A Field of Dance Historiographic Innovation" (2020–2024) at the University of Bern Institute of Theatre Studies has brought new theoretical attention to dancers' autobiographical sources and their potential for dance historiography.³⁸ These materials span different mediums: Firstly, the genre of dancers' and choreographers' written autobiographies and memoirs. Secondly, autobiography in/as dance, choreography, and performance—including solo performances, choreographies for group ensembles, and installations that stage autobiographical documents, gestures, and narratives. Thirdly, autobiographical oral history interviews with dancers, a rapidly growing component of performance archives. Fourthly, sundry personal documents and archival sources, such as diaries, letters, photos, reviews, employment contracts, and videos; today this also includes digitally published manifestos and biographies now commonplace on dancers' websites. To promote consideration of these sources and their interpretation through a dance-studies-specific framework informed by autobiography research, Christina Thurner, Nadja Rothenburger, Julia Wehren, and I have named and promoted the extended concept of "Auto_Bio_Graphy." This expanded term embraces the interweaving discourses of dancers' self (*auto*) life (*bio*) descriptions (*graphy*), enabling review of how they interrelate and provide material for historical writing and analysis.³⁹

As part of my collaboration with these scholars at the University of Bern, we have published an extensive bibliography surveying sources of dancers' and choreographers' Auto_Bio_Graphy (focusing on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in English, German, and French). These provide a trove of dancers' self-narratives, dance experiences, and personal testimony of historical

37 For further examples, see Brandstetter, "Autobiography in/as Dance"; Friedman, "Oral History a Go-Go"; Friedman, "Fractious Action"; Rothenburger, *Autochoreografie im Zeitgeschehen*; Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 79–93.

38 Funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation under the direction of Christina Thurner. See also <https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/192436>, last accessed November 21, 2024.

39 Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 23; Hilari et al., "Auto_Bio_Graphical Urgencies. Vier Tanzwissenschaftliche Perspektiven."

events.⁴⁰ To develop their reception in dance studies, our scholarship has honed modes of interpretation of these sources that render their subjective and aesthetic components fruitful, rather than dismissing these aspects as inutile fictions or, conversely, reproducing eyewitness remarks uncritically. Secondly, we have encouraged field-specific dialogue on the discursive practice of dance historiography itself, exploring the cutting edge and experimental ways that history has been produced, organized, and inscribed; these contribute to scholars' heightened discussion of dance as a research focus.⁴¹

*

This book proactively produces in-depth traces of dancing lives and bodies, recognizing how dance studies scholarship has been limited by how little remains. This attention to the ephemerality of the moving, performing body and the challenge it poses to interpretation and traditional archives marks the formation of dance studies discourse.⁴² Prior to the digitization boom of the 1990s, the majority of dancers' lives left little more than a scatter of textual and image fragments in newspapers and magazines, compared to ample volumes of materials and secondary literature on ballet "big names" and prominent choreographers.⁴³ What remained was also based on the Western canon and its biases. Dance historians writing in the twenty-first century have advanced a new research paradigm, strongly criticizing prior ethnocentric attempts at "World History" and overturning genius-adoring, balletomane writing.⁴⁴ Theoretical developments in feminism and gender studies, postcolonial studies, and area studies began to redress neglect of non-Western and subaltern forms of dance, challenging prior histories that limited their view to Western "high art."⁴⁵ Carefully addressing problems of source selection

40 Castillo et al., "Auto_Bio_Grafie als Performance. Bibliografie zu Autobiografie im Tanz/in der Tanzgeschichte." See <https://boris-portal.unibe.ch/handle/20.500.12422/44522>, last accessed November 21, 2024.

41 This is summarized eloquently in Lucia Ruprecht's recent handbook article on dance historiography. Ruprecht, "Tanzhistoriografie."

42 Examples include: Giersdorf, "Dance Studies in the International Academy: Genealogy of a Disciplinary Formation"; Phelan, *Unmarked*; Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*; Schneider, "Performance Remains"; Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*; Wehren, *Körper als Archiv in Bewegung*.

43 Carter, "Destabilizing the Discipline," 120. See also, Eliot, *Dancing Lives*, 144.

44 Sachs, *World History of the Dance*; Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in Paris*; Kirstein, *The Book of the Dance*. For an overview, with valuable critique of Sachs, see Ruprecht, "Tanzhistoriografie," 366–69.

45 Bales and Eliot, *Dance on Its Own Terms*; Nordera and Franco, *Dance Discourses*; Giersdorf and Wong, *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*; Nicholas and Morris, *Rethinking Dance History*.

and limitation, theoretical framing, models of time, and scholarly authority/self-reflexivity, these new histories are written with closer regard to the testimonies and practices of the dance artists that they focus on.⁴⁶ To this end, Timmy De Laet has called for new collaborative methods for studying the recent past, working together with artists who are reenacting performance practices.⁴⁷ As one example of these types of collaboration, oral history collection has expanded dance archival holdings, while also broadening from audio tapes of interviews to video recordings in the last decade.⁴⁸ My work docks into these precedents.

Dance autobiographical sources may be legitimately contested for their veracity and authorship, as in the case of Victoria Phillips' concern for Martha Graham's posthumously published *Blood Memory*, which was developed from Graham's diary.⁴⁹ Yet dance scholar June Layson has argued that such sources, when evaluated critically, nonetheless provide "valuable primary source material for what is revealed about authors, their personal relationships, their perceptions and views about the particular events in which they were involved and the prevailing climates of opinion within which they worked."⁵⁰ Dancers' autobiographies offer insider accounts of the phenomenological experience of dance and choreography. They may yield insights into economic aspects of the profession, including memories of the daily business of dance production and rehearsal. They reference societal values and expectations, defining how dancing may address or resist these norms—of gender, class, or other modes of social performance. They provide historians with a feeling for the past, especially understanding of the emotional and moral factors that guided dancers through decisions, difficulties, and turning points. Last but certainly not least, as dance historians Susan Foster and Karen Eliot have proposed, the historian's

46 Carter, "Destabilizing the Discipline"; Carter, "Reshaping Dance Through Time." Highlighting transnationalism, see also Manning, "Dance History," 314–21.

47 De Laet, "(Re)Making Dance History Together."

48 Examples include the growing Oral History Collection of the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts, the substantial collection of the New York Public Library's Dance Oral History Project, the "Legacy" project founded by scholar Jeff Friedman at the California Museum of Performance and Design, and the digitally archived project "An Oral History of Hong Kong Dance (1950s–1970s)." For online references and a broader overview, see Wehren, "Oral History"; Wehren, *Oral Dance History*.

49 "The recovery of the book's history demonstrates that self-interested parties—perhaps not always with her intentions in mind—sanitized her elliptical poetic descriptions, excluded people (and even her desired insertions), and embellished others." Phillips, "Martha Graham's Gilded Cage," 65.

50 Layson, "Dance History Source Materials," 25.

empathetic embodied analysis of these narratives may reveal the dancer's body as the material from which dance was created and made.⁵¹

One such study, Karen Eliot's *Dancing Lives: Five Female Dancers from the Ballet d'Action to Merce Cunningham* (2007), envisions "embodied history" by developing a biographical approach to dance historiography. In contrast to history writing stratified by epoch, period, region, or dance genre, Eliot's feminist writing focuses on the lives of five female protagonists; she considers especially their roles as woman, exploring the ideological tensions they faced as female dancers, mothers, and wives in their diverse historical and cultural worlds. Interweaving analysis of primary and secondary sources—including autobiographical writings, diaries, and, when available, oral history interviews—as well her own embodied "intuition" and "empathy" as a former dancer—Eliot crisscrosses historical time and space to reconstruct and interpret these artists' dance practices and subjectivity.⁵² She describes looking at history not in the macro, but with a fine grained "microscope."⁵³ Her remapping of history along personal lifelines, exploring the textures of embodied lives while remaining attentive to the macro structures of history, is one model for biographical historiography. Working with dance elders, in my research I explore how to collaborate with living dancers to represent their biographical past on this micro scale: as Eliot writes, "dance history as it has been created on, in, and through their [the dancers'] bodies."⁵⁴ Eliot's concept of "embodied history" will be a throughline of this book, carefully considering bodies as materials, as well as expressive and social registers, giving meaning to dancing lives.

In this way, the dance autobiography genre is enabling dance scholars to reflect on a broader range of historical voices and to expand the variety of positionalities given prominence in their field. Yet the voices uncovered are still far from comprehensively reflecting the many people who become dancers and the roles that they have fulfilled in society. Dance historian Alexandra Carter has underscored how visibility and power shape our understanding of dance worlds, leaving many contributors disregarded:

We know about the big names, and we will probably never know the actual small names, but we can be alert to the notion that the dance event is produced not only by individual creative artists but by unacknowledged armies of dancers,

51 Though Susan Foster's writing at large brings the body of the dance historian to the fore, to my knowledge she does not address auto/biographical materials specifically. See in particular: Foster, "Choreographing History." See also Eliot, *Dancing Lives*.

52 Eliot, *Dancing Lives*, 6.

53 Eliot, 2.

54 Eliot, 6.

walk-ons, administrators, scene builders and movers, front-of-house, publicity and marketing people and so on.⁵⁵

Adding to Carter's list: Voices still missing in the genre of written memoirs and autobiographies include low level corps de ballet dancers, freelance dancer-choreographers, dancers working within styles and networks outside of Western stage dance, dance elders, as well as dancers in positions such as rehearsal director or teacher. Despite these many gaps, there are enough examples of dancer autobiographies and memoirs by the twenty-first century that one may consider this discourse to be a professional genre of life-writing.⁵⁶

There is no shortage of new voices being published: from Misty Copeland's *Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina* (2014), to Mark Morris's *Out Loud: A Memoir* (2019), and Ellen O'Connell *What You Become in Flight* (2020). These recent memoirs tell narratives of dancing resolutely in the face of racism, sexism, and homophobia, and even, in the case of O'Connell, achieving empowerment by leaving dance altogether.⁵⁷ As both Thurner and Eliot have shown, gender performance plays a strong role in dancers' life-writing, as they empower themselves through the written word and expose the tensions between gendered societal roles, aesthetic experiences, and their private lives. Specifically, Thurner illustrates how gender plays a special role in the autobiography of female dancers *because* the art of dance has been considered a female art of dance since the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ The body-biographies here will also be revealing of gender ideologies—unveiling how traditional binary gender roles as well as the twentieth century association of dance with femininity and queerness impacted my protagonists' perception of the profession. My need to add another form of biography to this flourishing discourse stems from a desire to deepen the self-reflexive and body-reflexive character of autobiographical analysis—something I aimed to achieve by involving my body in my research, thinking across multiple autobiographies as body-biographies.

My research on body-biographies will spiral more deeply into these debates all the way from the individual introductions to these life histories to my conclusions. Partly this is because of the role that examples play in my research. The nature of my work problematized the scale of dance-historical research by focusing microscopically on a small number of dancers' lives, concentrating on little-known rather than canonical figures. Rather than using these microhistories for the

55 Carter, "Destabilizing the Discipline," 120. See also, Eliot, *Dancing Lives*, 144.

56 Even, as Thurner argues, in cases such as Balanchine dancers, an interwoven paratext. Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 279–308.

57 Copeland, *Life in Motion*; Morris and Stace, *Out Loud*; O'Connell Whittet, *What You Become in Flight*.

58 Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 223–42.

purpose of generalization about the macro, they are intended as a much-needed form of historical supplement: exploring the communities of practice in which dance transmissions take place.⁵⁹ Body-biographies articulate the mobilities of dancers: across times and regions, paying heed to the very fine-grained materiality of individual bodies. My closeness to the protagonists, based on our teacher-student relationships, made the fine-scale and autobiographical aspects of the historian's body and life-narratives more accessible as sources of embodied history. This very personal, intimate approach is part of the growing plurality of methods within dance studies and demonstrates the theoretical potential of collaboratively working with living artists to develop dance history projects together.⁶⁰

Dance Oral History

"The *source* is alive" writes Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot in *Silencing the Past* (1995). Citing Trouillot, dance oral history scholar Jeff Friedman draws attention to the gaping holes in history where *live bodily experiences* have decayed, been disregarded, or omitted.⁶¹ Decentering the dusty, inanimate document as a source of history, Friedman has in the last decades promoted oral history as an elaborate processes of kinesthetic dialogue capable of "recuperating" the body.⁶² His research has drawn attention to oral storytelling as a method that fluidly interweaves dance and performance and triangulates with textual artifacts. In addition, Friedman has argued that the shortage of self-reflexive accounts of the past—describing embodied, kinesthetic sensations, movements, and feelings as well as descriptions of one's own and others' bodies—reflects the strongly internalized Western dualism of mind and body, as well as the dominance of visuality over the other sense modalities.⁶³ Following Friedman, I envision a dance studies scholarship that works with sensitive authority to unsettle academic conventions of disembodied writing, seeking instead to develop embodied inquiry through life-story research.

As a dancer myself, I presume that dancers live kinesthetically vibrant lives—lives that involve inward and outward reflection on their and others' dancing bodies, as well as bodies in the activities of daily life. In my prior research, I have questioned how dancers' lived experiences and embodied knowledge are

59 The term "microhistories," varies in meaning. Microhistories may be written about well-known figures, or little-known persons living in small towns or communities. For an illuminating discussion, see Peltonen, "What Is Micro in Microhistory?"

60 See De Laet, "(Re)Making Dance History Together"; Ruprecht, "Tanzhistoriografie," 369; Turner, "Time Layers, Time Leaps, Time Loss."

61 Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 29 (emphasis in the original). Cited in: Friedman, "Oral History a Go-Go," 171.

62 Friedman, 171. See also Williams and Bendelow, *The Lived Body*, 1–8.

63 See, for example, Friedman, 170.

encountered by dance scholars and inscribed in language. Seeking to enrich the sources and practices that scholars may examine to write about dance, I have largely focused on the powers of ethnography to do this.⁶⁴ For this body-biography project I turned to new terrain, asking how life story interviews and published life-writing might further provide access to these embodied memories and worlds, when they are thought of as sources that are “alive”—i.e. embodied, creative, and in process.

When dancers are learning to dance and rehearse for public encounters with an audience, they engage in rich dialogues that seamlessly interweave exchanges of movement, touch, and language. In her essay “Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre,” (Listening to the movements of another's memory) (2023), dance oral history scholar Julia Wehren describes the significance of these practices for the oral history interview. Observing the close physical proximity of interviewer and interviewee, as well as the liveness of discovery palpable in an interview dialogue, Wehren discusses how the interview will “echo” the physical transmissions of dance practice; therefore, she argues “the dimension of bodily perception and sensory experience must be taken into account as an essential component of the whole process of an oral history interview.”⁶⁵ Not only do dancers' oral history narratives suggest ways of sensing the compositional elements of their aesthetic practices—rhythm, harmony in space and time, contrast, and affects—but the oral history interview itself as a dialogue will trace intersubjective aspects—shared presence, shifting attention, even the lead and follow of duet dancing.⁶⁶ Moreover, the interviewer may, through showing respect and listening empathetically, infuse historical reflection with these relational qualities.

With the proliferation of digital recording techniques and the spread of oral history culture, dance communities, choreographic centers, and dance scholars are attracted to the possibility of recording interviews—in audio or video—as a way of enlivening history, as a dialogue between persons and between past and present. Consequently, dance oral history projects and scholarship are undergoing steady expansion.⁶⁷ As performing arts institutions acquire competence in oral history archiving, these history collections will richly transform the field of dance studies and dance education—offering dancers and dance scholars new representations

64 Waterhouse, *Processing Choreography*, 28–29. Hilari et al., “Auto_Bio_Graphical Urgencies,” 490–93.

65 Wehren, “Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre,” 4. Translation by the author.

66 Wulff, “Instances of Inspiration,” 167.

67 For an overview, see Wehren, “Oral History”; Wehren, *Oral Dance History*. Examples influencing my reading here, in addition to the previously cited works by Jeff Friedman, include: Anderson, *A Dancing Paradox*; Anderson, “Dance Overview of the Australian Performing Arts Collection”; Bräuninger, “The Oral Archive as a Form of Dance Archive”; Chernetich, “Orality at Work in the Body-Archive”; Young and Zabriskie, *Black Theater Is Black Life*; Wong et al., *The Unspoken Dance*.

of history to study.⁶⁸ Like first person autobiographic writing, first person oral testimony is accessible and inviting, especially for pedagogical purposes such as classroom discussions or introducing students to perspectives they may never have encountered before.⁶⁹

Dance oral history also holds theoretical potential. Oral history as a discipline has explicitly focused on expanding the persons whose lives are considered in history, under the adage of “giving voice” to underrepresented or marginalized persons; as Wehren observes, by foregrounding new voices, these “micro-histories expand the grand narrative, while forcing us to question it.”⁷⁰ Contrary to objective interview survey techniques in which the interviewer aims to ask standardized questions to a large sample, most oral historians today understand their work as *collaborating* on historical narration.⁷¹ Interviews are recognized to interweave verbal and nonverbal conversations—as in Jeff Friedman’s pioneering oral history interviews, during which he danced with his interlocutors, closely observing their body language. Through these processes, Friedman has shown how a discerning dance scholar may discover common metaphors, lying between narrative strategies and kinesthetic experiences.⁷²

The interview may be the final stage of the process; alternatively, a published transcript, a written oral history, or even a performance may result. Friedman has also used the creative registers of choreography to develop a kinesthetic review of history and diverse modes of publication: “oral history for/as/in performance.”⁷³ In interweaving oral, dance, and written components of life story research, my scholarship picks up on these important precedents. I clarify how oral history and life story research overlap in the next section, introducing debates in these fields and specifying their impact on my project of body-biography.

68 De Laet, “Expanding Dance Archives.”

69 Mary Luise Pratt rightly and critically situates such curricular claims within American discourses, where autobiography’s role serves “as an expressive vehicle both of individualism and an egalitarian notion of the subject.” See Pratt, “‘I, Rigoberta Menchú’ and the ‘Culture Wars,’” 39–40, here p. 39.

70 Wehren, “Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l’autre,” 5. Translation by the author.

71 Many authors have substantiated this. See, for example: Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 24–25; Portelli, “A Dialogical Relationship”; Wehren, “Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l’autre.”

72 Friedman, “Spiraling Desire.”

73 Friedman, “Oral History a Go-Go.”

Life Story Research

This section addresses the broader interdisciplinary frameworks of life story research—circling back to the writing of sociolinguist Charlotte Linde that was referenced at the start of this chapter. In contrast to *written* memoirs and autobiographies produced by the author themselves, life stories are designated by their production in *oral* conversation—including through guided autobiographical storytelling, i.e. interviews with the researcher. Scholar Robert Atkinson, in his key text *The Life Story Interview* (1998), defines the life story as follows:

A life story is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another.⁷⁴

The researcher actively elicits, ethically participates, and after the interview has concluded, becomes a custodian who makes the life story audible (through recording) or visible, in the form of a transcript or theoretical analysis. Scholars today are highly reflective and conscientious, not apprehensive of these entanglements.

Life story research highlights the constitutive power of narration, as a poetic and political act of meaning-making and the production of self-knowledge. Life stories do not merely give rich portraits of one person, these scholars argue. Rather, they manifest cultural values, such as an individual's understanding of their identity, their social position, and the events that have made them who they are. A life story will also commonly account for how one's life fits into larger frameworks, such as history and for many people, spiritual orders. Cognizant of this, psychologists, sociologists, folklorists, anthropologists, oral historians, and linguists have taken to this qualitative methodology: relying on interviews as a method to listen and record life story testimony.⁷⁵

While recognizing that life stories are culturally prescribed, Charlotte Linde views them in everyday terms as narratives exploring “what events have made me what I am,” and “what you must know about me to know me.”⁷⁶ She describes life stories as the circulating tales that individuals use to reflect and to make themselves intelligible to others. There is a script-like and acted quality to these rehearsed and accumulated stories of the self, in which fragile memories may also be stretched

74 Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 8. (emphasis in the original)

75 Plummer, “The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research,” 398. Atkinson, “The Life Story Interview as a Mutually Equitable Relationship.” For an overview of foundational literature, see Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 3–7.

76 Linde, *Life Stories*, 20.

and embellished. Narrators exaggerate to tell a good story, or to conceal painful or discrediting experiences. To differentiate life stories from other narratives, Linde emphasizes that their focus is on oneself (rather than others, history, or the world); to distinguish them from general reports of daily events, she highlights their repeatability in multiple social contexts. Linde underscores the plurality, complexity, and performativity of life stories in her definition: “A life story consists of all the stories and associated discourse units, such as explanations and chronicles, and the connections between them, told by an individual during the course of his/her lifetime.”⁷⁷ Accordingly, I conceive my body-biography inquiry with dancers as exploring this collection of shifting self- and body-narrations, studied through longstanding multi-year research using various methods (interviews, participant observation of dancing, cooperative life-writing, narrative analysis, and movement analysis).

Linde’s research in sociolinguistics has explored the forms and social strategies with which people articulate their life stories and negotiate their coherence—the nuance of sentence building, the structures of turn-taking, and the organizations of narratives. She has emphasized that life stories can be studied as speech units of varying size. While improvised in conversation, these structures have been strung together, practiced, edited, and performed on previous autobiographical occasions with diverse interlocutors. Life stories may be studied in real-world conversational environments, as recorded speech, or elicited by the researcher in formal interviews—such as those on professions that are interpreted in Linde’s study and those on the dancing body that I explore here. Linde focuses on conversation and talk, not written forms of autobiographical testimony, nor hybrid forms as I do here. Linde, drawing on Foucault, emphasizes that life stories are subject to power structures and should be studied historically and as interweaving sites of discourse articulation. Though embodied aspects of these articulations are beyond the scope of her study, my inquiry into body-biographies brings these dimensions into the foreground.⁷⁸

Pivotal Case Studies: *Testimonio* Literature

Influenced by debates about representation and research ethics, life story scholars in oral history and anthropology have become increasingly reflexive about their roles in selecting and producing these narratives of others, transforming oral testimony into archival holdings and print accounts. The ethical and political dimensions of

77 Linde, 21.

78 Linde, as a linguist, limits her discussion to discourses as speech events, and does not, like Foucault, extend the term discourse to actions without linguistic units, such as Foucault’s example of public executions. Linde, 223–24.

life stories, as well as their theoretical value, are shaped through these actions. I shall consider two examples briefly here, both from the testimonio literature. Though located in different cultural debates than my dancer life story research, these examples introduce the central discussions of research design and interpretation of life stories. Above all, they involve matters of authorship and ethics, stemming from the fact that the scholar must translate and refine the interview dialogue into a written and published text; these examples also raise the question of how narrative interpretation may be enriched, by adding the researcher's self-reflexive writing on methodology, place, embodiment—and other relevant theoretical issues. To state the key questions directly: While respecting our narrators' voices, how do we participate ethically in shaping them for broader public? How do we preserve their "authentic" testimony, while intensively reflecting on the constructed nature of the interview itself? I provide two examples to explore this.

One of the most well-known and controversial examples, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1984), presents the life story of an indigenous Guatemalan human right activist. This testimonio describes Mayan traditions and Menchú's eye-witness accounts of violence against indigenous persons. Produced through interviews with anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos-Dubray in 1982, the book is listed under Menchú's authorship with Burgos-Dubray as the editor and Ann Wight as the translator of the English edition.⁷⁹ The manner in which Menchú's life story interwove personal testimony and collective memories triggered scathing public criticism.⁸⁰ Had Menchú fabricated her life story for political purposes? Had Burgos-Dubray unconsciously facilitated or deliberately staged this fiction? Or rather, as Leigh Gilmore examined decades later, was Menchú's life story not fiction at all, but a subtle form of "jurisdiction," owning cultural memory through life-narration?⁸¹ This example raises valuable points for dance studies: Firstly, it canvasses the methodological challenges and ethical issues involved in publishing life stories, in which a private interview conversation is manufactured into a public narrative; secondly, it highlights the importance of contextualizing introductions and fact-checking; thirdly, it demonstrates the challenge involved in cross-cultural narration of a subject for an assumed Western audience, or more broadly said, narrating an "other" to a public.

Another significant example for my research, again from outside dance studies, is Daniel James' *Doña María's Story* (2000). Here, in contrast to Burgos-Dubray, James constructs a highly reflexive and relational text, representing his interview

79 Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*.

80 See Arias, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*.

81 Gilmore, "Jurisdictions." I leave the nuances of these debates to scholars with a specialty in Latin American Studies and a local understanding of Guatemala's history. Aceituro, "Arturo Taracena Breaks His Silence"; Arias, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*.

partner's life review under the anthropologist's authorial signature—the model that I take here for *Body-Biographies*. James' book has two parts. The first section presents the edited first-person testimony of Doña María Roldán—an Argentinian meatpacking laborer, militant union activist, and Labor Party member—translated and condensed from interviews. Shaping a way of reading this testimony, James notes in a preface that Roldán's "unique voice carries within it tones and lyrics imbued with the sharp outlines and the fading traces of the cultural, ideological, and moral context that Berisso bequeathed to her."⁸² In dialogue with Roldán's storytelling, the second part of the book comprises four reflexive essays written from James' scholarly perspective. These immensely thoughtful chapters position the transcript's production and historical value for understanding working-class labor and political mobilization under Peronism. James' writing combines meditation on the secrets and disclosures of his narrator, their composition, and the limits of his comprehension in the face of resistant testimonio.⁸³ Situating his embodied listening as an interviewer in the context of the cold homes of his interlocutors in the city of Berisso and the changing scholarship of anthropology of Latin American studies and testimonio, James produces a complex and self-reflexive scholarly text, negotiating the limits of memory and cross-cultural understanding.

These two examples illustrate developments in life story research since the 1990s, as it has responded to the decentering tremors of postmodernism, postcolonialism, gender theories, and critical theory, and subsequently developed forms for reflexive life stories and explorative writing strategies. In his review, "The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research" (2001), Ken Plummer highlights the genre's increasingly "reflexive and recursive" texts—the direction exemplified by James' aforementioned writing, and which I also take here.⁸⁴ Today, published life stories may blur the genres of biography and autobiography, typically through collaboration between a narrator and a scholar who begin with life story interviews, and then transform those materials into written text. The final text form may also interweave genres of ethnography, sociology/anthropology, and even fiction. Writing may also crisscross cultural analysis with reference to the scholar's life (or scholars' lives), as in the genre of autoethnography—for instance, in the works of Arthur Bochner, Carolyn Ellis, and Tony Adams.⁸⁵ These developments are still fraught with debates on the criteria for evaluating self-reflexive writing, and the problems with structuring analytic

82 James, *Doña María's Story*, 31.

83 See, for example, James, 140–41.

84 Plummer, "The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research," 398. (emphasis in the original)

85 Bochner and Ellis, *Evocative Autoethnography*; Ellis and Bochner, *Composing Ethnography*.

writing within or around more poetic or creative writing techniques. Furthermore, discussions of authorship and ethics mean this is still an exploratory terrain.⁸⁶

Sensitive to these difficulties, in the subsequent Chapter I will rethink these theoretical challenges while reflecting on my methodology. Further discussion of debates in life story and oral history research in the following section lay the groundwork for this appraisal of method.

Debates in Life Story and Oral History Research

“Skeptics might reasonably ask: At a moment when the autobiographical voice is so highly commodified—most visibly in the talk shows of Oprah and Geraldo Rivera—shouldn’t scholars write against the grain of this personalizing of culture, rather than reproduce it?”⁸⁷ While, according to sociologist Robert Miller, autobiographical and biographical sources are increasingly recognized as valuable for fine-grain readings of history and culture, especially for looking at longitudinal change, they are still often met with criticism, even when applied in the correct contexts.⁸⁸ This was illustrated in the last section through the example of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. The scholarly value of life story testimony for dance studies hinges on these wider debates regarding first-person biographical testimony as a source for historical and cultural study—or in my case for the study of dance. Critically responding to these is my focus in this section, in which I look across disciplines.

The main arguments against the legitimacy of autobiography research as sources for historical or cultural study foreground concerns that people lie, exaggerate, and self-aggrandize, so their stories cannot be trusted as credible sources. Anthropologist Franz Boas distrusted life histories for these reasons.⁸⁹ Similarly resistant, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu defined his reflexive approach as “anti-autobiography,” seeking instead critical reflection on the researcher’s habitus and stringent objectification of ethnographic data and encounters.⁹⁰ As mentioned previously, even when narrators were not deliberately lying, the subjective aspects of recalling memories and telling stories have been stumbling blocks for researchers working with life stories as data within positivistic frameworks in the social sciences.

This concern for the accuracy and facticity of first-person testimony remains legitimate. My protagonists in *Body-Biographies* wished for their life stories to

86 Providing valuable critique, see for example Hermer, “The Personal as Primary Focus.” Winkler, “Doing Autoethnography.”

87 Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer*, 25.

88 Miller, *Researching Life Stories and Family Histories*, 21–40.

89 Peacock and Holland, “The Narrated Self,” 367.

90 Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 213. Cf. Reed-Danahay, “Bourdieu and Critical Autoethnography,” 147.

be perceived as sincere and truthful dialogues on the past and the present, giving subjective accounts of lived history—not fictional and self-aggrandizing mythologies. To support this, I therefore fact-checked the names of artists, titles of artworks, and dates of key events in their narratives, and under the protagonists' supervision, edited these facts into their chapters. Evidence of further archival triangulation is found in my footnotes. Where there were ambiguities between dance history sources and the testimony of my interlocutors—i.e. when other credible sources or persons reported differently about the events they had described—I brought this to their attention. Here, rather than changing their stories, I made these ambiguities explicit through the footnotes, as has been advised for best practices in oral history.⁹¹

Beyond their factual content, academic debates around the value of autobiography—in short, its legitimacy as a source for scholarly study—have also turned around the matter of the researcher's reflexivity and their recognition of what a "life story" is epistemologically. This has been debated in terms of the "portal" vs. the "process" models to life story research.⁹² According to anthropologists James Peacock and Dorothy Holland, in the "portal" approach to life story studies, the life story is elicited by the researcher as a gateway to see and reconstruct events in cultural history. In this model "the life history is regarded as a trace of some external reality that is more important than the story itself."⁹³ This has been the approach of realist anthropologists, like Boaz, who used social survey techniques to gain access to data on cultural events. Accuracy and impartiality were deemed important to acquire objectively good and representative data. In contrast to these objectivity-seeking methods, in subjective approaches, the life story was used as a window onto the narrator's psyche and subjective experience. Drawing upon psychology and psychoanalysis, researchers working with this approach considered the life story to illustrate the psychological reality of its protagonist, which in turn was viewed as a mirror of culture.

The metaphors of life stories as "portals" onto events in cultural history, and "mirrors" of culture may still be productive categories for interpreting life stories today. However, from the perspective of recent life story research informed by cultural anthropology, earlier explorations are viewed as insufficiently reflexive about the processes through which life histories are produced, mediated, and theoretically interpreted. As anthropologists shifted from gathering life histories according to positivist assumptions, to analyzing life stories as complex storytelling processes, more reflexive research methods were developed, subsequently followed by experimental modes of publication. In this "process" model of life

91 See Shopes, "After the Interview Ends"; Shopes, "Editing Oral History for Publication."

92 Peacock and Holland, "The Narrated Self." Cf. Linde, *Life Stories*, 48.

93 Peacock and Holland, "The Narrated Self," 368.

stories, the researcher viewed the narrative fabrication of a “self” and “life” as a construction that could be explored theoretically—constituted by both the narrator *and* the scholar. In sum, according to Ken Plummer, by the twenty-first century, scholars are working at a meta-level: “less concerned with what the story tells us than with understanding the processes through which the life is composed, constructed, and created.”⁹⁴ Case studies enabling probing of the “social sources of constructing lives,” ask “from what bricolages and fragments does a person come to assemble their stories?”⁹⁵ These are very relevant questions for dancers’ life stories, which I will take up in subsequent chapters.

Overall, when we consider the interrelated debates in oral history and life story research, we find similar developments. In her essay on “Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice” (2016), oral historian Penny Summerfield discusses shifting ideas about oral history production that, since the 1970s, have paralleled the anthropological debates discussed here. Summerfield summarizes: “Oral history today is less a quest for objective eye-witness accounts in which the narrator provides the historian with data for interpretation, and more a means to engage with experience, subjectivity, and historical imagination.”⁹⁶ This parallels sociologists Svend Brinkmann and Steiner Kvale’s discussions of interview research; using rich metaphors, they differentiate between research that is like “mining” for data, (i.e. gathering information), and research that is like “traveling,” (i.e. producing knowledge through active inquiry).⁹⁷ They summarize:

The data-mining conception of interviewing is close to the mainstream of modern social sciences where knowledge is already there, waiting to be found, whereas the traveler conception is nearer to anthropology and a postmodern comprehension of knowledge as socially constructed.⁹⁸

As these metaphors clarify, the study of culture and history have become attuned to the subjective positionality of the researcher and the ethics of researching not only “about” but also “with” one’s interlocuters. This extends such work from fieldwork and interviews into the poetics and politics of *Writing Culture* (1986), as one seminal anthropological text marking a turn in these matters puts it.⁹⁹ While anthropologists and oral historians are still concerned with theoretical rigor and debating objectivity on the part of the researcher, today great attention is also being paid to reflexivity and research ethics. My research on body-biography draws

94 Plummer, “The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research,” 399.

95 Plummer, 399.

96 Summerfield, “Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice,” 1.

97 Brinkmann and Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 18–22.

98 Brinkmann and Kvale, 20.

99 Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*.

upon these important precedents and reconsiders them in the framework of dance studies.

Each paradigm of life story research points to its intention: whether to interpret history, culture, or dance as I do here. Cultural studies tend to look across space by means of traveling, whereas history looks back in time. Dance scholars may do either of these, or as I do here, look across the geographic times and places of embodied transmissions. The various scales and shapes of dance studies, as described by historian Alexandra Carter, are becoming increasingly investigative, experimental, and nonlinear.¹⁰⁰ Christina Thurner has also forecast new models of time in dance historiography, imagining time layers, discontinuous leaps, and creative gaps.¹⁰¹ The opportunity to explore lifelines as a source of history is one potential of body-biography, providing new scales and shapes of experiential time.

For the sake of discussion, my writing in this section has highlighted two contrasting paradigms: of the life story as a *portal* to study of culture and history, vs. the life story as a *process* to study narrations of the self, reflecting the mobility of its cultural and historical protagonist and their relationship with the researcher. I have highlighted that the former denotes more objectivity on the part of the researcher, and the latter greater reflexivity, interpretation, and attention to ethics. Part of this reflexivity might even warrant inspection about the extent to which historical narrative (as well as cultural understanding and aesthetic experience) can be reconstructed at all, including the difficulties of reconstructing memories.¹⁰² I recommend that the reader's close inspection of life stories be accompanied by triangulation with other sources of history, in dialogue with the interpretive framework I have outlined in the introductory texts and footnotes.¹⁰³ I view myself as a scholar-facilitator, sharing authority in dialogue with my interlocuters. Interweaving the present time and the past, the research partner and the narrator, life story research may be both evocative and rigorous.

Life Review: Training, Aging, and Injury

The age of the protagonists foregrounded in *Body-Biographies* is also significant. To introduce my narrators again: Christine Kono, born in California in 1946, is at the time of writing seventy-eight years young. Marcus Schulkind, born in 1948 in New York, is seventy-seven. Hilary Cartwright, born in Leamington Spa in the United Kingdom in 1943, is eighty-two. Chris Lechner, born in 1963 in Myanmar, is sixty-

100 Carter, "Reshaping Dance Through Time."

101 Thurner, "Time Layers, Time Leaps, Time Loss."

102 Summerfield, "Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice," 5.

103 I elaborate upon this in Chapter 2, in the section "Making This Book," 78–87.

two. While these artists rarely described themselves to me as “old,” they were all going through processes of life review. Hilary Cartwright had been asked to give interviews by multiple people, including one reflecting on her life as a teacher as an honoree for the 2023 Dance Teacher Award.¹⁰⁴ In 2024, Marcus Schulkind made a performance with three solos as a form of retrospective in Boston. Christine Kono was exploring self-discovery since her cancer’s remission and questioning the new place dance would hold in her life. Lechner celebrated his sixtieth birthday during the research process; in the last two years, I witnessed him restructuring his teaching to focus more on his practice of Fascial Yoga, including a new description of his life and work on his personal website. These personal acts of self-reflection infused my research with substance for dialogue.

Oral historian Penny Summerfield describes “life review” as: “looking back questioningly to evaluate a life as it was lived; comparisons of the self with other individuals or of the younger with the older self; and the search for self-affirmation.”¹⁰⁵ After his interview with me, Marcus Schulkind summed this up in his own words. He said we should discuss, “*what* we are doing [today], *how* we do it, and how I look at what we are doing *now* as a seventy-five-year-old person, how I looked upon it as a younger person, and . . . what are the important things now the younger people know? It is phenomenal how much change has occurred, honestly.”¹⁰⁶

I was not prepared for how deeply emotional this life review process would be, one that brought me closer to my interview partners and also gave me greater self-understanding. Interviewers should be mindful of this: both the emotional care involved, as well as the possibility of receiving back very personal, meaningful insights.¹⁰⁷ While making this research, I was “middle aged,” another phase of life where life review is known to be important.¹⁰⁸ Writing now at the age of forty-five, I am confronted by the norm that dancers cannot sustain professional labor as performers after forty; on the other hand, ensembles such as Dance On from Germany challenge this assumption, creating new visibility around the value of dancing throughout life.¹⁰⁹ Many dancers continue their self-growth and exploration throughout their lives, changing roles within and beside the dance profession: from dancer, to choreographer, teacher, rehearsal assistant, somatic worker, and healer, to name those that appeared during these interviews. I was

104 Holmes, “2023 Dance Teacher Award Honoree Hilary Cartwright.”

105 Summerfield, “Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice,” 7. Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 13.

106 Schulkind, “Body-Biography Interview with Marcus Schulkind,” March 18, 2023.

107 See Atkinson, “The Life Story Interview as Mutually Equitable Relationship”; Bornat, “Remembering and Reworking Emotions.”

108 Hamilton, *Middle Age*.

109 See Nakajima and Brandstetter, *The Aging Body in Dance*.

curious how my protagonists would articulate the coherence and explain the reasons behind their career shifts.

When reading these body-biographies, we can, as Summerfield describes, observe how life review is co-constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee. We can also listen to and learn from any contradictions that might be disclosed within. Summerfield writes:

Historians can deepen and build understanding of an individual by eliciting her subjective assessments of the value of her life, studying the sources of affirmation and denial in her account, and noting the continuities and contradictions in her comparisons with others and with her younger self.¹¹⁰

For example, in the interviews you will read of Schulkind's deep avowal of his artistic path and freedom, yet reticence about his lack of savings and status. Lechner acknowledges his shame at only realizing his privilege as a White man performing ballet later in life, and affirms the subsequent prosperity within poverty he experienced, as a nomad and improviser in contemporary dance. Kono fully encourages dance as a mode of life for everyone yet denies that she is emotionally attached to performing and expresses concern about the isolating effects of dance's professional culture. Cartwright confirms the vulnerability of her body after multiple surgeries, distancing herself from her younger drives of ambition and perfection as a ballet dancer. The interviews that follow will substantiate and "breathe life" into these matters.¹¹¹

One question I have frequently received from scholars responding to my work was why the dancers were not all the same age. Why had I chosen one protagonist, Lechner, who was significantly younger than the rest? Based in Bern, Lechner was my go-to friend for dipping into movement research. For personal and academic reasons, I was very excited to include his novel approach of moving the body's fascia (explained at length in his chapter). Also, adding Lechner allowed this collection of voices to traverse from dancers trained in the 1960s, to Lechner's own training the 1970s, to my own experience of dancing since the 1980s. I gained a longitudinal comparison, as well as one of cross-cultural perspective.

In particular, Lechner and I discussed the somatic aspects of dance training and embodiment studies, foregrounded in the study by dance scholars Melanie Bales and Rebecca Netti-Fiol in *The Body Eclectic* (2008).¹¹² These authors' observations about the increasing "eclecticism" of the American dancing body since the Judson period theorized these in terms of "deconstruction" and "bricolage," giving insight

110 Summerfield, "Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice," 7.

111 Peacock and Holland, "The Narrated Self," 370.

112 Netti-Fiol, "Somatics: An Interview with Martha Myers."

into the “messiness” of dance training, and requiring close examination of the specific process in which dancers and choreographers work.¹¹³ I was very interested to learn how Lechner’s encounters with dance techniques around the millennium in Germany and the UK would compare to Bales and Netti-Fiol’s writings and reports from sources in America as well as my own experience as an American. Furthermore, the contrast between Kono, Cartwright, and Schulkind’s applications of anatomy and somatic practices and Lechner’s, as a member of a different generation, is striking in their body-biographies, showing longitudinal shifts in body-understanding that warrant further study. Therefore, Lechner’s inclusion was crucial.

One final topic that recurs throughout this inquiry is aging, highlighting the significance of injury and illness to dancing lives. Broader research is needed to determine whether these body-biographies highlighting physical resilience and the acquisition of bodily knowledge through practices of healing constitute a general feature of professional dancers’ life-narrations, or whether they have been foregrounded here through selection.¹¹⁴ My background, as a dancer with mild scoliosis and numerous dancer-related injuries, underpins my attraction to these four teachers—all of whom have refined expertise to instruct fragile and injured bodies like my own. Before our interviews, Lechner and Kono had not foregrounded their stage injuries in their discussions with me, only their sicknesses unrelated to dance: a lung infection (Lechner) and cancer (Kono). Cartwright’s tragic slip onstage and subsequent back injury was a seminal turning point in her life story, reported in her autobiography *Dancing for a Living* (1974).¹¹⁵ I had received acupuncture from Schulkind, who refers to his discovery of acupuncture treatment after a knee-injury as one of his life’s redefining moments.¹¹⁶ These stories are retold, with new layers, within the subsequent body-biographies. We can read into these narratives the tensions of life review: revealing ageism and the lessons of personal experience. Themes of resiliency, acceptance, compassion, and self-knowledge will be central narrative elements in the subsequent body-biographies, interweaving the topics of aging, healing, and discourses of Western and other medical traditions.

In sum, by giving voice to my teachers’ life stories, *Body-Biographies* presents new impulses for dance history writing and designing dance studies research by opening personal matters to scholarly interpretation. To underscore, for this autobiographical project of life story collaborations, I have chosen protagonists with significance for *me*, whose distinct perspectives on dance throw light on various

113 Bales, “A Dancing Dialectic,” 14–15; Bales, “Training as the Medium Through Which,” 35.

114 Similar arguments are raised in this study of life stories with professional ballet dancers. See Aalten, “In the Presence of the Body: Theorizing Training, Injuries and Pain in Ballet.”

115 Cartwright, *Dancing for a Living*. See in particular her report on the injury, 94–103.

116 See <http://www.marcusschulkind.org/acupuncture.html>, last accessed November 21, 2024.

aesthetic styles and socio-cultural positions. I draw upon our existing relationships and rapport to engage in and then promote mutual life review as a practice. By means of my neologism “body-biography,” we return recursively to the body. The emotional challenges and rewards of this have already been alluded to; the intellectual ones will be grasped subsequently, troubles included.

Summary

Life stories are fascinating and complex sources for the study of dance, history, and culture. They offer micro-perspectives for understanding subjectivity and embodiment, enabling interpretation of dancing lives as “mirrors” of culture and “portals” onto history. This chapter has laid groundwork for embodied life story research in dance studies, positioning dancing subjects and dancing bodies within the cross-disciplinary currents of auto/biography research.

Advancing body-biographies as rich sources for embodied life story research, this chapter has contextualized “life story” research within the broader field of “auto/biography studies.” Beginning with the pivotal scholarship of sociolinguist Charlotte Linde, I have highlighted that life stories are *created, selected, and composed* through social interaction—*narrating and performing the self*. Referring to life stories in the plural, I have emphasized that this collection of stories shifts throughout one’s life: They are filtered and transformed across contexts of social exchange as well as changing over time, and must be interpreted accordingly as transmutable and performative gestures of self-narration.

Life stories are composed to express self-understanding, often drawing from narrative examples reflecting one’s profession, identity, and social milieu. The embodied aspects of these narrative performances are under-theorized, aside from pioneering work in dance oral history. Despite strong androcentric “hero” conventions of autobiographical literature—focusing on narrative coherence, chronology, and centering the self—today there is also great visibility to life-narratives from minoritarian voices, drawing attention to diverse examples of lived bodies and their experiences. Significant for my project of body-biographies, collaborating with living dance elders on publishing their life stories, I have highlighted both theoretical and ethical challenges in inscribing biographical writing based on oral interviews. My writing in this chapter has also considered debates on facticity, memory, and reliability—underlining scholars’ increasingly self-reflexive writing.

Growing scholarly attention is being paid to dancers’ autobiographies, in which autobiography takes multiple forms (i.e. “auto_bio_graphy”): written, oral, dance and performance. Recognizing the potential as well as the challenges of these interwoven autobiographical discourses, dance historian Christina

Turner has demonstrated their canon-critical and polyvocal potential for dance historiography—analyzing artists' changing perceptions of their self-understanding and aesthetic experience of dancing.¹¹⁷ My micro-study of body-biographies, developed with four of my dance teachers, similarly opens new perspectives for studying dance history. This research explores a fine-grained perspective into practice-linked networks of practitioners. I argue that the value of dancers' body-biographies lies not only in their potential to add new positions to our understanding of dance history, but also in helping us envision the complex temporalities and interpersonal bodily exchanges of “embodied history,” a term that I draw from dance historian Karen Eliot.¹¹⁸ Realizing this potential requires methodological approaches attuned to how dancers' share memories and narrate—i.e. *perform*—their life stories. It calls for a body-reflexive participation on the part of the researcher, carefully and theoretically cooperating with dance elders on publication of their life review.

The process of making this book is therefore reflected upon methodologically in the next chapter. Expanding the sensory and participatory dimensions of life story interviews, I invited the participants to record conversations with me about their embodied lives and to collaborate on editing this book. During recorded interviews as well as in unrecorded conversations and lessons, my teachers shared their memories of the past and reflected on their present activities in dance; we also reviewed any relevant sources in their personal archives of memorabilia—such as digitized videos, photos, scanned press clippings, and their teaching notes. To elicit conversation and stimulate memory, I brought into the interviews my recollections of dancing with them in the past as well as sources from my background research—such as photographs, reviews, and articles. These exchanges enlarged my understanding of their teaching, a valuable resource for my professional development. Beyond the personal relevance of this mutual life review, however, it is a legitimate question, “whether it is possible to obtain the distance needed to interpret one's experience with all its emotional attachments.”¹¹⁹ In the next section, I will explore this and other relevant questions within the context of interview research and the publication of oral history and life story narratives.

117 See Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*.

118 Eliot, *Dancing Lives*, 2.

119 Hermer, “The Personal as Primary Focus. Reviews in Anthropology,” 386.

Chapter 2: Body-Biographies: A Novel Methodology for Body-Reflexive and Participatory Dance Research

In “Reshaping Dance through Time” (2009), dance historian Alexandra Carter observes the growing “self-reflexivity” of dance history writing, revealed in “books that not only present the [historical] narratives but that also tackle the methodological nature of their construction.”¹ My writing in this chapter accordingly turns to the subject of methodology, elaborating on how the body-biographies presented in Part II achieved their form and theoretical focus. Although these texts (Chapters 3–6) may appear as polished interview transcripts, they are, as I shall justify in this chapter, better understood as written performances of life review developed cooperatively with their protagonists. Explaining this novel and interdisciplinary methodology is my focus in this chapter, with the intent to offer other scholars tools to begin their own body-biography projects and to further innovate methods in dance studies.²

This writing on methodology contributes to the expanding domain of interview research within dance studies. The exciting prospect of interviewing a dancer or choreographer is already a common way in which Western stage dance is framed and mediated, through program booklets, advertising, journalism, and social media. As discussed in the previous chapter, dance oral history collections are growing in number and international scope; furthermore, the dancer-as-interviewer is an emerging field within artistic research and dance documentation.³ However, this growing domain of dancer interviews has yet to be fully examined and systematically

1 Carter, “Reshaping Dance through Time,” 44.

2 See Williams and Bendelow, *The Lived Body*.

3 Some noteworthy examples include, *The Dancer as Agent Collection* by Chrysa Parkinson, http://sarma.be/pages/The_Dancer_as_Agent_Collection, last accessed June 26, 2025; interviews from Marlon Barrios Solano and other artists on the online platform Dance-Tech, <https://dance-tech.net/videos>, last accessed June 26, 2025; the podcast “Sleeping Giant Dreams” by Eleanor Bauer, <https://open.spotify.com/show/09QKhRHNp1OMOFZ7yisZ67>, last accessed June 26, 2025; and the podcast “Movers and Shapers” by Erin Carlisle North, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/movers-shapers-a-dance-podcast/id999896565>, last accessed June 26, 2025.

reflected upon, considering best practices of production, theoretical interpretation, research ethics, and formats of scholarly publication. Nor are there widely available curricular materials for teaching dance-specific interview methodologies in higher education.⁴ While drawing upon established interview research from other fields, specific frameworks for dance studies are also needed that recognize interviews as performative, embodied dialogues. This chapter begins to address these gaps, proposing methodological innovation for dance studies with broader relevance to disciplines in which bodies matter.

My writing unfolds in four sections: First, in the section, “Outline of Body-Biography Methodology,” I introduce my research through a concise overview of the research phases. In the second section, “Background: Interview Research,” I contextualize this participatory and embodied research within debates in interview scholarship, referencing the work of sociologist Fritz Schütze, life story scholar Robert Atkinson, feminist oral history scholars Kristina Minister and Kathryn Anderson, anthropologist Sarah Pink, and dance oral history scholars Julia Wehren and Jeff Friedman, among others. In the third section, “Making This Book,” I expand on the interwoven phases of my methodology outlined previously. Foregrounding dilemmas in transcription and publication, the descriptive detail of this section should appeal to graduate students seeking in-depth introductions. I conclude with the section “Theoretical Interpretation,” in which I examine the interplay between interview practice and interpretation—through narrative and movement analysis—drawing on the scholarship of life story scholar Daniel James, dance scholar Jeff Friedman, and dance anthropologist Sally Ann Allen Ness, among others, to synthesize these remarks. Together, these sections sharpen the embodied dimensions of my methodology and refine self-reflexive and performative components specific to dance studies analysis.

My arguments throughout this chapter will foreground the ethics of research cooperation with living dance artists. I present an epistemological framework for interviewing that is neither positivistic nor procedural, but rather empathetically adaptive and uniquely shaped by each protagonist. Like my understanding of bodies, body-biography methodology is relational, sensual, emplaced, dynamic, contingent, curious, vulnerable, and extended in time. Merging sensual ethnographic interviews with life review practices, body-biographies involve the

4 Related examples in the broader field of artist interviews and oral history include: Diers, Blunck, and Obrist, *Das Interview*; Imhof and Omlin, *Interviews*. In dance studies, articles by scholars addressing methodology include: Kraft, “Private Lives in Public Places”; L’Hotellier, “The Bennington Summer School of the Dance Oral History Project, 1978–1979”; Friedman, “Oral History a Go-Go”; Friedman, “Spiraling Desire”; Gore et al., “Eliciting the Tacit”; Wehren, “Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l’autre”; Wehren, “Oral History”; Wulff, “Instances of Inspiration.”

bodies of both interviewer and protagonist ontologically, rather than erasing them or reducing them to carriers of oral history. Instead, body-biographies are kinesthetic exchanges: narratives as dialogic social performances. Rather than research that prizes distance and objectivity, body-biography enables intimate dialogues to gradually become thoughtful performances of life review for a broader public, creating archival traces and scholarly texts that allow for this knowledge to propagate: becoming rigorous through exchange and critical triangulation. In sum, this chapter encourages dance scholars to continue innovating ways of bringing dancing bodies sensitively into their research methodologies.

Outline of Body-Biography Methodology

The term “body-biographies,” like “oral history,” refers both to a research practice and the written product resulting from this methodology. As in oral history research, I espouse that “practice and theory—doing and interpreting—are entwined.”⁵ Body-biography is a body-reflexive approach to life story research. It is a flexible and holistic practice that fosters collaboration between interviewer and interviewee. Each body-biography is contextualized by the scholar’s commentary and left open-ended, documenting artists’ lives and making available rich sources for further theoretical analysis. Whether published as a single example or brought together as a small case study as I have done here, body-biographies are a new opportunity for theoretical inquiry within dance studies, and, more broadly, as an exploration of bodily lives, cultural expression, and embodied history.

My body-biography research can be modeled as a process with six stages. In my practice, these stages of inquiry overlapped and blended over time, a dynamic that I will clarify later in this chapter. The outline below is intended to give a generalized overview, not to be reproduced as a procedure. In practice, this process is highly creative and adaptive.

Stages of Body-Biography Research

1. Inquiring and Designing: The first stage of research develops the author’s questions related to embodiment and autobiography. This process may include explorative life-writing focused on the researcher’s body-biography. At this stage, the selection of a narrator or small case study of protagonists is made, with careful consideration of theoretical, ethical, and technical aspects of the research. Contact with a repository for archiving interviews is advised, as is preparation of a legal agreement (see Appendix A). Additionally, background literature should be reviewed in

5 See Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 1.

preparation for the interviews, and a research trajectory for all six phases should be anticipated.

2. *Interviewing and Participant Observation*: Beginning with a pre-interview, the interviewee (or interviewees, hereafter singular) is introduced to the project topic, timeline, and publication vision. The interviewer extends an open invitation, such as: “I would like to conduct research together with you reviewing your life as a dance artist. I call this body-biography to highlight the special knowledge that dancers acquire through their decades of work with their bodies in the performing arts. We can move or dance together during these interviews. We will have ample time to formalize these stories for publication together.” A legal form is exchanged and signed explaining the intended archival recordings and transcripts of the interviews.

The life review process unfolds over multiple sensory interviews, integrating conversation and dance practice. The interviewee chooses a comfortable location for these conversations. These sessions are deliberately spaced over an extended period—at least several months to a year—to foster rapport and facilitate exchange. This extended timeline also gives opportunity to assess narrative consistency, coherence, and the intimate dimensions of body-narratives. The researcher takes the role of an active facilitator and empathetic listener, dialoging and dancing with the protagonist. Through this process, the relationship between researcher and interviewer grows closer, and the boundary between theoretical inquiry and personal engagement becomes fluid. Recordings serve to structure and demarcate the process.

The formal body-biography interview conversations are conjoined with activities that blur the boundaries of research and daily life, i.e. “participant observation.”⁶ This is comparable to the manner in which extended anthropological fieldwork and life history collection may be brought together for cultural study, exploring individual experience and its cultural context. In this approach, the researcher’s own body and self are tools for inquiry. As demonstrated in my research on the four dance artists featured in this study, participant observation may include activities such as: witnessing the artist’s choreographic work and teaching, improvising together in a dance studio, receiving mentorship, studying historical sources relevant to the artist’s practice, and reviewing the artist’s personal documents from the past (e.g., photos, press clippings, video recordings) and the present (e.g., professional or personal websites). These activities should be

6 Participant observation is a practice in anthropology, in which the emplaced researcher makes observations while participating in their fieldwork. The embodied nature of this engagement has received considerable attention. See for example, Okely, *Anthropological Practice*, 75–106; Okely, “Fieldwork Embodied.”

conducted compassionately, with time set aside for self-reflection and writing field notes. Beyond building rapport, they provide helpful situated study of the processes that transform dancing bodies over time—both materially and in terms of symbolic meaning. The researcher is thus engaged in a dual process of self-reflection and attentive observation of the interviewee's evolving body- and self-narratives.

All interviews and participant observation should be documented through detailed field notes, as is common in ethnographic practice.

3. Transcribing and Verifying: Reflexivity deepens through the process of reviewing the interview recordings. The first step is producing precise, word-for-word transcripts. These transcripts are then shared with the interviewee for verification, improving their accuracy—including the names, dates, and titles of artworks. At this stage, the researcher may invite the interviewee to retell certain life stories—particularly those that were fragmented or recounted differently across interviews—or to fill in notable gaps in the life story narration. Keeping a research diary or field notes during these review sessions is recommended, with attention to both the interviewee's evolving narratives and the researcher's own embodied engagement.

4. Drafting Life-Writing: In this stage of the research process, the focus shifts from participating in embodied life review to producing life-writing. How can the published body-biography not only represent, but analytically develop the embodied and personal exchange of life review? How can the publication present a refined and rehearsed conversation, as if performed for an audience? The researcher initiates this writing process by carefully condensing and editing the transcripts into a written dialogue. It is recommended to preserve as much of the original narrative material and sequence as possible, ensuring authenticity and demonstrating the narrator's authority.

Alongside drafting, the researcher engages in interpretative analysis of the entire collection of research materials, including recordings and field notes. This analysis informs the ongoing writing process and marks the beginning of an intensive phase of feedback and revision. Maintaining the distinct voices and theoretical perspectives of the interviewer and interviewee is critical; the researcher's voice is foregrounded in sections such as the introduction and movement analysis within the body-biography.

5. Feedback and Editing: The final stage of life-writing involves refinement and closure of the written body-biography process with the narrator. This necessarily slow process provides an opportunity to carefully negotiate how life review becomes a public text, ensuring mutual agreement on the content, tone, and style of the publication. Ample time should be allowed—ideally six months to a year—for multiple revisions and discussions. Depending on the interviewee's preferences,

collaboration may take various forms, including oral dialogue, written annotations, or co-writing.

Through these activities, prior traces of the interview drafts become cooperatively refined—even transformed—into a public script for performance of life stories. The scholar should preserve their voice, speaking beside and with their protagonist, and refrain from imposing or ghostwriting for the interviewee. Using their knowledge of dance history and biographical writing, they dialogue with the narrator on editorial proposals: selecting, cutting, and clarifying the life stories. While the protagonist remains central, the researcher's reflections—presented in introductions, footnotes, and analytical commentary—provide critical clues for interpreting and also appreciating this writing. To further integrate bodily experience into the text, movement analysis and/or descriptive vignettes from participant observation are appended. Triangulating the interviewee's story, cross-references with other historical records are added in footnotes, complicating the dance historiography and suggesting further potential for scholarly writing. Lastly, one should also dialogue about the inclusion of photographs and video stills, to bring the reader visually into the narrator's lifeworld. Because of this inventive and collaborative nature, each body-biography will take a unique form.

6. *Publishing and Archiving*: Beyond publishing the finalized body-biography, consideration should be given to the long-term preservation of research materials. This includes archiving interview recordings, transcripts, and metadata. One may also consider writing additional theoretical publications that delve into specific analytical aspects of the research questions and scholarly discourses. A performative project may also be undertaken, embodying the research materials and using choreographic techniques. In this final phase, the relationship between researcher and interviewee should also be reassessed, with regard to how it will evolve beyond the scope of the research project.

The theoretical writing that has influenced my decisions in crafting this methodology is presented in the next section, which focuses on debates in interview research.

Background: Interview Research

For this project of body-biography I drew upon my prior work interviewing dancers, as well as literature from ethnography, feminist oral history, narrative life story interviews, and sensory ethnographic interviews as precedents.⁷ What these paradigms share is an epistemological framework in which interview practice is

7 Waterhouse, *Processing Choreography*.

conceived as a *participatory* and *collaborative* process of knowledge production. This is emphasized in the citation below in the qualitative research guide *Doing Interviews* (2007/2018) by Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale:

In an interview conversation, the researcher asks about, and listens to, what people themselves say about their lived world, about their dreams, fears and hopes; hears their views and opinions in their own words; and learns about their school and work situation, their family and social life. The research interview is an inter-view where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee.⁸

Life story scholar Robert Atkinson similarly finds that the interviewer and interviewee together are “composing and constructing a story the teller can be pleased with. As collaborator in an open-ended process, the researcher-guide is never really in control of the story actually told.”⁹

This viewpoint, embracing the social construction of knowledge, may be challenging to scholars trained to pursue objectivity and distance—raising questions regarding how they should address their own involvement and social entanglements in their research.¹⁰ For example, students without prior experience of interviewing, and who tend to view scientific work as fostering objectivity, might wonder if they should plan their questions verbatim and minimize their influence on the interview, in order to gather knowledge that is reliable, factual, and consistent. Should they avoid sharing their own views and expressing bodily signals that might bias their narrator to respond a certain way—or accept their subjective participation as inevitable? Will empathy and emotional involvement prevent them from interpreting the interview? What are their criteria for interpretation and evaluating whether the interview was “good”? I will draw out further differences among interview approaches and principles for crafting and evaluating interview methodology in my discussion in this chapter.

Because body-biographies are extended over time and involve both interview conversations and participant observation, they are similar to ethnographic interviewing. Sociologist Barbara Sherman Heyl describes ethnographic interviewing in a way that aligns with my methodology; such projects involve researchers, she writes, who “have established respectful, on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views.” She adds that, in addition to this trust, there should also be “enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore

8 Brinkmann and Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 2.

9 Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 9.

10 Reviewing sociological interviewing succinctly, see Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 73–76; Brinkmann and Kvale, *Doing Interviews*, 19–20.

purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds.”¹¹ Ethnographic interviewing typically contrasts with the brevity of oral history and other forms of life story interviews, in which dialogue is limited to one meeting. Instead, body-biography interviews are conceived as a complex and participatory process of knowledge production incorporating discussions, dance practice, archival holdings, and textual publication.

The longevity and rapport of my preexisting relationships with “Hilary,” “Christine,” “Chris,” and “Marcus” were therefore integral to my body-biographical inquiry. As is expected in ethnographic work, I continued to foster and negotiate these social ties throughout this research. Between 2022 and 2024, we engaged in a “genuine exchange of views”—not only in recorded interviews, but also through informal conversation, movement practice, and collaborative manuscript editing.¹² Recognizing, as feminist oral history scholar Kathryn Anderson has written, that “traditional historical sources tell us more about what happened and how it happened than how people felt about it and what it meant to them,” I facilitated a research process designed to cultivate trust over time. This allowed for deeper discussions of the “feelings, attitudes, values, and meaning” at the core of telling life stories, creating theoretically richer and more complex narrations of embodied experience.¹³

Both ethnographic interviewing and feminist practices of oral history emphasize the ethical role of the researcher as a listener who must balance their research interests with the ethics and dynamics of live human interaction. Listening attentively creates space for rapport, and rapport adds depth and nuance to one’s discussions. Respectful transparency with one’s interviewee necessitates sharing background information about the project, its outcomes, and legal rights regarding ownership and use of interview materials. While planning questions is often advantageous, the dialogue should also be open to the emergence of new and unforeseen topics. In contrast to this, oral historian Kristina Minister describes androcentric precedents of oral history, and the negative effects that these may have in interviews:

The standard oral history frame—topic selection determined by interviewer questions, one person talking at a time, the narrator “taking the floor” with referential language that keeps within the boundaries of selected topics—denies women the communication form that supports the topics women value.¹⁴

11 Sherman Heyl, “Ethnographic Interviewing,” 369.

12 Sherman Heyl, 369.

13 Anderson et al., “Beginning Where We Are,” 109.

14 Minister, “A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview,” 35.

Minister critiques androcentric oral history frameworks where the historian dictates the conversation's flow, signaling when the narrator should speak and guiding the topics of discussion. She contrasts this with women's conversational styles, which tend to be affirming, socially connective, and empathetic—characterized by eye contact, turn-taking, responsive “hms,” affirmative “yeahs,” laughter, and joking. In agreement with Minister, I sought an interview format for body-biographies that would respect and integrate the communication strategies of my narrators as dance artists—not only with respect to gender but also the unique conventions of dancer talk.

To give one example that helps substantiate my argument: A memorable instance reminding me of dance communication conventions arose while making this book, on a morning off from the university during which I gave the company Bern Ballett their morning ballet class.¹⁵ Before the class, several dancers and I were sharing a large studio with mirrors on one side. The dancers were getting ready for their day: warming up while talking. Some were introspective, others engaged in animated conversation. They greeted each other warmly with smiles, small talk, and embraces—including hugging me as their guest teacher. Throughout their conversations, they stretched, fidgeted, and used bands, balls, and other fitness devices. They often looked at themselves in the mirror and even had conversations while making eye contact through it.¹⁶ Emotions were visibly shared. They laughed together and consoled each other. At one point a dancer plugged his smartphone into the speaker system and gave the room some electric dance music; the mood of music infiltrated the conversation.

This example of studio interaction among young professional dancers in Switzerland highlights that dance settings have distinct norms for communication, which of course vary depending on context and dance style. Instead of androcentric oral history conventions, professional dancers—accustomed to spending extensive time together in groups in dance studios—engage in conversations attuned to attentional, sensual, and spatial dynamics. Nonverbal aspects of communication, or paralanguage, are critical for building rapport. Instead of sitting down, dancers position their bodies dynamically in conversation and use them both as fidgeting tools and thinking resources. Unlike conventional oral history interviews, where participants sit still and engage in frontal, directed conversation, dance workplaces encourage embodied, fluid interactions. Though dancers are certainly familiar with traditional interview norms from television and social media, their everyday communicative practices emphasize what Minister calls “intersupport.”

15 This company, under direction of Isabelle Bischof, has a repertoire of contemporary dance works. The dancers' daily training alternates between ballet and contemporary dance technique classes.

16 This is described similarly in Wulff, “Instances of Inspiration,” 167.

In these interactions, overlapping remarks, sounds of encouragement, laughter, and gestures become a social form to collectively move the conversation forward, enhancing social bonds as topics become clarified. This contrasts with androcentric conventions, “where utterances from those not possessing the floor are regarded as attempts to take it over.”¹⁷

Anthropologist Helena Wulff, who trained in ballet, observes similarly that ballet dancers exhibit distinctive communication patterns compared to nondancers she has also interviewed. She remarks that having a dance background as an interviewer can also be advantageous. I quote at length:

So there we were, me asking questions and a dancer responding in an attentive yet flexible tone. Contrary to most other interviews I have conducted, I could sense the dancers’ trust and how they reach out for me. There was a give and take and exchange just like in dancing. They were trained in partnering. . . . When I was interviewing ballet dancers, many of them, again, related to me *as if we were dancing a duet* together. For me, Bourdieu’s (1977) body hexis was activated, and I was reminded of my bodily memory of having danced classical ballet. It is important that the dancers were aware of this as dancers see themselves as different from other people, often misunderstood. My dancing past made them trust me and accept me as a part of their setting.¹⁸

Similarly to Wulff above, my own memories of dancing also resurfaced in my body-biography interviews. As my case studies will illustrate, I performed these memories rather than holding myself still, reinforcing the co-constructed nature of storytelling. These embodied dimensions of the interview process are theoretically valuable for dance scholars, as they highlight how dance practices shape the sensual field of interviewing. Like Wulff, I argue for viewing the inter-action of the interview through the lens of performance and dance, as a narrative interweaving the logics of practice-based dance knowledge as well as the surrounding storytelling discourses familiar to the narrator and interviewer.

Another scholar who has drawn attention to these kinesthetic dynamics is dancer and dance oral historian Jeff Friedman. Like Wulff, Friedman has argued that interviews with dancers should be analyzed regarding how their embodied storytelling relates words and body language.¹⁹ He has also highlighted the documentary value of using an interview framework as a context to record dancing practice and performance. Friedman fully embraced his own bodily participation in his life story interviews by dancing with his informants and choreographing performances that reflected on these oral history conversations—an advancement

17 Minister, “A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview,” 33.

18 Wulff, “Instances of Inspiration,” 167. (emphasis in original)

19 See in particular Friedman, “Oral History a Go Go,” 182.

that guided my own approach. Like Friedman, I recognized the improvisatory nature of oral history and its potential for including movement. When my interviewees danced, I also moved with them. I attuned to their pauses and energy shifts, recognizing moments where my own life review might elicit theirs. While the time-intensive nature of writing body-biography absorbed me, leaving no time to choreograph a lecture-performance, my work considers the page as a place for performative life-writing, as the examples of body-biography in Part II substantiate.

Beyond pioneering dancing together with his interlocutors as a foundational component of dance oral history and dance documentation, Friedman has also advanced dance studies frameworks for interpreting oral history interviews. Overall, he has argued for understanding dance oral history “AS performance, FOR performers, IN performance”; theoretically, this entails scholarly attention to oral history *as* embodied performance, i.e. as knowledge created dynamically *in* performative cycles of embodied dialogue and interpretation, and, as a practice of knowledge production relevant *for* dance artists, not only dance historians.²⁰ Spiraling into these analytical threads, the final section of this chapter unpacks how Friedman’s performative turn to oral history informs the theoretical apparatus of body-biography, in particular through movement and performance analysis. Given its importance, this topic requires an expanded treatment, better accomplished after this introductory section of literature review. Having highlighted the participatory and collaborative nature of interviews and outlined the specific challenges and affordances of collaborating with dance protagonists, I shift now to other recognized narrative approaches to interviewing that focus explicitly on autobiographical testimony.

Autobiographical Narrative Interviews

This section focuses on the autobiographical narrative interview approach developed by German sociologist Fritz Schütze (1983) and *The Life Story Interview* (1998) research of American developmental psychologist and scholar Robert Atkinson, respectively.²¹ While differing in their theoretical backgrounds and practices of interviewing, both have significantly advanced research on autobiographical interviewing in German- and English-speaking contexts.

The narrative interview method, established by Schütze and further developed by scholars such as Roswitha Breckner, has played a significant role in shaping German oral history research and underlies the work of my archival partner, the

20 Friedman, 192. (emphasis in original)

21 Schütze, “Biographieforschung und narratives Interview”; Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*.

Oral History Projects at the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts.²² Schütze's methodology centers on oral narrative rather than embodied dialogue of the kind I have explored in this project. The interviewee selects a location where they feel comfortable sharing their life story. At the outset, the interviewer reiterates the research goals and process steps: explaining that the project aims to document biographical narratives, inviting the interviewee to describe, in any manner, what has shaped them into the person they are today. The interview can either cover the entire life story or focus on specific phases relevant to sociological inquiry.

The interview unfolds in three phases. First, the interviewee is given time to narrate their life story without interruption; the interviewer provides only nonverbal affirmations—small facial gestures and sounds of listening—without directing the conversation. Once the interviewee concludes, the interviewer moves to the second phase: follow-up questions designed to elicit further narrative, but not yet analysis or interpretation.²³ These questions advance through close, interpretive listening: inviting elaboration, for example, when narration thinned or stopped suddenly, or in response to stories that appear “vague” or “opaque,” or even events when there was a “lack of plausibility” or, conversely, over-justification. Schütze instructs the interviewer to be alert for abridgements or omissions by the speaker intended to avoid matters that are “painful, stigmatizing or problematic in terms of legitimation for the narrator.” Schütze is conscientious that while the speaker's evasion of certain themes may be deliberate, narrators may themselves also be searching for meaning and can benefit from having multiple opportunities to rephrase their narratives.²⁴ The third phase of the interview shifts toward reflection and analysis, as the interviewee is asked to interpret their own life experiences.

The narrative interview is a rigorous process that demands exceptional interviewing skill and the ability to build rapport with strangers. Before reflecting further on the values of this approach in relation to my own research, I will first examine Atkinson's methodology.

While also invested in the narrative potential of interview research, Atkinson's focus on life stories is more holistic than Schütze's and allows for greater flexibility and researcher involvement.²⁵ The outcome is not instrumentalized for sociological analysis but incorporated into counseling and archival collections, in addition

22 See Wehren, “Kleinteilige Strukturen und globale Einflüsse,” 94–95; Breckner, “Von den Zeitzeugen zu den Biographen.”

23 Svašek and Domecka, “The Autobiographical Narrative Interview”; Schütze, “Biographieforschung und narratives Interview.”

24 Schütze, “Biographieforschung und narratives Interview,” 285. Translation by the author.

25 Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*; Atkinson, “The Life Story Interview as Mutually Equitable Relationship.”

to scholarly research.²⁶ The interviewee selects a comfortable setting, and the conversation unfolds with frequent friendly prompts from the researcher. Atkinson describes the interviewer as a “guide” and “listener,” allowing the protagonist to take the floor but assisting with gentle prompts such as “Where would you like to begin the story of your life?” or “What did that mean to you?” and “How did that make you feel?” His book includes an extensive list of potential questions to facilitate storytelling.²⁷ Atkinson insists, however, that these interviews are not conversations in the conventional sense. The roles of interviewer and interviewee remain distinct: The researcher is there to listen. They should ask questions purely in the service of the other person’s life narrative. In the publication phase, only the narrator’s words are printed, ensuring that their life story takes center stage. Still, Atkinson sees the process as a “mutually equitable relationship,” emphasizing that the researcher also undergoes personal growth through their role as a custodian of life review.²⁸

Both Schütze and Atkinson provide effective frameworks for gathering life narratives in one or two sessions. Their methods may offer psychological benefits to interviewees, including catharsis and self-understanding. What the narrator will share or “perform” for an interviewer is influenced by the prevailing atmosphere of the interview and level of trust achieved, as well as psychological and identity factors—for example the influence of the scholar’s perceived gender, age, social class, education, values, etc. Because the timeframe of these interviews is limited to a few hours, the narratives are highly condensed, placing pressure upon the speaker to select themes and create coherence. Schütze’s follow-up questions engage directly with discontinuities. Yet in such limited frameworks, will narrators have the time and trust to report truly sensitive stories or reflect anew on life’s ruptures and paths not taken? I had doubts about the efficacy of these methods to record complex and unconventional stories, especially about personal matters pertaining to dancing bodies. The briefness of these processes, however, do render them efficient for explorative research or larger studies involving an extended group of protagonists.

Drawing upon these precedents, I conceptualize body-biographies as a significantly slower, extended, and more intimate approach to autobiographical narrative interviewing, informed by the embodied trust of existing relationships based on dance transmissions. Rather than eliciting life stories in a single session, I worked over multiple interviews, included participant observation, and extended the study into processes of cooperative life-writing. The three stages of Schütze’s rigorously interpretive model were stretched into a multiyear process; Atkinson’s ample questions were extended into a series of conversations. My involvement

26 This archive is at The Center for the Study of Lives at the University of Maine. Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 5.

27 Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 31. See the questions on pages 43–53.

28 Atkinson, “The Life Story Interview as Mutually Equitable Relationship.”

in these narratives was undeniable: I was entangled in them through my own past and present relationships. This positioned me uniquely to interpret bodily knowledge and specialized vocabularies that conventional interview techniques might overlook. Furthermore, I used my observational skills as a practicing dance artist to elicit embodied knowledge and memories in the framework of the interview.

Would Schütze and Atkinson's methods even uncover embodied narratives? And if they did, how would they support their interviewees in making them public? My research design allowed for deeper engagement with stories of bodily experience—particularly those that signified or challenged identity through injury, vulnerability, shame, and trauma. Such narratives required time, trust, and a collaborative approach towards the generation of coherence. Additionally, because bodily experiences are often relational and articulated through shared memories, a more extended and participatory methodology was an advantage.

As a dancer interviewing my own teachers, I worked carefully. Asking the question of how they became the person they are today with the body knowledge that they currently possess, I remained open for all sorts of answers. It was clear to my informants that I did not enter this relationship with therapeutic competence, only an empathetic ear. Interviewer silence, as required by Schütze, would have been counterproductive. It would have stifled conversation and obstructed memories that were inherently relational and embodied. But what kind of listening did I seek?

Rapport Between Bodies Listening

Dance scholar Julia Wehren brings extensive experience of interviewing dancers into her particularly sensitive approach to oral history. Working in partnership with the Swiss Archive for the Performing Arts, Wehren has predominantly interviewed dance elders with whom she had no prior relationship, in conversations informed by Roswitha Breckner's narrative interview protocol.²⁹ Using the formality of a video-recorded interview as a structured space for listening to an elder's autobiographical performance, she achieves deep rapport. Wehren has described her approach to listening as an interviewer as follows:

Sometimes, memories only emerge during pauses and moments of silence. As a researcher, I try to understand why the interviews took place the way they did. I listen with the utmost concentration, while maintaining eye contact and sensitivity. When I talk to the dancers, my attention is focused on the movements of their thoughts, the paths and logic of such a personal narrative, the gestures and mimicry, the reactions to my listening, the choice of words, the tone, the melody,

29 See footnote 22.

the narrative arcs, the strategies of the performance in which I'm involved. I hear how words flow, reverse, stop, interrupt, circle, wander. The mutual trust of the whole team involved is essential if the spirit is really to be one of sharing.³⁰

Like Wehren, I prioritized deep listening, but I also embraced embodied participation. When my interviewees moved, I moved with them. I attuned to their pauses and energy shifts, recognizing moments where my own story might elicit theirs. In contrast to an asymmetric one-sided interview conversation, my experience aligned with oral history scholar Alessandro Portelli's concept of a "deep exchange." He describes this as: "the multiplicity, doubling, and role reversal between observer and observed, interviewers and interviewees, narrators and narratees, in a multivoiced dialogue."³¹

Being sympathetic as a listener is vital. As oral history scholars Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack argue, a sensitive interviewer listens not only to what is said but also to the "moral language" of the narrator.³² This means attuning to the values embedded in their storytelling: the justifications and critiques they offer, and the emotions woven into their voice and body language. I applied this principle by listening to the content of my interviewees' stories while also paying close attention to how they narrated their experiences with their voices and bodies. When did they use moral language? Why did their voices waver, speed up, or change in intensity? What gestures punctuated moments of vocal pause? What stories or events most activated their bodies? Why did their gestures shift into a different movement repertoire or change significantly in their dynamic qualities? When did they consciously demonstrate dance? What other movement repertoires reoccurred and permeated their narratives?

Beyond these embodied observations, I also paid attention to the structure of their storytelling. I listened for temporal shifts and time leaps: for example, when they commented on the past from their current perspective. I paid attention to "meta-statements," moments when interviewees stepped outside their own narratives to comment on their life stories.³³ I listened to how the narrator judged and offered explanations of their reasons for action or for others' behavior. I noted inconsistencies or gaps—places where a thought seemed to be circling back, as if trying to find coherence. At times, my own interruptions inadvertently disrupted a narrative flow; in reviewing transcripts, I recognized instances where I had clearly misunderstood or prematurely shifted the direction of conversation. These moments of imperfect listening, however, underscored the inherently dialogic

30 Wehren, "Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre," 7. Translation by the author.

31 Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 73.

32 Anderson and Jack, "Learning to Listen," 24.

33 Anderson and Jack, 22.

nature of storytelling. Interviews, like dance improvisation, are co-created in real time. A conscientious listener learns to participate in their partner's storytelling: listening, prompting, and responding—imperfections and all.

Wulff's interpretation of dancers' interviews as duet-like echoes my own observations. Dancer talk, as I have emphasized previously, draws upon competences learned in dance practice. Interviews activate dancers' trained capacities to be alert, present, and to sense others' attentional attunement. The attentional give and take—the lead and follow of duetting—was palpable in the interview; my first interview with Lechner was even enriched by his curation of partnering exercises.³⁴ Based on my own training as a dancer, I applied this dancing knowledge to be a sensitive interviewer. My task was to firstly to initiate (i.e. lead) conversation through questions, but then to actively follow (i.e. listen and respond to) the life stories of my interlocutors: As in dance partnering, this can be described as a processes of “leading-following.”³⁵ Unlike the strict silence required of the interviewer in Schütze's narrative interview framework, I valued the role of a leading-follower: giving priority to the narrator's storytelling, while actively keeping the improvisation going, through my nods, embodied participation, and turn-taking. Our shared attention and presence could also then emotionally transform into various moods, following the energy of life review processes and their extensive demands on both interviewer and interviewee. Developing a framework to fine-tune the sensory and kinetic dynamics in the interview, in the following section I elaborate further on the potential of sensory interviewing.

Situated Sensory Interviews

Both Schütze and Atkinson recognized the importance of place in autobiographical interviewing, underscoring that the setting should be comfortable for the narrator. Other scholars have furthered this involvement of sensation and place more explicitly, especially anthropologist Sarah Pink. In *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009/2015), Pink devotes a chapter to rethinking the precedent of the interview as a recorded verbal conversation. She highlights that, regardless of whether the interview is conceived of as sitting or in motion, both the interviewer and the interviewee, “*continue to be* active participants in their environments, using their whole bodies, all their senses, available props and the ground under their feet, to narrate, perform, communicate and represent their experiences.”³⁶ Pink advocates that the researcher harness the full sensory potential of the interview by

34 See “Chapter 6. Chris Lechner,” in the section “A Movement Lesson,” 302–7.

35 I have written elsewhere about this term, adapted from the writing of dance artist and philosopher Erin Manning. See Waterhouse, *Processing Choreography*, 166.

36 Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 78. (italics in the original)

communicating to the participants that they are not required “to simply sit still and talk.”³⁷ This reminder is especially important when interviewing dancers.

Meeting in a location of movement practice and changing into dance clothes are simple rituals that help to break the convention of interview stillness. As I have demonstrated through my example of dancers warming up at Bern Ballett, communication in artistic contexts is inherently multimodal and interactive; it draws upon the space, objects, music, and especially the physical presence of other bodies. These serve as prompts to memory and expression. For this reason, for the project of body-biographies I chose to let my narrators choose places where they would feel comfortable: in a dance or yoga studio, or in the case of Marcus Schulkind, in his acupuncture office. A movement studio facilitated the emergence of verbal and nonverbal dialogue (including dancing, teaching, demonstrating, or marking) and provided space for these interactions. The room itself could also serve as a prompt for storytelling—for example Schulkind’s discussion of the photographs of dance and specialized imagery for acupuncture on his office walls.

I was interested in examining how dancers narrate the development of their sensual capacities over the course of their lives. From my studies of dance and yoga with these artists, I had learned firsthand how to feel my body and attune to the environment, in manners that go beyond a five-sense model—including modes such as the sensation of breathing, internal perception of anatomical landmarks, perception of body-temperature, proprioception, and buoyancy or weight-sensing in gravity. Their classes had already produced my body with sensual attunement to these possibilities. The life story interviews afforded further opportunity to discuss these embodied experiences. I took time and offered my body and memories as a resource to develop this knowledge in words.³⁸

This dynamic approach to interviewing not only deepened the trust between me and my interlocutors, but also expanded the kinds of knowledge that could emerge—in contrast to the sit-down interview and its pressure to speak coherently. Where Schütze’s structured narrative elicitation might have prioritized narrative coherence and sociological categorization, and Atkinson’s guided storytelling might have supported personal meaning-making, a sensory approach created space for embodied, affective, and relational forms of knowing. By extending the interview process over many months and by participating bodily in the exchange, I was able to explore not only what my interlocutors remembered, but how they remembered—how memory lived in their bodies, in their movement, and in the shared intercorporeal space between us. In the following section, I will examine how this approach informed the process of translating these embodied narratives into

37 Pink, 79.

38 For comparable discussion of sensory ethnography outside of the field of dance, see: Pink, 80–81.

writing, and how the interplay of movement, memory, and storytelling shaped the final form of the published body-biographies.

In summary, across this section, I have examined diverse theoretical approaches to interview-based research, focusing particularly on life story narratives and sensory ethnography. Drawing on Schütze's sociological method and Atkinson's flexible life story interview frameworks, I have highlighted the ways in which narrative emerges within the specific constraints of an interview setting. My approach, however, differs from these "disembodied" models by incorporating embodied, participatory, and sensory dimensions—a critical shift when working with dancers whose life stories are deeply entangled with bodily practice. The methodology of body-biographies, as I have argued, necessitates a slower, more immersive process than other interview techniques, cultivating long-term relationships of trust and mutual exchange. As in ethnographic interviewing, I also use interviews in conjunction with participant observation. This process is care-intensive, extended in time, and personal, which also makes the research process challenging to evaluate and formalize in writing. Drawing on Jeff Friedman, I have highlighted the performative dimensions of oral history conversations and the potential for considering life-writing as a performative text. Having theoretically motivated my interview research of body-biographies, in the next section I shift focus from doing interviews and making participant observation to the process of publication.

Making This Book

At the start of this chapter, I provided a general sketch of my methodology, while stipulating that this "procedure" was highly interpretative and adaptable. In this section, I dive into the minutiae of making body-biographies. Not only was my research emergent to the specific protagonists involved in this project, it also dynamically generated research materials and media—in the sense of audio-visual interview recordings, interview transcripts, and fieldwork notes—as well as experiences perceived through my dancing and aging body. By creating and reflecting on these traces of life review, the embodied life story dialogues with my teachers were gradually assembled and cooperatively inscribed into print. In this section, I deepen my reflection on the interweaving phases of making this research.

Interviewing and Participant Observation

The life story interviews for this book were conducted in Bern, Paris, and Boston between September 2022 and April 2023; these were followed by collaborative life-writing and feedbacking until September of 2025.³⁹

Following best practices in oral history, I provided each narrator with a legal agreement permitting the interview recordings and transcripts to be archived at the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts (SAPA).⁴⁰ After the interviews, I also distributed a survey to collect basic biographical data that had not emerged organically in conversation—such as family history, as well as residential and immigration timelines. This was done after the interview to ensure that these details did not bias the narrative.⁴¹

My approach to interviewing involved thorough preparation, beginning with research into my interviewee's life and the development of a questionnaire. While I deliberately never read verbatim from this questionnaire during the interviews, the preparation helped me to enter the conversation with greater confidence and directions for follow-up questions. To support my role as an interviewer, I also developed a general repository of life story questions for dancers, which is included in Appendix C. This expansive questionnaire was designed to frame a dance studies-specific approach to life story interviews. Modeled on Robert Atkinson's guide to life story interviewing, it adapts his questions to key phases of a dancer's life and career.⁴² Rather than adhering strictly to these questions, I prioritized open-ended prompts and allowed the dancers' narration to shape the flow of the interview, ensuring that each conversation unfolded organically and centered the speaker's reflection.⁴³

Each dancer's interviews generated five to seven hours of recorded conversation, supplemented by video recordings when permitted. To remove the need for an obtrusive microphone pack or electric cables, I used two light wireless microphones, commonly employed by fitness podcasters. This ensured freedom of movement while maintaining high-quality audio in the interview. To maximize intimacy, I worked without a film crew, opting for a low-tech SD video format. In retrospect, I would recommend lightweight smartphone technology with HD capacity, to improve image quality. My framing choices prioritized a wide shot that

39 The specific dates, locations of the sessions, and references for the recording and metadata are provided in the introduction of each body-biography chapter in Part II.

40 See Appendix A.

41 See Appendix B.

42 Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*, 43–53.

43 While further elaboration is beyond my scope here, those new to interviewing may benefit from the comprehensive manuals produced outside of dance studies. For example, Yow, "Interviewing Techniques and Strategies"; Yow, *Recording Oral History*.

foregrounded the interlocutor while including myself in the frame, as seen in the screenshots included in Part II.

A defining characteristic of body-biography is the blurred boundary between interviewing and participant observation.⁴⁴ To support each narrator's process of life story narrative, I actively engaged with their ongoing artistic work and teaching. I participated in Cartwright's teacher training for Yoga Narada® and attended her Zoom lessons regularly; I attended Lechner's open classes in Bern; I took Schulkind's classes when visiting Boston, and danced with Kono when I visited her in Paris. By observing while immersing myself in their transmission processes, I was able to bring their movement vocabularies into our interviews and life-writing.

My research process also incorporated verification. I cross-referenced our discussions with dance history books, newspaper articles, and materials from the narrators' personal archives of reviews and photographs. While Cartwright, Kono, and Lechner had limited documentation due to the international nature of their careers, Schulkind—who had scanned materials for his job review at the Boston Conservatory—shared digitized reviews of his dance company, stamped with his company logo. Reading these together spurred additional memories. I also read Cartwright's autobiography, her Yoga Narada teaching manual, and her published testimony about the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.⁴⁵ Kono shared with me her teaching notes, and I uncovered some interesting articles about her teachers. Lechner and I reviewed his collected photographs. Additionally, I consulted their personal websites, discovering public biographies on these pages that I could further interrogate and integrate in our life-writing.

This multi-faceted approach—combining interviews, participant observation, archival study, and movement engagement—created a rich, participatory research process. Through these dialogues and embodied experiences, I found my own kinesthetic awareness recalibrating, and I poured this shifting perception into my fieldwork notes.

44 Referencing this overlap in other scholars' work, see Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 76.

45 Cartwright, *Dancing for a Living*; Crabb, *An Instinct for Success*.

Transcribing and Verifying

Interview Excerpt: Chris Lechner and Liz Waterhouse, Bern, September 9, 2022

Chris Lechner [00:51:42]: But this game works beautifully with the center, too. That actually we are . . . (We practice, audibly sharing weight and breathing – 8s) Yeah. (We practice – 8s)

[. . .]

Liz Waterhouse [00:52:47]: No, I . . . We did [in The Forsythe Company]—Partnering was always the whole body.

CL: It is in the end then.

LW: Right.

CL: Obviously.

LW: And it was then . . .

CL: That becomes then intelligent. All over what we're doing just locally.

LW: Right.

CL: The brain here (points to head) spreads everywhere.

LW: Right. That was a big step from student to . . . (3s pause, we continue practicing)

CL: (Overlapping) . . . kind of advanced.

LW: (Overlapping) . . . professional.

Transcription was a crucial step in creating body-biographies. Producing accurate word-for-word transcripts is a labor-intensive, time-consuming, and subjective process—particularly in my interviews, where paralinguistic features and overlapping speech were significant, as demonstrated in the excerpt above. The scholar must define priorities and make interpretive choices. Oral history scholar Lynn Abrams reminds us: “it is rare that any one transcript will please all possible users.”⁴⁶ The transcription approach I utilized was developed in collaboration with my archival host, SAPA, and followed best practices in oral history.

Beginning with automated transcription using the online software sonix.ai, the transcripts were then corrected manually word-for-word.⁴⁷ All turn-taking in conversation was marked, with additional markers for overlaps and pauses. Direct speech was punctuated in quotation marks. We choose not to transcribe my overlapping sounds of encouragement—my frequent “hms” and “mms” were omitted—when nothing additional was said. We marked significant changes in vocal stress and volume. We recorded approximately 50 percent of paralinguistic

46 Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 14.

47 I am very grateful to our project assistant, David Castillo, who transcribed these interviews. Castillo's background in sociolinguistics and dance studies was ideal for both the attention to linguistic detail as well as comprehension of the dance-specific terminology.

vocalizations, as greater accuracy is highly time-consuming for the transcriber and can be off-putting for the narrator. However, incomplete sentences were preserved, especially when they indicated hesitation or difficulty articulating a thought. Gestures and movements were noted very roughly using parentheses, as illustrated in the transcript excerpt above. In separate files, I described the movement interactions from memory with richer analytic language.⁴⁸ Triangulating to credible sources such as published books, journals, and encyclopedias, we verified the spelling of all referenced artists and artistic works, adding dates where possible to enhance accuracy.⁴⁹

Once the transcripts were completed, I returned them to my narrators for verification and follow-up discussions. This offered them an opportunity to review both the audio recording and the transcription. Naturally, this process led to new dialogue. We assessed the stories they had presented, revisited topics that had been overlooked or misunderstood, considered omissions, and reflected on the overall tone and narrative form. In this way, the interview dialogue organically extended into the life-writing process. Some of these discussions generated new stories, which were similarly recorded, transcribed, and integrated into the writing process.

The intensive labor required for transcription—far exceeding the duration of the interviews themselves—can lead to a scholarly attachment to these documents. I remained mindful that while transcripts were very important historical records and prototypes of body-biography, they were not the ultimate object of my analysis. My research involved a broader process of embodied life review, and the transcripts were but a means to this end. They served three valuable functions. First, lodged at the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts, they provide an accurate record for future scholars to study my interviews on site, giving access to the unedited talk.⁵⁰ Second, they enable analytical interpretation: indexing themes, cross-referencing narratives, and examining narrative structures. Third, they functioned as provisional texts for further collaboration with the dancers in shaping our conversations into a book manuscript. Again, I was cautious not to mistake the transcript for the embodied interview encounter; it was just a representation, and an odd one at that. The quiet, disembodied nature of transcription had not evocatively captured the performative, kinetic, and relational aspects of our discussions. For this, my physical memory and fieldwork notes remained valuable interpretive tools.

48 Because of the interpretive quality of this writing, I chose to keep it separated from the transcript.

49 We did not footnote these references in the transcripts because of the time involved. These points could be considered in future projects.

50 Only Marcus Schulkind requested for two short instances of sensitive material to be removed from his recordings, which we complied with. The materials are otherwise complete and unedited.

After completing the transcription work for the SAPA archives, I transitioned into drafting life-writing. Passages of interview conversation, such as the one reproduced at the start of this section, were revised for clarity (as the reader can confirm by turning to Chapter 6).⁵¹ The complex decision-making involved in this editing is considered in the next section.

Drafting Life-Writing

Those familiar with interviews will know the shock of first encountering a transcript of what had felt like a coherent discussion. On paper, what emerges is often a fragmentary mess: incomplete thoughts, with rambling and stuttering elocution. The transcript is rarely flattering. The polished, full-sentence paragraphs we read in publications are the result of many editorial decisions. As Raphael Samuel writes in “Perils of the Transcript” (1972), “People do not usually speak in paragraphs, and what they have to say does not usually follow an ordered sequence of comma, semi-colon, and full stop; yet very often this is the way in which their speech is reproduced.”⁵² Samuel further cautions, “The historian ought not to impose his own order on the speech of his informants.”⁵³

While these cautionary remarks are essential for creating authentic transcripts that respect the narrator’s distinct voice, the messy nature of oral testimony also limits the readership of these narratives. My protagonists had no desire to portray themselves through the imprecisions of oral speech; I too was quite embarrassed to publish my own digressions and stammering. Samuel is correct to caution scholars from rewriting oral narratives to meet their own academic standards, without the consent of the speaker. When the narrator is willing to collaborate, however, I advocate using the transcript as a prototype and collaborating on revisions together—with readers of dance studies and dance historiography in mind. Linguists and other dance scholars seeking the authentic interview recordings and transcripts can still study them directly in the SAPA archive.

To create these body-biographies, I began by “weeding” the interview transcripts: omitting unnecessary stuttering, repetition, and connecting words such as “so” and “and.” I then corrected glaring grammatical errors and removed mitigating speech, such as “sort of” and “kind of.” When incomplete sentences seemed significant, I highlighted them for the speaker to revise themselves. Thematically, I preserved the order of narration while condensing and organizing the material into titled sections. Small, isolated anecdotes that were not repeated elsewhere were removed, though I kept a record of these extractions in case they

51 See “Chapter 6. Chris Lechner,” in the section “A Movement Lesson,” 302–7.

52 Samuel, “Perils of the Transcript,” 19.

53 Samuel, 21.

needed to be reinstated. Finally, I drafted paragraphs that highlighted anecdotes and thought progressions.

I imagined this work as akin to the delicate gestures of an archaeologist who, over months, carefully brushes away debris around a fossil without fully knowing its contents, origin, or shape. Through these micro-edits, the narrative shapes of larger life themes gradually emerged. Content became clearer, and some narratives could be slightly restructured—particularly those interrupted by my questioning or interwoven across multiple interview sessions.

As this storytelling gained clarity on the page, I returned to the audio recordings. Listening closely through my headphones, I paid greater attention to vocal qualities: How could I convey the sound of the interviewee's voice? What was its speed and inflection? What emotional undertones could I hear? Did a bright, energetic vocal quality signal excitement or hope? Did a dry, subdued tone indicate disappointment? Could I translate these vocal nuances more effectively into words? Borrowing from scriptwriting techniques, I added vocal annotations in brackets, enhancing the script with tonal intent and emotional inflection. I did this especially in cases where irony was present—when the manner of speech contradicted the literal meaning—subtleties that could not be captured in a transcript alone. An unexpected effect of this meticulous study was that I memorized their voices. I could read my first drafts and hear their voices in my head. The “grain of their voices” had been transferred to me and with this a sense of bodily empathy.⁵⁴

In developing the performative life-writing of body-biography, I questioned how to translate these vocal qualities, with their affective capacities and intensities, into the written text. Rhetorical shifts such as pauses, rhythmic phrasing, and repetition lent the narratives a performative or poetic quality. Speakers sometimes shifted from chronological or descriptive storytelling into more reflective or evaluative registers, using gestures or a change in vocal dynamics to underscore moments of personal significance. These devices were not merely ornamental; they served as embodied strategies for remembering. They also guided my attention as a listener and brought me into their narratives empathetically. Attending to these shifts helped me better understand how my protagonists shaped meaning in the moment, blending linguistic and corporeal expression to create a textured, expressive account of their dancing lives.

It was equally important to recognize when to stop drafting and instead return to my collaborators for feedback and revisions. While my ability to perceive detail in interpersonal communication was intellectually enriching, the life stories also needed to be shaped for the written page—a distinct medium with its own compositional tempo and energy. Ethically, it felt necessary to let my narrators shape

54 Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice.”

how this adaptation of their life review into writing would unfold. Similarly, oral historian Lynn Abrams cautions:

Without rejecting the need for accurate transcription, especially if one wants to undertake an analysis of linguistic and paralinguistic elements, one should not equate obsessive *accuracy* with the ability of the transcript to convey the *meaning* of the speaker.⁵⁵

Thus began a process of collaboration, finding a final form for publishing our embodied life review.

Feedback and Editing

In this section, I reflect on the phase of body-biography after the initial life story interviews have been made and transcribed. This involves theoretical evaluation of the material and collaboration on life-writing with dance artists. The guidelines I developed for this theoretical review are highlighted in the subsequent subchapter.

This is the most challenging phase in terms of care work and the ethic of collaboration: One has to balance adherence to one's research questions and agenda as a dance scholar with respect for the protagonist's knowledge and their desire to shape their own public self-presentation. Learning from a demanding experience of receiving feedback in a videoconference session—during which one of my narrators disoriented me by giving me cryptic feedback and then insisted on retelling their stories for nearly two hours—I began to develop a gradual process. First, I requested feedback upon short texts—one or two life stories at a time—to build rapport and to learn what my protagonists found important in print, in terms of content, tone, and style. How much authentic speech could they tolerate? Did they prefer to rewrite their testimony? How did these new life stories fit with prior tellings? I was not merely accommodating; I also explained why I thought specific sections should be included or omitted.

Immersing my collaborator in the writing process bit by bit, I allowed the draft to materialize in pieces before we examined it again as a whole. To gain perspective on the overarching life themes, we then engaged in sessions where we revised and refined the full text—including a final version with my contextualizing content. Depending on my interlocuter's preference and experience, feedback was given orally, through handwritten notes, or via digitally shared drafts. While disagreements arose, our gradual approach to shaping a print project made negotiations manageable. Perhaps this is also because I had taken the time to engage deeply with their lifeworlds—including physical dance and movement practice.

55 Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 13. (italics in the original)

Dance oral historian Julia Wehren has undertaken a similar project, involving extensive collaboration with Swiss dance artist Fabienne Berger on a joint publication of her oral history. Wehren's recent article reflecting on this collaboration and reviewing her work interviewing dance elders in Switzerland is titled "Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre" (Listening to the movements of another's memory) (2023). In this essay, Wehren explores the particularity of the domain of dance oral history.⁵⁶ She describes how joint evaluation of an oral history interview with the mutual intent to edit and publish within a scholarly framework may productively extend the dialogic interview dynamic over time. Wehren also observes how this collaborative labor blurs notions of a historical "source" and its process of historiographical evaluation—innovating her textual understanding of "sources" for dance history writing. Consequently, Wehren shares my regard of the importance of transparency within the research process: as part of the research ethics of maintaining rapport with a dancer-interviewee and also with the purpose of deepening historiographical evaluation.⁵⁷ Working similarly to Wehren through extended interview techniques that are alert to embodied narration, I value these remarks on how participatory and collaborative interview dialogues may blend into life-writing. Part of my work for *Body-Biographies* was to discover modes of writing that would allow these processes—and their contexts—to be more transparently published—while ensuring that my narrators' embodied storytelling remained central.

Another aspect of my work was bringing together different writing elements. The body-biographies in this book are presented as a constellation of texts, each composed of five elements: 1) an introduction in academic prose contextualizing the narrator's career biography, our relationship, and the process of life review; 2) an extended dialogue reviewing "life stories" that foregrounds the protagonists' voice in conversation with my own; 3) supplemental introductions and movement descriptions written in my own voice; 4) footnotes that provide references, clarify terminology, and explain significant collaborators; and 5) fieldwork vignettes, drawn from movement lessons and dancing together. This structure emphasizes the distinct storytelling and lived experiences of each narrator—as well as the individual creation process of life-writing. Emerging from interviews, participant observation, as well as study of various other documents of embodied history, these body-biographies can thus be interpreted as *written performances of embodied life review*. The scripts select and compose dialogues carefully from our rehearsal of life stories, polishing them like a creative act of preparing dancing for a public audience. The writing consciously develops a compositional tempo, dramatic energy, and

56 Wehren, "Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre." See also Berger and Wehren, "Comment cette matière de vie devient autre chose."

57 Wehren, "Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre," 8.

layered meaning, woven through gestures, words, and vocal nuances. These scripts give space for their narrators to perform their selves, while also allowing their secrets and modesties to remain private. As several narrators reflected, it was fascinating to see these texts mirroring their lives back to them. The stories would certainly have emerged differently if they had been told at another moment, or to another person.

As underscored in the acknowledgments section, I reflected on how to best recognize authorship in this collaborative work. By placing the four protagonists' names in the subtitle of this book, I highlight their contributions and enable their stories to be found. My position as an author indicates the theoretical audience of dance scholars and the responsibility I took in shaping this public form of biographic bricolage. Based on my prior ethnographic work, I saw my cooperation with my protagonists as a respectful form of working together, continued until both parties felt satisfied that our life review and publication had reached their course. I was a textual custodian, translating and assembling print and reviewing it together. Not mere editor, as Hilary Cartwright told me: I was pouring my heart into these texts.

Scholars reading this writing might still be questioning how I interpreted the interviews: according to which categories, theoretical questions and frameworks for analysis? In the final section of this chapter, I outline these interpretation strategies, showing how they permeated the different stages of my methodological process.

Theoretical Interpretation

In the introduction to my methodology that began this chapter, I underlined the extensive interpretive components of making body-biographies. My writing has emphasized that theoretical analysis and ethical relationships develop throughout the methodological process of researching. As in oral history and anthropological research, my study of body-biographies also upholds that theory and practice, documenting and interpreting, researching embodied practices and theoretical writing are entangled.⁵⁸ This creates numerous challenges for the researcher. Foremost among them, the extensive care work of live collaboration may prove difficult, as may gaining distance for the critical and inscriptive side of this pursuit. Researchers may also experience discomfort in reflecting theoretically on their own body and activities in their scholarly writing; they may also struggle with resistance from protagonists who are uneasy about exposing their vulnerabilities—where private themes and ambiguities in their self-presentation become subject to scholarly analysis and the public gaze. Bringing embodiment doubly into the

58 Ample texts substantiate this. On oral history, see Abrams, *Oral History Theory*. On anthropology, see Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*.

analysis as topic and tool requires sensitivity and the expansion of scholarly frameworks.

Arguing that life story narration is embodied and performative, my work advances a dance studies approach to theoretical interpretation. I interpret dancers' life stories by interweaving sensual narrative analysis of storytelling in language and movement across sources of interviews, participant observation, and life-writing. Carrying this analysis into composing the poetics of life-writing, my intent was to reflectively shape an aesthetic form for each individual's body-biography—one that would evocatively describe our bodies and dance aesthetics within life story narration, while also showing the challenges in bringing embodiment into the foreground: the gaps, discontinuities, contradictions, imperfections, and obscurations. The following sections on narrative and movement analysis provide concluding perspective on this theoretical process.

Narrative Analysis

Telling anecdotes is known to be culturally and professionally determined, as well as heavily influenced by gender and age. Narrators grant oral history narratives coherence and composure by referencing existing storytelling traditions, techniques, and tropes appropriate to the topic—whether dramatizing, inserting, resisting, or contradicting existing narrative models learned through socialization. Historian Daniel James synthesizes:

Access to such models is generally assumed to come from the literary forms and genres found in the various expressions of popular culture and literature. More fundamentally, it has been argued that a repertoire of certain basic narrative forms is part and parcel of an individual's experience of the social world.⁵⁹

While Western dancers certainly share common cultural narrative forms that exist in literature outside of their professional field, it was my expectation that dancers would also tell life stories in ways specific to their profession—using storytelling modes learned within the communities of practice for certain dance styles, schools, and choreographic workplaces. In dance studies, there has been limited consideration of these topoi. In her pioneering research on dancers' autobiographies, dance scholar Christina Thurner observes that these texts offer complex self-descriptions of changing artistic identity; themes such as emancipation and freeing or fighting for the self may be staged, for example,

⁵⁹ James, *Doña María's Story*, 160. See also Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story."

through dramatization of the story of discovering dance.⁶⁰ Additionally, in my case studies I also observed the following themes pertaining to common career phases: first encounters with dance, the trials and tribulations of dance education, lessons from professional experience, finding a peer group, the pressure to gain status (as choreographer or teacher), lessons from injury and illness, challenges of work-life balance, changes of life vision in middle age, views of aging, and judgments on current dance practices today. Thurner also highlights in her theoretical research that dancers' autobiographies contextualize aspects of identity such as gender and race, as well as society's views on aging—providing perspective on how these change over time.⁶¹ This is also true in these body-biographies, in which I contributed to these important discussions as an interview partner.

In their body-biographies, my narrators intermixed chronological and associative narratives that sprang back and forth in time and place. Narrators jumped in time, from descriptions set in the past to talk about the present: comparing and reflecting, and frequently mixing tenses. This narration can be reflexively enhanced in subsequent life-writing, using guidelines such as those I have assembled here (Box 1). Asking narrators to reconsider these time leaps and refine them into more conventional print-narratives may add rich reflexive content to their stories.

Interpretation should also attend to the shadows within the story, in the forms of silences and omissions. Historian Daniel James underscores the importance of these tensions:

One of the richest interpretive veins that can be mined in studies of life stories lies in probing the relationship between key narrative patterns aimed at creating coherence and continuity and other elements that clarify, obscure, make more complex, or simply leave in the tension-laden coexistence of contradictory themes and ambivalent meanings in an account of a life.⁶²

One of the most challenging aspects of life story research ethics is balancing theoretical rigor and the care work inherent to the intensive collaboration to determine how to represent elements that obscure simple narratives—such as a coherent or favorable self-presentation—within the life-writing phase of research. In these four body-biographies, each dancer's resilience in phases of injury or illness became a theme enabling them to speak about the difficulties of their careers as dance artists—about pain, abuse, power, and vulnerability. Also, influenced by common narratives of aging and ableism, they described how they lived and

60 Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 63–78.

61 Thurner, 223–79.

62 James, *Doña María's Story*, 165–66.

performed aging in relation to these conventions—whether resisting or adapting their activities. Extending life review in time helped to develop the rapport necessary to approach and hence to publish these important perspectives.

The extensive physical and familial toll of the lifestyle of being a professional dancer suggested unexplored topics in the shadows. These life stories contained gaps around the topics of family planning and having children. Some of my narrators left out or minimized the roles of important ex-partners who were also dancers and choreographers. Few stories foregrounded pain and bodily numbness, perhaps because these memories are too difficult to remember or too painful to retell. While each narrator brings these themes to light individually, together they reveal frictions between the ways that bodies are, on one hand, materializations constrained biologically and by socio-historical formations, and, on the other, emergent personal stylizations realized through aesthetic practice.

Finally, an important theoretical factor in life story research is the effect that the published life story will have upon other people. In an important sense, any self-narrative is not only a story of oneself; rather, it is a story produced through reflection on others and their actions. Biography is therefore an account that makes one vulnerable to the response of others, whether in critique or refutation.⁶³ While reference to famous others can bolster the status of one's story, narrators may also give thanks or lay claim to status that might have been disregarded. We may experience these tensions in the individual narratives of Part II, as the dancers reference members of dance history well-known in the canon while also trying to lend visibility to important others, whom they believe are less well-known, but still significant to their lives.

Bringing these theoretical topics into my research of body-biographies, I developed an interpretive matrix (see Box 1) that influenced my drafting and editing of my collaborators' life-writing. Above all, I highlighted the primary narrative themes I observed in triangulation between the life story interviews and my practice-led participant observation—while working with my narrators to include the difficult topics, contradictions, and shadows.

63 Gergen and Gergen, "Narrative and the Self as Relationship." Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story."

Box 1: Narrative Interpretation

Content

- What themes and topics are brought up in the life narrative?
- What themes and topics have been omitted?
- Are there explanations that the narrator focuses on?
- What explanations have I imposed through my questions?
- What conventions within this person's community shape their storytelling? How do they draw upon or rewrite them? Are there any contradictions?
- What are the themes that bring together different life phases and provide closure/continuity of the self? Conversely, what themes show ruptures, multiplicities, and discontinuities?
- What morals are illustrated? Through which emotional structures, or aspects of vocal and physical performance, are these morals performed?

Composure

- How are the anecdotes within the life stories structured to form the overall life story narrative? Is there a key narrative or model, for example a key issue in self-representation, that other stories continually adhere to or rebut?
- What vocal performance and embodied rhetorical strategies do the narrators use to draw attention to and illustrate their stories?
- What gives weight or drama to the story?
- Are there norms and/or stereotypes that the speakers draw upon that reflect the discourse of the dancers' communities, inflecting the telling/drama/ tone of their stories? (For example: That they must hold the interviewer's attention—that they should be “entertaining” “polite” or “intelligent”? That they should sit up straight and maintain eye contact?) What expectations do they project upon me as a listener/researcher and how do these norms also influence the telling?
- To what extent is there narrative coherence?
- How are the more difficult/painful aspects told? Do we see explanations or silences?
- Are there significantly misremembered aspects?
- In which ways does my invitation to explore the bodily/kinesthetic aspects of biography impact the narrator?

Movement Analysis

The previous section has explored how life story narratives recompose and creatively adapt the professional, gendered, and cultural conventions of autobiographical narratives. In this final section of my methodological review, I conclude with a broader discussion of how scholarly attention to embodiment may be enhanced within life story research with dancers. Drawing on dance studies analysis, I describe ways of interpreting bodies, movement, and performance within this research process. I also illustrate the benefit of cross-referencing interview analysis with participant observation beyond the interview context and composing autobiographical life-writing collaboratively. Throughout this chapter, I accentuate that the researcher's body and memories should be viewed as an active component of inquiry, not only sensitive to research ethics but also rendering embodied aspects of practice and history theoretically accessible. Here I build closely upon prior research by Sally Ann Allen Ness, Jeff Friedman, Sarah Pink, and Penny Summerfield, as elaborated below. My writing has three parts, exploring "Participatory Movement Analysis," then "Sensory Dimensions of Interviews," and finally "Embodiment and Laban Movement Analysis."

Participatory Movement Analysis

My approach to movement analysis drew upon existing scholarship by dance anthropologist Sally Ann Allen Ness. In Box 2, I summarize key principles of Ness's movement analytic framework, as I have understood and applied it, indicating categories of analysis and the tone of analytic writing that emerges from this standpoint.

Ness's interdisciplinary approach, blending dance studies and anthropology, constructively debates the difficulties and mistakes in scholarly writing about movement.⁶⁴ She views human movement as a cultural process that is temporally and contextually emplaced—consistent with a praxeological approach. She theoretically demands that scholarly inscriptions of movement are reflexively composed to discern movement's plasticity, precisely drawing on modes of writing that reflect the singular participation, context, and shifting social position of the scholar. Participatory movement analysis may include the practitioner's preferred oral language for describing their movement, while also opening a dialogic space for learning between the analytic standpoints and terminologies of practitioners and scholars. Therefore, unlike the goal of notating a choreography or describing a performance, the interest is to learn about the forces, contexts, and variations of praxis—about movement's ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Dance teachers are well equipped from their years of teaching to describe

64 See Ness, "Being a Body in a Cultural Way."

transformations of movement education that change and build skills, attitudes, and aptitudes—consistent with the participatory approach. I tapped into these competences frequently in my interview questions, listening carefully and learning through my body.

Box 2: Participatory Movement Analysis after Sally Ann Allen Ness⁶⁵

- The movement description is written in a “temporally complex or *plastic*” manner, not in a present-tense grammar without temporal context. Rather than using present perfect or declarative mode, the analysis should show movement’s plasticity: writing in a conditional subjective or even a futuristic mode.⁶⁶
- The movement analysis is contextualized. The movement is shown to reflect the specific context of its enactment, including other movers, space, clothing, props, onlookers, and materials.
- The movement analysis describes individual bodies and persons. It does not generalize or assume movement to be generic or originating in specific parts of “the” body.
- The movement analysis explores and differentiates aesthetic experiences of moving, co-moving, performing, and spectating. If appropriate, interpretation may describe all of these: inner sensations of movement kinesthesia, the movement’s dynamic form, and its affects.
- The movement description should not assume or conflate what individual movers think or feel while moving. Opportunities to dialogue with the dancers may give key testimony about their motivations and experiences of movement. Talk and experience are not assumed to be consistent; it is the work of the analyst to question how these fit together.
- Movement should be described not only teleologically but also in terms of its contingencies and causes.
- In addition to movement ideals in performance and pedagogy, the researcher should be equally interested in learning about possible difficulties, failures, and mistakes.
- The analysis may be written in a “how-to” character. This means interpreting not only how the movement appears but also how it emerges from a set of conditions and competences.⁶⁷
- The author should examine the extent to which movement is singular or generalized and abstracted in terms of general vocabularies or concepts for interaction.

Using the criteria of inscribing movement in Box 2, I embraced movement analysis to learn how dance practices have shaped artists' experiences of their and others' dancing bodies; in addition, I asked how dancing persons develop specific somatic and reflective competences to remember and describe dancing bodies as well as their bodies in daily life. My own autobiographical reflection with my dance teachers was seminal to sharpening these analytic dimensions—involving critically reflecting on their influence in constituting my aesthetic understanding of dancing and my body. My focus and criteria are further exemplified in the following sections, beginning with discussion of sensory registers.

Sensory Dimensions of Interviews

Over the course of this chapter, I have highlighted, after sensory ethnographer Sarah Pink, that interviews with dancers should be perceived as sensory contexts in which narrators communicate in relation to their own bodies and the body of the interviewer: sensing the floor or chair supporting them, the space, and the interviewer's attention—all in order to communicate, demonstrate, and persuasively perform their life stories.⁶⁸ Developing this more precisely, in this section I describe the different registers and scales of embodied storytelling, clarifying how they offer insight into logics of sensation and aesthetic practice.

My attunement to and study of these interrelated and synergistic registers is summarized in Box 3. Beginning with vocal performance, I used the interview recordings to study how breath and bodily support of the voice were recruited for narration. I also noted paraverbal aspects of communication, listening carefully and repeatedly. During the interviews themselves, I examined micromovements of conversation that were visible to me but were not examples of consciously danced movements: in particular, postural recruitment/shifts and facial expression. I paid close attention to the speaker's hand gestures, which drew from their aesthetic practice and social conventions. Lastly, I looked in depth at the key moments in the interviews in which dancing or reenacting embodied knowledge took place. To study these interweaving levels, my analysis took one of two forms: firstly, looking cumulatively to articulate the speaker's general personal repertoire and communication style, and secondly, focusing on the instances in the narrative when important exceptions to this personal repertoire were made—performative moments of drama or meaningful rhetorical change within the storytelling. All of these I attend to in a multisensory way, not only through visual description. I expound further on the registers outlined in Box 3 to clarify these different modes

65 Ness, 131–37.

66 Ness, 137. (*italics in the original*)

67 Ness, 137.

68 See Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 78.

and their sensual composition. Since vocal performance is transparently described in the introductions to each body-biography, I focus on the remaining three levels.

Box 3: Sensory Movement Registers in Body-Biography Interviews

- Vocal Performance
- Micromovements of Conversation
- Hand Gestures
- Episodes of Dance and Movement Practice

At the most granular level, micromovement analysis considers the subtle actions that accompany speech, reflecting the speaker's somatic awareness and ongoing sensory engagement. These gestures—such as when dancers casually play with their hands and hair, stretch, or lightly massage the body—function unconsciously as a tactile means of staying present and thinking through motion. I studied these movements live during the interview and again when reviewing my video documentation. Shifts in posture over time, including stretches or changing seating position, respond to physical asymmetries and stiffness, revealing individual body sensation and habitus—reflecting prior injuries and surgeries. While not always tied directly to narrative content, these postural changes express an ongoing negotiation between bodily comfort and interview participation. Likewise, facial expressions—smiles, ironic looks, or moments of visual withdrawal—can dramatize difficult content or mark shifts in emotional tone, while changes in gaze (e.g., looking away or directly to the interviewer) signal processes of memory, visualization, or internal focus. All of these, therefore, I highlighted in my introductions and within key compositional moments in our dialogues. They evoke for the reader the embodied registers of listening to these artists.

Gestural repertoires in life story interviews give insight into aesthetic practices and socio-cultural positions. Dancers bring with them skilled movement vocabularies shaped by dance, longstanding physical training, and their teaching practices—as well as the appropriate socio-cultural conversational patterns for people of their age, gender, and class. Schulkind, for example, drew upon very different shrugs and rhetorical hand gestures (such as pointing and counting) than Cartwright, who often recruited gestures from her Yoga Narada® to tell her story. These hand gestures may serve didactic or illustrative purposes—modeling anatomical concepts or internal sensations—or function mimetically to represent objects, actions, or spatial relationships. Gesture phrasing and effort qualities may shift in relation to narrative tone: from soft, internal, and cyclical modes to direct, impacting, or emphatic actions. The floor can become an interactive surface—touched, pressed, or traced—as a way of grounding or emphasizing

speech. Descriptions of key gestures in our dialogues illustrated how embodied memories aim to bring the listener empathetically into the story and serve rhetorical purposes creating life story coherence.

Beyond describing these gestures for my readers, I was particularly interested in highlighting significant moments when dance practices or sensory engagement explicitly appeared in the interviews: When we conscientiously began to demonstrate or use our bodies to explain sensations, or to remember. These significant episodes are primary evidence for scholars asking how dance is remembered, experienced, and passed along. For these sections, I wrote participatory movement analysis in the first person that described my participant observation of the protagonist, based on my experiences in the interviews and subsequent study of the recordings. My notes presented complex kinesthetic memories: in the present, between two persons, reflecting on the past. Though unable to record these ephemeral passages objectively and completely, especially with a dual regard for myself and my speaker, this writing ensured that our moving bodies left a vital trace. To emphasize the importance of these moments, they are italicized in the life story dialogues. In the following section, I clarify my approach to movement analysis more specifically.

Embodiment and Laban Movement Analysis

Embodiment has been a central concern within dance scholar Jeff Friedman's approach to oral history. Friedman has introduced new possibilities for studying dancers' oral histories through the lenses of cultural phenomenology and Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), demonstrating in his case studies "how individuals use embodied experiences to ground and articulate their consciousness of the world around them."⁶⁹ Advocating for an embodied turn to oral history, Friedman's existing research is foundationally important for my inquiry.

Friedman's study of embodied narration may be compared to what Penny Summerfield has called "composure." By this, Summerfield refers not only to the "psychic equilibrium" that an interviewee may experience when reflectively sharing oral history, but also to the compositional means by which their narratives are crafted, as I have highlighted in the previous section on "Narrative Analysis."⁷⁰ While Summerfield does not include the aesthetic qualities of dance and choreographic practices in her analytic framework as a historian, these are richly exhibited in life story interviews with dancers.⁷¹ Logically, dancers draw upon conventions of "dancer talk" and aesthetic notions of well-made compositions and performances

69 Friedman, "Spiraling Desire," 79. See also Friedman, "Oral History a Go-Go," 172–82.

70 Summerfield, "Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice," 9.

71 Supporting this claim, see also Wehren, "Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre." Wulff, "Instances of Inspiration," 167.

from their backgrounds as artists during oral history and life story conversations. They enact the qualities of posture, attention, and social courtesy that are valued within their communities, performing these in a conscious way for the next generation to remember them by.

As I have explicated in the previous section, these contributing aspects of vocal performance, gestures, bodily recruitment, and movement are leveraged to create coherence and dramatic impact and to afford further insight into aesthetic practices. The researcher may even investigate these consciously by emplacing the interview in a dance context and co-moving or partnering within the interview, as I do here. Jeff Friedman also attuned to these aspects of embodied storytelling by dancing with his protagonists. In his scholarship and choreographic work, Friedman innovatively explored choreographic and compositional aspects of motion in his oral history interviews, focusing on key moments of rhetorical poetics as well as figural narrative motion—both of which I will give examples of below. Friedman's research has also highlighted the importance of triangulation: comparing aesthetics of movement within his narrators' dance practices with their actual gestures and figurative narrative motions in oral history interviews.

I offer one case study analysis to illustrate Friedman's manner of closely reading movement, performance, and embodiment as integral to dance oral history. In his interpretation of American dancer Terry Sendgraff's interview testimony, Friedman resisted his scholarly urge to chronologize; instead, he learned to decipher spiraling stories within her oral narration and understand them as echoes of the kinesthetic experience of three-dimensional space in her aerial dance technique, *Motivity*. He argued that the narrative erotics of queer autobiographical narratives, such as Sendgraff's, resist normative narrative chronologies and spiral in search of their own expression. He detected evidence for this in narrative fragmentation, as well as narratives coiling recursively in time, as Sendgraff creates "her own coherent connections among diverse temporal and locational differences."⁷² In this, Friedman makes apparent Sendgraff's resistance to normative dance training—showing her evolving experiences of movement aesthetics and refinement of her own practice.

To come to these conclusions, Friedman draws on his training in the comprehensive framework of Laban Movement Analysis. This framework gives insight into the dynamic world of movement interpretation: enabling perception of the speaker's movement effort (towards space, weight, time, and flow), phrasing, and body shape.⁷³ Using Laban Movement Analysis to study the nonverbal aspects of interview conversation, Friedman observed cognitive schemas and metaphors that corresponded with his interviewees' dance

72 See Friedman, "Spiraling Desire," 84.

73 See Maletic, *Dance Dynamics*.

practices.⁷⁴ He also asked his interviewees directly during their conversations to articulate their own understanding of their movement: wishing to bring this tacit knowledge explicitly into language, to the extent that this is possible. Friedman recognized that the narrator's movement description is likely to be different from the interviewer's, even when both are dancers. Using his ability to interpret choreography as a spatiotemporal field of rhythm, gesture, and communication, Friedman contemplated his narrator's speech and movement during the interview itself—enabling his readers to discover with him the multiple meanings of these kinesthetic registers and movement vocabularies.

Building on these precedents, my research also drew upon my background as a dancer and training in LMA.⁷⁵ Like Friedman, I looked comparatively at the movement aesthetics of the dancers' practices and interview performance—considering their movements during the interviews as well as the figural rhythm, speed, structure, and dramatic arc of their storytelling as a composition. I observed carefully the Laban motion factors of intentionality towards space, weight, time, and flow, and looked punctiliously at the dancers' phrasing—discerning general personal repertoires as well as important rhetorical changes in motion factors.⁷⁶ One challenge of using LMA, as Friedman himself has acknowledged, is that while it is a rigorous system for studying movement analytically, it does not reflect the learned and individual ways that bodily knowledge is developed through dancers' personal biographies. Therefore, dialogue between LMA approaches and individual articulations of meaning are necessary to learn how movement and bodily understanding are constituted through praxis. Citing how my teachers had instructed me to interpret and perform movement, I drew upon these personal memories, as well as my background in LMA, to enhance our dialogues with these multiple perspectives.

By conceiving body-biographies as performative life-writing rehearsed through research encounters between a dancer and a dance scholar, I aimed to bring interpretive attention to my narrators' gestures, bodies, and affects in my sensual writing, wishing to further expose the dimensions of embodiment that marked each narrator's stories. One challenge in the writing process is finding a form for this on paper. Embodied narration is rich with meaning, and interpretation risks overexplaining or diluting what is already concisely poetic in live storytelling—a gesture or facial expression is worth a thousand words. In my work, I developed three strategies: First, in the introductions to each body-biography, I highlighted the bodily qualities of the speaker's paraverbal communication, micromovements, and

74 See Friedman, "Oral History a Go Go," 179, and the discussion on 172–182. See also Friedman, "Spiraling Desire."

75 I was educated in this system during my Master's studies at The Ohio State University.

76 See Maletic, *Dance Dynamics*.

gestures that made their storytelling unique—giving readers a sensual picture of how they spoke and moved together with me during our interviews. Second, within the printed dialogues, I inserted descriptions of seminal examples of embodied narration and highlighted these for the reader in italics.⁷⁷ By adding a second space for my analysis, these texts break out of our conversations to offer readers more in-depth interpretation of what these significant moments tell us about embodied memory and dance practice. Third, for each narrator, I added a section to their body-biography that elaborates on their practice—through a more focused description of their teaching or movement research—based on my participant observation. In this way, themes from our life review conversations resonated through embodied registers, composing a written text with palpable embodied dimensions. The texts also resist the chronological narration format and individualism that are dominant conventions of life stories and autobiography, describing rather two persons in the present, reflecting on embodied history together.

Closing Remarks on Theoretical Interpretation

This section on the theoretical interpretation of body-biographies has integrated perspectives from narrative analysis, movement analysis, and body-reflexivity. I have underscored that the interpretive work of analyzing body-biographies does not occur through the researcher applying theoretical questions to their life story interview transcripts; nor does it involve ghostwriting or uncritically reflecting on life story production. By contrast, knowledge in this domain is created through the researcher reflexively participating in life story interviews, performing participant observation of dancing, as well as engaging in cooperative life-writing. The outlines offered here (Boxes 1–3) underscore key principles of analytic focus that may sharpen the researcher's inquiry: shaping emergent life story dialogues for research purposes and enabling inscription of participant observation of movement, both within and outside of interviews.

I have highlighted throughout this chapter that this methodology involves the researcher's corporeal participation, attending sensually and responsively to how dancers narrate, gesture, and perform their life stories. The cultivation of sensuality and sensitivity within life story interviews is not simply an ethical stance but an epistemological method: It opens a space where bodily experience and verbal testimony inform one another. The body-biography interview is understood as a relational framework for mutual learning, in which bodies, movement, memory, and narration are co-constituted through dialogic performance. In basic terms, cooperative life-writing does more than document the gestures performed by the

77 One exception to this is the body-biography of Marcus Schulkind, where, for continuity, these passages were placed in the footnotes.

protagonist during an interview. By reflecting on corporeality both in life review and in the research methodology, the approach contributes body-reflexive writing that aids the reconstruction of embodied history. I acknowledge the partiality of this account, and the way my analysis doubles as review of my own body and movement perception while interacting with my interview partners—as readers will discover. Further remarks synthesizing this methodology are presented in the final, concluding section of this chapter.

Summary

This chapter has laid the groundwork for understanding body-biography as a participatory and embodied methodology for research of dance. Contributing to the growing field of dancer interviews, I have contextualized a methodology of body-biography that resists positivistic categories of “data,” “source,” or “transcript.” The “results” of this methodology are neither polished oral history interview transcripts nor raw or momentary reflections of lived experience. Rather the life-writing presented in Part II should be understood as written performances of life review that have been developed collaboratively with their protagonists. These carefully composed narratives emerge through relational storytelling and longstanding reflexive engagement between dancer and interviewer.

By detailing the multilayered process that underpins these texts—interviewing, participant observation, movement analysis, transcription, and life-writing—I have illuminated how such narratives are not only gathered but actively composed. The ethical, affective, and methodological dimensions of this construction, particularly the post-interview collaboration in refining and revising life stories, form a key contribution of this chapter. In this way, body-biography foregrounds the presence and agency of both interlocutors, offering a methodology that honors dancers’ lived knowledge while inviting critical reflection on the role of the researcher.

Although grounded in a small-scale study of four elder teachers with whom I share longstanding relationships, the methodological principles outlined in this chapter are adaptable. They can serve researchers with different backgrounds—inside or outside of dance—so long as the embodied, dialogic, and cooperative nature of the research is respected. Body-biographies, as I propose them, are not only valuable for scholars to produce dance historiography and archiving. I imagine that they might also be simplified for guiding student assignments in higher education: cultivating self-reflexivity, historical consciousness, and dialogue between teachers and students.

For the field of dance studies and artistic research, where interviews are increasingly common but often under-theorized, this chapter offers a framework for thinking with and through the body in the production of knowledge. It invites

readers to approach interviews not as neutral instruments, but as generative encounters shaped by movement, memory, and mutual curiosity. As such, body-biographies contribute to a growing body of methodological work in dance studies that seeks not only to document lives, but to understand how knowledge moves—between bodies, across time, and through the medium of language itself.

Interlude: Autobiographical Gestures

Figure 1: Holding a photo of myself. The headband suggests that I am growing out my bangs, around the age of seven, circa 1986. Location is the swing set of Albany Academy for Girls in upstate New York. I am wearing my school uniform for gym class.



Photographer unknown. Part of my parents' collection of photos.

December 31, 2024. I am writing from an apartment in the Piedmont region of Italy, a short train ride away from my primary residence in Bern, Switzerland. My four-year research grant at the Institute of Theatre Studies at the University of Bern has recently finished. While applying for teaching positions, I anticipate itinerant projects as a freelance dance artist: teaching, dramaturgy, production assistance, and perhaps even performing again. This morning, I drafted a short statement for an artist residency before revising my notes for this autobiographical chapter. In a few weeks I will celebrate my forty-sixth birthday. Other facts: I am in a long-term partnership, unmarried and without children. I am perceived by others who do not know me well (i.e. at “face value”) as younger than I am. I welcome my white hairs: finally, visible evidence for others of the time and authority I’ve developed in *this* everchanging body, making *these* interdependent selves.

My aging body helps others to recognize me—as continuously there but also changing. I perceive these changes as a sign of vitality and mortality. They coincide with a wide range of emotions: sadness, joy, anxiety, fear, laughter. Thankfully, my senses are sharp. My stature is short and sturdy. I have movement-vision: I can sense a slinking cat in my peripheral gaze or locate a moving satellite in the night sky in just seconds. My feet and toes are deft. My skin elastic. My muscles are not toned like they were in my youth, but they still pump well enough to keep me going here and there as desired. My mind is plastic. My memory, regretfully, is becoming slower and rusty. I search for words or slide them into wrong grammatical places—justifying that my difficulties stem from switching frequently between English and German. With my dancing body, I find joy among other dancers and, in particular, passing on dance to younger professionals. I continue to style and make my body through my interactions. My movement changes depending on where I am and who is watching—my body adjusts to the terrain, in time, to others, and is supported in locomoting by my comfortable shoes and clothes. I am patterned from this doing, repeating, and creating; resisting and changing requires energy, but so does all the dancerly upkeep of listening, practicing, and sweating.

I was raised in a lusciously green region of upstate New York. I departed the United States to move to Frankfurt, Germany, in 2004; I moved to Dresden in 2012 and to Bern, Switzerland, in 2013. Through my family heritage, I have two passports that legalize my citizenship and mobility. If I were to narrate my life as an adventure tale, my quest has been for freedom: the intellectual freedom of lifelong learning as a scientist and the embodied freedom of a dancer. I discovered dancing very young, as the subsequent narrative will recount. Ballet was my first love, and like many love stories, this one was riddled with misunderstanding, disappointment, and a surprising resolution. My life stories are interwoven with dilemmas regarding the pressures of social norms. For example, it has not been easy for me to define myself as *one* coherent, developing person and personality, given the plurality of contradictions and desires within me. My life stories share how these constructions

of the self are imparted through participation in various communities. I focus in this Chapter on tensions between dance worlds and other positions that I have inhabited in my professional identity. I strive to tell you truthfully about my body and myself, the confluence and divergence of the two. Sharing this body-biography book with four other protagonists, my commentary here must be brief, and therefore very selective. I preserve the privacy of my family life, my romantic partnerships, my sexuality, and many other intimacies. To show the importance of others in my life stories, the body-biographies that follow and the acknowledgements section illustrate the interdependency and generosity with which others have made me who I am.

This life story collection is one among many. I have typed multiple drafts in the last two years, as an exercise to explore embodied life-writing through self-reflexive life review. These different versions of my life stories convinced me how strongly these narratives can shift and change. I struggled to articulate my life stories from my position as a writer in “middle age,” a phase of life whose nature the philosopher Christopher Hamilton has described as “to resist articulation and clarification.”¹ Moreover, my narrative mood was frequently dark, marked by crises: the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, rising authoritarianism, and a general sense that the digital age has propelled us into an epoch of alienation, insecurity, and terror. Dear reader, be forewarned: I am nostalgic towards the dancing of my youth. This project of body-biography made by conducting life review with four of my dance teachers sometimes burns with my wish to turn back the clocks—not to be younger and to suffer again the growing pains of self-confusion in coming to maturity, but to again taste the freedom that I associated with my youth, discovering dancing and thereby becoming my plural and changing self.

*

I was born in Albany, New York, in 1979. Dance came into my life early, at the young age of two and a half. There are photos of me from this time, wearing two pigtails and a gaping T-shirt over my tights and leotard, doing what appears to be a side chassé—but of course I cannot remember exactly what gestures I made, nor what dancing felt like. The remaining photographs and my parents’ stories are my best clues about this period of my life. These photos, like the one at the start of this chapter (see Figure 1), portray a happy child amid family, teachers, and friends—often wearing a bathing suit or a costume—content blowing bubbles, playing in piles of leaves in the autumn, going to school, riding a bicycle on the weekend, and performing in dance recitals, dressed in frilly pastel tutus.

1 Hamilton, *Middle Age*, 24.

At the age of two and a half, I begged my mother for ballet lessons. I insisted with such fervor that she first bargained with me and then acquiesced, searching for a teacher who would take a very young tot. I have a memory of seeing a ballerina on television at a very young age—being mesmerized by the textured swirling of a long blue tulle costume. I can also recall watching a homemade VHS recording off a public broadcast on television of the Royal Ballet dancing *La fille mal gardée* (1981).² I remember being confused by the manner in which this ballet enacted storytelling, without words and involving a man wearing a dress playing a woman. I was delighted by the dancing, and fascinated by how a large ensemble could dance together in formations on a stage. I watched the tape repeatedly.

My first dance school was JoAnn's Academy of Dance, a privately owned studio that had classes in ballet, tap, and jazz.³ Unfortunately, I cannot recall any bodily sensations or other memories from my earliest years of dancing. I remember only how the room looked and felt: including the large squares of the hard grey linoleum floor and some of the dance memorabilia on the walls, including a headshot of Mikhail Baryshnikov. I can recall this in a manner that I believe is filtered by the cultural circuit of memories of women dancing in the early eighties: the sexiness of high-cut leotards framing the hips, the smell of hairspray, and the convoluted saucy feminism of aerobics. I remember encountering older girls who presented themselves with these fashion markers of femininity, and wondering what it would feel like as I too grew up into a young woman. My first memory I have of the *feeling* of dancing is from the age of five or six. Alone in our basement, I invented movements to the vibrations of Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* spinning on the record player. Jumping off the brown plaid sofa, I danced with abandon to the *Overture*, making up the dance as I went along. I was thrilled by the richly orchestrated sound of the music, which I remember playing really loud. The musical world of sound was a power that riveted me—still rivets me—and sustains my closest relationships today.

My life in dance reflects inclinations—towards movement, music, and play—that all appeared early. But becoming a dancer required considerable resources and consistent practice, all of which was dependent on my parents' dispensable income and regular commitment to driving me to dance lessons. The dance I encountered also reflects that my family was White, living with middle-class means at a suburban crossroads. Our home was three hours' drive north of New York City, about 240 kilometers, and an hour by road from Saratoga Springs; this placed me within a network of connections around the vibrant dance center of

2 A film of the Royal Ballet from 1981. Choreography by Frederick Ashton, with Leslie Collier and Michael Coleman.

3 Directed by Jo Ann Tibbitts.

New York.⁴ The Saratoga Springs outdoor performing arts center is the summer home of the New York City Ballet and the Philadelphia Orchestra. It smelled like pine and gardenias in the summer, and my parents took me to watch magical performances.

Before the age of twelve, I explored many forms of the performing arts—ballet, pointe (starting at ten), tap dance, musical theater, acting, piano, singing, jazz dance, and ballroom dancing. From these lessons and little shows, I imbibed a sense of musicality with its roots in Western ballet music and American Broadway tunes. As an only child, I loved performing with other youngsters. A highlight of my childhood was the shows that I appeared in as a child actress with the New York State Theater Institute. This community, involving adult actors and a couple of children rehearsing and performing together, enveloped me in warmth—imparting a feeling of belonging, collective risk, and shared achievement. I sensed for the first time what a big stage feels like as you dance or sing alone as the central focus of attention—how the audience perceives you, while you perceive them—the quiet of the audience concentrating on you. As an only child, I appreciated the extended family structure of the theater. I was delighted by how sets and costumes could transform the stage into an entirely new and fantastical world.

The world of theater was, like other elements of adulthood, mysterious to me. One aspect that remains vivid in my memories was the stressful auditions. By competing for roles as a young child, I experienced the vulnerability of self-presentation, evaluation, and rejection. I began to strategize to get the parts I wanted: putting on a certain outfit, preparing for a role with voice lessons, and learning to look at the jury with my eyes and act like the part I wanted. As I aged, I acquired the ability to perceive expertise, assessing which performers were better and which were worse. I felt and learned how actors were “typecast” based on gender, age, race, and appearance. Thankfully, this is before the social media that young people are dependent upon today; while my self-presentation was intensively evaluated a few times a year, I did not feel this perpetually. Thankfully, I had safe childhood spaces where I was freer to play, with neighbors and my school mates.

Around the age of twelve, I asked my parents to let me focus on ballet more seriously, by attending a different local school and receiving more lessons. I was excited by annual performances of *The Nutcracker* and my new one-piece pink leotard with an attached skirt, a luxury item that had been a birthday present. After JoAnn’s Academy, my parents enrolled me in ballet classes in the Cecchetti method at a more professional ballet school in Albany. The summers when I was eleven and twelve, I also participated in a ballet program in Saratoga with the then recently retired New

4 Our home was also an hour east of Jacob’s Pillow, a pivotal festival in the history of American modern dance, but I did not visit “the Pillow” until I was an adult, to see a performance of *Love* from choreographer Sharon Eyal.

York City Ballet soloist David Otto (see Figure 2). Part of the program include passes to attend the entire summer season of the New York City Ballet at SPAC, giving me an insight at a young age into Balanchine repertoire and the technical level of world-class ballet dancers. This education into ballet expertise and training practice would pivotally shape my emotions, beliefs, and body, in short my *habitus*.

In the fall of 1990, I followed Otto to join his newly opened Albany Dance Institute, which was above a garage and had two studios. I was transfixed by the advanced structure and kinesthetic sensations of Balanchine ballet technique and its progression within and for my body. There was something exceptionally empowering about learning physical skills and performing them to music. My teacher “David” was youthful and charismatic.⁵ Not only could he embody these forms, having only recently retired, he was excited by the opportunity to try his hand choreographing ballets for our student performances.

In discussion between classes and rehearsals, Otto was plainly honest about both the positive and negative sides of a dance career. The positive side, of course, being the magical feeling of dancing ballet and the expressive registers of using your body to feel and communicate; the negative sides included that the career was short and could be crippling for the body. With so many young women interested in dancing ballet, the competition to garner a place in an elite company was extreme. Understanding the importance of female mentors for his predominantly female students, Otto also hired his colleague from the New York City Ballet, Leslie Roy, to teach us pointe classes, and his wife, jazz dancer Christine Miller Otto, to teach us jazz and intermediate ballet. I enrolled in two ballet classes a day, taking both the intermediate and the advanced classes, and took part in rehearsals for the Capital Ballet Company on the weekend. Those long days at school, followed by ballet classes at night, a home-cooked meal, and then homework, are very happy memories of growing up.

5 David Otto, born 1960, is from a family of dancers with five siblings in the field. His mother, Leslie Otto, trained at the School of American Ballet and started the Eastchester School of Ballet and Ballet Atlantic. See Ames, “About Westchester: Ballet Fever.”

Figure 2: Dancing in the center, on a makeshift dance studio on a basketball court. On the back of the photo is written "Age 12. David Otto's Summer Dance Program."



The photographer is unknown.

Otto taught us what he knew and found important about ballet and life: crossing the existing gender conventions of ballet pedagogy to teach his young female students how to jump and turn (as is needed in the male dance repertoire). I was a “natural turner” and a “good jumper.” Turning one, two, three, four . . . five . . . six, sometimes even more pirouettes! These sensations of moving I remember much more vividly than the bodily pain and tiredness reported in my ballet notebooks. Beside the scrupulous writing down of corrections, these notes also chronicle my growing obsession with the ideal female ballet body. These notes begin during the summer schools that I attended at the School of America Ballet (SAB), the gateway school for the New York City Ballet. While Otto’s teaching was generally constructive to building my confidence as a teenager, the teaching at SAB was driven by very elite ideals of female beauty and pleasing aesthetic line, around which there was a steady stream of young girls competing for attention.

I remember thinking that the competition was more body- than talent-driven, which in hindsight might have to do with how ballet teachers seek malleable bodies to enter the field. For the first part of the one-hour auditions for SAB in New York City, our appearance and joints were assed optically and manually by two women (a director and her secretary). They asked us to point each foot to the side in tendu, to check the articulation of our feet. The director then lifted our legs with her hands to feel the flexibility of our hip joints, to the front, side and back. Next, we were given a short ballet barre and a few center exercises. Because my body was not “perfect” for

ballet—my feet were “pretty” but my legs were not long, nor was my extension very flexible—I was very nervous for these assessments. My heart would beat quickly, and my palms would sweat. I spent extensive time choosing the leotard to wear that could best flatter my body. To my relief, I was accepted for three summers. Each year I rose in level and received different teachers. I wish I could review these ballet auditions and classes again with my eyes today, to know if my harsh feelings towards this institution, marking the end of my childhood, are justified. I wish a comparative ethnographer had conducted interviews or observed these sessions to give a richer interpretation of how power influences the development of young dance artists—of children’s dancing bodies.

On the one hand, I observed that my progress at the school was rapid. The refined exercises, corrections, and the other dancers’ mastery all synergized my learning. My quality of movement improved as well as my musicality. My muscles changed shape, and I appeared leaner. Boys and girls were separated for all but *pas de deux* class, and gossip and social interaction were also significant. Emulating George Balanchine’s preference for thinness, girls at SAB learned to “diet” to maintain the ballerina body; many were also pushing through pain and injury to stretch their bodies and keep their good standing in class. Other girls suggested that I start dieting, for example eating only salads and fruits, so that my body would appear longer and more aesthetically pleasing. I come from an Italian American family, with a mother who insisted that I eat home-cooked meals each night with my family at dinner. But encouraged by other students around me I started skipping breakfast or lunch—eating just a yogurt or a grapefruit and a few bites of sandwich. Instead of eating enough to dance and grow, my personality and energy started to fade. My parents sought me a therapist, who helped me to reflect on the costs of this competitive world on my bodily health, emotional well-being, and social relationships.

It is at this point, in the tumult of puberty and with the challenges of being malnourished, where my memories become very occluded. Journal entries list my thoughts and experiences that I can no longer remember. There are some positive memories: the radiant warmth of ballet classes with Violette Verdi, the mysterious corrections of Stanley Williams that I still teach today, and the fun-moving choreographies by David Otto. But I will fade out here, leaving a gap or silence around events that I can no longer recall.

*

One of the main discontinuities in my autobiography is this phase that I cannot remember and narrate well, which is a mix of growing pains and culturally relevant ways that our bodies and selves are constituted by the situations, interactions,

aesthetic and social performances we place them in. Therapy, interestingly, would foreshadow my later work as a dance ethnographer by introducing a distant “other” into my field—my therapist who did not ascribe to ballet values. She helped me to learn, as a young person, how values can be chosen and experiences used to enact change, to live a fulfilling life. The social order and intensity of the ballet world at SAB had diminished my sense of agency—to the point of physical weakness. Unfortunately, it may have been the purpose of such orders of power—thinking with Foucault—to create docile bodies: an army of women for the optical field of the corps de ballet.⁶ Ballet can also be practiced as a form of empowerment or resistance, I would see this later in queer performance by Ballez and Ballets Trockadero—but as a child, I was quickly derailed by the force of its practices of bodily objectification. My parents breathed a collective sigh of relief when I told them that I wanted to take some time off from dancing to focus on my life as a high school student.

*

I prefer to leave these discontinuities as part of my life story, rather than to erase them entirely. They mark the ongoing nature of life review and the complexity of major life transitions.

*

Two years later, I am a freshman at Harvard University, living in one of the newer brick-buildings in Harvard Yard and struggling through problem sets in Physics 16, the toughest introductory course. I will earn my degree in physics four years later. Narrating my anecdotes from my time in the natural sciences usually requires extra justification: Interlocutors will be confused, intrigued, or beguiled, exactly as Charlotte Linde predicts for atypical professional trajectories.⁷ To take one example, if a host introduces any disbelief when they read my biography before a conference or group of artists, the audience will laugh; it’s happened on multiple occasions. The reason is that dance and physics are both exoticized professions perceived as lying at opposite ends of multiple dualities: dualisms of body and mind, irrational and rational, and stereotypes of female and male competences. These dualisms have shaped my experience of these practices. Yet, I prefer to conceive of them as different logics of practice—communities with alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting.⁸ Their contrasts were important to my exploration of the world and

6 See Liu, “Mind and Body,” 36.

7 Linde, *Life Stories*, 5–11.

8 I take this term from Pierre Bourdieu. See Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 89.

even my balance as a person. Moreover, their discontinuities became part of my longer life story arc, as a dancer and dance scholar.

My passion for the sciences manifested differently than my attachment to the performing arts and the accompanying sense of community. This coincided with my starting to understand myself as part of a larger world: a biological one and a natural world with its own language (mathematics) and order. My interest was certainly influenced by my mother's passion, as a biology teacher, and the support also of my own schooling. I went to an all-girls' school, which meant that between my education and dancing, my world was largely defined by female teachers and students. Theater had been a positive exception to this, as were my lessons with "David." There are photos of me from this time next to my science fair projects, "Senses and the Sexes," and "The Effects of Gravitation on Human Balance." I found the strategizing and creativity of science fascinating, and I think also a sort of performance—using certain discourses to explain my ideas and become recognized. In contrast to ballet, in science my appearance and body were supposedly unimportant—though being a "girl" still marked me as an other in the male-dominated natural sciences.

Around the time that I stopped dancing, I applied for a scholarship to attend "Space Camp," attracted by the romantic idea of becoming an astronaut. I did not get the award, but was encouraged to apply for a second scholarship, for the Astronomy Camp at Steward Observatory in Tucson. Gifted with this opportunity, in this "coming of age" moment, I took my first flight alone to a city in a new landscape: landing in the heat of Tucson and busing with the campers through the desert up Mount Lemmon to the telescope site we would inhabit for the week. This camp introduced me to a very different culture of work. Astronomy was a romantic science that impressed us young people with the "wonders" and "beauty" of the universe. The camp director, Don McCarthy, took an active interest in mentoring young students and was extremely generous with his support for me. I received help in networking, academic advice, and emotional support. McCarthy even reached out regularly to dialogue with my parents, giving them perspective on a career that was outside their familiar world. McCarthy also gave me my first assignment as a writer, for *Mercury* magazine. Having a mentor like this was seminal to my path. McCarthy was also a runner, I remember, and took an interest in my dance background.

The liberal arts education I received at Harvard catered to my breath of academic and artistic interests: I was required to take eight courses across disciplines as well as a mandatory academic writing course. My physics education, shaped by the vision of Professor Howard Georgi, emphasized collaborative learning on problem sets and took place in an atmosphere supportive of the participation of women and minorities. Harvard students in physics had a reputation for testing poorly afterwards on standardized tests, but we were supported in learning analytic problem-solving skills and working in teams, something I believe Georgi saw as preparation for cross-disciplinary innovation. Already at this time, Georgi and other

institutions at Harvard actively supported women in STEM fields, and I recall the change of policy in the 1997–1998 school year, the first in which Harvard admitted an equal number of male and female physics graduate student candidates. Prior to this, I was one of the few women studying in the physics library. The department also had few female physics professors (my memory was there were only two, my fabulous advisor Melissa Franklin and Lene Hau). I partnered up with another female student, and we worked together in study groups to get through problem set after problem set: solving them through teamwork until the wee hours of the morning.

My interest in becoming an astrophysicist flickered as I discovered the professional reality of academic research practices. Long hours writing at a desk and especially programming code at a computer hurt my body intensely. In a development that was not infrequent among STEM students at Harvard, I developed Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) in both hands from extensive typing during computer science courses. The pain was worse than I remembered from dancing, though I was able to manage it enough to complete my studies by reducing my typing and doing physical therapy.

At Harvard and within the local area of Cambridge, Massachusetts, I avidly explored new dance styles and discovered the pleasure of participating in this city's vital dance communities. I took ballet classes and created performances as part of a student-run ballet ensemble at Harvard University. During the first year of my studies, I met Boston-based choreographer and teacher Marcus Schulkind (interviewed in Part II of this book), and became a regular class-taker at Green Street Studios. It is Schulkind who ushered my transformation into a modern dancer. (My memory is that I invited Schulkind to watch a student performance during the second year of my studies, which in hindsight—I cringe with embarrassment on this aspect—was a “rock ballet” to the music of Pink Floyd, with terribly tacky lighting. Schulkind, who does not remember this event, told me days later I should come study modern dance with him. Perhaps he saw my potential as well as my ignorance of the diversity of dance aesthetics and choreographic projects at my fingertips?)

In Schulkind's expressive classes with live piano music, I felt something energetically stir in me—between me and others—in the room. His Graham-influenced modern classes followed a routine, and these exercises I can still remember today, despite having not performed them in over twenty-five years.

With graduation approaching, I sought advice from mentors in both physics and dance about the prospects of graduate school, or other related career choices. It was a very difficult decision for me. In this aspect of my life story, I can usually convince my interlocutors of coherence without actually telling the truth. The more involved story is highly personal, and I usually do not bother explaining the full version. I do so here as a means to explore writing an aspect of my life story that I normally have trouble performing in social interactions.

In the summer after my junior year of college, I had a fellowship at the University of California Berkeley in biophysics research. I took the position for my own career advancement, as well as to be closer to my boyfriend, who was a graduate student in physics at Stanford. Though my research on the challenges of genetic repeats for genome coding proved to be less interesting than I anticipated, I enjoyed the fun student atmosphere of Berkeley's campus, the smell of eucalyptus in the air, and the laid-back quality of student life.

On a hot afternoon over a month into my fellowship, I was at home alone in my sublet—an apartment east of the Berkeley campus that I shared with two other young women. We customarily left the front door open because of the heat, and I heard someone come in. I assumed it was my roommate. When I exited my room I discovered a stranger at the door—a young man, wearing casual clothes and sneakers. He asked to use my bathroom and then followed me into the apartment. He asked me for money. I knew within seconds that I was no longer safe.

This story is a narration of a traumatic memory—describing an event lasting only a few minutes, for which I was truly not prepared, that violated my sense of safety and security. This vulnerability is a very important aspect of embodied life stories that are difficult to articulate in social interactions. I have lost the memory of the intruder's face and clothes. This happened immediately, as I told the police officers directly afterwards, and the memory has not been regained. I reported that the man attacked me and that I fought back—for my life. I can remember some fragments of the choreography of our bodies fighting in the space of my bedroom. There was a part where I was throwing my brown leather wallet down on the floor and pleading with him to take it; in another moment we were on my bed, and he was trying to push me down and pull off my dress; I remember also being in the middle of the room and somehow toppling him over to the floor, before escaping out the side entrance. The mantra in my head during all of this was to “get out.” When I ran onto the street in my bare feet, I started yelling for help. A stranger came to my aid and helped me to phone the police. I had scratches and small bruises, but no lasting physical injuries.

I include this life story for its importance in highlighting bodily trauma and the existential dimensions of our body-biographies. Aside from with my family and closest partners, I have not practiced telling this story to others. I resist recounting it, because when I do, I feel like I am losing my breath; I feel my heart begin to race. As a writer, I am concerned with finding the right tone: not exaggerating to seem heroic, nor belittling my physical and psychological strength. Yet this event is a stinging turning point in my biography, explaining my transition back to dancing. Displaced by this event, I began commuting from my partner's home in Stanford—a

long two-hour journey each morning and evening. I lost focus upon my research. My supervisor empathetically understood and allowed me to slow down. Each evening, I sought out dancing: taking night classes in “Savage Jazz” with dance teacher Reginald Ray Savage in Oakland. Unfortunately, I cannot describe these few weeks of classes in much sensory detail, but I remember that they were physically demanding and in a new style; Savage had danced in the Katherine Dunham Dance Company before moving West to California. In his classes, he played jazz music, and I found solace in the challenge of encountering a new dance technique, very different from the modern and ballet that I was used to.

A few weeks after this event, I was sitting on a bus with another dancer, who told me that she wanted to attend graduate school for dance, perhaps at the University of Michigan or The Ohio State University. My life was floating in a lot of confusion for the remainder of my stay in Berkeley, but that physical and existential fight also changed my sense of self: I was a person who could fight alertly with my body when provoked. My body was both the object of others’ violence, and a tool for my own survival, curiosity, and empowerment.

*

I returned to Harvard and sought out advice from mentors about what to do after graduation. With the provisional decision in mind that I could always return to physics if exploring dance yielded disappointment, I was fortuitously accepted into the three-year MFA program in dance practice at The Ohio State University (OSU). Within this close-knit community, in my class of ten master’s students, I explored the possibility of a career identity as a modern dancer. My studies introduced me to the distinctions between different genres of American dance—modern dance, release technique, Contact Improvisation, what today I would call “Black dance,” but then I believe I called “dances of the African diaspora.” I tried my first classes in yoga, bodywork, and somatic practice—all of which would later become passions. At that time they either made me feel embarrassed, due to the intimacy of someone else touching me, or challenged my patience, because of the slowness.

At OSU, my knowledge was developed to reflectively address dance practices culturally and historically, building further upon an introductory dance studies course I had taken at Harvard.⁹ In particular, our professors at OSU fostered critical

9 The course, titled “Embodied Expression/Expressive Body. Dance in Cultural Context,” was taught by Deborah D. Foster within the Folklore and Mythology department. The description reads: “An examination of the ways in which the dancing body internalizes and communicates cultural knowledge to both dancer and observer. By participating in dance workshops, watching dance performances (live and on film), and reading ethnographic and theoretical texts, we attempt to understand the emergent meaning of dance performances

reflection on the impact of postmodernism on American stage dance aesthetics and training practices; we also discussed diasporic dance fusions and the importance of decentering Western hegemonies—considering the impact of all of these on transmitting dance practices in higher education.¹⁰

*

The event in my life story that is the most rehearsed narrative in my collection—reinforcing how central it remains to my identity—is the day that I met choreographer William Forsythe at OSU. That turning point, which redirected my life, is another surprisingly fragile moment; it almost did not happen. The week prior I had needed minor surgery, so I had taken a few days off from school to heal. I went into the studio not knowing much about Forsythe, nor whether I could participate safely. I was careful and danced mostly without using my right arm.¹¹

My memory of that day is of the busy room full of students. Forsythe gave us some proposals for improvisation, moving through imaginary geometries in space. It was new to me, though I already had experience and affinity as a dance improviser, and this sort of abstract visualization was very easy for me as a physicist.¹² Responding to Forsythe's proposals, I felt powerful, capable, and curious. It was a novel mind-in-body experience: I moved through space with intensity. I felt like the movement was moving *me*, faster than I could think—or perhaps a different sort of thinking? My friends remarked afterwards that they had never seen me dance quite like that before. In hindsight, I was very lucky to have been in the right place at the right time. After the class, Forsythe asked about my background and responded that my physics education probably helped; he could see it in how I moved. He suggested that I contact him and visit the company in Frankfurt. With some twists and detours along the way, that is what eventually happened.

This transition, which also brought with it significant setbacks and mental health challenges, is another aspect of my life story that I frequently simplify when

from multiple perspectives." See https://cscie12.dce.harvard.edu/cgi/courses/fe-courses.htm?department_code=FOLK, last accessed November 28, 2024.

10 Two of my professors at OSU, dancers and dance scholars Karen Eliot and Melanie Bales, are cited in this book for their enquiries on dance history and dance praxis. Eliot was the primary supervisor of my master's thesis. Professor Candace Feck also influenced my practice of dance writing significantly and was the second reader for my written work. Publications indicative of this discursive climate include: Bales and Eliot, *Dance on Its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*; Bales and Netti-Fiol, *The Body Eclectic*.

11 The surgery had been to remove a noncancerous lump in my right breast.

12 At Harvard, I had discovered improvisation in a choreography class with Elizabeth Bergmann. Improvisation opened a new door to self-examination and self-expression and would later become a cornerstone of my artistic practice.

I recount it to others—including a depressive year living in New York City, with a populace still terrified after 9/11, and a difficult apprenticeship with Shen Wei Dance Arts. Thankfully, I was persistent in emailing and calling Forsythe, and my professors at Ohio State supported me as I finished up my studies amidst all these twists and turns of professional development. Arriving in Frankfurt in 2004, I caught the tailwind of Ballett Frankfurt, participating in the final months of tours before the company closed.¹³ I was 25, full of dreams, and unprepared on many levels to be living in a foreign country. I was embedded in a new culture, a new language, and a new notion of choreography, while still embodying—in ballet—a mode of training with which I had determinedly parted company. I knew no one in Frankfurt and only one other dancer in Europe. My unfashionably wide dance pants, my practice of “floorwork,” my “downtown release” body, my scholarly and research background, were all foreign in that context. But the chance to further embody my physics education in a dancing body—to think of these pasts as scientist and dancer as coherent—was a promise that kept me returning to the studio.

As a dancer in The Forsythe Company, I reinvented myself, forging a new dancing identity within a constellation of fifteen dancers. Their bodies became seminal to mine, onstage and off. Their smells, their heights, the feeling of their individual textures of muscles, were aspects that I would learn intimately. Thankfully, the studio was a safe space with these artists. Forsythe was respectful and self-reflective, even though he challenged us relentlessly and pushed us to extremes. This rare combination of empathy and insistence made him a great artist, capable of motivating his team to pursue enormously intense and experimental ventures. The touring life and production schedule were extremely difficult. I was frequently injured—multiple ankle injuries and one injury to my left knee capsule that still limits my endurance today. The experience of this time of my life was so impactful (fascinating, yet confusing, untellable) that I searched for a productive means to reflect upon my (and the group's) knowledge and share it with a new public. This took the form of a dance studies dissertation, published ten years after I left the ensemble. This piece of writing, which became my first book as a dance scholar, is closely connected to this present inquiry on autobiography: From my perspective as a former Forsythe dancer, it explored ethnographic methodologies to articulate knowledge of dancers' practices and write polyvocal histories of performance practice.¹⁴

My memories of dancing in The Forsythe Company include few of actually performing on stage. Perhaps with the performer so alert and stressed in

13 The company closed in the summer of 2004, and Forsythe opened The Forsythe Company, working between Frankfurt and Dresden, in 2005.

14 The dissertation was turned into the book, *Processing Choreography: Thinking with William Forsythe's Duo* (2022). My supervisors were Christina Thurner and Priska Gisler.

performance there is little capacity for the body-mind to remember these individual experiences? Moreover, I was too tired at night to write fieldwork notes. I can remember better the moments before and after the performances, and our contexts and routines of rehearsing. I also recall details of the choreographic structure of pieces, the tasks and research focus in the different creations, and the sensual atmospheres of the rooms in which we worked. I remember exhaustion and muscle pain that grew with age. Because of that discomfort, I began to seek out somatic therapies. Reiki with the company physio helped me extensively. Regular osteopathy appointments also helped to repair my body from the previous night's battery.

Though there was a culturally prescribed notion that aging as a dancer should lead to a career transition at forty, many dancers in The Forsythe Company were over forty themselves, creating a field of intergenerational exchange. In my early thirties I began to consider a life transition. Most of all, the extensive pressure to perform fifty to sixty shows a year internationally was wearing me out. I could feel that the lifestyle was also eroding some of the intellectual and textual capacities I had sharpened in my youth, and I worried about my forthcoming career transition. I was excited by the prospect of trying out other modes of artistic work and working with other choreographers in a more horizontal manner. Lastly, uncertain if I wanted to have children, I was aware of my "biological clock" as a woman, and thought I should explore these options sooner rather than later.

Turning back time a little, an important influence on my practice as a dancer and my changing self-understanding as a Forsythe dancer was the artist Christine Kono (interviewed in Part II of this book), whom I met through her work as a guest ballet teacher for The Forsythe Company. Kono was first a ballet teacher, then a colleague and friend who fostered my imagination and creativity in new directions. In a kind of apprenticeship, I studied at length in her home, learning new approaches to sensing my body and performing improvisation with others (see Figure 3).

Fast-forwarding through my story of leaving The Forsythe Company: A few years later, after arriving in Bern to write my dissertation in dance studies, I met dancers Chris Lechner and later Hilary Cartwright (both interviewed here, in Part II). Lechner's contemporary dance classes restoratively reawakened my scholarly sitting body after a few years foregrounding sedentary study, asking me to bridge many layers of my body-biography (ballet, release technique, somatic practice, and instant composition). Cartwright's Yoga Narada® workshops and teacher training returned me to daily self-practice as a form of self-discovery for my aging body, which was no longer regularly performing. Cartwright also helped me to remember my prior voicework in singing as a child and raised my consciousness about the power of orality in dance transmission praxis and dance oral history.

Zooming in to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic: Defending my dissertation in dance studies weeks before the coronavirus brought public life to a standstill, my plans to return to the dance field and continue work as dance maker, dramaturg,

and teacher were thwarted. Entering the empty university stealthily to pick up my dissertation advisor's handwritten notes on my manuscript, I revised my dissertation for publication at the desk of an abandoned physiotherapy office, empty of patients. During this strange time of uncertainty, I learned about a dance studies postdoc position in a scholarly project on dancer autobiography (with my dissertation advisor, Christina Thurner, at the University of Bern). Thankful for a potential new project and employment during those bleak months of isolation, I incubated my concept for this book slowly in many a Zoom call and, when civil protection measures were lifted, in live meetings with our research team and each of my protagonists for this project: Hilary Cartwright, Christine Kono, Chris Lechner, and Marcus Schulkind.

Figure 3: Dancing in Aporia (2014) a performance installation at the Athens School of Visual Art created with Christine Kono, Dimitris Kraniotis, and Stéphane Vernier.



Photo by Stelios Baklavas.

☆

This brief autobiographical text highlights the relationships and standpoints to be unfolded more intimately throughout this book. *Body-Biographies: Our Life Stories in Dance* considers the life-narratives of the aforementioned dance teachers: (in order of the length of our relationships) Marcus Schulkind, Christine Kono, Chris Lechner, and Hilary Cartwright, as constituted in our mutual life review process. Our life stories, as micro-histories, describe our interweaving and relational experiences of movement, dance transmission, emigration, and aging. This book presents refined

“interview performances” with these four dance teachers. In the process, I explore how my sense of my body, self, and artistry are constituted through their teaching practices and body-biographies, and conversely how their teaching and dance work are also created within networks of dance exchange. Influenced by dance studies and auto/biography research, this scholarly work considers how dance teachers make and pass on dance history, focusing especially on transmission through teaching. The biographical interviews I made with these protagonists also bring me back full circle to the autobiographical writing of this chapter, which was developed through and in response to these interview conversations. Together, this collection of body-biographies shows how dancers’ life stories are created and performed, tracing dance as a socio-culturally and historically constituted phenomena.

Part II – Body-Biographies

Chapter 3: Christine Kono

Introduction

Christine Kono is a dance artist with an exceptional purview of dance practices in the United States and Germany since the 1950s and first-hand memories of working with choreographers George Balanchine, Martha Graham, Eliot Feld, Kurt Jooss, Pina Bausch, and Joachim Schloemer. Born in Pomona, California, in 1946, Kono is a third-generation Japanese American woman. She grew up in Los Angeles. One of the earliest professional Asian American ballet dancers on stage in America, she danced with the Philadelphia Ballet, and was subsequently both a dancer and choreographic assistant in Eliot Feld's American Ballet Company in New York.¹ Kono trained in modern dance at The Graham School and The Juilliard School. In 1971, she moved abroad to West Germany to dance in the Cologne Dance Forum (Tanz-Forum Köln), where she worked with choreographers Kurt Jooss, Glenn Tetley, and Christopher Bruce, among others. After studying dance pedagogy at the Folkwang University of the Arts, Kono became a teacher at the Essen-Werden School for children and at Folkwang. She was ballet mistress for Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch and later for her former Folkwang student, Joachim Schloemer, at the German National Theater in Weimar and Theater Basel.

Since 1992, Kono has collaborated extensively on research with Dimitrios Kraniotis, a Greek poet and dancer based in Paris.² This collaboration has led to performance events, dance films, and workshops under the name Collective Ludwig. Kono has additionally been a guest teacher with The Forsythe Company, Ballet Preljocaj, Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, and the ensemble Dance On in Berlin, with whom she performed in the 2019/2020 season. At the time of writing, Kono continues her movement research with Kraniotis in Paris and travels often to

1 Then called the Pennsylvania Ballet Company. Throughout this text, I use the current English names of dance institutions.

2 For Kraniotis' biography see footnote 33. Kono frequently uses the term "research" in conversation. At the time of writing, her identity as a researcher also appears prominently on the opening tableau of her personal website, <http://www.christinekono.com>, last accessed September 24, 2025.

Greece, compelled by the beauty of living close to nature. She is questioning how she wants to dance *now*: at this moment in her life and regarding the current changes in dance and society.

I first met Kono in the context of ballet classes for The Forsythe Company, when I was a dancer in my late twenties and “Christine” was in her early sixties. Kono was beloved by the ensemble, giving a class that resonated with spatial imagery and internal investigation of anatomical touchstones within the body—the pelvis, sternum, diaphragm. Kono subsequently invited me to participate in “exchange” with her and her collaborator Kraniotis in 2009 in Paris.³ Years later, our ongoing collaboration bore fruit in the performance *Aporia* (2014), which we created at the Athens School of Visual Art. Thus, Kono and I share many physical practices and artistic references: as teacher and student, as artists involved in different capacities with The Forsythe Company, and as dancers creating performances together. We are also both Americans who migrated to Germany in our early twenties. Thus, we share a similar transnational history—albeit offset by three decades—enabling interesting comparison of dance practices across places and times.

Figure 1: Interview between Elizabeth Waterhouse (left) and Christine Kono (right) on November 10, 2022, in Freiform Atelier Bern.



Screenshot by E. Waterhouse.

3 The term “exchange” is also one Kono has used throughout our working relationship.

Writing Kono's Body-Biography

My conversations with Christine Kono about her body-biography escaped the boundaries of the interview recording, which is preserved at the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts.⁴ Her narration began casually, in the form of telephone conversations preparing our interview in Bern. Her stories continued during our walks to and from the dance studio; they permeated meals and transformed physical practice sessions with anecdotes. They interwove a second week of exchange in Paris, in which we explored movement research, improvising together in a dance studio.⁵ Both limiting and formalizing, the recording apparatus helped to mark what was intended for our readers versus what was the personal part of our longstanding artistic exchange. I turned the recorder on and off in line with Kono's affirmation, letting her steer this process. At times I pushed the wireless microphones closer to her, when she chose not to wear them, pestering her, but hopefully not overstepping her boundaries.

As you read the body-biography that follows, you can imagine "Christine" and me, both wearing dark dance clothes, as we move between standing and sitting in a small studio with white walls, a grey floor and windows on one side (see Fig. 1). In our dialogues, Kono foregrounded chronological reflection on her professional life—as a dancer, union representative, rehearsal assistant, and teacher—speaking also about personal matters including family planning and aging. She articulated her stories reflectively and critically: with respect for the art form and other dancers' privacy, and never losing her sense of humor. Before and after the recorded interview, we bantered about our mutual friends' recent activities and the current state of the art. We spoke about the difficulties of getting older and our current bodily ailments. She did not mention her recent battle with colon cancer during the recorded portion of the interview, though it provides significant context for interpreting her statements on injury and sickness. Overall, the interview process revealed Kono's memories of bodily experiences, filtered, reflected, and grounded in the present. Our conversations are composed by my questions and my presence as interlocuter—creating a conversational duet in which Kono's self-narrative is supported and modulated by my inquiry.⁶

One challenge in writing Kono's body-biography is doing justice to the value she places on the subtle, nonmaterial registers of bodily presence and communication.

4 For the references to this data and metadata see: Kono, "Body-Biography Interview with Christine Kono"; Waterhouse, "Metadata Body-Biography Interview Christine Kono."

5 Our recorded interview conversations took place on November 9–10, 2022, in Bern, at Freiform Atelier, the movement exchange from January 9–14, 2023, in Paris at Micadanses studio.

6 On "composure," see also Summerfield, "Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice," 10.

While the audio recording traces our speech, our bodily presence could only be partially documented in this register: requiring imaginative reconstruction, based on listening to the recorded sounds of breath and bodies brushing across the floor. Our improvised movements during the interview—dancing, gesturing, marking, and communicating—I preserved in memory like a dancer learning motion from a choreographer. Each night I chronicled these memories into written inscription in my fieldwork notes. When I daringly asked to use a video camera to record a physical warmup session on our second day of conversations, Kono politely obliged, but frequently turned her back to it. Thus, it was my challenge as her biographer to use the recordings as well as my fieldwork notes—written each evening based upon my short-term memory—to augment the conventional interview transcription, overcoming the obfuscation of body and movement. Writing our bodies into the conversation meant curating life stories where danced interaction had blossomed and attempting to describe and interpret these layers of physical presence.

The text that follows is an edited, condensed, and shortened rendering of the recorded interviews, revised by Kono through careful line-by-line editing. To make this life story narrative, I first condensed the transcript for readability, focusing on what I found to be the most meaningful and performative portions, selected for an audience of dance historians and dance practitioners. Kono's intersectional perspective as an Asian American woman on race and gender in dance practices and her recollections of working with a plethora of great artists provided rich content. Wishing to be faithful to the interview, my editing was curatorial and discreet. I marked passages that required further clarification for Kono to fill in and highlighted my own editing in color, so that she could review my insertions and changes. I maintained Kono's choices in terms of themes and the largely chronological organization of the narrative. Where possible, we chose to translate the German words used during the interview into American English, as well as to correct our grammar. While it is common in oral history testimony for interlocutors to seamlessly shift and juxtapose present and past tenses, Kono preferred editorial consistency—correcting her own statements so that each paragraph was coherent. My editing added further structure to Kono's stories by introducing titles and pull quotes as headings. Finally, I used footnotes to substantiate Kono's testimony with references I had brought into our research dialogue; I also used this space to add biographies of key persons, who, unlike the well-established choreographers that Kono has worked with, were less well-documented and canonized contributors to dance history.

Vocal performance is a vital form of embodied narration, and it was important to restore this to the transcription of our conversation. Kono's shifts in narrative tropes and tone provide the reader with very important information—this is especially true of her ironic laughter. The beginning of the interview, as I note here, is charged with irony—due to Kono's balking at her own, unaccepted identity as a ballet dancer—and

authoritative, yet diplomatic, criticism of the injustices of dancers' labor in the sixties. In addition, there are instances when she joyfully retells anecdotes, reporting the speech of others. There you can imagine her voice speeding up, only to slow again in moments of critical reflection, as she enunciates more carefully. While attempting to annotate all these modulations of pitch, volume, timbre, tempo, and rhythm would make her stories illegible to all but a few specialist linguists, I have carefully marked key instances of vocal attributes within her narrative—reminding readers of the singular voice within and behind these personal tales and chronicles.

Lastly, following Kono's own preference for poetic minimalism, in significant instances I have added description of her expressive gestures and movement, as well as my own embodied memories of moving with her during these conversations. My accounts take two forms: Short reflections are positioned in the footnotes, describing physical gestures. Longer reflections are italicized and interspersed within the interview conversation, recreating extended phases of communication interweaving words, dance, and gestures (for example when Kono described dancing Balanchine ballets and movements of the Martha Graham technique). In these sections, dancing together significantly shaped the logics of our talk, and a word-for-word transcript was startlingly incomplete.

The reader will notice that my bodily presence is also highlighted within these movement descriptions: that I describe our interactions, not only Kono's movements. Wanting to make Kono's body sensually perceivable within the transcript and illustrate its eventful participation in this interview, I described her from my perspective. It was necessary to position my body in these accounts and give my analytical perspective on the movement. To help to infuse Kono's phenomenological experience and voice back into the movement description, I asked her to re-perform and describe some of her gestures to me; I also asked her to kindly review my descriptions. Finally, taking advantage of the video recording, I inserted movement dialogues that were captured on camera during our exchanges that preceded the interviews—the camera recording offering a further source for study.⁷ In this way, movement analysis is extended into a dialogic process of life-story creation, and the co-construction is actively shown in embodied reflection that involves both authors.

The body-biography ends with a section that returns to the topic of dancing together with "Christine." Here, I discover themes from the biographical interview reiterated in our warmups and improvisation practice. I also highlight Kono's own written articulation of her dancing by referencing her teaching notes: a powerful third source for understanding her embodied history.

7 See the section "Dancing Memories: Warming Up with Kono," 165–69.

Life Stories

Beginning: Discovering Reasons to Dance

Liz Waterhouse: Can you please tell me how you started with ballet?

Christine Kono: First of all, I was very sick until I was nine years old. I had a double lung infection—pneumonia—when I was born. So, my lungs were always in a precarious condition. I never had anything to do with my body because I was always sick. I almost died when I was nine. That's not so sad. I didn't feel so sad. My doctor, Dr. Yamazaki said, "You have to do something consequently, physically active."⁸ I wanted to take swimming classes, but my parents didn't have the money for swimming classes. They had enough money for *ballet class* once a week, which for anyone who is not interested in moving was torture (laughs). I *hated* it. But Dr. Yamazaki said, "You continue, you continue. It's good for you. Especially for the lungs, because of the jumping." But I didn't like it at all.

I already could tap dance because that's what we did at school. I was a track and field athlete, doing running and hurdles like my father (a physicist and engineer). But I never had any formal dance training. Ballet was a terrible experience, *except* for one teacher. The teacher who took me for the first time was Russian, Igor Schwezoff, who ran away in 1930 from Russia because he was White Russian via Manchuria.⁹ He gave the audition for the scholarship class at the studio where I started, and when he was in LA, he gave me private classes to help me keep up with the more advanced

-
- 8 Pediatric doctor and Professor Dr. James N. Yamazaki (1916–2021) was born in Los Angeles, California, of Japanese ancestry. After serving as a doctor in the US military, he was made responsible for research on the effects of the atomic bomb on children in Hiroshima and Nagasaki as part of the US Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission in 1948. Returning in 1951, he worked as a pediatric doctor and professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. Kono maintained a trusted patient-doctor relationship with Dr. Yamazaki throughout his life. See Yamazaki and Fleming, *Children of the Atomic Bomb*; Yamazaki, "Why Does a Pediatrician Worry about Nuclear Weapons?"
- 9 During Igor Schwezoff's (1904–1982) life as a dancer, choreographer, and pedagogue he taught in many ballet institutions across Europe, North and South America, and Asia. Kono had lessons with him at "Mr. Belcher's studio" in Los Angeles and at the Washington School of Ballet. She brought out her personal copy of his autobiography *Borzoi* to fact check her testimony about his early life. An influential teacher in the development of ballet in Japan, between 1961 and 1966 he is reported to have taught between Washington and Japan at the Asami Maki Ballet Company and the Tachibana Ballet School. See Craine and Mackrell, "Schwezoff, Igor"; Schwezoff, *Borzoi*. See also photographer Scott Highton's website documentation of an article on Schwezoff published in an unknown source in 1979, <https://www.highton.com/pages/pictstoriesindex.html>, last accessed September 24, 2025.

students. I was definitely the least physically able, but maybe the way I liked to play with rhythm was appreciated?

Luckily, he had such a great sense of humor so that I went to class because he was funny. He was always smiling, with a twinkle in his eyes, and had us laughing while being corrected—although we took the corrections seriously. This is a great talent to have as a teacher. And he was encouraging to everyone. There were no favorites. He would laugh a lot and also use very nice creative images for movement. Like he said, “When you do a *failli* it has to be through the fog.” You don’t just put your foot forward. You have to feel the air changing. I said to myself, “Well that’s a good idea!” We thought he was crazy because he had these crazy images, hardly spoke any English, was trying to teach us in Russian and French. Listen, we were from Los Angeles! We all could tap dance. We had never seen ballet before in our life. You can imagine, well how crazy that was, to see *ballet*? You’re going like (mocking her childhood voice), “This guy is crazy, but he’s funny, so we’ll do it.”

I was the worst in the class. We were six little people, and I was the most turned in. My hips are turned in. I asked my doctor, “You know, they asked me to do this?” (Demonstrates first position in ballet.) He said, “Oh, you’re not turned out. You’re turned in in the pelvis.” I said, “Yeah, but they want me to do this.” And he said, “Well, you can turn out—rotate in the hip joint—but you are not naturally turned out. Your legs are placed like this in the pelvis. You can only work as much as you can.” So I did as much as I can.

Liz Waterhouse: Do you agree with the doctor’s assessment? Was this perhaps racial body stereotyping of the “turned-in Japanese girl”?¹⁰

Christine Kono: There is a backstory here. One of my other ballet teachers was not so nice to me. One day she put me in a perfect fifth position, building me into the position from the feet up. I was horrified. I said, “I might look good. But I *cannot breathe*.” I was kicked out of class for this confrontation.

Afterwards I went directly to my parents to discuss this incident. I was educated in liberal California during the fifties and sixties. As students we learned to be proactive—to voice our concerns and to have dialogues with our teachers and other adults. I also went to my doctor, Dr. Yamazaki, to ask if this ballet training was healthy, and I asked my track and field coach. I think because I was born sick, I always thought I’m not going to do something with my body that will harm it.

10 In the initial telling of this story, Kono did not explain that her doctor was Japanese American, and I had assumed that he was White. Our discussion about stereotypes and prejudices was deepened during the review of the transcript and subsequent editing. The text above condenses these multiple discussions.

So perhaps my doctor, Dr. Yamazaki, was stereotyping when he said I was turned in, but I too noticed, particularly in my childhood, many Japanese men and women with very strange leg alignments. Could this have been a dietary problem, which has since greatly declined? I'm not sure. In any case, with me my hips were not the problem. I did not have a very open pelvis, but I think there's a lot of rotation possibilities in the hip joint. Because some people have the hip joints with very little or no socket protection. This is much more dangerous. So I could rotate as much as I could, and I felt very centered. Because the hip joints are protected, it's better! Whereas many ballet dancers were loose, but they had no center. It's this feeling of the ki-hara center of energy.

Kono uses her body to communicate this narrative, to demonstrate her memories of her childhood. She rotates her toes open into the first position of ballet: making a very wide "V" without contorting or appearing uncomfortable. To my eye, she is not turned in or lacking in hip mobility.

Kono explains her hip structure using hand gestures, modeling the anatomical form of the hip's ball-and-socket joint. One hand represents the end of the leg bone, the bulbous femoral head, and the other models the hip socket that cups around the femur. On the word socket, she brings her hands together with an audible impact, modeling the stability. Then she rotates her fist, illustrating the range of internal rotation of the hip joint.

Both flexibility and strength are needed to turn out as a ballet dancer. To demonstrate her stability, Kono draws on a common teaching gesture to support the feeling of lifting "inside." She touches what she calls her "ki center" with her right fingertips, holding her shirt below the belly button. As she performs this gesture, I sense that her center energetically condenses, and her spine elevates and lengthens. Then she changes her body state to illustrate a contrast: dancers with flexibility but no stability. To demonstrate this, she playfully mimes ballet dancers with hypermobile, loose arms and legs. She dances quickly and wobbles her center and limbs, in a playful loosey-goosey manner. Then, to emphasize her point, she repeats the gesture of ki, touching her center. She accentuates the condensation of energy with her mouth: "Hm."

In a subsequent meeting to review this manuscript, she again stood up to clarify physically when I asked whether I had described her bodily communication well. She performed new gestures. Sliding her hands around her hips, she described the ki energy as the support of the deep abdominals—the transversus abdominis muscle—wrapping around the lower torso and fastening together at the front of the belly, like a muscular belt. Her hands moved from her lower back, around the ilium bones of the pelvis and met at her lower belly. With this gesture of stability, she explained that ballet creates lightness in the body. The weight of the pelvis must be suspended above the legs and the legs moved from the lower back. She compared this feeling to the sensation of hurdling in track and field, and the lightness of the quick movements in performing Balanchine ballets. In both, she observed, there is rebound and elasticity in the pelvis and knees.

These physical anecdotes, in which Kono uses her own body to reflect on her memories, give insights into the various layers of her bodily experiences and knowledge. Culture, sport, healing, medicine, and aesthetic dance movements interweave. Her embodied knowledge crisscrosses the praxis of sports at school with corrections in ballet class. Her terminology embraces Asian ideas of energy that Kono attributes to witnessing her mother's shiatsu treatments and her own exploration of muscles and anatomy. Her embodied memories go forward in time to her performance career, and then back in time to her childhood training. Like narrative memory in general, embodied memories condense, refract, and swirl in time, merging sensations, terminology, and skills.

Christine Kono: So in any case, what was more problematic for me was that I couldn't straighten my legs. This was against the tap dance principle. My teacher, Mr. Schwesoff, kept on saying, "Okay, now, Kono do a tendu to the side and drop your heel and point." I would always do a little bend in the leg (laughs). He would say, "Oh, it's much better." He wouldn't say "No, no, no." He would say, "Okay, *that much* better." I said, (whispers) "What is he talking about?" But he was being encouraging. I appreciated his kindness and humor.

Then in the exercises, we learned Russian folklore dances. We learned the *Mazurka* (demonstrates).¹¹ I said, "This is crazy," you know, really another culture, totally. We were all looking at each other like "What's this guy doing?" But it was *fun* at the end, and I think this combination of fun and creative imagination awakening was what kept all of us going.

Three of us became dancers eventually. But I was not enthused, because in my generation there were no *Asian* ballet dancers. I could care less, because I hadn't seen ballet anyways. I only started to go to performances when I was like thirteen. There was something at the Greek Theatre with Alicia Alonso. I wasn't impressed. I mean, she was amazing, but I had no personal identity with her. Then, the New York City Ballet [NYCB] came to rehearse in our studio because it was so big. The original owner of the studio, Mr. Ernest Belcher, was the teacher of Maria and Marjorie Tallchief.¹² So the big companies would come and rehearse. But I still wasn't impressed—though I loved Diana Adams. When I saw her, I went (emphatically), "That is beautiful." The NYCB did pieces from George Balanchine, like *Agon*, that were *amazing* musically, choreographically. But I never related to them. I said (frankly), "I have nothing to do with this."

11 The Mazurka has Polish origins.

12 Kono added to her testimony: "The main teachers at the time, circa 1956, were Harriet De Rea, who with her husband had taken over the school from Ernest Belcher, and Wilson Morelli, who was a former student of Mr. Schwesoff, dancer for ABT [American Ballet Theatre], choreographer and teacher." Personal correspondence, April 4, 2024.

Then the Bolshoi Ballet came for the first time in 1957/58. There was this old lady in the class like this (demonstrates). She was pudgy, moving at the barre very cautiously. I said, "Oh, she's still doing ballet." That was Galina Ulanova!¹³ Then I saw her in rehearsal. I went (exclaiming suddenly with a voluminous, deep voice), "Oh, transformation!" That was where I first said, "That is possible." Where you saw the *value* of performance was this ability to transform. She became something she was not. So you didn't see her. You saw what she was expressing. She did Giselle and Juliet, and she was sixteen years old, and she was actually at that moment almost fifty! That was my first attraction to dance, where I thought there is a *reason* to dance. I was attracted to this idea of transformation: that the body could become something else. You don't see the body. You see what it wants to say. So that was my first decisive moment—I was thirteen—where I said, "Maybe dance is something." But nevertheless, there were no Asians dancing professionally, as much as I knew. So that's the beginning.

Then, I was preparing myself with a college preparatory school program to go to the university; many people in my family went into medicine and law—something must have happened because suddenly the Royal Ballet of London came, and they offered me a scholarship. I also got a scholarship to the Joffrey Ballet, the American Ballet Theatre Schools, and the San Francisco Ballet School. My first reaction (to the scholarship from the Royal Ballet) was: I don't want to be English. I am American. And I want to study, probably international law. I really wasn't interested in going around on pointe.

Then my classmate, Elizabeth Lee—she is of Chinese heritage and one year older than me—her parents wanted her to go to New York because she had the same scholarships as I did. But they didn't want her to go alone. So my parents said I could go with Elizabeth to New York and make sure that she got settled, and then go down to my aunt and uncle in D.C. I was sixteen then, and I was getting ready to do my exams. My aunt and uncle helped me a lot—to inquire about the possibilities of getting a scholarship for two years. My uncle was a professor of French and German. The administration said, "Well, we'll see what your exams are like. If you take this exam and if you qualify, you're able to study here, but we probably can't give you a

13 Russian Ballerina Galina Ulanova (1909–1998) made her American debut with the Bolshoi Ballet in 1959, around the age of fifty as Kono reports. See Lvov-Anokhin, "Ulanova, Galina." When recounting this anecdote, Kono imitates Ulanova physically. She sinks her head and spine, while opening her arms to the side in a rounded second position. With low energy, she demonstrates soft leg brushes to the side, tendu, with a focus inside her body, not externalized in space. This softness, sinking, and inward focus are not ideal in classical ballet performance, but represent ways of energy saving, or marking, sensible for an older performer. This physical anecdote also adds drama and comedy to Kono's story, emphasizing the importance of this revelation to her appreciation for dance as a medium capable of transforming the self.

full scholarship. So you will have to work.” They offered me a job, of all places at the Pentagon in 1962, the beginning of the war in Vietnam. That was the decisive point.

So I went to the Pentagon. That was a “trip”—to go through security! I only worked for two weeks. They put me in the Department of Statistics—wrong idea—because (laughs ironically) I realized what war was about. I was very shocked as a very young person—naïve as I was—and still feeling very American and very grateful to be American. I realized that even if President Kennedy was there, that the statistics were about: How many civilians will die? How many American soldiers will die? But how many weapons will be sold? And how good is this for the economy of the USA? It was an economic estimation. It was not about a “war.” It was called a police action by SEATO. So this was not a “war.” It was an action to protect Southeast Asia. I realized there was a lot of info coming in from France. The French advised: Don’t bother because they had already been there. So I went like (maturely, decidedly), “I can’t do this. I’m not ready for it. I don’t understand enough. I am too young. I don’t want to get involved in something that is way over my head. I don’t want to make any judgments either.” I said, “I need a break, to decide if I will study something like international law or go back to California to study something else.”

That was the decisive reason to go to New York, before going back to California. I was invited by a lot of dancers to stay with them and to see their performances. I knew a lot of Broadway people, so I got to see a lot of good shows. Because I didn’t have much funding left to take dance classes, I went to auditions. If I was lucky, I got at least a bit of training—a ballet *barre*—before they kicked me out! (Laughs.) Then I was taken as an apprentice into the Joffrey Ballet and into the corps [de ballet] of the Pennsylvania Ballet Company. So I called my parents. I said, “I’m going to try dancing for one season, because I’m a bit disillusioned with my former ambitions.” In the meantime, I was also offered an apprenticeship with American Ballet Theatre. They offered me other work besides dancing to exist, so I worked in the office. I said, “That’s good for me to see how a company functions,” not just to go around doing this (imitates ballet ironically, laughs).

Getting into these companies, learning to be in the corps de ballet, was rough. To learn to be in the corps for *Giselle* in ABT [American Ballet Theatre] was like being in a traffic jam. It was a mess. I felt the rehearsals were bad—without working on quality—just getting through it and going: “Go to the right. Go to the left. Go back. Go front.” I was not satisfied with that at all.

I did the most with the Pennsylvania Ballet Company [PBC], which was interesting because Mr. Balanchine was then artistic director. PBC had a big Balanchine repertoire. The first thing I did was *Donizetti Variations* which was so much fun. I danced in the group, of course, not as the main dancer. We did *Scotch Symphony*, *Concerto Barocco*—which I wasn’t in usually because I’m too short—*Raymonda* *Pas De Dix*. I learned *Serenade*, but I didn’t stay long enough to do

it. In any case, Balanchine had his touch in whatever we did. He came to work with us.

Oh, I did *Symphony in C*! I did the fourth movement.

Liz Waterhouse (sings a motif from the music): It's the one where you leap on?

Christine Kono (laughs): No, that's the third movement.

Liz Waterhouse: Oh, okay. So I just know this (demonstrates).

I mark a few steps from the corps de ballet of Symphony in C, from the grand finale performed by female dancers in a large "U" formation. I believe that I learned this series of syncopated tendus as a teenager, watching a VHS video recording of the New York City Ballet.¹⁴ I loved the music as well as the unusual movement pattern of the tendus. I had also seen Symphony in C performed live as a teenager, during the summer seasons of the New York City Ballet in Saratoga. The part that Kono references is the soloist's part, to the same music.

Christine Kono: Yeah. Good!

Liz Waterhouse: Something like this?

Christine Kono: No, the fourth movement. The coming in and doing a lot of fouettés. I was the one who came in and did this (demonstrates).

Kono demonstrates the rapid, rhythmical steps: marking the movements as an elder ballet mistress would, with precise timing and playful intention, but without full execution of the movements. She emphasizes the rhythm and dynamic play of elevation up and down: There is the triple beat of the pas de bourrée turn, then the syncopated whip of the fouetté turn with the stylistically unusual use of the right arm flying up above the head with the whip of the leg—this is done multiple times, which I imagine is challenging—then she shows the fast coupés with the arms to the side, with a rhythmic down beat audible in the recording. Kono smiles as she performs this.

Christine Kono: That was me!

Liz Waterhouse: Oh, yes! (Sings the accompanying music by Georges Bizet.)

Christine Kono: Yeah, that one!

14 To question my memory, I reviewed this sequence in documentary footage from a performance in 1973 by the New York City Ballet. See Balanchine, *Symphony in C*, 27:00–27:30.

Liz Waterhouse: You still remember that in your body? That's very impressive.

Christine Kono: Oh, I can't do that anymore. I don't do that to myself.

Liz Waterhouse: Can you tell me what it felt like to do that? Do you remember what your body felt like before, during, after?

Christine Kono: Well, sometimes I prepared myself by jogging. Because it was really important to get to this tempo and just keep it.

Liz Waterhouse: Fast.

Christine Kono: Yeah. So it really was keeping the tempo and a little bounce. It was fun. It was a lot of fun. To do Balanchine it's always fun. It's amazing because his musicality and the choreography go so well together that you don't have to think. The musicality takes you and you feel lucky to do it.

But we also did *Swan Lake*. There were stupid things in—excuse me, I don't know if I should say this—those unnecessary pas de trois. (Laughs ironically.) Totally unimaginative choreographically, and I feel, story-wise, totally unnecessary. And you end up doing some kind of variation. You say to yourself, “What? Why are we doing this?” It's totally incoherent. It doesn't belong at all, any place. The best thing in *Swan Lake* for me was to run out and pose—stay—and run back. That's so beautiful. Just that! Why do we have to do those stupid variations? No, I did, of course, the little swans, because I am short. That was okay. That was sort of funny. But the little pas de trois and the third act with the Black Swan and all these people coming in doing things. Also *Sleeping Beauty*, (gasps horrifically) “Ahh!” Superfluous!

Liz Waterhouse: So were you a ballerina then?

Christine Kono: I was a soloist. I would do ballerina things as fifth cast on tour. If someone was having a nervous breakdown, I would go on.

Liz Waterhouse: Your feeling of yourself? Were you a ballerina, Christine, at that age?

Christine Kono (changes tone to a more intimate voice, at a lower volume): I think I always had a feeling of laughing inside of me. It was really not my cup of tea to think of myself as a ballerina. You know, I was embarrassed a bit. Like if my classmates in Los Angeles had seen me doing this—because I come from a Black school where they would do like Motown coming down like this. So here you are, in ballet doing like this (demonstrates). I went like, “What would they think of me?”

With Balanchine, I didn't have that problem. With classical Petipa it was a little bit hard. You know, going like (light disgust), "Uh." Like *Giselle*, the *Peasant Pas De Deux*. I'm just going like (whispers), "Oh my God, this is stupid." For me in the audience, when I was watching something like that, I said, "I didn't know how it belonged in the whole thing and helped to create the atmosphere and the advancement of whatever was going to be said." It was like *cutting* the whole thing for me.

Kono illustrates the contrast physically. First, she performs a bit of Motown. She bobs, knees loose. With a groove and a vibe, she walks and swings her arms. Then she changes her body state to enact the light, shapely arms—the port de bras—of ballet movements, with a bit of coquetry in her head and eyes. This contrast shows that Kono experiences the tensions of embodied difference, between doing and watching, popular and stage dance, between participating in African American dance cultures and European American concert dance. The judgment of her peers seems significant here. Perhaps this also reflects issues of class: Kono having family who were educated doctors, lawyers, and professors, who would evaluate ballet from this perspective.

Liz Waterhouse: You remarked before that when you were a child that you hadn't, other than Elizabeth Lee, other Asian American dancers around. Is that right?

Christine Kono: She was the only one I knew, besides me.

Liz Waterhouse: When you came to New York were you seeing more dancers that were not White?

Christine Kono: Yeah, it was in the sixties. Well, first there was Arthur Mitchell, New York City Ballet. I saw him in LA rehearsing Balanchine's *Agon* in 1957. He was so beautiful. Then Alvin Ailey started his ensemble in 1958. Then there was Judith Jamison, who was *gorgeous*. So the Black people started to appear.¹⁵ There was—we called her "big Yuriko"—Yuriko Kikuchi in Graham, who was also a *wonderful* dancer.¹⁶ But in classical ballet, there were no Asians. There was Ruth Ann Koesun, who was half Asian in American Ballet Theatre.¹⁷ She was a principal dancer with

15 Kono's testimony gives *her* perspective on the comparative visibility of African American vs. Asian American dancers in Los Angeles and New York in the sixties. The important contribution of persons of color to American dance history is considered from an academic perspective by dance scholar Takiyah Nur Amin. She describes earlier antecedents to the visible wave and climate of diversification that Kono reports here, in which Kono also includes canonical figures visible in ballet and uptown dance. See Nur Amin, "African American Dance Revisited."

16 See Kisselgoff, "Yuriko, Keeper of Martha Graham's Flame."

17 See Kisselgoff, "Ruth Ann Koesun."

Chinese and Russian parents, but I never saw her really dancing. There was a lot of influence from Cuba, Puerto Rico, a lot of nice dancers coming from there. So things started to open up just around the sixties. I was lucky, in that sense, or unlucky because I ended up dancing. Because I was always very interested in other things.

I tell you what made the change when I was nineteen. I was about to leave dancing, because I felt it was enough. The tours were so hard—bus and truck. You didn't have your own hotel room; you always doubled up. There were no rules. You could arrive one hour before a show and go on stage and have to dance. Sometimes there was no preparation and no respect for the body and the mind. I said, me personally, "I don't think I'm going to last." The dancers were falling right and left from injury.

I broke my metatarsal in a rehearsal because I went through the floor on pointe. My partner went through the floor too. He broke his Achilles [tendon, in the ankle] and I broke my metatarsal [bone, in the foot]. We were on the floor laughing. We said, "Now we have to really think about our education." Because we both couldn't help each other stand up. We looked at each other with amazement, and the first thing we did was laugh. It was a good reaction. I mean, inevitably under those conditions, which were inhuman, something like that had to happen. It was happening also to others, not only us.

Figures 2 + 3: Christine Kono at the Pennsylvania Ballet Company (1966). Kono remembers this moment to be after the accident when she broke her metatarsals as she was returning to dancing on pointe.



Photo by André de Ribère.

Injury and Care: "I'm not going to sacrifice my body."

Liz Waterhouse: What was the process after a dancer would get injured? Or what was your process?

Christine Kono: The company was responsible because it happened during rehearsal. So the insurance company would pay us—for the doctors' fees, and for the time off in recuperation. It happened with the Pennsylvania Ballet Company, but I still had a room in New York. Nothing was happening in Philadelphia. I would go back to New York also to see a doctor for my foot—someone who said he could at least bring back the flexibility of the metatarsal and not operate so I couldn't move it anymore. I didn't think about dancing again. In the meantime, I could reorganize myself to think about studying again.

But Barbara Weisberger, who was the director of the Pennsylvania Ballet Company, said, "Christine, can you teach *Concerto Barocco* to the Balanchine scholarship class?" I said, "Well, I can't move, but I will help them as much as I can." So I went down to Pennsylvania again. This was in 1965. The students had all been selected by Mr. Balanchine. Luckily, they were all shapes and sizes: twelve girls between the ages of eleven and thirteen. They were so gifted. I mean, I only had to move my fingers. I said to myself, "That's interesting!" They were good researchers. There was no negative competition, only positive observation between them. I taught them *Concerto Barocco* more or less with my arms. I don't know how I did it, but I had already studied the concerto on the violin, which I played until I was fourteen. The last thing I studied was Bach's *Concerto for Two Violins in D minor*, which is the music for *Concerto Barocco*.

It was a good combination. I was nineteen. It was interesting to teach people who were so smart and curious. I said, "It would be interesting for me to teach because these people will *use* dance even if they don't dance." That's how I got involved in the idea of teaching, with these girls. One became a soloist: Ellen Federov with the Pennsylvania Ballet Company. Lisa de Ribère became a member of the New York City Ballet and soloist for American Ballet Theatre. One girl worked with Robert Wilson, and the rest did something else. I knew one became a lawyer. Another became a nurse. But it didn't matter (thoughtfully, bringing her words together slowly): It was this atmosphere of using dance as something for life, not in order to be on stage, that encouraged me to think, "Well, maybe dance can be something that I can investigate as a teacher?" That was the beginning, I think, of that idea.

Then after three-quarters of a year, I went right back on pointe. But that was a mistake because it was too quick, as usual. It wasn't good for my body, but I did it. Then Eliot Feld asked me to come to New York permanently. I knew him already. I was a friend of his sister. Occasionally he would come and give a class for the Pennsylvania Ballet Company, which was sort of like doing everything *backwards*,

which was interesting for me. Good for my (points to her head). But he asked me—not to dance for him—he asked me to be an agent, to look for dancers, because we personally didn't really like each other.

Liz Waterhouse: Why?

Christine Kono: Bossy. You couldn't ask questions easily. I didn't think everything he did was cool. But I liked his musicality and some of the ideas, like doing a movement without showing off. "It should look like you're doing it," he said, "on the subway." I said, "That's a good idea." Sometimes I would do the choreography but not perform it—meaning help to make the steps. That was also good for me. Because there were some dancers who didn't like to look for their own material or invent dance movements. I would take them in a room, and we would work out something—at least a score which they could present to him. He was so nasty sometimes. But I said to myself, "I don't need to take this personally."

I was also the union representative for his company, because everyone else was afraid of him. For me it was important that the dancers had someone with whom they could express their opinions openly. I said, "I have nothing to lose. If he kicks me out of the company, it doesn't matter to me. Because there are some *principles*—human principles—that have to be encouraged. And won. And I'm not afraid to defend those principles, no matter who it is."

A lot of dancers, unfortunately, they're afraid. I found that very unhealthy. So you were sort of the one they complained to. Some of them I felt shouldn't be dancing because they were unable to see themselves independently of a choreographer and imagine their lives beyond what they were doing at that moment, and sometimes dancing too injured—afraid to say, "I don't feel good." Afraid to say, "It's too much for me," like on tour.

Another injury: I fell. I was dropped on my back because my partner was doing too much. It wasn't his fault. He was suddenly thrown into the piece. Someone was sick and he had to learn so much on tour under the worst conditions, and to remember all the choreography in a couple of days. I said, "Of course he forgot." He was in the wrong wing. He was so upset. I said, "It's not your fault. You shouldn't have to be put under this pressure, especially with someone criticizing you in a not nice way. It's not your fault, you know." I said, "What are you going to do if you have to learn all these parts suddenly, like six pieces, and you're in all of them. You never had proper run-through rehearsals. You're doing great!"

These conditions had to be changed for the dancers. I tried to mention these issues at union meetings. Speaking to people, directors of companies, and saying, "Maybe it's better to have one less dancer in the company and provide the dancers with enough pointe shoes, so they don't hurt their feet." Things like that. "Consider that if you have a heavy repertoire with at least six hours a day on pointe that the

dancers may need more shoes.” Things that they don’t (indignantly) *consider*: “That someone has to see a stage before they go on it, the rehearsal conditions, and that the dancers need after eight hours of bus travel, a night off before they go to work. I thought these things would make a big difference in the quality of the performance, which everyone is dependent on, and are also very important for the health of the dancers.” It was simple. There was no planning before.

Liz Waterhouse: Were you the first union representative for Feld or had there been someone before?

Christine Kono: I was the first, because I was one of the original members of the company. I don’t know how I ended up in this, but I felt there was already a union representative for the Pennsylvania Ballet Company, for American Ballet Theatre, for all the big companies. But there was also the category of small companies. (Thoughtfully, enunciating her words slowly) I just discovered then how important it was to have an organization that protected people just for human rights—independently of your artistic freedom. Sometimes people were so afraid to miss a rehearsal and they were really sick or injured. I think this is one of the reasons why there was so much drug abuse. I have to say that I think I’m one of the few dancers who allowed myself to be sick, even if I lost a part. It was, I figured, good for *me* and also good that someone else could do it. So you don’t have this attitude, “I’m the only one who can do it.” *That’s not true*. It’s a very dangerous attitude to have. It’s good to be able to recover if you are injured or sick. It’s also good to see other people doing what you did. You learn a lot!

Sometimes I loved to dance a piece. Then, I saw the piece from the audience’s perspective, and I said, “Oh that’s boring.” And sometimes, with pieces that I hated to dance, I saw them from the audience and loved them. So you have a total “other” perspective if you go outside. It was an opportunity when you were injured to go out. Even if I lost something, a part, at least I said to myself, “This body you’re going to have to carry with you for the rest of your life. (Slowly, defiantly) I’m not going to *sacrifice* my body. I don’t help the art form. I don’t help anyone, not the choreographer, by performing sick and injured and taking drugs in order to dance. I could help by being honest about my condition and allow someone else to dance.” That’s positive, at least. And if the choreographer will not accept me because I had the audacity to be sick, then I shouldn’t work with him/her.

Liz Waterhouse: Were many dancers on drugs at that time?

Christine Kono (incensed): It was a rumor, but I saw it in some open classes. It was obvious that some dancers were going up or coming down. I knew this from Balanchine’s *Symphony in C*, for example. With the Pennsylvania Ballet Company,

there was once one girl doing the first movement *and* the fourth movement. I know I could only do the fourth. I mean, it was maybe short but exhausting to really be there for that kind of movement. I asked her how she did it. She said that she did it with speed. She took drugs. I said, (gasps) I was shocked. *It's not worth it.*

I didn't ask too many questions, but you could see that a lot of dancers were acting very silly sometimes. I thought, "They're not themselves." This is a sign of drugs (sighs). I think they took methedrine and heroin. It is absolutely amazing that people felt it so necessary to dance that they did *that*. Because I always thought dance is something about being honest. (Imploringly) Isn't it?¹⁸ About what you are, who you are, what you have. Your instrument is very precious. So you take care of it.

I've had to save some people who went on extreme diets. They were not only anorexic, but they had ulcers. I had to call ambulances and have them rushed to the hospital—stuff like that. I said (indignantly), "Why?" Young girls in their early twenties, sick when they should be flourishing. This one girl from the School of American Ballet was gorgeous! I mean, perfect! And she joined the Pennsylvania Ballet Company—beautiful, tall, perfect for the New York City Ballet. And I think sometimes Mr. Balanchine sent people into the Pennsylvania Ballet Company first to have dance experience with us. Then a ballet master told her that she had to lose weight. I said, "Why? She's gorgeous." And she was one of those dancers whose ulcers exploded. I had to take her to the hospital, call her parents to get the permission to operate. She had three hours to live and after that she couldn't dance anymore. I'm going like (despondently), "What are these people telling these kids?"

Liz Waterhouse: When I think of stereotypes of ballet and the Balanchine tradition—"Don't think, just do."—this way that the ballet world is your life, not having a perspective outside—these are things that you have always spoken out against, when I worked with you.¹⁹

Christine Kono (resolutely): Well, I was lucky that I don't look like a Balanchine dancer, and I never could get into that school. So if I got something to dance, I didn't have this pressure. They were under tremendous pressure. As soon as you were blonde, five foot seven with long legs, you had to live up to Suzanne Farrell. I went like, "I'm glad I don't have to do that." (Laughs.) I was very lucky. I saw these wonderful, talented people—beautiful dancers, really very beautiful to watch, not only their bodies, but they all had a *wonderful* sense of movement. They *destroyed*

18 Kono's belief is shared by Martha Graham, who writes: "Movement never lies. It is a barometer telling the state of the soul's weather to all who can read it. This might be called the law of the dancer's life—the law which governs its outer aspects." Graham, "I Am a Dancer," 120–21.

19 Wilkin, "Remembering Balanchine," 711.

themselves in order to fit into this image. They didn't have to do that. This happened often in the ballet world. Very often. I thought it was really a shame.

Listening to Kono here, we see how dancers' experiences in the ballet world reflect individual encounters with discrimination and privilege, revealing the complexities of intersectional identity. Kono describes how a ballet dancer's outward appearance makes them vulnerable to others—subject to judgment that, in her professional context, was rooted in racist and sexist ideologies about the normative physical appearance of classical ballet bodies. My follow-up question invites Kono to explain this further, in her own words as a witness.

Liz Waterhouse: Did you feel that the way others treated you when you were a ballet dancer was a form of empowerment or racism or both?

Christine Kono (speaking slowly, considerably): I was told by Barbara Weisberger, of the Pennsylvania Ballet Company, that some of the board members were very skeptical about *me* because of my Japanese background, *because* all Japanese dancing is parallel, not turned out. I said, “I’m very turned in and very proud of it.” (Laughs.) “And, I’m not really an example of Japanese culture. I’m the third generation in the United States, and I don’t want to be responsible for other Japanese dancers.” I’m sure there are many Japanese dancers—which is proven now with history—who are physically very *able* to do classical ballet. I don’t want my body to be an example for a lot of other Japanese people. We don’t fit into one basket. There are many different bodies, also within the Japanese people. This sort of attitude is really crazy.²⁰

It is maybe because of this influence—because of being Japanese American or American Japanese—that I could *identify* with classical ballet. Especially because I am Western. You know? If I were direct from Japan after the Second World War, it might be a little more difficult. But having been in—exposed to—in a society that is American, also the way of education and thinking that I don’t disassociate myself at all with what I am dancing.

I had it really much easier than a lot of other dancers after I started. Because I noticed the criticism of the other dancers, particularly female ones, was unjustifiable. They had to be like an image that was being created of what a dancer should look like. I felt so sorry for them.

Liz Waterhouse: What was the way that a female dancer should look like at that time?

20 This concurs with dance scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s examination of race and the dancing body as a social construct and not a biological imperative. Dixon Gottschild writes, “There is enough variation *within* any ethnic group to make the theory worthless.” See Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*, 5. (emphasis in original)

Christine Kono: Except for me, everyone else had to be, at least, as I said, five foot six, five foot seven, very skinny, with long legs—like a fashion model. Not like a dancer. We're not models, we're dancers. This is where I bring in transformation. There are many dancers that I *love* on stage, but if you see them in person, you don't recognize them. It's the magic that they're able to create through movement. They are able to transform themselves and everyone/everything in the space. You don't *see* them—you don't see them. You see what they create. I was wondering why they were making all this *fuss* about these girls. Because most of them, I would say, were destroyed psychologically along the way and had the potential of really becoming wonderful artists.

Liz Waterhouse: From your position today, do you have any better insight as to why all that went on?

Christine Kono (long pause, sighs audibly): I think in some places there were and still are, unfortunately, people who, when they are in positions of power, they want to control people. They're not interested in what the dancers can offer. They're interested in controlling them.

Mentors in Modern Dance: "Martha Was a Performance in Herself."

In contrast to the ballet world, the circuits of modern dance in New York City impress Kono with their generosity and provide her with role models who are also female and Asian. Throughout our dialogue, the ideal of Martha Graham's body appears as both a specter and a referenced ideal for the perfection of Graham technique.

Liz Waterhouse: When and how did your practice change from ballet?

Christine Kono: Through Kazuko Hirabayashi, a professor at Juilliard. She was the teacher of Alvin Ailey and born in Japan.²¹ She got me to do Graham classes with her and go to the Graham school in my break. She also arranged that I had enough financially for this time. So I started with Graham technique. I was twenty, so this was 1966/67. It was so nice because I started at the very beginning. There were demonstrators at the Graham school. One volunteered every day, half an hour before

21 "As a choreographer, Ms. Hirabayashi came to early notice in the 1960s with a highly personal style that combined American modern dance and some ballet with a Japanese theatrical sensibility. Yet her own creativity in the two companies she founded and directed was eventually overshadowed by her international reputation as a teacher whose depth and dignity inspired extreme devotion from students at the Juilliard School and elsewhere." Kisselgoff, "Kazuko Hirabayashi."

class, to come and help me to learn the exercises and to correct me. What a privilege! They did this for everyone. I thought, "How generous, how nice!" You know, you're not used to this generosity in the ballet world.

Kazuko did a piece called *The Stone Garden* (1971) where I danced with Jonathan Watts from the New York City Ballet, as well as with Larry Grenier and Lance Westergard, who were with Eliot in the American Ballet Company.²² The piece was for eleven boys and me. Basically, I was a boy until the very end. So it was *fun*! She had a lot of lyricism in her movement. Kazuko's movement wasn't as static as Martha Graham's, so it was easier to connect movements. There was a kind of harmony in the way phrases were made, so you initiated, and it just flowed. It was not about form. I think it was more about allowing something to unfold naturally. Kazuko had this lyrical quality in her own movement, even with Graham, which was helpful. Because we also had Graham as a teacher occasionally (laughs), which was frightening!

Liz Waterhouse: Why?

Christine Kono (her speech picks up speed and energy): Martha was a performance in herself. She was wonderful! She was so verbally articulate, but frightening. She believed in everyone; this was wonderful about Martha. I don't know if we did everything out of fright. Because in the Graham school you didn't know who was going to teach the class. You had to knock on the door of the school, and someone would come out and look at the people and decide if you were allowed in or not. It was a ritual.²³

In any case, Martha was amazing. I had her when she was in her sixties. She was still dancing. And this body! She was two hundred degrees turned out. I went like, "her legs are backwards!" (Laughs.) So all the spirals in her technique were so easy for her. It was great to *see* her because it's always great to see a body which works. Everything followed that spiral, so logically. Double spirals, and I went like "Oh my God." So, you know, you do it in your minimal possibilities, but it's great to see that it worked totally for someone else.

Kazuko also taught the Cunningham dancers Graham technique. So that brought me into another group of dancers, on the other side of the dance world. She was the teacher of Robert Swinston, who was the assistant of Merce Cunningham, and Cunningham was a Graham dancer originally.

22 "Miss Kono particularly had a special delicacy that made the abstractly presented theme of a young woman's spiritual journey and search for love radiate with poetic beauty." Kisselgoff, "Kazuko Hirabayashi Company."

23 Testimony elsewhere remembers Martha Graham as an authoritarian teacher, capable of physical and verbal abuse. See Lakes, "The Messages behind the Methods."

Liz Waterhouse: Can you share some of the things that you remember that were part of the Graham training? I have some experience, from my teacher Marcus Schulkind, who, because of his knee injuries, taught a modified Graham technique.

Christine Kono: Better. Yeah, Graham is very hard on the guys. The technique requires the maximum use of the space inside the pelvis, and naturally, in the male pelvis there is less space than in the female pelvis. I always thought of a contraction as a stretch. Because you open the ribcage lumbar to the back and the top, the sternum goes up.

Liz Waterhouse: The sternum goes up?

Christine Kono: I'm trying to go up in a contraction. I'm not trying to go down. Martha could do it. She could. I can't do it anymore. She really could arch here in the sternum and open back in the lumbar. She had a very flexible spine.

Kono experiments, gently and carefully, with her body. We are both seated on the floor of the dance studio. She opens her legs in a wide straddle ("V") and moves from the spine, finding a contraction. In recent documentation of the Graham technique, these movements are called the "deep stretches," the name in agreement with Kono's memory of the sensation of stretching.²⁴

The terminology that Kono uses with me during our movement exchange is anatomical and connected to her work with Dimitris Kraniotis. To my knowledge, it is not the pedagogical terminology used in Graham training in the late sixties. The lower back is the lumbar spine; the sternum is the chest bone where the ribs come together. The dorsal spine, another term for thoracic spine, is the spine in the middle back—from the base of the neck down twelve vertebrae to the base of the back ribs. Kono demonstrates rolling the pelvis back and floating the ribs up towards the ceiling. I am amazed how easily this happens for her, as if based on deep muscle memory.

I join Kono in exploring. I too open my legs into a straddle. I contract with an exhale that is audible on the audio recording of the interview. I extend energy through my limbs by cupping my hands and flexing my feet, details that I remember from my training with Schulkind. In this elongating extension, I move the spine in the concave position of a contraction. My guts go back, soft like a worm. Then I release the tension and return to sitting. Repeating the motion a few times and following Kono's encouragement I begin to sense the soft, pliancy of the abdominals and core. It's a layered feeling of intention: my lower body recoils backwards, while my eyes and intention stay lifting—Kono exclaims at the end: "Yeah, right!"

Christine Kono: Take your dorsal spine into an arch, and then try to get your center to go back. Yeah, right! It should take you up. Martha could do it.

24 See the documentary film *Martha Graham Dance Technique*, 12:01–13:40.

Another thing that I thought was good was also all the work here (she touches her hip) all through here.

Liz Waterhouse: You're pointing to the area of the hip crease? Not the side of your hip, but in line with the psoas muscle? And I see you making diagonal pelvis movements.

Christine Kono: I won't do it fully. All these spiral motions. Moving all through here.

Kono points to a zone on her body between leg and torso, that I call "the hip crease." Interestingly, here in our movement exchange she does not use anatomic vocabulary, even after my prompts. Instead, she dives into the motion to remember. Using her body gently, she explores the "spiral turn" motions, which through extension and release of the hip, enable turning the body in a spiral. Kono plays with the mechanics of the legs and spine—without performing the arm motions I associate with this exercise, based on recent video documentation from the Martha Graham Center of Contemporary Dance (2018).²⁵ I join her, imitating. Crossing her legs in front of her, Kono marks some of the motions of the "breathing" exercises and "the double spirals." In her movement, she shows the importance of the internal motion, moving the upper body from inside of the torso, rather than from the periphery or limbs.²⁶

Christine Kono: There was also the double spiral. The double spiral to the back of the head. You take it *not* from the top, but here (points again to her hip crease).

And then there's all this—I can't do this anymore—going to the floor and coming up. I used to be able to do all of that (laughs). Good, Liz!

Liz Waterhouse: Is this Graham?

I perform my memory of "The Pleadings," a composite memory mixing Marcus Schulkind's modern class and Hilary Cartwright's Yoga Narada®. I begin sitting, my legs stretched out in front of me. Imagining the first beat of the phase, with an exhale I thrust suddenly into a contracted position—laying down with my legs together, an image that makes me think of Jesus on the cross. To release the position, I inhale and exhale to lie down. Then, entering a yoga pose that is also part of my current practice of Yoga Narada, I flex my feet and arch up, with minimal weight on the top of my head and elbows. Then I return to rest and lie down. Then, I exhale to hollow out my abdominals and cup the hands to come up to sitting, before lowering myself down

25 See *Martha Graham Dance Technique*, 16:30–18:00.

26 In an interview between Bessie Schonberg and Deborah Jowitt, Schonberg describes Graham's credo as "you moved between the shoulders and the knees and that was it." Bannerman, "An Overview of the Development of Martha Graham's Movement System (1926–1991)," 10.

to begin the sequence percussively again. Mixing elements from the present and the past, I have little knowledge of what is from Graham and what is from other sources.

The first part of my movement resounds with Kono's embodied memories. She, however, remembers "Martha" coming up in a different way. She also has embodied memories of developments of the exercise onto diagonals, which were adopted and simplified in Schulkind's classes. We both have many gaps in the details of the sequencing. Are the feet flexed? How is it coordinated? Kono, after her abdominal surgery for cancer, is careful not to exert her body too forcefully. I become a surrogate body, keeping our conversation going. This anecdote displays the active nature of embodied memories as reconstructions; messy and imperfect registers, they link past and present, one body to another.

Christine Kono: Then all this. I remember this (demonstrates seated spiraling exercises).

Liz Waterhouse: The fourths. I've seen this in documentation of Graham technique, but none of this was in Marcus's class. Too hard on the knees. Your heel is in line with your pubis?

Christine Kono: Yes. So, basically, if I were really good, I could stand up here—I can't do it anymore, I should be able to go up here and fold back (down to sitting on the floor). I should be able to stand up without my hands. By going from a contraction here, to unwind and bring myself all the way up to standing. That's how we stood up from the floor, from this spiral. (Amazed) I don't know how I did that! I had quadriceps [thigh muscles] I don't have anymore.

Liz Waterhouse: This side of my body just doesn't want to do it. That's very interesting. This is the knee, the left knee, that I injured in The Forsythe Company (laughs).

Here the virtuosity is challenging to both of us. I have never learned any of these motions, and Kono—amazingly agile for her age—is not able to demonstrate them.

There are a multitude of exercises to train these kneeling motions and level changes in Graham technique. The leg position of fourths is an important and challenging position in the Graham training, already taught at the beginning level. One is not supposed to feel pain in the knees as one spirals the upper body, but the danger of pain is present.²⁷ Kono's switch to speaking of an ideal body, "Martha's," as well as imperatives of what one should do are

27 The narrator of the Martha Graham Dance Technique video admonishes that in fourth position "there should be no strain on the knees." See *Martha Graham Dance Technique*, 16:50–17:00.

consistent with this virtuosic technique. I try a bit of what she is exploring. But I am not able to perform these movements.

Christine Kono: I remember a fall in six, something like that. You go one, two, three, four, five, six (both laugh).

Side Jobs in New York

Liz Waterhouse: Returning to the topic of your career as a young professional dancer in New York, you were studying Graham and performing . . .?

Christine Kono: Well, I was doing Graham training and working with Eliot Feld, basically. Together it was a good balance. I also did other jobs occasionally. I'll mention two. One was that I was asked to be a judge at a dog show! I loved this! Another job was from a dancer who knew Richard Avedon, the photographer for *Vogue*. They were looking for someone to help him find dancers to model clothes, and they thought that I would be a good person to choose some dancers. Through that work I met this famous model, Veruschka von Lehndorff.

I chose some dancers from the New York City Ballet because they looked like models—not the principal dancers, but some dancers that could use the money! Veruschka wasn't beautiful when you saw her, but it was again one of those people who could transform: she could make clothes move. She was not too skinny, and she had a strong gaze. She was unattractive without makeup, but once she put makeup and clothes on, she transformed completely. She knew how to move and bring the clothes to life. That was a very interesting experience. So I was looking for extra jobs—not extra ways to dance—but extra things like that to do.

Sometimes, there was a ballerina who couldn't do a pas de deux—was sick or something—and they asked, "Can you do this for me?"

Liz Waterhouse (surprised): And you put on your pointe shoes again?

Christine Kono: Yes. Honestly, I don't know how good of a decision that was. I couldn't sustain performing classical ballet repertoire day-after-day. After one performance, my body would say, "Maybe you shouldn't do this for a couple of weeks?" Holding positions like this (demonstrates arabesque) and like this (she touches her back, mimicking pain, after performing an attitude), I don't think this was very good for me (both laugh). You know, I wasn't very good at it—I mean, I didn't feel like I could develop it. And this image of a ballerina, I never had it for myself, so

...

Liz Waterhouse (overlapping): The Spanish ballerina!

Christine Kono: But if I could help, I was always willing. I tried to look for other work that was more interesting to me. I didn't work in cafes, but I worked in offices, and I was a babysitter. In fact, I was a babysitter for Lewis Lloyd and Linda Fosberg. Lewis Lloyd was the first husband of Barbara Lloyd, a dancer from Merce Cunningham. That got me free tickets for Cunningham! Louis was the manager for Eliot Feld. Because his son from his first marriage was very intelligent, it was a great job. I also babysat for Jane Hermann, who eventually became the director of American Ballet Theater after Baryshnikov. She was then on the board of directors of Eliot [Feld].

I learned a lot through talking to these people about management. I learned about what they were doing, and I could complain/express my dissatisfactions to them. I could tell them what was going on in rehearsals, explain what I felt about performances and tours, because they were members of the foundation or managers. In Feld's company there was dissatisfaction. He was already thinking about having another company, and I agreed that things would have to be different. I said, "You know, this doesn't work. It creates a bad atmosphere in rehearsals: There is a bad—a wrong—sense of competition. There's not a good sense of competition. There's not a healthy atmosphere." I was able to work well with people like Lewis Lloyd and Jane Hermann; just being a babysitter and close to them on a personal basis enabled me to say things which I think interested them. They were very nice people, but as managers, they didn't always really know what was going on.

Liz Waterhouse: Why not?

Christine Kono: When they came into rehearsals, they knew, of course, that it was *difficult* sometimes, but they did not know why. To hear specifically what was behind the problems—what specifically had happened—for instance, that someone had gone to the dentist instead of taking class and therefore was treated badly in rehearsal. I explained *specifically* why the atmosphere was not good. Also, I felt that, independently of my status as a union representative, that a certain attitude had to change. It's an attitude. It's a whole attitude. It's not just this one event. It questions (with emphasis) "*What is a dancer?*" You must respect dancers as people, as human beings first, and then if you do that, maybe you can have a good working relationship. They are not just tools. They are not just instruments. They are people. And as human beings, in order to have the most productive, creative experience, there must be a respectful atmosphere. You don't have to love everyone, but there has to be at least mutual respect.

Dancing in Tanz-Forum Cologne: A New Vision of Being a Dancer

Moving from Los Angeles to Washington, then to New York and finally Cologne, Kono learns new ways of laboring and perceiving her dancing body. In contrast to her earlier work within the hierarchical structures and narrative fictions of ballet companies, dancing within the context of German Tanztheater enables Kono to explore relations between aesthetic abstraction, movements in daily life, and performing dramatic roles. Her testimony compares the various dance aesthetics she has encountered, exploring her personal preferences while also highlighting differing approaches to movement, meaning, individuality, and narrative.

At Tanz-Forum Cologne, Kono fondly remembers a sense of camaraderie in ensemble dancing. Her testimony notably shifts away from foregrounding the topic of race while continuing to reflect on the bodily vulnerability of artists in the dance profession. In contrast to her earlier experience working with choreographer Eliot Feld, she speaks with reverence about choreographers Kurt Jooss and Pina Bausch—their capacity for empathy and communication with dancers. Yet, based on her past experiences, Kono remains cautious not to sacrifice her health or body. She describes taking reflective distance from herself as a public performer, valuing the choice to keep some aspects of her life private—even secret.

Liz Waterhouse: Can you tell me about your transition to working in Europe as a dancer?

Christine Kono: I was not sure about New York anymore. I wasn't really learning anything, or couldn't find anything that really interested me. There was the option, when Eliot Feld's first company folded, to go to American Ballet Theatre or to Joffrey's. I was asked by Kazuko Hirabayashi and Martha Hill to apply for Juilliard. It would have been the only option that was interesting to me—to study choreography. But I felt like at twenty-four I still needed to have more dance experience.

Suddenly these people from Germany came up to me and said, "We're forming a company, the first German state modern dance company in Cologne, Germany."²⁸ We saw what you did for Eliot. Maybe you would be interested to join us?" One of the regular choreographers would be Kurt Jooss. I had seen Joffrey do *The Green Table* (1932/1967).²⁹ Now, I was interested, but I never imagined myself having anything to do with something theatrical. I liked abstract movement, basically. But I said, "This is a change that might be very important."

They told me they needed dancers that could still do pointe work as well as the Graham technique—which was at that moment not far from what I could do. Two students from Juilliard also went to Cologne. The rest were from who knows where. The four directors were Jochen Ulrich, Jürg Burth, Helmut Baumann, and

28 See Jeschke and Vettermann, "Germany," 63–67.

29 See Siegel, "The Green Table."

Gray Veredon. They also did their own pieces, but the major choreographers besides Kurt Jooss, were Glenn Tetley and Christopher Bruce. The company also still did some Balanchine: *Allegro Brillante* was what I learned there. So I thought, “Why not try?” The contract was for one year. I said, “Get away for a while from New York.”

Immediately when I came to Germany, 1971 in the fall, we started to work with Kurt Jooss. He was such a generous and kind person—to everyone. There were no favorites. We learned *The Green Table*. First, we did improvisations leading to the movement, and then we were divided into groups learning major parts. Everyone learned a major part. No one was left out. We also learned the corps [group dance] parts as well. It was interesting to learn a major role and to know what the group was doing at the same time, and to not know whether you're going to do a group role or the major role in the next performance. Jooss knew how to create an atmosphere of positive energy between people. It wasn't negatively competitive. I learned to appreciate my colleagues very much in this company.

What I love about Tanztheater people—and probably what they all had, like Mary Wigman—was their ability to observe what was individual about everyone.³⁰ They were very good at people observation and *concerned* about us as human beings. Even how you were cast was, more or less, you realized, what you needed to do. It would be a good lesson for you. It wasn't to fulfill a type that was already preset, even if there were three major women and three major men roles, including the role of Death. The process was so important. You felt this is good for us: to learn *this* role, or *this* kind of movement, and to understand where it's coming from.

So, for example: when I was the Infantin in *Pavanne* [*Pavanne auf den Tod einer Infantin*], Jooss said to me, “Go, go to the playground and watch how children move. You're a young girl.” He'd ask questions about your childhood. It was not about emotional *feeling*. It was something that you could find through researching everyday movement: “What happens when you kick a ball? What happens if you are running for the bus? And you're late!” Everything was associative. You could really say, “Yeah, I know that.” It was interesting how he worked with us. There was always something that you had to imagine and something that was not emotional. It was very pragmatic. He would give an impulse that you could really realize through your daily life. It wasn't like (changes voice, ironic earnestness): “You have to feel stronger.”³¹

30 It is interesting that in her description of Tanztheater, Kono draws continuity to artists from East and West Germany from the first half of the twentieth century. Dance scholars Claudia Jeschke and Gabi Vettermann have used this term more specifically to refer to the West German phenomenon beginning in the 1970s. See Jeschke and Vettermann, “Germany.”

31 Concurring with Kono's testimony, dance scholars Claudia Jeschke and Gabi Vettermann describe in Tanztheater a focus on “individual truth” in which “the body was treated as both medium and message, as an autonomous universe with its own expressive characteristics.” See Jeschke and Vettermann, 63.

I realize very much how Jooss could have been Pina Bausch's teacher. Because she was also really able to look at people and know how they *felt*, deeply. He too had this ability. You could easily talk to him about your insecurities. I said, "I don't like so much the idea of dying." I never died on stage. The idea of being a victim bothers me. I don't want to do anything that is too personal. What you learn is: It has to come from the movement. It's not you or how *you* feel. It's what the movement is saying. Even if it's a very dramatic role, you take yourself out of it and you examine the movement: how you change from something that is accented to something that is maybe dropped, from someone that is very clearly focused, to someone who is focused to the back. It's interesting that, in order to work with him, I had to approach these roles just as if I were doing something for Merce Cunningham: something very abstract. I didn't like observing sometimes when my colleagues would get emotionally involved. I said, "The movement has to speak." I spoke to him about that and said, "I don't feel it. It's difficult for me to find an identity with this." He said, "You don't have to. Just do the movement."

I mean, dancing *The Green Table* is really another trip! (Laughs.) After that I did *Pavane auf den Tod einer Infantin* (1929). He gave me the role of the Infantin, who is a princess, who was really hard for me to be, and who at the end also dies. I'm like (she makes an ironic grimace of disgust with her mouth, shakes her head and then giggles; this irony injects momentum into her narrative, as her pace of talking speeds up and her voice warms in tone). I went up to him *again* and he said, "It's good for you. It's good for you—to *find* a way to do this." He had so much patience, and interest in giving someone an experience that they needed.

I really had no problems with Glen Tetley or Christopher Bruce, but with doing Tanztheater, I was going like, "I really find it difficult." It was a study of: *Why you do dance?* Are you afraid of revealing a side of you that you would like to keep secret? Or does it have nothing to do with you, but this exists in all human beings? So that was the way to do it: It's not you; it's us; it could be anyone. So how do you *transform* the movement? Jooss would change the movement—like all choreographers—he would change the movement according to who was dancing. Like my first teachers of classical ballet, he had wonderful images to give everyone and different avenues for everyone, even if they were dancing the same role. He treated each of us differently—because I would watch him work with other people—it was *so beautiful*—because we were individually observed and coached. You learned to observe people, and to appreciate others for being different and giving you another approach to what you are doing yourself.

I would love to watch my colleagues dance. Especially then, especially after my experience with Kurt Jooss, I didn't have to be the one performing. I became really interested more and more in my colleagues. If in any of his pieces I was in the corps de ballet, it was so nice to know that you're supporting one of your colleagues; or if I had the solo that night, that my colleagues were supporting me. I felt that strongly

with *The Green Table*. I really have to thank Kurt Jooss for this experience because, you know, the ballet world was just the opposite! (Laughs.) It became clear to me that this was so important—his involvement—because his attitude towards what makes a team carried into all of our work. We appreciated everyone and everything; it wasn't just in his pieces. It started to go into the other work.

I noticed this especially with Glen Tetley. Glen was used to setting very precise, pretty, classical pieces. And when he came to us, we did a thing called *Moveable Garden* (1973). He made it in two weeks, and it was largely improvised. We were waiting for him, sitting like this (she sits on the floor casually, wrapping her arms around her knees). He said, "That's the beginning." Then he would just say, "Okay, try different ways of standing up." Then he'd say, "Well, like, maybe how would you—like if I'm with you and we're two blades of grass in the wind? So figure that out. What kind of movement you would do together and differently?" Or (laughing), "I need a water fountain over there. Everyone try something like a water fountain. I need a bird who's flying!" We all were crazy. But we finished it in two weeks. This happened after *The Green Table*. I know that it was possible for us to do something only scored and helping each other because we had gone through this other experience—of support and conversation—so that it was easier to create without this feeling of negative competition and hierarchy! This, I think, was the greatest gift from Kurt Jooss.

I wrote down a lot of what Kurt Jooss had said to me. In 1979 he died. I had a good relationship with his daughter, Anna Markard. I said, "Listen. It's not only the steps. I wrote down what I remembered from Kurt Jooss. Not only what he said to me, but what he said to *us* all, and how he approached certain movements." For example, if you have a light here in front of you or if you have light there behind your body (she gestures), it's different: The imagery changes the dancers' movement. So that way, the girls had better creative motivation. There were no videos that they could learn from, so I went and I showed them what I remembered. For me, this was really good.

Kurt Jooss would also invite us to go to different performances. He had a VW bus and could drive us. He said, "Oh, I'm interested to see this performance. I can take three or four people." Especially when Pina Bausch started in 1973, I went with him and other dancers to see her first works. I liked *Fritz* (1974). Quite frankly, I liked all her theater pieces. Of course, I was very impressed by the *details* that made a big difference in her dance pieces—like with Malou Airaud in *Iphigénie auf Tauris* (1974). Malou was so gorgeous. She was just sitting and then does the most subtle movements of—I guess of sadness, of doubt. How Pina was able, with *very fine*, almost invisible movements to create this Iphigenia that she did—it was remarkable. I knew about Pina's ability with *details* to create a total person. And her *presence*! Pina was a beautiful woman. I realized how important presence was, for her and for her work. The technique was not about an athletic technique. It was more about sensitivity, which I appreciated, as well as her observation of human beings, and human qualities. I appreciated this as a member of the audience. And

so, because of Kurt Jooss, of course, I was interested in Pina Bausch's ensemble but never thought of working with her. *Never*.

Liz Waterhouse: Why not?

Christine Kono: As I said, I'm not theatrical. I like the process of arriving into movement. Every movement has something to say—is a question. It's *how you get there*. I was amazed at the dancers who could expose a part of themselves which could be psychologically very dangerous. I felt . . . (tentatively) Maybe I'm conservative? I couldn't be so direct about some things about myself. There are some things I think I would like to keep secret. I could feel that these people who were working with Pina were really revealing themselves, exposing themselves in a way that could be very dangerous for them. This was my observation. I admire their dedication and ability to *sacrifice* basically themselves for the work. I was not ever able to do that. *Never*. I'm selfish, I guess. (Laughs.) But I was wondering also how she did it.

Career at Folkwang Tanzstudio and Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch

Liz Waterhouse: Can you please explain your transition to teaching and working for Pina Bausch?

Christine Kono: When I decided to stop performing with Tanz-Forum, I was invited by the Folkwang Hochschule to study dance pedagogy.³² I thought it was good to stop dancing and to study. Still, I kept the doors open in Cologne because I said: "Listen, if you need a substitute dancer—of course I'll be a substitute. I knew the whole repertory from all the choreographers. Or, if you need me to *help* someone learn something, or want me to come and show anything, I would do it *gladly*." I kept on as a substitute dancer until I was thirty-five. It was fun! I was allowed to leave my studies to go to rehearsal.

But after my child came when I was thirty (1977), I never did major parts or tours. I slowly went out of the repertory, but I also made sure that the people who substituted for me felt good. This was important for me. I also did that with the Pennsylvania Ballet Company, and also with Eliot Feld when I left. For me, the best was if the replacement was *better* than me. Of course you're replaceable!

I got to know Pina Bausch very well while I was doing my master's studies in dance pedagogy. She came to watch me teach. I finished my master's in '81. I had

32 Now called the Folkwang University of the Arts. This school in Essen, Germany was an important institution for the development the new German Tanztheater in the late 1960s, and remains a very important context for the education of dancers in Tanztheater as well as contemporary dance. Servos, "Folkwang Tanzstudio."

a position [*Lehrauftrag*] at the Folkwang, and I was teaching children in the public school [Gymnasium Essen-Werden]. I was co-responsible for the dance classes at the school. It was a lot of work with kids aged ten to nineteen years old. To teach children was very interesting, probably the most creative teaching I've ever done.

So Pina came to watch me teach. We went out together and she gave me some suggestions. I *never* thought of working for her company. After six years of working with children, she asked me to be the teacher for her company. Because of the association with Folkwang, of course, I had continued to watch her development. I thought her work became more and more interesting, and more and more experimental. Especially starting maybe with *Kontakthof* in 1978, it began to be not so much dancing—in the sense that we know it—but every movement was dancing. The dancers were my age. I thought, this is maybe an interesting experience for me. That's how I got to work with Pina.

Liz Waterhouse: Do you know why it took her so long to ask you?

Christine Kono: She needs a long time to decide. This is Pina Bausch! (Laughs.) I know some dancers who went three times to auditions and were not accepted, and the fourth time they were taken into the company. It's how all creative people are. It's such an "on the spur of the moment" sort of thing, where their creative tick comes suddenly at that moment. It's luck. If that is what I need now for my creative imagination, then it works. It's not a matter at that point of physical ability. It's a matter of do we match in values? Do we match in our creative imaginations?

Me, I wanted to see how I could support this sensitivity that she had. I *loved* the idea of her wanting to work with people until . . . I mean, if she were still alive, she would still have the original dancers working for her. For Pina you didn't stop dancing after a certain age. This was also *very* interesting for me. She *loved* old people. Her attitude was not as long as you can move, you can work with me—it wasn't like that—it was as long as you *want*, we will find a way to work together. This attitude was not common.

At the beginning, because I didn't have much to do with the company at the Folkwang Hochschule, I was at every rehearsal. She asked me to be there in Wuppertal. It was not to learn the movement, but if there were problems with the movement, she would ask me what I would suggest. One of the suggestions I gave was, "Don't start to work with the form. If you want people to move together, even the smallest motion, you get them to *breathe* together. If they are breathing together, the movement will follow. They will create something together, even if they don't do exactly the same form at the same time. If they're not breathing together it doesn't work." That's when I think we were working on *Palermo Palermo*. Even if they're doing the simplest movement, if they're breathing together, it will carry into space and

people will *feel it*. They will feel it, and we will feel it. That was one of the things I said.

Also regarding the sternum for Tanztheater—there are a lot of movements involving it—like in *Sacre* [*Das Frühlingsopfer* (1975)]. It's really from here (Kono touches her sternum, the breastbone, at the front where all the ribs come together). It speaks. The sternum is a very *emotive* part of the spine. I think that is what was interesting about working for Pina. She has an amazing, subtle way of moving herself. Pina would be sitting and smoking (laughs). Then she'd get up and dance *Sacre* with no preparation. She was *amazing!* Without warming up! I said, "How does she do it?" When she demonstrated, those *arms* would just cover the whole room, the entire space. Her arms were *beautiful*. I admired her as a dancer. She was an example for me. Once we were at Barnard College in New York, and Pina had a conference which I attended with her. She was asked "What you consider yourself: a choreographer, teacher, or dancer?" She said, "I am a dancer."

She would get very nervous before *Café Müller* (1978). I think with great artists, it's not the nervousness about technique. It's the nervousness about: Are you able to be *there* at that moment and transform the space? To have this big responsibility for everyone else in a company and occasionally to have to dance—it's not easy. But it's the only piece in which she danced, as well as in one other piece, *Danzón* (1995), in which she did a solo with the fish video in the back.

One reason that I'm happy to have known her is because she was never angry. I don't know how she did it! She never screamed. She was always looking through people. She would also give *very* good movement corrections. For example, in a solo she created—it was a beautiful solo for Christiana Morganti, I think. Because many solos are with people closing their eyes. All Pina said was "Very slowly, while you're doing it, take your time, just open your eyes, and I want you to (she drops a beat and then says smoothly) *smile*." It was exactly what the solo needed. It gave it a reason. She was able to do that with all her dancers. She cared—she loved all her dancers. So, it's great to have worked with someone like that.

But, at the same time, it was a very *closed* group of people. Me personally, maybe—I don't think it's right or wrong—I felt like I needed to experience working with other people. I needed to experience rejection of and questioning about what I was doing with dance. That's why I decided to leave after seven years. It was important for me to do it nicely. Alfredo Corvino, who had been Pina's teacher at Juilliard was coming regularly to teach the ensemble. Everyone was happy with him, so it wasn't like I was deserting. I was able to speak to Pina about *my* necessity to question what I was doing—to know I can use *this* kind of work, with *other* kinds of dancers." She was of course sad, but not so sad because Alfredo was there. It was the right moment.

Next, I joined a company directed by Joachim Schloemer, whom I knew as a former student from Folkwang. He had gone on to dance for Mark Morris. I worked

with him in Weimar (1994) and then in Basel (1996). It was good because I was only with his company seven months a year, and then I had time for guest teaching. I also had time to start to work consequently with Dimitris [Kraniotis]. So it enabled me not only as a teacher, but also as a *person*, to discover other things and other people. Because before, with Tanztheater Wuppertal, this was impossible while being under contract for fifty-two weeks.

Liz Waterhouse (incredulously): Did you have vacations?

Christine Kono: Listen, Pina worked! It's no wonder that she died early—poor thing—it wasn't only smoking. She would work constantly: It was ten in the morning till two in the afternoon and six to ten at night. Six days a week. Sometimes if she had a creative inspiration, it meant working overtime even later, or on Sunday. It was very, very intensive.

Kids: Motherhood and Teaching Children Dance

Liz Waterhouse: How did you balance your work as a dancer with your care duties as a mother?

Christine Kono: At the beginning, during the first three years with Pina, I had a child, Benjamin, so I didn't have to be there as intensively as the dancers. I did the morning class and stayed for the morning rehearsals. But towards the end of a creation, just before the performance, Pina asked me to be there all the time, so I had to organize childcare for my son with his nanny.

I took my son to performances occasionally. I thought it was important when you have a child to not sacrifice your interests. Actually for me, my son *helped* me to be interested in what I was doing. I never would want *him* to think that I *sacrificed* what I really wanted to do because of him. This is my idea of having a child as an active person. I also didn't want my son to lose out on normal things a child would do, because of me—to drag him into the theater all the time. He had his own friends, and he went to school. He had his hobbies. He used to play guitar and then basketball. If the basketball game was in the week, I asked to be excused from rehearsals and tried to go see it—or his nanny, Mrs. Heinschke, went, or Uncle Heinschke, her husband. They were really such wonderful people and my neighbors.

I was lucky, but I also worked on that. Even before knowing Mrs. Heinschke, I had another woman taking care of my son who was also wonderful. She was in her mid-fifties. She would pick him up at six thirty in the morning, and if necessary, she would take him to the doctor—all the things that I would normally have to do. I organized my studies so that I usually was finished at three or four in the afternoon, and weekends were free. He had enough of me. This is a problem with some mothers:

they think they're the only ones who can take care of their children. It's not true! I did a lot of research and auditioning to find the right caregiver [*Pflegemutter*]. I think it's possible if you really want it. My son was a joy for me. He was absolutely an inspiration. You shouldn't have a child if it's a problem.

I think kids are amazing! In the school in Essen-Werden I was responsible for what they call theory, composition, and ballet. For kids, the best way to get a good jump is to skip. That's the best timing for jumping. So you're looking for things that are natural that you eventually can apply. Then you ask kids their opinion, "What do you think of this?" (Laughs.) I said, "Well, how does it *feel* to go like this?" (Kono moves from a parallel position, to a turned-out first position). "What happens to you? What happens to your whole body? Why do you think that this is useful, or is it not useful for you?" You know, it's a lot of questioning the technique: "Is it useful or not?"

Kids usually do athletics. If you do track and field, there's a lot of ballet in it. Just the hurdles. It's a grind! Your hurdle is really all this "kre-kra-kruh"—and timing, timing, timing. There's mathematics. Can you jump on seven instead of eight? You can say, "Okay, now we find a rhythm, and we decide altogether when we want to jump. What count?" It's a game!

Also to do improvisation: like to finish with something like a Motown, where you choose your favorite music as a class. We get together; we're in two rows, and we slowly move to the middle. Two people come forward and they have to do an improv and go back in line. I grew up in in Black Los Angeles, so we used to do that in the afternoon. We used to improvise. There was a guy called Billy Preston who was in my class. He was a very active musician in the fifties and sixties, even had an association with the Beatles, so he would improvise on the piano in the afternoon. We would go in and figure something out, "Want to create a dance called The Four Corners? Want to hit the ball?" So you let kids do something like that.

To dance, you need flexibility and strength. So once you do something that's flexing, you have to do something that's strengthening. You decide things like that—not just stretching. It's all related eventually with daily life. The children find values in what they think are normal movements like running, jumping, falling, spinning. Once they experience turning—spinning or falling, recovering and jumping—then you can give them ballet. Then you can see if we can use that with the same impulse and feeling that you got when you ran from here to there, if you do (mimicking an arduous rhythm): *jeté, jeté, jeté, jeté!* (laughs). So you try to find associative things that the kids know and they enjoy.

The last thing I did in the Gymnasium was the project week. I had something like sixty kids who volunteered to do a dance project. One week, but six hours a day. They were divided into classes. It was really funny because they went from this size to this size (gestures from small to big), and they all wanted to do a dance project. So the thing was, "Okay, you guys. "What do you want to create? What can we create together? We're all different sizes and ages?" They decided they wanted to create

some kind of wonderful magical machine and find a way that it coordinated and functioned fluidly. Then it should go crazy. It should fall apart and slowly try to come back together again, but it didn't quite function as before. It was a little broken. They wanted to do that. That was the decision of the group. They chose some kind of electronic music that they found themselves, and they decided certain tasks they wanted to try out. They decided, "Okay, let's go with contrasting the littlest with the biggest." They created something which resembled cards folding, something like baking where everyone was a different ingredient. They were amazing!

So they had this cookie machine, or some kind of machine. They started to throw each other out (she manually imitates throwing and catching bodies). They were great at catching. My job was somehow to suggest how to put all this information together and to make sure they didn't do anything dangerous. After one week, we had about twenty minutes of interesting stuff. We put together everything they had done by themselves." The director of the Folkwang Hochschule at that time said to me. "Do you think you can finish this?" I said "I didn't do any of it, and I'll never get them together again. They're from all different classes. The last year will be gone, you know?" But I was amazed: They did it all by themselves. They had options. We discussed what to create and what inspired most of them. They were wonderful. Children are amazing.

Sometimes I regret not continuing with them. I could also offer a composition class to the senior, nineteen-years-old students—like a simple solo or duet—no group choreographies. There were some beautiful things coming from them. We did ballet as a question. "What could we use? Where was there natural movement? What was unnatural but useful? What was unnatural but harmful?" Those are the questions we asked.

I think only two of them became dancers. I still have contact with one. He works, I think, as a microbiologist—in a laboratory with things moving! He says it's like choreography. He still takes ballet class regularly. He's around fifty-five. He's also an excellent pianist. Another became a lighting designer, another a costume designer.

Liz Waterhouse: It's wonderful. You're giving people a perspective on dance for their lives!

Christine Kono: My problem was that the other co-director wanted to make an official dance school where the bodies of the children had to be evaluated at ten years old. I said, "No." Everyone who's interested in dance should be able to have good classes. Good classes mean with respect for their bodies. It's important that everyone who wants can experience their bodies in movement in an organic and positive way. It doesn't matter the shape, size, whether you're turned out or turned in. No. It was a musical school, so they all played instruments and sang. They were very good dancers. But some of them didn't have the bodies of "dancers." But they

were wonderful to watch. Beautiful. I had problems with the other co-director because she wanted a little Leningrad Kirov, you know?

Collaboration with Dimitris Kraniotis: “He Would Add Those Spicy Philosophical Words”

Figure 4: Dimitrios Kraniotis (left) dancing with Christine Kono (right). Impromptus (2009).



Photo by Thierry Gründler.

Liz Waterhouse: How did you begin your long-term collaboration with Dimitris [Kraniotis]?³³

Christine Kono: I found that my body needed it. We met in 1989. He worked with Pina Bausch, from '92 to '94 as her dramaturg. He would come to take my ballet class and do as much as he could. He didn't have prior ballet training, but sometimes he would do amazing movement. I asked myself, “Where is that coming from?” I went

33 Poet, philosopher, and dancer Dimitrios Kraniotis, whom Kono calls by his nickname Dimitris, was born in Athens, Greece, in 1950 and emigrated to Paris in 1967. He is the heir of American dancer Jerome Andrews, with whom he studied and performed from 1980 to 1992. After Andrews' death, Kraniotis was assistant and dramaturg for Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch from 1992 to 1994. There he met Kono, beginning a longstanding collaboration on movement teaching, research, and performance. He has published numerous anthologies of poetry and a book on Andrews. See Andrews, *La danse profonde*. See also the biography on Kraniotis' website, <https://www.kraniotis.com/bio>, last accessed September 24, 2025.

up to him and asked him, “Where did you learn that?” Some of the dancers were in a much better mood since he had appeared in the company. They were much more creative in their improvis. I decided to ask him where he got his ideas, and he showed me some floor exercises—this was all based on Dimitris’s work with Jerome Andrews in Paris and the work was very new for me. We moved our spines—from the top, the atlas, down through the thoracic, and to the sacrum—while on our hands and knees. Rounding, arching, circling. We also did sternum circles, active breathing, and rolls—things like that.³⁴

I was having problems in my lower back, and I realized that this way of working helped me. So every so often, even while I was working with Pina, if I had time, I scheduled a class with Dimitris in Paris. He also invited me to improvise together in a studio. He gave me all these themes based on the awakening of the spine. Then he would add those spicy philosophical words in order to stimulate the creative imagination. We went, “Huh?” (Laughs.) Things like “eclipse,” “complete with missing parts,” “the other side of the coin,” etc.

Around '99, I decided to spend more time with his work. At that time I also did Alexander classes with Tom Koch.³⁵ It was a good combination. I had been visiting Ballett Frankfurt since the end of the 1980s whenever I went to Frankfurt to take Alexander classes from Tom Koch.³⁶ One of the dancers there, Thomas McManus, asked me if I could introduce him to some work, as a coach or teacher. Thomas was in the process of leaving Ballett Frankfurt (circa 1999) and I introduced him to Dimitris. Dimitris did not have access to many professional dancers: He inherited his students from Jerome Andrews. (Jerome was against the development of a state-controlled system where only dancers educated in formal techniques were considered “professional.” So most of Jerome’s students worked outside of the system.) So Dimitris and I organized a workshop with Thomas for the Centre National de la Danse in Paris, where we worked together for three weeks with dancers we had selected. It went so well for the three of us. We found that we had a lot in common.

It was at that point that I decided that I wanted to dedicate more time to this idea of working with Dimitris and Thomas. Then David Kern, Thomas’s colleague

34 See footnote 38 on Andrews.

35 The Alexander Technique of movement re-education was developed by Australian actor Frederick Matthias Alexander (1869–1955). Alexander, *The Use of the Self*.

36 The American teacher Tom Koch was certified in Alexander Technique in New York in 1987. His impact upon professional dancers includes dancers of Ballett Frankfurt/The Forsythe Company, Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, the Dutch National Ballet, Sydney Dance Company, Chunky Move and many international students of dance. He has also had a longstanding relationship cooperating with choreographer Anouk van Dijk on Countertechnique. For a short biography, see: <https://www.countertechnique.com/obocnyc2022/>, last accessed February 14, 2025.

from Ballett Frankfurt, moved to Paris as well. It was such a blessing to have both of them to work with. Then this kind of research just took over, because it enriched my ideas of how I perceive a person in space, how I look at a performance. Initially we didn't think about performing for an audience. We thought it would help us in our teaching. It was to explore—to find ideas—how to work better with ourselves as dancers, in order to then teach people. Then someone approached us, and they suggested, “Why don't you perform this?” This was in 2002. Thomas was not interested in performing with us at that moment, but he continued to come at least twice a year for one month to exchange. We did some performing with David Kern in Weimar and Jena, and in Paris at a small theater. But then David moved back to Frankfurt to join The Forsythe Company—with you. We did our first bigger performance project, *Impromptus*, at La Chaufferie in Paris, in 2006 with Thomas. So that is the beginning of making our own creations.

What I think is unique about Dimitris's way or approach to improvisation is that while he may be involved in a task, at the same time, he's looking for an escape! Not only that, but he's also looking for where that escape will take him. He doesn't *stay* on the same task, and he's also not expecting that from anyone else in the space. So you're not expecting someone to *keep* something; you're expecting them to *offer a development*, an unexpected change. The task is a catalyst. Let's see where it takes us. We know where we begin, but we don't know where it will go, and this is great.

It's also an attitude which makes human beings very special: that they can surprise themselves! They are not just instinctive. They can choose. They can deviate. This is what makes, I think, the human being amazing! Whether it is a musician or a dancer or a painter or a poet, it's where you deviate from the structure because of what you're trying to say. You may not even know what you're trying to say, but you know and trust your whole nervous system and your creative imagination, you allow them to take you away from your original intention. Only human beings can do that, and why should we not allow that to happen?

What is happening in a very strange way now with society is this: If you go on any public transportation, for example the Métro in Paris, people are not looking around at all. They are looking at their smartphones. I think it is very important to take human beings away from something so regulated and to allow them to have their own imagination, and to determine how they use it themselves. I mean, I won't be able to exist without technology. I need my computer. I need my iPhone. But, to *really* not avoid myself—to take the time to reflect—to think deeply about my own perspectives and mindset—this is where I may use my movement exploration. This is my only possibility of knowing who I am, basically. It's an opportunity to explore your potential. Instead, everyone nowadays is like this (mimics looking at a smartphone and dabbing the screen). So maybe that's a reason why we help people to dance: not necessarily to perform on stage, but to *listen* to themselves and how they are with their environments at that moment—how they are with other people

as well as objects—so that they can *discover* and be surprised by their own selves and open up their limits.

It's terrible when we go to a performance and we feel that it is not about that. It's either about impressing or showing a compositional structure that is *closing* the participants on stage. This does not help our situation. Maybe before it was necessary? I don't know. Even Laban Notation or Benesh Movement Notation is lacking a dimension—this is also the case with video documentation—and it is this dimension that is missing, that gives dance its essence. This is what we try to give to others as teachers or as performers or as choreographers. I *think* that you try to give people that dimension that is very special in human beings. When that is not the intention, it's difficult to watch that performance—for me. The performing becomes an aperitif before dinner. You go and you forget it. This is where I say: "It's a shame."

To see The Forsythe Company, to see a new piece from Pina Bausch, to see a new piece from Merce Cunningham—it was a big experience that, as a person in the audience, I had to prepare myself for. I knew that if I went, I would feel different after the show. It was as if I was going to perform myself, because I knew something would happen to me. I wouldn't just go and forget. Now I go, and I forget. I try to think positively, but this one *essential* thing I think for us now, in all societies after what we've been through in the COVID-19 pandemic and what we may have to go through—who knows what's going to happen in the future—is to remind us of our creative abilities as human beings. *All of us*. That's why sometimes people who are not trained in dance can be much more creative—freer than those who have been officially trained. This is what I've experienced, not only myself, but in the classes of other people especially, when the students have a task where they have to *offer* something. If you're really involved, if you find the right interest, you're not concerned about people watching you. You do not perform but are there, in the moment, in a process of investigation.

Broader Horizons: Ballet Mistress

Liz Waterhouse: Can you please share more with me about your work as a ballet mistress? For which companies did you work, and how did your teaching adapt to these different contexts?

Christine Kono: I worked with Ballet Preljocaj from 2001. Preljocaj choreographs—he sets the movement material—and doesn't really allow a lot of space for deviation. The dancers that he has are amazing. Many of them come originally from the Paris Opera or from the Bolshoi Ballet. For me, it was interesting to work with these super technicians. Because all of them had ideal classical ballet bodies. You know, I'm not used to that! (Laughs.) I allowed them to change what I gave them: to leave out or to add. It was also important for me.

Whereas you guys (in The Forsythe Company) changed the exercises all the time! I didn't have to do anything (laughs). For example, I would have to tell the dancers from Preljocaj to use a different timing or to go to another space, or create an obstacle in another dancer: meaning, you do a combination where the other person is in the way, so you have to do a deviation of the movement. I would have to create the questions myself. With you guys, it was easier. I would have a lot of interest in watching how you would manipulate whatever steps were given. It was more that what I did with you was an outline and for them what I did was very specific, and I had to deviate. But both were very important. To be specific and to be open was a good combination.

Then I also went back to Pina, when she was still there, to teach her company. That was also interesting because there were still these older dancers there—both old and young dancers. I tried to create combinations that someone who is young and someone who's old could also use. Even a grand allegro. So if they no longer could do big jumping, to allow them to change the movements so that they were suited to their abilities, or to take a young dancer and ask them not to show their technique. I mean, really just the opposite of what they wanted to do! They wanted to show you the big jump. I said (feigning seriousness), “No, no, I don't want to see the big jump. You do just the opposite.” (Laughs.) That was also interesting for that reason, because you had the capability of emphasizing difference—that was a very good reason to work with them. I had a wonderful time between you guys, Preljocaj, and Wuppertal.

But when you do company teaching, you're always, of course, adjusting to the needs of the company. There's no time really for extensive experiments. Luckily with The Forsythe Company, they were experimenting all the time. Whereas in most cases you don't have the time that you need to break the ice so that the people feel free to try something else which may appear for them. So, I had a very good time, but I now feel the need to work creatively (pauses): If I teach, it's not teaching, it's really exchanging. I need to work with mature people: people who are looking for their own way of working, their own way of sharing dance. They can be from another art form, but they're looking for a way of communication and to take responsibility for themselves. They are not waiting for me to tell them what to do. Because (She makes a face suggesting tedium; LW laughs.) It's enough. In any case, even if you are a beginner in teaching it's always more exciting if you are working with people who have their own values.

Dancing Memories: Warming Up with Kono

The practice-based knowledge of dancing presented in this section was recorded while warming up together with Kono in a dance studio (see Figure 1).³⁷ Beginning with the theme of learning to perceive and sense space, Kono interlinks memories from her practice of ballet, the movement language of Pina Bausch, and her movement research with Dimitris Kraniotis. The lightly edited testimony below highlights Kono's embodied knowledge as well as her voice as a pedagogue: encouraging, inquisitive, and searching for creative resonance. Dancing bodies are shown to be powerful through their imagination and their capacity to affect others.

Christine Kono: Ballet offers a lot of possibilities of thinking of moving in space. This is where I think ballet can be helpful. It's the awareness of épaulement.

Standing together in the dance studio, initially we orient our movements towards the camera as if it were a ballet teacher watching us, or a mirrored surface representing the audience's gaze. As Kono teaches me about port de bras, we stand on the diagonal, facing the corner of the room, as is common for these movements. The rectangular room construction is important for these geometric space perceptions and is included within the diagrammatic drawings of many ballet manuals. Kono uses terminology such as mathematical degrees and numbered positions that corresponded closely with the Vaganova system of classical ballet instruction.

We first practice the half port de bras, a small teaching element for children in the Vaganova method. Then Kono demonstrates the first port de bras. In both, her arms magnify themselves into very long curves, which create space around her vertically lifted torso and spine. She looks near to her body at her hands, and then further out into space away from herself. She does not flex her wrists or drop her elbows. Instead, the light tension of elongating and following the curves of her arms creates an evenly flowing motion, where passage and position eloquently morph. Her long, individually awake fingers are much more feather-like than the clawed hands I learned in Balanchine ballet technique.

The muscle memory she displays in this practice is exquisite and deep. As indicated in Figure 1, she has a radiant, humble, and eloquent presence.

Because the first thing you learn is the bras bas—you have to feel the energy between the fingers. You have to feel the energy between. And immediately when you start to move, it's asymmetrical. Now, if I'm going to open my arms to the side. I look into, for example, my right hand. Even if I feel the left hand, I follow the right hand into space with my head. That is what the little child learns. Now, I'm going to go allongé, and I'm going to go diagonally up with my arms. This is only as far—a little higher than ninety degrees. Now I follow with my focus on the right arm as it lowers,

37 Interview between Elizabeth Waterhouse and Christine Kono on November 10, 2022, in Freiform Atelier Bern.

until forty-five degrees. Then I let the arms continue moving down to bras bas, and the head returns upright. It's such an awareness of space! It's incredible what one learns. That's just a half port de bras.

Also, the interesting thing I think for me was, as a child (returns to the allongé moment), even if I'm looking past the right arm, I'm feeling there (points with her back arm to the back opposite corner of the room). And as I close, I'm taking both spaces with me: not only the one I'm looking at, but also the one that I'm *not* looking at. This is what's interesting about ballet. It's this space awareness. It's what makes someone who has studied ballet very, perhaps *precise* in the space. It's not that they can lift their legs or jump up to the sky. It's that suddenly the space becomes present (she reaches in different directions around her, with non-ballet gestures). Maybe that's what's valuable? You see this in some very excellent ballet dancers; they create the space. You don't see their bodies. This is where I think I can justify the technique.

When you're little and you start, it's not just training the legs. I had a Russian teacher, so everything was based on the port de bras. Which meant it was based on how you use your back. And the legs fell out of the back. So it wasn't first the leg. I know some teachers where you begin by moving your legs a lot, but with us, with the Russian school, the first thing you learn is épaulement. They first learn the half port de bras.

Watching Kono perform these ports de bras, I observe with reverence how her "muscle memory" animates her body. The standardized exercises of Vaganova ports de bras are routines that she performs masterfully. I view this practice-based knowledge not only as echoes of the past—echoes of what Kono's teachers told her—but also as practices that have been sustained and nourished by her subsequent career as a dancer. Through performing diverse choreographic languages and conducting movement research with Kraniotis, Kono has cultivated feeling spaces inside and outside her body; these approaches resonate with her balletic sensibilities. Rather than routines of rote repetition, these routines of practice shine through her life, interconnecting her bodily knowledge and allowing her to narrate seamlessly across dance styles.

Now, this is the first port de bras. (Demonstrates.) Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. In this first port de bras, your arms overhead, your head turns to look before the elbow, indicating out in space (she points to the corner). You open your arms, and you start to change the hands, exactly at that in-between moment (at 135 degrees diagonally upwards). Then you allongé and lower the arms down to bras bas. It's so precise. I mean, we would spend hours just going, "Okay, what does he want (laughs)?" But really, it was how we started: with port de bras.

So now in a grand position (Kono demonstrates the second port de bras in Vaganova technique, beginning in croisé devant, moving to croisé derrière). It's about how you move the space, moving the space usually from the back. So I'm

moving this whole space (she gestures behind her arms) which is logical. Now I'm going to take this space (she indicates with her eyes the moving lower arm) and put it together (the arms meet). You could put it together, and you could carry it there. All your energies going between the hands out into space (she walks forward out of her arms). This is the way I learned. When you start to watch people, that's what you start to look for. Like watching Diana Adams as a young girl, the way she used the space was amazing. It wasn't because she was a ballerina-showoff. She knew how to use space. This is also interesting about Bill Forsythe's work, because it's so space oriented. Because as soon as someone is concerned about what the space is moving or if the space is being closed—as soon as it gets to be that—it communicates beyond the person in movement. This is what was inviting for me.

Inviting for me was also the fact that Pina [Bausch] had wonderful port de bras. Her arms were moving really from her pelvis and when she would do anything, it was like when she does these eights for *Sacre* [*Das Frühlingsopfer*], the whole room was moving (gasps and laughs).

Liz Waterhouse: Can you show me?

Christine Kono (overlapping): I don't know how to do it; actually, I never danced *Sacre*. But she did it. She would do eights and the whole pelvis would move counter . . . Dimitris [Kraniotis] and I do figure eights a lot too.

Dancing while she narrates, Kono and I begin to improvise. The "figure eight" becomes an image for movement. Kono guides me to explore different spatial orientations, planes, and scales of action—inscribing the interconnected loops of the "8" into space with different parts of our spines. Our legs, arms, and heads ripple in counterpoint.

Initially we stand face to face, mirroring one another in motion. I am trying out the ideas that Kono proposes. She is speaking while moving. Holding onto her shirt at the point of her sternum, she emphasizes first the movement of her dorsal spine: the spine behind the heart. Fluidly her pelvis moves counter. Then, changing her stance to direct her motion so that the camera can see, she describes variations from her improvisations. She stops her motion to watch my progress and continues to coach with her voice. She transitions seamlessly in and out of exploring herself and watching me. The exercises have a logical progression from listening to abandon: from listening inside, practicing, moving in the space, challenging oneself and finding a surprising flow without stopping. The dialogue below captures this coaching, full of exclamations of support and surprise. "Right!"

Rather than a hierarchy of transmission, like guru and student, Kono is sharing and exploring with me in movement research. Each person is different, and each side of the body is different. Kono's body, though lighter than mine, appears on video more grounded—more weighted in its rooted quality. My supple spine is more flexible, my eyes and facial expression more inquiring.

What I would do is to take a part of my spine, and let it eight—your dorsal spine, or your sternum, say. You can write eights like this, vertically. So the movement goes forwards and backwards at the same time, doesn't it? Forwards, and then it goes in and back, and at the same time. You could do that also *through* your spine. That means, I can start with the top of the spine. So you can start with the head, and then go down to the coccyx, and start with the head, and go down to the tail. Now you can find another eight to the other side. It's not the same because your other side will be different. Right!

Now you can create eights in the space, traveling. That means you can start with your head; go back to your tail. Start with your sternum and go back here. Start with your head. Let it go in space. Do a different one, right. Right!

Now you can escape. Now you're going to challenge it. Maybe to jump a bit. Let it go down, but you have to continue the eight. Right? You're going to continue, don't stop (laughs)! Don't hit the microphone. Everything in there you incorporate, you add the extremities. Right. It's beautiful! Get in the camera. Don't stop. Keep going. Right. There you go. That's where an eight can take you. Beautiful.

Now do as small as possible. Like a secret . . .

You can also do a break . . .

I think it's great with Dimitris's approach to improvisation: What you can do is also, if you get onto a theme: Moments you show and you don't show. This one moment. I may stop, and I don't want to show it. So I try to hide (laughs) things, and then you start getting into something that could lead to an idea. If you break a rule, it's not breaking a rule, but opening it up. Like saying you can add silences . . . Add another kind of movement . . . Come back . . . Go to a space that you never use . . . What about your eyes? You can do eights just with your eyes. This is where he's great, as a coach.

It is so interesting to work with someone who is a dancer, philosopher, and poet, who does not have a formal education in dance techniques. I sometimes feel myself being a little bit, I suppose, restricted in ideas, by my formal education—feeling that I have to create a kind of structure. Yes, you should create a kind of structure but be open to changing it in the moment in order to open up to people in front of you, to give them the opportunity to really discover what dance can do for them. Sometimes coming from a formal technique restricts me.

You can start with a very simple principle. Like in classical ballet, you move either from the back of the hand, or you can move from the palm of the hand. You can move from the thumb side, or the little finger. All of this, you can use it in improvisation. I think almost everyone can do this—can feel these parts of the hand. This also in Tanztheater (gestures with her hand); this says something totally different, when I think of moving from the little finger or the thumb, or relating my hand to the space. Doris Humphrey said, "The hands are very important. The whole dance is in your hands." Pina [Bausch] also was so conscious of this.

Kono performs these gestures. Her soft fingers are slightly curled, each individually shaped in the air. Her knuckles are slightly hardened with age, but with these motions they become sensuous—like an elephant's trunk. There is a liveness in her subtle movement, in which each delicate finger is like a sea creature, able to spring into life.

One principle she models is the difference between lifting a hand with the palm raised to a spectator vs. the back of the hand. These very different attitudes of address project different energies. Another gesture is a rolling movement, turning the upturned palm and forearm from the thumb, and then reversing the rotation with a roll led by the little finger. She illustrates how the personal gestures of Bausch's solos may emerge from these fluid and meaningful details, of hands moving in space and touching the upper body.

What is also interesting is not to look at your movement. To be someplace else, while something else is going on. You either demonstrate it, or, while you're doing that, you're attracted to something else. It's all very important for classical ballet too. There are a lot of double coordinations in ballet. Like if you do petit battement with the legs, which is fast, and you do a slow port de bras with the arms (laughs). It's a kind of double coordination. Combining a swing of the arm and a vertical turn: That's a pirouette!

Creativity and Aging: "Dance Was the Whole Life"

Liz Waterhouse: You often use the words "creative" and "creativity" when we talk. Can you tell me where that interest originated?

Christine Kono: Well, I think it's probably coming from the research I did about Jerome Andrews.³⁸ Because he really—and all the Tanztheater people, Mary Wigman, Harald Kreutzberg, Gret Palucca, Dora Hoyer—I mean, for them, dance was the whole life.³⁹ Also with Pina Bausch: She never thought dance was limited to a certain age. It was a way of life, basically. Maybe that's when I started to use the word creative, because all these people were creative their whole lives. They wanted to give their students this joy that is not determined by age, but the joy you continue to have through dancing. This is sometimes lost now, because now dance becomes very amazing physically, and we lose this value of our dance as something that one

38 Jerome Andrews (1907–1992) was an American dancer, choreographer, and dance teacher who worked with many modern dance and *Ausdruckstanz* pioneers (Denishawn, Graham, Humphrey, Weidman, Wigman, Holm, to name but a few). He also studied intensively with Clara and Joe Pilates. He immigrated to France in 1950 and lived in Paris after 1953, where he continued to interweave dancing, teaching, and movement research. Kono encountered Andrews' life and work through his heir Dimitrios Kraniotis. See Andrews, *La danse profonde*.

39 On Tanztheater, see footnote 31.

can experience creatively our whole lives. Instead, dance is too often something that you only can do as long as you are physically capable. There is a problem there.

Even with ballerinas. Excuse me, Anna Pavlova was fifty when she died of pneumonia. Actually, Pavlova was promoted by Fokine because she had a *weakness*. She couldn't do bravura things, but he promoted her fragility. Now, I don't think she could survive. This is also an age thing.

But for many dancers that I know, my former colleagues, their lives seemed to have stopped at forty. When they notify me or call me, they talk about something that happened forty-five years ago. For me, it's a very *sad* experience. Instead of talking about what is happening with them *now*, with their knowledge and experience of dance. For them, teaching is not a creative experience. It's as if they give to their students what they did before. You shouldn't do that. You should give what would be good for the student at that moment. Because then the student makes you creative. It's not just saying, "Okay, this is the way I did *Giselle*. So do it like that." No! You have to figure out a way to make it a creative experience for *you* as well as the student. That means that you have to be creative as a teacher.

There's a reason for the corps de ballet which I like within the hierarchal classical ballet system. That's because in the corps de ballet, you *watched* the other people who were more experienced. What you may have noticed was that many of the younger dancers had much more technique than the ballerina, but the ballerina had something else. That something else, became evident with the experience of being in the corps de ballet: So the reason why the ballerina was a ballerina was *not* because of a physical capability. She was able to use all the elements of dance effectively, in very subtle ways, creating another world in which the imagination could thrive.

Liz Waterhouse: Do you think young people today see dance differently than you do?

Christine Kono: Of course, because they have much more exposure to dance and social media than we did in my generation. There are many more ways to dance. But I feel that they are all very, very physical. These new ways require a very young and athletic body, which is amazing and wonderful to watch. But is that the reason to dance? I mean, it's wonderful, but what happens when you can no longer do that? Do you have something to *say* through movement? Unfortunately, it's often the case that we start to learn through *injury*. Sometimes this injury gives you another path that may be even more interesting for other people to experience. What worked before no longer works: This makes you creative. It's like we have to lose the technique in order to find the dance, right? You have to let it go. Some of these amazing techniques don't allow the dancer and the public to experience *deviation*. Everything works! Deviation means experiencing something that works differently. It's not a mistake. It's a possibility to experience and think differently.

Older dancers have inspired me. Besides Galina Ulanova, dancing when she was almost fifty, there was also the Butoh dancer Kazuo Ohno. Now if you see him on video—it's nothing. I took classes with him in Yokohama. The last time I was in Japan, Kazuo Ohno was ninety-three. His son was teaching the class. Kazuo was on the chair sleeping. Yoshito, his son said to him, "Come, Papa! Get up! Dance! Dance!" We were given volleyballs and told to imagine what this could be, to carry the ball right in front of the hara and to walk as *slowly* as we can to the back.⁴⁰ Kazuo Ohno got up and he went past us—he went through us randomly. He was like light and inspiration, and he made this whole thing—he gave a sense to what we were doing—through his movement. Now, whenever I go to the theater, and it's not working, I think: Kazuo would know what to do! He would know how to appear and what to do in order to give it sense . . . in the *simplest* way. That's an example of what a great dancer he was.

This is for me like creating a good society: giving it sense. This is what this language of dance can do. Of course, when you're young, you should be athletic and experience wonders with your body and try things out. But it's so wonderful too when a dance gives everyone something essential to experience—where everyone senses their bodies in space—where the observer is *invited* to participate, and everything makes sense—it is what you call flow, right? It *happens*. I haven't witnessed this for a very long time: this flow where everything makes sense. Where you go: "Yeah, that's it." The moment, everyone in the space, everyone outside of the space, all make sense. This is what dance can do! This is what I wish would happen again, for me. I don't know if I'm not observant enough, or I don't watch enough. Well after The Forsythe Company, what also brought this sense was seeing some of the installations of Bill Viola. They moved me in that way. It doesn't have to be dance. It's why human beings are special. They're capable of creating something like William Forsythe's *Heterotopia* (2006).

It's maybe like when you watch a Noh master turn the corner. You don't know how he does it. It is so hidden. He doesn't show the technique. He creates an effect. That is not the purpose of Noh. The performers are usually trying to create great heroes or gods (laughs). In any case, there has to be magic.

Liz Waterhouse: With you, Christine, there is more than meets the eye! Thank you for these conversations.

40 The hara is the center of ki energy located below the belly button.

Dancing *Wabi-Sabi*

A few months after our biographical conversations, Kono and I meet in Paris to improvise together with an important collaborator and body in our past: Dimitrios Kraniotis. Almost ten years previously, we had made the performance *Aporia* (2014) at the Athens School of Visual Art, for which we had developed a common movement vocabulary and process for rehearsing and performing improvisation. This extended performance of two to three hours began with movement solos that focused on sensing and freeing the spine, and then extended into the unknown—wherever that evening took us.

For our reunion in 2023, Kraniotis again generously hosted our daily warmup and movement research in his home, providing lessons for us with his precious machines made by his teacher Jerome Andrews, after the constructions of Joseph Pilates.⁴¹ On two afternoons, we improvised in a rented dance studio in the center of the Marais district of Paris. During these domestic and aesthetic exchanges, aspects of our body-biographies were further substantiated and materialized in oral and nonverbal forms. Here I narrate vignettes from these encounters, theoretically linking them to themes from our interviews and concepts outlined in Kono's typed notes on her movement research that she kindly shared with me.⁴²

Kono and I are both perceptive of the daily changes and long-term malleability of our aging dancing bodies—changes accumulate and also prompt further change. Kono tells me, “We are full of handicaps, when a dancer is over forty. We bring out the handicaps into the work. We feel around them.”⁴³ Kono's feet and hands appear seasoned and sensitive. While dancing, her hands articulate her ideas. Kono describes this as a “German hand practice,” linked for her to Kurt Jooss and especially Pina Bausch. Raising her arm to demonstrate, she explains this as knowing the feeling of communicating through the energy of the palm of the hand, versus the energy of moving from the back of the hand. She then uses her whole body, improvising some arm material in memory of Pina Bausch, showing further refinement of energies linked delicately to specific fingers and planes of hand motion.

Kono's feet are also sensitive. They are small but broad: her big toe and little toe are oblique, with large bunions. Kono reminds me, as I examine her feet, that her right foot was broken during a ballet accident. Recently, her osteopath said to her that the tibia bone in her lower leg is too mobile. Indeed, the bones in her lower left

41 For Andrews' biography, see footnote 38.

42 Kono, “Themes and Tasks 2016.”

43 All citations in this section, unless otherwise attributed to different sources, are based on my fieldwork notes from January 9 to 14, 2023.

leg felt very soft and pliant when I gently pressed down on them, revealing a loose ankle and a lower leg much more pliant than my own bony shins.

As we warm up together, each of us attunes to her own body, while reacting to one another's movement and chatting informally. When Kono saw me move into a bridge (a yogic pose) she affirms that it's "good" that I practice that.⁴⁴ She reminds me that her hamstrings—the thick strands of muscles running down the back of her upper legs—do not engage like they used to when she was younger. Kono sits on her mat in a kneeling position, explaining that she is "taking it easy." Turning in her legs and reclining backwards, she stretches the ligaments and muscles of her legs and hips. Watching her, I know this is a sitting position that I cannot perform comfortably, without feeling pain through my knees. She reminds me and Kraniotis: "She is turned in." She adds, "This is part of her Japanese heritage."

In addition to cultural heritage, dance training and professional injuries, Kono's body is also shaped by her personal health history. Kono has had cancer twice on the left side of her body, treated successfully both times by the Institut Curie in Paris. First was breast cancer in her left breast, which required removal of some of the breast tissue and lymph nodes, followed by radiation treatment. Then on the left side again, she had cancer in her large intestine, requiring surgery to remove some of the intestine and heavy chemotherapy. These operations have changed the tissue of her body—the scarring adding counterrotations on the left side, modifying Kono's feeling of asymmetry. At the time of our interview, she still has the chemotherapy port inserted in her arm and neck, which irritates her when she lifts her arm. This is part of the reason why, as she moves, she is careful to explore movements under the shoulder level, or only lift one arm—her right—to explore higher regions and diagonals in space. These are examples of feeling around handicaps and readjusting habits that Kono has spoken of.

We can draw this together with a principle that Kono quotes from Japanese aesthetics: *wabi-sabi*. Kono describes *wabi-sabi* as the beauty of asymmetry and imperfection. For example, she and Kraniotis have developed movement exercises more asymmetric than the symmetric ones passed down (from Pilates to Andrews to Kraniotis). Kono recognizes the value of asymmetry, contrary to the Western norms of developing bodily bilateral symmetry and perfection, which are especially prevalent in ballet aesthetics. As a result of my scoliosis, my body is visibly and palpably asymmetric. My ballet training taught me to see that as a flaw. Around Kono, these imperfections feel less like defects to be corrected. I can focus instead on imagination, expression, and feeling. I find myself moving with greater awareness of my physical structure and my potential to communicate through it.

44 For those unfamiliar with a bridge pose: this exercise begins in a position lying down with the knees bent. Pushing into the feet, one lifts the hips upwards from the floor creating a shape like a bridge.

Kono reminds me during our movement exchange that she feels lucky to be alive and dancing again at her “old” age. She adds that her doctor told her she is lucky. Cancer has taken her to a place close to death that many people do not come back from. In 2023 her dances are no longer about recreating her past dancer self: repeating movements or ways of being with a real or imagined audience. They are instead more existential. Kono raises the question: “Perhaps I cannot dance anymore?” If so, she is not embarrassed. There is always something to be curious about—some bodily communication to explore. Returning to dancing now during her remission, she is interested to keep the body quality that she has found since the operation and recovery: A keystone of her practice is transience and impermanence. She believes that “Change is an inherent part of dance.”⁴⁵

*

After arriving at the dance studio in central Paris, we change into our practice clothes. Since I’ve known her, Kono’s dance clothes are typically dark colored—navy and black—and made of soft fabrics: such as a long-sleeved cotton shirt, light cotton pants or loose shorts worn over tights, black ballet slippers and over these black cotton socks. She has curated the music for our improvisation session on her computer, with playlists that include samples from John Cage, traditional Japanese music, Bob Dylan, and Western chamber music.

Our working process, honed a decade ago, is that we begin by improvising alone, taking turns and offering solos. We allow these introductory movement ideas to evolve further into duets, solos, or even a trio. The order of our improvised dancing is not predetermined. Usually after an hour we sit down to discuss what we observed when others danced and what we experienced while dancing, before repeating the process for another cycle of dances. All of us keep notes where we track “themes” to motivate improvisations. It is often enriching to guess what themes the others were performing. Creating a common movement language, physically and verbally, our research is based on sensitive listening and response, not mimicry. What I offer will elicit a response in somebody else, and it is my responsibility to give and to receive.

I also take notes for the purpose of writing about Kono’s dancing, to further reflect on its relationship to our body-biography dialogues. I document both how she dances and what her dancing evokes in me. Kono begins one improvisation by dancing with her back to her two spectators, myself and Kraniotis. She appeared to commence movement by shifting internally, moving her spine, and articulating gestures of her arms and her feet. I observed her develop this presence by walking further away from us, and enlarging the explorative motions of her arms. Her

45 Kono, “Themes and Tasks 2016,” 1.

gestures create arcs and angles, also adding rhythm to the space. Her hands showed to me her sensitivity: It appeared that she sensed precisely how her hands curled or uncurled, the fingers flexing and unflexing lightly. On this day, some of Kono's gestures reminded me of cupids—slightly cute figures in flight. At other moments, when Kono looked down or pursed her lips in concentration, I perceived her in reflection—thinking in motion.

Kono's improvisations are a present-past: merging together elements of her understanding of dance and of the body, practiced over time. Her dance experience shows not only in her skilled balance, but also in the ways that she is able to fold her limbs pliantly to transition between levels. In the studio, she put one knee down onto the floor and descended easily from standing into sitting. Also, in reverse, she used a hand to assist her rising from sitting into standing. These weight transitions of her light body were made carefully and pragmatically—showing years of practice—teaching her how to economically rise from the floor and fall again. Reminding me of the suppleness of a child, at one point she bent down to the floor with her legs in front of her—at another instance into a little ball, with her knees bent. As I age, such movements become increasingly difficult, but I see in them my learned skill as a dancer, to adapt my body wisely. I wonder what my dancing will be like when I am in my seventies like Kono.

Part of our shared improvisation practice, honed during our work together for *Aporia*, is a manner of listening in to the body's present reality. In her notes, Kono described this process as follows:

One small change can change completely one's presence.
 Change the focus during the movement.
 Change the form during the movement.
 Change the expected/anticipated path during the movement.
 Have unusual associations of body parts: for example, have five spines . . .
 Your limbs are also spines.
 The movements are colors, lights or sounds. For example: Different parts of the body are different instruments which together form an orchestra.⁴⁶

This attention to impermanence and strangeness, to subtlety and imagination, brings a distinct quality into her practice.

One of her themes for improvisation during our studio session was: "When? And how?" Kono responded with consideration to our dancing, with timings slow and surprising. Her gestures were unadorned—minimalist and pensive. I tried to capture these qualities of her dance in my notebook, jotting down: "Christine moves slowly, like a plant orienting itself towards the light, without using too much of

46 Kono, 1.

a dance vocabulary borrowed from any one style. She slides her feet on the floor, then steps, pivots, or uses a heel or a toe to reach the leg around. Most of her steps are in parallel. Sometimes they open into turned-out or turned-in positions, showing certitude and humble grace. She knows the floor and never stumbles. The purpose, I believe, is physical curiosity: exploring, transforming her place in the room, sometimes her level, and also the vantage point from which she sees or is seen. Her dance is not driven by a desire to impress others with physical virtuosity. Rather, it is the quality of her presence stepping and sensing the room that seems important." Focusing on taking notes while she dances, I am also aware that the dancing presence Kono creates through her body challenges and resists my efforts to describe her bodily form and presence.

Kono creates rhythm as she dances. She does not mimic the music. Instead, she moves in and out of relation to the music or even ignores it. She moves in a manner that is unhurried and without strain. Her actions are punctuated with pauses. At one moment, Kono lightly interrupts her motion—suspending time by holding a position—before carrying on again in her original tempo. She also creates contrasts: an audible slap on her body or the floor, or a swinging arm that suddenly changes her direction, propelling her to the other side. Overall, her body quality is patient and explorative. Decisive but also hesitant, in that there is no "right" or "wrong" way. She has described her work as follows: "The form of the body is secondary: Ideally the body disappears."⁴⁷

Kono's dancing plays with scale and time. She varies the size of her gestures to become smaller. She takes long pauses and then speeds up. Her eyes look out into the room. Her steps take her onto *relevé*—onto the balls of her feet. She takes a few steps there, up high, before pivoting and continuing to vary the position of her upper arms, letting her fingers trail. Sometimes she appears to be imagining something else, other than what she is doing—to be both inside and outside her movement. She might be thinking: "Notice how the energy of the inner space of the body resonates in space."⁴⁸

Playing with the barre at the edge of the studio, she comes again onto *relevé* and then hits the bar loudly, making an accent and surprising me with her spontaneity. Though she is not theatrical in her face, this little moment is humorous to me—not entertaining *per se*, but delightfully strange. It deviates from what comes before. Kono continues her dance, appearing connected to her whole body and using it, she explains afterwards, like playing music. She tells me: "The dancers' body is like a musical instrument." As she learned through violin lessons as a young girl: "You learn to take care of your body. Your body is precious." In this dance, she was exploring the

47 Kono, 5.

48 Kono, 5.

technique and range of her instrument. She does not quite know what the resonance will be.

Kono remarks that almost all the themes that we work with in improvisation are good for life too: exploring the opposite, going inside (introversion) and outside (extroversion), living with imperfections (*wabi-sabi*). Another improvisation theme is “take it easy.” This too is a major life theme and a Californian cultural adage. She mentions that she is researching how to use her body in a way that never strains it. “If something hurts, well, relax. Take it easy. Find out: Is there another way?”

Kono’s movement research is developed consciously in conjunction with qualities of being oneself and the ethics of treating others. In her teaching notes, she suggests that the dancer “create atmospheres which give the sense of humility, generosity, gratitude, vulnerability (openness and willingness to risk), transparency, alertness, surprise, simplicity and complexity, honesty, *Gelassenheit* [serenity].”⁴⁹ As the three of us dance, we are appreciating, listening and responding. Kono and Kraniotis often phrase their ideas for improvisation in the form of puzzling koans, or Zen riddles. They examine and include oppositional forces. Kono also emphasizes that when you find a theme, you shouldn’t be afraid to lose it: one should not hold on to it too long. Kono lists examples in her teaching notes, such as: “fast/slow, tension/release, form/formless, obvious/unobvious, appear/disappear, inside/outside, up/down, front/back, small/big, quiet/loud/silent, linked/fragmented, close/far.”⁵⁰ Rather than seeking beauty, a spirit of the unknown, unexpected, unidentified, and unrecognizable is sought.

Again, I return to thinking about *wabi-sabi*. “*Wabi-sabi* is a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It is a beauty of things modest and humble. It is a beauty of things unconventional.”⁵¹ Kono’s imaginative and transformative sense of the body and dance, as a medium of human inquiry and communication, not a material for aesthetic perfection, has impacted me significantly: re-educating my ballet beliefs and aesthetic sensibilities.

The imperfect can be beautiful. Differences between people can also be moving. Perhaps I am attracted towards dancing with Kono precisely because of our differences? We don’t look alike, or move alike, even when we do the same movements. I could never imitate “Christine” convincingly—but she inspires me. When I am around her, I feel a desire to move *with* her. When I am beside Kono, dancing nearby, I feel a force come into my body. I empathize with her movements. Just walking beside her, I gain energy. Despite her calm nature, her general walking tempo is faster than mine. Our relationship is part of our movement journey. Kono

49 Kono, 5–6.

50 Kono, 2.

51 Koren, *Wabi-Sabi*, 7.

reminds me to imagine, to transform, to be more than my body's material. She inspired me to let go of the Western ideology of perfection—so strongly fostered in my childhood and ballet education—furthermore, to change my mind and to deviate from plans. Living with imperfections, the aging body of the dancer stays curious: asking how experience can lead to something puzzling and mysterious that activates communication through the body and language. A human dialogue, beyond the physical.

Chapter 4: Marcus Schulkind

Introduction

Marcus Schulkind is a dancer, dance teacher, choreographer, and acupuncturist, currently living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the United States. He was born in Queens in New York City in 1948 and grew up there as the youngest of two children in a middle-class family with Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry.¹ Schulkind speaks his last name with American English pronunciation and describes himself as “Jaoist” (i.e. Jewish and Daoist). His discovery of Graham-lineage modern dance as a young man at Goddard College in 1965 changed his life trajectory—channeling his creative, physical, and emotional energy into his passion for dance. Beyond Goddard, Schulkind studied dance at Jacob’s Pillow, The Juilliard School, and in New York City at the dance studios of Martha Graham, Daniel Nagrin, May O’Donnell, Gertrude Schurr, and Norman Walker. He performed as a dancer in the Batsheva Dance Company of Israel and in New York in the companies of Pearl Lang, Lar Lubovitch, Kathy Posin, and Norman Walker. In the mid-seventies, The Marcus Schulkind Dance Company emerged as a “hot ticket” in New York.² In parallel, Schulkind developed his reputation as a teacher of ballet and Graham-influenced modern classes, often using his teaching income to support his choreographic projects.³

Moving to Boston in 1989, Schulkind found extensive employment as a teacher—at the Harvard Summer Dance Festival, Boston Conservatory, and the

1 His father’s family emigrated from Germany to Brooklyn circa 1895 and his mother’s family from Kyiv to Brooklyn around the same time.

2 Schulkind’s words, from our discussions.

3 Some memories of Schulkind’s influence as a teacher are found in Madonna’s recently published biography, for which Schulkind was interviewed. See Gabriel, *Madonna*, 58. Madonna took classes with Schulkind at the American Dance Festival and in New York. She reportedly asked him if studying modern dance would make her famous. Schulkind quipped that to the contrary, when most Americans hear the word “Graham” they think “Graham cracker,” not choreographer. Citations from my videoconference interview with Schulkind on March 31, 2024.

Boston Dance Project. In 1991, Schulkind cofounded Green Street Studios, a private dance studio in Cambridge, between the campuses of Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The studio—with high airy ceilings, skylights, and a sprung floor—served for nearly thirty years as a community dance center and refuge for Schulkind's choreographic projects and teaching. It was in this context that I met "Marcus," when I was nineteen and studying nearby at Harvard. I became Schulkind's student in ballet and modern dance, progressing to become an apprentice and then a dancer with his company.

Impacted by a debilitating knee injury early on in his dance career, Schulkind added healing work to his professional activities while living in Boston. He graduated from the New England School of Acupuncture in 1998 and subsequently built up his own private acupuncture practice. After closing his dance company officially in 2001, Schulkind continued to make solo dance pieces intermittently, including benefit concerts for Green Street Studios in which I took part as a performer. In 2013, Schulkind returned to the Boston Conservatory as a Professor of Dance, where he is still on the faculty today—teaching ballet, contemporary ballet, and dance pedagogy. Additionally, he teaches freelance classes on weekends at a private dance studio in Cambridge called The Dance Complex. We met there to begin this project of life review. As I approached the studio, I heard the music of *Swan Lake*, which Schulkind was listening to on the stereo as he prepared his Sunday classes: "Back to the Marley" and "Intermediate/Advanced Ballet."

Writing Schulkind's Body-Biography

Schulkind's life stories presented themselves to me as a dynamic collection of anecdotes and memories that developed extensively throughout our research process. His stories were performed—by which I mean selected, crafted, and animated for me as his audience—in a way that reflected my position as his former student and company member, as well as my status as a dance scholar curating perspectives on embodied dance history. Schulkind spoke about the pleasure of remembering the past—the value of having an active listener, with whom he could rethink his memories.⁴ He contrasted this process of empowerment with the lack of validation that he feels in his current position as an elder dance artist—no longer working actively as a choreographer and disconnected from the aesthetic standpoints of his dance students. Following knee-replacement surgery and arthritis, Schulkind stopped teaching modern dance about a decade ago, when he was in his late sixties. Our research together could therefore not engage

4 The possibility of achieving "psychic composure" in oral history interviews is reviewed by scholar Penny Summerfield. See Summerfield, "Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice," 2.

Schulkind's muscle memory as directly as I had with Kono; instead, we relied more on storytelling, my embodied prompts for dialogue, and curated questions.

Our initial conversations approached dance biography from the conventional perspective of a chronology of professional phases: focusing on Schulkind's dance education, early professional experience, choreographic work, teaching and healing work. Therein, many humorous stories erupted with well-practiced charm, while dark moments and discontinuities (such as Schulkind's move to Boston) were left unresolved and hanging. Like Antonín Dvořák's *Dumky Piano Trio*, which Schulkind has used for his choreographic work, Schulkind's storytelling colorfully shifted in mood and rhythm, presenting self-reflection in the form of pithy anecdotes.⁵ In hindsight, I see now that our editing process mimicked Schulkind's choreographic process, in which a sequence invented by Schulkind's body is reinterpreted and developed through dialogue between the performer and the choreographer. Relying on that rapport, Schulkind entrusted me to take a leading role in shaping his stories, through a dialogic process of research and revision, moving oral dialogue into written form.

The body-biography that follows was developed by interlacing various techniques of life review. At the heart are recordings of in-depth narrative interviews, focusing on Schulkind's career and bodily experiences as a dance artist.⁶ I also revisited Schulkind's dance classes live in Boston, and we explored his digitized personal archive of press clippings, using them as a stimulus for memory.⁷ To launch the editing process, I emailed Schulkind an arrangement of his prior stories, developed from light revision of our word-for-word transcripts. This draft set in motion an extensive process of revision: adding and subtracting narratives, working on the tone and message of the stories, and figuring out how to translate vocal and gestural emphasis, timing, and mood into scripted dialogue. The final manuscript manifests the give and take of collaboration, reviewing multiple drafts until we declared mutually: "It's a wrap." As with Kono, the writing formulates a substantial process of mutual reflection, demonstrating how the researcher becomes part of a protagonist's life-story creation, rather than standing outside it.

5 Specifically, Dvořák's *Piano Trio No. 4 in E minor, Op. 166*. Schulkind choreographed the solo *Let Bygones Be* (2002) to this music for dancer Lorraine Chapman.

6 Interviews held in Boston on March 18 and 21, 2023, were recorded in both audio and video. The audio recordings and transcripts of these conversations are available at the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts. See: Schulkind, "Body-Biography Interview with Marcus Schulkind"; Waterhouse, "Metadata Body-Biography Interview Marcus Schulkind." Secondary interviews, reviewing the manuscript draft, took place via video conference on January 3, 2024, March 31, 2024, and July 18, 2024. These were recorded with audio and selectively transcribed.

7 I made audio recordings of the dance classes and protocolled them with fieldwork notes in a process of participant observation.

Throughout the interview process, Schulkind was conscientious and critical of his own storytelling performance: He desired to be perceived as speaking truthfully, without deliberate exaggeration, narcissism, or hubris. He thus invited my fact-checking and was delighted when I studied the New York Times records to search for further reviews and identify the biographies of his dance collaborators. There are some stories printed in this collection that Schulkind has not recounted often: accounts revealing his deepest troubles. His process of becoming a dancer was euphoric but also extremely difficult, requiring him to resist military service in the Vietnam war and confront bullying and adult authority. Additionally, a debilitating knee injury in his thirties put him out of the spotlight for a few years, requiring seven surgeries over the course of his life. A broken partnership and a car accident are also notable stories. Unlike my other interview partners, Schulkind's narratives sustained greater attention to describing difficulty, pain, and the troubles and injustices of life, while also interlacing these with humorous tales, shrugs, and smiles. This emotional range is also palpable in his collection of choreographic works—many of which are solos that, as he puts it, explore the sensual qualities of the “human condition.” These solos were my first modern dance repertoire as an aspiring young dancer.⁸ Learning a modern dance vocabulary and process of rehearsal with Schulkind, I changed from a ballet-influenced performer to one interested in the choreographic expression of modern dance—intimate, nonverbal storytelling through practiced and personal gestures.

As with Kono, my research with Schulkind manifested the “creation” and “exchange” of life stories highlighted by linguist Charlotte Linde: My role as a researcher was not to mine Schulkind for preexisting stories, but to work together with him to produce coherence.⁹ To this end, we aimed for a satisfying form that would bring together Schulkind's narratives for the reader to interpret—marking them as traces of embodied dialogues, not word-for-word transcripts. Together, Schulkind and I have created an episodic text. We begin with my reflection on his teaching, followed by an introduction to his present lifeworld, then crossfade into a curated selection of life stories, and end with Schulkind's review of the interview process. The footnotes create an accompanying second space referencing the print and digital sources we investigated, providing biographies of Schulkind's collaborators, and adding my description of his body language during our conversations.

8 I performed *Slanting Sun* as an apprentice in Schulkind's final company concert in 2001, *Let Bygones Be* for my MFA concert at The Ohio State University in 2004, and created two new solos with Schulkind during my breaks from The Forsythe Company: *Hippogriff* (2004) and *Allemande* (2006).

9 Linde, *Life Stories*, 3. See discussion in the opening of Chapter 1.

In the form presented here, Schulkind's body-biography exposes the tensions between his deep humanistic love and appreciation for modern dance and the underbelly of its economic reality as a financially precarious career in American society. Furthermore, Schulkind's heritage of the Martha Graham technique and repertoire adds to our understanding of how Graham's practices were institutionalized and developed by teachers in the second half of the twentieth century, including Schulkind's own alterations for the purpose of injury prevention and rehabilitation.¹⁰ His unique perspective, as a Jewish and heterosexual man, navigating the dance field through his physical, social, economic, and cultural capital, gives great insight into the ways that dancers move and mobilize their powers uniquely—using their bodies as tools for labor and expression.

Figure 1: Marcus Schulkind teaching ballet at Green Street Studios, circa 2016.



Photographer Peter Schweitzer.

-
- 10 Schulkind's perspective exposes the tensions of dancers developing modern dance in New York City and Boston, paralleling the aesthetic developments described by Sally Banes as post-modern and postmodernist. Interestingly, in our conversations, Schulkind did not mention the artists that Banes focused on in her analysis of different waves of post-modern art making in New York City. Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*.

Schulkind's Teaching

Schulkind is a spry, small, and effervescent septuagenarian, agile despite a slight limp in his left leg. On the day that I visit his classes, he is wearing grey sweatpants and a black fleece jacket.¹¹ The participants in this “Back to the Marley” class are mostly women over the age of sixty. I’m the youngest in the room. The ballet students come afterwards, a mix of students from the nearby Harvard and MIT campuses, freelance dancers living in the Boston metropolitan area, and working professionals, who practice ballet with Schulkind regularly on the weekends. Schulkind begins class with a short note about the change of seasons: Since it was the Spring equinox, his breathing exercises would change to reflect this. The large dance studio has high ceilings, beautiful dark wood-paneling, and a quiet piano in the corner. Even while wearing a COVID-19 mask, Schulkind projects his voice resonantly.

As we did twenty years ago, when I was a regular student with him, we began with an exercise of Daoist breathing. Schulkind provided our healing imagery. Spring, the time of our interviews, had wood as its healing element, with the color of green, and the taste of sour. Liver is the yin. Gallbladder is the yang. Though it has been almost twenty years since my last training with Schulkind, these routines are still accessible in my body; they still made me feel calm, capable, and peaceful. After this rebalancing breathing ritual, we then continued with arm gestures from dance. Seated on our mats on the floor, we followed Schulkind: scooping one arm backwards, lifted it up over our heads and then offering that hand expressively to the front of the room, growing up tall with our backs and lengthening our spines. In unison with the other dancers, supported by the musicality of Schulkind’s directions, we repeated this little phrase—altering right and left—symmetrically awakening the body. Then we scooped and opened our arms to the side of the room. Holding the arm extended sidewise, we changed the head: sharply (“spotting”) looking to the left, right, and left again. Scooping, gesturing, and seeing: my body started to sense the space. There was no audience for this—no complex movements or even music, but fundamentals of Schulkind’s dancing were being animated, incorporated, and kindled.

The beginning of Schulkind’s warmup drew together many aspects of his body and dance philosophy—his lifeworld. These facets are Daoist healing modalities, Graham technique and ballet without the “bullshit” (of painful contortions, gender ideology, and a teacher enforcing banal repetitions), and Schulkind’s unique sense

11 This description is developed from a “Back to the Marley” class that I took and recorded on March 19, 2023, at The Dance Complex in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I also studied recordings of Schulkind’s zoom-classes from June 14 and 20–21, 2000, during the COVID-19 pandemic. See, <https://vimeo.com/429747558>, <https://vimeo.com/431300326>, <https://vimeo.com/43164228>, last accessed September 27, 2025.

of humor.¹² The class interlaced these. We began to arch and curl—making rounded and extended motions of our backs. This terminology is influenced by Schulkind's study of GYROTONIC®.¹³ The contraction and release movements echoed his prior Graham training and are fundamental within his body as his first exploration in dance. After this, we prepared the limbs with fundamentals of ballet: articulating our line and turnout in the legs. We lie down and brought our legs together with the knees bent: our knees were pressed together, our heels were pressed together, waking up the deep pelvis muscles and the inner thighs in a way that Western dancers practice daily. Hissing to vibrate the muscles of the core and support the movement with our diaphragm, we flexed one foot and straightened one leg, before lifting it to bring the knees together. The load here will surprise any nondancer, who must build this leg-torso connection to coordinate the legs. We articulated the toes, the flex and demi-pointe, and then explored ballet positions and movements: attitude, développé, dégagé, battement. All of this was reoriented in gravity, abandoning the ballet vertical by lying down on the floor. Coached by Schulkind, I re-experienced the basics of ballet extension, without strain and accents, finding smooth articulations. We changed orientation to lie on our sides and even used the outer wall of the studio to model the floor in this horizontally flowing ballet—where turning out becomes a strength exercise, not one of contortion and pain. Props in the form of a foam roller and a balloon helped me to feel my body: squeezing the balloon gently to activate my pelvic floor, and rolling out some of the complex, interlacing, and often gripping muscles in the lower back and buttocks. Schulkind sometimes beat a small rhythm on the floor with his fingers to accompany our rhythmic repetitions of battements. At the end, following Schulkind's lead as a chorus, we sang three notes rising in scale. Then we rested and dispersed, the lesson complete.

Throughout this meditative, flowing, and inwardly focused movement series, Schulkind was teaching with boundless vocal energy and keeping everyone motivated. His well-projected voice was ever-present: encouraging, reminding, thanking, and cheering when people accomplished his directions. His voice brings me home, with its nasal New York accent. He addressed all his students by name and celebrated their developments. He told newbies to watch—to follow the unfamiliar sequences that they had yet to memorize—and he made precise both what they had accomplished on that day and what would be the next step in their development. I imagine that this positive atmosphere might be cloying if it were

12 Upon his request, Schulkind's expletives have been removed from this publication. Though he uses respectful language in dance class, in our trustful relationship he enjoys storytelling using his vibrant, New-York-City-style curse words.

13 For the purpose of readability, subsequent references to the method of GYROTONIC® in this chapter are made in lowercase without the registered trademark symbol.

not name-based and the intimate result of a community's work together—a kind and caring atmosphere built around judging and improving very specific physical skills. The material of dance is one's body, so corrections can feel very personal. Schulkind is sensitive to this, aiming to be constructive—assuaging insecurity, shame, frustration, and anger by affirming the process of learning at one's own pace. As the teacher, he coaches more than he demonstrates, affirming a positive mood of detailed work on individual bodies, shaping collective values. From my position in the middle of it all, he appeared to speak to everyone, maintaining a sense of fairness. On this Sunday, he energetically served a community, giving space for physical connection, peace, and self-discovery.

As this introduction is beginning to unpack, these preparations for the dancing body and reasons for attending a dance class are not only aesthetic: They are personal, psychological and social. Schulkind's classes position dance at the interface of private and public, spiritual and secular—a holistic and healthy counterpart to the outer (non-dance) world. Though he resents capitalism, Schulkind works in a dance economy where his lessons are purchased as commodities; in fact, his lessons have brought him more financial profit than producing his choreographic works of art. But beyond being a mode of employment, they contribute to his sense of living a meaningful life. For Schulkind, dance has for over fifty years been a daily practice of tuning in, developing deep muscular skills, and using this to intuitively connect to others, in a manner that is existential, and more than verbal. Dance has been a basis to connect to emotional energies and feelings that compensate for the anxiety and loneliness of modern living, exacerbated by the stress of capitalism. This class microcosm brings together Schulkind's world: of healing and balancing the body, of connecting to deep internal feelings in the torso, and of extending lines and energies through the body and communicating in space. All this, while reminding city-folk to stay rooted in nature and the seasons.

This body-biography project allowed me to rethink, from my perspective today as a dancer and dance scholar based in Europe, the world of dance that Schulkind introduced to me when I was in my early twenties. Not only did I wish to better understand the components of Schulkind's teaching practice, and their autobiographical significance to him, but I also wanted to learn what he had witnessed as a dance practitioner in the revolutionary 1960s and the American dance boom of the 1970s and 1980s. I hoped to better articulate, as I have in the passage above, what that practice was and what it did to me, by means of its sensual and emotional components.

Life Stories

Figure 2: Marcus Schulkind (left) and Liz Waterhouse (right) on March 18, 2023, at Schulkind's office in Brookline, Massachusetts.



Screenshot by E. Waterhouse.

Context: Schulkind's Office

Our initial interviews take place in Schulkind's acupuncture office in Brookline, Massachusetts—a part of the Boston metropolitan area where Schulkind's practice has been located for over twenty years.¹⁴ He wears fleece jackets, the same ones that he wears when teaching dance training, with casual khaki pants and sneakers. Before my flight to Boston, Schulkind reminds me over the phone that his building is at the corner of Hawes Street, pronouncing the street name with a strong New England accent on the “aw”—nasal and bright. The small room of his office was filled with the relevant materials and tools for his profession and padded with a well-worn carpet. I ask Schulkind to begin by saying where we are. He responds pithily: “We are in my acupuncture office in Brookline, Massachusetts, United States of America, planet earth.”

¹⁴ For the references to this data and metadata see: Schulkind, “Body-Biography Interview with Marcus Schulkind”; Waterhouse, “Metadata Body-Biography Interview Marcus Schulkind.”

Our conversation starts by inventorying the many photographs, paintings, magazine clippings, diplomas, and posters framed on the walls. A large anatomical poster titled *The Points and Meridians of Acupuncture* has a prominent position in the room. I ask him to describe these images on the walls. Schulkind explains. “I ask people that I treat, if they’re comfortable, to give me a picture for my wall. So, that’s all the dancers over here. On the other wall are some pictures of my sister’s art because she’s a watercolorist. The Buddha comes from the woman I used to share the office with. She was a masseuse, who sadly ended up with melanoma cancer and passed away. She devoted ten years of her life to figure out how to live with what she had, and not fall into disrepair or doom. She had been told by the Western medical people that she had six months to live. Eleven years later, she died. She spent ten years researching and exploring her mortality: how one looks at and deals with a death sentence, and how one prevails. Then, on this wall there are my degrees from the acupuncture world.”

Brightening his voice, “And this is a *Dance Magazine* from 1978, with a review of my dance company.” I read out loud:

(Mini Umbrella, October 22). Dance dialogues about human relationships dominate the dances here. The Beatles sing about lost love as Serena Ward sweeps the space with broad, clean gestures in the first two solos which make up Schulkind’s *Ladies Night Out*. Elisa Monte follows, setting a mysterious and sensual dance dialogue against Randy Newman’s lost-love song. Both women seem to be moving on the impulses of emotion, yet their solos are not emotional. They are dramatic, somehow pensive. Two couples (Zane Rankin, Dante T. Del Giudice, Ward, and Monte) dip and swirl through *Crêpe de Chine* (Schulkind’s new piece), building up undefined tensions as they group and regroup, forming lovely shapes connected with lines of lyricism.¹⁵

Schulkind continues: “In the 1970s, my company was based in New York City. As a new company, I got a lot of work where I was produced—like this. We did Dance Umbrella. We did the Shakespeare in the Park Summer Dance Festival. I was creating for my own group, and I did some work for Dennis Wayne, who had a ballet company that he just started. That piece seemed to be very well received as well. The Playhouse in the Park, which is in the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, happens at the end of August every year. To be picked was like one of those major things. So this reminds me of my fifteen minutes of New York fame, where I was getting attention, money, grants, and things.”

As a last bit of informal banter before we start his interview, I ask Schulkind whether his acupuncture images are Chinese or Japanese. He answers, “Chinese.

15 This magazine clipping did not list the author. See “Review: Michael Sullivan and Marcus Schulkind Dance Companies.”

The way you get your degree is your knowledge of traditional Chinese acupuncture. I happened to go to a school that had a very strong Japanese program as well. I chose to do that because I liked that work more than traditional Chinese medicine. According to the Chinese, there's about 386 points you can use on the body. They are still discovering new points. The Japanese have *very* different locations, depending on which master you study with, of where these things are located. Whereas this is chapter and verse."

During the interview, we sit at the desk he uses for greeting patients and doing paperwork: Schulkind on his doctor's swivel chair, and I in the patient's seat. Besides us is a table for treating patients, covered with hygienic paper. I position my camera at the opposite corner on a bookshelf, to capture more of Schulkind's bodily movements and facial expression. We both wear wireless microphones.

The atmosphere is friendly and energetic—for Schulkind is an experienced and gifted storyteller, and I am very happy to be reunited with him. During our conversation, Schulkind sometimes props his legs up casually on the treatment table. Overall, his appearance, vocal performance, and sense of humor remind me of other male Jewish artists and natives of New York: actors and comedians Woody Allen, Larry David, and Jerry Seinfeld. When the stories get going, Schulkind layers his non-verbal communication with choreographic expertise, changing the scale of his motions to make wide, expansive gestures. He also uses rhythm and rests to add groove and accents between his words. For rhetorical emphasis, he often points with one or both hands, vibrating his gestures on key phrases. He frequently shrugs, as if to say, "That's life!" This gesture appears to be one that he has made throughout his life; it is portrayed vividly in a photograph of him at a very high point, before his company's Boston premier in 1989 (see Figure 3). When Schulkind speaks about dance teaching, he uses his own body to mark movements like a teacher—economically with his arms to illustrate positions. In between, he performs a small repertoire of common conversational postures: rocking the chair right and left, interlacing his fingers or crossing his arms on his chest, rubbing the palms of his hands together, and playing unconsciously with his fingers and nails. While annotation of all these movements during the interview would ruin the flow of the text, in what follows I have illuminated key anecdotes by adding my own descriptions, which are placed in the footnotes so as not to disrupt the flow of Schulkind's storytelling.

Injury: "Is Acupuncture Making Me a Better Creature of this Earth?"

Liz Waterhouse: What brought you initially to acupuncture?

Marcus Schulkind: I believe it was 1979, I came down from a jump *horribly* in a dance class and tore my anterior cruciate ligament (he points down to his right knee).¹⁶ At that time, they didn't have a really great sense of surgery for that, because usually the people who injured themselves that way were football players, and a football player doesn't need flexibility, they needed to be solid. The surgeons would just put it back together very *tightly* and that would get the person, who was the football player, back to playing their sport.

Unfortunately, they did that to me, and they made it too tight. It took a year and a half before I could perform again. I was basically told it was a career-ending injury, and that if I wanted, I could try to come back. But they said, "There are very few people who have succeeded at coming back." So then, my journey towards self-exploration and self-help began. Ultimately, that brought me to Boston. After ten years here, I started seeing an acupuncturist for knee pain, and it was very helpful. He was a Japanese-style acupuncturist. What I noticed—that was the most interesting thing—was that not only was my knee better, but my emotional *tsuris*—which if you don't know Yiddish, my emotional crap—got better.

Liz Waterhouse: Tsuris?

Marcus Schulkind (smiles, makes a soft gesture pointing with both hands to his head, as if pointing to himself): Grief, craziness. Tsuris! I started talking to the acupuncturist and I asked, "Is acupuncture making me a better creature of this earth? Or is it I'm finally growing up," He said, "Well, if the whole purpose of acupuncture is to *balance* out your energies, one would assume it's going to balance out the emotional energy as well." Then little by little, I started asking him, "How long does it take to be in acupuncture? What is it like? How does it happen? Because this is kind of fascinating to me."

Happily, the oldest acupuncture school in America was in Watertown. Happily, at that point, because acupuncture was not a trendy thing to do like it is now—their program started in the evenings. So, from 4:00 to 10:00 p.m. you went to the acupuncture school, every day. Every other weekend you spent there. That worked out for my schedule because I could do my dance teaching and my company. So, I started that. (Stands up, leans in to read diploma, then sits back down.) I graduated in 1998. So, I probably started in '95. And happily, that school had the only kind of

16 This story is reported similarly in: Temin, "Marcus Schulkind Helps Keep the Dance Faith Alive."

Japanese program that was extensive. I got a chance to work with some really genius people, and that was the beginning of that.

I have to tell you—when I was nineteen, I went to a very famous psychic, because I was at a turning point. I had only been dancing a year or two. I wanted to know what to do. He was expensive. He was in the West Village in New York City. He read my palm, he asked my birth date, and then, he proceeded to talk for two hours about me, my family, and it was *dead on*. I went, “This is really spooky, because you don’t know me and there’s no way you could know this.” This was way before computers. So, he went, “Well. I think, if you came to me and you were fifteen, I know you have healing hands. I would have told you to go to medical school and not be an artist. But I suspect you’re not ready for that. So, you should go off and do art. That won’t be bad, but at some point, you’ll want to go back to healing. I know that’ll happen, because you have (emphasizing each word) natural healing abilities.” I don’t know, I thought—whatever. But he was right. I really didn’t want to deal with that at all until I was forty-seven or forty-eight, when I started acupuncture school.¹⁷

What he said really scared me. Later, I was old enough and had lived long enough, that having that gift wasn’t so scary that I wanted to pursue it. Because knowing you could heal people also meant your *responsibility* is overwhelming. Because if you’re not really good, or if you get in your own way, or if your motives aren’t clear, then you’re not helping them and you’re just being an egocentric person who has a gift they’re not using well. When I was first receiving acupuncture, I was still at a point in my life that I really wanted to be involved in dance, meaning to have my company—at that point, I wasn’t dancing too much. But I could gradually add acupuncture to what I was doing, which I still do to this day. So now, I teach nine classes a week at the Boston Conservatory, where I am a full professor, *albeit* part time. I teach two more classes publicly, on Sundays at The Dance Complex in Cambridge. So I teach eleven dance classes a week. Most of them are early in the morning, which is the best time for me. When I’m not there, I’m *here* doing acupuncture. So, I work six and a half days a week still. I’m seventy-five. That’s kind of my life.

Goddard College: “The Story of My Dance Existence”

Marcus Schulkind: I have to tell you that I had no friends in high school. High school was, you know, a nuclear wasteland. Middle school had been worse. I was

17 Schulkind appears to relish telling this anecdote about the psychic. He begins with vocal energy, speaking quickly. He rocks his stool left and right. He inflects many words with slow, vocal emphasis. I notice his hand gestures, because we are speaking about his healing hands. I have felt the intention of Schulkind’s hands, as an acupuncturist and a dance teacher, and they did feel wisely precise, soft yet clear, and healing.

very bullied, which was the reason my parents sent me early to a prep school. When I think back, the two most important things that made me the artist that I became were the bullying and then—much later—the car accident. I think those were the really the big issues for me. Also, I hated conventional education. It didn't work for me. Never did. When you study pedagogy and educational philosophy, you differentiate a) forms that are dominated by the *institution* deciding what you should study vs. b) forms that say you as a *person* in that education should have *some* right to decide what you want to study. At that time, most colleges followed the former, and I wanted the latter. So, I knew if I went to a college, where it was going to be the same old academic crap, I would drop out, have a nervous breakdown, or be dancing naked in the streets in some way.

So, I heard about a place called Goddard College, which has no marks, and tests, or grades. I flew up there, to Plainfield Vermont, because I wanted to see it. Goddard was the *ultimate* in progressive education—meaning not only did you decide what you were gonna do, but everybody argued about it every day. Their education was in an *incredibly* gorgeous flux, and there were *brilliant* people teaching in Goddard, because they didn't want to be in the city [New York City]. At Goddard, you could go and do your work, and it would be a cheap place to live and raise a family. So, I lucked out. The only thing you had to do at Goddard was work in three areas. I loved this place! There was nobody telling you that you had to do a science, and math, and this and that.

You had an advisor. I decided my first semester I would do creative writing. I really liked to do that, and they had really good people teaching. I decided to do vitreous enameling on metal because I liked the idea of crafts. They had, in the middle of the woods somewhere, a weird little workshop you had a key to 24/7 to go in and make very elaborate jewelry or ashtrays. I liked that! It was complicated because the person teaching it was incredibly advanced. I had to learn cloisonné and plique-à-jour, which is when you take enamel that is in a flux and fill it in to filigreed silver that you've made a design. I just went, "Jesus! This is super hard!"

I was trying to figure out what would be my third course. It was the beginning of the semester, and a woman named Brooke Dyer-Bennet walked past me in a leotard and tights. I'm seventeen. I follow her. She goes into a dance studio. I have no idea what is going on, but I look in and there are sixteen women in tight clothes and a guy teaching class. So, I wander in, and I sit down. I'm just kinda going, (breaking a smile) "What the fuck is this?" I watched for an hour and I'm kinda going, "This looks weird, but interesting! Whatever."¹⁸

18 Schulkind also shares this anecdote in an interview with Iris Fanger in 2009, published by the Boston Dance Alliance. I discovered it in Schulkind's press clippings. In it Schulkind recounts similarly: "I started dancing at Goddard, on my first day of college at age 17. A gorgeous woman walked by me in leotard in tights. I followed her into a room with 13 girls in tight

So, the guy comes up to me afterwards and he says, “Are you interested in this?” And I said, “I haven’t done a *step* in my *life*, and I’m pretty awkward!” And he said, “Do you wanna try?” And something said, “I do!” And that’s the story of my dance existence. Because I started dancing every day. Because Goddard had no rules, I danced every day. And I danced every day for as long as I wanted to. I would be in the studio rolling around on the floor, thinking I was being creative.

Liz Waterhouse: Who was your teacher at Goddard?

Marcus Schulkind: Mark Ryder. Mark Ryder had come out of the Martha Graham Dance Company. He did both ballet and modern. He had a dance company with a woman named Emily Frankel, Mark’s first wife, called Dance Drama Duo [later renamed Frankel-Ryder Dance Drama Company]. They were very famous for their time. I don’t know any of this, at this point. Mark *became* my artistic dad. His family, he had three small daughters and a wonderful wife, and I kind of was his artistic son. He taught and parented with real intellectual wisdom, and I hung out with him.¹⁹

I have to say, the whole idea of everything was terrifying to me, because it was still *incredibly* difficult to tell people that I did dance. Because they looked at me like, “You’re either gay, or you’re stupid and gay.” It’s the way it was at that time. For the first two months, I didn’t even wear dance clothes. I wore a pair of jeans, that were like killing me and I couldn’t lift my legs and sit. (LW stifles laughter; Schulkind cracks a smile.) I finally went and bought a pair of tights at a Sears [department store] in Montpelier, Vermont. Of course, they didn’t have male or female tights, they had *tights*. I didn’t even know what to wear under it, so I came in in underpants. Mark took me aside and said (feigns seriousness, hiding a smile), “We need to talk about dance belts.” I went, “I have no idea what . . .” So, he said, (gestures lightly down to his crotch) “Yes, I can tell! (Laughs.) You have no idea.” Then, after the first semester I kind of got that.

I loved it. It was the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do in my life. It was just so hard, and I wanted to be someone who could do double tours. I wanted to turn. I wanted—like all young men—the idea of being able to have control and do tricks

clothes. It started out as lust, but it was the hardest thing I ever did. After three months, I was totally taken by the physicality—and the beauty of it all.” In our conversation, I was struck by the vocal earnestness, slightly higher in pitch, of his “I do” in this origin story of discovering dance. Fanger, “Interview with Marcus Schulkind.”

- 19 Mark Ryder, born Sasha Liebich (1921–2006), was raised in New York and trained in the performing arts at The Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre. He was a dancer in the Martha Graham Group in the forties, interrupting his dance career to serve in the army in WWII. He later served on the faculty at Goddard College in the sixties and the University of Maryland in the seventies until his retirement. Kisselgoff, “Mark Ryder, 85, Former Dancer in Martha Graham’s Company, Is Dead.”

like that. So, at the end of my second semester, Mark said, "You like this?" I said, "Yeah, it's pretty good!" My parents, at this point, had totally freaked out because I was dancing. They couldn't believe it. My mother actually said that I picked dance to torture her, personally. They weren't bad people.

Liz Waterhouse: Were your parents artists?

Marcus Schulkind: Not at all. My father was a businessman; my mother, a housewife. So there was nothing much in my home life before I went to college that was truly artistic. My mother made my father take a course at Queens College, learning about opera. And she dragged me and my best friend Freddie—and his parents and my father—to see opera. By 9:30 p.m., I was ready to fall asleep, and often I did. So, there was some culture there. I liked to listen to classical music when I was in my high school years. But they didn't care, except that I played it sometimes at the same volume that one would if you were listening to the Rolling Stones or the Beatles. (Quick story: So one day it was summer. The window was open and my dad came in and he went, "I could hear that music down the street." And I said, "It was Mozart. They probably think that we're very trendy." And he just went, "Turn it down!")

So the only reason they were doing opera at all was, I think, my mother thought that it was an important connection only because the *hoi polloi* did not go to opera, whereas those who were, pretentiously high middle class did, those who knew got dressed up and went to opera.

Liz Waterhouse: So it was about class?

Marcus Schulkind: Yes, it was. It was class. It was about not wanting to be seeming like just middle-class Jewish strivers who never went to college—because neither of my parents went to college. My sister and I were the first generation of our family who attended a higher institution. (My sister was five years older than me growing up, so I didn't really have such a deep connection to her until much later on in our lives.) So, my parents said, "We promised to pay for your schooling, which we will, but anything you do out of college, you're paying for yourself." And you can imagine dance was not what they imagined when they thought of college.

So, Mark Ryder wrote a letter to Jacob's Pillow and explained my situation to them. I got a scholarship at Jacob's Pillow. I parked cars. I pulled the trash down to the dump. I took class every day with teachers I'd never had and with people who were good dancers. I had my first gay man try to *schtup* [have sex with] me, which actually was such a learning phase because I never understood how obnoxious I was to women until I had a guy come on to me. Changed my consciousness! I kind of

went, “Well, he was obnoxious. So, I guess I am too. I should figure something out.” Anyway, that’s where I met Norman Walker, who was one of my teachers there.

Liz Waterhouse: I also read, from your collection of papers, the *Dance Magazine* article about Goddard, and I read Mark Ryder offered “nude dance classes.” Did you do courses like that too?²⁰

Marcus Schulkind: I took it. Honestly only did it twice. We had newspapers up on all the windows. Happily, it was only two women and me. Everybody talked the talk there, but the reality of being naked in a room and trying to dance was not overwhelmingly going over big. And so, we did it twice. It really didn’t become a very full class, because if you’re jumping around naked, and you have big breasts, it hurts. And if you have balls and gonads that flap up and down, that hurts a lot too. So, we weren’t doing, needless to say, a lot of jumping.

Liz Waterhouse: There was also a class called, “the mutual fulfillment of fantasy”?²¹ Did you take that one as well?

Marcus Schulkind: Well, there were all kinds of things that were being done. I don’t remember that one. They had a guy who was teaching a course in general semantics, but it all just became a course that was really about focusing on your senses. So, one day we spent the day working on taste, and I remember we had to each take a Triscuit [cracker] and chew it, not swallow for like five minutes and then put it in your hand, feel it, put it back in your mouth. It was kind of weird. But what they were trying to get to was how no one was tasting things anymore: eating slowly, finding some pleasure with it, giving it a responsibility in a way that our culture really doesn’t care about giving it. So, Goddard was questioning not just the macro, but the micro systems as well. It was amazing.

Liz Waterhouse: Interesting. I wondered about those experiences, in comparison to your students today. Today is another moment of gender and sexual revolution.

Marcus Schulkind: There’s such a new thing now that I didn’t have growing up, which was there’s more than two genders, right? Holy smoke. We didn’t have that. You

20 “This past semester Mark announced he was prepared to teach ballet, modern dance, dance games, a nude dance class and a class dedicated to ‘the mutual fulfillment of fantasy.’ The greatest student demand was, interestingly enough, for classical ballet.” Anderson, “Goddard,” 38.

21 Anderson, 38.

either were one or the other, or you had a variation on one of those two themes, right?

Juilliard School

Marcus Schulkind: In my second year at Goddard, I started to get a little bit somewhere with my dancing. Mark came up to me, and he said, “You know, I don’t really have that much more that I can teach you. You need to audition for a conservatory.” I said, “I don’t even know what you’re talking about. What’s a conservatory?” He says, “It’s a place where it’s about dance. You’re going to go there. You will be the worst person there. You’re not going to know anything. Everyone around you will dance circles around you, and that’s going to help you because you’ll watch them.” I said, “Okay, where?” He said, “There’s a place called Juilliard, and you’re going to audition.” We sent a letter out. Juilliard responded, “Come down, you’re going to take a class and perform a solo.” Mark said, “You know that solo you did in the winter? You’re going to do that.” I went, “I could do that, that’s fine.”

So, I’m at the audition. We took a ballet class. Not so good for me, but it was a ballet class, and I hadn’t really spent a lot of time in a *really classic* “Don’t mess around! Turn out! Shut up!” ballet class. Then, I did my solo. You will never believe who was on my jury?

Liz Waterhouse: Tell me!

Marcus Schulkind: Okay. José Limón, Antony Tudor, three principal dancers from the Graham company, Martha Hill, and Lucas Hoving—Lucas Hoving was one of José’s people. I mean, thanks God at that time I didn’t know who they were! I would have choked so bad. (Both laugh.)

So two weeks later I get a letter in the mail that says, “You’re accepted. We’re giving you a scholarship starting in the fall.” Mark had written them that my parents had cut me off financially, which was true. I did another summer at Jacob’s Pillow. Norman Walker was still there. I’m getting pretty good at modern. Not so good still at ballet, except I had good feet, but like turnout and everything else was just not there (shrugs). And then I started at Juilliard. The problem was I went from my autonomous design of my education—at Goddard—back to the other educational model, which is the institution is going to tell you what to do, from eight in the morning till ten at night. You *have no room* to have your own agency. That was a very difficult transition for me. When I was at Goddard no one was telling me what to do and I was very happy designing my life. I was working my head off, but nobody was saying from eight to nine you do this, nine-thirty you *have to* show up to do this, etc. So, that was that was tough the first semester (shakes his head).

But the background on all this was Vietnam. I *never* wanted to kill another human being, and that was a primal thing to me, but I did not have a *religious* background. In order for you not to be in the army and become a conscientious objector—which meant you became a corpsman, a Red Cross person—you had to have a religious background. This is before the Seeger case [Daniel Andrew Seeger, Supreme Court case 1965]. One of Seeger’s children sued the US government and said, “I’m an atheist, but my religious feeling of not wanting to kill people is as powerful as if I was a Quaker, or as if I was an Amish person.” That won. But then, to prove that, you had to have an incredible political backing. So anyway, my college time was . . . The way not to get into the war was to stay in college.

The pressure was I *needed* not to get kicked out of college, because that would be the army. I have to say: Taking class with Antony Tudor was the most wonderful thing, and he liked me. José Limón’s health was failing. But the people teaching Limón [technique] for him were really interesting. The ballet teachers didn’t like me. They thought I was a renegade, and I didn’t show enough desire to turn out, and to do line the way they wanted. I started, after my first semester, to get some work outside of Juilliard, which I liked. Because who wouldn’t want to get paid to learn your skill, right? But we also had *horrible* things to do there. Labanotation was academia’s look at trying to make dance into music. Here’s this strange staff. Here’s this strange score. If we train you how to read this score, you can replicate this dance. Of course, my hand went up and went, “But how will I replicate the intentionality of the dance?” They said, “Someone will tell you about that.” (Smiles smugly.) I just thought it was crazy.

So, I still had my “Goddard thing.” My, “I’m gonna do what I want” attitude. So, my second semester at Juilliard I stopped going to the classes I didn’t like. But *they* don’t like you to do that. At first, they give you warnings. I decided I’m not going to deal with Labanotation. It was driving me crazy. It felt like a waste of my time. Instead, I would go up to the music library and just listen to music, because they had versions of everything—it was fabulous—and I really liked classical music. In fact, at Juilliard you have to take four years of music, including solfège, which is singing on key. Also, you better know your music coming and going, because it’s a music school. Duh, right?

In my last semester there what I decided to do was this: Any time I cut a class I made it a discovery day. I said to myself, “You’re in New York City. Juilliard keeps telling me this is the best place to get classes. Do it!” I take the subway; I go to Martha Graham to take a class. I take a subway; I’m at Merce Cunningham’s studio. I took class with Charles Weidman, in the tiniest little studio on the corner of 9th Avenue and 38th Street. I tried to trace all the people that I could, because this was part of my background; this is part of my life.

Daniel Nagrin—who became one of my mentors—he had come up to teach at Goddard a few times, so I took classes with him.²² He was in the East Village near CBGB's. He had an apartment with a secret moving bookcase that led to his studio. At my age, it was so beyond cool! A lot of interesting dancers took class with him. I was the youngest person there. Everybody else is somebody, and I'm like going, "Who's that person?" It was *very* improvisational, and crazy. I could do none of those things. So, it was really interesting to me.

But—as you can imagine—the administration at Juilliard did *not* find that vital to my education. The head of Juilliard, Martha Hill, and I had fights. Today, with distance, I can see it differently: I was rebellious and probably aggravating as hell to someone in charge. Institutions and I did not mix. But then she was the projection of all my troubles. I said, "You have to also understand that *maybe* this isn't my *path*. Because, I have to tell you, that since I've been here, your consciousness is to tell me that if I graduate here, I'm lucky to be able to say, "I'm a Juilliard dancer." And I don't really want to be a product of *you*. I want to be a product of *me*. You want me to be something that you can get more people to come here with. I don't want to be part of your means of production. I don't want to get this into capitalism. I want to get into—*What is art?*"²³

So, after I finished my first year at Juilliard I took a break. They said, "We'll allow you to come back, but you're on probation for next semester. If you mess up anything, you're out." I went, (whispers) "I have a big job now. I'm not coming back."

22 Daniel Nagrin (1918–2009), is described in his obituary by Jennifer Dunning "as widely credited as an inspiration to male dancers and older performers." Nagrin worked fluidly across styles of modern dance, jazz dance, experimental improvisation, as well as sound and video art. He also danced for many decades, and was outspoken against norms of aging, publishing *How to Dance Forever: Surviving Against the Odds*. Dunning, "Daniel Nagrin Dies at 91."

23 For this story, Schulkind places me in the role of his interlocuter, Martha Hill, the former director of Juilliard, to situate me in the field of their conflicts. His story closely associates guilt and rebellion, in the ambiguity of being a young artist searching for independent self-expression. Schulkind's gestures emphasize distinguishing and differentiating himself from the big dance institution. First, he gestures casually and lightly outside himself to his interlocuter, with one upturned right hand, then to himself with both hands. He then changes effort to perform irony—using a more smooth and formal opening of the right hand, while retracting in his chair backwards. He holds this pose to announce with a deeper, mocking voice: "I'm a Juilliard dancer." Instead, he emphasizes his own rhythm and discernment. He makes a vibratory pointing gesture with one hand, vibrating after the word "you." Then doubling this gesture with two hands to affirm the importance of personal discovery and freedom, he points to himself at the solar plexus with both hands—"me"—vibrating both hands for emphasis. Then he concludes the vignette by releasing both hands and changing positions in his chair. The story returns organically to further justify and perform why, for Schulkind, a path of defiant artistic exploration trumps a rigid Juilliard education.

I actually worked that whole year. Started working with Pearl Lang, which was my connection to the Graham world. Norman Walker had his company. Worked with two holocaust survivors, Felix Fibich and Judith [Berg] Fibich. These were people who did Jewish folk dances for the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union at town hall, in New York, for their big meetings. They hired amazing dancers to do their work. One day, I saw Felix's tattoo (points to his inner left wrist). I went up to one of the dancers and I said, "Did you know about that?" And he said, "Yeah, no. He's a survivor. He and his wife made it out of Auschwitz." I went (holds both hands up by his shoulders, palms forward, as in shock). So, I had a really interesting year. I was working in a wine store when I wasn't doing that. It was it was the kind of education I really liked, but it didn't follow their idea of education.

Juilliard had by this time reported to my draft board that I was no longer in school. They had to—*by law*—tell them if somebody dropped out. But it felt like a personal affront. I discovered, through some of the anti-war activity I was doing, that you could go to an ex-Navy psychiatrist and tell them why you didn't want to be in the war. They would write a narrative for you that would get you a 4-F [registrant not acceptable for military service]. But I was in Manhattan. Everybody had that note, meaning no one wanted to go. Really, honestly, no one felt that going to a country in Southeast Asia and killing people you didn't know was upholding the American dream.

I decided, also because my parents were putting ungodly pressure on me, that I would go back to Goddard. I had to take my physical and my draft in New Hampshire, because there was not even a center in Vermont. It was awful, the way they lined you up in your underwear and evaluated you. I finally got to the end of it, and presented my note, my 4-F form, and he said, "Yeah, no. We're not going to take you." The note said, in essence, that in a war situation I would have a nervous breakdown and be unreliable as a killer. It was from a Navy ex-psychiatrist, so that seemed to be more than enough for them. It was a life-changing moment, but I couldn't celebrate, right at that moment. I remember going back in the bus to Goddard, and meeting Mark [Ryder], and driving for a while in the car with him, before I could start to feel relief. (Schulkind, looks at the camera directly, smiles, whispers) "Yay!" I did it very quietly. But when I got back to Goddard, I was so happy that was over.

Batsheva: "A Modern Repertory Dance Company"

Marcus Schulkind: After I finished Goddard, one day I was walking in New York City in August to go take class somewhere. I saw Norman Walker across the street. I hadn't seen him in a long time, and I went up to him and said, "How are you doing?" He said, "What are you up to now?" I said, "I just finished school." He said, "Are you up for an adventure?" I said, "Oh, duh!" He said, "I'm the artistic director of Batsheva

[Dance Company]. I need a man [a male dancer]. Could you leave quickly?" I said, "My bag is packed, I'm ready."

This is way before Ohad Naharin came to Batsheva. The company was started by Martha Graham, and aside from Martha's own company, and London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Batsheva was the only other company that did Graham's work. So I've been trained for this. I'm ready to do it. Norman had brought in *amazing* people. A program that we did was: *Diversion of Angels* (1948) by Martha Graham; *Moves* (1959) a piece in silence, by Jerry [Jerome] Robbins; *The Mythical Hunters* (1968) by Glen Tetley. There were also pieces from Israeli choreographers that were always about war, because that's all they knew. All told, I got the chance to do something that didn't exist in America, which is to say, a *modern repertory dance* company. Because in America, you danced either with Martha Graham, or you danced with Pearl Lang, either you danced with José Limón, or you danced with Paul Taylor, but you didn't dance any of them all together. Except in Batsheva!

Unfortunately, somewhere after the third month of my being there, Norman got horribly sick—he survived—thankfully it was fine. The high point of my time with them was a four-week American tour. I got to do all the repertory I wanted to do. It was sponsored by the United Jewish Appeal. Every Jew had to come out and support the Israeli dance company. It was all big towns with big Jewish populations. We did a week at City Center in New York. I've never been on a bigger stage like that in my life! But then Norman announces that he's sick and not going back. I didn't want to stay and be in a place where we weren't going to do the amazing kind of work that I started out doing. So, I left. Maybe I was there six months (shrugs). I wasn't there for a long time.

So, I came back to New York. A couple of months later, Graham gets a big grant from the federal government, because Martha is still kinda "drying out" and getting her stuff together. I'm not quite sure if she really had an alcohol problem, but she was having problems and was at an institution in Arizona where her sister Geordie lived.²⁴ Meanwhile, the company got a huge grant. The grant was to take people who had never danced in the Graham Company and reform the company. So, they had an audition. I show up. The audition is movement from *Diversion of Angels* (1948). I know this dance coming and going. I don't tell them that. I just did it. And they go, "You're hired!" So, I got that job and worked with them for about three months. Martha is not back, yet. This is all taught by the people who are the keepers of the flame, which is to say Bert [Bertram] Ross and Mary Hinkson. We did some interesting things.²⁵

24 On Graham's own account of her alcohol problems, see Phillips, "Martha Graham's Gilded Cage," 72–73.

25 In a scanned article saved by Schulkind, featuring him posed in a photo by Martha Swope, dance critic Marcia Siegel provides valuable context for Schulkind's remarks. The article focuses on the new group that Schulkind is part of—316 East—which is named after the

For example, we did a piece called *Seraphic Dialogue* (1955). We're six men and six women. The prop was this little (gestures in the air, showing an oblong shape between his two hands) weird-shaped thing: not a ball, but a sculpture Isamu Noguchi made. Each of the men got the prop, came off our set, and did a whole dance with that prop. What Mark Ryer told me was that Martha was looking at how every man plays with an idea. So, it was very clever, very interesting. We did only studio showings because the company wasn't reformed yet, but she invited all these people, and it was a big deal to come to her studio in 63rd Street. (By the way, Bethsabée de Rothschild bought that studio for Martha, because Martha then started the company in Israel. Bethsabée was one of the Rothschild people who settled in Israel, but had more money because of their family than God itself, because they were bankers from the Middle Ages on, right?)

Around that time, I started to see Elisa Monte.²⁶ We had been together already when I was living in New York and studying at Juilliard but had broken up when I went to Israel. (I got married afterwards to Dana Mann, but the marriage was annulled after about two years.) Elisa was dancing with Lar Lubovitch. She said, "I'm gonna tell Lar about you and you should come and audition for him." So, I got that. We did a little tour with Lar. Then, Lar broke up the company somewhere in the middle of Europe. Lar was kind of an interesting combination of a ballet flow, with a lot of Limón and contraction under it. That wasn't such a hard step because I was spending a lot of time doing ballet with Maggie Black at that point.

address of Martha Graham's studio. With Graham in retirement, the group began rehearsing in February 1972 under the direction of former dancers Mary Hinkson and Bertram Ross. Siegel questions whether modern dance's "heroic sensibility" and "odd, earthbound shapes and complex rhythms" still have an audience, and whether the dancers can preserve the lineage alone, without Graham taking part. Siegel observes changes in the new generation: "Where the movement should be hard and percussive it looks round and lyrical. Instead of giving you the feeling they've been punched in the stomach, they look as if they've just caught a nice squishy beach ball. This blander, nicer Graham technique looks more like balletic imitations and adaptations of Graham that have become internationally popular in recent years." Lastly, she describes socio-economic changes in the modern dance field: "It is not just that the early moderns went out of style. The way they organized and ran their companies couldn't survive the businesslike and competitive climate of dance in the 70s." These observations give important background for interpreting Schulkind's stories. See Siegel, "An Art Form Poised on Threshold of Rootlessness?"

- 26 Elisa Monte, born in Brooklyn, directed her company Elise Monte Dance from 1981 to 2016. She trained initially in ballet and danced as a child for Agnes de Mille in *Carousel*; as an adult she performed in the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company, the Martha Graham Dance Company, Pilobolus, as well as with Schulkind. Her career as a choreographer was launched by the premiere of *Treading* in 1979. For many years her ensemble was co-directed by dancer David Brown, Monte's husband, under the name "Monte/Brown Dance." Burke, "Review"; Dunning, "DANCE"; Dunning, "Elisa Monte."

When we came back, I said to Elisa, “You know, I need to start making my own work. My work is basically just this shit.” It really was time to make my own statement. So, we did. And that explains this (gestures to the *Dance Magazine* on the wall), because I had done *Ladies Night Out* (1974), and *Job* (1976/1977), and a couple of other things.²⁷ People were liking what I was doing. I did three summers at the American Dance Festival [ADF] teaching. One of the people who was really helping me at that time was Martha Myers [director of ADF]. She thought I was a valuable teacher and had me teaching there as a guest artist. I am very grateful for that. I did a big piece there on the students that I think was really good: *Of Taliesin* (1978). Then, I turned it into a company piece, and I brought two students from ADF to join the company. I loved that piece. *Taliesin* was to the second [Sergei] Prokofiev *Violin Concerto* [Op. 63]—the whole piece. We did it in the New York Delacorte [Theater], Shakespeare in the Park. That was when I had the big company. It had eleven dancers in it.

Liz Waterhouse: Was your early work like what I danced with you later? Was the movement vocabulary similar?

Marcus Schulkind: A lot of it had to do with what I was teaching people, because I was *always* teaching. I started my second year at Goddard (smiles). The only place where I didn't teach was in Israel.

What I taught back then was more Graham-ish. More, more literal Graham. My last year at Goddard, when I went back to finish, I taught every day, seven days a week. I had twenty-five people, *every day*. They couldn't believe it because Goddard was such a hippie place. The fact that I could draw that many people, every single day.

Liz Waterhouse: So, you were a teacher early?

Marcus Schulkind: Yeah. I think that was something I could *do*. Another (wiggles fingers on both hands in front of him) instinctive kind of thing, you know?

27 *Job* is reviewed in Schulkind's collection of press clippings in 1977, though articles in the 90s report that the piece was made in 1976. Cf. Temin, “Dance Review. Schulkind Creates Beautiful, Brief Bits of Truth.” In 1977, Kisselgoff's review states: “Mr. Schulkind himself showed off a startling degree of virtuosity by giving a literal twist to many standard modern-dance falls to the ground in another solo “Job.” The tone was set by Randy Newman's talking lyrics of a dialogue between God and mankind. As *Job*, Schulkind was beset with travail—mainly falls to the side of the body when he was expected to go down slowly backward. These whiplash movements carried their own excitement.” Kisselgoff, “2 Dance Concerts with Common View.”

So then, I started making work. Yeah, it was scary. It was hard. but I could use some of the connections I had. For example, Ethel Winter and Stuart Hodes were on the New York State Council [on the Arts] as people who would decide on grants. I had put grants in, and I had them come to showings. They did that because they knew who I was. It made a huge difference because I could get some money from the New York State Council, and from the National Endowment, which even though it was minor, that made a huge difference to me. It was a couple of thousand bucks, then. Was nothing stupid.

American Theater Lab: "If They Didn't Think You Were a Comer, You Didn't Get in."

Liz Waterhouse: The first writing I found about you in *The New York Times* is by Don McDonagh, describing a shared concert you did in January 1975 at the American Theatre Laboratory.²⁸

Marcus Schullkind: Do you know what the American Theatre Lab was? Okay, so let me let me hip you about this—in terms of dance history in New York City. After Jerry [Jerome] Robbins made a lot of money from his big three shows, which was *Fiddler [on the Roof]*, *West Side [Story]*, and *Gypsy*. This is before George Balanchine. He was a little bored. So, he bought a building on 19th Street in New York City, between 7th and 8th Avenues, the bottom of which was a tire store, the top of which he turned into a 150-seat black box theater and two rehearsal studios. I loved it because as you walked up the stairs, you'd smell the new tires.²⁹

First, Jerry did this amazing project with all of these out-of-work actors who could dance. He put together a group of people, paid them 150 bucks a week. They did a ballet class, a modern class, improvisation with him, Japanese tea ceremonies and martial arts. He created these ten, wunderkind actor-dancers. One of the things that was coincidental to this, and the reason I know about it, was that Elise's sister Barbara [Monte] was an actress, and she was in the program. Eventually Jerry started doing other projects, stopped that, but he hired someone to run his place, named Sue Anne Shirley. It became a rehearsal space for people, but he had performances there. To be allowed to perform there, you went through Sue Anne Shirley and the board. If they didn't like you, you didn't get in. If they didn't think you were a comer, you

28 McDonagh, "Dances by Bowyer Are Small Dramas with Core of Truth."

29 With the assistance of the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1966, Robbins established the American Theatre Lab "to explore experimental music-theater techniques, from dance to Noh drama, with a small handpicked company in a workshop setting for a period of two years." See Hunter and Jerome Robbins Project Staff, "Guide to the Jerome Robbins Papers, 1930–2001."

didn't get in. (Smiles.) We did *shows* there. When it says American Theatre Lab, those shows were under the aegis of, indirectly, Jerry Robbins.

Liz Waterhouse: So that was a real funnel into the scene, as an emerging artist?

Marcus Schulkind: It was *very* under-spoken about (wiggles fingers). Every fourteen-year-old choreographer and a brother were trying to do it.

A year after that, a man named David White was running a thing called Dance Theater Workshop [DTW] in New York.³⁰ He took over American Theatre Lab and that's where the Dance Theater Workshop did all of their shows for a billion years. David White liked me, so we did some shows there as well.

So, one day we did a show for DTW, I went into David's office, and I said, "Okay, feedback!" He said, "Here's what I need to tell you. It's important." He said, "I know you're a good teacher and you want to *develop* dancers, but you had dancers on stage who weren't as strong: *big fuckin mistake*. You cannot afford to do that. They won't give you grants until you show people who have that kind of caliber of talent." I said, "But what? They wouldn't accept somebody who's going to be that?" He went, "No." So. (Brings hands back together to affirm the closure of the story).³¹

Liz Waterhouse: Did you agree with him?

Marcus Schulkind: I listened to him because he was on *every* funding thing in New York: National Endowment, New York State Council, etc. I went, "I don't like this, but I will listen to you because I want to survive. I want my little piece of the pie—not a big one, because I'm competing with Merce [Cunningham], Martha [Graham], Paul Taylor, and everybody else in town. But I want my little piece of the pie, because it also makes me *feel* that I am seen as somebody to pay attention to, rather than just another person making dance in New York City." So, I really listened to that.

I had two *amazingly* difficult-to-hear conversations in my career. One was with David White; (softens voice) one was with Pearl Lang, pretty early on in my career.³²

30 Dance Theater Workshop was a performance space in New York City founded in 1965 for the rehearsal and presentation of new dance work. In 1975, under direction of David White, it moved to American Theatre Lab. Craine and Mackrell, "Dance Theater Workshop."

31 Sitting with his legs propped up on the patient's table in his office, Schulkind gives energy to this important anecdote. He leads with a smile, before changing into a serious tone, playing David White and turning me into his interlocutor. Schulkind scrunches his eyebrows together and looks directly at me, trying to put me in his shoes. He uses his left hand to draw attention, pointing with an impact on "this is important" and using the rhetoric of a weighted index finger, emphasizing each word: "big fuckin mistake."

32 Pearl Lang (1921–2009) was a dancer with the Martha Graham Company and choreographer, directing her own company in New York City from 1952. She also taught internationally and

Pearl took me aside, one day. She said, “You know what’s wrong with your dancing?” And I said, “No, Pearl, but I bet you’re going to tell me.” (LW laughs.) That’s just the way the conversation started up. She said, “I am, and I want you to really listen to me.” She went, “You’re too small to lift big women.” “What does that mean?” I said, “Yeah, what does that mean?” She goes, “You have to learn and make yourself be a *virtuosic* principal or soloist. Otherwise, no one will hire you because you’re too small.”³³

So, that changed the way I took class after that, because I went, “Pearl’s in the business. If anyone knows what’s important. You know, I can hear you!” This was way before I started doing my own work. This was like, “Who doesn’t want to work?” (Softer voice) “Okay, I hear you. I’m going to . . . I’m going to make that happen.” So, that was another of the more interesting—here’s a kick in the balls. Take it or leave it. But it’s probably not a bad perspective for you to know. Which now takes me to the conversation about my audition for Paul Taylor!

I *always* wanted to dance for Paul Taylor!³⁴ I thought his musicality and his *brilliance* and *athleticism*, and *virtuosity* were amazing. So, I had come back from Batsheva [Dance Company], and this was before the Graham-thing formed. He had an audition for men. I went down to his studio, four hundred men. He got rid of them fast. You did two pliés, you got rid of twenty-five people. It was like that. And then, I got down to the last three. There were two big guys and me, and they said to us, “We will call you by tomorrow and let you know who’s got it.” Now, this is before cell phones. I am now like Pavlov’s dog, sitting in front of my phone. I’m sitting there

directed modern dance at Jacob’s Pillow. In her obituary, Jack Anderson writes: “As both dancer and choreographer, Ms. Lang demonstrated an intense lyricism and a taut dramatic sense.” Anderson, “Pearl Lang, Dancer and Choreographer, Dies at 87”; see also Chapman, “Lang, Pearl.”

- 33 Still sitting with both legs propped up on the patient’s table in his office, Schulkind looks at me obliquely. He continues to put me in his shoes, as he recreates this difficult-to-hear conversation with Pearl Lang, treating me as his interlocutor. He energizes the story with drama by knitting his eyebrows together to start. He breaks a smile through the serious dramatization, as I laugh with his setup of a punch lunch. Clearly this is not going to end well. He drops his left finger for rhythmic emphasis on Lang’s advice. But the final judgment from Lang is voiced with a diminuendo and a growing smile. His gesture of pointing resolves before he concludes Lang’s testimony. Schulkind ends smiling vulnerably, resting his cheek on his left hand. A criticism heard.
- 34 Paul Taylor (1930–2018) was known as an exceptionally “versatile performer,” dancing in the works of Martha Graham, George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, Charles Weidman, and Doris Humphrey. As a collaborator of Robert Rauschenberg’s and a teacher at Black Mountain college, his experiments in the 1950s shocked critics for their non-dance elements. Later, framing his work within the traditions of modern dance, The Paul Taylor Dance Company maintained an eclectic body of repertoire and was known for its diverse, individual dancers. Kane, “Taylor, Paul”; Macaulay, “Paul Taylor Dies at 88.”

from seven in the morning, and I am like *schvitzing* [sweating] bricks, I am like dying. I am waiting for the phone. Anybody calls me, I said, "Don't call me today!" It got to be about three o'clock and I hadn't heard. So, I said, "Okay, you lose nothing, call him."

I call him, and the phone gets picked up. It's Paul Taylor's manager. I said, "Hi, my name is Marcus Schulkind, I was at the audition. I was one of the three last people. You guys said you would talk to us, and you haven't. I know, I'm probably not supposed to do this, but what's going on?" So, he puts down the phone and I hear him scamper off. Then he comes back, picks up the phone, and he says, "Mr. Taylor *wants* you to know that he thinks that you are a gorgeous, beautiful dancer, but you're too small for his company." And I said, "Okay, wait a minute! I just want . . . Would you go and tell Mr. Taylor that I project *huge* on stage?" He puts down the phone and he scampers away, comes back, picks up the phone again and says, "Mr. Taylor *even* understands that, but you're still too small. (Schulkind changes from playing the character of the manager, to *his* speaking voice) So, but thank you, you're a beautiful dancer. He meant that sincerely. That's why you got one of the three left. But he can't really use you."

So, you're one of the last three! Your expectations are like *something*, right? It's not like you got caught after the first plié. (Exhales with a sigh, while dropping his arms with emphatic release.)

Liz Waterhouse: What an honor though! I don't know if you could have felt that, at that time?

Marcus Schulkind: No, not at that time. But on some level, I could at least say (imitates the deep voice of actor Marlon Brando) "I'm a *contender*, if my *fucking* genetics was six inches bigger, I would have been a *champ*" Okay, whatever. So, it was like *On the Waterfront* "Stella! Paul!" (Both laugh cathartically.)³⁵

35 We can learn from this anecdote how bodily appearance—physical attributes of gender performance, such as height—are important to the perception of Western concert dance, strongly impacting dance careers. Schulkind has set up the suspense for this story, which is gaining momentum, as his third anecdote in a row. Smiling, he begins by making an exuberant gesture, like swinging a heavy baseball bat. Throughout his narrative, he alternates moods. Accompanying the serious conversation between Schulkind and Paul Taylor, mediated by an assistant and the phone, there are many comic interludes. Schulkind mimics holding the phone, acts out the sounds of the assistant walking by drumming on his legs, and changes his voice to mimic that of the assistant. Both of us often burst out laughing at the ridiculousness of such a serious conversation taking place in such a mediated, bizarre way. When he voices the final testimony of Paul Taylor, he delivers it dryly. When he pleads that he can dance *huge*, he smiles wryly, showing his desire, confidence, and social determination. Schulkind finishes the conversation by hanging up the imaginary phone. He returns to his speaking voice, in its deeper tones, to deliver his last reflection.

Six months later, Paul Taylor has another audition. I called up the manager before and I said, “Hi, my name is Marcus Schulkind, and I was one of the last people at your last audition. I *don’t* want to go through this again, to be told I’m tiny. Would you *ask* Mr. Taylor if I should even come to the audition or not? Because emotionally, it will tear me apart. I’ll *wind* myself up, and you’ll keep me or *not*. But either way . . .” So he scampers away, comes back, and he says, “Mr. Taylor *really* thanks you, but you really shouldn’t come.” And I went “Okay, you know, I can dig that. Because at *least* I didn’t have to wind myself up and turn myself into whatever I need to turn myself into, to come to an audition and make that work. So, thank him. And thank you because I’ll *never* come to an audition for you guys again. I got it. I appreciate that because it’s better to understand that. You know?” I’m sure even if you had put in the audition notice “Men five foot ten and bigger,” shrimps would still come because they want to try—because that’s the nature of the beast. (Looks away, contemplating.)

But I *really wanted* to work for that man. I never got the chance. Years later, when I was looking at how hard they killed themselves—Paul Taylor’s company works almost eleven months out of the year. They are a touring company. When they’re not touring, he’s doing new pieces. It was a *difficult* company in terms of your knee joints and other things to survive. When I thought about that, I rationalized why I didn’t get picked. God wanted me to dance another two years! So, that was that story.

So rather than our first conversation, which was my building up a “Marcus myth” a little bit, these are stories that are much more real, honest, and heartfelt, because they were instrumental in how I would consider looking at my career. Because this is, again, before I was creating anything. This is when I was trying to dance with anybody I could, but especially people who turned me on.

Next Generation: “You Taking the Time to Be You”

Marcus Schulkind: My dance career is so circular. In my last year at the American Dance Festival [ADF], Daniel Nagrin said to me, “I want to do a new solo for you.” He was having a big concert, because he had just recovered from knee surgery. Daniel invited all of the people who had danced with him to come in and do his solos. Then, he would close with a new solo for himself that was called *Getting Well* (1978). It started with him on a gurney, and then he would get up, and dance around. Daniel was amazing!

We rehearsed in New York. Neither of us had a lot of time, but we made time. This solo was the hardest thing anybody ever gave me. A recording of that’s in the [New York] Library of Performing Arts. It’s archived under Daniel. I’m not sure who can get to see it, but that’s there. That was part of the circularity of my career in dance, because Daniel was one of my first teachers and I got to do a new solo from him ten years later, which was *so* gratifying. It was called *Time Writes Notes on Us* (1978). It was *so* hard. It was horrible to do. The more I could do, the more he made it

harder (laughs). It was to a *discordant* piece of Aaron Copland piano music, an awful piece of music that had nothing to latch onto, emotionally. (Opens hands and smiles mischievously) I think he picked that because he *knew* I would find a way to latch onto it, physically, emotionally, some other way.

So, another circular story, also about ADF. I told you about my experiences at Juilliard, where I stopped going to all those classes and they failed me. Now fast forward ten years. This is my last year at ADF [1979]. At ADF, they always had a couple of panels of the faculty. The kids would all come in and then the faculty would tell them stories of their lives and careers. The first year, I remember sitting in the audience listening to somebody talk, thinking this guy was so full of himself. *But* the next year they asked me to be on the panel. I'm on stage, and it was my turn to start talking. I said, "You know what I want to tell you? This career is incredibly circular and weird. I'm going to tell you why. Back in the day when I was at Juilliard, three of the people who were on stage with me *failed* me miserably because I stopped going to their classes, because I doubted the value of their classes. (Pause) Guess what? I'm *here with them now!*"

The other guys on the panel looked at me, like they could kill. It was so perfect! I said, "What I want you to understand is you need to follow your own path. You need to not buy in to the corporate logic. You need to understand it's about *you*, fulfilling *you*. That if there's nothing else about art, that's what it's about! You might be poor, you might be unknown, but you have found an authenticity about who you are and what you want to do with it. That's art. It doesn't matter who fails you, as you can tell. I'm here. I'm their peer. They must be pissed as hell at me. Not only that: I choreograph! They must be pissed as hell at me, because they were trying to teach me choreography when I was so not ready to even think about choreography! Which is why I stopped going, because I could barely put a phrase together. I could barely walk across the stage. I could barely improvise. So, I just want you to know. That's such an important lesson for you to hear, that this isn't all glory, and it isn't all kissy kissy, and it isn't all politics. It's always the underpinning. It may have those things, you may need to do those things, but it's really about you, taking the time to be you."³⁶

36 This anecdote is performed expressively. Schulkind begins by creating a serious mood, his hands are folded together. As he begins his testimony about the panel, he creates attention by opening his hands and lowering them slowly, as if he is placing them onto a piano to play the first note of a piece of music. He continues, setting up the situation and story, and then makes a dramatic pause before resolving into his punch line. I exclaim in laughter, as he opens his arms at the elbows and smiles mischievously, raising his volume—delivering his candid advice for the students—that also demonstrates his status gained among his peers at the panel. He continues with sincerity, lowering his volume and tone: bringing his thumb and index finger together precisely. Then gesturing his right hand downwards with rhythmic emphasis—"It's about you."—he gestures downwards with his palm. Then, on the

After that, nobody in the faculty would talk to me except Daniel [Nagrin] and Doug Elkins (leans back in his chair to laugh). I think they couldn't accept my provocation. Here's this place where you "have to" do your classes. They don't want anybody to upset the structure. But I came from Goddard, I came from a place where it was in terms of educational *existentialism*. You decided exactly what you were going to do. No one told you what to do. Granted maybe not everybody wants to do that. Maybe they need to have a little cubby hole of activities every day, so they feel that they're fulfilling things, and get graded. I didn't! It *pissed* me off, and it made me feel less worthy than anybody else. Yet, I was spoiled, or angry, or ridiculous enough to do my own thing (smiles gently). So, you know—there you go. It all kind of works out in the wash, somehow.

Those are my stories more about real life. In our first interview, I was painting a picture of my career, that didn't show all the things that were difficult—you know hurtful. I mean, when they failed me, it was amazingly painful to me. But what could I expect? If you challenge them, they're going to fail you. (Laughs.) That's not the game! They don't set you aside and go, "Let's have an educational, philosophical conversation with you." They're not going to look at you, as you being as worthy as they are. Because you haven't done the same amount of work as they did.

Liz Waterhouse: I think in general, dancers' stories that are made public, they're very glamorized.

Marcus Schulkind (agreeing): No, no, no. And the *decline* isn't really talked about because it's so painful and difficult. But the interesting thing, and this would be, when I think of my career, (softens vocal volume) *I always taught*. I taught from the second year of starting dance. I taught seven days a week. And I think *one* of my gifts was being *able* to teach people things (offers his right hand forward).

Liz Waterhouse: Your contact as a healer and your contact as a teacher.

Marcus Schulkind: So, one of the great things about you having been here these last few days, is you're *reminding* me of that. Much more so than how it is now for me,

words "fulfilling you," he turns his hand over invitingly. He stretches his fingers and gestures downwards towards the desk for emphasis: "That's what it's about." Then he opens his palms invitingly, beckoning me into the play of: "That's art." Later, when he returns to contemplating his education at Goddard, he crescendos in his voice and gestures, looking like a conductor flinging his arms more extensively around him with weighted impact—strong, slow, free, and indirect. This contrasts with the prolonged gestures accompanying his description of "other" educations: the tiny, minute repetitive slicing of his hands one on top of the other—bound, quick, small, and spatially direct. This mastery of performance shows confidence and clarity: a defiant self-presentation.

when the path is *this* way (points with his index finger, making a straight diagonal line down) rather than the path is *that* way (draws a line in the air rising vertically). Because, when you're going, you know—thirties, forties—you're hot. Things still are okay: collagen [connective tissue] doesn't rip. Collagen gets nervous but is fine. But I have to also say that fine line between humility and humiliation occurs with major injuries. (Looks away, reflecting.)

Kathy Grant and Maggie Black

Marcus Schulkind: Once I got really hurt, I became a *real* teacher. That knee accident, to me, was the humiliation that allowed me to get into my humility about everything. I was a good teacher before then. I was a talented teacher. But I didn't have true empathy. After that, "Woke, smoke! I'm walking in your shoes!" I understand when you can't do things in a certain way, with a certain skill set. That was my greatest education. That's also when I found the teachers who then enabled me to go on. Kathy Grant being one of them. Maggie Black being one of them. They were both in New York. The injury was the key that opened the door.

Kathy Grant was the last of the three living people who had actually worked with Joe [Joseph] Pilates.³⁷ Kathy specialized in dance because she had been a dancer. Kathy also was one of the few people who could use Pilates to *fix* dancers or *fix* people, rather than teaching the rote way. Kathy was wonderful human being, who, as a Black woman, had lived through a life of intolerance and segregation. So, she had a love/hate for all of us being White. I had to prove myself worthy to her on so many levels. First, as a man. Second, as a *White* man. Third, as a *Jewish White* man. Fourth, as a Jewish White man who wanted to dance and wanted her help. For some reason, Kathy liked me, and I was grateful. Maybe because I had a sense of humor—I don't know. But Kathy let me in. Kathy let me *really* figure things out. When I went back to performing, my first performance (points to right knee) after I got hurt was at Harvard Dance Center [1987].³⁸ I did *Job*, and right after it was over, the first person I called was Kathy. I told her I performed, and we both cried. Because she knew about that road that I had taken to get there.

37 Kathleen Stanford-Grant (1921–2010) had an extensive career as a dancer, dancing with and for Bill Robinson ("Bojangles"), Cab Calloway, Pearl Bailey, Carmen De Lavallade, Geoffrey Holder, Arthur Mitchell, and Donald McKayle, among others. After a knee surgery she was referred to studying with Joseph Pilates, becoming a master teacher. See the websites <https://diversityinpilates.com/kathy-stanford-grant> and, <https://www.kathygrantpilates.com>, both last accessed September 24, 2025.

38 Dreyfus, "Faculty Show Eclectic, Energetic."

Maggie Black was also enormously helpful to me.³⁹ Somehow, Maggie let me into her world. She rehearsed me once or twice. I mean, she was into *crème de la crème*—Kevin McKenzie when he was a principal at American Ballet Theatre, Martine van Hamel, Gelsey Kirkland, when Gelsey started to become a fallen human being with [George] Balanchine, *because* she went to Maggie. She was there, too. So somehow, I got into this. Maggie let me in. And watching her teach her class in her formal, anatomical, structuralist style was a revelation to my mind. She would teach you how to physically enable your body to accomplish technical things.

Opposites Attract

Marcus Schulkind: I also learned a lot from Elisa Monte.⁴⁰ Elisa was my polar opposite. Elisa was streetwise. She had gone through it, knew it, understood how to deal. She understood all the little angles. *And* she had talent, which attracted me to her enormously. Elisa at that point was dancing with Martha, doing principal roles: Helen McGehee's in particular. She could wail through Helen's work—unbelievably powerful. She had the lead in *Clytemnestra* (1958), one of the biggies that Martha did. So, Martha seriously loved Elisa.

Liz Waterhouse: Did you ever have issues about authorship working with Elisa Monte? She also became a choreographer. Did that ever cause tensions?

Marcus Schulkind: Yes of course. Okay, so let's talk about some other things that happened with me and Elisa. Like I said, Elisa was really a good energetic match for me on a thousand levels: relationship level, also as a performer, she was beyond brilliant. I could just fold things into her, choreographically, and it was like going to be super brilliant.

I was the one who encouraged, "You should go to Graham." So she went to dance for Graham. Graham loved her. I knew that they would temperamentally click. But I also saw her talent was more than being an interpreter. One day, I was watching public TV, and they did a program on Pilobolus Dance Company. It was the first time Pilobolus got major recognition; they had taken the two women in [Alison Becker Chase and Martha Clarke]. That changed Pilobolus from a bunch of crazy scientific jocks, into theater. On TV they showed this piece called *Untitled*, where they're on men's shoulders and they come up in dresses. It was *fabulous*. I said to Elisa, "You should work with them." So, Elisa met Moses Pendleton and went up to their place

39 Maggie Black (1930–2015) toured internationally as a ballet dancer before teaching at the Metropolitan Ballet school, The Juilliard School, as well as private studios in New York City. Zeller, "Teaching through Time."

40 For a biography of Monte, see footnote 26.

in Connecticut and started working with them *also*. I kind of realized that for her development, that would be the next step. After she'd worked with them for a while, she started choreographing. That was really bad in the sense that we had a little competitiveness going on (rubs hands together), and that was not good. Especially because she had such good connections and was such a great dancer, she kind of jumped ahead of me. Alvin Ailey took her and did one of her pieces [*Treading*, 1979]. That made a lot of her career happen because of that.⁴¹

So, our relationship, I think, fell apart for two reasons. One, she was doing so much better than me (laughs joyfully and extendedly, changes position, stands up and then sits back down again). Our last concert *together* was at Marymount Manhattan Theatre. I did two works, and she did three works, and we shared dancers, but it was no longer harmonious—shall we say. The other reason, beyond our artistic relationship, was family planning and kids. Elisa really wanted to have a family. So, of course, I thought about the matter seriously, but I knew, I'm not emotionally or economically ready to be a father. After that was clear: We were done. Then it was a question of, since we had built this loft together, but she had put the money down for the loft on Great Jones Street, I could rehearse and teach there for two years. That was my "divorce severance." We weren't legally married. But I think we were together more than eight years. So, I think common law said, "You're married." So that was that.

Vehicular Trauma

Liz Waterhouse: Is the end of your relationship with Elisa also why you left New York?

Marcus Schulkind: Well, there were a few reasons. I left New York also because something else happened, that has nothing to do with my dance career per se. I was teaching at SUNY Purchase in the evenings in their evening dance program. There's no public transportation to speak of to get there, so I rented a car. Diving down on the New York Thruway [highway] one night, I'm in the left-hand lane and suddenly a *body* falls in front of my car, and I hit it. It's a man in a crouched position. So, of course, I stop the car. I put on blinkers. Police come. It's kind of damp out. My car is not totaled, but I didn't want to drive anymore that night. I'm sitting in the cop car, and I'm crying. Because there was no way, from the sound of what happened to that body and to my car, that person was alive. The person was dead. The cops took me

41 Anderson presents a different account of Monte's biography here. See Anderson, "Alvin Ailey to Open with Elise Monte Premier." For the performance of the Marcus Schulkind Dance Company on January 24, 1979, at the theater at St. Clement's, Monte is credited as co-Artistic Director and for costume design. Cohen, "On Ambition, Part I."

back to the local police station. I was still crying. The cop said to me, “You’re not at fault here. We even have a witness. I know you’re traumatized.” I said, “Okay, I don’t know how to get home. He said, I’m going to call you a cab. This is the Bronx. You should not walk alone.”

Liz Waterhouse: So, you were not at fault?

Marcus Schulkind: The cops told me that night, “We’ve investigated this whole thing. You’re not at fault. Do you know what happened?” I said, “Not really.” He said, “On the other side of the Thruway, this man had an accident. He had gotten out of the car. He was directing traffic around his *own* accident, on the other side of the highway, when another car clipped *him*, and sent him flying over the barrier. He landed in front of your car. You were in the wrong place at the wrong time.” And I said, “It doesn’t make me feel any better.”

This is how messed up this was. So the cop said to me, because I was so upset, “He was dead by the time he got to your side of the road. He was dead. He could not have survived what had happened to him on the other side of the road. So, you really shouldn’t feel that you have actually killed this person. The person was pretty much gone.” That was really, I guess, a situation where the cops were as comforting as they could be.

But that was the most astonishing and difficult thing to happen. To realize that *suddenly* this “thing” falls in front of you. Literally within five feet of you, and you make contact with it. And that thing happens to be another human being. So it was from that night on the trauma set in, because I had never killed anybody before—which goes back also to my protest and abstention from Vietnam.

Liz Waterhouse: Hmm

Marcus Schulkind: So it was a traumatic thing, because it also was, I guess, serendipitous. It was so random. It was so ridiculous. They never found . . . So, you know it was horrifying—just horrifying. But then after a few years it kind of disappeared, and then it became real as suddenly I’m going to trial.

Liz Waterhouse: What trial?

Marcus Schulkind: A civic trial. A civil case is very different than a criminal law case. If the police report had said that I was guilty of vehicular murder, then that’s a *legal* case. Then, they would have put me in jail or gone after me for manslaughter. Since there was *no legal case*, this was *civil* case. That’s why it took so long to get to court. This family is suing you for the intent, whether conscious or not, of killing this man. It’s a different thing when it’s *civil* versus *criminal*. There was no *criminal* case, which

you would think would kill off the civil, but no. Because it's *civil*, the judge had more power.

The lawsuit was for an astronomical figure. First, I called up the rental car company and I said, "Well, I had insurance through you." They said, "You only have insurance for us for up to 500,000 dollars. We'll provide you with a lawyer for just the first 500,000 dollars. We suggest you get your own lawyer." Basically, nothing happens for years. It takes ten years to go through its cycle. Then we go to court, and I testify. It's in the Bronx, which is where this happened. I had never really seen the family other than to express my deepest condolences right at the beginning. They're staring at me, with hatred and also greed. (Shrugs.) They're poor. In the same situation, I would try to get as much out of the insurance too. But they're suing me, at this point, for a million and a half—which meant, if I *lost*, I could be responsible for a million dollars, even though I didn't have it. My lawyer said to me, "You're going to declare bankruptcy, now, because we need you to be bankrupt before this happens."

I go through the whole court case. Because five years had gone by, the person who was the witness, who saw the man hit on the other side of the highway, can no longer be found. So, it's basically my word and the police report, against the family's. I said to our lawyer, "But there's no way. One doesn't *walk* on the New York Thruway. Pedestrians are not allowed on the highway—especially in the left lane. So, how did this person suddenly fall in front of my car? Like, are we missing some logic?" he said, "The jury is very sympathetic to the family." I said, "But there's no *facts* here." He said, "That doesn't matter." We get to the final moment of this whole thing and the civil jury says "Guilty, million and a half!" The judge has more power though, because this is a civil case. The judge comes back, and he said, "I'm changing the award. The award is going to be 500,000 dollars to be paid by the insurance company. This person [Schulkind] obviously was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I'm not going to *penalize* this person for this situation."

So, thankfully I was not bankrupted. But honestly, it was so traumatic to me. I just felt like people reading this should know that this person was hit on the other side of the road and fell into my lane. It wasn't like I was drunk driving down the road. So that was the most astonishing and difficult thing to happen. I had to rent another car the next week to go teach at Purchase. I drove back on the same route, to make myself understand there were no ghosts, and I was okay. But never—I'll never forget that sound.⁴²

42 In the first rendition of this story, Schulkind pauses for many seconds, as if deliberating or remembering, and inhales deeply before recounting this difficult event. In this writing I have blended two accounts, from March 21, 2023, and July 18, 2024; the first version was much more fragmented, as one would expect from a story of trauma seldom told. The second version morally justified that Schulkind was not at fault, while also explaining the choreography of how the man had been killed more clearly.

Liz Waterhouse (Overlapping): Mm-hmm. I'm so sorry!

Marcus Schulkind (Overlapping): No, it's okay! Probably made me understand how to do *Job*.

Then, the other thing that happened—you asked me why I left New York—was: I hurt myself, you know, horribly. Tore my ligament in my knee. The *repair*—which at the time wasn't frequent—except for football players, and that's an *easier* repair because you just make it tight as hell. So, this too—this pushed me away. Because at this point, I hadn't gotten back to dancing yet.

Once I get to the point where I (drops hand to injured right knee) could actually dance a little bit, I decided maybe I shouldn't be in New York anymore, and maybe I should try to teach in academia and see if I could stand that. A friend told me that they needed a modern dance teacher in Ohio. That's when I went to Denison and Ohio Wesleyan University. Unfortunately, Denison is a party, fraternity place. Kids there were not interested in the arts. The other place was fabulous. The kids were brilliant, and interesting, and I really enjoyed working with them.

But I was living in Denison in their young faculty dorms and driving back and forth to the two colleges. What I discovered is that people in academia are crazy. They actually think they're changing the art world with what they're exploring and researching, and they actually think they're important. At meetings, I would just go (shakes head). Then, they get caught up with, "Do you wanna stay here? Do you have to be tenured? You're gonna have to write a book." I just went, "No, I don't think that's what's gonna happen."

At the same time all this was happening, every summer, for nine summers in a row, Iris Fanger ran a thing called the Harvard Summer Dance Festival. I am so grateful to her, because that teaching helped me to continue after my injury. So, I would come to Cambridge for six weeks (opens palms, raises voice positively in pitch, smiles). I taught for nine summers. One summer, the last one, I met Gerri Houlihan, who had danced with Lar Lubovitch. She was starting the Boston Dance Project, and I said to her, "Gee Gerri, would you be interested if I came here and taught for you?" She said, "Let's try a winter workshop." I came in, and did a winter workshop, and it went over well. So, I moved to (voice raises up in pitch) Boston. I taught at Gerri's. Suddenly, I got a ton of work in this town—so (shrugs), I stayed.

It is a very interesting thing: I *knew* I wasn't done with dance. I *could* have stopped then, when I went out to Ohio. But I wasn't done with it. I needed to get back, I needed then to see. Once I got back, then I went, "Hm! Got things to say! Still got things to say, so I'm not done with this yet."

Liz Waterhouse: What a mix of factors that shaped your life story: There's your personal relationship with Elisa and questions of competition vs. family planning. There's your body, the injury. Just chance, this accident. The American legal

system and its procedures and verdicts. Then also, the dance network of different institutions for teaching. That's a real complicated mix of factors shaping a life story.

Marcus Schulkind: It was kinda thorny.

Liz Waterhouse: Just one last question, financially how did you get through this? How did you get by when you were injured? Is that also why you went to Ohio, to have a fulltime gig?

Marcus Schulkind: After the knee injury, I fortunately had disability insurance from MetLife, that I started when I was a teacher as SUNY Purchase, in their evening program. Thankfully it hadn't cost me much, but after I hurt my knee, I actually got a check from them every month. So that got me my rent and my basic food. That's how I survived then.

Another source of income for me in the early eighties was that I got a gig called "Affiliate Artist." Affiliate Artists [Appointment Residencies] was an organization in New York City, and they took three or four dancers, musicians, actors, and artists, and connected them to a corporate sponsor to work in what were called "underserved artistic communities." The first time I auditioned, I didn't get it—the guy didn't like me—but at one point they needed to replace someone, so I got invited to down to the Southern Illinois Art Consortium.

It was a great gig. What you did was called "informal performances." It was basically a forty-five-minute informal performance riff, where you talked and did a couple of dances and then you talked, and then you answered questions, and you then pitched how you were being sponsored by, for example, the Columbus Arts Council, or Battelle Foundation. I filled in for six weeks in Southern Illinois and then did another two years: first in Columbus, Ohio, with Batelle Foundation and then the third year in Patterson, New Jersey—I forget my sponsor in New Jersey. Basically you went in there for two-week periods, four times over the course of a year. The gig paid \$15,000 clear, all expenses paid, which was amazing cash. They flew you; they fed you; they put you up. It was a big high, a clap on the back, because to get this was a major thing. So that helped fund my company when I was in New York City. All this money that I got there, I would throw into the company, and any of the other gigs I got, including my teaching; all of the money I got went into the dance company, because I always paid people.

Figure 3: Marcus Schulkind at the Boston Conservatory on September 6, 1989, days before his company debut in Boston.

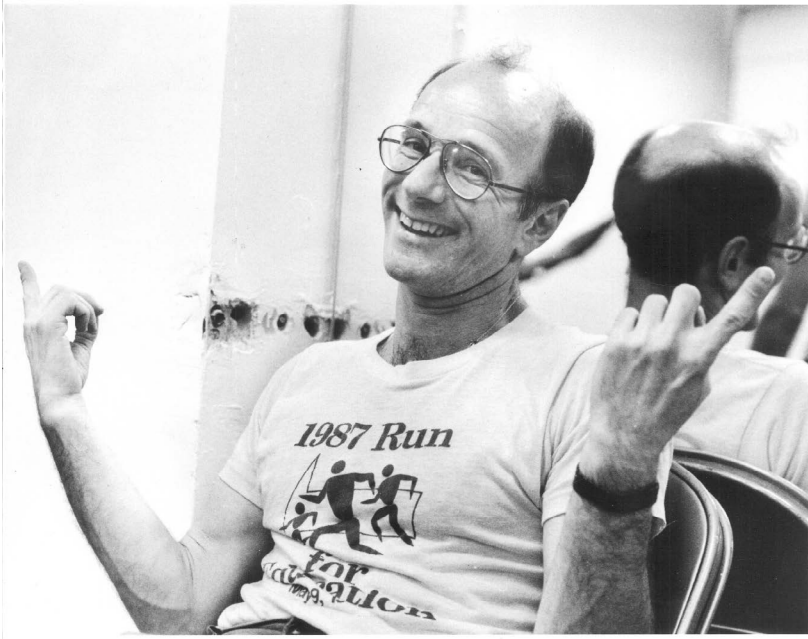


Photo by Ted Archer.

Choreographic Work in Boston

Liz Waterhouse: How did you start making your choreographic work in Boston?

Marcus Schulkind: My first big project here was when I was still teaching at the conservatory for Ruth Sandholm, she was my dean for ten years. I am very grateful to her. Ruth gave me the rights—I was the first choreographer who did this—to perform my work at the Boston Conservatory Theater. I mean, a show featuring my own dancers, not the Boston Conservatory kids. I decided that we would actually be a company. We did six weeks of paid rehearsal at the Boston Conservatory. We worked Monday through Friday for six weeks. I remember one dancer, Jimmy [Jim Viera], coming up to me and going, “That’s the best thing in the world!” Because we were doing a two-hour class, and then we work for four hours, and then you paid us. What more could I possibly want?”

There was no summer program at the conservatory, so I was there all August. Plus, then we went right in after Labor Day to do the show. We sold the place out. We

did Thursday, Friday, Saturday nights. It was a 250-seat theater. It worked out great. I learned from that to do my company concerts *before* anybody else in September. We worked all summer and then did the first concert of the year. Because we had *no* competition, I got every reviewer in town. It just had to be after Labor Day in September. So that's what I did, and it worked out brilliantly.

Liz Waterhouse: How many years did you do that?

Marcus Schulkind: Only once. Because after I did it, they didn't let anybody else ever do that again. Not because of *me*, but because they started summer programs, and the theater people didn't want to let it go.

I was also teaching publicly at The Joy of Movement, which was a health club run by Kenneth Estridge. His Central Square location in Cambridge was his dance health club. It's now called The Dance Complex. The *same* building I'm teaching in now, I was in thirty years ago. It's kind of strange when I think about it. Ken Estridge burned out badly. His building was seized by the federal government and the state government for tax. We walked in one day to teach, I was the morning person, and the building was padlocked with a sign that said, "This property is taken over by the state for back taxes." No one had told us! So, I was sitting out there with twenty people, and we weren't getting in.

Liz Waterhouse: So this was when you started Green Street Studios?

Marcus Schulkind: Yeah. Five of us got together. We were: Ruth Birnberg, Ruth was a modern dance choreographer in town; Cheri Opperman, who had danced with Susan Rose; Paula Josa-Jones; Paula's lover Pam White; and me. We opened a studio together. What started out really good and amicably, fell apart over time. Paula Josa-Jones was very wealthy. They lived in Concord and after about five years, they bought a house on Martha's Vineyard and built a studio there. Money wasn't an issue. Cheri was the next to go because she wanted to have kids. I don't think she really liked the aggravation of running a studio. It was a lot of work. Then, Ruth and I ran it for a while. Ruth left because she needed to go. She went back to school and got an MBA [Master of Business Administration]. Then, she ran the Boston Dance Alliance, which she did really well. It was an organization to unify us—all of the disparate forms of dance in town—into something cohesive. Lasted almost twenty years, until gentrification pushed us out.⁴³

43 Green Street Studios was founded in 1991 at 185 Green Street in Central Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The studio's mission was "to provide affordable rehearsal space to artists and innovative programming, including classes, performances, and artist residencies, to the community." It closed in 2019, when rent increases, caused by gentrification in the area,

In the 2000s, The Marcus Schulkind Dance Company was picked five times as one of the ten best dance events in Boston for that year. I was competing with Boston Ballet, all the biggies. I was picked five times, so I thought I must be doing something right. But I have to tell you, even though I got good reviews and even though I got picked, I got *nothing* for this. I got no *grants* from this town, ever. I got grants in New York, from the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] and from the New York State Council, and there I'm competing with the greatest of the great. Come up here to Boston, and I got nothing from anybody. I got a thousand dollars in grants, in twenty-three years.

That's partly why I kept on doing solos. In the beginnings of my dance career, I never got paid. One didn't get paid for rehearsals. If you got paid for a concert you were in—I mean for the show—you were lucky! I said to myself, “As a person who choreographs, I will *never* do that to people. I will *always* pay them really well for a show, if I can't do anything else. Whenever I can get a lot of money together, I will.” Like that concert I told you about that we did at the Boston Conservatory [1989]: I lost thirty thousand bucks just for paying people for six weeks. I was paying them five hundred a week and there were six of them (mimes handing out cash). I'm going “Hmm! I better use that credit card to pay for that for that week.” It was like the economics of dance kicked me in the head.

So, one of the other things that I understood was that if you do a concert and you've got six soloists, it's much cheaper than if you've got twelve people. You cut your costs. Plus, *I'm interested in doing solos!* Solos are personal and individual. You don't have to do the same thing as the *schmuck* [fool] behind you on the same counts. What a great idea! I've done the group thing: “Okay, put the line down. Everybody get the timing right.” Whatever. I also really enjoyed making solos, but only with these really special people who were brilliant themselves. All of those people that I had in the company made me want to work.⁴⁴

All my early pieces were about the human condition. My solo *Job* (1976/1977) is a perfect example.⁴⁵ By the way, *Job* was a bet with Danny Nagrin, my first year at the American Dance Festival. Danny says in front of a class—and I was listening—he said, “You *cannot* do a solo to a song with words.” I went, “Bullshit, Danny!” So, I did *Job!* To the music of Randy Newmann [“God's Song (That's Why I love Mankind)"]. He came up to me afterwards and he went, “Okay!” Which was, I think, why we ended up doing a piece later on together.

were no longer affordable for the artists. Dwyer, “Green Street Studios Says It Will Close This Month.”

44 In 2005 Schulkind reports on this choice: “Limiting it to 10 minutes is so interesting. . . it's like a short story. You get a sense of character, time, place and few moments of an idea that I hope will be truthful and interesting and resonate with life.” Daniels, “Few Moments of Dancing.”

45 See footnote 27.

The piece *Ladies Night Out* (1974), which was kind of in the same period: They're dances about loneliness, the human condition. That's their focus. They're *short*. None of those pieces were more than three and a half minutes. As a result, I think people didn't take them seriously, because they were like either short stories or one-liner jokes. In fact, Don McDonagh in *The New York Times* said I was the master of one-line jokes as choreography.⁴⁶ (Laughs.) I wanted to go and kick him in the balls! But, whatever.

Later, the solos that I did in Boston were much deeper evocations in their musicality. I wasn't picking *angry* songs. It became more abstracted about what I wanted to say. Both, about the human condition, but also about music—about how, as a solo artist, we phrase things and stylize them. But ultimately, the things that made the pieces happen were the people I chose to do them with. Every single person I chose, to me, was amazingly special, was amazingly unique, was amazingly in another world—truly in another world. They were those kinds of dancers—they lived in another reality. I think that's why people—like, one of the reviews I got was—it was a concert of twelve solos and after the concert was over, you wanted to go off and just delight in what just happened, for the last hour and twenty minutes.⁴⁷

Liz Waterhouse: I remember as your student also being very inspired by the dancers you chose for your company. The word that comes to mind is “individual.” These people were physically different, emotionally different. Their technique was different. They were men and women. They were White, Black, and Asian. They were all so stunning and different—just different. They shared a movement vocabulary, but like a prism, each person spoke through this language very poetically and personally through your choreography.

Watching these dancers was a very important training ground for me in my transition from student to aspiring young professional. When we got to the phrase at the end of your modern class, I watched each dancer's ways of interpreting the material. I also watched the other people taking your modern classes—the elder women for example, over the age of sixty—they were also so fascinating to watch perform your material. I observed people take different musical and dynamic permission, personalizing gestures and also clarifying things that you wanted.

Marcus Schulkind: The people doing my work never looked like each other and they never even had nearly the same sensibility. What they had was a gift of lyricism,

46 McDonagh, “Fragments’ at St. Clement’s.”

47 Writing of a concert in 2004, critic Marcia B. Siegel writes: “The evening was satisfying in a way that eludes discussion. Once you note that the room was full of terrific dancers, luscious movement, thoughtful choreography, and real music, you just want to go away by yourself and savor it all.” Siegel, “Ones and All.”

elegance, grace, and then their own shit. That made them, to me, as a person, “Okay, you’re my paint, as you offer me a palette of paint that makes me happy. Because you give me a lot of choices. And I can give you something, and I can see how you take that choice, and make it that color for you.”

Liz Waterhouse: As you said in class the other day, you’re watching the performer experience a deep narrative while they move. It’s a non-verbal narrative, and it touches you.⁴⁸

Marcus Schulkind (nodding): Right! And I have no idea what your narrative is, but it doesn’t matter. But the *quality* of it being a personal narrative is all I need to have from you. Because then, I can either make up my own story, or I’ll just kind of watch. Since I’m trying to make academia buy dance as a language, then you would be less literate if you don’t put some extra time in while you’re working on your training, to be more fluent in your language. Because that’s the metaphor that I’m trying to get people to buy into, with this stuff.

Maybe no one really wants to fund solos, because it’s more like a one-line joke.⁴⁹ I’m not saying that I agree with them, but I’m saying they want a new work with eight people, at least fifteen minutes long, that’s what they want to fund. Even at the conservatory today, the politics being what it is, some of the kids came up to me and said, “Why don’t we do your work?” I said, “They don’t like my work here. It’s that simple. When they do a piece for you guys, they want half of your cohort to be on stage altogether, so everybody gets a chance to do it. If I did a solo, it just would be with one, maybe two casts—so three people.” I said, “I don’t think that that would be a *bad* thing.”

Liz Waterhouse (interrupts): In terms of my progression, that one-on-one depth was what I needed.

48 Writing about a concert in which I danced in 2004, Marcia Siegel describes: “Schulkind’s movement style comes across as a modern descendant of modern dance. His work seems to fuse the lyrical humanism of the Doris Humphrey–José Limón branch of the family with the fevered expressionism of the Martha Grahams. And there’s more than a little ballet added to the blend. Looking at the miniatures on this program, you’re exquisitely conscious of the dancers’ physicality, not just their muscles or their shapes but the way the movement is making them feel. Or perhaps the way their feeling makes the movement.” Siegel, “Ones and All.”

49 In 1979, a review by Don McDonagh criticizes Schulkind as “a man infatuated with the kinetic equivalent of the one-liner.” In 1987, a review by Andrew Dreyfus of Schulkind’s comedic solo *Do Be Do Be Do Be*, describes it as containing “a single joke that lasts too long.” McDonagh, “Fragments’ at St. Clement’s”; Dreyfus, “Faculty Show Eclectic, Energetic.”

Marcus Schulkind: That's what we love! The best part is seeing some young person who's *really* talented, and then working one-on-one with them, watching the solo become something.

"I Was the Bad Grasshopper Who Didn't Put Away for Winter"

Liz Waterhouse: I know it's by choice that you work so much still at the age of seventy-five, but also the American social security and health care system doesn't allow you to slow down, correct?

Marcus Schulkind (mockingly): Well, it also has to do with the fact that—if we go back to Aesop's fables—I was the bad grasshopper who didn't put away for winter. All of my expendable money that I made went into my dance company. When I think of the amount of money that I've put into it, that really would have been a retirement.⁵⁰ (Mockingly) If you invested it carefully like Aesop told you to, it would have been a retirement. (Shrugs.)

Liz Waterhouse: Also the gentrification here is staggering. Now I barely recognized Central Square, and I lived here twenty years ago. Did you rent or own Greet Street Studios?

Marcus Schulkind: We rented the building. We never owned it because in this real-estate market, there would have been no way that five of us artists had enough money to *buy* a building. It was a *prime* property in Central Square, in Cambridge—right between the campuses of Harvard and MIT. That's just the way it is here, you know? The arts will never be subsidized *well*, let alone subsidized at *all*, from the US government. I think if you really need to have your own theater, need to have your own studio, because that's where you'll be feeling creative, safe, capable of not hurting yourself to do the work you want to do, because it's built *well*. In this culture, you're going to put every cent you have into it. Because unless you are fortunate enough to be wealthy to start with, then you just put your own money that way.

Here's the deal. Anywhere there is a big population and not a lot of real estate, it becomes vertical. Not just to knock out California but in these places—New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington: It's the vertical. Anytime you're in vertical, every little *bit* of property costs a fortune, because there's no real estate. There's no horizontal. So, when there's no horizontal, the dollar sign goes, "Bing!"

50 Schulkind estimates: "I paid more than 340,000 dollars in rent over the twenty years we had the place. If I gave 1,000 dollars a month, that'd be 12,000 a year—times twenty, we're already up there. Does that make sense? Then, I donated it at least another 80,000 or 90,000 dollars to keep the place going." Citation from our interview on March 18, 2023.

Because you're now competing with not only academic institutions, but commercial institutions. You're competing with the guy who wants to run a bodega, which makes a hell of a lot more money than you do. You're competing with the for-profit yoga thing, or whatever is the latest rich people thing they need to go to feel good about themselves. It always comes back to the *economics*.⁵¹

Of all the art forms, dance is going to cost the most because it needs more space to practice in. I could be in a room this size and play an oboe and be happy. I could not be in a room this size and dance because there's no room. No one really understands, except people who try to do studios, that dance is about real estate. If you think it's not about real estate, you're living a fantasy life, or you're very wealthy. Because you need enough money to get that piece of real estate, so you can do your art.

When I came to Boston initially, I worked with Gerri Houlihan, who had a studio called The Boston Dance Project, above a place on Mass Avenue, near the Boston Conservatory. That was owned by the store downstairs, which is called Little Stevie's Pizzeria. Two stories up with Gerri Houlihan's studio, across in the building next door to it was Susan Rose's little studio. This was in the go-go years of mid 1980s in Boston: There was money, you could find a little place, Stevie's Pizzeria was happy to have you upstairs. You could make a place to do your work, and to have rehearsals, and things like that. You can't do that now because every little bit of real estate here is being fought for, by everybody.

Liz Waterhouse: Interesting. In places that I've lived in Europe, there's been some industrial spaces that have been renovated and used for the arts. [Schauspielhaus Zürich] Schiffbau, that was a ship building center in Zurich. In Frankfurt, I danced in the Bockenheimer Depot, which was a former train station.

Marcus Schulkind: These are the best things in the world! Because basically, as small industry has left, because it goes to places like China, you have empty spaces that used to be industrial. In New York City that explains the neighborhoods

51 Schulkind's narrative begins with a rhetorical opening, used often by American President Joe Biden: "Here's the deal." He borrows common hand gestures of male American politicians to develop his story—small pointing gestures in front of his torso, moved rhythmically for emphasis. Yet unlike in political speech, Schulkind also shapes personal gestures and uses his craft as a choreographer to poetically illustrate his arguments about real estate and dance. He raises his index finger smoothly above his head to depict the meaning of "vertical," holding the large gesture as he speaks—a stillness that is beautiful and poignant. This is contrasted with spreading his arms at full length, to illustrate the space of "horizontal." Then he makes a last gesture, drawing a small dollar sign high in the air above his head and ending it with an emphatic slash. It is in this rhythmic progression of three gestures that I recognize Schulkind as both an American male conversation partner and a choreographer, with wit for how to use movement meaningfully yet also unconventionally—and with personal flair.

of NoHo [North of Houston Street], and SoHo [South of Houston Street], and Tribeca [Triangle Below Canal Street], because those were *old* manufacturing buildings—loft buildings that people left. The artists snuck in!

When I lived in New York with Elisa Monte, we had a loft in NoHo. At that point, we were illegal, because you couldn't live in these buildings; you were not allowed to, by code. What you would do to keep from being kicked out by Inspectional Services is, you would lock the building at night from the inside. On the outside, you put on three letters: "A.I.R." What that meant was, if there was a fire, you're letting the fire people know, "Artist in Residence: break the door down and get me out!" This is the way it used to be in illegal spaces. You would walk down the street and that's what you would see on every doorway because people wanted to make sure they would live through it.

Dialogue on Schulkind's Teaching

Liz Waterhouse: I would like to know more about where the material from your teaching comes from.

Marcus Schulkind: I think in the beginning of my teaching, I *slavishly* imitated my teachers. When I first started, I did basically a May O'Donnell Graham class. May O'Donnell was the pioneer woman figure, like in *Appalachian Spring*. She was the opposite of Martha Graham: She was tall. Brilliant teacher. An old-world Graham: she didn't change a thing to the new world. A lot of bouncing, a lot of hitting drums, lot of bound movements.

Then I came to New York—started working with Norman Walker, which was more of a Graham-plus-ballet kind of idea. My original teacher Mark Ryder: We did a barre, then we did a Graham floor section, then we did whatever material we were working on. So those are always going to be my preoccupations. And, since our techniques come from what our body does *well* and feels *good* doing—because I had good feet and good lines, I kind of liked the ballet. Because I was an emotional *refugee*, doing Graham was perfect because it *grounded* me and it was all every emotion of tension you could possibly have, and then released. But nonetheless, I liked all of that. So, that was the underpinning of what was the beginnings of me.

My modern classes were, I think, two hours. What I didn't do with my Graham work was anything that was jeopardous to your knees, which for men, or for people who don't have hyper flexibility, is difficult to survive.

Liz Waterhouse: Do you mean these seated exercises, the fourths (demonstrates)?

Marcus Schulkind: That's it. All those things that you do in Graham. Those go into the *floor*, and falls, and things like that. They become—regardless of your personal strength—a stressor to your knees unless you have a Martha body . . .

Liz Waterhouse (interrupts): How would you describe the Martha body?

Marcus Schulkind: Hyper-flexible, small, (pause) *intensely* crotch.

Liz Waterhouse: Got it!

Marcus Schulkind: So then, we did things that got you to understand *spirals*, things that got you to understand *contraction*, things that got you *grounded*. Then we would get up and do a ballet barre. It would be a barre that was not obsessed about the perfection of 360-degree turnout. It would be a barre that was about taking movement into the vocabulary of ballet, without having to buy into all of the philosophical and mannered “isms” that deal with ballet. Basically, we're still now following the form of what a ballet class is.

After we got off the barre, we would do material that would be adagio-like; it certainly would use the floor, and it certainly would be multi-dimensional. Then, we'd do maybe a little jumping to warm up the feet, and then we would go across the floor. So, it kind of follows the metaphor of what a ballet class might be like, without any of it. Again, across the floor would be things of interest: off-center jumps, finding ways to connect to them, contraction jumps, finding ways to connect into whatever I was interested in exploring. Then, the class really becomes how *you* (pauses, gestures circularly with his index fingers, making a circle into the body down and away) *inhabit* the forms that you're working with. It's kind of like a pan—meaning all—form, because you have to know all of these underpinnings to have the clarity to become authentic in how you're dealing with the movement—if that makes any sense.

Liz Waterhouse: Let me show you what I remember. This was the first sequence (demonstrates).

Marcus Schulkind: That's all Graham, done lyrically. That's the start to get your body spiraling. That's a start to get your core engaged (on the word “core,” Schulkind gestures, touching from below the navel and tracing up the front of the spine to the sternum).

Liz Waterhouse: Your psoai [deep core muscles, connecting lower back and leg].

Marcus Schulkind: Totally!

Liz Waterhouse: Then, the second exercise. Is this more floor-barre?⁵²

Marcus Schulkind (affirms, nodding): Hmm. Pulsing is just: Where's my hip flexors? How do I rotate from the depth of the ball and socket [hip joint]? How do I start to connect into that.

Liz Waterhouse: Traction! Also, the release. I remember learning: How do I release the excess tension that I, as a ballet-trained dancer, have in the shoulders or in the standing leg. Okay. And then, the next exercise would come into spinal work from Graham?

Marcus Schulkind: Yeah. Those are variations of either *the* Graham or, May O'Donnell, or Norman. So, they're *authentic*, but they're not chapter-and-verse Martha. (Smiles.) They would kick you out, in the Graham world, for you modifying it at *all*.

Liz Waterhouse: Things like the breathings, the spirals, the long leans, and the pleadings. Then there is the standing section. I've seen this sequence of yours, in a Merce Cunningham class.

Marcus Schulkind: It's Cunningham. When we get up, we're going to play with: *How* do I curl my back? How do I roll my back? How do I move through the lateral energies to a spiral. So, I'm combining Cunningham and Martha, which probably Merce did anyway.

Liz Waterhouse: Let's talk about your ballet class too. For me, things that are distinct are: You do a *lot* of grands pliés. Can you tell me why?

Marcus Schulkind (shrugs): I do. To my body, it felt good. So, that was enough. Also, Maggie Black did a lot of grands pliés. I think that's where that came from. Maybe that was also part of the Cecchetti/Tudor kind of thing, where you did a lot of grands pliés, just to be stretching out and opening up.

Liz Waterhouse: Another aspect is slowness—slow tempi. I'm Balanchine trained, which emphasizes speed and anticipation. William Forsythe's movement is also fast.

52 Floor-barre® is a technique by Zena Rommett (1920–2010). Rommett emigrated to New York from Italy as a child, becoming a ballet dancer and opening her own studio in 1968. Schulkind recalls her teaching class for the Lar Lubavitch company. Anderson, "Zena Rommett, Ballet Dancer Who Developed Floor-Barre, Dies at 90."

So, for me, I enjoy when I get to your class that there is the slow tendus, or the slow grands pliés in second position at the end of the barre.

Marcus Schulkind (thumbs up): Oh, yeah! That hasn't changed! I think that's such an important part. The first exercise (marks tendus in fifth) is a little quicker. Then suddenly, no arms, I want you to work on your demi plié and how your foot (gestures with his hands smoothly) slides into positions in the lines. Then, let's add arms. Then, let's make it a dégagé. Then, since pas de cheval is a microcosm of a développé, let's get that going. We'll do that at the barre. We'll put that into our bodies and then we'll start moving along a little faster.

Liz Waterhouse: Also, I feel your classes are more choreographic—there are elaborate sequences, almost variations and solos in the center, with beautiful, original qualities. But in your class the slow adagio, the turning, the small jumps, and the big jumps—they're little microcosms. They're little choreographies, for me.

Marcus Schulkind: Right. Me too! I mean, I plan. For *me*, what happens and why I have a piece of paper. First, I can't remember if I don't sketch it out on a piece of paper (laughs). What happens is I rent the studio at The Dance Complex on Sundays before class. I plan my class for that day. If you looked at my piece of paper (draws the paper in the air, making a rectangle with his index fingers), you wouldn't see anything about what we're gonna do at the barre. What you would see is four columns: turns, small, big, adagio. Then, once I've warmed up and figured out what I'm doing, at this point, my brain retrogrades by itself to what we need to do at the barre that connects to what we're gonna do on those four big columns.

Liz Waterhouse: Right. Do you start then making the turn?

Marcus Schulkind: Turn goes first. Always, the easiest thing for me to do. Every time I plan a class, both turn and small jumps come easy—piece of cake!

In my classes at the Boston Conservatory, I'm making my students *connect* things. The other day, I made them turn into a front attitude—then plié keep turning into passé—then plié keep turning into back attitude—then plié, come back in. Because I said to them, "We need to be able not just to do three or four outside turns, or inside turns, but we need to figure out more complex skills." Because no choreographer is going to give you the standard thing: chassé, pas de bourrée, fourth, pirouette. No one's gonna do that, trust me. So, and I try *always* in the turning phrase to have something where you have to travel—like a waltz phrase, because you need to move this stuff. That's the difference between me and a ballet class (hint of a smile). We're not making pictures that are static. You can go to anybody else and get that much better than me. Not interested.

So then, after the turns, we do petit allegro, which I like because I can throw in things people don't do.

Liz Waterhouse: Your petit allegro is complex! It's hard to remember. You have to think!

Marcus Schulkind: Very! Very! And my students know it. Actually, everybody that comes in understands that what I'm doing with them is going to be rigorous. Yeah, you have to think. I'm putting things together most ballet people *wouldn't* put together, because I don't have the same rules. (Shrugs with hands open) Because I got no rules! Got no rules! I got no rules. "Well, no, let's do a brisé there! Why not!"

So, I'll do that on Sunday. When I go to the conservatory on Monday, I have my piece of paper and I start varying the material. Tuesday, I vary it more. So, the conservatory schedule is: I have Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, an hour-and-a-half class; I prefer two hours, but that is not an option. Wednesday is my elective day: I have a two-hour ballet class, it's called contemporary ballet. Basically, it's what we do at The Dance Complex. Wednesday, I warm up again, we do a different set of exercises. That then, gives me the material that I'm going to do for Thursday and Friday.

There really is in my mind the need to make sure that my students know how to do everything at the conservatory: in terms of having vocabulary. Some weeks on Sunday I'll say, "Outside turns, today, in every position! (Small smile.) Then, we'll do that for maybe two weeks. Then, it's all inside turns. "Let's work inside!" It's not that I only do those things, because we'll still go through all the forms, but there is a sense that I need to make sure that they know how to do the vocabulary. There are vertical axis jumps, and you have to show me you know them. You have to show me you know them downstage and upstage. You have to show me you know them forward and backward. Like what we were doing on Sunday, (marks with hands) *trois assemblé* back. The week before I had done that at the conservatory.

Liz Waterhouse (laughs and claps hands): I didn't have that skill!

Marcus Schulkind: Nobody does! You have to practice it! It's nothing that's taught. The week before that I said to them, "Instead of doing this on two counts, I want you to do it on one count. So, you have to pick up your rhythm." They were so pissed at me!

So *then*, I said to them, "That's half of the vocabulary of petit allegro. Now we gotta do *moving* petit allegro. You have to show me the A's: *assemblés*. The B's: You have to show me *balloté*, *ballonné*, *brisé*. You have to show me the C's: You have to show me *chassé*. I go (with a grand sweeping gesture, opens arms in full extension to the side): "Here's your vocabulary! If you don't know this vocabulary, how can you

say you want to be in the advanced class? That's part of the *syllabus*. I'm giving you the syllabus." They said, "You're the only person who teaches like that here. You're the only person who comes in and has prepared class." I said, "They pay me for that. They're not paying me to come in and make something up on the spot and improvise a balletic class. I don't want to do that. I won't remember it. We'll waste time. I want you to get this." (Shrugs.) Some like me; some hate me. It's all good.

Liz Waterhouse: I think your way of developing virtuosity, it's about movement awareness, kinesthetic skills. This *petit allegro* teaches a lot about: Where are the limits of your toes? (Schulkind confirms with a "thumbs up" gesture.) Find that floor. How do you safely use your knees?

Marcus Schulkind: How do you navigate at a speed, because that's *petit allegro*, rather than how do you navigate at a slower form, which is *grand allegro*? It's about navigation. So, I mean, that's how I plan the work that I do.

A lot of the material in the floor barre comes from ideas I get in physical therapy [PT], ideas I get from other places, like Gyrotonic sometimes. I've had big conversations with PTs about arabesque and hyper-flexibility. That's why I'm talking so much now about the lumbar [spine] for arabesque rather than the sacrum. Because we need to get the *big* vertebrae, which are your support vertebrae, *not* hyper flexible. Because your back's going to die in a certain amount of time if that's the way you use it. So now, we have to find a way to go slightly higher up the spine. Yes, it's gonna involve the sacrum, it can't not, but you don't want to leave lumbar out of it.

Liz Waterhouse: I remember what I learned from you as a young student was watching you coach people. Arabesque was a balanced movement. There was a breath, a movement forward with the arm and the head . . .

Marcus Schulkind: . . . that equaled the movement that was going backward. At each point in your life, some dance styles resonate to you to be truthful, and some dance styles don't resonate at all. Our goal and job as people teaching has to be to help you figure out what resonates, why it resonates, and how best to deepen that resonance, that texture.

In Closing: Reflection

Liz Waterhouse: Now, after reviewing our interviews, is there anything else that you would like to add in post-production to our text?

Marcus Schulkind: Yes, there are a couple of things. When I really think of looking backwards at this whole thing, which is my career, which you're writing about, I want

to make sure that I mentioned and honored all the people who had some kind of belief in my ability as a teacher: Iris Fanger, Martha Myers, Elaine Finsilver, and Ruth Sandholm, and also to my teachers: Mark Ryder, Kathy Grant, Maggie Black, and Norman Walker.⁵³

What I wanted to emphasize was how these people really offered me a livelihood as a teacher throughout my career, and were incredibly important that way, because it was ultimately the teaching that enabled me to make a living and survive, and more importantly invest in my art. Which, of course, you know, because that's all there, but I wanted to emphasize it more. When I lived in New York, I was less known as a teacher, more so as a choreographer. In Boston I was more well-known as a teacher. I did do well in New York for a while. You know, like anybody who can be the young fifteen-minute attraction, until the next fifteen-minute attraction comes along.

The second aspect is about storytelling. I'm thinking of a musical by Stephen Sondheim, *Pacific Overtures* (1979), specifically the song called "Someone in a Tree." It's a brilliant work. This song is about two witnesses to the meeting of Commodore Perry and the Japanese shogun. One was a Japanese kid in a tree, who was singing this song, and another witness was a Japanese kid who is under the floor of the house. The kid in the tree is singing, "I was there, I was young, I was there, I was in a tree. I heard 'tap, tap, tap' I saw 'la la la.'" Where I'm going with this oblique reference is, it's a song about how the people, who were not really, fully sensorily *there*—in person—as witnesses, made this story up about what was really happening in the past.

So, jumping off that metaphor: while I was reading the first draft of this conversation, what I came away with was: I was doing the same thing as the kid in the tree! What I did with my stories, was I made *me* the central orbit and everything else around me the planets. Fabulous stories! I am really good at doing stories that I made up. Most showed my being the central character—meaning thinking I was the sun as opposed to the earth—and describing everything revolving around me. The reality in most of the stories I was telling you had nothing to do with me being the centralized figure at all. For example, from Martha Hill's point of view, I was

53 Schulkind elaborates: "So, Iris Fanger: Teaching at the Harvard Summer Dance program enabled me—after my injuries—to continue to stay in this profession. It was majorly important to me. Martha Myers helped me by getting me to the American Dance Festival. She thought I was a valuable teacher and had me teaching there as a guest artist. Elaine Finsilver ran the YWHA in Westchester, where I taught once a week for years. I taught adults who were dancers before they got married and continued to pursue dancing in a very serious kind of way as they aged. Then Daniel Nagrin and Mark Ryer—I know I spoke about both of them. Ruth Sandholm ran the Boston Conservatory for the first ten years when I was working there. She was my dean and was super important to me. And again, Kathy Grant, Maggie Black, and Norman Walker. The people who taught me how best to do my craft." Transcribed from our videoconference conversation editing the manuscript on July 18, 2024.

just a little annoying flea that she could really not stand much of, nor particularly spend a lot of time on. There was a real clear hatred between the two of us. It was a philosophical hatred. So, I made it seem like I was the supreme rebel—which I was, that wasn't a question—but what I kind of felt like I did was to create a narrative, with my presence being the central character, of course. In a way I magnified my importance in terms of dance history. So, you know, that was part of what I was doing.

You met me at my prime. You did my final dance concert with my company. You worked with me when my information for someone like you was a perfect meeting point. It was you recognizing, through my imaging you—as a mirror—that there was room for you in this culture and in this work. That you didn't necessarily have to buy into science, which was your other love on many levels. Basically, you were one of the students around me who were interested in figuring out how another form of dance could interest them, and also support them—going from, “I’m a bunhead” to “Wow, there’s another world to live as an artist.” You were able to intellectually and emotionally take and springboard off whatever I had to teach you, into whatever you needed it to be, to get you to the next place. That really is ultimately what a teacher does. Being a mirror that shows you the intimate soul you really have, that you can't really appreciate, because you don't know about it yet, because it's too hard to face, or for whatever the reason is. So, what I wanted to come back to was this: I'm not sure that I need to build this much of a myth about me. When I think back about my stories on Juilliard, for example, it sounds as if they're grooming me to be a major figure in dance, which I think they really do feel about all the people they accept at Juilliard—instead of basically talented people that they could mold into whatever they wanted to.

I also wanted to come back to—because I'm teaching pedagogy—the concept of essentialism versus progressivism in education. Because my whole existence once I left high school was my need to be in a *progressivist environment*, which is why I ended up at Goddard. Goddard was on one hand for me the world: because of the teachers I had. On the other hand, it was such a pain in the ass, because everybody was so complicated. We would argue about self-government for hours at the haybarn (which was the big cafeteria). It was that kind of progressivism where no one could rightly tell you what to do. We were feeling it out every single day, educationally and in every other way. In my educational trajectory, I went from that progressivism to essentialism. I went from designing my education (in this case, I just spent all my time dancing and learning about what was interesting to me) to essentialism, which was Juilliard. I went from self-guided and teacher-guided to fascism, because that's what Juilliard was. So basically, everything I told you was true, but it was more about my coming up—as a young man—against that big word, which is institutionalism, and where I must succeed.

This week I was taking Gyrotonic, and I said to my trainer, Lisa Pari, “You know, maybe it’s really time for me to stop doing this?” And she said, “Well, yeah, but don’t stop. Don’t give up on it quite yet.” And I went, “Okay.” I’m still exploring ultimately the ways that I want to explore. And educating people in the way that I think is appropriate. But what it really was about was my early education possessed institutions that were not only venal, but really didn’t educate. Their whole purpose was—especially my high school—was to get you into a college. If you perhaps learned a couple of things along the way, fine. Education was to satisfy the needs of a middle-class Jewish community to give their children a college education—to be able to compare with their colleagues and their cronies their kids—not to even understand whether that college was giving someone an education to further their life, their form, their ethics, or anything else. So that’s the bigger picture. That’s what I think of when I really think of the beginnings of my dance. It’s much more about bumping up against the various educational philosophies of the time, and that which gave me the room to explore and be learning in a different fashion—to be successful *to me*—versus that which was more institutional success, that I couldn’t muster. Having come from a place that allowed me to question everything that I was doing, to then be suddenly to be caught up in the world of academia and be looking at Labanotation at Juilliard!

So, when I finished reading your first draft, I realized it’s your mirror back to me, after my mirror back at you—when you were working with me as a dancer twenty years ago. This text is your mirror back to me. It’s like we’re finishing a cycle here. Thank you.

In order to be honest and real, I wanted to give you a more complete view of my life that isn’t the theatricalized view that I gave you in our first interview. Because if push comes to shove—this is very real—and it doesn’t matter who this book is for, whether it’s for dance scholars or other dancers, like your little intro that you sent me talked about. It doesn’t matter to me. It matters more that I give you the real mirror, rather than the image of myself that I wanted to project, which still was real. It just was an exaggeration, which I’m very good at doing. Well, if you haven’t noticed. So, as we rewrite together, I would like to have less of my need for bravado and adoration and show more the substantive things that I’ve done with people like you.

Chapter 5: Hilary Cartwright

Introduction

Hilary Cartwright was born in Leamington Spa in the United Kingdom in 1943. She attended Elmhurst Ballet School and the Royal Ballet School before joining the Royal Ballet in 1962. After a serious back injury several years into her career, she transitioned into teaching—a process described in her autobiography *Dancing for a Living* (1974). In her thirties, Cartwright taught ballet internationally, as well as holding leadership positions in dance companies and ballet schools; between 1978 and 1983 she moved between London, Winnipeg, The Hague, Geneva, Rio de Janeiro, Montreal, and New York. While searching for movement practices and healing work that would help care for her back and educate dancers holistically, Cartwright discovered the movement practice of Juliu Horvath, leading to their extended collaboration. In 1984, Cartwright co-founded the White Cloud Studio with Horvath in New York City. She managed the studio and staff for twelve years, training new teachers and developing movement methods in synergy with Horvath's innovations in movement equipment, today known as the GYROTONIC® expansion system.¹ In parallel, Cartwright continued to work as a ballet teacher, choreographer, and to set ballets as part of the Frederick Ashton Foundation. For the last twenty-five years, Cartwright has additionally focused on refining her Yoga Narada® practice, offered initially in New York City as well as through international workshops and retreats.² In her words: “Yoga is a coming together of body, mind and spirit. Yoga Narada provides a way to achieve flexibility in the body, while maintaining coordinated control, passing smoothly from one shape to another.”³ Cartwright currently offers

1 For the purpose of readability, subsequent references to the methods of the GYROTONIC EXPANSION SYSTEM®, GYROTONIC®, and GYROKINESIS® in this chapter use ordinary capitalization and are made without the registered trademark symbol.

2 With Cartwright's permission, for the purpose of readability, subsequent references to Yoga Narada® are made without the registered trademark symbol.

3 See the subpage of Hilary Cartwright' website, <https://www.hilarycartwright.com/yoganarada>, last accessed September 24, 2025.

lessons in presence and through Zoom. She resides in Alpatró, Vall de Gallinera, in the province of Alicante, Spain.

*Figure 1: A candid shot of Hilary Cartwright
lunching with friends in Aspen, Colorado, USA.*



Photograph Tom Mossbrucker.

Cartwright's status as a founding member of the Gyrotonic community meant that I encountered her name and reputation years before we met in person.⁴ Joining Cartwright's annual spring workshops in Bern for the first time in 2017, I was captivated by her radiant teaching practice and the way her yoga energized my body.⁵ My notebook entries documenting my first encounter with Cartwright begin graphically with a pencil sketch of "Hilary" standing benevolently, like an icon of Our Lady of Grace: the Virgin Mary with her arms outstretched. A subtle pencil dot at Cartwright's center marks my first impression of her breathing—designating what

4 I have practiced the Gyrotonic method since 2004 and received my teaching certification in 2014.

5 She was invited to offer this by Annemarie Parekh, the founder of akarStudios in Bern, beginning in the mid-nineties.

Cartwright calls “breathing from the dan tien.”⁶ My knowledge of this embodied practice and philosophy have deepened in the subsequent years: through live workshops, Zoom lessons, and since 2020 under Cartwright’s mentorship in her teacher-training practice. Collaborating on her body-biography, this project built further intimacy between us, as we both engaged in life review and I learned more about the history of Cartwright’s teaching practice.

Figure 2: Hilary Cartwright demonstrating during a teacher-training lesson on Zoom, November 16, 2020.



Screenshot by E. Waterhouse.

Writing Cartwright’s Body-Biography

This body-biography adds to Cartwright’s growing collection of autobiographical projects: in writing, photography, poetry, and dance. At the age of thirty-one, Cartwright published a 124-page autobiography, *Dancing for a Living: Ballet and Contemporary Dance* (1974), as part of an educational career series of books for young people introducing various professions. The materials for this publication had been developed in the form of articles for the British magazine *Dancing Times* under the title “Things They Forget to Tell You.”⁷ We revisited these stories in our interviews, giving Cartwright room to reflect on her perspective on these times from her position today.

6 This is explained further in our life story dialogues. See footnote 49.

7 Cartwright, *Dancing for a Living*, 104–5.

Cartwright also added finishing her autobiography to her bucket list during the COVID-19 pandemic. Supporting her intention, I provided our interview recordings and transcripts as accounts that might be useful for her own writing. Her own selection, editing, and narrating of these materials would of course be different from mine. It was my expectation that Cartwright's body-biography, created together with me, would not only add new information about her life to this body of written work, but would also reveal my influence on her reflection. Cartwright was also invited to make two, exceptionally beautiful, photographic life review projects while making this book, and to perform a solo in which she chose to look back at her movement practices (see Figure 4).⁸ Delighted for all these interweaving efforts to document and honor Cartwright's contribution to dance history, my interviewing directed her towards narratives of the body, which I explained might potentially differ from a chronicle of life events—public career successes and failures—more typical of the dancer memoir genre.⁹

How would an autobiography authored from Cartwright's standpoint today present her life stories from the past? Would she repeat or rehearse prior narratives? Were there new aspects or topics that had been excluded? Cartwright's voice in *Dancing for a Living* is largely consistent with her voice here: discerning, equanimous, poetic, and analytic. She does not sensationalize the work of a ballet dancer. Rather, her life review takes the form of honing advice for aspiring dancers, framing constructive lessons from the difficulties of her past. In other words, Cartwright aims to show realities behind the myths, to help young students make meaningful life decisions and resiliently persevere through career difficulties. The power of her voice also establishes her place as an observer with an uncharacteristic autobiography—not only a ballerina, but a ballerina who becomes a teacher. To this end, Cartwright intuitively dissects her own education and labor within dance organizations, illustrating challenges of gaining access, recovering from injury, and competing within hierarchical working structures. She encourages young dancers to develop a healthy sense of self-esteem and a support system, broadening their perspectives outside the world of ballet.

To my surprise, Cartwright retold her life stories about her first experiences as a ballet dancer in a similar fashion during our interviews, which may indicate how her prior autobiographical writing has enabled her to achieve coherence; to these memories, she added new stories about “middle age” and “aging.” Her narratives cohere around the themes of continuous self-growth, learning, and resilience in the face of difficulty. Already in *Dancing for a Living*, Cartwright describes the importance

8 See Puente, *A Singing Body* and Franceschi, *Ageless Dancers*. Cartwright's solo is described in the section “Choreography: ‘I was asked if I would work with the dancers.’”

9 Here I draw on the writing of historian Christina Thurner on serial autobiographies. See Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 194–217.

of nurturing her identity through hobbies and art forms outside of dance, and the pleasure of her career circling back to the Royal Ballet by becoming a teacher and *répétiteuse*. Within our discussions, I observed her give equal treatment to her ballet-self and her identity as a practitioner and teacher of Yoga Narada: two “selves” that also interact within these interlinked communities. In contrast to her earlier writing, however, Cartwright has since developed a transnational position and perspective beyond her Royal Ballet network (through her work in the Ashtan Foundation, the Gyrotonic community, and her own Yoga Narada network). By working outside dance institutions, she now has more distance to critically reflect on her own social mobility. Additionally, by describing the two hip-replacement surgeries she underwent later in life, she narrates how her aging process has ushered in further acceptance of herself and her body’s imperfections. At the start of our interview, she distinguishes self and body, while showing them to be related: “I feel my body has served me very well. We’ve had our ups and downs considerably, but I feel that over time I’ve been able to let my body really serve me in a way I didn’t anticipate that it could at different junctures in my life.”

Each of my protagonists spoke of gender conventions in their stories: discussing how they perceived normative roles and how gendered realities impacted their self-fashioning and job opportunities. Certainly, my position as a woman interviewing Cartwright, a female elder with leadership status, motivated me to also raise questions about her experience negotiating power and authority, as well as her observations of and encounters with sexism, at the notoriously complicated intersection of dance and femininity.¹⁰ More generally, oral history scholars working with gender theories research the conventional roles, self-narratives, and self-representations that shape the telling of women’s life stories, inquiring into how women construct or escape narrative coherence and manage discontinuities.¹¹ As we have already seen with Christine Kono and Marcus Schulkind’s narratives, oral autobiographical storytelling is typically interlaced with self-evaluation and justification: time leaps that rethink the past from one’s position today. These may highlight distinctions between norms and actions, such as personal beliefs versus perceived societal conventions, or changes in society’s values over time.¹² They can reveal themselves not only in words, but also in a narrator’s body language, as

10 Close studies of dance, autobiography, and gender are made in Christina Thurner and Karen Eliot’s writing. See Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 223–41; Eliot, *Dancing Lives*.

11 Daniel James’ thoughtful reading of gender in oral history interviews and *testimonio* literature influences my thinking here. See in particular James, *Doña María’s Story*, 213–43.

12 Much literature supports this, indicative works include: Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 106–29; Boyd and Roque Ramírez, *Bodies of Evidence*; Gluck and Patai, *Women’s Words*; Portelli, “A Dialogical Relationship.”

when, during her interview, Cartwright uses contrasting gestures to distinguish yin/female and yang/male energies.

In contrast to men's stories, women's stories often emphasize community and support roles—reporting social dialogue and highlighting relationships.¹³ In the case of Cartwright, her body-biography does all these, while also presenting highly reflective decisions that demonstrate strong authority and ambition—as well as an eloquent and rhetorically self-aware voice. As she explains, however, rather than an easy life, Cartwright's agency to create narrative authority has “met resistance in a lot of places.” Her story has been “repudiated completely” by the Gyrotonic community, and also marginalized by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet—histories foregrounding male leadership and genius myths of creativity.¹⁴ Instead, the practice of Gyrotonic has been marketed by manufacturing the biography of its inventor, Juliu Horvath; the Royal Winnipeg Ballet highlights the charismatic personality of Arnold Spohr, director from 1958–1988, in its public history.¹⁵ Wishing to learn more about Cartwright's involvement in these contexts, I listened carefully. I also influenced her storytelling by means of my follow-up questions about sexism and authorship. I wondered: How do ambitious women such as Cartwright tell their tales without rehearsing the narratives of male geniuses that become popular on the “cultural circuit”?¹⁶ Would she distinguish between her personal and professional self in her relationship to Horvath? Would she have been encouraged to become a choreographer and not a teacher if she had been a man with her talents? My conversations with Cartwright embellish upon these questions, tacitly posed as I listened to her narrative, first live in person and then again multiple times while transcribing and editing.

This body-biography was developed from two recordings of interview dialogues, held during Cartwright's fall and spring Yoga Narada workshops in 2022 and 2023 in Bern.¹⁷ The opportunity to perform “participant observation” of her workshops in parallel to the interviews was beneficial, allowing me to study her movement practice and her biographical-narratives simultaneously. Cartwright

13 See Gluck and Patai, *Women's Words*.

14 Citation from our interview on April 20, 2023.

15 On Gyrotonic, see the blog published on December 4, 2020, on the corporate website “History of the GYROTONIC® Equipment with Creator Juliu Horvath” <https://www.gyrotonic.com/history-of-the-gyrotonic-equipment/>, last accessed September 24, 2025. See also Horvath's biography published on the corporate website, <https://www.gyrotonic.com/about/juliu-horvath/>, last accessed September 24, 2025. On Spohr, see Crabb, *An Instinct for Success*.

16 Summerfield, “Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice,” 4–7.

17 The interviews took place on October 13, 2022, at Drehpunkt studios, and April 20, 2023, at akarStudios, both in Bern. For references to the audio recording, transcripts, and metadata, see Cartwright, “Body-Biography Interview with Hilary Cartwright”; Waterhouse, “Metadata Body-Biography Interview Hilary Cartwright.”

was accommodating to my use of a camera to capture the paraverbal aspects of conversation in the second interview. After some opening questions, she found her flow through chronological narration. This order has been preserved in the text that follows. The recordings were transcribed word-for-word. Condensations were reviewed by Cartwright, who thoughtfully collaborated upon editing the manuscript.

One notable gap in the interview that I encouraged her to elaborate upon in post-production was discussion of her choreographic work. While Cartwright had not foregrounded her identity as a choreographer, she had made pieces throughout her career. Cartwright submitted the subsection “Choreography” to me via email, and I gladly inserted it, bridging the first and second interview. We also collaborated, and I sought secondary sources, to add further dates to Cartwright’s narrative, which had flowed through time often without marking precise moments. For example, the approximate dates of her injury, travels, and the years when she had worked at the White Cloud Studio were added in the editing phase.

The quality of Cartwright’s paraverbal communication energized her storytelling: her enunciation, the timbre of her voice, her shifts in pitch—from “head voice” to her base range—her swells in volume, her changes in pace, her rhythm and intonation. Cartwright’s voice reflects her training in reciting poetry and performing stage plays as a child. When she speaks with her clear English elocution it gives her voice a recognizable accent, reminding me of the sonorous melody of my childhood singing idol: Julie Andrews. Moreover, Cartwright’s voice traces her body state. Her breath control—honed through yogic breathing—enables her feelings to bubble up communicatively in her voice. I have made a deliberate effort to bring these qualities into this publication.

Hilary’s name, after the Latin *hilaris*, is associated with cheer and humor. In our teacher-training lessons, she has emphasized that maintaining a sense of humor is an important part of teaching. Humor also abounded in our discussions of her biography. In fact, after dutiful transcription, there was so much laughter in the transcript that an early reader bravely suggested that we consider cutting some for the publication: While laughter is infectious and social when *live*, in print it felt like a terribly out-of-tune laugh track. This was precisely the opposite of Cartwright’s intention: to connect empathetically. Reaching a compromise, we preserved only some of the original laughter. I kept instances when the reason for laughing was important. Cartwright, like Kono, used laughter to layer semantic meaning. Kono’s irony typically showed her distance from and distaste of classical ballet body-representations and storytelling. Cartwright’s irony is lighter and more diplomatic, as if to mark progress rather than criticize the past—as if to add, “Can you believe that was how things really were, way back then?”

It would be interesting to know to what extent Cartwright’s speaking voice has changed from her youth: When she was a more shallow-breathing ballet dancer,

could she narrate with such vocal power? In our dialogues, Cartwright inflected her pitch up for playful variety, creating motion within her story. To accentuate difficult phases in her stories, she dipped down into her deep tones and sometimes raised her volume—becoming louder—or alternatively shortened her words to highlight dry indignancy. To articulate positive memories of beauty and pleasure, she slowed her tempo—slower than any of my other interview partners—to emphasize certain words as if immersing herself again in the past. Here her pronunciation of single vowels and diphthongs rings beautifully, elongating her tones as though she were savoring a special memory. At the end of the interview, her tone becomes more dream-like and softer, as she recollects her experience of New York during the COVID-19 pandemic, remembering the quiet and reflective space she discovered. Further indications of vocal performance in the interview hopefully bring the reader sensually into Cartwright's vocal world.

Recognizing that Cartwright's gestures often drew upon her dance and yoga practices, I have added more movement analysis to the second half of the interview—in which I had a camera recording to reference. Seminal breakouts of her physicality are inserted into the text as movement-analytic descriptions. I describe aspects such as her sitting postures, facial expression, and spinal carriage. I especially attended to her repertoire of gestures in different planes of motion—for example, differentiating male/yang qualities (strong, bound, frontal, impact phrasing) and female/yin (to her side, lighter, or in cycles undulating her spine and breath, connecting her inner sensations to gestures outward in space). Like Kono and Lechner, she also modeled the hip joint with her hands, in motions that are illustrative rather than danced.

In the footnotes, I create dialogic space between Cartwright's memories and other historians' writings, such as her memory of working with Lubov Tchernicheva on *The Prelude* solo and her remarks on Arnold Spohr. This begins the triangulation of body-biography within a constellation of sources, from which dance historians may elaborate further.

Figure 3: Liz Waterhouse (left) and Hilary Cartwright (right) during an interview at akarStudios in Bern on April 20, 2023.



Screenshot by E. Waterhouse.

Practicing Yoga Narada® with Cartwright

Cartwright is an empathetic person manifesting the grace, beauty, confidence, carriage, and class that I associate with heroines from the past: such as the self-assured elegance of dance stars Cyd Charisse and Ginger Rogers partnering Fred Astaire. In his recent introduction of Cartwright to the audience of the 2023 Dance Teacher Awards in New York City, Cartwright's student Amos Machanic similarly acknowledged: "When I think of Hilary I think of grace, I think of beauty, I think of elegance, but most of all I think of generosity."¹⁸ As Machanic emphasizes, it is Cartwright's warm-heartedness and overflowing care that elevate her as an elite teacher. Cartwright teaches respectfully and fairly, generously helping her students to grow as persons *and* as dancers. She is horrified by authoritarian teaching, including shaming and forcing bodies physically without proper knowledge of anatomy or respect for young artists as human beings. In her life review with

18 Rodrigues, "A Recap of the 2023 Dance Teacher Awards." Amos Machanic was a dancer in the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (1996–2011) and is currently a teacher of Horton Technique and Yoga Narada.

me, Cartwright is critical of these problems.¹⁹ Equally, however, she highlights the extraordinary opportunity for emotional and aesthetic expression that dancing provides.

When I first met “Hilary” I was dazzled by her radiant, fairy godmother form of beauty—the charisma of her smile, her lithe ballerina silhouette, and the virtuosic movements of her supple body. Since that time I have developed tremendous respect for Cartwright’s bodily wisdom and communicative competence. To Machanic’s introduction, I would add that when I think of “Hilary,” I also think of her refined embodied knowledge—kinesthetic, coordinative, conversational, analytic, creative, and sensual—that in combination have enabled her to become an inventor of movement methodology and a master teacher with high standing in the professional dance community of New York City and beyond. This skill relays knowledge of *her* body with knowledge of *others’* bodies. This expertise is well evident in the classroom and will be brought out in the discussion that follows.

In her interactions with her students of Yoga Narada—from young dancers to septuagenarians with sundry professions—Cartwright demonstrates her knowledge of how to assist movers to find their *individual* way to achieve a *common* technical goal. Problems in technique may (especially as people age) incorporate a long history of habits and injuries. Her assistance during lessons with my own scoliosis and its complications has demonstrated the patience that she possesses to investigate issues step-by-step, over months and years as bodies continue to change. Eight years into our relationship, we are still exploring how I can find more freedom in my movement, given my lifestyle of pervasive academic sitting. Movement problems and pains that show up in a dance or Yoga Narada lesson—as she explains in our dialogues—entwine body, mind, and emotions. Moreover, bodies are singular and dynamic, requiring each person to be addressed individually. To do this, Cartwright relies on intuition that assembles many interweaving layers or “data” of experience. Movement education for Cartwright is not superficial—in the sense of bodily-appearances and physical-mechanics—but truly influences the whole person and their agency through movement development. As a teacher, she understands her role is to empower others—to offer them keys, for *them* to open new doors.

I fear sounding too idolatrous, opaque, or esoteric. In contrast to Cartwright, it is very challenging for me to maintain the same equanimity, or, as she has noted once very tactfully, not to fall behind in my tempo because my mind is busy working on something else (such as this book). I also find Cartwright’s approach to repetition inspiring. Cartwright finds a world of variation within Yoga Narada—a microcosm of endless discovery and novelty. In her lessons, sensitivity

19 Testimonies of authoritarian teaching practice fill Robin Lakes’ insightful study. See Lakes, “The Messages behind the Methods.”

and organization, intuition and systems, feeling and movement analysis are not opposed; they are codependents. The exercises of Yoga Narada are highly structured, honed from forty-odd years of practice. Cartwright improvises each class singularly and intuitively, following her logics of interacting with her students and organizing coherent lines of self-discovery. She maintains a stranger-friendly community. Creating a convivial and inclusive classroom, Cartwright introduces herself to all newcomers. She arranges the yoga mats in space so that she can see each person in the class—to connect and help them, as well as to motivate via eye contact. Moreover, she usually makes her students laugh before beginning—using some trivial small talk on the weather or her morning. After class, she stays in the room to address questions. She senses and listens to her students' body-stories and inquiries, and may give hands-on corrections, as well as verbal ones. My project of body-biography therefore fit well into her own practice.

The material of Yoga Narada, as a movement philosophy and a variable container of exercises, will be described in the dialogue that follows. Cartwright depicts her research as a practice connected to others' discoveries: merging dance, yoga, physical therapy, and energy work, through her own experiential path. She says Yoga Narada will never be finished. In her teaching manual, she reminds her instructors: "Yoga is a never-ending journey when you remain open to the energies around you: when you listen: when you look and when you remain faithful to the roots. It can take many different forms and none is better or worse than another when these edicts are observed. Staying honest to yourself, eschewing ambition and never imposing *your* way on others is to me the humble approach of a Yogi."²⁰

Life Stories

"I Feel Very Fortunate to Have the Body That I Have."

I invite Cartwright to introduce the reader to her individual body. In her response, she differentiates herself from her material body. Human bodies, for Cartwright, are more than the sum of their physical parts and mechanics: They are sacred, living, and energetically interconnected beings.

Liz Waterhouse: You have a wonderful, particular body Hilary. How would you describe your body?

20 Cartwright, "Hilary Cartwright's Yoga for Dancers: Now Known as YOGA NARADA. Teachers Manual," unpublished manuscript shared with the author in 2020, 1.

Hilary Cartwright (laughs): Oh my goodness. It's a very interesting question, actually! I don't know that I would ever know really *quite* how to describe my body. I guess I would say, I feel my body has served me very well. We've had our ups and downs considerably, but I feel that over time I've been able to let my body really serve me in a way I didn't anticipate that it could at different junctures in my life. It's taken a lot of thought, a lot of effort in a way, a lot of research—inward research, almost more than outward—but some outward research of course. But I feel very fortunate to have the body that I have. It will do a lot of what I want it to do. As I age, of course, things are very different, but it still allows me to feel very alive from inside out. That's the best way I can describe my body!

I know it—my body—also from other people's point of view. They go, "Well, it's extraordinary that you can do what you do, now." Because of first, how old I am, and also having had two hip replacements, back problems, various things through my career. But I believe that really for anybody with the right approach—as well as the right help and guidance—you can find a way to make things work for you.

Liz Waterhouse: Can you please tell me more about this inward and outward research?

Hilary Cartwright: What I meant by that was having to go inside myself to feel what was it that I needed to do to correct the things that went wrong—the things that weren't working as they should do. I had to *listen*. I had to really listen to my body. Whereas before, I think as a younger dancer particularly, I had *told* it what I wanted it to do from outside, in a way.

When I say that I looked outside, what I mean by that was that I did research: I studied the structure of the body. I went and did courses where we did anatomy work, including *in situ* with a cadaver which was fascinating. A lot of things that one knew, but then when you saw it, that gave a different dimension. So really studying the anatomy, but at the same time realizing it's not just flesh and bone and muscle. It's not even the brain behind it. It's the engine behind it—that serves it—that goes through the nervous system, through the fascia, through the intangible elements really, of the body.

I had for many years done energy work—and I still do energy work. It was something that I could sense through my hands with other people. I'd never applied it to myself, which was a little bit of what I had to recognize: I could give out, but being able to take it in was harder. I feel that's how—when I say the inside and the outside—it meant going inside and facing certain things within myself: my impatience, my impetuosity, my *angry* things. I wanted everything to happen *now*, you know? I had to really pull back, to learn, "No, that's not going to happen. That's not the way it is." And finding a patience and a trust. Also, I am extremely fortunate with the people who helped me enormously during this journey

of discovery of what I could do—some wonderful healers, energy people, people with extremely practical knowledge on physical therapy, craniosacral therapy—all of those things help to give me a sense of how I should work with this body and accept it.

Liz Waterhouse: What is your history with healing work and the healing arts?

Hilary Cartwright: I feel that that work motivates and supports what I do as a teacher, as a dancer, as a dance teacher, as a yoga teacher.

When I was dancing and had my first major back injury, I had gone to somebody that everybody in the Royal Ballet had gone to—a wonderful woman called Anna Legallois—and she was a healer. She had wonderful energy. I found I responded to that immediately. Anna said that she felt it was work that I should do. She felt that I had that kind of ability. Another person who I knew, also a healer, said the same thing. I said, “Well, I don’t know, how would I do that?” They said, “You’ll just know.” Neither of them gave me any kind of, “Oh, well, you do this, and you do that, and you do the other.” They said, “You will know.” The only thing that we will teach you—both said this—was “how to cleanse other people’s energy out of you after you finished,” which is really important. What I’ve always done is, after I’ve worked with somebody, I will run my hands under the cold water. It must be running water. If that’s not available, then any natural stone, or wood. I have gone scrubbed a tree with my hands (laughs) if there’s no sort of water around. That just takes any kind of exchange of energy that you’ve done with somebody, it takes it out of you, and it doesn’t sit in your own body.

I then went off and started working with dancers. They would have injuries and problems, and so my hands would go. It was like having a guide who told me where my hands should go. They would go instinctively and be able to unravel problems—or situations. As time went on, I learned to trust it more, to know that there was always that guide. I never felt it was me: It was a transmission through me. I became the vessel for carrying that. That’s what I always felt, as I went into teaching: that it’s not about me telling someone what to do. Rather, it’s: What is the essence of what you’re trying to give? What is it that you’re trying to say, that you’re trying to help somebody achieve? To me, it’s actually very sacred. I always felt the healing work was. I thought it was a gift that I had to honor and respect.

Teaching was something I *never* thought I would do because I thought I was *way* too impatient. But discovered that I actually had *infinite* patience with other people, because I recognized very often in them my own shortcomings and knew what they were dealing with. It takes understanding. I felt that the work that I did with my energy work also really inhabited my teaching and my teaching skills. There’s always that moment of preparation before you go in. It’s like going on stage. There has to be that moment gathering yourself together to go and be able to present. There are

many teachers I've seen who are performers—for me, it's not about performing. It's about how can I best communicate with the dancers that I have in front of me? Who are they? Am I going to be able to give them something that can take them somewhere at some point?

Liz Waterhouse: Was this energy work Reiki?²¹

Hilary Cartwright: I didn't study Reiki, no. Some people had also suggested to me I should do craniosacral work because it's similar, the way I use my hands. I was very drawn to doing that. But at the same time, I felt like if I went into some kind of *structured* healing work that I might lose myself. I might lose my gift, or whatever it was. I thought, "Well, is that ego talking?" Or is that because it's so spontaneous? Because I can trust it, and I have done different manipulations with people and then spoken about what I felt and saw.

Somebody who's been a big influence with me in the latter years is Marika Molnar, who is the physical therapist of New York City Ballet. She became a great friend. She is a generous woman with an enormous knowledge and an absolute passion for learning. I felt that if I was working with some of the dancers she worked with, I needed to say to her, "Look, this is what I'm feeling. Are you okay with me doing this?" She was wonderful about it, because I was not a trained physical therapist. I'm not a doctor. I'm not any of those things. But I just knew how to open spaces—to make spaces through joints and rearrange things. Also energetically, sometimes somebody is just caught up inside. The emotions play so much on it that if you can relax, release that emotion, it releases the muscle. It *lets* the body *breathe*, and then it can (inhales) start to sort itself out. People say, "Oh, thank you." And I say, "No, thank you," because you've given me a gift as well in that I can see there's been a response and things have shifted.²²

I feel that has been a very interesting part of my work. I pick up and I sense where somebody is at and what's going on, even if they haven't told me. Sometimes people will say they've got something troubling them. I'll say, "Well, you know, it's very strange, but I'm picking up this." And they go, "Oh, yeah, well, I didn't think to say that." And I'll go (laughs), "Actually, it's kind of fundamental to what's going

21 *Reiki* is the Japanese term for "universal life energy" associated with healing practices shaped by Mikao Usui (1865–1926). See VanderVaart et al., "A Systematic Review of the Therapeutic Effects of Reiki," 1157.

22 Here, midsentence, Cartwright transforms her rhetoric into a highly poetic mode of speech—to describe this energy. She begins to alliterate, bouncing off the words "re-lax" and "re-lease." After creating this momentum, she then slows down to elongate her vowels. She decelerates her speech and introduces a transformative pause, inhaling before resolving on the exhale that the problem "sorts itself out." This is the type of poesis of speech—from and within the body—that Cartwright brings to her work and the coaching of dancers.

on in the other thing that you think is the big problem.” All of that has taught me about myself: Don’t obsess with where you think the problem is, because it’s probably somewhere else—very often up in your head!

All of that has come into how I teach. For me, what’s important is to walk in the room and to feel: Where are these people at? How are they feeling today? What have they got on their agenda? How can the structure of what I give them help support them for today? Because each day is different.

The Royal Ballet in the 1960s: “We Had to Be Representative of Royalty”

Opening the topic of Cartwright’s past as a dancer with the Royal Ballet in the 1960s, Cartwright reflects on the societal expectations at that time, negotiating modern society while representing royalty.

Liz Waterhouse: I’d like to open a new topic, which is, I’d love to hear about your early work as a ballet dancer. Recently, I looked again at your memoir, *Dancing for a Living*, which was published in 1974 when you were thirty. I have a quote from the beginning that I would love to read:

Frequently it is only the glamour of a dancer’s life which is revealed, while the drudgery, sweat, tears and boredom are either politely swept beneath the carpet, or dramatized to the point of absurdity. I would like to lift rather more than the corner of this particular carpet, without exaggerating its murky aspect in any way, to try to let you see what is really involved in becoming a dancer.²³

It’s wonderful! And throughout the book you are—very sensitively and honestly, it seems to me—looking and drawing out this spectrum of, as you say, pleasure and pain. I’m curious now, in retrospect, if you would reflect on that period of your life in the same way? The pleasure and pain of, say, the disciplined ballet body? Do you still see that period of your life in this way, or has your view changed?

Hilary Cartwright: Yes, I feel and I also talk about this sometimes with other contemporaries of mine. We laugh about the time we had, and how it was—some of it is the same for young dancers now. But I think back then—we’re talking about the early sixties, like ’62, ’63—when I joined the Royal Ballet and I was eighteen or nineteen. It was an amazing thing to be able to join the company. But our working conditions were not the most brilliant, especially when we were out on tour in the provinces in England. It was really very hard.

23 Cartwright, *Dancing for a Living*, 14.

The first tour I ever did was in the winter. It was one of the harshest winters that they'd had for a long time. I have trouble keeping warm at the best of times. We would be rehearsing in a studio, where we had fur gloves on, holding the barre, all wrapped up to stay warm. You could see your own breath in front of you, while trying desperately to get some part of your anatomy warm in order to be able to go into a rehearsal and later to go on stage. It was really, really hard.

Again, a lot of those sorts of difficult conditions: working in very cold weather, working on very hard stages. We also worked on raked stages, on a slant, and the slant can vary. We would be in a different theatre each week. Each day we would do class on the stage. You would either choose whether you were going to face up- or downhill or stand sideways, which meant one leg was shorter than the other as you worked. (Laughs.) You were constantly finding where to put your weight and where was center. Also, we encountered different floors: Some of them were wood floors, just planks, and some of them were not a Marley floor, which you have nowadays, but would be a sort of linoleum almost. The stage could also go up and down with ridges, which you had to encounter if you were bourrée-ing across the stage (laughs). Those sorts of conditions, that was the sort of the murky—the hard work. Then you've got to come out and look like none of that existed.

We were doing eight performances a week. We'd do six evenings, two matinees. The first tour I did was a sixteen-week tour like that. Which was a little bit too long. At first when I was with the company, we had a company train, which sounds nice but—it was *freezing* cold. The train would come out on Sunday and there we were, climbing into a *freezing* cold train, which never really got warm as it took us to the next city that we were going to. Later, they dropped the train, and we just made our own way up and down the country. Some people drove, sometimes you took a train. That's just to give a little bit of background of how it was. Plus, you were finding your own accommodation. It wasn't provided for you (laughs). There would be a big box where we rehearsed at Barons Court. As a dancer, you could go through this box of letters from each city of people offering bed and breakfast or a small hotel or a private house, and you would write to them, to see if they would accept you as a lodger. Some places as you got used to touring, you knew, and you would write to them ahead of time. But there were other places where you never found a good place to sleep. I mean, many's the pub I've slept in—over the top of a pub—because that was all that that you could find (laughs)!

Liz Waterhouse: Another aspect that you spoke about in your book, which reminded me of my own ballet education, was the cycles of exams and auditions. You also spoke about the respect you had for maintaining your appearance: both your costumes and your private clothes. Could you share more about that?

Hilary Cartwright: Yes, we had a very strict code when we went on European tours or abroad—because we were the Royal Ballet and we had to be representative of royalty, basically, because that was our sponsor. We were the Royal Ballet.

We had many receptions in embassies, consulates, and so on when we went on tour. So, before we went on tour, there would always be a list put up: Ladies, one full evening dress, two cocktail dresses required. Gentlemen, an evening suit, or a lounge suit, depending also what category you were in. The principal dancers, you know, even more so. Even on my first tour, I remember being told: “Yes, you have to have one good dress” (laughs). That was a carry on down from when the company was first formed—when they first were flying to America and they had to wear gloves and hats. I was the next generation down. I didn’t have to do that. Thankfully, it was in the sixties when, you know, it was Carnaby Street and what were called pantsuits. We were allowed to actually wear pants—trousers—which up till then you would not. On those freezing cold journeys that we did, at least you had something warm around your legs! Which previously you’re not been able to do. (Laughs.) You had to wear a dress or a skirt.

I remember talking with Monica Mason, who was a contemporary of mine and then became director of the Royal Ballet, since retired. I was talking with her when she was still director. We were sitting up at Covent Garden in her office and she said, “You know, I do remember the days when we used to come in the stage door and you had to be—if you were seen coming in the stage door or leaving—you had to be well dressed. You had to be representative of the company. You had to be elegant.” She said, “I do miss that a little bit. When I see them coming in sweatpants and sweatshirts. I know, that’s fine, you know, and it’s how it is now, but . . .” she said.

There was one particular young ballerina who I’d helped bring to the opera house from America—beautiful young dancer—Alexandra Ansanelli, who had been with New York City Ballet. I had introduced her to Monica, and she had wanted to dance classically, and she did. Alexandra was like from another period. She always was so *beautifully* dressed. Monica said, “Oh, I just love watching when she comes into the stage door.”

You know, it’s just things have changed. While you have to go with it, I do miss that a little bit too. I do. We used to sort of groan about, “Okay, now we’ve got to dress up and stuff,” but actually—it was fun! It was nice to do that. It gave you a sense of pride in the work that you do, a sense of respect also that you were presenting something. Ballet, dance, it’s *beautiful*. It’s a beautiful art form, an art form of beauty—also of passion, of depth, of showing many different emotions. But there is something about it for me, always has been, that is beautiful. I believe that if you carry that in your everyday life, it has to come over at some point. I know many people could think very differently about it and I understand, but it’s just how I feel. I mean, I’m of that period.

Career Changing Injury: "I Couldn't Really Feel What Was Happening Down in my Foot."

As in the body-biographies of Marcus Schulkind and Christine Kono, injury marks the turning points of Cartwright's body-biography in profound ways. Cartwright tells it as a story of resilience, reflecting on the impact of her back injury upon her understanding of her body. Interspersed throughout this section are anecdotes about the different styles of dance that she has encountered—underscoring how her teaching has responded to these influences. Important moments of embodied narration surface within these memories.

Liz Waterhouse: Would you be open to talking about your injury? And the impact it had on you? I believe that your injury was in 1965, to give context to our readers.

Hilary Cartwright: Yes, absolutely. Because my injury really is what has given me so much about why I teach and the reason for it.

As I say, this was around 1965/1966 when I was dancing, and conditions weren't great. It can happen to any dancer. I had had one slip and fall, but then I had a fairly major one. As a dancer, I was a jumper; so many of the roles I did, I was jumping. I took off one time on one of the stages—it was slick, my foot went—I was already up in the air and half turned round. I landed on my back, slid along the floor (drops hands on her thighs audibly) and got up and finished, and fine. Of course, I was on tour at the time, so we didn't really have anyone with us—a doctor or therapist—that could immediately treat you or take care of it. Also, as I said, we were working on these raked stages. It really wasn't noticed that actually I was now lopsided. What I'd done was knocked the vertebrae in my lower back a little bit off to one side and the disc slipped. So now the vertebrae were beginning to fall on one side towards each other. Trapped the nerves.

The first thing I really knew about it was, yes, my back was hurting, but also my right leg. I couldn't *feel* what was happening down my right leg. When we got back to London, I had work done on it and it was treated. They did the best they could. But as time went on, it got increasingly worse. I began to feel like when I was on pointe, I couldn't really feel what was happening down in my foot. By now I was doing principal roles. It became more and more apparent to me that this was becoming a big problem. At that time, they decided that a cortisone shot into my spine would be maybe the best thing. Again, it was not realized that if you shoot cortisone into the spine . . . And also, they didn't at that time really measure it out. As they were doing the injection, I said, "I'm performing tonight. Is that okay?" "Oh, yes, yes, yes. That would be fine."

So (laughs) as we went through the performance and I'm feeling more and more paralyzed—that I can't bend forwards even. I managed to make it through the performance, but then was *painfully ill* all night long, throwing up because it was just

too much for my body. For me sadly, it meant that the next night, I was doing one of my *favorite* roles, which was in *Les Sylphides*, and I did the Prelude. But I couldn't go on. I had to cancel because I couldn't move. I was so sad. It was at Covent Garden, and I couldn't do that. It was by now I was beginning to know that this probably was going to bring the end of my career.

Just to explain: The reason why the Prelude was so special to me was because we used to have Serge Grigoriev and Lubov Tchernicheva coaching us. He was ballet master for Diaghilev, and she was a dancer in Ballets Russes and later a ballet mistress. They were in their nineties when they would come and coach us in the Fokine ballets, and they were absolutely incredible. I had been coached by Tchernicheva in that piece. It was very, very special to me that I was doing something that she had danced. We were told that she had been part of the original creation.²⁴ She was a *beautiful*, wonderful, wonderful woman. I mean, she would sit there and just the way she used her *arms* and her *body* and her *eyes*, and I would be like, "Oh, my God, I wish I could look like that." I felt really stiff and awkward in comparison to what I was seeing (laughs).

Cartwright is conjuring an important aesthetic memory here. Through closer examination of her vocal performance, we can understand how Cartwright's storytelling alights upon her kinesthetic memory of the role she is describing.

The Prelude solo is a hallmark for the floating, ethereal quality of a Romantic ballerina. Cartwright's rhythm as she conjures this memory is marked by triads. Remembering Tchernicheva, Cartwright evocatively elongates and rolls a series of three syllable words: beautiful, wonderful, wonderful. Then, slowing her reminiscence and speaking with a gentler tempo, she pays reverence by musing on another triad: Tchernicheva's arms, body, and eyes. Interestingly, musical threes, though very different in pitch and rhythm from Cartwright's

24 Dance historian Lynn Garafola also remarks on Tchernicheva's "striking beauty with lovely hand and arm movements" and confirms her dancing *Les Sylphides*. In *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, Garafola lists the soloists of the Paris premier of *Les Sylphides* (1909) as Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, Alexandra Baldina, and Vaslav Nijinsky—not Tchernicheva. In *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, Tchernicheva is reported to have joined the Ballets Russes in 1911, after this premier of *Les Sylphides*. As a student at the Maryinsky, Tchernicheva may have seen *Chopiniana* in 1907 and 1908. When presented with this discrepancy, Cartwright was surprised—remembering Tchernicheva as a humble woman, who Cartwright suspected would not exaggerate her biography. Perhaps younger dancers like Cartwright had assumed she was an original dancer, because of her closeness to the source and her persuasive performance while teaching the role? As often discussed regarding the interpretation of oral history, Cartwright's narrative is certainly a meaningful story, relevant for understanding her phenomenological experience of dance. It should not be disregarded because of factual discrepancies with other historical sources but rather enter into dialogue between historical evidence and testimony. Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, 400; Garafola, "Tchernicheva, Lubov."

speech, also play a prominent place in the final line of Chopin's melody in the music of the Prelude.²⁵

Through listening closely to Cartwright's voice, I realize that the floating ethereal quality of the sylph is a quality that Cartwright brings into her teaching of Yoga Narada, in which many aspects of ballet aesthetics and yoga forms are fused. In Yoga Narada, Cartwright insists that the ease and flow in the upper body is produced through very grounded legs—something that she learned also through her ballet practice. It is also significant that this positive memory is juxtaposed with a story of loss, as Cartwright goes on to describe the vulnerability of a ballet dancer's body to injury. In contrast to what she felt before, she is thrown into a disembodied sensation of numbness caused by her back injury. By musing poetic and then developing dramatic contrast, this anecdote gives insight into the seminal bodily experiences that shape Cartwright's body-biography.

Hilary Cartwright: So anyway, it did actually bring my career to an end. Because especially, as I said, a lot of the roles I did were jumping roles, and my back by now was so painful, and I couldn't feel what my leg was doing. I thought, "I can't go out on stage like this." I said I was going to stop, and I did. I had no idea what I was going to do. Absolutely no idea.

At that time Sir Frederick Ashton was the director of the company. I had worked with him quite a lot. I went to tell him, and he said (imitating Ashton's soft voice), "Well, my dear, you know, you could come and coach the dancers." I was like, "What! I can't do that!" This is something that's still in me. I want to be doing those roles. I did not want to be a bitter ballet mistress (laughs) who always felt bad about the fact that she'd not been able to complete the roles herself. I said, "No, thank you." I said, "No, I need to go and find another life." So that's what I did. I left. I had no idea what I would do professionally. I basically had no other skills. I couldn't type. I thought, "Well, maybe I'd better learn how to type." I never did learn how to type properly. But I thought, "Well, I better go and do that now, see what I can do."

It was an interesting period. There was nothing like social security or anything to give you any support. I just had to set about finding what I could do.

Liz Waterhouse: And you advocated for yourself. In your book you describe that you sought compensation.²⁶

Hilary Cartwright: Yes! I did actually. I was so angry about the sort of social security aspect at that time. They said, "Oh, you're still perfectly fine physically." I said, "No, I'm not. Not for the job that I was trained for. I cannot do it. In fact, there are a lot of other jobs I can't do because my back is not healed yet."

25 Chopin's *Prelude in A Major, Op. 28 No. 7*.

26 Cartwright, *Dancing for a Living*, 101.

I remember one of the doctors laughing at me, because I could lift my leg up. He said (scoffing), “Oh, you’re fine. You can do anything.” I said (indignant and resolute in tone), “You don’t understand. You simply don’t understand that no, I can’t.” Nobody had even taken an X-ray of my back at this point (laughs). They didn’t even look to see what was going on. They just went, “Well, I don’t know. We don’t know what it is.” As you can see, I did agitate for it. It took over two and a half years, but I finally got them to change the wording of the National Health Insurance claim—for when a dancer had to stop because of an injury—that allowed them to be compensated for a period of time. Until such time as either the injury could be taken care of, or they could find a different form of work.

That was something that made me feel for a while in my life that I wanted to become a lawyer. Because I was very concerned with people’s rights and what was just and so forth. But the more I looked at that, actually, the more I realized that the law had a lot of stuff that, to me, wasn’t justice, that I didn’t agree with (laughs). I thought, “No, that’s not the life for me.” But it started me looking at different things of what else could I do?

I always had loved cooking. Chance had it that a friend of mine was a Cordon Bleu cook, and she became pregnant, and she said, “Well, I can’t bear the smell of things at the moment. Would you go and take over some of my clients?” Yes! I would go and be a private chef. It was a very interesting time and very fun. I learnt a lot of stuff working with different people. With my inadequate typing (laughs), I also applied for a job where I was translating for a French wine importer.

Liz Waterhouse: Did you learn French through ballet?

Hilary Cartwright: No, through my school, and also then through my sister.

My older sister—her artist name was Suzanne France—was also a dancer, but not in ballet. She eventually ended up on Broadway, but first she was in Paris. She was a Bluebell Girl, which a lot of people today probably won’t have the faintest idea what that is! They just tore down the Lido in Paris. There were the two big nightclubs in Paris. There was the Moulin Rouge in the Latin Quarter, and then there was the Lido on the Champs-Élysées. The Lido was the classier one than the Moulin Rouge. The Bluebell Girls were called that because the woman who organized it was English. She brought English girls in because they were a lot taller than the French girls. It was this thing that the Bluebells were very tall. They were all ballet trained, *beautifully* trained and elegant. They had to be at least five foot ten. That was the minimum height. Then, of course, it was increased with the large chignons they had on the top of their heads and the jewelry.

They had wonderful choreography. Even when I was fourteen, fifteen, I would go to Paris, stay with my sister, and I would be snuck into the back end of the Lido because I, of course, was direly underage! I would go and watch the show, which

was fabulous. Aside from the dances, there were, of course, the *mannequins*, who were nude: beautiful, elegant women, who walked very tastefully wearing pasties and these elaborate chignons. It was a very classy nightclub. So that's how I learned French, aside from being in school (laughs).

Liz Waterhouse: As a dancer, as a young person, were you fluid between dance styles?

Hilary Cartwright: Not really. I mean, we didn't have much. In the school at Elmhurst, we had had sort of contemporary. Nothing like really what people do now. When I was in the [Royal Ballet] Company, we had what was sort of considered contemporary.²⁷ Ballet Rambert had become a contemporary company, and Norman Morrice was the director at the time. He was also a choreographer. They started to interchange between the companies to bring new choreography. One of my greatest things was that I worked with Sir Kenneth MacMillan, and his choreography has a very contemporary feel to it. Of course it's ballet, but it's very different. Some of the roles that I did working with Kenneth meant so much to me. And that, I guess, gave me my first feeling about contemporary work.

Liz Waterhouse: You just made an important gesture. Can you please describe what you mean?

Cartwright is sitting on the wooden floor of the studio, her legs folded underneath her in a kneeling position. She separates her knees so as not to strain them, a resting position common in martial arts as well as yoga. Accompanying her narrative with this gesture, Cartwright moves her hands downwards from her center to the floor, opening the fingers as she does so. It's a powerful motion—reminding me of a tree whose roots grow deep into the soil, giving it strength to grow tall.

Hilary Cartwright (laughs): Yes, it's that grounding. It's that earthiness. It just comes from the gut. His work was wonderful for me. I love doing Kenneth's work.

27 My naïve question reflects my own uncertainty about the visibility and access to modern dance at the time of Cartwright's training and work as a young professional ballet dancer. Cartwright's testimony gives perspective on her personal experience of different styles of dance training in the UK in the fifties and sixties, and living in London in the seventies. The dominant historical narrative that modern dance in London became visible in the mid-1960s, with Ballet Rambert and the London Contemporary Dance Theatre and School, is reiterated here. We should keep in mind, however, as dance historian Alexandra Carter writes, that no dance style "neatly starts or finishes." Carter, "Destabilizing the Discipline," 115.

His musicality, his phrasing, and the fact that he always chose very dramatic pieces most of the time.²⁸

Liz Waterhouse: Do you remember your first contact with contemporary dance that took you?

Hilary Cartwright: *Really* contemporary dance? I'm trying to think . . .

Liz Waterhouse: Or modern dance? I assumed you had some Graham training. Is that true?

Hilary Cartwright: No, I didn't. I didn't at all.

Liz Waterhouse: Ah, interesting. There are many similarities between Graham technique and your Yoga Narada.

Hilary Cartwright: Of course! Because Graham drew a great deal from yoga, there's some of those movements within it that are within the Graham work. When I work with Graham dancers, it's very easy to work with them, in a way.

So after the injury I did all this different work: acting, modeling, cooking, working for the wine importer and writing for *The Dancing Times*. At one time, I thought I could *maybe* go back to dancing. I started studying ballet with a unique woman, long since passed on, named Audrey de Vos. She was extraordinary. She helped to bring me back to a real understanding of anatomy. We got quite a long way, but once we got back into jumping again—which I knew was what I wanted to be doing—it was like I knew I'd never have the freedom to go out on stage and not be thinking about how I was going to do something. I was like, "I can't do that." So, I stopped and realized: Nope. Move on. Go on into something else.

I thought about teaching. I was approached, actually, by the woman who ran what was then called the "movement group" of English National Opera. They didn't want an opera ballet. They wanted people who would look right with the singers. The English National Opera was wonderful—not only in that they translated the major operas into English—but they also believed in making the staging much more

28 In her 1974 memoir, Cartwright writes "Whereas ballet is based on an aspiration towards weightlessness and elevation, modern dance develops from a much more earthy quality, and is far more *terre à terre*. The transition from one to the other can therefore be very difficult. This is probably why some modern dance teachers are still wary of accepting, or advising students to train also in the classical style. But there is no reason why the use of one technique should not assist the other, as long as you are aware of this difficulty. It only remains then to discover which style best suits both your temperament and physique." Cartwright, *Dancing for a Living*, 108–9.

realistic. Not something that was just up there—the singers standing and singing out beautiful arias and so forth—but much more interaction. I'd written a series of articles in *The Dancing Times* in England about how it was—the practicality of being a dancer.²⁹ The person who was running the movement group read them and she called me up. She said, "Would you come and teach this movement group?" I said, "Oh, I'm not a teacher. I'm not going to be able to teach." She said, "Oh, this will be a group of some dancers, but there will also be some actors, but they have to move."

I thought about it, and I thought, "Hmm, it's kind of interesting." By now, it was nearly two years since I'd stopped dancing. I felt, you know, it's really a shame because I had been given so much by so many different people while I was dancing. It's a shame if I don't give that back—so maybe I should think about it. I went and talked to two people who I really respected as teachers. One was my teacher in the company, Erling Sunde, and another one was Anna Northcote, whose artist name was Anna Severskaya. She had a very special way of teaching. I said, "You know, I would like to teach, and may I study with you?" Both of them said, a little bit like the same as when I asked about doing energy work and healing work, they both said, "Well, you can watch, but I'm not going to tell you anything. You've got to figure it out yourself." So I went, "Okay, fine." So, I would sit and watch.

Then I began to see the structure within the class exercises. I'd always just taken it for granted as a dancer. You know, someone comes, they teach the class. You either like it, or you don't. It either works for you, or it doesn't. I hadn't thought about the structure. I hadn't thought about anything. Then as I watched, I began to see and feel what is a class. A ballet class has a central hub, and then everything else feeds into that hub, and that hub feeds out into it. So I was like, "What is the hub?" And for me, the hub was the adagio.³⁰ Adagio had always been the hardest thing for me to do. It was that thing of being still, of being centered. I wanted that everything would lead towards that adagio and then go from the adagio into the subsequent small and big jumps—the petit allegro into the grand allegro.

Now that's how I've always built my classes ever since. I would create the adagio and then the structure of my barre work would lead up to that. From there it would go on through whatever the turning combination or the petit allegro, the grand allegro would be, following on from that adagio. Then the actual structure of the barre work was about how do you warm the body up? How do you get the feet moving and

29 Cartwright, 105.

30 The adagio section of the ballet class, named for the tempo marking of the music, is a sequence of slow movements, performed in the center of the space, or also at the barre. The dancer typically coordinates the arms fluidly while raising the legs into long extensions or lines. These smooth and graceful transitions between positions are very challenging to sustain and balance while appearing effortless. The ballet repertoire typically foregrounds women performing adagio movements: balancing on pointe, supported by a male partner in the pas de deux.

the body, and you're moving from the center. So all of that then I worked on, and gradually built over time.

I was very fortunate with this group that I had at the English National Opera, because some of them had never taken a ballet class. They'd done movement in their acting. They would go, "Well, what's that? What's a tendu? What's a rond de jambe? Why am I doing it?" And I go, "Ahhh. Oh, God, I never thought about why I'm doing it." It made me go, okay, I have to think. Why am I doing it? Is there a point to it? Does it have some reference to what's coming later? And yes, of course. Then I worked out the logic of it and so that helped me build how I was going to structure a class. They were actually very important to me. This was like the early seventies by the time I started doing that. Then I started teaching open classes in London. The Royal Ballet heard I was teaching, and they asked me if I'd come back and teach and be a *répétiteur* [rehearsal assistant] with the company. By then I could do it, even though many of my contemporaries were still there. I was *really* young to be doing it. I was only in my early thirties (laughs). I was very aware of that because I also had people way above me that now, suddenly I was giving them class, you know?

One of the most generous people ever was Margot Fonteyn, who was still dancing. She was so wonderful to me. I will never forget her generosity. At one point, we went to Greece. We were working on tour in the Amphitheatre [The Odeon] of Herodes Atticus, and she came as the guest artist; it was really towards the end of her career. Of course, our performance started at like nine o'clock at night. It was in the summer, and we had to wait for the heat to go down. She said, (imitating Fonteyn with soft, quiet voice) "Darling, you know, I just can't wait that long in the day before I start. Can we do a barre and a class together in the morning?" And I went, "Yes, of course, Margot, you know anything. Of course." And I thought, "God, just me and Margot and the pianist. Help!" (Laughs.) I was still very young.

I went to a couple of the principals who I knew would probably like to move a little earlier in the day, too. I said, "Do you want to come and take class with Margot?" After that, I had like two or three other people and Margot and the pianist and me in a small room with a big circular fan going overhead. Because we didn't finish until after midnight, we started around eleven in the morning. Margot was amazing. She did everything. One day I said, "Margot, do you want to do big jumps?" She said, (changes to a softer, feminine voice) "All my jumps are the same size, just a little slower now." I was like, "Oh, my gosh, this woman, her honesty, her humility!" (Laughs.) That was a pretty amazing experience working with her.

Prior to that, she had one day suggested to me that perhaps it was better to do grand battement after adagio at the barre, rather than before. I went, "Oh, my God, of course, that makes absolute sense." You have the strength in the adagio, now you have the strength and the freedom in grand battement, because you'll already done grand rond de jambe, rond de jambe en l'air, that kind of thing. This made sense to me, and I incorporated it into my teaching.

Liz Waterhouse: Interesting. Most of my ballet classes had that progression. What was your progression of the barre exercises?

Hilary Cartwright: At the barre you do the pliés, tendus, the jetés, the rond de jambe à terre, rond de jambe en l'air, your frappés, into an adagio at the barre and then grand battement, or battement cloche, or something.

Liz Waterhouse: Yes. That's the structure that I inherited too—in the company class model of an hour and fifteen minutes in The Forsythe Company. It's always a question where fondu comes!

Hilary Cartwright: Yes, I've also had many discussions about this!

Liz Waterhouse: To draw out further comparison between our generations: I joked during my time in The Forsythe Company that adagio was just getting faster and faster. It was barely even adagio.

Hilary Cartwright: The thing about adagio for me is, it's that moment of grounding. That moment of being able to be still, but to speak through your stillness. Also, with contemporary choreographers—you may be still for a moment, but you're not dead. You're still. It's going, going, going (she reaches with her hand forward and elevates her spine). You know, there's that suspended-yet-sustained quality. Where does it come from? How do you make that happen? Also, the *smoothness* of the movement of being able to *glide* into a movement.

I feel it has got lost in some ways, that feeling of what adagio is. From the feeling of adagio, you should move into the grand allegro (increasing her voice in volume, tempo, intensity). Now it's flying! It's taking that stillness and letting it fly and move and cover space. Because that is something I also find, oddly, a little bit with some classical dancers nowadays. That they don't cover space. They don't fill space. They can travel, move and do a lot of stuff, but it's that thing of being able to encompass the entire space and take it with them dynamically, you know?

Recently I saw something in Valencia at a gala and I was like, gosh, I haven't been able to see performance for such a long time. It's going to be wonderful! And the disappointment of seeing some very fine dancers—technically excellent, lovely—but there was no life! They didn't touch me. They didn't move me. They were doing it. I could go, “Yes. Good, good. Tick that one off. Yep, yep.” But there wasn't that *energy*. The dynamism. That thing that gets you on the edge of your seat. “Wow, is he going to come down?” Or the *phrasing* of a turn. It was just disappointing, shall we say (laughs). It's bringing that *life* from the adagio into the big movement, you know?

Thinking about, *Les Sylphides*, the Prelude girl. Yes, she's much more the lyric, adagio sort of thing. But then the mazurka—in that mazurka, she flies! The whole

thing is just flying through all the time, but having to come from a central point, and finding life in the music as well. Some of the ballets that come back now, they come back and because dancers moved a great deal in that period—it was not maybe as pristine and clean as we expect now, or as thin and long, as seems to be the current vogue—but my God, they could move! Sometimes you watch old videos, sort of black and white photography that's been done and you go, "Wow, that person could move." They could turn. They could move like this and change direction. Now you don't always feel that. There are people that can—and it's so exciting when you see it—but it's somehow, something I don't feel is being encouraged or taught either in the rehearsal room or by some of the directors and I'm sorry—I don't mean to criticize, and I probably shouldn't say—but I feel it. I see it and I'm like, "Where's the guts? Where's the excitement?" You want the audience to be thrilled, not just by tricks! That's a circus artist and they're wonderful, but that's a circus. This is an art form, and we can't forget it. And it's being forgotten. I'm seeing it slide away.

Expanding Internationally: "It Was a Lot of Moving!"

I encouraged Cartwright to elaborate more on the period following the publication of her autobiography Dancing for a Living (1974). In discussion of her mid-thirties and early forties, her narratives sprang back and forth in time and place, highlighting her experiences working with notable choreographers. Condensing these stories, this section traces Cartwright's social mobility as she rises in status. We learn how transnational networks facilitated the movement of dancers and the circulation of the international ballet repertoire across the globe. Cartwright compares institutional experiences, distinguishing between companies rooted in more authoritarian and hierarchal systems of ballet, and those open to new forms of labor and authority.

Hilary Cartwright: Going back to when I was working with Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT) and working with Jiří Kylián. My God! That man made some of the most beautiful choreography. *That* for me, that was contemporary work and just wonderful. Jiří was a wonderful man to work with—is a wonderful man, I should say—poor man is still alive! (Laughs.) I had never really trained in contemporary work, but the more that I was discovering about where you're rooted from, in ballet, the more I could understand what it was and appreciate it.

When I was then directing the Springplank, the junior company of Nederlands Dans Theater, I also brought in Christopher Bruce because I knew his work and I loved it. I thought it would be great for the kids. I brought in Robert North as well. Robert is originally American, but he directed the Ballet in Gothenburg and directed the Scottish Ballet for many years and is in Germany now and still creating. He worked with Graham and with the London Contemporary Dance [Theatre], so his work is very grounded. But, oh my gosh, Robert could move wonderfully! And we

were good friends. So, I brought them both over for my young dancers and then also had two of the dancers from within NDT: Nils Christie and Jimmy [Jim] Vincent. It was their first time to choreograph anything (laughs), so I would kind of help them with that a little bit. For that year that I was with them, I felt very fortunate—with the people that I brought in and with my dancers. They grew a lot through the experiences with these people.

Liz Waterhouse: It was only one year?

Hilary Cartwright: Only one year, yes. (Laughs.) It was difficult because, going back to when I was then teaching with the Royal Ballet. I was there for seven years, teaching and coaching. I took a sabbatical at one point. I asked to go and see other companies in other countries. I felt like I was getting stale, and the company was getting stale. I felt like I needed to see what else was going on. Therefore, I took a sabbatical, and I went to Canada, I went to the United States. The sabbatical was a small stipend, so I needed to supplement it. I taught also while I was in Canada with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet (RWB), and through that they asked if I would come back and direct, co-direct the company.³¹

At that time, their current director, Arnold Spohr, who had been there many years, had said he wanted to retire, and so he wanted to set up for somebody to come in. There were three of us: one of whom really worked with the school, David Moroni; Salvatore Aiello, who had been a dancer in the company; and me. We really took care of the company. We directed the company. We had big ideas of what we wanted to do. After that, I went and spoke to the direction at the Royal Ballet and I said, “Look, I’ve been offered this, and I feel it’s a huge opportunity at this point in time.” They said, “It’s an incredibly good opportunity and it’s one you wouldn’t get here for probably another twenty years.” The Royal Ballet is a slow-moving piece of machinery. You don’t quite know how long things will take before they change (laughs). So, I thought, “Okay, that’s fine.” I totally respect and understand that. But I have an energy. I’m a very forward kind of moving and looking person. I thought, “I’m going to take this opportunity.”

I picked up and I moved. I went to Canada and directed there for a year. Unfortunately, the past director, Arnold Spohr, decided that Sal and I had done such an amazing job. We took the company to New York to City Centre. We changed the whole structure of how we were touring. They’d been doing a lot of one-night stands. We said, “This is not viable, we can do this a little bit, but we have got to

31 Cartwright was a guest teacher with the RWB in 1976 and a company teacher in 1977. Her consistent testimony about Spohr’s intent, that her position was “effectively to be that of associate director” is repeated in Michael Crabb’s detailed discussion: Crabb, *An Instinct for Success*, 184.

start getting a more solid kind of structure for the dancers. It's impossible to expect them to perform at the level you want on one-night stands travelling on a bus across acres of Canada and the States." (Laughs ironically.) Spohr felt that the company was looking really good and doing really well. We brought in productions that were really invigorating for the company. He said, "I want to come back as director." In response, I was like, "That's not the terms. I gave up everything and moved here."

While we had been in New York and having a good success in New York, he had gone to the board and had spoken with them. He said he wanted to come back. With such a long history with them and so forth, they agreed.

Liz Waterhouse: What did you do? How was that legally, with your contract?

Hilary Cartwright: Yes, we had a contract. Well, it was a one-year contract, but it was obviously going to be renewed.

The chairman of the board at that time had a difficult time dealing with Sal and myself, because we had a different energy. We said, "We have a five-year plan. We have a three-year and a two-year plan of how we envisage the company to grow and come back to the level that it had had before." Because the level of the company had dropped down. It was no longer going to Europe or to anywhere. We said, "This is how we see it developing." This kind of took them aback. They were very comfortable with how it was, and they were into comfort, and we were not. We were pushing the comfort zone very much, and so we didn't get on *too well* with them. I guess probably that was—I was being too pushy, too forceful—not enough experience to know how to play the game a little bit.

Anyway, I went to Arnold, and I said, "Well, if you're coming back, no, I'm not stepping down. I'm not." I didn't like the way he directed. It was, for me, very abusive for the dancers. I said, "So I guess one of us has to go and it's not going to be you, is it?" He said, "No." I said (with dignified, curt, resistance), "Fine. I shall leave." I obviously stayed until the end of the year. We finished in Mexico, in Guadalajara, and that was it.³²

By this time, I had now married another dancer within the company, so we both were leaving. In fact, a lot of the dancers left at the same time, because they didn't want to go back to what they had before, in the company, now they knew what they could have. It was a huge exodus from the company. We had no idea where we were

32 This period of history of the RWB is given extensive treatment in Michael Crabb's biography of Arnold Spohr. This book includes prior testimony from Cartwright, though Cartwright today could not remember these interviews. Her testimony is consistent: then and now. The institutional complications of the company's financial difficulties, Spohr's history of conflict with the board, and his power as an authoritarian leader are contextualized in Crabb's writing. See Crabb, 184–98.

going, or what we were going to do. We had bought a house by this time. We had to sell the house and pack up everything. I had friends living in New York [City], and we came to stay with them. We thought, "Well, we'll look for work." My husband was American. He said, "Well, I haven't worked in America. So, let's go to America."³³

While we were there was the very first year that Nederlands Dans Theater came to City Center in New York, and we went to see them. I was just stunned by it. One of my friends from when I had been in school was their ballet mistress at that time, Deirdre O'Donohoe. Deirdre said to me, "They're looking for a new director for the Springplank."³⁴ It's very different. Would you be interested?" I said, "Absolutely, I would *love* to do that." She said, "Well, we haven't had much success so far. They've looked at several people, had them come and give class, and it's just not working."

Following my friend's advice, I went to City Center to have a meeting. Jiří Kilián said, "I'm terribly sorry. We had an awful experience so far trying to find someone. I have to ask you if you would mind teaching the company a class so I can have some idea of how you are. I know your background and your record, but would you consider?" I said, "Of course." So, I taught a class. It was the *last* day of their season, and they're on *tour*. I'm like, oh my God, this is the last thing they want is to have a brand-new teacher. I started off by apologizing to them and saying, (laughs) "I'm terribly sorry," but I said, "I will be considerate. I know it's your last day. We'll have a nice—you know—a good, easy class. But you know, here we go."

On the strength of that—bless his heart—Jiří decided that I would do (laughs). I said, "Well, you know, I have a husband. Is there chance you'll got a place for him in the company?" He said, "Unfortunately, I'm completely full." He said, "Let's talk to Rudi [van Dantzig] at Het Nationale [Dutch National Ballet] to see if he needs any male dancers." So, on a wing and a prayer, we go over to Holland. My husband, Ron [Ronald Tice] came. He went to audition. Rudi loved him, but he said, "I've actually got somebody else on hold from Canadian National Ballet." He said, "I'm just waiting for him to decide." So unfortunately, the gentleman decided that he did want to go to Het Nationale. Now we're like, oh my gosh! Where else can we find him work? He could meantime take class with the company.

At that point, Patricia Neary called. I had known her from where she used to come and stage Balanchine ballets with the Royal [Ballet]. She said, "Oh, I heard you're there." She was directing in Zurich. She said, "I need men. Do you have any

33 Cartwright's first husband is ballet dancer, choreographer, and teacher Ronald Tice.

34 The company De Springplank [Springboard] was founded in 1977 and is today called Nederlands Dans Theater 2 (NDT 2). It is the junior company of Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT 1), intended for young dancers to gain experience before transitioning to the parent company or other professional dance ensembles. Cartwright was the second director of NDT 2 after Simon Mottram. Schaik, "Netherlands Dance Theater."

men?" I said, "Yes, my husband." So dispatched Ron off to Zurich. We were now having to commute between Zurich and Den Haag.

Liz Waterhouse: Which is a ways away.

Hilary Cartwright: Yes, it is. Added to which, we had a young kitten that we had acquired in New York who came with us!

It was difficult, and it wasn't great for us or for the marriage. Ron finally was like, "I can't, you know, we can't do this." He said, "Oscar Araiz is coming to Geneva to take over the direction there." We both knew Oscar well from our time in Winnipeg. He said, "I've gone with a couple of friends and auditioned there. Oscar asked where you were, and would you consider coming as a ballet mistress? But he knew that this was going to be a step down, but it would put us together. I would be an assistant with Oscar."³⁵

Well, I told Jiří. Jiří's like, "You're going to regret this." (Laughs.) I said, "I'm really sorry. I really have loved this, and I would have loved to have stayed—I would have given anything to stay—but I feel I have to give this a chance with my marriage."

We auditioned somebody to come into the Springplank to take over from me. And I went to Geneva. At that time also, there was a new *Intendant* [Director] at the theater, and he had come from the Paris Opera.³⁶ He had big plans for Geneva, which had a conservatory that he wanted to be like the Paris Opera. He said, "Well, if you come to Geneva, I would like you to take charge of the conservatory and remodel it. Because it's very old fashioned." I had a double job. I was assisting Oscar. And my second job was to take over the conservatory—remodel and restructure it.

I set up a syllabus from the age of five up to fifteen, sixteen, and then had to present that to the old guard that had been teaching there (laughs). It was difficult because I wanted to be respectful. I had one young teacher who worked and danced in the company, one sort of middle aged, and then I did have one who was old-Russian-style trained. This was where, when I'd gone to see classes, I saw the little kids being forced into a first position. Their little bodies just couldn't do it. It was just frightening to see. Here I am talking about anatomy and correct placement. I said, "Okay, we're going to do away with all the categories of level one, two, three, four. We're going to call them something different." I just renamed them, so that none of the children realized that they were being shuffled around and put into a different

35 Argentinean dancer and choreographer Oscar Araiz (b. 1940) took direction of the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Geneva in 1980, staying for eight years. His works had become visible in North America through the Royal Winnipeg Ballet by the time Cartwright joined in 1977. See Crabb, *An Instinct for Success*, 186; Moyano, "Araiz, Oscar."

36 Hugues Gall, director of the Grand Théâtre de Genève from 1980 to 1995. *Le Monde* and AFP, "Hugues Gall, ancien directeur de l'Opéra de Paris, est mort."

structure. I wanted to actually work with the young ones, because what's up there now is going to be very hard to undo, you know. They will eventually go on. Most of them were never going to be dancers anyway. They were sent there because that's what mother wanted them to do, to learn a little ballet and a little deportment still.

Liz Waterhouse: Mostly girls?

Hilary Cartwright: Mostly, yes. There were a few boys. For the younger ones coming up. I told them, "We're going to work a little differently, and we're going to find rhythm and movement. We're going to have fun, and we're going to learn how to do things." Actually, the seven- and eight-year-olds I loved! They got so excited about discovering new things that they could do. They were absolutely sweet. The classes were small, so I could really work with them. So anyway, I built that structure.

Then meanwhile, I would be teaching company class in the morning. We had a very hodgepodge group of people: Oscar brought people from Brazil, Argentina, France. Some of the people, knowing that it was now going to become a contemporary company, had left because they wanted to be in a classical company. It was a little bit like the Tower of Babel, because there were so many languages and people trying to understand each other. About six of the dancers who had been with me in Winnipeg and who knew Oscar—because Oscar had choreographed there—came too. So now we had a lot of old friends coming to the company. But English became the language that we did rehearsals in. I don't know why, exactly. I think it was somehow that anybody who came from Argentina or Brazil, they were more likely to have a little English than they were to have French, but they were now learning French. So anyway, you sort of spoke in several different languages because you needed to be able to communicate with everybody.

I would teach in the morning and then do some rehearsals. The company had the traditional European format of stopping at two in the afternoon and returning for rehearsal around six in the evening. Worst possible structure ever—awful, awful, awful! Because you had to do a warmup again in the evening—otherwise you can't just shoot straight into rehearsal. I would then teach at the conservatoire from usually about 4:00 p.m. till 6:00 p.m. Then I would go across the road and work again from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Laughs.) It was quite a lot that I was doing.

At the end of that year, my husband decided that actually he wanted to do more classical work. He was younger than me, obviously, and he was more at the beginning of his career. He also wanted to dance in America, where he was from. It was right when [Mikhail] Baryshnikov was taking over American Ballet Theatre (1980).³⁷ We had flown over at Christmas and Misha [Baryshnikov] liked him, wanted to take him into the company. Misha, when he took over the company, he actually

37 Greskovic, "Baryshnikov, Mikhail."

got rid of the American Ballet School, which I found the most extraordinary thing to do. Usually, a school helps support a company financially. It also gives a specific and consistent style to the company as students graduate out of the school. Patricia Wilde had been directing the school. And because Misha dropped the school, he also could not take me in even as a ballet mistress. Interestingly, one of my old friends from the Royal [Ballet], Georgina Parkinson, was now ballet mistress for Misha. So, now I was going to move with no work this time. We decided we would try. We would see how it would go.

Liz Waterhouse: So have I understood correctly. One year in Canada, followed by one year in The Hague, followed by one year in Geneva?

Hilary Cartwright: I was about eighteen months in Canada, because I took over Royal Winnipeg halfway through the season.

Liz Waterhouse: That's a lot of moving.

Hilary Cartwright: Yes, it was a lot of moving!

So back to America, we come. I started teaching open classes in New York. It was never my favorite thing to do. I taught at the dance studio Steps [Steps on Broadway]. It was uptown by Columbus Circle. Melissa Hayden was the director there.³⁸ It was actually sort of a fun time, but you were also dealing with teaching around three pillars in a room. So, I was teaching there and seeing what other things there were around. There was not much.

I applied also to the Joffrey Ballet. [Robert] Joffrey was very interested, because he was bringing in choreographers from outside of America. He'd brought in [John] Cranko, he brought in [Sir Frederick] Ashton, he brought in Jiří [Kylán], in fact. Therefore, with my background, it was going to be a good fit, because I knew so many of the ballets that were coming into the repertoire. He agreed that he would like for me to come and be a teacher in the company, but there was a huge hierarchy in that company. What I did not even realize was because of my background and what I had already done—being from the Royal Ballet, both as a dancer and repetiteur, directing the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and NDT 2—I was intimidating to others. He said, “Are you all right coming in as a company teacher and ballet mistress?” I said, “Yes, I’m

38 This private dance studio, still in operation today, was opened in 1979. In 1984 it moved to its current location at 2121 Broadway. Co-founder Carol Paumgarten envisioned the studio as a place for “everyone” to train: students, professionals, and dancers of all ages. Cartwright discusses her view of the challenges this created. Vadukul, “Carol Paumgarten, ‘Den Mother’ to a Dance Scene, Dies at 76”; Shadle, “Carol Paumgarten, Founder of Steps on Broadway, Passes Away.”

fine." It's fine. But it wasn't so fine for the main ballet master, and one of the ballet mistresses.

Liz Waterhouse: Why?

Hilary Cartwright: It was not so fine because they were scared. While I was the last person in, I had a lot more experience than *any* of them have had (sighs). This was a big threat. I didn't even see it that way! It was a very difficult time for me. I was just like, "I'm happy to be here. It's nice, you know? How lovely and how are you?" But I had to eventually go to the ballet master and go, "Look, I don't want your job. I'm not interested in your job. I'm perfectly happy doing the job I do. But you have to let me do *my* job." Because he would come into *my* rehearsals and say, "If I come into the room, then it's my rehearsal." I said, "Even if you don't know the ballet?" "Yes," he said. "It's my rehearsal. When I come in, it's my rehearsal." And I'm like, "Boy. Okay."

Liz Waterhouse (interrupts): May I ask one more question? Were any of your challenges entering positions, did they have to do with you being a woman at all?

Hilary Cartwright: Yes. Royal Winnipeg [Ballet], *definitely*. Chairman of the board *not happy*. And a young woman who was prepared to be feisty to boot. *Not welcome*. Thank you very much. (Laughs.) Happy to see you go. Yes, I met resistance in a lot of places.

Holland, no, I didn't. That was wonderful. But then at Joffrey, boy that was frustrating. I'd been in Geneva then for the year and that was fine. The working relationship was good. I thought, "Well, people work together. Isn't that the job? Isn't that what you do? You work together?" Well, no, apparently not. At Joffrey, this whole structure was very old-school. It also had a lot of what I had disliked about the director of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, Arnold Spohr. He once had said to me, that how he saw his job was to *break* down a dancer when they came in, and then he would *build* them back up and he would make that dancer.³⁹ I'm like (drops hands with exasperation), "That's not the way I work." I look at what material is there. I don't put myself in their position. I look at them and my idea is that you build the dancer with the material that they are. You develop, you bring that out of them, but you don't destroy them. I'd seen that, what he had done to so many of them. They were like shaking, you know, to go out on stage. The year that Sal [Salvatore Aiello]

39 The authoritarian behavior reported by Cartwright is also confirmed in Spohr's biography. To take two examples: The commonplace occurrence of young dancers bursting into tears is described in the opening pages, in a preface by former dancer Evelyn Hart, and author Michael Crabb's opening memory is of Spohr yelling. See Crabb, *An Instinct for Success*, 7–8, 13–14.

and I were there, we'd been able to build confidence back, make them feel like they were worth something.

Now suddenly, I'm back in a situation of seeing, "Oh my God, this is what you do?" The way they were spoken to—it just appalled me. I spent a lot of time trying to look after dancers that I saw being literally diminished, beaten down. I would go and find them and go, "No, you're going to stand on your own two feet. You're going to be fine. You're going to be okay." You know?

Liz Waterhouse: Was this also more towards women than men, or was it both?

Hilary Cartwright: Towards both. It was not good. There were lots of examples I had of seeing that. So anyway, I did that. I started in with Joffrey. But Joffrey was in severe financial difficulties. (Laughs.) I remember, Joffrey calling me in and saying (imitating him, in a high voice), "Well, dear," he said, "You were the newest person in. I think in the next six months I could probably offer you six weeks' work. How's that?" I went, "Not good." He said, "Well, you know, maybe when things get better, you could come back." I said, "Sure, fine. If things get better." Meanwhile, I'll see what else I can do.

I spoke to my friend Georgina Parkinson in ABT [American Ballet Theatre], and she mentioned that the director there in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, Delal Achcar, was searching for good teachers. She also thought that [Sir] Peter Wright was staging *Giselle* there. I'd already staged it for Peter with Het Nationale when I was with the Royal Ballet. She said, "Let me talk to Delal." She was wonderful about it. The next thing was, I flew out to Rio. With a little phrasebook because I had never studied Portuguese. (Laughs.) I went and the first contract was for six months. I *loved* this company. I love Brazil. I love Brazilian culture—the *passion* and all the *emotion*. I was like, "Oh, Yes! This is what I want!"

Then, as usual, in Brazil, money problems started and nobody was getting paid, and after a while I was like, "I can't stay if I'm not going to get paid, you know? Doesn't quite work like this." The Brazilian dancers, they were used to it. They were so sweet, they used to share whatever they had with each other. It's really appalling. Hasn't changed much, I have to say, to this day. I was like, "I'm afraid, Delal, I have to go back and I'm afraid you do have to send me the money." I had to eventually get an international lawyer to get the remains of my payment.

Came back to New York. During this time, my husband and I had been apart too much, and we both realized it just wasn't going to work. He had also met somebody else. It was very sad at the time, but we agreed, and we're still very good friends. That's another whole side of how you deal with things—because he's not only one of my best friends, but his next wife is also. This is life, you know? Life and things happen, and you go on.

I came back to New York, and that was a fairly bleak period of having no work. I went back to Mr. Joffrey and I said, "Well, you know, now the company is back on its feet." And he went, (speaks in a soft high voice) "Hm, well, I don't think it's going to work." I went, "It's Scott, isn't it? It was the ballet master?" (Laughs.) Joffrey could never deal with confrontation. He just kind of, "Hm-mm." I went, "It's fine, Mr. Joffrey, thank you very much and pleasure to have known you." I walked out and I knew it: The ballet master couldn't stand the thought of my coming back. He just couldn't take it. So now, there was now no job, no husband, nowhere . . .

Liz Waterhouse (interrupts): Lots of experience!

Hilary Cartwright (laughs): What am I going to do? The studio Steps was under new direction. I did go back to teaching open classes, but I found it soul destroying because there was no consistency. People were in and out of class. Then you also have this—in New York particularly—this group of people who want to go on and on dancing forever. I'm sorry to say, but they take up space. Some of them were very respectful, of course. They love to take class, and I understand. But please don't come into a professional ballet class and use the space for the professionals, because it's not fair for the others.

Anyway, eventually one of the people who'd been coming to class mentioned that they needed a teacher at the New Jersey Ballet. She put me in touch with the director and so I started commuting back and forth to New Jersey—being a ballet mistress, coaching, teaching the company. I stayed there for maybe two years, which by now was a long time for me. But gradually, again a little bit—because of my background, because of my history—I clashed with the director even though it was another female. It was also a threat because she knew I could do a very good job. So again, (laughs) I was like, "Okay, it's time to go." We actually got on very well, but it was because I was questioning how she kept the company small, and it really could have gone into a bigger situation. But again, it was comfortable to keep it like that. It was what she knew. I also choreographed there. I never think of myself as being a choreographer because I have way too much respect for the craft. But I know I can make a nice piece, you know? So, I did that for New Jersey Ballet, and I enjoyed doing that.

Choreography: "I Was Asked If I Would Work With the Dancers"

This section highlights Cartwright's experiences making dances. In our interviews, I observed that Cartwright had understated her choreographic work, out of respect for the sizable contributions of the choreographers with whom she had worked. Yet Cartwright had choreographed frequently for professional dancers and students. This writing offers insight into

the thematic concerns, approaches, and values that Cartwright espoused in her choreographic projects.

Figure 4: Hilary Cartwright performing in the installation Movement as Flowing of Time by artist Carlos Bunga, at the Bombas Gens Centre of Art in Valencia, Spain. Performance on Friday July 7, 2023.



Screenshot by E. Waterhouse from a documentary video © Bombas Gens Centre d'Art.

Liz Waterhouse: Can you please tell me more about your diverse experiences choreographing?

Hilary Cartwright: I think the first thing I choreographed was for Springplank [NDT2] in the Netherlands. Jiří [Kilian] asked me to choreograph, which was very generous of him. It then started me actually enjoying doing that. I went on to choreograph more, three years later.

One of my most enjoyable memories of choreographing was for a film in Canada, in Montreal. It was the one-hundredth year celebration of Anna Pavlova (1981), and we were making a tribute to her. I was asked if I would work with the dancers—to choreograph something in it or restage some of the things that had been lost of Pavlova's own choreographed pieces. I was given a lot of fairly rare film footage to work with. I mounted pieces of old film footage where she was dancing on a tiny floor

space, so the one stationary camera could record her. In my choreography I could let the dancers move more on a bigger floor surface, looking more as she would have done in real life. In some of the other footage, I could see how she moved when she had more freedom and space.

Pavlova would also dance in her garden near Hampstead Heath, in London, to entertain guests, and I used some of the sequences she danced in this footage when I restaged *Christmas*, a ballet that had been lost. It was one of her favorite times of the year, and even on long sea voyages to South America, she would make sure to have a Christmas tree on board! This and the fact that she always liked to be the center of attention—in a very charming way—was what I used to recreate an idea of what she might have done.

For this Pavlova project, we rehearsed in New York and filmed in Montreal. I was restaging pieces, working with the dancers, coaching, and then finally, also went back with the director Pierre Moran to do some of the editing. I sat in, so that the editing was clean with the music and so forth. It was a beautiful piece in the end. It's called *Pavlova*. The narration was by actress and dancer Leslie Caron—because she could do both the French and the English—because it was for French TV. We had some incredible dancers in the piece. It was a lovely piece and very interesting project to work on.

Over a decade later I co-choreographed a tribute to Pavlova for Ballet Bellevue in Washington, with my ex-husband Ron [Ronald Tice] who was then Director. We collaborated using projections and recordings, together with live dancers recalling her favorite pieces to dance. It created a lot of interest, but sadly was not taken up by other similarly small companies, who could use their schools' students to recall Pavlova's early days at the Maryinsky Ballet School.

I also choreographed many pieces for students, when I was later a teacher for American Ballet Theatre's Summer Program. My pieces were usually ten to twelve minutes long, requiring two casts, so that everyone was used. I nearly always made little story ballets for them, so they could act as well as dance—something I felt was very important to incorporate into their training.

The most recent project I've done was this year, for an art gallery in Valencia, Spain, and was very different from anything I had done before.⁴⁰ I was introduced to the artist Carlos Bunga by my friend Moraima Gaetmank, who was curating

40 Performance *Movement as Flowing of Time* with dancer Hilary Cartwright on July 7, 2023. This live performance by Cartwright was commissioned for artist Carlos Bunga (b. 1976, Portugal), as part of the site-specific piece *Inhabiting Color*, in the exhibition "Performing Nature" at the Bombas Gens Center of Art in Valencia, Spain in 2023. I did not have the opportunity to witness this performance live but followed with interest Cartwright's accounts of participation and online video documentation. See the trailer by Pedro Ruiz, *Let's Dance!: Carlos Bunga/Hilary Cartwright*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxozkFDxSbE>, last accessed November 16, 2025.

a performance of dance on and around his work. He particularly wanted me to move on the central piece, which was an incredible project created directly onto the floor/canvas of the gallery. It was a huge piece covering the entire space under a vaulted ceiling. The painted surface was textured both with other pieces of material, heavy brush strokes, and the use of his own feet to create the movement he wanted. The piece really spoke to me. The exhibition was part of what he called “nomad.” Having been a traveler all my working life, I could identify with it a lot. Memories, uncertainties, nothing fixed, it brought up a lot of images. I agreed to do the two performances which would be shown consecutively on the same day.

After visiting the gallery once, and talking via phone with Carlos several times, I never touched it again until the day of the performance. I spent many hours in my head thinking about what it represented and what it meant to me. That was basically the extent of my rehearsal. On the morning of performance day, I met with Moraima who made some very gentle and perceptive suggestions as I moved around experimenting with what had been in my mind. Never before had I performed something with so little physical preparation. It was all in my head. We had agreed to do it in silence, not to distract from either the piece or my movements, which I drew from Yoga Narada and my strongest memories of ballets I had loved to perform. It was about twenty minutes long, and really pure improvisation both times, based on a blueprint that lay somewhere in my head. Nerve wracking, but immensely rewarding.

Yoga Narada: “An Organic System That Grows and Develops”

I was eager to record Cartwright’s perspective on the history of Yoga Narada and Gyrotonic—practices developed through her collaboration with Juliu Horvath in New York City during the 1980s and 90s. This section invites us to imagine the generative context and community of movement innovators that surrounded Cartwright and Horvath at the time. Within this hotbed of exchange and experimentation—at the international crossroads and dance metropolis of New York City—Cartwright and Horvath brought together Eastern and Western medical knowledge with the embodied experiences of training in diverse stage dance styles, all while navigating the intersecting pressures of capital, real estate, technology, copyright, health, beauty, and fitness.

Hilary Cartwright: During those two years that I was working for the New Jersey Ballet, my back was really beginning to play up, and I really needed to take care of it. I tried different types of yoga and things. By chance, one of the dancers from New Jersey Ballet had said to me, “Oh, you might be interested in this yoga, from a dancer.” I tried a class, and I thought: “Okay, this is very, very different. This is different. And this, this could work for me.”

This teacher, as you know, was Juliu Horvath.⁴¹ It was quite a revelation to me, to find someone teaching yoga who understood a dancer's body: how a dancer warms up and prepares their body for movement and transitions. This was very different from any of the yoga that I had looked at, or different kinds of movement that I thought I could maybe move into. Even looking at things like tai chi, peripherally—which I love, I think it's beautiful—but it didn't fit or suit me, at the time. It was too slow. I always said that maybe I would do it by the time I was ninety!

Before the first class that I took with Juliu, I tried to explain, "I have a back injury, I don't know how much I can do." He was like, "Oh, don't worry. Don't worry. You'll be fine!" I went through the class much as a dancer does, kind of like watching, looking, mimicking, because that's the best way we do it in the beginning. It felt comfortably familiar and offered things that I felt that I should be addressing, of breathing and finding ways to move that were not going to be damaging anymore. I walked out of there—I felt like I was walking on air. I went: Okay, *this* is it! This is what I need to do."

I started going back on a regular basis. The place doesn't exist anymore. It was at Columbus Circle, where there is now a *huge* shopping center. It was one of these old dance studios. It was a familiar environment, being in a dance studio. The classes were in the evening, so I'd come running back from New Jersey, and go straight into the class, which seemed to not have any determined end to it. I thought it was going to be like an hour-and-a-half class, the usual sort of thing (laughs). Then, gradually I realized that these classes—they just really went on as long as Juliu felt there was something to do, or to be said. The class was very open ended in that way but structured at the same time. I just loved it. There was a smallish group of people that were there—a very sort of mixed bag of people—some people who had been in dance, and some who wanted to be.

41 Juliu Horvath (b. 1942) was born in Timișoara, Romania. After playing sports, he began dancing at the age of nineteen and became a principal dancer with the Romanian National Ballet Company. While on tour in 1970 he defected, later receiving political asylum in the US and settling in New York City. He worked as a dancer in the New York City Opera, toured with diverse ballet stars, and was a principal dancer with the Houston Ballet. After a rupture of his Achilles tendon while dancing in the Houston Ballet, he moved in 1977 to St. Thomas in the US Virgin Islands. There he researched his own healing and movement modalities. After six years, he returned to New York, teaching what he had developed during this retreat, as "Yoga for Dancers." It is at this point, soon after his return to New York, that Cartwright met Horvath. Their collaboration is reflected upon from Cartwright's perspective in our interviews presented here. Horvath's narratives on the development of Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis are made public on his websites, see <https://www.gyrotonic.com/>, last accessed November 16, 2024. Adams, "Reflections on the GYROKINESIS® Method," 291; Campbell and Miles, "Analyzing the Gyrotonic® Arch and Curl," 148.

Gradually, Juliu sort of approached me and said, “Oh, you know, you’re really interested in this?” I said, “Yes, I really feel like this is going to help me a great deal, as I’m going on forty, into how my body is going to feel as I progress, and in teaching.” He said, “Well, you know, I also do acupuncture. Maybe I can help with that?”

He invited me to come and see a session he was doing of acupuncture, on someone who was agreeable to me being there—they were a dancer. So, we gradually got to know each other more and more. At one point, I was like, “You know, you really need a studio of your own, because this is wonderful work. You leave it open ended, which is very nice, but I think it could help a lot more people if they knew that you had your own space, and you’d feel comfortable with that.” He agreed that was what was needed. Meanwhile, we also got together as a couple, which I hadn’t really in any way, or shape, or form anticipated. But we did. Basically, he sort of said, “Well, shall I join you, in your apartment?” Because he’d been staying with friends, he’d come back from the Virgin Islands. So almost by chance, in a funny kind of way, we ended up living together. But then, that gave us a lot more communication, a lot more back and forth. His ideas of what he was trying to do, finding out his background, which had been very interesting, and the injuries he’d had, and how that brought him to where he was now.

Eventually we did find a studio space. It was down in the fur district, on 29th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues. I financed the whole thing with my salary from the New Jersey Ballet and other outside work. Juliu didn’t have money at the time. And we called it the “White Cloud Studio.”

Liz Waterhouse: What was the origin of the name?

Hilary Cartwright: Both of us came up with the name together. I had an old book, which I still have with me today, *The Way of the White Clouds*.⁴² Juliu would say that the white cloud drifts through the sky. It goes where the wind takes it, open and free, finding its way. We agreed that this was a perfect name for the studio.

The studio began to attract a lot more dancers: New York City Ballet dancers, some from ABT [American Ballet Theatre], some from the Graham and the contemporary world, as well. So, he would be teaching down there, and I was running the administrative side, having not done anything quite like that in America before, learning a lot as I went along. He began thinking about ways to get across the message he was trying to get over in the class, and maybe using some equipment. At first, he wanted to find something that would help the dancers with turning—it was just sort of simplistic sort of things and ideas. But gradually, *that* led to a whole lot more. This is a story I’ve related, that’s been sort of documented, except I don’t think now it’s referred to, or used, or referenced by anyone in the Gyrotonic community.

42 Govinda, *The Way of the White Clouds*.

We literally made the first machine out of salvaged products off the street: two revolving chairs which provided the turning handles, a wooden door which became the base of the seat, some old carpeting we found in ABC Carpeting's remnants department, and some nuts and bolts. That was how the very first piece of equipment got built.

From that, gradually, Juliu backed off teaching. More and more, his thoughts were going to how he could construct and make this machinery. He wanted a tool that really relayed the kind of organic movement that he had been teaching in his class. I was always there in class, and he'd suddenly get up, walk out, and say, "Well, you take over." So, I'd take over (laughs). I knew the rhythm of the class and the structure of it, and I'd start going. Then finally, it was just me left teaching. He'd stepped out of it altogether. He continued working with some of the special dancers from the New York City Ballet, in a small group in the morning before their ballet class. I would continue to teach the open class to anyone that was coming.

As I started watching people, I realized why he thought he needed to build some equipment to give them some idea of what they should be doing, or how it should be feeling. I thought, "Well, I need to maybe make some changes here, in how people can approach this work."

Liz Waterhouse: Can you compare what you were teaching then, to now? Would I, for example, recognize what you were teaching?

Cartwright's gestures become richer in their dynamic interplay in her response to this question. Sitting on the floor cross-legged, supported by a blue meditation cushion, her dynamic palette and range of movement increases. Rhetorically emphasizing the wide circumference of movements of Yoga Narada, she symmetrically lowers her hands widely to the side and then gathers the space in front of her torso—bringing her hands together, as if gathering something imaginary in the air. Her fingers enliven. After resting her hands on her legs, she then slowly stretches her hands and fingers into full extension—down and forward in front of her pelvis—as she describes the “yang” quality of Juliu (a gesture that is bound, direct, and intensive). Her palms are facing one another, a fist-length apart. In contrast, she places the gesture of “yin” to her right side, transferring her parallel hands beside her (a gesture that is softer and more indirect). The flow between these different methods, she dances with carving curvilinear motions of her two hands, motions more rhythmically in concert—almost like little fishes swimming closely around one another.

Then with two weighted and accented motions, she throws both arms resiliently downwards to emphasize “his” way. In contrast, “her” way is from the inside: flowing, circular, emergent. She articulates this to me through two different gestures. Describing feeling inside, she closes the fingers of her right hand in front of her center, as if holding something delicate, and lifts her arm with her spine before letting the gesture emerge forward and out, to me. This is a simple undulation. I know it from Cartwright's teaching as a foundational premise within

Yoga Narada. Secondly, describing her way of moving forwards, Cartwright glides her hands down forward and out into extension, without any accents or bound hyperflexion of the fingers.

This movement articulation blends into her oral narrative to help explain meaning on multiple semantic levels simultaneously. Changes in presence and movement merge her practice of Yoga Narada with oral life story narrative. This emphasized to me narrative approaches with different gender, movement, rhythm, and energy forms. Also, it describes Cartwright's philosophy of movement pedagogy: not forced, but soulful and holistic, and energetically structured. This example demonstrates how deeply Yoga Narada, Cartwright's movement practice, relates to her ethics and values: She uses her own movement practice to tell her autobiography, and vice versa—her movement practice also records her body knowledge.

Yes, some of it you would. Some of it you would find a lot more athletic. I mean, what we do now in Yoga Narada covers a wide circumference of movement, and action, and stretching, and strengthening. But really, the easiest way to say it is Juliu's approach was more *yang*, more male, and mine was more *yin*, more female. And we could flow back and forth between the two. But that was more his instinct, was the more yang approach, which is where actually his Gyrokinesis has gone on.⁴³ The rhythm of that is completely different from the rhythm that I teach in. Plus, as he left me more and more alone, I started exploring more and more from the inside of myself: "How does this feel? Why am I forcing myself to go into something?" Because if I am, then I know other people are. I needed to find a way—what it was for me, and why I had started doing this, was in order to protect my body and to give it a way forwards that was going to be supported. When Juliu would occasionally come to teach a class, or give a master class, I found that I actually would hurt myself. Because it's that old dancer's instinct: You want to please, you want to be seen to be doing what you're supposed to be doing. But it was not appropriate for my body to do that.

I remember it was twice I kind of threw my back out doing stuff taking class. One time particularly, he was incredibly understanding, and I realized this other side of him, that could be very gentle, very soft, very caring. He really did help me to get back into myself again. Going to see either a doctor or a physical therapist, they would go, "You know, you probably need to have an operation. We need to fuse your spine." I was like, "No, no, no! Not doing that. Not doing that at all." So, with some of the help he gave me, I was able to keep that going. It gave me motivation to develop something that meant people would *not* get injured in the process, that could always be counteracted, and where there were different ways to get into specific movements.

43 See the corporate website for the Gyrokinesis method, <https://www.gyrotonic.com/about/gyrokinesis-method/>, last accessed September 24, 2025.

Really kind of cutting a long story short, as Juliu went on developing—building the machines, designing them—we started then putting the movement from the class onto the machines (see Fig. 5). So, everything in a way that's on the machines, you can take off the machine and you're back on the floor again. While we were doing that, I was progressing with the class. I could more and more see where and what needed to happen. I found my own rhythm with it, as I say. I would talk to Juliu about it and describe what I was doing. He'd listen and he'd go, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's fine. That's okay." Then, more and more, he got into just working on the machines—building and developing them. He's an absolutely inherent creator and inventor. This is really his kind of *soul* that comes through on that (gestures).⁴⁴ I had a lot of respect for the work, but I felt like it needed to also be protective of other people. So, I started sort of going a little bit my own way. We still worked in the studio together. But also, I think he saw the machines as not only a way of doing what he'd originally intended, but also a way of being financially stable—of finding a really good business, and so on. This is where we started to come apart a bit. Because for *me*, it was not about making a business. It was about health. It was about support and nurturing.

In the process too, because he'd been spending so much time in the workshop building the machines—really killing himself doing that—he had a lot of back problems. He said, "I can't sit on the floor anymore. Surely there must be a lot of people who can't do that? So, I'm going to build something." He built these little stools. They were like little mushrooms to sit on! (Laughs.) He said, "I have this idea for a class!" Because, of course, once his brain started, he was off. I have to say that the first class he did like that—on the little stools—I hated every minute of it. I was uncomfortable. I was just like, "This is so different from what I want to do." Gradually as that mushroom grew, it got higher and higher, he started developing different ways of how he wanted to move with it. Still in a very organic way. A lot of it I can appreciate. There are a lot of similarities still, with what he had done before, which I have already gone into. Because any kind of movement system like this, they all have the same roots. It's not like you can invent the wheel again. It all, eventually, comes from stuff you've seen, done and know. My feeling is you always pay respect to your roots. The roots come from *way*, way back and a *long* time ago. They can be rediscovered and reborn, but it's not just your invention. It is not. It is an organic system that grows and develops—and can be offered.

For me, it's always: You are offering a key, for someone to be able to open the door. I'm not going to open the door for them, but I'll give them the key to open the door. It's up to them how much they want to open the door. It doesn't matter if they only open it a little bit: That's enough for them. Other people want to fling the door open.

44 On the word "soul," Cartwright makes the undulating gesture of circular breathing from Yoga Narada described previously.

You go, “Be careful!” It’s a bit like Pandora’s box. I think anyway, life is a continual growth. You’re always growing, you’re always discovering, there’s always something new. It’s the same with how I feel about Yoga Narada. It’s never finished. It will never be finished because it will keep growing. That’s how I feel about my Yoga Narada teachers: For me, each one of them is very special. They have something that they bring to it of their own spirit, their own personality, their own interpretation. I feel they’re like little elements that go out in the world! I’m very, very careful about who I choose. Some people, I have to say, “You know, I don’t think it’s really quite time.” Or “It’s lovely that you would like to, but I’m not ready to say yes to that yet.” It’s not that what I have to say is the ultimate word at all. But I want to know that they have the essence of it and that they’re carrying the essence of it forward, communicating it in their way. The relationship I have with all my teachers is very close. There’s always a back and forth, even if I haven’t seen them for a long time, there’s always that reconnecting back in. I value them for that: for their integrity, and their honesty. Wherever they want to take it, that’s important to me.

Juliu and I really came to differ more and more and more on our principles of how we wanted to offer the information. Because by now, he had developed what he then wanted to call Gyrokinesis.⁴⁵ For him, because his mind goes to—and loves going to—different places, he felt he had to make a format. That to me is like instant death, because the moment you have a rigid format, it’s just not alive! I mean, I can see how it does a lot of things for a lot of people, and that’s wonderful. We’re all different in how we receive information or give out information. But I think you find that element of rhythm, that flow that fits with yours, and that didn’t fit mine at all. It was everything I was learning about myself—about my *push*, my aggressivity, if you like—that I wanted to change: that it was not necessary to have that attack, that *proving-yourself* all the time.⁴⁶ It was going to take me down the wrong path. So, it was time to diverge, which we did both personally and then, eventually, professionally.

I would have wished that we could have had a good understanding of why this was happening. This was a natural transition in life, for both of us. That I would always care—and do always care about him—but there also has to be mutual respect. If there isn’t, I have to move away. So, that era came to an end. I continued teaching both the Gyrotonic and what I had originally done. It had started from him but had progressed *so differently*.

45 See footnote 43.

46 During this narration, Cartwright’s physical effort adds to her storytelling. Embodying “push” and “aggressivity,” she drops her right fist in a controlled impact. Suggesting “change,” she turns her right hand upward, cupping her fingers lightly together, like a rose bud. For “attack” she opens fingers with tension and uses impact phrasing. On “proving yourself” she repeats the downward punch, with tension in her facial expression.

Quite a lot of people who take class with me now, they love the rhythm of it. They find it teaches them a great deal. You know, what I teach is not recognized and is repudiated, completely, by the Gyrotonic “headquarters,” by which I mean Juliu and the inner circle of people who run his business. I am not recognized as the co-founder of the first White Cloud Yoga studio. Nor I am allowed to train teachers officially. My workshops and retreats do not count as continuing education. In fact, I lost one of my teachers because she wanted to become a master trainer in Gyrotonic. She was told if she did, she had to stop teaching Yoga Narada. She taught for me for like ten years. Her life choice was that she wanted to become a master trainer. She felt like that was going to give her more financial stability. I wish her well and I have said, “I hope it does bring you what you wanted.” But I have never, ever in any of my teaching, looked at how much money I can make from it. A lot of the times I made nothing. I would take people and just allow them to come for free, because I knew they couldn’t afford it. Because I thought it was more important to give the information, and the energy, and what I believed in. I would make my money somewhere else, enough to live on. I don’t care about having a fortune or anything. It’s not been in my sphere to work like that. I have been very fortunate, very blessed to have been able to do the work that I do—and continue teaching in ballet companies, and so on, and being able to bring some of this work there, too. Being able to stage ballets. So, I’ve been able to survive.

Gradually as time went on, with more work coming in through my yoga, I separated from doing the ballet so much. I would go out and guest teach—also because I was staging [Sir Frederick] Ashton ballets. I am still a member of the Ashton Foundation, and do still stage his ballets, but it’s sort of a little bit less now since the pandemic.⁴⁷ There are many more people who do the staging. So, it just depends. If I’m in a convenient place for them, then fine, I can go and do it.

Liz Waterhouse: Has your work in ballet helped financially?

Hilary Cartwright: Weirdly enough, yes! Which is a very reverse round way of how things normally happen!

Liz Waterhouse: But your motivation was not financial?

Hilary Cartwright: No. I also believe very much in having diversity in my life, in so far as I don’t want to be doing just one thing all the time. I like for my brain to be stimulated in different ways, and to be able to draw on different elements around me. They’re interconnected. I’m not saying that I would go off and run a computer. I recognize my boundaries! But there are other things that I can do and that I was

47 The COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

willing to do, to be able to survive. I did not want to jeopardize or diminish what I believe is something very valuable.

This all took place over a decade: We were together for about nine or ten years, and then I continued to run the studio. By the end, I knew the financial, administration, and everything, but it was beginning to become too much. It was interrupting my work, and I said, “We have to find somebody else to come in and manage the studio.” Because we had two studios at one point, in two different parts of New York. So gradually, we introduced people into running the studio and let other people take that over. I was able to finally step out of that.

Liz Waterhouse: Do you remember the locations of the studios and their dates of operation?

Hilary Cartwright: About five years after the first, we opened a second studio on 72nd St. and Broadway. So, around 1989. We closed that shortly after the stock market fell in 1994. People were not coming to class as regularly. The studio was just not making enough money. A few years later, I think in '97 or '98, Juliu moved the first studio on West 29th to West 61st St. Then, two to three years after he opened it, he decided to dissolve that studio as well, because it wasn't running financially as well as it should have been.

Liz Waterhouse: Why was that?

Hilary Cartwright: I think just not good management in the end—not knowing how to handle the funds. Plus, also, a change in how much interest there was. It wasn't the novelty anymore. There was always Pilates studios that everybody knew. Pilates was more simplistic—didn't take so much kind of processing to do.

Liz Waterhouse: Did you invest and profit equally?

Hilary Cartwright: I financed the whole thing initially. Juliu had no money. So, I financed the studios with my salary from the New Jersey ballet and other outside work.

Figure 5: Hilary Cartwright in Studio Kinétique, Paris, in 2018. Behind her are two Gyrotonic towers.



Photograph by Moraima Gaetmank.

When Juliu closed the main studio, that was quite a shock for all the teachers he'd employed there. They had like two weeks' notice that the studio was closing and were scrambling to see where they were going to work or what was happening to the equipment. I bought two pieces of the equipment. A group of us then got together with our bits of equipment that we'd managed to buy from Juliu and set up in a new studio.⁴⁸ Our clients kind of re-found us, because all the files and records with contact data had disappeared. I lost contact with all my clients, but through word of mouth, people started to find out. I had to start from scratch again, almost. It was not well handled, shall we say. (Laughs.) Anyway—that being said—we pulled together.

Then, I felt the freedom to be able to go with my own flow, my own developments, my own times. When I could go away on my own, reflect on how movement was, what I was observing in my students, and then translating that back into what I knew already and what I wanted to try and discover. Very often, in all of that discovery, realizing it was something somebody else had discovered years and years ago—you know centuries ago. But still, it was good to find it. Not always to be *told* something, but to find it from the inside out.

48 The studio Yogamoves, now known as Fluid Fitness, owned by Lisa DelSignore.

Flow, fluidity, and continuity amplify and connect Cartwright's gestures as she senses and expounds on the freedom she felt at this moment in her life story. Her prior gestures of speaking—casually circulating her right hand—intensify as she closes her eyes, appearing to concentrate internally on her motion before enlarging her gesture and rocking her spine more expansively. Remembering the importance of self-reflection, she appears like a visionary: Cartwright slows her flow by bringing her fingers to her forehead and closing her eyes. She holds this alertness before flossing her arm downwards and extending her fingers forward and out—still with closed eyes—and then repeating that gesture more fluidly. These rhythmical motions all flow in counterpoint to her spoken narrative, helping to drive it forward without any breaks in oral or kinesthetic time.

Cartwright's inward contemplation leads into a memory of her students. She shifts her gaze on a diagonal, squinting and seeming to remember something near, modeling interaction with her hands, before returning her eye contact to me. To conclude, she describes her teaching as knowledge translation, culminating with a motion of both arms—inward to outward—a motion within Yoga Narada called "swimming." This movement sequence fades without a dramatic ending. Cartwright continues speaking while caring for the sole of her right foot—by rubbing it—a gesture that has come and gone throughout the interview. Without adding drama, this presumably unconscious episode of bodily memory—on discovery, body, others—filters poignantly into the narrative, marking this turning point and its positive inflection. Cartwright describes how her experience of movement deepened and she found new self-fulfillment.

So, that's really how Yoga Narada came about. For a long time, it was still known by the studio name of "White Cloud Yoga." Then I was told I could not use that name any longer, because I was not to associate myself with the whole Gyrotonic empire, people said, "Well, it's like yoga for dancers." And I said, "Yeah, it is. But I have many different people. They're not all dancers, and they don't need to be. Everybody has that spirit within them." It's really something more than that. Then, one of my teachers, Jim Phillips, said to me one day, "I was thinking about what to call it. Because I don't know that I could say 'yoga for dancers,' or 'Hilary Cartwright's yoga movement,' You know? I came across this this wonderful traveling monk, called Narada. He believed that through *movement*, through *music*, through *dance*, you could achieve enlightenment as much as sitting on a cushion, looking at a brick wall."

I said, "Oh, my God, that's my man! That's the way that I feel." Narada is always depicted with a lute hanging across him—strung around him. I said, "Would you mind if I took that, and we made that the name?"

He said, "No, no, I think that's lovely." So, it became Yoga Narada. I explained to people, "This is what I feel—Narada's philosophy is how I feel. So therefore this is how I would like for it to be known." I didn't really want *my* name attached to it. It felt really good, and I've been very happy with that name ever since.

Jim Phillips is still teaching workshops for me, and this summer [2025] I will co-teach a retreat with my adopted son, Ryan Carroll, in Den Haag.

Liz Waterhouse: I have one element of Yoga Narada that I thought to bring into our discussion: *dan tien*. Because that's something essential to the practice that I learned through you. Could you talk about that feeling, or motivation?

Hilary Cartwright: The *dan tien*, it's actually a Chinese word. In the English written translation, it's spelled in various ways.⁴⁹ It refers—through classical Chinese teaching and working with the elements and the meridians in the body (she brings both hands to her *dan tien*)—it refers to that central energy point. Which is in the pelvis, like between the belly button and the top of the pubic bone. It's also when you look, and this is centuries back, you look at the Leonardo da Vinci man: when he's standing with his arms spread and the legs spread. Da Vinci said, there is equal distance in any human being from that point to the foot and that point to the hand to his center point. It's an equal distance. That's your center point. That's the axis. So the *dan tien* really is the center of the body, and I talk about the *breath* from the *dan tien*.

Another big influence was the writings of Mantak Chia. He calls it “the inner smile,” and it comes up through all the different chakras.⁵⁰ That feeling of that smile that comes from *deep* inside. It's not just a smile on the face, it comes right from down in the pelvis, right from your gut.

Speaking about the dan tien as “center,” Cartwright makes her right hand into a tight fist, suggesting a quality of strength and gathering. Then, modeling breathing from the dan tien with a gesture, she articulately spirals her fingers into a cupping hand, down in front of her energetic center. With her fingers pointed down, she smoothly pulls her right hand in a straight line up towards her head and then evolves this gesture by splaying her fingers—generously giving and extending her arm in front of her chest, before the hand floats down, completing the cycle. She performs this fluidly without breaking the flow of her speech.

*Citing the influence of Mantak Chia, she adds an “inner smile” to this motion. Demonstrating, she clarifies in both speech and gesture that this quality of presence comes from inner listening. She closes her eyes, now repeating the cycling with both arms. As if dancing a *révère* (the final movements of a ballet class in which one uses the arms to thank and bow*

49 The Western transliteration of the Chinese term 丹田 is variously given as *dāntián*, *dantian*, *dantien*, *dan tian*, and *dan tien*. See Bowman, “Feel the Difference.” In reviewing this manuscript, Cartwright clarified that in the writings she had seen with Chinese references, the spelling had fluctuated between *dan tien* and *tan dien*. For this publication she chose *dan tien*.

50 See Chia, *The Inner Smile*.

to the teacher and musical accompanist), she gracefully opens both arms and her focus, with a transformed, gracious presence, a smile in her eyes and upon her lips. These experiences of breath, center, and flow give key insights into Cartwright's biography of embodied knowledge.

So, yes, the dan tien is central to everything that I talk about. It's hard to access for some people. I found it really difficult in the beginning. I realized I was a shallow breather, even though I was a dancer, even though I did a lot of jumping. I did it all from the upper part of my lung. I wasn't actually getting that full capacity of drawing it in. Yes, the air is in the actual lung, but the energetic force comes from the dan tien. You pull the force and that opens the lungs. As you go progressively up through those chakras, it releases, opens—fills, fills, fills. Then, when you exhale. It's like a gentle subsidence going down.

In the various breathing elements which I use in the Yoga Narada, I always say it's like starting the engine of a car. It has to *purr*, first of all. It gets going. Now, once it gets going—okay—now we can kind of chug along a little bit. Then you get a little bit more stimulating with those sort of breaths (demonstrates).⁵¹ But they're coming—and this is the thing that I still see, like even today when I was teaching. I thought, "How much do I go into this—with them?" I will say it a little bit each time, but it's a very individual journey of being able to find the subtlety inside, that subtlety of that little sniff. I often say, "It's like a little anemone in the sea. It just goes . . ." (demonstrates).⁵² It just makes itself go along that way. It's a gentle little engine, you know? It's not a great big traction engine.

We need that little pulse deep down inside, to know that we can start the motor from there. Like the sipping breath at the beginning of class is just *pulling* energy up through the nervous system. Then, as you exhale, it's taking out the staleness. Now again, it's like pulling from a *pool* of water. You pull that energy, cleansing the spine. (Sighs vocally) Ahhhh. And letting it out. It's like yawning—you know—when (yawns) you're letting out all that stale air, which automatically lets you bring fresh air into your lungs. It's interesting, when you observe people who have some kind of oxygen deficiency, they can be talking and then start to yawn. Which can seem incredibly rude, but actually is a vital necessity for them, to clear out and be able to start getting oxygen back into their body.

We misunderstand so many of the natural, instinctive things that happen in our body, and try and suppress them—which doesn't allow the body actually to function

51 Cartwright demonstrates forms of lightly accented breaths: first the "double inhale" through the nose, and then the "double exhale" through the mouth.

52 Cartwright simulates the slurping sound of a sea anemone gliding through water, illustrating the motion by showing the ocean floor with one hand, and then the pulsing sea creature with the other. The creature moves with a very light accent, floating up and then descending in the water towards the seafloor. This is a metaphor that Cartwright often uses in her training.

as the piece of machinery it really is—the piece of equipment that we have, working on the inside. We see everything on the outside, but there's so much more going on the inside. Which—if it isn't lubricated, and cleansed, and so forth—it can't support you externally. Some people take that to an extreme. I'm not a big advocate of like, people who will do a purge, or they'll do a long fast, or something. I mean, sometimes you get sick and that automatically makes you fast. Now, you can start. "Okay. I'm going to be very careful what I put back into the body now, to get restored."

I think it was from living with Juliu for so long, because he was such an extreme person. He'd go from one extreme to the other so much. I thought that I used to be somebody that went to extremes, but that made me very conscious of how it certainly wasn't good for me. Really, just moderation—finding a balance—was going to be more productive in the long run than one extreme, another extreme. I feel that it puts the body under stress to do that. But I really believe in finding balance—finding moderation in everything you do. That's not to say you can't have fun, you know? Because that's the other extreme to me, is having absolutely nothing. I'm sorry, I don't believe in that.

Liz Waterhouse: Hilarity!

Hilary Cartwright: Hilarity! There, you see. Yeah.

Liz Waterhouse: I remember in the training with you that was an important thing, to bring out the humor. I always see it in your dialogue with people.

Hilary Cartwright: Yeah. It's like not going (sternly), "No, no, no, no!" But it's, you know, (laughs) "I'm sorry, but that's . . ." So, you are never laughing *at* someone you're always laughing *with* someone. And that builds a community. For me, that's what's important.

Vitality, Hip-Replacements, and Aging: "Now, I Am Listening More to My Body."

Liz Waterhouse: I would like to introduce the topic of aging. One aspect of your life story is your two hip replacements. It's a miracle to me that you move so well, after these surgeries. I'd love to hear more about that process.

Hilary Cartwright: Yes, that was a big turning point in my life too. Because here I was. I was practicing yoga for health, maintenance, good training, and all the rest of it, and suddenly began to realize there was something seriously wrong, first with my left hip. I thought that I'd just pulled a tendon or something in my hip, but it got progressively worse. I was teaching a lot of ballet, at the time (places left hand on her left hip). I just found it was excruciating to try and pick my leg up or

show anything with a *développé*. I went to different chiropractors, and healers, and different things.

First, I wasn't willing to admit that, possibly, I was going to have to have a hip replacement. I'd seen a lot of other people go through it and I thought, "No, all the work I'm doing, there's no way I could" But finally, I had to have an X-ray, and even on the X-ray, you could see that I no longer had a rounded acetabulum [end of the leg bone]. It was, it was like a pointy mushroom, which meant that it was not fitting into the socket very well. There was absolutely no coating around it—no cartilage—added to which there were bone spurs where the nerves, particularly from the SI joint [sacroiliac joint], came through. Occasionally, depending how I was moving, those bone spurs would catch the nerve, and it was the most paralyzing sort of pain that I've ever known. I mean, I literally couldn't move for a minute. It got worse and worse. Actually, doing the movements I was doing felt good. It was walking that became the worst thing when I was upright.

I really went in denial about it needing to be done. I thought, "How can I, someone teaching all of this, have to say my body's failed me? I have not been able to maintain it the way I said I should." So, there was ego to be overcome—and pride. There was also recognizing that something needed to be done. I tried every alternative method that I could. I was very beautifully supported by an acupuncturist and by my treasured chiropractor. Finally, I was like, "Okay, I cannot tolerate this pain anymore. I can't cross the road without worrying that I'm going to get run over, because I cannot run if I haven't made it. I'm not able to go up and down stairs properly."

I went to see Doctor [Douglas] Paget, who was a surgeon several dancer friends of mine had gone to, at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York. He loved going to the theater and seeing dancers, and he was the most compassionate person. So, I went, "Okay, that's it. I'm going to do it." In making the decision, first, this was facing age and facing also the fact that in having this, not only was I going to have to admit, "Look, I'm vulnerable, too, and prone to stuff as much as anybody." I may not be able to come back and teach. That was my biggest fear. I thought, "Okay, you have other skills. You can do other things." So, I really looked at my life again, and thought, "Okay, you can reinvent yourself if you have to."

Liz Waterhouse: How old were you?

Hilary Cartwright: I was just coming up for sixty at that point. I had always been a very active teacher, both in ballet and, obviously, in the yoga. I thought, "I don't *know* another way to teach, but maybe I'm going to have to learn that." Which, going fast forward, I gradually have over the years. But it took a while to realize: I don't have to demonstrate everything, you know? It's not necessary: indication. Remembering my past teachers, everything was done through indication. Actually, it's better for the

student because they don't pick up your bad habits, and, they have to think harder. They have to use their brain and not just mimic.

So, I had the operation. It was life-changing in that suddenly I could be relaxed again. I could be happy. Friends came to visit me. I said, "Well, I have to walk. I'm going out for a walk, come with me!" One guy said to me, "My God, she went bounding off across the park!" I was like, "Well, it's good! You know, we're going uphill, downhill. It's good for me!" It's a little scary. The first day, you kind of come to and they go, "Okay. Now, swing your legs out and we're getting out of bed." I go, "Hang on a second. I'm not sure what's happening here. (Laughs.) I have no idea what's going on in my hip."

Liz Waterhouse: Do you remember what it felt like?

Cartwright takes on a different repertoire of gestures than those used previously in the interview to remember and explain this body transformation.

She begins with what appears to be inward listening, shifting her eye focus away from me. She places her right hand, her dominant hand, on the operated hip, opening her left palm upwards—as if to sense and also to keep the flow of her narrative inquiry. While returning to me for narrative contact with her eyes, she appears to be thinking and dialoging with her hip—or recreating this process. Going in and out of the present, she closes her eyes when recounting the numbness. Using her hands, she illustrates the surgery: She jostles her fists to describe separating the bones, and then illustrates the insertion of the prosthesis. She shows repeatedly where on her body this happened, through the posterior insertion, and the intervening muscles. She animates what she learned about her inner anatomy, modeling the bones with her hands. Playfully, she brings her hands together and wiggles her fingers to describe the bone hairs, which allow a merging of prosthetic and bone. Holding her fists together, she defines the stability of foreign and human matter by moving the structure up and down repeatedly; the opposite to the motion of popping out, which she shows suddenly. To conclude, perhaps cathartically, she opens her legs into a straddle to stretch.

Hilary Cartwright: Well, there was a sort of numbness. A bit of me had been separated and something else put in. So, I now have this foreign object there. I was like "You and I have got to come to terms! We needed to figure each other out, as to how we're going to deal with each other."

I'd been told all the things I would not be able to do after I'd had it. At this time, it was not so prevalent to have the anterior insertion operation, this was a posterior insertion which is just *behind* the hip bone. But I learned a lot about it, and I learned a lot about bones: How bones breathe, and how they have little hairs inside. So that when the prosthesis goes into your femur—why you have to be careful in the beginning is because the little hairs inside the bone are growing into the holes in the prosthesis, to hang on so that everybody's united, and in harmony together, and

will work together. If you don't let that growth happen, then it can pop out very easily because it's not properly anchored yet. Plus, all the ligaments and tendons have to grow back, and the muscles have to strengthen. Walking is the best thing for it, but it does also need some specific exercises to reengage the glute [gluteus muscles], the hamstring, the sartorius muscle. All those things need to kind of get back into gear.

I was also going back, at that time, to teach at ABT [American Ballet Theatre] summer school. I think it was just about six weeks after I'd had the operation. I was a little nervous about how that was going to be, and what I was going to be able to do with young students. Plus, they'd asked me to choreograph a piece, which I used to do every summer for them. My physical therapist, Marika [Molnar], insisted that I had at least one elbow crutch. Especially when I was on the subway, just to keep people away from my hip. But it actually was really good therapy for me: I was careful. I found I could start working again, and it felt good. All the things that I'd been told I wouldn't be able to do—like turning-in and using the hips and stuff—I very gently explored. It gave me a great awareness of the pelvic basin, of where I was holding, what I needed to do. Not pushing it—not pushing beyond what I thought I was capable of doing, but gradually finding my body was so happy not to be in pain. And amazingly, I was able to go back to being able to show how the students should prepare going into a split—so that their hips and pelvis were in the right place, square to the front, where their leg would be.

I had to go back for a checkup, obviously, with Doctor Paget. (Laughs.) I was talking about some of the things I was doing, and he was like, "It's amazing! It's amazing!"

Liz Waterhouse: This is the hip series on the Gyrotonic machine that I learned from you?

Hilary Cartwright: That's right! Before everything had broken apart with Gyrotonic, I did in fact then develop a program for teachers to learn, and which I taught to them in many places, on working with people with hip replacements. I wrote a whole treatise on it. Then, I would talk about, "You have to know whether your client has a posterior or an anterior insertion." Different rules apply for it.

I consider it a little bit of a fallacy that having the anterior is a quicker process of healing than the posterior. Any surgery you have is a shock to the body, and the body has to be respected for the shock that it's had, and you need to come back gently. You cannot just rush back in. I saw people do that going, "Oh, I had an anterior. I'm fine, you know?" Then, complications would occur a couple of months later. You have to respect the body.

Aside from two hip replacements, I also had two major abdominal surgeries later in life. When I was a young dancer, around twenty years old, I had my appendix

out.⁵³ Later, the scar from that had attached itself to my small intestine, eventually blocking it. The first surgery—which scraped the scar tissue away—left a huge vertical scar I had to heal from. That was another time I wasn't sure how it would be coming back. Then after the first hip replacement I had a second incident when the small intestine (where the scar had been scraped off) lost some of its elasticity. As you eat, it expands and then it contracts back. This is naturally how the intestine works. Well, like a piece of old elastic in a pair of knickers [panties] (laughs) gradually over time, it would get twisted and turned. Couldn't eat—just felt really, really uncomfortable.

It went on for quite a long time until it actually did tie itself in a knot. It was very dramatic. I had to go into hospital in the middle of the night. First they thought it was diverticulitis. Then, fortunately, the house doctor on duty that night said, "I want to do another X-ray, I don't think that's what it is." Which was correct. They said, "Okay, you're going into surgery as soon as we get the surgeon here, because otherwise you could die." That was fairly shocking. They took out about three feet [90 cm] of small intestine—you have so much small intestine tucked in there—and then they reattached whatever ends were left together. They also took out something called the ileocecal valve, which is the valve between the large and the small intestine. I had to really relearn how to deal with digestion and with food, because I couldn't take anything that was too fibrous in the beginning. That took about a year of figuring out what I could eat and not eat. Then, that over time has gotten much better, and it's not such a problem, now. Then, came the second hip after that.

Thus, I had several "stop-and-look-at-yourself moments." My tendency to overdo—pull back, pull back—constant reminders. I thought, "Am I so stubborn and thick headed that I have to have these very big question marks put in front of me? Apparently, not able to see the smaller asterisks along the way?" No, I have a big thing put there to go, "Uh-ah. No, stop."

So anyway, after that abdominal surgery, then I had the second hip, which was a real surprise. This was 2010, so I was sixty-seven/sixty-eight years old. Came out of nowhere. They still don't know how it happened because I suddenly started feeling acute pain. I thought, "No, don't tell me the second hip needs to go. As far as I knew, there was nothing that wrong with it. But it turned out that somehow it had cracked. The head of the femur had cracked. I have no recollection—no fall—nothing that I could think of. Anyway, that had to happen quickly. Same wonderful doctor. Same posterior operation. However, the sweet man thought he was doing me a great favor, because he said, "Oh, my gosh! You know, I learned so much from you, about how much rotation you could get back in rehabilitation." So, he put a different prosthesis in from the one on the other side. I was perfectly happy with the one on the left

53 Cartwright, *Dancing for a Living*, 55.

side. He said, "You'll have more turnout." I'm like, "I'm sixty-eight! I don't need more turnout at this point in my life! This is bizarre!"

Something didn't get stitched back right. Marika and I—we worked, and worked, on it. She finally said, "There's something that's not reattached." Because it's like your brain is telling your muscle to do something and there's no message getting down there. I was still able to go back to teaching amazingly. I would do a tendu front: left leg stayed nicely turned-out, right leg would start turned-out and then slowly turn parallel (gestures.) I go (speaking to her leg), "Who are you?!" (Both laugh.) I could start the movement; it could not complete it.

What you can see when I sit, this [right] leg is much higher up than this one [left]. So something is going on back there. We don't know quite who or what is not cooperating, but he's not. Unfortunately, what it does—it tends to make both the piriformis [muscle] and the glute medius [gluteus medius muscle] try and do everything instead. Whoever is out of the picture, they try and take over. Therefore, I need to have either acupuncture or massage on that—on a good maintenance level—to keep those muscles relaxed, because otherwise it just gets so tight. But I feel well. That is small compared to not being able to walk, or worse: not being able to do anything.

That's one of the things—all these surgeries—for reflecting upon: "I have been so fortunate. I've been taught my lesson, but I have been given benefits afterwards." It's also helped me as, talking of aging, which you asked me about. I never feel the need to hide my age or say, "Oh, well, I'm getting older." Well, yeah, I'm now eighty, you know? I'm constantly sort of surprised at having got to that point. I don't feel that inside. I've spoken with a lot of other people who are also aging or becoming older. When you enjoy life, you keep that spirit still of the youth that you were. It's not that I want to try and look young, or be young. The reason I move is not because I'm trying to show that I can move. It's because I *enjoy* it! I *like* it! I want to be able to enjoy it and say to people, "Don't just look at me and say, 'Oh, but I could never do that.'" It doesn't *matter* what I do. Or what you do. If you enjoy stuff, you do it. You know? That's how it is.

Now, I am listening more to my body. I'm listening. This is the way I do it. As I still have been coaching and working with dancers. I can show them from my upper body. I remember the wonderful coaches that I talked about, in the early part of my life. Oh my God, what I got from them—just from seeing that intention. It's something you can't teach someone, but they can gain from it. They can feel it, and they can get the intention. Then, they take it, and then it's theirs. It is truly theirs, then. This is the beautiful thing to see in anybody, is that they are fulfilling their purpose—their full aura, if you like. So, I'm gradually learning. Then, having a partner who is the same age now (laughs). Constantly reminding him, with a similar mentality, that: "Just because you used to do it five years ago, doesn't mean that you can still hop

up and down off a tractor, and jump up and down, and scramble up through the undergrowth!"

Liz Waterhouse: I find it so inspiring that you moved to a new country, from the US to Spain, just a few years ago. This is wonderful too, that you keep on going for new adventures.

Hilary Cartwright: It's funny because we didn't even think of it really as being an adventure. Where we were wasn't right. We needed to do something else. We'd gone through COVID; it still wasn't over. There were still things to be seen, things to be done, places to go. That's why we just picked up and said, "Okay, let's go!"

We're very fortunate to have found such a beautiful house in such a beautiful little village. It was just the epitome of everything we could hope for at this point in time. Trying to remain a little realistic about the fact that probably this wasn't the place that we would end up with, eventually, because it is remote. Even though we're in a little village, we are a long way away from the normal sort of services or things that people think are necessary. We had to think ahead a little bit and ask, "Well, what does happen when we can no longer drive?" I mean, I will be very conscious of the day I feel like I should not be driving anymore.

Liz Waterhouse: Do you miss New York City?

Hilary Cartwright: I lived there for over thirty years and loved it. I felt, "This is my home." I am a New Yorker. But over the years, I was aware that I did not want to grow old—really old—in New York. It is not an old person's city. It's for young people—a lot of rush and energy. For a long time, it was fine because I would go away for like four or five weeks at a time and then come back. So, it was balanced enough, but then COVID came. The city was so completely different during COVID. It was quiet. I loved the year that I spent in New York during COVID, actually. It was very sobering, but reflective, and a time to gather myself.

I was very fortunate: I lived half a block away from Central Park. Central Park, they call it the lungs of the city, and it really was. It was the most nurturing thing. So, every day I went into Central Park. Also, I started writing poetry again. It brought out all the other things in my life that I want to do, that I keep saying, "I'll do that when I'm older." I'm going to run out of time soon to do all the things that I wanted to do when I was older! So, it was a preparation for knowing that I could leave the city. Then joining my partner Raynel [Chavez] in Santa Fe [New Mexico]—which is another beautiful place—that shifted everything so much. Having shed basically thirty years behind me (laughs), to move again after another year. It was like, "Okay, fine. Here we go." Gradually, letting go some of the debris along the way. It was very lightening and life-affirming.

So, I talk often to my friends in New York. Many left, some have stayed. I get a little thought every now and then, “Oh, I’d like to go back and visit! Just for a short time.” It might be a terrible shock going back and finding that noise, that clamor.

Liz Waterhouse: Do you miss your contact with dancing, or dancers there?

Hilary Cartwright: Yes, and that’s shifting. It’s probably time, you know? There are many other beautiful generations of ex-dancers coming up, who have a lot to offer, and can work with *this* generation—which is very different from most of the people I knew and worked with. What I love is I still have links with certain young ones in companies. That’s like having little jewels. Knowing that those little jewels are there, and they have the same ethics, the same feeling about our art—the same respect, the same passion for it.

Liz Waterhouse: Yes, other dancers carry on your values and your teaching, developing these principles with the next generation. Thank you, Hilary, for these extended conversations.

Chapter 6: Chris Lechner

Introduction

Chris Lechner is a dance artist with a unique transnational perspective on dance and movement practices whose body-biography provides the last chapter of this research. Born Christoph Lechner in 1963 in Yangon, Myanmar, and raised in India, Lechner's childhood experiences of international cultural exchange and artistic practice were enriched by being the son of parents working on dance and art curation; both were directors of the Goethe-Institut, a worldwide network of cultural institutions supported by the Federal Republic of Germany.¹ Raised in Kolkata and Delhi, Lechner moved to Salzburg at the age of eight and then two years later to Ulm. He excelled in martial arts—judo and tae-kwon do—before discovering ballet, training at Theater Ulm and the John Cranko Ballet School in Stuttgart. For the next decade and a half, between 1981 and 1995, Lechner worked as a ballet dancer in the Hamburg, Zurich, and Stuttgart Ballets, as a corps de ballet member and soloist

Today Lechner is an agile dancer in his early sixties, living in Bern and working as a contemporary dance artist and yoga teacher. He travels to Southeast Asia as often as possible—every couple of years—when his schedule and health allow. His stories are articulated to me in English, his first language growing up in India and my mother tongue. They reflect our ongoing collaboration and friendship, which has always included elements of mutual life review. Lechner's selection of topics and narrative choices were certainly influenced by our shared ballet literacy and aesthetic positions as contemporary dancers in Europe. Lechner

1 The Goethe-Institut, founded in 1951 by the Federal Republic of Germany, advances cultural and social exchange worldwide, promoting and providing context for Germany and Europe's diversity. This involves language courses, artistic exchange programs, grants for artistic production and presentation, and activities across institutes in nearly a hundred countries. The Goethe-Institut has adapted politically from a vehicle of cultural export to its current role promoting discursive and aesthetic education and critical reflection, participating in the changing discourses of culture and postcolonialism. See Lentz, *Das Goethe-Institut*. For a recent perspective on the role of dance within the context of the Goethe-Institut, see Landwehr, "Open for Everything."

narrates his body-biography with reference to this common ground: looking back upon his life as a dancer, foregrounding contexts with which I am familiar. His narration echoes and ricochets through references to intercultural contacts, cutting-edge bodywork, canonical choreographers, and improvisers and teachers in freelance networks. We hope our readers will share some reflective and critical competencies—from critical dance studies, postcolonialism, and critical race theory—to challenge the dominance of Western hegemonic narratives.² Lechner's stories address—sometimes implicitly, at other moments explicitly—how these societal and theoretical currents have influenced his self-understanding as a White male dancer, traversing cultural contexts and negotiating what is the “contemporary” edge of avant-garde dance.

Lechner's perspective of moving geographically between east and west and his vantage point, which shifts across classical and contemporary dance, give substance to his stories. He has belonged to and defected from ballet, a professional reorientation that cultivated his capacity to describe his subsequent re-education and transformation of aesthetic identity. Taken together, these travels in space, time, and aesthetic registers split open and decenter the White body politics and male gaze that, as Lechner remarks during our conversations, are typically robust in artists within a “ballet bubble.”³ By contrast, Lechner has learned to live and make his body differently—even multiply. One of the key questions that his body-biography raises is therefore how a person's physical body accumulates a sensorimotor history, or habitus, while remaining adaptable and mutable; another is to what extent one's body and self are perceived as coherent. Lechner's life stories highlight instances of rupture and transition—including moments of exciting inspiration, devastating injury, intensive sickness, and profound travel—describing processes shaping his self-identity that reveal his questions, rather than general answers.

Another motor of self-reflection and change in Lechner's life is yoga—a conduit to learning an affiliated cornucopia of bodywork and training practices, within and adjacent to dance.⁴ Beginning in the mid-nineties, Lechner drew upon his cultural and kinesthetic capital as a virtuosic performer to work as a freelance artist

2 For unfamiliar readers, we can recommend the following texts that intersect theoretically with Lechner's body-biography: George, *The Natural Body in Somatics Dance Training*; Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*; Dixon Gottschild, “Racing in Place”; McCarthy-Brown, “Dancing with Race”; Morris, “Dance Studies/Cultural Studies”; Prichard, “From Color-Blind to Color-Conscious”; Sarkar Munsu, *Mapping Critical Dance Studies in India*; Raman, “Indian Dance Criticism as Decolonial Post-Performance Performative”; Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 223–41.

3 A term Lechner used in our interviews.

4 Lechner's background spanned release technique, Contact Improvisation, osteopathy, GYROTONIC®, windsurfing, fascial weightlifting, Body-Mind Centering, Continuum Movement, and Body in Water/Watsu® inspired therapy.

across production networks in the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, and India. This traveling and interlacing of networks facilitated his career transition from ballet to contemporary dance. His body-biography describes the rewards as well as the precarity of this transition: both financially and in terms of fissions in self-image, belonging, and identity. Lechner creatively juggled roles as a dancer, choreographer, improviser, and teacher. Pursuing work and relationships, he relocated to Birmingham in 1995, to Bern in 1998, then to Brighton in 2000; in 2006 he returned to India, living between Almora, Bangalore, Arambol, Kolkata, and Delhi; he settled in Bern again in 2011. Crafting a life comprised of contiguous projects and workshops, Lechner composited and self-styled his own movement practices in dialogue with practitioners he met along the way—Laurie Booth, Gary Carter, Russell Maliphant, Lisa Nelson, Steve Paxton, and Kirstie Simson, to name but a few. The details of these investigations are brought out more kinesthetically in the text that follows, interweaving my observations of his teaching practices and our biographical conversations.

For the last decade, Lechner has focused his energy locally in Switzerland, teaching contemporary dance and yoga. He also collaborates with his wife, Sunita Asnani, on artistic projects foregrounding politics of diversity and inclusion. My relationship with “Chris” has grown out of friendly contact within the freelance dance community of Bern. In our first conversation, some ten years ago, we compared the different work we had each done with choreographer William Forsythe. Lechner had danced with “Bill” in the early eighties, as had I over twenty years later.⁵ While writing my dissertation in dance studies at the University of Bern, I became a regular within Lechner’s class community, taking his dance classes as well as some private lessons in fascial training. Over the years, we exchanged teaching materials and clients as part of the movement studio Drehpunkt. We also made local performances (see Fig. 1) and hosted movement research sessions with collaborators. This rapport enriched our dialogues for this body-biography.

5 Lechner’s participation in Forsythe’s *Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (1980) is elaborated upon during the text that follows. I was a dancer in Ballett Frankfurt (2004) and The Forsythe Company (2005–2012).

Figure 1: Liz Waterhouse and Chris Lechner rehearsing Tangled at Bern Schloss Holligen (2019).



Photo by Sunita Asnani.

Figure 2: Chris Lechner demonstrating during a dance class on Zoom, May 24, 2023.



Screenshot by E. Waterhouse.

Writing Lechner's Body-Biography

The text that follows was given impulse by interviews recorded in Bern and fostered by my observant participation in Lechner's contemporary dance classes.⁶ Lechner was extended an open invitation to collaborate on a process of sharing life stories and reflecting on the bodily aspects of his dance career and biography. The collaborative and open-ended aspects were comfortable for us as movement improvisors, at ease with seeing where the verbal and nonverbal dialogue would go. We also agreed that our life review would work mutually: meaning he could also ask *me* questions. Lechner's dialogues aided my own life-writing presented in the interlude between Part I and Part II.

The audio recordings of our conversations were transcribed word-for-word, including every audible body-thud, breath, and pause. We chose not to make video recordings, because we wished to preserve an open and intimate frame, without the pressure to perform for an "outer eye." Persistently challenging movement's

6 Our recorded interview conversations took place on September 1, 2, and 14, 2022, in Bern at Freiform dance studio—the same space in which I interviewed Christine Kono. For references to the audio recording, transcripts, and metadata, see Lechner, "Body-Biography Interview with Chris Lechner"; Waterhouse, "Metadata Body-Biography Interview Chris Lechner." I attended classes from fall 2022 to winter 2024.

ephemerality, I used my short-term memory after each interview and dance class to generate descriptions interpreting our gestures, movements, touches, and affects.⁷ The studio framework of the life review enabled us to practice bodywork and improvise dancing comfortably.

Lechner's interview transcripts were, however, the most difficult to edit into life-writing of these four case studies. This is not because of any deficit, but rather a result of the extensive layering of our oral conversation with interactive movement practice. Also, Lechner's teaching and movement research were constantly evolving. Through my subsequent notation of vocal attributes and physical interactions, his life stories became a fascinating and complex record: littered with conversational turn-taking that elongated themes across multiple pages. Noticeable gaps of silence also manifested, in which we practiced bodywork or dance, listening to one another with our senses. Suspecting that these augmented transcriptions were too fragmented and specialized for most readers to follow, I deposited these fascinating traces for scholars to encounter in the SAPA archive.⁸ Homing in on one seminal example of embodied narration, the first section of this body-biography, "A Movement Lesson," provides a gateway into Lechner's autobiographical reflection. By enhancing the interview transcript with my memories of our movement interactions and editing extensively for readability, I allow the reader to take part in a physical dancing lesson with Lechner that highlights the influence of partnering in his body-biography: i.e. learning to dance by touching and moving with others.

The subsequent sections of Lechner's "Life Stories" discuss his embodied knowledge from the perspective of the present day, through retrospective reflection on his biography. After studying the interview recordings in depth, I selected and arranged excerpts pertaining to my interests in dance history, somatic practice, and Lechner's experience of his own and others' bodies. While these stories preserve the oral form of an interview, Lechner and I worked together to co-edit them extensively. Lechner's literacy, locality in Bern, and digital competence were invaluable to the publication of these stories. He was quick and clever in editing together, enabling our collaboration to transition into the mediated space of academic writing. Lechner also searched his private archives for photos and video materials, which are referenced here. Last but not least, I reached out to his collaborators, not all of whom are yet part of dance lexicons and encyclopedias, to add their biographies to the footnotes.

7 This was facilitated by the automated transcription software, Sonix, which enabled me to write notes directly into the first draft of the transcript, just hours after the experience. I was also surprised at how well the orality of the interview enabled me to conjure back the memory of complex sequences of both dancing and touch-based bodywork.

8 See footnote 6.

Lechner's Teaching

My participation in Lechner's "Tuesday classes" in Bern provided a common ground of kinesthetic knowledge, impacting our conversations about autobiography and dancing bodies. Much to my surprise, they became a source of biographical research in their own right—on which I report in this section.

The small community of dancers in Bern who avidly take these courses includes both freelance dancers and non-professionals, intermixing harmoniously.⁹ Typically, Lechner commenced these classes with short anatomical lectures—using digital pictures from anatomy books, models of the skeleton (see Fig. 2), and/or images of animals and athletes in motion. These opening principles then launched further warm-up exercises, followed by dynamic movement-research proposals, all with inspiring playlists in the background for ambience. Lechner has never, in my experience, presented choreographic combinations or movement phrases as part of his training, as might often be the case in certain contemporary dance technique classes. Rather, Lechner's courses present impulses for movement improvisation, which he plans and motivates carefully. By providing a context in which each student may explore their own responses to his proposals—adapting them to their bodies and dance experiences—Lechner's classes cultivate embodied awareness, coordination, compositional attunement, and inspiration through play. A key principle is sensing the feeling of one's body moving in dialogue with gravity, and the energetic power of the body to spring and rebound into action. To an onlooker, the class would not look like a "free-for-all" improvisation jam, but a group of persons moving similarly. This implies that his anatomic images shape coordination collectively, and that the norms of Lechner's class build common understanding, rather than exploring divergent movement proposals.

Lechner's pedagogical approach brings together creative impulses with learning-by-doing, and each class concludes with time for further reflection and individual questions. Along with his creative teaching tools for conveying images and anatomical principles, Lechner also employs his dancing body to motivate his students. He dances beside them, appearing to share their enjoyment as well as to set an example. He thereby creates motivation for performing highly virtuosic and kinesthetic tasks, space-swelling, gravity-sensing improvisation—rolling, inverting, lunging, twirling, and springing across the studio. Lechner typically speaks about movement while demonstrating his ideas physically, then invites students to "have a play." In response, the students move all together or in small groups—weight-sensing, with loose flow, and changing attitudes towards space

9 Both women and men, predominantly White.

and time—mimicking his body-state without precisely copying his movement.¹⁰ Themes for the 2022–2023 lessons include the springy potential of the forefoot, the pliancy of the “core,” the resilience of “folding” the hip deeply into spiraling motions, the dynamic potential of softening the front ribs to sense gravity in the exhale, changing motion patterns through “undoing,” and, last but not least, the dynamics of twisting the ribs while extending curious, reaching arms.¹¹

After attending his classes, I challenged myself to articulate in words “Chris’s” singular body and his dancing body. On the street, his physique blends in with the crowd. Lechner, as he explains in his interview, is short for a male ballet dancer (at 1.71 m or 5 foot 8 inches). Despite this, what strikes me foremost is the energy his body imparts—to myself and others—when he is wearing athletic clothes and eager to engage in dance transmission. As referred to repeatedly in his life stories, Lechner’s kinesthetic impact on others became a signature of his identity: an awareness of his own performative power and potential as a movement leader. In his constitution, I observe that Lechner’s wise muscles are soft, contractile, and fluidly interlinked. He has—like his gurus William Forsythe and Steve Paxton—three attributes: incredible fast-twitch coordination, a balanced use of strength in the upper and lower limbs, and flexibility (without hypermobility) to make high kicks, twists, deep knee bends, and squats. Dancing barefoot, his toes grip the floor, twitching with alacrity. Lechner usually keeps his ice-blue eyes a bit fuzzy as he dances, following his toppling, or slicing, or springing motions with a gaze suggesting inward listening. His surprising talent for theatrics surfaces only intermittently—when he exaggerates to make students laugh at the kinetic difficulty of his proposals. After demonstrating, you hear Lechner surprisingly more out of breath than his students. His endurance is limited by a prior lung infection and tissue biopsy, also described in the life stories that follow.

My participant observation of Lechner’s teaching revealed that dance teachers may include life stories within their lessons as a means to offer context, explicate their motivation, and engage in reflection about their approach to dancing. While taking class in parallel to our research, I observed Lechner’s teaching responding to our biographical interviews and began to bring a notebook to class. On multiple occasions Lechner introduced or contextualized his proposals with anecdotes about how the practices were important to his self-discovery as a dancer—and would look me in the eye as he did so. He described different colleagues’ influences or seminal exercises; then the class would “have a go,” trying them physically. This suggests that

10 Laban terms for Lechner’s effort would be “resilient” phrasing, shifting between an elastic and a weighty quality. Lechner’s improvisations typically maintain a state of weight-sensing and free flow, while changing efforts in space and time articulately. See Maletic, *Dance Dynamics*, in particular on “resiliency” see p. 73.

11 The citations in this paragraph are all common terms within Lechner’s teaching.

contexts of teaching are rich environments that shape and share body-biographies, between teachers and students.¹²

Through participant observation of these studio laboratories, I studied how Lechner logically interlinked body-practices and recreated discoveries for his students, curating journeys built from his personal body-biography. He narrated associatively, following kinesthetic logics that aimed to teach and transmit technologies of embodiment. I observed Lechner interlinking categories and movement styles: martial arts, dance, yoga, somatics, and myofascial science, all contributing to the purpose of constituting dancing bodies and selves. I saw Lechner's extensive ballet prowess as he added tours en l'air and virtuosic spins to his contemporary classes. His martial arts background I sensed reflected in simple movement studies—kicking, tumbling, walking, retracting—as well as his understanding of a moving body's energetic center and powerhouse: inside the pelvis, beneath the belly button. Excited by these pedagogical narrations of his life stories, as a researcher I attended to them by feeding the information forward into our editing process—bringing content from the classes adjacent to stories from Lechner's life story interviews, and fusing these in the form of our cooperative life-writing.

Describing Lechner's dancing body brought my own embodiment into the analytical process—as Lechner's movement partner, student, and scholarly collaborator. The reader will encounter these impulses in the form of my movement description and questions within the interview dialogue. Moving with Lechner as a “middle-aged” dancer/dance scholar reawakened distant memories of training as an American student in a mélange of “release technique” practices and styles.¹³ Our bodies, though differently trained and styled as male and female, are, in terms of gravity, similarly weighted and scaled—allowing us to connect and counterbalance rather easily. Moreover, our shared references to common training

12 This theoretical argument has also been proposed by dance scholar Yvonne Hardt, who examines teaching as praxeological exchanges. See Hardt, “Grasping Practice,” 108–10.

13 By “release technique” I refer to a collection of Western dance practices in which movements are trained by letting go of excess muscular tension and adjusting habits of postural binding, producing a style of soft virtuosity (in contrast to other techniques emphasizing achievement of bound form and shape, such as classical ballet and dance techniques like Graham and Cunningham). The term circulates around the work of Trisha Brown, Joan Skinner, Barbara Mahler, Susan Klein, and the somatic influence of Body Mind Centering, Alexander Technique, and Feldenkrais. Release techniques are still practiced today and can be traced to developments and frictions between dance styles within American dance networks since the 1970s. In discussion, see issues 18 and 19 of *Movement Research Performance* from 1999. My exploration of release technique occurred in the contexts of the American Dance Festival, my MFA studies at The Ohio State University, and as a freelance artist in New York City between 2001 and 2003. See Bales and Netti-Fiol, *The Body Eclectic*; Wittmann, “Historical Context: Lance Gries. Release and Alignment Oriented Techniques.”

practices allow me to copy Lechner's movement, despite never having quite the same talent to abandon myself, tumbling with gravity, trustfully across the floor. Lechner's movement vocabulary—involving swinging, squatting, rolling, falling, cartwheeling, and hand-standing—is performed with virtuosity, by using all five limbs (arms, legs, and head) to travel dynamically through space. The kinesthetic feeling of Lechner's dancing is very different from the controlled verticality of ballet, as well as the isolated, twisted, and polyrhythmic body I practiced for years as a Forsythe dancer—problem-solving spatial tasks of cognitive and conceptual thinking in motion.¹⁴ Lastly, touch-based partnering and somatic bodywork were vital references in both our body-biographies, as will be explored vividly in the next section. Conducting this life-story research has evolved our comprehension of our tangled dancing bodies, their similarities as well as their different experiences of dance history.

Life Stories

A Movement Lesson

Meeting at a small dance studio in Bern to commence our movement research at the intersection of autobiography and the body, Lechner and I were both eager to engage in mutual life review. We changed quickly into our training clothes, athletic pants and light T-shirts, and I rushed to set up my audio recorder.¹⁵ Unlike a formal oral history interview, typically conducted seated and commencing with the interviewer thanking the narrator and posing the initial question, Lechner had enough rapport with me to start speaking without any performative gesture signaling that “the research” had begun. He started sharing stories as I set up the audio recorder. Then, with the words reproduced below, he enthusiastically took the floor to narrate. I appreciated his decision to use a private lesson format, guiding me to experience some of the physical knowledge that he has learned with my body—between our bodies, both in motion. This reenactment of knowledge provides a portal onto Lechner's embodied history.

Chris Lechner: So, we could just do something very simple today. These are lessons that I remember from my experience as a contemporary dancer that I sometimes revisit in one manner or another. I thought I could string together some of these ideas physically with you. We should remind readers encountering this lesson that

14 Waterhouse, *Processing Choreography*; Siegmund, William Forsythe.

15 This condensed transcript is from the audio recording our of interview on September 2, 2023, at Freiform Atelier in Bern, 0:00 – 0:53. Those looking to study the original language of dance transmission are encouraged to retrieve the word-for-word transcript in the SAPA archive. See footnote 6.

this does not represent the material in my current teaching practice, but I think it shares an example of recent ideas that have been inspiring me, coming from new rehabilitation work.¹⁶ Let's have a go. I'm sure you will bounce off it in some way or other.

Hara is here (he touches his energy center at the base of his belly). And sacrum is opposite. If you let your breath fill your lungs, and maybe contract a little bit here (points to above his pubis) on the exhalation. You're getting a sense of how you can stand, with this whole area filling and emptying but also condensing a little bit.

Now, you can come into one heel while you're doing it—then the whole foot, to even more on the front foot. Change sides and try the other leg. What does it mean to actually go there? Without over-tensing the body? What shifts back? Keep expanding the breath, then contracting slightly.

And then, maybe what we can do with this—just letting the arms hang. And then just half a forward bend with the torso. Just coming forward, a little bit, but still breathing here (Lechner points to where his hands were, on the hara and sacrum). And testing—shifting the body's weight a little further back.

Liz Waterhouse: Is this right? Should I hinge more? Or curl?

Chris Lechner: No curl. But that's right, just sensing that you're almost falling back.

Now, you can start dangling your arms—either in circles, or swinging them—accessing the breath, expanding the lower belly, and gathering it. And you're almost toppling over! It's just to disorient your organization enough that we have something to work with. And you see how there's some grounding needed so that it's possible. Without that you're constantly destabilizing too much.

Very slowly from there, now come back into standing. Keep circling and dangling your arms, as if you have weights in your hands, and they're just pulling everything a little bit down. Keep dangling, dangling the arms.

And now, start giving the arms swing! It's not the navel doing it. It's more like the ribs giving the arms the swing. The ribs have started to massage around the diaphragm a little bit. It's shifting the weight. It's loading the center.¹⁷

Super. Yeah, it's right there (laughs). Now maybe even higher (our arms go higher, faster, becoming freer, looser).

16 For example, Lechner's current teaching explores physical therapist Dave O'Sullivan's exercise of "the soleus slouch," described on his website, <https://thegotophysio.com/the-soleus-slouch-the-best-lower-limb-rehab-exercise-your-patient-is-not-doing/>, last accessed September 26, 2025.

17 Lechner has developed this lesson drawing on ideas from Irish physiotherapist David Grey, who had influenced many of Lechner's teachers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Lechner studied Grey's online materials. See Grey's website, <https://www.davidgreyrehab.com/pages/david-grey-rehab>, last accessed September 26, 2025.

From there, just getting a sense of how you could be taken for a ride around your axis, over the heel. It's coming from swinging. (Lechner exclaims delightfully as he swings his arms into a one-legged spin on his heel. His standing foot, spinning on the floor, is flexed and his arms fly out to the side for balance). You don't close in that swinging energy. You let it take its course.

Eventually you're going to come onto other parts of your foot. From here, you're going to probably roll over to the front of the foot. Yeah! (We play, swing, and spin.)

If you go into first position, turning out the legs, you play with the same thing. Take your shoulders around, but not the navel. So, from here, you're reaching (Lechner extends his arms gently, coming out of an arm-swing, almost like an arabesque line of the arms).

Liz Waterhouse: It's like a pirouette!

Chris Lechner: Yeah, it is. So, then there are all these places we can move to. But the navel can stay quieter, more gathered. Whereas the ribs, lungs, diaphragm are getting more interesting, in a way.

Liz Waterhouse: That's new to me. It's not a way I'm familiar with how to use my center.

Chris Lechner (laughs): Yeah! We're so used to kind of articulating a lot here (in the pelvis), no? This is more of a "martial arty" thing right now. But this is a nice way to practice it, simply. And this has to do with what we're going to do next, with partnering.

To begin the next lesson, we stand face to face, Lechner offers me his right hand, and I place my palm onto his. With our elbows bent, our arms together create an "S" shape from an aerial perspective; this handhold is common in martial arts as well as in male-female partnering in ballet, with the man as the leader and the woman as the follower. Lechner has the bottom hand, the leading position, and leads me on a walk. The footsteps are audible on the recording. We practice for a few minutes, then we switch roles and handholds. I take the role of the leader, and we continue walking.

Our movement audibly becomes more varied in tempo: speeding up, slowing down, stopping, resuming walking again, etc. The pauses elongate. We are beginning to change level, to rise and fall, to take advantage of the corners of the studio by running towards them and then curving around.

Chris Lechner: Now this connection is like an "S." But if you look, it actually is an "S" that emanates here, my center, and stops somewhere there, in your center. So, we're connecting. This is less like an exercise now, and more like something we could

practice in a workshop context extendedly—for multiple hours and with multiple partners. If we have a leader and follower, then what if I could take your center just somewhere else? There's a little bit of energy in here, in our contact. Do you feel that? Even as a follower, it's not quite as passive as it's alert. This belongs more to my past: to the time when I was learning about gravity, informed by Contact Improvisation, in the late nineties and early aughts. (Lechner and I experiment, switching leading and following roles multiple times).

Now, we could try something like this. (Lechner stands in front of me and gestures to show our related centers). Now our centers are almost touching. I'm just gonna come down onto all fours, and your center follows my center. You're just going to use this to fold me (he gestures, touching my hands to his hips to assist). And then I'm following your center back up to standing. So, it's a simple little dance. We do it together. We synchronize with a little touch now from the contact work [Contact Improvisation]. Such a different connector, no? It works beautifully, no? Because we're already so clear about what we're moving together. (We try the exercise repeatedly, shifting roles).

There's a way I could use that for a moment. After we come down, you can move onto my center and then maybe just roll the leg, spiral the leg around, and you swivel out of our connection. (Lechner guides me with his shifting body. Then we shift roles.)

Here, now you're coming onto a clear support, so I can rest down into you. So here, center over center. I could actually take your center with me now again, too. Which again . . .

Liz Waterhouse (peeps with surprise): Oh!

Chris Lechner: There (laughs). Center, center. We could kind of learn all of Contact Improvisation's vocabulary, just by this principle. Just gives a lot of sensation into, or reality, to this place we've been breathing into.

Lechner instructs me to stand directly behind him, my nose right behind the back of his head. The front of my moving body is brushing his. Lechner bends his knees and comes down onto all fours, in a tabletop position. I follow him, descending my body gently to the floor, supported by his back. It reminds me of a young animal riding lazily on a parent's back. I have to use my body in a softly weighted way to join him. Then we retract and ascend back up to the original standing position. Reversing our motion brushes the microphones clipped on our T-shirts.

The way my body is supported upon Lechner's back, table upon table, is an exercise that I remember from lessons in Contact Improvisation when I was a student at the American Dance Festival in 2001/2002, studying modern dance with Lisa Race and David Dorfman. Perhaps I have not made these motions since then: well-over twenty years. They are somehow in my bodily memory but also foreign at the same time. This close proximity to another body—especially

a male body—is rare in my daily life as a dance scholar and dance teacher. I am comfortable with this, but conscious of having switched codes involving touch and proximity, which are very different in artistic and academic contexts.

Teaching the next progression, Lechner stands beside me and again initiates my descent down to the floor, into the tabletop position, supporting his body. From there, Lechner rolls his body, so we are back-to-back, turning so that our spines are resting not directly over one another, but at a ninety-degree angle. In this stance you feel the weight of another person pass through you and push down into the floor. Lechner's body is heavy on top of me, but it is not crushing. He is using his feet to take some of the pressure off, so that we can be gentle and move safely, sharing momentum and weight. I am always surprised by how much of another person's weight my body can bear—also how much weight my body has when I let someone support me in falling through gravity. This give and take of stakes and vulnerability, trusting and being careful to another, I am reminded, are very pleasurable aspects of our training as contemporary dancers.

Lechner begins to play and, by taking me slightly off balance, to exchange positions. His actions surprise me, but are also logical within the repertoire of give-and-take, lead-and-follow in this dance style. We experiment a bit more with different speeds and shifts. With these more advanced exercises, I'm lacking the sensitivity to quickly reposition my body and stay connected—but it is enjoyable nonetheless.

Chris Lechner: So now, we can read each other, also when we come apart now. (Lechner walks away from me, creating a duet with separation and no touch.) Our centers are still related. I could decide to follow your center. (We begin to improvise dancing without contact.) And you could come closer to my center or a little further away. But we've actually started synchronizing. Yeah. That's working so beautifully already.

Now we could just do a little travel, across the studio together. We don't disconnect. You need to read my center, in a way. You're not doing exactly the same movement as I am, but you're organizing the same journey. (We travel together.)

I'll follow you now (laughs). So, the material now starts to unravel in different ways. But the reason, let's say "our secret," is that intention or effort to connect. Anything is possible in that way. We could go deeper into it next time we meet—from partnering work, or from healing work. It could be that one of us is leading. It could be that we don't know who's leading. We're just following each other's centers, no? Probably, at this stage, it's kind of more interesting for the play, no?

This, last thing, also as a game is called "ghosting."¹⁸ One person is leading; the other one is following, but not copying. And we are also going to change levels. So, you are kind of ghosting through the connection of the center—more of the shape

18 Swiss theater and dance maker Thomas Mettler brought this into Lechner's research on male duetting. Lechner believes the principle came from Laurie Booth, for a short biography of whom, see footnote 26.

that you catch, or don't catch, together. I think traveling was important to start this with. And if you do that same thing, constantly changing level, that's what's going to bring the center in. (We explore practicing ghosting, moving with dialogic timing and flow through the room. Lechner more dynamically changes from dancing on his feet, to lowering his body down to the floor, doing traveling motions of floorwork, and then moving through standing again.)

So, what I'm reading now is also that our centers can go further apart comfortably, no? They can move to opposite sides of the room and stay connected. That's a nice moment. I didn't feel that before. It's totally clear now that we can investigate something. That's how we're reading each other, no? And again, a lot of it has that sense that you are always committed. You can, kind of, push, pull—yeah, totally! (Sounds of vocalizing and moving dynamically are interspersed with intermittent laughter, then audible signs that the motion is quietening down.)

And you feel like, you know, there's moments where you kind of come out of it, then you're in it, again. (We have an extended practice, synthesizing.)

There was such a joint action of leaving the space, no? The playfield, it was beautiful. Wow! I mean, it takes a lot of time for it to become *true*, but it's not years or months. It's actually quite fast. The nervous system loves that permission, in a way.

Liz Waterhouse: It's interesting how partnering, starting with exercises for the hands or the back, comes to involve the *whole body*.

Chris Lechner: It is in the end then. That intelligence, all over what we're doing just locally. The brain here [in the head] spreads everywhere [in the body].

Liz Waterhouse: Right. That was a big step from student to . . .

Chris Lechner: (overlapping) . . . kind of advanced.

Liz Waterhouse: (overlapping) . . . professional.

Figure 3: The fascial qualities of the body in a gesture. Chris Lechner performing in Bern (2019).



Photo by Sunita Asnani.

Narrating Life Themes

Lechner reflects here on the deep currents in his life stories, underscoring the theme of embodiment: a lived body honed through physical inquiry and experiential practice. Viewing human bodies as complex living structures, he highlights his understanding of the physical body's myofascial system.

Chris Lechner: As a traveler, you might want to go to the regions furthest away. But I've always felt like wherever I am, moving in the contemporary arts, my vehicle is the body and movement. I try to stay connected to this inquiry of the body. For me what is attractive is where we barely know, or where assumptions are just kind of being formed, or visions are being made, or a new way of seeing things emerges. So that would be one thing, guiding my life.

Then for where I am now: Fascia as a way into the body is at this cutting edge of what we know. It's not necessarily the best way. We've got more reliable ways, like the muscles or the bones, but fascia is at the forefront of what we know of the body, and it's graspable. You can verify these ideas by your experience, and since a few years ago also science has developed the instruments to be able measure them. I think that is so important for me as a dancer: that I can think new ideas and then try the taste of them in my mouth. The taste in the mouth is quite important—the somatic part of it—so they don't just stay ideas. I am very inspired by the work of my friend

Gary Carter. Also, thanks to Tyr Throne who made me feel my fascia for the first time and Russell Maliphant for showing me how to move from within this connection.

Your entire body is filled, enveloped, and permeated with fascia from head to toe, from your skin to every individual cell. Fascia is your third brain and is characterized above all by its fluid nature. Just as our most advanced technology is embedded in a liquid medium such as silicone, our body intelligence is at home in the liquid-viscous medium of the fascia matrix—it communicates and reacts around sixty times faster than the nervous system. This matrix is not an inert tension and pressure system, it is alive, it feels into itself and is constantly in a fluid, gliding movement. With 250 million nerve endings in the fascia matrix, it feels/senses more than our vision and our skin. Everything you may do is greatly enhanced by connecting to them. It also seems to play a huge role in healing and pain management. Fasciae have been around in all times and all cultures, just called different names. We—I mean we Westerners—were the first ones to ignore them and cut them out of the picture.

Yoga is another big current or motor in my life story. Although yoga's been sold as a very ancient system, really the way we're practicing it only emerged some eighty years ago—influenced by British military training. So, it is ancient and evolved from the dawn of time somewhere, but it's also such a *new* practice that is developing rapidly.

Today yoga is at the crossroads, fed by workers in an international network mixing different movement modalities. This is exciting. In contrast, martial arts tend to be more orthodox in their practice. I have to be careful here, because there are new martial arts emerging all the time (e.g., aikido, tae kwon do, new kung fu styles, the list is long). But, based on my experience, tai chi or chi gung change only when they are integrated into another modality. In contrast, yoga is being re-invented within itself, and then of course adapted even more as it is applied or integrated into other forms, like dance. That's why as a form it is contemporary and traditional, all at once.

It makes so much sense to me to bring together the cutting edge of our understanding, which are the fascia, with this dynamic evolving form of yoga. For me, yoga is just up for grabs! It's like all the cards are thrown in the air. It's again, something that has this feeling, this quality of a cutting edge of something that we're just about getting hold of and saying "So, it's this what we're doing now, is it? Is that modern yoga?"

Again and again, while I was performing and dancing, yoga popped up. When I was in a ballet academy, it was just an old record my mother had from a hatha yoga instruction. Something about the letting go into breath made a lot of sense as a kind of relief, or release. Especially because the physical practice of learning ballet was so intense. Then later when I was injured, I went to Monte Carlo and studied with

Marika Besobrasova.¹⁹ Her inspiration really was through yoga work that she would kind of realign and set up a healthy, working, balanced body for ballet. Then later, when I was working mainly in the field of contemporary dance, there was either martial arts, or Feldenkrais, or yoga informing a lot of the movement work. I realized that I was most at home in what yoga did to me. I was very at home also with the “martial-arty” bits of contemporary dance. But the most interesting, juicy bit for me was always when yoga didn’t insist on being linear anymore and still stayed yoga. Then it became movement.

I’ve practiced yoga in many ways. As a ballet dancer, yoga was restorative. Later, for my contemporary dance practice, it evolved into a way to set up the body—but not only the body. Yoga would introduce a change of state in me. And this state would become the dance. It was a manual that informed, say, my joints as much as the person present to the practice. Most of my peers at that time got this experience, this tuning, from martial arts or Feldenkrais-related work. Yoga had a particular energetic signature or flavor that hit closer to home for me.

Liz Waterhouse: I’d love to hear more about your work with Marika Besobrasova.

Chris Lechner: Well, that was very specific. This was around 1987/89. She was working with breath—very simple hatha yoga principles—but then very specifically applied to dancing. You talked about how everything in the body in ballet is kind of a crossover or crossing over. Only then does ballet actually come alive. One of her big things was force croisé. She would teach you through a kind of more linear setup, which was yogic, and then you would start crossing over the sides more and more—so you became dynamic, and it became ballet. It became fifth position, and extending from there, and closing into there (demonstrates). She had this incredible way to take the sting out of ballet, that what would be harmful to you, and make it, I suppose, yogic in the sense that it became healthy.

So, in my case, coming from an injury, she could really teach your ankle. The scar that I had, for instance, around the ankle. I had three ripped tendons, and they operated on it. That the foot just started recovering in such a short amount of time back into just being juicy.

Liz Waterhouse: It was your right ankle?

19 Marika Besobrasova (1918–2020) was born in Yalta and educated in dance in France. She developed her own system of teaching based on the Vaganova method and established her own academy in Monte Carlo in 1974. See Warren, *The Art of Teaching Ballet*, 12–43. For her recounting being given books on yoga by her husband and teaching based on “relaxation” and breathing, see Warren, 31–32.

Chris Lechner: Both actually (laughs). A few years later the other side too. They operated at that time still. Nowadays, they wouldn't operate anymore. The first one was in Zurich Opera House. It was towards the end of the season. I was *super* tired, and I had a just unbelievably technical solo in the third act of *Sleeping Beauty*. Just something so wacko. I think it was just a moment when I was just too exhausted. I was in the air and didn't quite gauge where I would land. I just went over the foot, landing, and heard this loud snap. I tried to get up from there and realized, "Oh, I'm not getting up." I just kind of hobbled off stage. Thankfully it was not painful in the moment. There was so much adrenaline. Then an ice pack and I rushed to the hospital and was operated on that same night.

I was lucky that when I was trying to reconnect to movement, that I came across a few people, like Marika Besobrasova and later Russell Maliphant, who helped me shift the paradigm I was used to moving in. I took workshops with Russell in the late nineties. He would take us through sun salutations in a way that it would take ninety minutes to get through just one repetition—pausing, deepening, hanging out with the breath and gravity, undoing patterns, and opening up connections. All this created a fertile ground for coming into movement from there.²⁰

I was in that phase where I had just finished being—or calling myself—a ballet dancer. And that yogic approach was just so familiar and yet new to me. First of all, that the body could be *really* respected. Differently than in ballet, where you had to override pain, discomfort, etc. In yoga you could allow the body to have a strong voice. It becomes a dialogue with the body, in a different way than in ballet. And if you do that, respect the body, the body would still be available in that way, would surprisingly *still* go to the limits. Because it's one thing to stop dancing by saying: "No. You moved one way for a while in your life. Now you can find a much more reduced but healthy way, maybe more around pedestrian movements." While new dance, with its emphasis on pedestrian movement as the source for dance, was a welcome and healing antidote to ballet, a profound relearning that literally any movement might be the dance, I never lost interest in the extreme range of motion that is explored in ballet and yoga. I just have too much love for any and all kinds

20 Russell Maliphant (b. 1961 in Ottawa, based in London) is a dancer and choreographer working in the United Kingdom. He trained at the Royal Ballet School and performed with Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet (1982–88), DV8 Physical Theatre, Laurie Booth Company, Rosemary Butcher, and Michael Clark Company. Supplementing his income as a freelance artist, he became a Roling practitioner in 1994. In 1996 he opened The Russell Maliphant Dance Company, working with his long-term collaborator, lighting designer Michael Hulls, on works positioned in "modern dance," drawing on research into ballet, yoga, and martial arts. See Craine and Mackrell, "Maliphant, Russell"; see also the biography of Maliphant currently on his company website, <http://www.rmcompany.co.uk>, last accessed November 8, 2024. Related to my arguments here, see Hardt's praxeological analysis of a lecture by Maliphant: Hardt, "Grasping Practice," 116–17.

of movement! I don't want to put the restriction on myself "I'm not supposed to go there." So yoga offered me a way to go there.

Childhood Memories: From Martial Arts to Ballet

Liz Waterhouse: Could you tell me about your memories of dancing, before your work as a professional ballet dancer? And any kinesthetic memories of your childhood?

Chris Lechner: There was actually no dance before I started ballet. There was a whole lot of sport. After we moved away from India, the sports class was where I started kind of getting noticed. The teachers were encouraging my mother to send me to a place where they would train me more to be an athlete, because it was a mathematical school. That was the first moment where I kind of realized, well, people notice me when I do something with my body.

Similarly, I noticed then a few years later, when I started martial arts training—tae kwon do—that I quickly received affirmation. They called me, “the best horse in their stable.” Soon after I started training, the main honcho guy from Tae Kwon Do Germany came and spotted me, and said I should train for the national team. I didn't even have a black belt yet at that time. That year, just before he had spotted me, I had done my examination and then was called again back. I thought, “Oh shit, I must have messed something up.” But they said, “Please, do the routine of the next belt, because we know you know it.” So, I did it, and they said, “Yeah, you have the next belt. You skipped a belt today.” Which was also yet another pointer that I would be noticed and appreciated via movement.

I was playing music at the same time. I played the classical guitar and did drumming. I was nowhere near as talented in those as whatever I would try with my body. Then one summer I was visiting my father, who was working in Montreal, and he was married to an Indian dancer, Sonal Mansingh. They were writing an article for the *FAZ* [*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*]: “Ten Questions about Western Dance.” So, they had all these dance books and magazines lying around. I started leafing through some of the pages. In one book, I saw Mikhail Baryshnikov who had just defected.²¹ And it was the first photos of this body *leaping* into space. And I just went like, “*What* is this body doing? I want to do that.” Then I found out, “Okay, he's a classical dancer. He's one of the best.” At the end of the summer holiday, I announced to both of my parents, first my father in Montreal and then coming back to Germany, “I think I need to do ballet as a complementary training to tae kwon do.”

So, the dancing came, strangely enough, through my father. Both my parents were in the Goethe-Institut. They had no problems when I told them, “You know,

21 Baryshnikov defected in Toronto in 1974. Craine and Mackrell, “Baryshnikov, Mikhail.”

I'm gonna be a dancer. I'm not gonna go and study." I didn't have any problems with them. The only thing my father said was, "Well, you're not gonna earn much. And what do you feel about other men liking you, because that's going to happen in that world?" I was like, "Whatever." (Laughs.) I was so naïve, no? But my father was totally supportive.

So I started with ballet at the theater in Ulm. The theater was a good experience. I went through the doors, passed the *Pförtner* [porter], looked around and went, "Oh, everybody's like me! We're all crazy." (Exhales.) What a relief! Because I was living in Southern Swabian, Germany. Can you imagine coming from India, through Austria where I was beaten up because I didn't speak Austrian—kind of mobbed and beaten every day, or snowballs. I had no idea why. I mean, my main language was English. What was their big issue? So, there was first sports, then martial arts, and then I did my first ballet classes. But it was huge, because just as I became interested, that day in the newspaper, there was an announcement that the Theater Ulm was starting a boy's group for ballet. Because I think that would have been off-putting for me, if I had come into a class and there would have been a lot of pink. I was really just a dude, and I was doing my martial arts black belt training.

I did the training and the class, and I loved it. We did turnouts, and then jumps, half-tours, and demi-tours, some stuff at the barre, and it just felt fantastic. Then, the teacher who was the choreographer and director of Ulm theater said, "Please, come to my office." There he put the *Schläppchen* [ballet slippers] on the table. Then he pulled out a *Suspensorium* [a dance belt] and a schedule. He said, "You come whenever you can, but please, wear this and this whenever you come." (Laughs.) I didn't need to pay for anything. I could go any day, any time there was a ballet class in Ulm theater. So, that was again reaffirming that when I did something physical, I would be noticed. I would get so much back—which at that age I was also so hungry for—being an outsider and always different.

A year and a half later, we were doing RAD [Royal Academy of Dance] syllabus. We had somebody come from the Royal Ballet School to take the examination. After my examination, he said, "Please come to the Royal Ballet School." It was one of those really big moments. I was, I think, fourteen or fifteen. I kind of went, "Oh, that's what you're going to do with your life." Because it was so clear. My parents were highly accomplished intellectuals.²² I was, of course, going to go and finish school, and study. That was just implied. That was our family. The moment this examiner said, "Please, come to Royal Ballet to study. There'll be no problem. There'll be auditions, but I can guarantee that you'll be accepted. Please, consider this." I was like, "I'm not

22 Lechner's father, Georg Lechner, and mother, Hannelore Werlé, both studied philosophy with Ernst Bloch. His father received his doctorate in English and Romance Studies from the University of Munich, his mother the equivalent of a master's degree from the University of Leipzig.

gonna be staying in this small town in southern Germany, I'm going to be part of the world again, where I come from. And this is going to be the vehicle." Not in so many words, but it was as if thunder had struck, or something.

Just a day or two afterwards, I spoke with the ballet director and told him that had been suggested. He kind of went, "No, not Royal Ballet School. You're going to go to a museum. There's nothing creative there. You're probably not even so tall, in the end. You're just going to be a frustrated little puck, or something in a museum! Go to Stuttgart. All the choreographers come there. Go to the school. You're going to get in the company eventually, and you'll be so much happier." So, thank God for him, no? And that's what I did. I auditioned for the John Cranko School. Got accepted and started there.

Recently I had a reunion with some of my classmates from that time from Ulm—now after forty years or more. In meeting them, I realized, "My God, they're just such decent people." A young boy—thirteen, fourteen—that starts ballet in a small town. If it had been in Austria, I would have been in so much trouble. Instead, they were just curious. Then later, they would write to me and said, "You know, I read the newspaper, the *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, it seems like you did well with that role. It's so nice to hear from you." Now and then, I would get little messages, letters and stuff from them, but I never saw them anymore. But they would be constantly kind of happy that a boy would do ballet, you know? Or at least, it was incredible to realize that those people were around at a time where I could have also just kind of went, "No, this is too much. I'm not gonna do this. This is too embarrassing. I'll just do my black belt."

Figure 4: A grainy photocopy of Chris Lechner leaping (1982). Hamburg Ballet, Fourth Mahler by John Neumeier.



Photographer Holger Badekow.

Career Trajectory as a Ballet Dancer

Chris Lechner: At the end of the second school year, William Forsythe approaches me and says, “I’m doing this production in Copenhagen, and I would like I would like you to dance with us.” Boy! I mean, that was just incredible, that moment. I was seventeen. For this drama, *Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (1981), there was the son, and Bill needed a young dancer to play this role. We did it in Copenhagen and we then did it a few months later in Stuttgart, when he had announced that he was leaving Stuttgart. That was one of the last things he did with the Stuttgart Ballet.²³

So, by the end of my time in the ballet academy, Bill had taken me under his wings, and I had just performed. The whole company [Stuttgart Ballet] was going, “Of course, you’re gonna be one of us.” I was hanging out with them in the canteen and partying with them. But at the end of my academy training, the director, Marcia Haydée, talked to me and said, “I’m not taking you into the company,” which was devastating. But she said, “You wouldn’t dance. Look at the other guys in my company. They’re all tall. What would you do? That would be such a waste. Go and learn to dance and then we’ll talk again.” So that’s how I started at the Hamburg Ballet.

Liz Waterhouse: Was your height an issue there?

23 Nugent, “William Forsythe and the Lost Stuttgart Ballets.”

Chris Lechner: With [John] Neumeier, not at all. It was 170 performances a year, and within like two months solo roles. I enjoyed it immensely. I was just—swimming free, swimming into the world. That's what gave me enough experience that it was possible a few years later to return to Stuttgart. I remember, a few years later, I met Marcia in Spoleto on a strictly ballet tour. I sat down, and the sun was going down in this amphitheater, and I was like, "Marcia, I think I'm ready." She was like, "Yeah, I've got a contract, too." She then took me into the company.

Between working in Hamburg and Stuttgart, and later the Zurich Ballet—there was a good nine/ten years where my "ballet bubble" was completely intact. There was the ladder within that hierarchy: the bigger and better roles, becoming a soloist. There's a whole trajectory which works so well.

What we haven't spoken about, but I feel that it's been very much part of that chapter of my life, is that there's so much privilege that comes with being a male dancer in the ballet world. If you have a just a little bit of talent, you've got a job and you're in a good company. You don't need to worry much. In Hamburg Ballet, I would just flash my opera pass and be in every nightclub, every place where the "in-people" go. I was part of the in-crowd. We were on tours, and it was just all embassies, and five-star hotels, and grand theaters. So, after that there was a whole retraining a self when I became an independent choreographer, dancer, performer. All of a sudden, I had nothing. And I was still doing what I loved, which was moving and dancing, but nobody wanted to see this version in a way.

It's kind of like this whole "prince syndrome": being part of a family of high status in India, where I was growing up, where we had a mansion, and servants. I was a blue-eyed White boy, which is beautiful to Indians. If it had been China, I would have been the ugliest duckling, actually. (Laughs.) But in India, I got so much affection, just by my skin color. So, today there's so much shame in me, too. You know, just kind of going, "My God, this privilege!" What I took for granted, you know? So, that needed to be eroded later in life. I was welcoming that too—being kind of a penniless, but very happy independent artist just learning about art. Because I'd been spoon-fed a version of art as a ballet dancer. But then, I realized, "My God, art is so big and it goes so deep! And I will probably never be that choreographer that I am as a performer, or mover, but it's my world." It became my world.

The only way I would be noticed in art, too, was: I would have to move and dance. All good! I would only have to say, "Well, I'm former soloist of Stuttgart Ballet." I had a residency. I had a grant from the British Council. You know, I didn't have to earn anything.

Liz Waterhouse: So as a freelancer you were quite well supported, because of that history?

Chris Lechner: I think that transition will never be so easy, unless you know, “I’m marrying the doctor (laughs) and I’m gonna have two kids in three years.” Or, “I’m studying law, because I’m gonna help refugees.” Or, “I’m going to be an *Inspizient* [stage manager] and the theater’s paying my education.” You know, there’s certain pathways where you don’t need to need to do much homework, really. And you’ll get a lot of help.

If you want to stay in the field then, as a ballet dancer, you either become a choreographer, or it’s three steps down: You only become a ballet master, or a rehearsal master, or something like that. But in the contemporary world, it was very much, “If you move and you have your practice, you also do your own work.” As I mentioned, I realized quite early on that my choreographic work was never going to be the same kind of quality that I had as a performer. Everything about me as a dancer had become very skillful at that stage in my life. My work as a choreographer showed promise but could in no way be compared to the level that I could offer as a performer. At one point, I had to consciously embrace and also to communicate, “I am perhaps simply a dancer. I’ve been in the trenches for fifteen, twenty years. This is what you’re gonna get. And I’m good at this.”

I think that’s what I picked up when we were talking earlier and you said that your time as a freelancer after leaving The Forsythe Company was difficult. Actually, you could have used your cards to receive choreographic residencies, but it would have meant that you would have to actually also stand behind it and have a direction yourself as a choreographer. After my transition out of ballet, I in fact was working pretty fluidly between improvisation, performing, creating and choreographing—and crossing dance and somatic research. But when residencies came, they wanted to label me either as an “improviser” or a “choreographer.” I had some doubts—because somehow working between these seemed more important than any one trajectory or market.

Becoming a Contemporary Dancer: Reshaping Identity

This life-writing presents a central narrative in Lechner’s body-biography: his shift in aesthetic practice from ballet to contemporary dance. Lechner discusses both the changes in his aesthetic practice and physical body, as well as his shifting experiences of social relationships, class mobility, and self-understanding.

Chris Lechner: I think I’ve done something that very few ballet dancers have done, which is to become a contemporary dancer. Now, what does that mean is for me the big question. But I know it has happened, and I know it has happened on so many more levels than simply physically approaching something slightly different, or maybe fundamentally different.

Originally, I started out training as a ballet dancer, and we've discussed also the whole mental, visionary—everything—outlook, worldview, that's tied into that, especially at the time when we learned. There's a whole worldview that comes into play. There's a huge thing that needs to happen, I think, and very few of us actually go down that route—I don't know why—to retrain, and what that means. For example, if somebody who has an opera training, who does things that only the fewest of us could ever dream of with his voice, but then when he doesn't want to do opera anymore, always sounds like this (Lechner imitates the voice of singer, with a constricted larynx, higher pitch than his speaking voice). That is something that we're left with as ballet dancers. (Switches back to natural voice.) We're always in a ballet body. What would happen if that operatic voice would become his voice again? So, that was one of the biggest things for me: if I could reclaim my body again.

There's a context, which I can kind of give it, which is: I became a contemporary mover, dancer, creator, teacher. I think that's kind of a big signature in my body-biography.

Liz Waterhouse: You described reclaiming the voice, or your body after ballet. Did contemporary dance for you also create a body that was trained, that was different than your body?

Chris Lechner: Yes and no. It depended where I went with it. But I think because gravity showed up as such a big common thread of the teachers that I was working with. I realized that the body that I dropped into was a body that I would recognize when I was teaching in India, or wherever, or in Thailand, or in America. It seemed to be, kind of, a language that our bodies have in common once we enter gravity. It's not a style, but it becomes something that you recognize. I know that was the thing that helped me probably to land in this new paradigm. In the first one or two years I found myself in the studio crying, maybe grieving, but quite often just out of sheer relief. Then slowly, something started feeling. It wasn't like: I was a Pilates practitioner and now I do GYROTONIC®.²⁴ They are similar and yet I can tell the difference. You know, it wasn't that. It was kind of a stripping away, or stripping down, which happened in the first—at least—three or four years, I would say. And then slowly, aesthetic questions emerged for me.

But I would say that—it's interesting, it's the first time I've ever spoken it out that way—that I think it was, first of all: How do you undo ballet training? It is so tenacious. It creeps so deep into your, almost, DNA. Very much like an opera training, or like a lot of classical trainings, I suppose, would kind of become very much part of you.

24 For readability, subsequent references to the methodology of GYROTONIC® in this chapter use ordinary capitalization and are made without the registered trademark symbol.

I have some encounters with Indian dancers—Bharatanatyam dancers—that said the very same thing: that it took them forever to feel something underneath that they could claim as a natural movement, or body. For me, it was more like, I wanted Chris's body back. What if I hadn't trained in ballet all those years? What would my body have been? How would it make love? How would it enjoy itself? How would it suffer? How would it (laughs) walk up and down the stairs?

Another thread that comes with the whole subject of being trained in a certain way and then leaving that paradigm. The re-education of thinking: about what I'm doing or viewing what I do. I mean, the most obvious kind of changes. You go from a proscenium stage playing to one to four thousand people in ballet, to dancing for smaller kinds of audience, fifty to maybe two hundred people. No elevated stage. And more and more, actually leaving that stage. So what happens there?

When I was ballet-trained and part of a company with reputation, like Stuttgart Ballet: I had an apartment, a sports car, money, nice clothes. Five years later, I was in Brighton, in London. At the end of the month, I didn't know if I had enough money to fill the fridge—if I could even eat. In both circumstances, I was so fulfilled. I was fulfilled as a ballet dancer for a long time, until it didn't quite fit anymore—the gold surface started rubbing off. During the times, where I felt really, almost like poor [in financial terms], I felt so rich, and curious, and excited about each day actually. But, when it comes from, let's say the encouragement of the world outside of me—from others—I was celebrated for the choice of being a ballet dancer. And I was absolutely dropped by the choice to become a contemporary dancer. You know, who wants you to make contemporary work? Nobody wants you to do that. There must be something in you that really needs to do it. Otherwise really nobody has the need for somebody who's not in the either entertainment business, or the high arts, or sports, I suppose.

That's the kind of niche where the physical transformation was hugely important. There are several other colleagues of mine around that time when I was living mostly in the UK—that completely went with their, let's say, ballet aesthetic, and training, and understanding of the body, and changed it into a postmodern view. That was such a valid thing, no? Because they would get such wonderful dance material or dancers, at that time. Still in the 1990s, it was still kind of very hit or miss on how good—well, if that's the right word?—or how skilled, or whatever you were as a contemporary dancer. You had a lot of givens, and then you made the shift in your thinking, I suppose. So, coming back to it, I've seen very few people who've done not only the shift—as a way of looking at their dancing, or what they're presenting—but also morphing or changing into this creature that is a contemporary dancer.

Because with most friends that I had at that time, I have nothing to talk about anymore. The moment I start speaking about what I would be doing just now, or maybe ten years ago, they just get glassy eyes. They have no clue what I'm talking about. I'm just one of those people that don't stretch their feet. There's a very clear kind of crystal palace around this kind of ballet training. And I'm not talking about

the generation that is trained in both, and doesn't necessarily have to go one or the other route. I'm really talking about more the family that I came from, and in a lot of ways left, but not consciously.

I remember also, at one point: my last season was over but there was a very fluid change. I was already working in England. The Stuttgart Ballet needed me for some things still, for about another half year. They couldn't replace me right away or didn't want to. So, you would think, well, all that time I would at least do some kind of like training, a ballet barre, or some kind of preparation that I would have always done to perform those roles. I didn't. I don't even know when was my last ballet class? I just dropped it like a hot potato and didn't need any of that ever again, ever. I think in 2008 I did a Feldenkrais session and was inspired to teach a ballet barre to the Indian students from Feldenkrais principles. It just came out of the moment, but it was the only one incident in thirty years where I felt, "Oh, I want to use this that way and want to train myself this way." It was so absolutely overdue.

So that kind of also hid from me. It really took Steve Paxton to kind of point out, "Wait a minute! But isn't that part of your deal, too?" I remember Steve musing one evening in Brighton, how all great ballet dancers kind of transcend the form. Maybe it was his way of inviting me to realize in my movement and dance that paradox—that which transcends ballet and yet is ballet?

Transformative Collaborations and Conversations

Lechner's life stories were brimming with references and anecdotes about the key artists and body workers that had inspired him significantly. This writing brings together some of these stories, referencing the contributions of dance artists Steve Paxton, Laurie Booth, and Kirstie Simson.

Chris Lechner: Steve Paxton had this heart-to-heart talk with me once at a time where I was trying to break away from dance altogether.²⁵ That was the time where I was delving into very muddy waters. Steve Paxton came to Brighton—this was around 2000. I was not even sure if I even wanted to dance again. I was working with an osteopath, and it felt very, very far away from everything. I saw Steve give a lecture. Afterwards, we were at a friend's place, where we were all sitting together and having dinner. So, I got to talk to him and tell him that one performance that I

25 Steve Paxton (1939–2024) was an American dancer, choreographer, and improviser known for his central role in developing the dance form Contact Improvisation from 1972. He danced in the companies of choreographers José Limón and Merce Cunningham, was a founding member of Judson Dance Theater and Grand Union, and danced with the group Freelance Dance. He was a close collaborator of Lisa Nelson (see footnote 27). Seibert, "Steve Paxton, Who Found Avant-Garde Dance in the Everyday, Dies at 85."

saw some years ago actually shifted everything for me. It was his *Some English Suites* (1991), and I saw it in Bern. That was (laughs) a big moment to actually tell the person, “No, you’ve actually really done something very important to me. It really impacted me a lot.”

We started talking about what you love in dance, and he started sharing his love for Greek dances, and Greek rituals: that there was a warmth and humanity in there that he misses in contemporary work, but a formality at the same time, without needing to express anything. A step to the right and two steps to the left. A step to the right, two steps to the left, for the next three days. He said: “That took them into a state of non-affect.” You’re not animated by your personality or social reality. Another self emerges through doing dances that simple. All this was kind of just quite beautiful. Then he asked, “Well, so how are you making use of your past in ballet?” And I kind of went, (deepens voice) “No, I don’t do that at all anymore. You know, I’m doing this and that.” He started looking at me with such a sad expression. He went, “Well, you did that how many years of your life? Your cells were put through this. How many hours and years? And how much *love* was in there?” I kinda went, “Yeah well, fifteen, twenty years.” And he kept looking at me and going, “And you’re not using that?” He looked at me with such sad eyes, and then I started welling up too. And was like, (inhales) “Oh, God, what have I done?” And he said, “It’s not like that you have to be a ballet dancer forevermore. But I mean, you would not be you if you were not in some way including—using—if that weren’t part of you. If you didn’t let it be part of what you show of yourself.”

Then the next day, I remember going with Laurie Booth into the studio and first position [from ballet] came to me.²⁶ From there our improvisation started and I started crying all over again because it was like, “But that’s what I love so much. But I don’t need to buy into the package anymore.” I suppose I am exaggerating here, I tend to be a little “Indian” when I’m telling stories—by which I mean more expressive, even over the top in emotion—but I was at least misty eyed. And lastly, Lisa Nelson’s work also did something like that to me.²⁷ That first position could emerge any time it wanted to. You know? I mean, it kind of created the hybrid

26 Laurie Booth (b. 1954 in London, based in Brighton) is a dancer, choreographer, bodyworker, and Gyrotonic instructor. Continuously researching the practices of movement training, he is currently formulating his system of “Triple Body Integration.” He performed Steve Paxton’s *Suspect Terrain* in 1989 and, like Lechner, has been inspired by myofascial science. Biography developed through correspondence with the author on November 8, 2024. See also Bolt, “Fascial Recognition: An Interview with Laurie Booth.”

27 Lisa Nelson (b. 1949 in New York City) is a dancer, choreographer, video artist, and international teacher of improvisation. Nelson’s “Tuning Scores,” collect materials developed from her research exploring sensory perception through videography, movement, and performance. She was a longtime collaborator of Steve Paxton and co-editor of *Contact Quarterly* from 1976. An anthology of oral history interviews and writings from and about

of training that I'm doing now. Because it doesn't exclude, but it includes that particular past—the particular past, or body-biography that each dancer has. I mean, it's always allowed to be part of it.

I also need to share more about Laurie Booth! In 1996 I went to see a performance at the Elisabeth Hall in London. It was *Storm Garden* performed by Laurie Booth and Gary Lambert, followed by his newest creation. On the huge empty stage appeared a larger-than-life figure, Laurie, his hands describing a tai chi-like figure eight in an endless loop. Similarly to when I saw Steve Paxton perform, I felt I was witnessing my future: what I might become as a dancer. Two months later I spotted him in a restaurant in Bern, where he was giving a workshop which I then attended. Eventually I moved to Brighton to work with him. Laurie has been probably the greatest inspiration and influence in my process of transitioning towards contemporary dance. The scope of his vision was breathtaking. One of his ideas is perhaps close to the idea of a body-biography. Laurie Booth was interested in the way you are building a myth, your own myth, through your body. Something that points beyond a narrative. So not just what appears of you in a specific production or dance style, but in the writing of your body—a myth that you are creating by a life lived in movement.

Another person who has influenced me profoundly was the dancer Kirstie Simson, who I worked with around 2000 to 2006, and who I began to collaborate with again this year [2024].²⁸ I remember that she would propose, “Just lie down and wait for whatever movement will come.” Obviously in her workshops, she was preparing us the entire morning over three hours, taking us very slowly into movement. That was already a retraining, no? That I could take time. That I could slow down. That I didn't need to train my body like I would train a horse, for instance—old school style. I could wait for responses.

Lisa Nelson are available on the website, <http://oralsite.be/pages/Anthology-Lisa-Nelson>, last accessed November 8, 2024.

- 28 Dancer Kirstie Simson (b. 1958 in Kenya, based in Wales) is an international performer and teacher of improvisation. She trained at the Laban Center, and her research has explored dance improvisation, Contact Improvisation, aikido, meditation, Alexander Technique, and approaches to healing. She was a professor of dance at the University of Illinois (2008–2020) and is currently performing *Subterranéa* (2024) and teaching workshops responding to her cancer journey (“Practices that Promote Well-being and Resilience in Challenging Times”). Biography developed through email correspondence with the author on November 9, 2024. See Simson, “Revelations of Life as a Dance Improviser,” <https://kirstiesimson.com/revelations-of-life-as-a-dance-improviser/>, last accessed November 9, 2024. See also Simson's artist website, <https://www.kirstiesimson.com>, last accessed November 9, 2024. For documentation of Lechner dancing with Simson in July 2006, see the bonus materials for the dance film by video-dance makers Katrina McPherson and Simon Fildes, *Force of Nature*. <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/forceofnature/2851084>, last accessed November 10, 2024.

She was very good at it, just how she introduced, “Well, just let’s lie down together, after lunch. We’re tired anyway, aren’t we?” There would be a way how she would just introduce some sounds or to speak to us about something. So that at one point in your kind of leaden body, something emerged, and it felt light and easy. Then forty-five minutes later, we were all in this dancing orgy. Just absolutely *ripping* through space. Coming from, “Lie down and let go of even, ever wanting to move again.”

That was so close to yoga too, no? That it would just start with, “Well, just lay your limbs down and connect to your breath. Sense where gravity is, and everything will emerge.” After that, what will emerge is not a collapse, but rather the voice—your love for dance will not be kind of edited out of the picture that way. So, that was a clue. Because at that time, I was still almost crippled from all those years of ballet. But I got more and more moments, and hours, and events. Where, yes, I was going right to that place where—yeah—there’s a thrill there. There’s an edge. There’s something so beyond the ordinary body. And it’s wonderful to hang out there. But the strategy was kind of through—the buzzword at that time was “undoing.”

Undoing is not simply letting go or releasing, which were also a big suggestion of that time. But I think simply “releasing” needed to evolve into something more practical, where we wouldn’t get injured because we were releasing so much. (Laughs.) So the undoing is more energetic. It’s a way that when you’re addressing the body, you get to that place where you’re needing to give a little more into it. Not only because it’s going to be looser then, but because it’s going to have more rebound and more spring. That is the reflex that we want to foster, in a critical moment, through undoing.

Liz Waterhouse: Can you talk me through an example?

Chris Lechner: What I meant is: You go to a specific location in the body. Say, for example, the psoas muscle, which is a very deep muscle. On the cow it’s the filet mignon. The psoas originates in the lower back and traverses through the hips down to the top of the leg. If you kneel with one knee on the ground, and the other foot standing, your felt sense connects with it—with the psoas. With undoing, you’re not stretching anything. You’re simply “hanging out” there and connecting to gravity. The psoas of the kneeling leg responds by softening/undoing and loading/charging all at the same time. Afterwards, you can ride this package of sensation into movement. There is a letting go and a tensioning happening that gives you the potential to move into/with it. The slowness of it, the giving into time, I think is also important.

So that sense of undoing and letting the body unravel into its dance or movement was a huge help to me at that time—not only physically, but also because it gave me so much permission to also wait and not feel guilty about it. “I’m doing nothing.

What am I doing here?” As a former ballet dancer, that was very foreign to me—to let things emerge.

Nowadays, this undoing or tuning has a very similar progression most of the time when I’m working with it. Like you start scanning your body. This is not something that I do frequently in my practice, but it has a value and sometimes I incorporate it into my teaching. Very slowly you scan from your toes, to your lower limbs, to your upper limbs. Following the surface of your body, from the base up to the skull. It takes time. But after you do this in a few classes, then the moment the map is there with you, you’re scanning more like in those science fiction movies. Like signals moving from the tip of your fingers into your body at great speed. Then your body-awareness changes into something which is then quite global—all over the body, at once—not only local and very slow. Then at one point, after practicing maybe for another hour or so, the scan is just present. You’re not becoming a vegetable and staying a vegetable, but you’re kind of just allowing a little more space and time to get a lot more thrill and performance in the end. It’s something which is so nice that when you actually get that sense of scanning or presence, that time slows down a little bit for you, like a race car driver at high speed. Or as a pedestrian, you actually see the car coming at you on the street and you move out of the way elegantly, as opposed to startling. There’s a slowing down, which is crazy when that happens, no? That we can stretch or bend time that way.

Liz Waterhouse: Did you have a similar practice as a ballet dancer?

Chris Lechner: No. I had my own practices for preparing to dance. I had the yoga, which was kind of a tuning into my joints in a way that the ballet training didn’t suggest. Is scanning perhaps more methodical? I had these very simple principles from Marika Besobrasova: that I would start my day turning in my joints, since I would spend most of the day then turned out as a ballet dancer. Then find the breath through it. A little bit of asana work. I also had some restorative practices, such as using shiatsu on my foot and lower leg. That was the start of every day, which also sorted out the body from being battered from the last night’s performance or whatever. Then a hot bath. Then training. But these kinds of self-care practices really made the difference: resetting the body every time.

It wasn’t a kind of an awareness moment, like scanning probably would be more of. But it was a tuning into: “Where am I, just now today, before everything starts going again and I’m supposed to function in a certain way, and I expect myself to do this and that? Truly, how am I now? Well, my calf doesn’t feel so great. But yeah, it’s easing out now. Okay. And then I’ll need to take care of the shoulder. Will do. Will do.” And at the same time, I’m feeling the breath entering my body and the joints opening, giving a little more space. With it comes just that curious thing—in yoga, or martial arts or somatic practices—that you kind of get something that helps you

survive the day in a much, much better way. But all this was more restorative for me, to return to and perform ballet, rather than as a means to change my body entirely, as a form of contemporary dance research. Later these practices were the core of my body journey, as a contemporary dancer, not a means to an end.

I remember also with yoga, in my first years of practice: You would do asanas—a little dog pose, and a little this, and whatever—and then you go into a resting place and put your head on the ground. That is the kind of crucial moment where you're putting the head on the ground and the nervous system assimilates the challenge. "Ahh-huhh!" Something opens up and the next time you repeat those movements, it's changed. Most of hatha yoga uses this strategy. In vinyasa-style, the rest lasts for not more than five breaths. In hatha, you can give this moment more time. I started looking for this as a way to enter into my dance practice.

And then yoga was also a big help in relearning what would it mean for this body to become a contemporary dancer. It wasn't so much my martial art background then. Rather, again and again, I was really inspired by yoga. I mean also Vanda Scaravelli's particular approach to yoga, which I came across then around 1997, which had a lot to do with gravity.²⁹ Something that I'd really not considered much as a ballet dancer.

Discovering "Released" Bodies and "Instant Composition"

*Dancers' memories of changing dance techniques and styles reflect their singular professional paths. Narrations of these embodied experiences may challenge models of periodization and simple turning points of innovation in dance historiography.*³⁰ In this section, Lechner and I compare our respective encounters with release techniques, improvisation, and contemporary dance—Lechner in the United Kingdom in the late 90s and me in the United States and then Germany in the early 2000s.

Liz Waterhouse: Did you train also in modern dance, or in release technique?

Chris Lechner: I discovered release technique in the mid-nineties during a mentored residency that I was invited to in Birmingham, England. By that time, I had started embracing a completely new movement vocabulary. I was there as a choreographer. Peter Bonham, who started Le Groupe Dance Lab Ottawa was there, mentoring European choreographers. At that time, he was working with Sasha Waltz, Russell Maliphant, and Wayne McGregor. They were kind of like the new

29 Vanda Scaravelli (1908–1999, born in Florence) was an influential practitioner of yoga, narrating it for a readership in the West. Scaravelli, *Awakening the Spine*.

30 See also Carter, "Reshaping Dance Through Time."

generation of choreographers. For some reason, he wanted to work with me at that time too.

Through Peter's very persistent and annoying questions, I started choreographing movements that were completely new to me, but somehow were the right thing for me at that time. I asked myself, "So what does my body need, and who do my dancers need, so that they could do this?" In other words, how could we prepare for this way of moving, since warming up at a barre like a ballet dancer would have not been so helpful.

While visiting Bern, a dancer in the company there introduced me to a release-based forward bend. I remember coming onto all fours and coming back and then recovering to the vertical. I was completely flashed by it. I thought, "Okay, yeah, that's the information we'll need." Probably there's much more to it. But we trained doing the forward bend the whole week and then whatever you wanted to take on board from there, from the sensations that came about. That was my introduction to released work.

Only then did I realize that quite a few people that I was talking about were saying, "Yeah, so. She's a ballet dancer, but she's also released. And that's why I'm interested in working with her." From my ballet bubble, from dancing in the Stuttgart Ballet, I had no clue that was even part of what dancers were training in or taking on board. I realized that all the really good dancers that I really love to watch, they have release in their body. They transcend the box of effort. There's something more, and it's quite released, even in ballet. Because there's such a lyrical side to ballet too, I suppose. It became the most interesting part of starting to look out for something new, training the body.

You know it's interesting that before the internet, that just to learn a forward bend in a released way, you had to have the good luck that somebody in the right situation teaches you that. Then you catch, "Oh, there's a whole *world* happening around this!"

Liz Waterhouse: Do you remember what type of release training it was?

Chris Lechner: Susan Klein Technique. Very clearly. Though later I trained also in other ways of forward bending, too. Over the years this evolved into a much more spring-loaded tensioned approach which I still like to take on board today. But at that time, in a rather tensed ballet body, I found release super helpful. Something about the kind of recovery to standing from being bent over: how much something needed to kind of pull forward through the knees to make you recover finally. It was very intense. I almost injured myself trying it.

Liz Waterhouse: What sensations and concepts did you work with? Was fascia already in play, or did you focus on the feeling of bones?

Chris Lechner: Yeah bones, absolutely. Because bones are the first big thing to feel beyond just your muscles. If you don't feel your muscles, you don't know who you are and where you are: If you're relaxed or not, if you're tired or not. So already, just to feel bone within that muscle awareness is huge. And then even just give away a little more and a little more of that muscular voice, and it becomes a bone voice. That's why I think Feldenkrais had such a huge influence in the contemporary scene as a way into how you work with movement.

When I started taking workshops on contemporary dance and making dance, it was so good to hear a different language—not to hear “choreography,” but “composition.” What does that mean to compose what you're doing? For me it required me to take so much more on board—not just to be dancing in a way that I was familiar with, which is kind of upright and on my feet. In these workshops, I would get the questions: “So, take it through different levels. How low and how high can you go with that?” It's just a complete way of taking your mind, but also your body, to completely new places. With everything that you're used to doing, but the paradigm changes then.

One of the terms for that was “instant composition.” While you're improvising, you are kind of choreographing or making something worth being watched. That's very different than the kind of improvisation of absolutely not knowing the next moment. It's a different practice. For me, [William] Forsythe's approach is instant composition. That's what is so beautiful, I find, about Bill Forsythe's work, because he found a way to make the body compose instantly, in the moment. You're allowed to kind of break all the rules that you set up, or simply keep the machine oiled in a manner of speaking. But in the end, all the decisions are geared towards a very particular vision, or outcome, or intent.

Liz Waterhouse: Sure. I do not use that term, but I agree with what you are saying. With students I emphasize Forsythe's work as performance of improvisation and choreography of improvisation—also to distinguish it from an “anything goes” spontaneity. You and I like to improvise together and seem to share ideas, whatever we call them.

Chris Lechner: Right! I find, we who have met each other and like to hang out with each other and are interested in our journeys, also through dance—not entirely only needing choreography as a vessel—we are interested in instant composition.

Liz Waterhouse: As well as in “movement research.” Within your classes, there is space for both. For me, the movement research part is when I'm not thinking about crafting my performance for an outer eye. I'm not consciously thinking about composing or framing myself in space and time. I'm figuring it out for me, exploring or prioritizing my pleasure/interests. Then, with instant composition, we travel

through the space together, or work on designing movement more precisely—with and for others. I suppose, one thing that was special about Forsythe's work was the way that structure and not-knowing managed to coexist.

Chris Lechner: Yeah. If you're improvising, you have to accept that, to a great extent, you do not know the next moment. If you don't do that, you're not improvising. Then you're playing with choreographical building blocks, or elements. It's more doodling. It's not improvising, really.

Liz Waterhouse: What about Lisa Nelson's work for you?

Chris Lechner: Lisa is very interesting. It can use material which is very personal. (Laughs.) You know, strange things that happen to you somatically, but she finds the right way to use it as a performing game. So simply to start something, and then pause it, and then reverse it, will kind of make something out of it, which is very watchable, all of a sudden again. It's instant composition.

What was so wonderful for me about Bill's work, too, is that it embraces you in a bigger way. So, it was totally okay in Lisa's approach. Like, if I wanted to do just do a ballet pas de cheval. That was my beginning. If that popped up, that was okay. It wasn't excluded because it wasn't contemporary, you know? It was so inclusive. That it was the most liberating thing that (laughs) happened to me at that time—where I was kind of like so confused and going, “Am I an improviser or not?” And finally, it was like, “No. But I'm interested in composition. And I can use all materials—including everything that has been shaped and formed in a particular way about me as a dancer.”

You could ask, at this moment in time, what would a dancer need to take on board to have a rounded training? And in the 1990s, I suppose ballet was enough, or release was enough in itself. I don't think it's that simple anymore. Definitely with ballet I felt at one point it was like a coat that didn't fit anymore. It felt so intimate and so worn and good; and at the same time, so wrong. And it was very confusing to live with these feelings.

Injury and Self-Discovery

Lechner's resilience in the face of injury, along with his encounters with experimental healers and bodyworkers, forms another strong narrative current within his life stories. Wishing to convey this embodied knowledge physically, we break into practice for Lechner to transmit these ideas through our bodies using touch. This leaves a large gap of silence in the transcript that is filled with embodied contact.

Liz Waterhouse: When and how does fascial work appear in your life story?

Chris Lechner: I was catapulted into fascial work because I had a neck injury that nobody could help me with. I had a slipped disk in my neck, and the doctors were afraid that I would be paralyzed if I moved a little bit too much in the wrong way from the neck down. And I was (laughs) a ballet dancer! I was twenty-seven, I think, so around 1990. I came back from a few months of not really getting anywhere. I mean, Stuttgart Ballet had fantastic doctors and connections, but nobody quite could figure out what would be the right physiotherapy for it. Then, every year I went to Zurich after the summer holiday to train with David Howard.³¹ He would give a summer course in Zurich, and he had somebody with him from New York—Tyr Throne.³² David said, “You know, this guy, just book a session with him. He’ll teach you what to do.” He was so confident about it.

So, I booked a session with Tyr Throne. He showed, *from my feet!* He showed me how my feet—through my fascia and my breath—could start communicating to my neck. So, my neck, wherever I would be, whatever I would do, would be supported through this fascial matrix. It took him about three and a half hours. We had booked for half an hour. At that time, you know, probably just as soloist with Stuttgart Ballet, it was your ticket into special treatments. But he probably also noticed that I was really soaking this up. I walked out of there just almost crying. Well, I didn’t know if I was crying or laughing? This feeling in my body. I kind of went, “That cannot be. Not in your wildest dreams.”

I felt amazing. My neck felt as if it could just heal completely or be pain free. Then three days later, I didn’t know what happened, but I could visit those progressions or exercises almost and reawaken it every day, again and again and again. Until I had gotten to know it well enough that I went, “Okay, so I guess I’m awakening my fascia that way.” Like you can awaken your craniosacral awareness, or your bones.

It really worked very well together with the yoga exercises that I had learned previously from Marika Bresobrasova. So, my morning practice just became a little more extended. Ten minutes more, fifteen minutes more, but I was in my fascial body. I think I discovered the bones truly only when I started release work in my

31 See Warren, *The Art of Teaching Ballet*, 110–39.

32 Tyr Throne (b. 1954 in Kaukauna, Wisconsin and based in New York City) is the creator of Somalogy™. Drawing inspiration from his early years as a dancer, Throne began Somalogy over fifty years ago when he saw the possibility of integrating physical, psychological, and theatrical therapies while studying pre-medicine, psychology, dance, and theater at the University of California in Santa Cruz. After working internationally as a ballet dancer, Throne directed Throne Dance Theatre/the Tribe, founded in 1979 in New York. He is a longstanding practitioner of martial arts, yoga, and meditation, with professional certification in multiple bodywork modalities (Structural Integration, Feldenkrais, neuro-linguistic programming, craniosacral therapy, and acupuncture). Biography developed in correspondence with the author on November 22, 2024. Further information is available on Throne’s website, <https://somalogy.net>, last accessed November 14, 2024. Dunning, “Tyr Throne Company.”

transition after being a ballet dancer. But by that time, I was so immersed in fascial work that, when I heard that there was someone in Brighton that was training with Tom Myers and was kind of like the new star on Tom Myers' horizon.³³ I totally wanted to meet him. So, we had Gyrotonic sessions where he would teach me how Gyrotonic worked as a soft-tissue practice. And then he went, "Well, I'm doing yoga, too." And so I came and started doing his yoga work, and that just blew my mind then.

His name is Gary Carter.³⁴ And he is, to this day, one of my closest and most cherished friends. He has a profound understanding of movement and anatomy. He comes more from sport: cycling; big injuries, starting with weightlifting work. His work then was called Natural Body. So, without steroids or anything you could sculpt your body. Then he discovered shiatsu, healing, then fitness work and the fascia. He was teaching me bodybuilding then, too. So, working with weights as a way of connecting to gravity. And then gravity's response, because weight was just adding to gravity a little more. It was such a catalyst.

Did I ever touch into your thigh? I did that once with you in a Gyrotonic lesson, I think?

Liz Waterhouse: Yes, I think so. But please, you can do it again.

Chris Lechner: This is something Gary showed me! If you just relax your leg. I think what we've been talking about is, for instance, with Body-Mind Centering, you could say skin, then you have muscle, I can now address the bone. There's something else that points towards the center and gets the bone.

33 Tom Myers (b. 1959) is an American bodywork practitioner trained in Structural Integration with Ida Rolf. He is also an author and international teacher of Anatomy Trains®. See Myers, *Anatomy Trains*. See also, the biography of Gary Carter in the next footnote.

34 Gary Carter (b. 1962 in North London, based in Brighton) has a background in athletics, competitive cycling, bodybuilding, martial arts, yoga, and fascial research. He founded Natural Bodies in Brighton in 1991, where he offers "Myofascial Movement Trainings," as well as anatomy movement courses and dissection labs for manual therapists and movement professionals. Gary Carter hosted Tom Myers for the first Anatomy Trains® courses in the UK (1998–2003); he graduated from the KMI school of Structural Integration in 2001 and co-taught Anatomy Trains courses in the UK and USA. Carter's work brings together this knowledge with yoga, shiatsu, chi kung & chi ne tsang, Pilates, Gyrotonic, and craniosacral therapy. As part of the Fascial Net Plastination Project, Carter collaborated with Gunter von Hagens' team to create the world's first plastinated fascial human models, showcased at the World Fascia Research Congress (2018, 2021). Biography developed through personal correspondence with the author on November 15, 2024. See also Carter's professional website, <https://www.naturalbodies.co.uk>, last accessed November 15, 2024.

With fascia, the touch is a little more like—I wonder if I can just do it spontaneously—but let me just tune into that. There. And now, they're inviting me in. And if I listen, they're actually also starting to . . .

Liz Waterhouse: There.

Chris Lechner: Yeah. Suggest, recruit, directions.

But it's like from the first moment here, I have the fascia. I'm just kind of sinking in. Yes, I have skin, bones, everything. Blood, in this touch. But it's a kind of matrix that connects it all. I have your heart. Just now on my touch. Your neck. Some toes. So, anywhere, where you go in—you're in the fascia.

Everything is swimming in this matrix. No? So, it's like a metaverse. And the change is already the way I see you moving the leg now. Because it's all of a sudden like . . .

Liz Waterhouse: . . . connected.

Chris Lechner: Yeah.

Liz Waterhouse: How to explain that to our readers?

Chris Lechner: That's such a conundrum, isn't it? Perhaps through imagery?

I remember workshops with Russell Maliphant.³⁵ It was kind of like: Okay, you're sitting there, with your legs a little bit apart. You want to help your partner kind of get a little more weighted here where the top of the upper thigh ends by the pelvis. Then there was this image from the film *The Piano*. At the end of that movie, a piano is dropped from a boat and sinks to the bottom of the ocean. It's the piano sinking to the bottom of the ocean that you're applying. Then you can also put your foot on top of your thigh. Rather than being kind of intrusive, the foot becomes the piano sinking, through your tissue to the bottom of the ocean. Also, Laurie Booth introduced this image: the abdomen is a zodiac around which the fascia is connected as if in a star system

You asked me earlier, "How did I get to know something beyond my own body?" It was implied through our ballet training—there was partnering. So, you knew about another nervous system, acting with yours and in concert. But it was so specific, the (laughs) connection beyond yourself that happens. But the partnership that comes about, if you dance with someone again and again, I think it's something we've taken on board anyway by being trained the way we are.

35 See the biography in footnote 20.

Then, through the fascial work, I got so interested that I did a training with Tyr [Throne]. He had broken down his approach into ten different workshops. I got up to level four. It had covered most of the body already. There weren't organs yet in there. They weren't very deep places, but I think that already started opening something that was beyond just being a dancer and partnering someone. You wanted to listen into somebody else's state and what the body might need. This particular listening, as you just felt, it lets you in. It takes you in such a different way.

Then, I started working more with partnering, because of the Contact [Improvisation] work. A lot of the workshop sessions would start with giving each other bodywork: just doing some good to the other body. Not just stroking it and not just manipulating it, but bringing some healing and listening into the mix, made moving from there a very beautiful experience. Again and again, I felt, "Oh, my God, that's wonderful." We only massaged the feet a little bit and held the leg. But what a way into moving. It was so completely opposed to anything else that I knew from getting the body ready to function, no? And I think from that time, because it was quite a while from, I would say '96 to 2009. I was really working as much with the solo body as with just partner work. That's a lot of time.

I found some of the questions around Contact Improvisation so interesting. What does it do to you? Maybe you could play soccer, then do contact work, and play soccer again. And after thirty minutes of contact work, you were so good at whatever your resources were in soccer. Much better than the thirty minutes before—before the thirty minutes of dancing. You could try almost anything: fixing your bike, baking a cake, playing golf, and you would do it better, more intelligently. I think that is something which is still quite untapped. I mean, it's so far away from me, contact work, for about ten, twelve years now. But I know that that was something that got me very curious and excited.

In Sickness and in Health

Injury and sickness are topics that spiral through these body-biographies. After undergoing lung surgery, Lechner adapted his labor as a dance artist considerably. His new experiences of his ailing body create a friction that coexists with his earlier sense of self—one grounded in being most fully present when moving. The larger theme of self-discovery through movement and stillness crisscrosses his narratives and helps to cohere these multiple and divergent experiences of embodiment.

Liz Waterhouse: What is your rhythm of work? Could you tell me about a typical week or workday?

Chris Lechner: It comes about just by my teaching schedule. Everything's changed since my lung operation, because I'm basically living life with so much less battery.

Now it's all about how much energy will I have to do this, this, and this before I collapse. That's why I got so drawn to Lisa Nelson's work. Her main interest is "What is movement and what is stillness?"

I think I had this theme in my life, that unless I move, I don't feel myself. Early on, I got noticed. I got attention and affection. Later on, I got jobs. But I think something rubbed off by growing up in India. There was this affinity to stillness that I would catch myself asking those kinds of questions. "So, what is meditation? Or contemplation?" It was more about just what in me could become very, very still. And, now when I work, it's mostly something to do with physicality—with either sharing my thoughts about fascia through the yoga lens or doing a movement training. It kind of structures my time and my week.

I can function most days until about one o'clock or two o'clock. But if there is a workshop or something I want to do in the afternoon, I need to keep that wide open rather than make a prior time commitment. So if I'm teaching in the morning, giving a session and then, let's see at 12:31, how low is my low? Maybe with a little bit of willpower, I can attend a lot of that workshop, or maybe I'll have to go home to rest. So, that rhythm is just given by the fact that I only have one functioning lung now.

Also, when I was living in India, my rhythm changed. There's a really precious time in India where finally everything is quiet. Finally, there's no dog barking or . . . (Laughs.) And it's kind of between three and maybe five thirty in the morning. So, that was a big time for me, to just wake up around three and then just become very still. Everything else kind of unfolded, and India just kind of picks you up and takes you into motion. India is really like a washing machine. So, how did I do that in the West? I think I was very happy as a ballet dancer, just by always having worked in companies that had a morning schedule, afternoon off, evening rehearsal or performance, and then the night off. And that stuck with me. So, my biorhythm really works even today that way. I can function well in the morning. I need to kind of drop somewhere in the afternoon, and then towards the evening most days I can make it again.

Liz Waterhouse: Would you feel comfortable to share more about your lung surgery? I don't know what actually happened.

Chris Lechner: I don't really know either! It really came out of the blue. I mean, I understand more now, just through being in conversation with so many doctors and therapists. They look always at your whole life, your trends and all that. Now I see more how that might have been possible—that it was just at one point an overload and it happened.

Basically, what took place was that I had taken a few months off with my wife, Sunita Asnani, who is Swiss and of Indian heritage, to explore what would it mean

for us both to be artists in India.³⁶ This was in 2012. Because I'd lived there for seven, eight years: from 2006 to 2011, between Almora, Bangalore, Arambol, Kolkata, Delhi. I had a network. Everything was just there for us. If we felt comfortable as artists working there, why not at least spend a good time of the year there—teaching, making work, collaborating with all the wonderful people that I knew there—and then maybe summers in Bern. Something like that.

We arrived and we were invited to a contemporary dance festival in Delhi called Ignite—one of the very few relevant festivals at that time in India. A few days later, I caught a cold, which was quite common for me to experience in India. I mean, I was riding the new subway in Delhi. I'm pretty sure it happened right there. So, I was not feeling well, but this time something was different, I just didn't recover. The cough got worse and worse. I felt weaker and weaker. There was a doctor there that helped me by giving me Voltaren [painkiller]. I didn't feel much. So, I could function. We could do the festival. And afterwards I realized, "Oh my God! The moment I stop with Voltaren, something's not good." Had it checked out in Delhi, but it just seemed quite obvious. Delhi had an unprecedented smog—weeks of smog because of wildfires and a typhoon. We were just under this intense dark bubble of smog. That didn't help my lungs. So, we decided, "Okay, we'll take on a project in Thailand: an art project in Bangkok and Chiang Mai."

On the last day before leaving India, I had a meal that gave me Giardia, a parasite in the stomach. We arrived in Thailand, and I was just going downhill. Every week was getting worse. I was getting thinner and thinner. I pretty much just about managed that art project. We had two or three performances in art galleries. Then the question was, will we go back to India? I kind of went, "I'm really not fit to go back. India is much too intense. At least we're in Thailand where it's so easy peasy, and you're a tourist." So, I just thought, "Go to a hospital and get checked out."

In the hospital, they found first the Giardia. I got antibiotics and then I started getting fever in the night. The next examination showed, "Okay, there's a dark spot on your lung. You probably have cancer—stage three, or probably four. You have a few weeks left. Maybe you want to write the letters to your dear ones. You're probably not going to make it back to Europe, but we can take care of you here." So, that's where the whole thing with the lung emerged, out of nowhere. It was hiding behind

36 Sunita Asnani (b. 1979 in Luzern, based in Bern) is a Swiss-Indian dancer and also a coach and facilitator for cultural equity and inclusion. She gained her master's degree in the sociology of religion from the University of Zurich. Her practices include ballet and kathak, then tango, Contact Improvisation, and contemporary dance. Creating the organization "bend-it" together with Chris Lechner, since 2017 Asnani has created performance installations, offered transcultural workshops, and practiced arts-based facilitation individually and in collaboration with her husband. Biography developed through email correspondence with the author on November 10, 2024. See also the "bend-it" website, <https://en.bend-it.ch/about>, last accessed November 10, 2024.

Giardia, behind not feeling so well. And then the doctors saying that I was in the last stages of lung cancer.

Thank God, there was a very good American doctor there. He worked half a year in America and half a year in Bangkok. He was in Chiang Mai at that time, and he saw me, and he said, "That's debatable if that's cancer. It could be other things." Thank God he said that because he could at least put in doubt what was a death sentence. I had lost about thirty-five, forty pounds. So, I was not fit to fly at that time. He brought me back to a point just where I could make the decision, and I could take a flight back to Europe. In Europe, there was a surgeon that looked at my stuff too, and said, "I absolutely agree with this doctor. I've been doing lung operations for twenty years. What you have there is something different. That's not cancer. But we can find out tomorrow if you let me operate on you." I had nothing to lose because all the other doctors said, "You have to go on radiation, and you maybe have a few weeks left." That was the whole eight months of having a few weeks of life left, no?

So, that doctor then operated on me the next morning, and had to remove most of my right lung, and send it to the laboratory. With *all* that tissue—three kilograms of lung tissue—they could without any doubt confirm it wasn't cancer. It had been an infection. The body builds scar tissue around infection. And it looked like, on the images, like a dark spot—like cancer, obviously. So, then the next years were just slowly making my way back. I think I'm still on my way back, in a way. It'll never be like before, but . . .

Then, even *then*, the only thing that got me a job, was that I taught a *Probeklasse* [test class] at a dance studio in Bern called akarStudios. I was very upfront about my condition and said, "I'm looking to find work again. I'm going to be living in Bern. I can commit." While I was in the worst stage, I mean, that was a time when I couldn't get out of bed anymore.

Before that, my wife was trying to find food that would be healing for my lung in Bangkok. So, hours of that for Sunita, coming back, cooking for me. And just then, the grant that I had applied to before going to India came through, at Theater Kampnagel in Hamburg. That was my ticket back into life—a future that was waiting behind and beyond the dark tunnel of cancer. There was an identity there: I was going to be someone who would make work in Kampnagel! A year later I also had a job teaching dance, and it was, again, just because I move. That was when I was literally reduced to nothing. It was really ironical. I remember in the first three or four years, the only times when I was completely myself—all of me—no compromise, not the specter of Chris from before, that I lived all the rest of the hours of the day—was when I taught my akar class, and I was completely, one-hundred-percent Chris. Moving into the material, sharing the research. And every time a price to be paid. Three days of even less energy. But for the price of being completely, one-hundred-percent alive. For that moment, was worth the whole week.

Liz Waterhouse: Thank you, Chris, for sharing that. How mysterious and how unusual. I need some time to process all this. Were you frightened?

Chris Lechner: Yeah, very much so. I think the interesting thing is that I had just met my wife not so long ago, and was so much in love, and felt it was so unfair that we couldn't live our love. I think that was the biggest motor why I survived eight months of severe sickness. I mean, there were two or three times where it was over—hanging by the finest thread. I was just looking into her eyes, and I stayed here. So, that was the one thing. But the other part was that I remember again and again speaking with my wife at that time. I said, "It's good. I've done wonderful stuff! Everything's good. If that's the end of it now, it's good. I even met you! It's all good." But when the doctor rushed into my hospital room with the results of the lab, beaming all over his face and said, "It's *not* what you thought it was! You're going to live, Mr. Lechner!" There I realized what fear had been in my body, what despair, no?

Liz Waterhouse: I can only imagine. Thank you. I don't think I have the words to . . .

Chris Lechner: Very personal! I don't know if that's what you are looking for? But that's part of the body-biography, in a way.

Liz Waterhouse: I think so. All the dancers that I have interviewed here have in different parts of their lives various injuries and health crises. From small to large. Christine Kono has battled cancer twice. Hilary Cartwright had a back injury as a young woman, multiple abdominal surgeries and two hips replaced. Marcus Schulkind had multiple knee surgeries, and more recently a heart attack and cataract surgery. I think in sickness and in health, we are dancers.

"When Am I a Dancer?"

Chris Lechner: Classical practices demand daily practice. Music demands that from you, too: that you either practice or what you want to express will not quite happen. You're always, to put it bluntly, not good enough, (laughs) not nimble enough, not whatever enough. Classical music, opera, ballet. It takes so much maintenance. Indian classical dance as well. I think it's not just a Western problem.

I remember a quite liberating moment: Around 1999/2000, I spent a few months traveling through India, and I had a Roling session just before, a few weeks before we left. I had taken with me the idea of the forward bends and just a few very simple things. I felt there was something, a kind of body story, that traveled with me for about nine months at that time through India. I didn't do dance classes; I didn't train. Whenever there was a chance that there was somebody who was a dancer or studio, I would engage in movement. But as a ballet dancer, I mean, after a few days of not

moving, I would feel less and less in touch with my dancing self or moving self. And at that time, and I think it was just a very particular place in my life, I felt myself coming more and more alive by deliberately *not* training but staying in that Roling body. The change that Roling was giving me around my ribs and shoulders and neck, at that time—even into my feet—was incredible. And dancing my travels that way. Dancing through nine months that way.

It's not so metaphorical. It's really the whole notion of: When am I a dancer? When am I engaged? What am I practicing? This started opening up hugely around that time—both for me personally as well as in my dance community. Because I was feeling better and better, more and more together. Being in India and traveling around that time meant just doing a Himalayan trek—you know, 5,000-meter mountains, for a week or two. I mean, it was just no joke what I was going through physically. Plus, Indian cities and the schedules and the physical madness of traveling through India. It was full on. But I didn't need my push-ups or all the things that I relied on before to be *very* resilient, strong, connected. So, did I need to still train regularly? Did it show years later that I didn't train those nine months? I actually believe it didn't, because until this day, bio-mechanically, I am quite fit, knock on wood.

Liz Waterhouse: On that good note, thank you, Chris, for teaching me so much and sharing your life stories for this collection.

Conclusion: Writing Embodied History

Dancers' life stories are evocative sources offering insight into dancing bodies and history. This testimony is, however, also challenging for scholars to engage with, as self-narratives are performative and memories are fallible reconstructions. Building upon the recent work of dance scholars Christina Thurner, Julia Wehren, and Nadja Rothenburger, who argue for the potential of expanded theoretical and methodological "auto_bio_graphical" research in dance studies, my writing introduces the specific approach of body-biographies, focusing on methodological development and aspects of embodiment.¹

This book explores how to document and interpret dancers' life stories—considering how artists perform narratives that articulate their self-understanding and embodied experiences of dance. In contrast to methods valuing the scholar's distant objectivity, I advocate that the researcher reflexively participates in life review and cooperates on life-writing with the dancer, with attention, care, and energy. Advancing a body-reflexive and participatory approach to inquiry through methodological innovation and case study analysis, this book has shown how autobiographical study enriches understanding of the complex, subjective, multisensory, fine-grained, and easily disregarded components of embodied dance practice and history. Body-biographies are collections of dancers' life stories that are produced, contextualized, and refined through emergent dialogues between a well-informed researcher and a dancer: research in which the scholar participates in practice-led autobiographical storytelling (rather than working with a fixed questionnaire or performing "sit-down" interviews). The chosen topics and expressive narration of body-biographies provide a performative format for life review and historical reflection. These texts are edited for publication with a readership of both scholars and other dancers in mind. The resulting body-biographies present situated life story research, sensory movement analysis, reflexive writing, and praxeological knowledge.

1 Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 23; Hilari et al., "Auto_Bio_Graphical Urgencies. Vier Tanzwissenschaftliche Perspektiven"; Rothenburger, *Autochoreografie im Zeitgeschehen*; Wehren, *Oral Dance History*.

The book has charted the following path: Following the introduction, which discusses my motivation and research design, Part I begins with a theoretical chapter reviewing auto/biographical discourses for the purpose of dance research (“Chapter 1: Life Stories as Sources for Dance Scholarship”). With reference to the writing of Charlotte Linde and Penny Summerfield, among others, I review arguments regarding the constructed nature of life stories as narrative performances that negotiate coherence and explore psychological composure. My discussion focuses on recent scholarship in dance history—including the writing of Christina Thurner, Karen Eliot, and Jeff Friedman—highlighting how dance scholars have examined diverse forms of dancers’ autobiography and envisioned what Karen Eliot terms “embodied history.”² This is followed by a chapter articulating my methodology (“Chapter 2: Body-Biographies: A Novel Methodology for Body-Reflexive and Participatory Dance Research”). There I specify my methodological approach with reference to existing techniques and epistemological debates in interview research, oral history, transcription, life-writing, narrative analysis, and movement analysis. Taken together, Part I demonstrates the potential of dance studies to generate new performative and embodied modes of inquiry for life story research—entwining theory and practice, observation and participation. My writing also underscores the gaps within existing research on dancer autobiographies, especially the need to pay greater attention to less famous artists and to the life and work of dance teachers. The particularity of embodied history also warrants exploratory research through in-depth case studies of individual dancers. Part II of this book addresses this need.

Shifting in tone to the intimate registers of autobiography, “Interlude: Autobiographical Gestures” between Parts I and II turns to my own life and career as a dancer. I consider how contexts of dance education and professional praxis have constituted my embodied knowledge and sense of selves.³ My stories and narrative fragments illustrate the theoretical significance of the coherence-defying registers of autobiography described analytically in Chapter 1. The difficulty I faced in producing this public life-writing helped me to comprehend the challenges other dancers might experience in telling their life stories: These include the difficulty of articulating embodied memories eloquently in words, as well as the wish to efface theoretically significant but painful or embarrassing stories. My life-writing, fashioned without the support of a well-informed interview partner and emergent practice-led research with another artist, exhibits the contrast between body-biography methodology and autonomous techniques of autobiographical writing.

2 Eliot, *Dancing Lives*, 2.

3 Plural selves as a person who is both dancer and scholar, an academic with multiple disciplinary foundations, and an expatriate who has lived in the United States, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland.

This sets the stage for body-biography as an alternative technique for writing embodied life histories.

Demonstrating my novel methodology of body-biography, the second part of this book publishes case studies developed with four lesser-known but significant dance artists. All are well-respected teachers in their communities of practice: Hilary Cartwright, Christine Kono, Chris Lechner, and Marcus Schulkind (Chapters 3–6). My relationships with these artists are based on my artistic study with them, as well as making and performing dances (in all cases but Cartwright, with whom I undertook teacher training). Our friendships grew through these artistic pursuits.

Taking the form of a group autobiographical project, in 2022 I embarked on life story research with these four elder collaborators, all of whom are over the age of sixty. Representing three national origins and currently living in four different countries, they present unique socio-historical life trajectories and aesthetic preferences in dance. All have achieved considerable professional distinction, without the recognition typically awarded to prominent choreographers or illustrious ballet stars. I envisioned that their experiences of dancing—as Lechner put it “working in the trenches”—would enrich my study twofold: first, through vivid accounts of dancing and embodied knowledges, and second, by discussing the challenges of sustaining life as a precarious dance artist. Studying these requires considerable rapport and reflexivity to see beyond the smoke and mirrors of coherent and status-staging self-narratives. These protagonists also have unique personalities and voices, reflective of their own international artistic histories and family backgrounds. Their evocative forms of rhetoric and empathetic styles of communication I knew well from their classrooms. I was eager to face the challenge to articulately document these distinct voices—and dancing bodies—on the page.

On a personal level, I felt an urgency to write down my teachers’ life stories because of their advanced age, the COVID-19 pandemic, and rapidly changing conditions of dance training and practice. I wished to make a record of their teaching practices and embodied knowledges for other dancers and dance historians to engage with. This documentation practice I was certain would offer me new understanding of dance history and my own dance pedagogical practice. Benefiting from my teachers’ witty and energetic investment in reflecting on their bodies and rethinking their careers, each chapter in Part II unveils an illustration of body-biographical writing.

As part of the reflexivity promoted in body-biography, I strive to make transparent how my research interests, subjectivity, identity, and aesthetic preferences shape the content of this book. One of my primary arguments is that participatory research can enhance dance historiography and dance studies, provided it is accompanied by reflexivity. My criteria for selecting these teachers and reflecting on the impact of my relationships with them on this life-writing are presented in the “Introduction.” Additionally, the opening pages framing each

individual body-biography (Chapters 3–6) expound in greater detail upon our prior relationships and mutual aesthetic interests, demarcating further limits of objectivity. With close attention to ethical debates on reflexivity and ethnographic writing in anthropology, my analysis demonstrates that life stories examining embodiment offer rich theoretical yields yet necessitate considerable care work over extended timelines to achieve the desirable balance between sensitivity and critical analysis—examining what other scholars might not gain access to, or might overlook, or dismiss as too subjective. In this way, the book defines a form of autobiographic inquiry that requires reflexivity on ethical, theoretical, and methodological dimensions simultaneously.

Our longstanding teacher-student rapport and shared practical knowledge complicated and enhanced this research. It offered me exceptionally in-depth, theoretically complex, and sensually rich content. Through this inquiry, interviews with my teachers “Christine,” “Marcus,” “Hilary,” and “Chris,” became biographic chapters staging life review with Christine Kono (b. 1947), Marcus Schulkind (b. 1948), Hilary Cartwright (b. 1943), and Chris Lechner (b. 1963). As we conscientiously shaped narratives about ourselves intended for publication, I insisted that our movements, gestures, and vocal performance appear on the page and evoke multisensory dialogues.

I learned that these aesthetic registers of embodied performance must be subtly translated into words—not cumulatively annotated—to achieve poetic effects on the page. I discovered that my embodied knowledge is mercurial, not hierarchical or Cartesian. I found that narratives describing embodied history resisted the linear timings of reading-flow and the straight lines of literacy. Our words, my editor politely noticed, were frequently shifting into unconventional grammatical positions. Out of respect for my narrators’ authority, I used light editing to adjust their speech in line with normative grammatical conventions—seeking approval for any changes (not ghostwriting) and being mindful not to eviscerate the bodily poetics of mobile and performative speech. All four narrators reported being initially overwhelmed by their words filling page after page—like a mirror presenting a strange reflection flattening reality. We took time to read and to refine the form of their individual body-biographies collaboratively. Working on paper as well as through digital interfaces, I was conscious that my expertise in scholarly writing made me the primary custodian of these texts. Body-biography methodology is emergent and does not produce cookie-cutter biographies, as the close reader will see ample evidence of.

My research revealed to me that embodied life-story narration with dancers gains momentum associatively and relationally in the excitement of dialogue with another bodily responsive and expressive participant. The sociality of the methodology impacts the content and yield. Embodied storytelling may draw together pivotal experiences and discourses that create vortexes and

springboards—then suddenly switch currents ficklely, like the wind, to follow convention and the narrator's curiosity to describe causal chronologies. After the resumption of chronological narrating, interruptions might again veer in a new direction, leaving the interviewer bewildered until they listen closely to the recordings and begin to discover patterns across life-story constellations. Recognizing embodied storytelling as relational and experimental, my narrators and I worked together with the objective of leaving rich knowledge about our artistic practices and bodies for the next generation of artists and dance historians to chew over.

We recognized that, as a group, our autobiographical project sharing one book would offer chapter-length windows onto our lives. The life stories thus would be highly selective: abridged, not comprehensive. One of my roles as author was to hold together an overview of the entire book's content, as well as to take responsibility for relaying correspondences and anecdotes orally between parties. I worked together with each participant, curating and arranging collections of life stories. While drawing upon interview recordings documenting exchanges between 2022 and '24, the writing highlights the protagonists' self-understanding in the final months of editing (rather than aiming to represent the process). Our writing would surely have changed if we had continued reviewing our lives in the subsequent months and years.⁴

In sum, *Body-Biographies: Our Life Stories in Dance* establishes an interdisciplinary framework and novel methodology for embodied life story research in dance studies and substantiates these ideas in intimate case studies with dancers. The research design is reflexively driven to draw upon my perspective as a dance scholar, teacher, and former professional dancer—placing my self-narratives, my body, and the lives of four dance colleagues at the center of my analysis. In the remainder of this conclusion, I discuss further matters for the benefit of other scholars, with sections addressing: the content and challenges of body-biographies, the writing process, the fine-scale of embodied history, the case studies, and lastly, broader methodological horizons.

4 For example, my life had a drastic change in October 2025 when I accepted a Professorship in Ballet Techniques at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts. Having submitted many applications after finishing my postdoctoral research grant for this project, I did not envision this reality concretely when drafting my life-writing presented in the interlude between Part I and Part II. I chose to leave this text unedited, reflecting my position when writing this book.

Content and Challenges

My invented term for this inquiry—ligating *body* and *biography*—has served as a gateway for articulating dancers' life stories as a form of critical dance studies scholarship. This project has drawn upon my competencies in reflexive ethnography and dance studies in addition to my skills as a practicing dance artist. As a dancer myself, anticipating the expressive and embodied ways that dancers might desire to tell their life stories based on the specific practical logics and social codes of working in the dance profession, I have built upon existing scholarship exploring how life stories are creative, performed, and composed narratives. This book develops life story research beyond an oral narrative focus on storytelling, shaping inquiry that richly attunes to the emergent dimensions of dancing bodies and the logics of dance practice—expanding and sharpening theoretical approaches for documenting dancing lives, writing embodied history, and studying aesthetic practice.

The case studies in Part II of this book foreground stories about cooperating with other dancers and choreographers, as well as teaching dance students: transmissions that are central to defining communities of dance practice. They describe physically learning to dance, energetically depicting seminal teachers and memorable lessons. Reading these body-biographies, we absorb vivid accounts of training, rehearsal, and production conditions, also gaining contextual knowledge of the networks that allowed dancers to find employment. My collaborators' life stories spiral around the topic of injury—recounting bodily discipline, vulnerability, precarity, empowerment, and resiliency. Another common theme is aging. The artists compare the experiences of young dance students today—in an age of rapid digital and social transformation—to their own memories of the past, tethered to the social revolutions of the sixties and seventies. Taken as a whole, these recollections offer valuable insights into the local contexts and extended social networks that have defined pathways for exchanging embodied knowledge. They envision “embodied history,” as historian Karen Eliot describes it, representing “dance history as it has been created on, in, and through [dancers'] bodies.”⁵

I anticipate that these body-biographies will catalyze further scholarly analysis. As Christina Thurner has shown, dancers' autobiographies not only provide testimony depicting the experiential phenomenon of dancing and accounting for its conditions of production, but also exhibit narratives of artistic self-understanding and self-fashioning, shedding light on processes of self-constitution.⁶ This is also true of body-biographies, which present self- and body-understanding, as well as accounting for pivotal discourses and practices that structure these experiences.

5 Eliot, *Dancing Lives*, 6.

6 Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 29–109.

Body-biographies examine how dancing impacts the sensory perception of one's own and others' bodies, as well as the surrounding environment (and space) created through movement. Dancers' body-biographies also report extensively on bodily awareness shaped through physical injury and illness, as well as practices of healing, health, and medicine. At times, these various discourses seem to multiply understandings of the self; or, in the case of injury and illness, they may alienate one from one's dysfunctional body and divide the self. Further research on these aspects of subjectivity and embodiment, and their extension through novel case studies, I hope will be engaged with by other scholars—deepening what I have commenced here.

While body-biographies enrich dance scholarship and archives, still, this methodological approach is challenging to produce and interpret. I discuss five critical points here. First, dance—as a largely nonverbal and kinesthetic art form—is not easily translated into oral life story narratives, leading to gaps, obscurations, and misrepresentations. While emplacing life story interviews in contexts of practice and extending them over time to enhance reflexivity have compensated for these difficulties, underfunded oral history archives and early career researchers might not have the infrastructure (dance studios), technology (wireless microphones), and financial resources at their fingertips to undertake this kind of research. In the future, I imagine that the pervasiveness of video technology will make body-biography more convenient and less costly—enabling further study of the impact of digital interfaces upon body-perception and dance practices.

Second, life story and oral history research advance active memory reconstruction—not extracting memory but producing it.⁷ This recognizes that human recall is fallible and mutable. One consequence is that earnest testimony that presents inaccurate renditions of the past may still have scholarly value in terms of narrative meaning. In this research, my narrators wished to be perceived as truthful. To this end, I made “reality checks.”⁸ I fact-checked the titles of artistic works, the spelling of artistic collaborators' and institutions' names, and the dates of key events. When faced with the ambiguities of subjective memories, I used footnotes to highlight discrepancies with other historical sources and discussed these openly with my teachers. Body-biographies therefore occupy a niche between the expressive and speculative dimensions of history writing, benefitting from the scholar's critical competences in triangulation and source review.

Third, the “dance” of the interview dialogue—in performative gazes, gestures, touch, breath, movements, and affects—remains difficult to represent in writing. Dance scholar Jeff Friedman's scholarship vividly describes him dancing in dialogue with his interviewees in the process of recalling memories, as a means of enriching

7 See Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 23; Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*.

8 Plummer, “The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research,” 401.

the sensual content of interviewing by adding multisensory components to oral storytelling.⁹ Building upon this important work and relying on my background in ethnography, Laban Movement Analysis, and dance improvisation, I similarly made use of my body and my kinesthetic knowledge in the interviews, immersing myself in participant observation and writing field notes. This augmented my depiction of my narrators' bodies and movements. Longer studio sessions or other experimental modes of elicitation (for example with music) are possibilities that other interviewers may consider. Another challenge facing scholars is that dance elders may decline to dance in the framework of the interview, limiting the suitability of the methodology to elders who remain active.¹⁰ Moreover, not all dance scholars possess a background in dance practice. I have therefore also drawn up a participatory theoretical framework for movement analysis that may assist nondancers in writing up and interpreting their interviews.¹¹

Fourth, the narrative throughlines and coherence of testimony are difficult to assess in real-time during the interview. Extending these conversations into multiple interviews distributed over time permitted me to find materials for elicitation and to triangulate these with other sources. This also enabled me to gently probe narrative consistency. To assist other scholars, I have developed a framework for theoretical interpretation of life stories that can assist in real-time as well as subsequent analysis.¹²

Lastly, the duration and intensity of my process and the large volume of documentation created (recordings, transcripts, notes) produced a hefty and challenging "dataset"—echoing the complexities encountered in long-term anthropological fieldwork. This sizable collection of materials was difficult to interpret. The process of selection (for publication) was arduous. The care work involved in completing this work cooperatively was also extensive. Scholars falling down this rabbit hole must have considerable resources (time, space, an office, an assistant for transcription). I was fortunate to be offered these assets via a four-year research grant. I encourage others to use this study as a reference when requesting suitable funding for long-term research. Taken together, these points present key tensions in body-biography and critical dimensions for further development. In the next section, I will examine more closely the exploratory form of scholarly writing advocated here.

9 See Friedman, "Oral History a Go-Go," 178–82. For an astute reading of non-figural and field perception approaches to narration see, Friedman, "Spiraling Desire," 82–89.

10 In my broader interview work for the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts, I had one example of an interview partner who explicitly declined to dance in the interview. Reasons for this can include health, limited energy, or shame related to aging as a dancer.

11 See Chapter 2 in the subsection "Movement Analysis," in particular Boxes 2 and 3, 93 and 95.

12 See Chapter 2 in the subsection "Narrative Analysis," in particular Box 1, 91.

Writing Process

Following Ken Plummer's understanding of life story research as a "reflexive and recursive" inquiry, this book offers an evocative composite of texts that weave together scholarship and embodied life-writing.¹³

Beginning with an interdisciplinary nest of theoretical materials on life story research and interview methodologies (Part I), these proposals are clarified and enriched through the examples of my dance teachers' body-biographies (Part II). Additionally, I have brought my own life review into this project by narrating key phases of my autobiography and presenting some vulnerable fragments of my own memories (Interlude). Together, the various chapters compose for the reader an assemblage of contrasting voices and conventions of writing. The discontinuities mark the research as "committed and incomplete," as historian James Clifford writes, indicative of "partial truths."¹⁴ This composite, though pruned and polished through editing, manifests the dialogic registers of its production—an articulation mobilized between writing theory and aesthetic practice, between spoken voices and their inscription, between myself and four others, in dialogues that reflect upon and speculate about the past. These conversations about life stories in the field of dance have been flattened for the page, creating a tapestry of interwoven and intersubjective knowledge.

Like Lechner's comprehension of the "fascial body" as a set of interconnected cell structures shaped and elastically enforced through movement, the knowledge inquiries in this book similarly took form—developing "composure"—through an intensive methodology of movement research.¹⁵ Respecting the dancers' authority over their bodies and lives, while actively bringing my own knowledge as a dancer and reader of dance studies into our dialogues, we cooperated on adapting the stories from private interviews to public narratives—slowly, consensually, and rigorously. The nonlinear, creative poetics of life stories, on the one hand, and the contrasting chapters of rhetorically sturdy theoretical writing, on the other, create a heterogeneity that reveals the different ways corporeal experiences may be inscribed in print. I intended the composite form of this book to resonate with a diverse readership: dance practitioners, dance scholars, and scholars of life histories more broadly. This reflects my motivation to see writing embodied history not only as a scholarly project, written with the rhetorical strategies and terminology of dance studies argumentation, but also as a collaborative work with dance practitioners who contribute to its creation. In the next section, I revisit the impact of this cooperation upon the life-writing process.

13 Plummer, "The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research," 398.

14 Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," 7.

15 Summerfield, "Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice," 9.

Composing Life Stories Together

Oral history scholars have moved beyond mining interviews for factual content, advancing the study of how oral history is composed as narratives that reflect the active co-construction of the scholar as interview partner.¹⁶ Protagonists adapt common storytelling forms and professional narratives learned through education and encountered in public media in order to create their autobiographies. They may borrow from familiar genres, such as the adventure story, the hero's narrative, the tragedy, and the sad story. Their rhetoric will commonly draw upon the poetics of narration—rhythm, repetition, alliteration, and metaphor—that renders the performance of oral discourse aesthetic and vivid. My research here expands on these known aspects of narrative composition by applying a dance studies lens, attuned to movement analysis and vocal performance. In this section, I will review my work, highlighting my role in facilitating and shaping the process of writing life stories.

In contrast to life story narratives that erase the presence of the interviewer and are told coherently in the first person without foregrounding dialogic components, I actively cooperated with my protagonists to find a written form for these stories.¹⁷ As we edited together, I enriched the dialogues to convey our bodies in conversation and the tone of my interlocutors' vocal performance. I also wrote additional vignettes describing their teaching and dance practice, which self-reflexively include descriptions of my own movement and body perception. In this way, the bricolage of body-biography exhibits biography as a performative dialogue—foregrounding the protagonist in their relations with myself and other people, and showcasing the embodied components of life story performance.

One key insight of life story scholarship is that norms, expectations about audience, and the psychological demands to present a coherent self all shape an individual's self-narrative. Thus, life stories change over the course of a lifetime and typically also adapt depending on one's interlocutor. It is for this reason that I use the term "life stories" in the plural. Key stories, repeated often, become part of one's repertoire for defining and performing the self. Building upon this knowledge, I have contextualized the composition and variance of my teachers' life stories in the introductions to each of their chapters and discussed it in my own life review (see "Interlude"). In addition to publishing their entertaining and well-rehearsed life stories, I also facilitated further examination of accounts that broke off, rambled, or otherwise eluded narrative closure. My own autobiographical writing has investigated these aspects that defy coherence—revealing narrative fragmentation, professional discontinuities, and exposing the pain and trauma

16 See for example Summerfield, "Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice."

17 Cf. Atkinson, *The Life Story Interview*.

defining self-formation. Consequently, this book has reported on the ethical challenges of shaping theoretical interpretation of life stories; it has also defined theoretical criteria for doing so.¹⁸

I assumed my chosen protagonists would explore dance-specific and creative means of expression—storytelling in an “artistic” manner, for example, one that is sensitive to body language, shared attention, and emotion. Perhaps they might even approach the interview like a shared improvisation, performance, or a creative rehearsal to invent a new choreography? Indeed, Kono and Lechner—both of whom have extensive backgrounds in improvisation—embarked upon life review as an emergent form of practice-led research, modeled on processes of creative collaboration. By contrast, Schulkind and Cartwright construed the interview more conventionally as a framework for vocal performance. Their approaches to life-writing demonstrated their interests in creative writing, poetry, and, in Cartwright’s case, also memoir. Schulkind pointed out to me that his body-biography read like a script for a play: enabling the reader to act out the different players and imagine their physicality from the textual directives. In all four cases, the methodological process actively negotiated existing conventions (of autobiography, interviews, research, creative process, and life-writing), while developing creative alternatives.

In exploring these innovations, I was surprised by the lingering hold and tenacity of classical autobiography in both my own and my narrators’ life reviews. While the protagonists’ narratives did not always cohere, the speakers demonstrated awareness of the conventions pulling their stories toward coherent, causal, chronological, and credible stagings of the self. Moreover, my teachers shared the belief that biography should investigate life phases, explain causalities, be truthful, and reveal intimate details (though “not too gossipy,” as Kono reminded me) of what made a dancer into the person she is today. The narrators were also conscious of the confessional and myth-making tropes of autobiography. All four protagonists asked for editorial support and validation that their stories would be relevant—not hollow, narcissistic, and self-congratulatory. They aspired to be self-reflective and appeared to enjoy learning from cooperative life review. We aimed to leave a trace for others that might elevate public understanding of the mysterious and precarious world of dancing, imagining like Karen Eliot, “a complex, dynamic history that accounts for the contributions of the dancers themselves.”¹⁹

Rather than theoretical analysis or generalizing from this small explorative study, I have focused on grounding and specifying my methodology, in addition to developing tools for honing the interpretive potential of body-biography—in other words: for reading. I annotated our conversations with footnotes, providing

18 See the section on “Theoretical Interpretation,” in Chapter 2, 87–100.

19 Eliot, *Dancing Lives*, 144.

triangulation with other sources; additionally, I added movement analysis and introductions that contextualize these texts with my own embodied memories. While editing their body-biographies with “outsiders” in mind and hoping to publish stories that will make a scholarly impact, I also endeavored to bring out the musical and emotional dimensions of dance transmission into the feeling of the text. “Bring our bodies into the text,” I kept reminding myself, “and show when and why this is impossible—or failing—when it is.”²⁰

The aesthetic and rhetorical composition of body-biographies provides substantial content for dance historians—offering us small mirrors that look at the self-presentation strategies of dance artists, as well as portals into their bodies, that give insight into their experiences and memories of their dance practice: the culture that vitalizes our art form—interlinking bodies across generations in migrating networks of practice. Their stories illustrate how the artists keep growing and studying, following the emergent qualities of embodiment as a process of discovery, shaping subjectivity dynamically. Unraveling these influences on memories through rhetorical and narrative strategies offers deeper understanding of the aesthetic practices, cultural perspectives, ideology, and morals through which the narrator has lived. In this way, the composition of body-biographies reveals the construction of bodily selves and kinesthetically vibrant worldviews.

Publishing Embodied History

The four body-biographies published here offer ample testimony for scholars—both within and beyond dance studies—interested in studying how bodily movements, affects, dance training, and performance transmissions constitute social structures and produce subjectivity. They describe how dancers cultivate the ability to transform their aesthetic bodies through training and performance, to appear different than they do in everyday life. Gestures in the life story interviews demonstrate learned dance aesthetics as well as absorbed cultural postures and gendered performances. The interview performances consequently show self-formation as an ongoing process of articulation, onstage and off. By extension, the page can also be understood as a performative stage for life-writing—continuing improvisation and performance of the self.

Body-biographies illustrate the complex ways that art worlds and daily life—the spectacular as well as the mundane details of daily practice—intermingle in constituting dancers’ embodied sense of self (or selves). This reveals multiplicities, composites, and divisions of bodies produced through negotiating interrelated practices and discourses, overthrowing conceptual separation and static ideals of

20 I thank James Leach for saying something to this effect during a feedbacking session early on in my process.

an aesthetic body, natural body, or authentic body. On the micro-scale of body-biography, the narratives in these chapters illustrate how singular persons, with unique identities, negotiate the practices that constitute aesthetic conventions and cultural norms. Identity and belonging are revealed to be scripted by gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, and ability. Markers of appearance and movement aesthetics also play key roles in constituting dancing bodies and personal identity. Dancers explore, transform, and sometimes even reject prior identities during their life journeys. They may cast off earlier aesthetic practices later in life, or interweave their prior practices into new ones, creating hybrid techniques and pedagogies.²¹ Taken together, these case studies illustrate the complex aesthetic dimensions through which identity and self-understanding are shaped.

These micro-histories also illustrate the relational networks of bodily practice and movement exchange that impact a single dancer's life. The dancers' life stories were frequently structured according to their excitement in explaining their encounters and relationships with other dance artists: describing a network of people that have influenced and supported them. Listening closely, I realized that these stories conveyed the artists' passion for novel embodied knowledge that motivated them to join new creative circles (new studios, dance ensembles, or communities of practice)—highlighting the charismatic people who energized them and drew them into new pursuits. As an editor, I recognized the challenges that these anecdotal ornaments pose for readers who do not share this lexical knowledge of “who's who.” Accordingly, I added footnotes referencing published obituaries and encyclopedia articles, and when necessary, biographical footnotes to assist readers' understanding. With the magnitude and depth of personal experience and extensive references to collaborators they contain, dancers' body-biographies may challenge, even occasionally overwhelm readers. The contrast is stark between this narrative multiplicity, flashing us with all the intensities and vulnerabilities of bodily existence, and other more linear and drier modes of theoretical writing. Body-biography is one answer to dance scholar Susan Foster's call to “vivify the study of bodies” in dance studies, producing texts that present dynamics of relationality.²²

In contrast to the “major” histories of the past, which were written in strong tones, with sweeping gestures, the tone and scale of embodied history is first-person and plural—following the temporalities of lifetimes and crossing the borders of traveling dancers' lives. For Karen Eliot, “embodied history” can be discovered at the intersection of biography and dance historiography. The scale of embodied history

21 This is also revealed in Bales and Nettle-Fiol's interviews with dancers, which focus on “training stories,” see Bales and Nettle-Fiol, *The Body Eclectic*, 170–249.

22 Foster, *Corporealities*, xi.

is small: more like a “microscope” than a “telescope.”²³ In the next section, I examine further these small dimensions as a defining scale of embodied history.

Scale: The Small Registers of Interconnected Lives

Body-Biographies: Our Life Stories in Dance presents a very fine-grain form of dance studies research, tunneling into the micro-dimensions of embodied memories. The case studies are produced through cooperation and foreground relationality. As a compilation of my teachers’ life stories, linked by their relationship to me, they offer a social view of professional dance networks and activities. This relational perspective is necessarily shaped by the fragility of memory and tinged with nostalgia. Body-biographies are speculatively personal—a deliberate departure from self-assured biography. Their fine-scale narrations differ from dance histories structured by chronological time or period, or alternatively organized around celebrated choreographers, recognized schools, or regional or national collections of oral history. My life, the fine thread that holds this group together, structures a vibrant and practice-linked study.

Like a flashlight or spotlight, the memories recounted in these life story anecdotes closely illuminate specific positions and moments, akin to local sources. Commenting on the value of local voices, dance historian Lena Hammergren observes: “We often use a shared canon of source material, which can be reinterpreted many times in different contexts, but national and regional sources hitherto not investigated or not addressed by international dance histories can offer us possibilities for new interpretations or complementary analyses.”²⁴ Life stories, like local sources, offer these possibilities for generating fresh interpretations and counter-histories. In this way, body-biographies contribute testimony that enables dance scholars to study how dance disperses: spreading across times and creating dimensions of place. Dance scholar Timmy De Laet, drawing on Foucault, imagines these new horizons of dance historiography: scholars shifting away from flattening historical data on a grand scale to emphasize, “causal relationships, homogenizing analogies, and periodization,” to instead embrace new narratives of embodied knowledges, rife with “indeterminacy, contingency, and dispersion.” This historiography would also, extending Foucault’s perspective, reflexively narrate the historic separation and regulation of embodied knowledge from written knowledge, as I explore here.²⁵

23 Eliot, *Dancing Lives*, 2.

24 Hamnergren, “Many Sources, Many Voices,” 137.

25 De Laet, “(Re)Making Dance History Together,” 31–32, here p. 31.

This fine-scale, dispersive model of body-biography inspects the detail of embodied history. These stories challenge neat notions of aesthetic periodization. In these body-biographies, each dancer explains their individual trajectories of discovering various dance styles (classical, neoclassical, modern, postmodern, and contemporary dance). They also describe their encounters with the healing arts and somatic practices (including yoga, Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique, Pilates, etc.), specifying how they have learned and adapted these practices in the context of dance teaching and healing work. Dancers' life stories narrate memories in relation to their knowledge of dance history and perception of a canon—highlighting anecdotes that involve well-known figures (Kono's and Cartwright's stories involving Margot Fonteyn). They also intentionally spotlight lesser-known persons and institutions to fill perceived gaps (Schulkind's accounts of American Theater Lab, Lechner's testimony about the underacknowledged dancer-choreographer Laurie Booth). In this way, life stories offer perspectives that re-envision the dynamics of dancing bodies—not only artists rebelling against prior dance techniques and choreographic aesthetics, but constantly creating through mixing, alighting upon things by chance, and adapting to what others are experimenting with in the same milieu. These perspectives on dynamic historical currents and seminal artistic works convey more fine-grained readings of the past. They offer alternatives to periodization and canon-critical viewpoints.

One key dimension of the body-biographies in this book is their transnationalism. Rather than reinforcing the "sweep and generality" of dance history written on a grand scale, body-biographies highlight "nuance and detail"—the micro-locality of the migrating body, as the narrator retrospectively reflects across contexts in time and space.²⁶ The protagonists have—like myself—moved between North America and Europe, and, in Lechner's case, between Europe and India.²⁷ Unlike oral histories directed towards reconstructing a national or regional dance tradition or even a local dance scene, embodied history tunnels through perspectives: showing an individual way that the past was experienced. In her recent review of dance history writing, scholar Susan Manning observes the growth of work overturning nation-state models in favor of transnational ones, noting: "Whereas the nation-state model plots choreographic families, the transnational model traces networks of exchange."²⁸ My case studies

26 Manning, "Dance History," 303.

27 Marcus Schulkind is an exception here, as he has lived most of his life in the New York City and Boston metropolitan areas. But, even so, his life story foregrounds comparisons between these two regions and exceptions within his working career: his short time touring with Batsheva dance company of Israel in 1970 as well as his work in the American Midwest. Schulkind's narratives think back and forth, comparing times and dance contexts.

28 Manning, "Dance History," 303. See also Carter, "Reshaping Dance through Time."

of body-biographies have similarly revealed the relational connections of dancers' labor, exhibiting nuanced stories about these exchanges. As a whole, these case studies draw attention to the transnational mobility of dancers in the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Like transnational historiography, body-biographies also present, as Manning describes, "how local conditions shape the assimilation and transformation of influences from abroad."²⁹ The life stories presented in this book entangle historically and regionally significant comparisons: interweaving local perspectives, international or regional contrasts, and descriptions of longitudinal change. In the next section, I will dive into these details by reviewing the specific content within my case studies and suggesting new directions for research.

The Case Studies: Domains of Further Research

The four body-biography case studies presented here (with dance artists Hilary Cartwright, Christine Kono, Chris Lechner, and Marcus Schulkind) reveal significant domains for further investigation. One noteworthy focus is upon the artistic conditions of production and networks that allowed dancers to gain employment. Body-biographies depict the economic pressures of the art market, contextualizing how choreographic aesthetics and dancing bodies are produced within systems that partition and share resources. Specifically, they detail the gatekeeping processes of auditions, securing funding, and competition for jobs. My research revealed how and why these narrators followed unique work trajectories, all dependent upon securing employment contingent on performing bodily competences. Their pre-professional habitus of daily physical practice and their first professional experiences of training and performance in precarious conditions led to injury and were unsustainable. Moreover, they reported few secure jobs and considerable competition for these positions. Their stories empathetically brought me into their efforts to improve job conditions and unite dancers politically around common grievances. In contrast to the challenges of a capitalistic dance market—marked by competition, power concentrated in strong authoritarian figures (e.g., choreographers, company directors), and little government support—these protagonists described valuing a climate of collegiality and solidarity between dancers, supported by external measures of social welfare. All four shared stories of how partnership, often domestic partners who were also dancers, helped them make new contacts, receive jobs, divide expenses, and share studio space, while also serving as close partners with whom they could hone their aesthetic practice. Further study of these competitive markets for aesthetic

29 Manning, "Dance History," 303.

bodies, together with the strategies that friends and partners develop for mutual aid, survival, and creativity are merited. More detailed readings comparing social-democratic systems of artistic support, as Kono experienced in Germany, with market-driven conditions of freelance artistic work are also warranted.

These body-biographies also accounted for social mobility and articulated criteria that the dancers used to evaluate their own careers. Our cooperation on writing a short professional biography for the introductory pages of each body-biography chapter drew my attention to specific tensions between dancers' professional status and the meanings their narratives convey, highlighting how life stories negotiate recognition, value, and embodied experience within the dance field. Their life stories manifested performance strategies to narrate discontinuities—to explain and bring into order the different professional roles of their life phases stretching across decades (e.g., as freelance dancer, ensemble dancer, solo ensemble dancer, teacher, rehearsal director, choreographer, company director, studio owner, etc.). Strategies of self-staging were apparent in the ways the artists moved certain roles into the foreground or background during our interviews and again in revising their stories into life-writing. In this way, I observed that their stories also contended with when to focalize aspects of their personal identity or roles (e.g., as partner, spouse, parent).

As one striking example, despite all four artists demonstrating choreographic competence, the two female-identifying dance artists devoted less attention and even actively downplayed self-staging themselves as choreographers. In contrast, the life stories of the male-identifying artists emphasized the trials of becoming choreographers and their reasons for stopping working as such—relating these to economic matters of status, class, and artistic identity. As a second and related example, the female-identifying dance artists placed more attention in their life stories on care roles: Moreover, they described their desire to obtain leadership positions in the dance field in order to better care for other dancers and transform the culture of authoritarian workplaces. The male-identifying artists invested in telling stories about discovering interest and talent in the healing arts—sensing empowerment in these roles as they stepped back from choreographic work. As their student, I can affirm that all four of these artists exhibit both choreographic skill and competences in the care work of teaching and healing. Therefore, these life stories reveal how social mobility is structured by gendered conventions and class. Closer inspection of the intersection of gender, care, and artistic roles, presents a promising future direction of study.

As this discussion has emphasized, body-biographies present narrative performances revealing how aesthetic and bodily discourses interweave and change throughout the protagonist's life (shifting with time, varying with regard to new activities, positions, and knowledge communities). These narrative performances describe the impact of dancing upon identity and self-understanding, as well

as the ways that bodily appearance characteristic of gender and race influence belonging and self-identification. In editing these stories for publication, I came to understand better how personal identity is experienced between the bodily appearances that mark someone within cultural categories and individual experiences of race, gender, class, age, and ability—revealing intersectional experiences of identity.³⁰ Some aspects were of course specific to dance. For example, both men in this study were conscientious of not obtaining employment opportunities because they were significantly shorter than the ideal male dancer in their field. Kono contrasted her sense of belonging to the West as an American with not looking like or identifying as a ballerina (and especially a Balanchine ballerina) as an Asian woman; she appreciated the empowerment of dancing to transform how she was seen as an artist and to offer meaningful opportunities to communicate with others. These findings point to the value of further research through body-biography on intersectional experiences of identity and subjectivity.

Another aspect highlighted by the fine-scale research of body-biographies is how engagement with dance contributes to an artist's aesthetic identity, sense of community, and experience of belonging. In particular, ballet forms a primary aesthetic habitus for three of these four artists (all but Schulkind), learned intensively in childhood and leading to professional employment. All four narrators give testimony showing how their earliest aesthetic practices primed their bodies and habituated them to a culture of labor—creating long-lasting aesthetic memories.³¹ These competences and dispositions are negotiated and questioned in their subsequent artistic training and employment. During our dialogues, the dancers' narratives often shifted back and forth in time, springing from the past to the present tense, to give energy to first-person description.³² All four artists also reflected on important exceptions and contrasts within their dance and movement educations: Cartwright on encountering cabaret dance in Paris, Schulkind on attempting nude improvisation in Vermont, Lechner on engaging with martial arts before arriving at ballet, and Kono on participating in Black dance in California. By recalling and comparing the predominantly White aesthetics of stage dance (in the sixties and early seventies) with these encounters, such life stories become an

30 Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex."

31 Cartwright describes these more directly in her autobiographic writing. See Cartwright, *Dancing for a Living*, 18–42.

32 Noticing these peculiar time leaps in their interview transcripts (i.e. switching tenses while articulating one thought or sentence), my interlocutors preferred to edit their statements to follow written conventions of speaking coherently in one tense. These time leaps were helpful markers for me, highlighting meaningful memories from the past. Like reported speech, they are tactics for making autobiographical testimony compelling.

important and revealing aspect of body-biography, enabling critical exploration of experiences of race and dance.³³

Finally, these case studies have also explored the fine-grain particularities of how experiences of privilege or discrimination, as well as social mobility, interweave dimensions of gender, race, class, age, and ethnicity. In particular with regard to Kono and Lechner, their body-biographies invite further examination of layered intersectional experiences of race and gender: Kono as an Asian woman working in Western dance contexts, and Lechner as a White European man who spent significant life phases, including his childhood, in India. Lechner's life stories circled around the question of where home is. They explored how his sense of self and belonging became rooted in kinesthesia, independent of where he lived or, at times, his health. His stories recalled moral tales: discovering shame, when as an adult he was confronted about his privilege of social mobility as a White European male—he specifies even “blue-eyed”—raised in an affluent and intellectual home in India. Taken together, these body-biographies illustrate how these travelers experience new cultures that shape their identity and influence their dance practices—creating hybrid, multiple, or even divided enactments of “the self” that belie any single aesthetic or cultural category. In this way, these life stories reflect on Whiteness and “othering” while considering the aesthetics of Western dance practices, offering testimony for rethinking dance historiography through the lens of intersectional frameworks. I hope this potential will be augmented and refined with new case studies by other scholars.

Broader Methodological Horizons

Dance scholar Jeff Friedman reminds us: “If we agree that history is comprised of a collection of memories teased into narratives, it is incumbent on us to acknowledge and incorporate those complex embodied experiences into the construction of memory and of history.”³⁴ Embracing textual and embodied study of historical sources, this book has defined a novel methodology for dance studies and demonstrated how theoretical analysis of life stories achieves rigor and complexity by attending to the fine-grain scale of embodied history. Because dancers are socialized through intensive daily training practices to dance with and for others, our dance research methodologies may benefit, as I explore here, from including the sensual participation of bodies and dancing environments as dancers collectively rethink “their” (or “our”) life stories. This, I demonstrate, can enhance our collective

33 The category of race is also a focus in Christina Thurner's analysis of dancers' autobiography. See Thurner, *Erinnerungen tanzen*, 242–65.

34 Friedman, “Oral History a Go-Go,” 170.

ability to recall, reflect on, contribute to, and write down dance history, as well as the narrative form of this writing. In particular, my inquiry has substantiated the possibility of the researcher's body becoming both a physical and theoretical partner in research: a tool for reflexive learning and an epistemological site for knowledge production.

Not only have I emphasized a sensitive and dialogic approach to life story research, but my methodology fosters sustained reflection and critical thinking. The approach advanced here offers dance scholars tools to cooperatively document dancers' lives and artistic processes. These ideas are also suitable for pedagogical techniques and student projects, educating students of dance practice or dance studies, in dance research and historiography. More generally, this book supports new methodological horizons by discussing the ethical, multisensory, medial (text, voice, image, movement, and embodied knowledge), and reflexive aspects of research in dance studies. It is through this research "choreography," merging rapport and reflexivity, that body-biography operates like a stereoscope, blending biographical inquiry and the scholarly domain of dance studies.

Like dance scholars Jeff Friedman, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Karen Eliot, and Susan Foster before me, in writing this book I have sought to relate how the scholars' own empathy and kinesthetic skills—as dance scholars with biographies rooted in dance practice—can enrich their interpretation of dancing bodies and dancing lives.³⁵ Whether they dance with their oral history partners physically, as Friedman does, bring their identity into their interviews and analytic writing, as Dixon Gottschild does, or dance in their imaginations with historical protagonists, as Foster and Eliot do, such practical knowledge shapes scholarly interpretation of embodied history. While embodied history should include impressions—even data—on the material dimensions of bodies, we see in these authors' writing astute attention to the relational, emotional, performative, and affective registers of body politics, praxis, and corporeality—setting the tone for the embodied biography that I have realized here, through my methodology of cooperating with living dance artists on rethinking dancing lives.

My approach to body-biography takes its cue from these dance scholars, while specifying a mode of reflexivity informed by feminist ethnography and debates in social anthropology. Reflexivity entails not only recognizing how one's identity both informs and limits one's fieldwork—producing varying degrees of alienation from or association with cultural "others." Reflexivity is also an acknowledgment that the researcher is representing and constructing knowledge. Self-reflection helps clear analysis from some of the biases of one's background, prior beliefs as well as the

35 These authors have multiple works addressing these topics. Here I speak in particular of Friedman, "Oral History a Go-Go"; Dixon Gottschild, *The Black Dancing Body*; Eliot, *Dancing Lives*; Foster, "Choreographing History."

feelings experienced while interviewing and undertaking participant observation. Beyond this, a stronger form of feminist reflexivity considers the operations of knowledge construction itself: the power dynamics of the author's scholarly field and publication process.³⁶ My practice of body-reflexivity recognized that body representations and sensual embodied knowledge are not easily inscribed in writing, for the reasons that I have elaborated previously. I have worked observantly and creatively to bring embodied attention into my research, structuring a theoretical engagement with life story materials and performances.

Drawing on the debates of *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), *Body-Biographies* has examined how the poetics and politics of embodied history may generate new historical narratives—highlighting participatory inquiry that sensitivity and reflexivity learns from and with living protagonists.³⁷ To close this discussion with one final scholarly reference that has informed my approach here, I turn briefly to Susan Foster's essay "Choreographing History" (1995/2019).³⁸ To choreograph history, after Foster, is to write from a reflexive scholarly position highlighting the formative ways that choreographic praxis shapes dance historiography. Foster argues that dancers' experiences of learning to dance and perform choreography are exceptionally powerful aspects shaping their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of the world.³⁹ Embodiment and choreography materially and theoretically shape the frameworks and trajectories of dancing lives—and for dance scholars who have danced, as Foster reminds us, also their academic research. In her essay, Foster highlights the impact of kinesthetic empathy and creative writing on dance historiography. The historian she envisions is theoretically attentive to the ways that bodies must be imagined as locally present in time and space, while also resonating with or resisting broader social contexts—bodies as active and transformative processes of material and symbolic signification—bodies as individual-collective, linking and joining us in action.

For Foster, choreographing history involves many comparisons: between the historian's present body and the past, and between the fragments of past bodies in postures and movements across time. Foster honors movement as both semiotic and textual, yet resistant to full translation into written text. For her, an aesthetic translation of poetics and rhetoric comes into play where the historian brings aspects of dance into the form of the theoretical writing—through metaphor, alliteration, rhythm, and the poetics of vibrant verbs. Foster does this often through

36 See Wasserfall, "Reflexivity, Feminism, Difference."

37 See Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*.

38 See Foster, "Choreographing History."

39 Foster does not draw on theoretical writing from Pierre Bourdieu, but her writing presents a similar comprehension of Bourdieu's concept of habitus. See Waterhouse, *Processing Choreography*, 98–100.

textual assemblies that vibrate the margins; *the fonts themselves shift form or slide with italics—just like this*. To choreograph history is to prevent distance, stillness, and thinness in writing history. It resists the erasure of the sensual and kinesthetic aspects of living bodies, including the historian's many bodies. It aims to “vivify” corporeality.⁴⁰ Body-biographies can also be described as a specific approach to choreographing history, through a methodology of collaboration with living dance artists upon life review and publication.

Following in the footsteps of these dance scholars, in this book I too develop dance studies scholarship that works with sensitive authority to destabilize academic postures of objectivity, certitude, and disembodied writing. I promote instead the theoretical study and writing of embodiment as a form of biographical dance research. Through this body-biography project, I have shown how life story interviews and published life-writing bring into view embodied memories, experiences, and worlds. I hope that other dance artists and scholars will further advance and continue this research, expanding the field of body-biography with a multitude of diverse artists. Perhaps one might begin an interview with a citation of choreographer Deborah Hay: “Just move the question from your head down through your whole body and notice how the sensual impact from the question alters you.”⁴¹

40 See Foster, *Corporealities*, xi.

41 Hay, “My Body, the Archive,” 198.

Bibliography

Interviews

- Cartwright, Hilary. "Body-Biography Interview with Hilary Cartwright." Interviews by Elizabeth Waterhouse, October 13, 2022, and April 20, 2023, Bern. Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts.
- Kono, Christine. "Body-Biography Interview with Christine Kono." Interviews by Elizabeth Waterhouse, November 9–10, 2022, Bern. Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts.
- Lechner, Chris. "Body-Biography Interview with Chris Lechner." Interviews by Elizabeth Waterhouse, September 1, 2, and 14, 2022, Bern. Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts.
- Schulkind, Marcus. "Body-Biography Interview with Marcus Schulkind." Interviews by Elizabeth Waterhouse, March 18 and 23, 2023, Brookline, USA. Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts.
- Waterhouse, Elizabeth. "Metadata Body-Biography Interview Chris Lechner," Bern Open Publishing BOP, Boris. 2024. <https://boris-portal.unibe.ch/handle/20.500.12422/44160>.
- . "Metadata Body-Biography Interview Christine Kono." Bern Open Publishing BOP, Boris. 2024. <https://boris-portal.unibe.ch/handle/20.500.12422/44159>.
- . "Metadata Body-Biography Interview Hilary Cartwright," Bern Open Publishing BOP, Boris. 2024. <https://boris-portal.unibe.ch/handle/20.500.12422/44158>.
- . "Metadata Body-Biography Interview Marcus Schulkind," Bern Open Publishing BOP, Boris. 2024. <https://boris-portal.unibe.ch/handle/20.500.12422/44151>.

Artist Websites

- Cartwright, Hilary. Last accessed February 14, 2025. <https://www.hilarycartwright.com>
- Kono, Christine. Last accessed February 14, 2025. <https://www.christinekono.com>
- Lechner, Chris. Last accessed February 14, 2025. <https://www.chrislechner.com>
- Schulkind, Marcus. Last accessed February 14, 2025. <http://www.marcusschulkind.org>

Works Cited

- Aalten, Anna. "In the Presence of the Body: Theorizing Training, Injuries and Pain in Ballet." *Dance Research Journal* 37, no. 2, Woman's Health in Dance (Winter 2005): 55–72. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767700008561>.
- Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Aceituro, Luis. "Arturo Taracena Breaks His Silence: Interview by Luis Aceituno." In *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, edited by Arturo Arias, 82–98. Translated by Arturo Arias. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Adams, Marianne. "Reflections on the GYROKINESIS® Method: Interview with Juliu Horvath." *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices* 10, no. 2 (December 2018): 289–301. https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.10.2.289_1.
- Adams, Tony E. *Narrating the Closet: An Autoethnography of Same-Sex Attraction*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Adams, Tony E., Carolyn Ellis, and Stacy Holman Jones. "Autoethnography." In *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, edited by Christine S. Davis and Robert F. Potter, 1–11. New York: Wiley, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrmo011>.
- Adams, Tony E., Stacy Linn Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, eds. *Handbook of Autoethnography*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429431760>.
- Albright, Ann Cooper. "Auto-Body Stories. Blondell Cummings and Autobiography in Dance." In *Meaning in Motion. New Cultural Studies of Dance*, edited by Jane C. Desmond, 179–205. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Alexander, Frederick Matthias. *The Use of the Self: Its Conscious Direction in Relation to Diagnosis, Functioning and the Control of Reaction*. 3rd ed. Long Beach: Centerline Press, 1989.
- Ames, Lynne. "About Westchester: Ballet Fever." *The New York Times*, January 15, 1984, National edition. <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/01/15/nyregion/about-westchester-ballet-fever.html>.

- Anderson, Jack. "Alvin Ailey to Open with Elise Monte Premier." *The New York Times*, May 2, 1982, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/02/arts/alvin-ailey-to-open-with-elisa-monte-premiere.html>.
- . "Goddard: Genesis, Transition and Tradition," *Dance Magazine* (September 1970): 36–40.
- . "Pearl Lang, Dancer and Choreographer, Dies at 87." *The New York Times*, February 27, 2009, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/27/arts/dance/27lang.html>.
- . "Zena Rommett, Ballet Dancer Who Developed Floor-Barre, Dies at 90." *The New York Times*, November 18, 2010, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/18/arts/dance/18rommett.html>.
- Anderson, Kathryn, Susan Armitage, Dana Jack, and Judith Wittner. "Beginning Where We Are: Feminist Methodology in Oral History." *The Oral History Review* 15, no. 1 (1987): 103–27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3674961>.
- . and Dana C. Jack. "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analysis." In *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, 11–26. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Anderson, Margot. "Dance Overview of the Australian Performing Arts Collection." *Dance Research* 38, no. 2 (November 2020): 149–67. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drs.2020.0305>.
- Anderson, Stephanie Marie. *A Dancing Paradox: Oral Histories of Dance Pedagogy*. Master's thesis, San Jose State University, 2013.
- Andrews, Jerome. *La danse profonde, de la carcasse à l'extase*. Pantin: Centre national de la danse, 2016.
- Arias, Arturo, ed. *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Atkinson, Robert. *The Life Story Interview*. Qualitative Research Methods Volume 44. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1998.
- . "The Life Story Interview as a Mutually Equitable Relationship." In *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, edited by Jaber F. Gubrium, James A. Holstein, Amir B. Marvasti, and Karyn D. McKinney, 2nd ed., 115–28. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452218403>.
- Bales, Melanie. "A Dancing Dialectic." In *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training*, edited by Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettle-Fiol, 10–21. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- . "Training as the Medium Through Which." In *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training*, edited by Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettle-Fiol, 28–42. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- Bales, Melanie, and Karen Eliot, eds. *Dance on Its Own Terms: Histories and Methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

- Bales, Melanie, and Rebecca Nettle-Fiol, eds. *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- Banes, Sally. *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987.
- Bannerman, Henrietta. "An Overview of the Development of Martha Graham's Movement System (1926–1991)." *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 9–46.
- Bauer, Martin. "The Narrative Interview: Comments on a Technique for Qualitative Data Collection." In *Papers in Social Research Methods – Qualitative Series*, Vol. 1. London: London School of Economics, Methodology Institute, 1996.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Grain of the Voice." In *The Responsibility of Forms*, 267–77, translated by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Behar, Ruth. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Berger, Fabienne, and Julia Wehren. "'Comment cette matière de vie devient autre chose'. Un entretien d'histoire orale autour des débuts de la scène de danse lausannoise." *Recherches En Danse*, no. 12 (December 15, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.4000/danse.6721>.
- Blackman, Lisa. *Immaterial Bodies: Effect, Embodiment, Mediation*. Theory, Culture & Society. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012.
- . *The Body: The Key Concepts*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2021.
- Bochner, Arthur P., and Carolyn Ellis. *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories*. Writing Lives 17. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Bolt, Amanda. "Fascial Recognition: An Interview with Laurie Booth." *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices* 8, no. 2 (2016): 303–15. https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.8.2.303_1.
- Bornat, Joanna. "Remembering and Reworking Emotions: The Reanalysis of Emotion in an Interview." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 3rd ed., 434–44. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc J. D. Wacquant. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Bowman, Paul. "Feel the Difference: The Dantian, Cultural Difference, and Sensory Remapping." *Asian Journal of Sport History & Culture*, April 3, 2024, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/27690148.2024.2327985>.
- Boyd, Nan Alamilla, and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, eds. *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*. Oxford Oral History Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Brandstetter, Gabriele. "Autobiography in/as Dance." In *Theory and Concepts*, edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 542–46. Vol. 1. of *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019.

- Bräuninger, Renate. "The Oral Archive as a Form of Dance Archive." *Dance Research* 38, no. 2 (2020): 242–54. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drs.2020.0311>.
- Breckner, Roswitha. "Von den Zeitzeugen zu den Biographen. Methoden Der Erhebung und Auswertung lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews [1994]." In *Oral History: Basistexte*, edited by Julia Obertreis, 131–51. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012.
- Brinkmann, Svend, and Steinar Kvale. *Doing Interviews*. The Sage Qualitative Research Kit 2nd ed. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018.
- Burke, Siobhan. "Review: Elisa Monte Dance Moves On, but Aesthetic Doesn't Stray." *The New York Times*, March 6, 2016, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/07/arts/dance/review-elisa-monte-dance-moves-on-but-aesthetic-doesnt-stray.html>.
- Butler, Judith Pamela. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd ed. Routledge Classics. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Campbell, Joyce, and Warren Miles. "Analyzing the Gyrotonic® Arch and Curl." *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* 10, no. 2 (April 2006): 147–53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbmt.2005.09.002>.
- Carter, Alexandra. "Destabilizing the Discipline: Critical Debates about History and Their Impact on the Study of Dance." In *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*, edited by Lorraine Nicholas and Geraldine Morris, 2nd ed., 114–22. London: Routledge, 2018.
- , ed. *Rethinking Dance History: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- . "Reshaping Dance through Time: A Critical View of Historical Periodisation in Relation to Pedagogy and Research." In *Proceedings of the Congress on Research in Dance: 2009 Special Conference*, edited by Tresa Randall, 40–46. Leicester: CORD, 2009.
- Cartwright, Hilary. *Dancing for a Living: Ballet and Contemporary Dance*. My Life and My Work. A Career Series. Reading: Educational Explorers Limited, 1974.
- Castillo, David, Nadja Rothenburger, Elizabeth Waterhouse, Julia Wehren, and Christina Thurner. "Auto_Bio_Grafie als Performance. Bibliografie zu Autobiografie im Tanz/in der Tanzgeschichte." Bern Open Publishing BOP, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.48350/196637>.
- Chanfrault-Duchet, Marie-Françoise. "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story." In *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, 77–92. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Chang, Heewon. *Autoethnography as Method*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2008.
- Chansky, Ricia Anne, and Emily Hipchen, eds. *The Routledge Auto|Biography Studies Reader*. Routledge Literature Readers. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Chapman, Sarah Alberti. "Lang, Pearl." In *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen and Dance Perspectives Foundation. Oxford

- University Press, 1998. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-1002>.
- Chernetich, Gaia Clotilde. "Orality at Work in the Body-Archive. A Case Study with Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch's Italian Dancers." *Dance Research* 38, no. 2 (November 2020): 230–41. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drs.2020.0310>.
- Chia, Mantak. *The Inner Smile: Increasing Chi through the Cultivation of Joy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008.
- Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. 25th anniversary ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- Clifford. "Introduction: Partial Truths" In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 1–26. 25th anniversary ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- Cohen, Aaron. "On Ambition, Part I." *Guysweek*, (1979): n.p. Marcus Schulkind personal archive.
- Copeland, Misty. *Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina*. New York: Touchstone, 2014.
- Crabb, Michael. *An Instinct for Success: Arnold Spohr and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet*. Toronto: Dance Collection Danse Press/es, 2002.
- Craine, Debra, and Judith Mackrell. "Baryshnikov, Mikhail." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance*. Oxford University Press, 2010. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199563449.001.0001/acref-9780199563449-e-293>.
- . "Dance Theater Workshop." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance*. Oxford University Press, 2010. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199563449.001.0001/acref-9780199563449-e-654>.
- . "Maliphan, Russell." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance*. Oxford University Press, 2010. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199563449.001.0001/acref-9780199563449-e-2623>.
- . "Schwehoff, Igor." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance*. Oxford University Press, 2010. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199563449.001.0001/acref-9780199563449-e-2111>.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 Article 8 (1989): 139–68.
- Daniels, Susan. "Few Moments of Dancing." *The Jewish Advocate*, (n.d.): n.p. Marcus Schulkind personal archive.
- De Laet, Timmy. "Expanding Dance Archives. Access, Legibility, and Archival Participation." *Dance Research* 38, no. 2 (November 2020): 206–29. <https://doi.org/DOI:10.3366/drs.2020.0309>.
- . "(Re)Making Dance History Together. Working Towards a Collaborative Historiography of Dance." In *On Reenactment. Concepts, Methodologies, Tools*, edited

- by Cristina Baldacci and Susanne Franco. Torino: Accademia University Press, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.aaccademia.12040>.
- Denzin, Norman K. *Interpretive Autoethnography*. 2nd ed. Qualitative Research Methods Volume 17. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014.
- Depkat, Volker. "History." In *Theory and Concepts*, edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 73–80. Vol. 1. of *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110279818>.
- Desmond, Jane, ed. *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Post-Contemporary Interventions. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822397281>.
- Diehl, Ingo, and Friederike Lampert, eds. *Dance Techniques 2010: Tanzplan Germany*. Leipzig: Henschel, 2011.
- Diers, Michael, Lars Blunck, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, eds. *Das Interview: Formen und Foren des Künstlergesprächs*. Hamburg: Philo Fine Arts, 2013.
- Diversity in Pilates. "Kathy Stanford Grant." Last accessed February 14, 2025. <https://diversityinpilates.com/kathy-stanford-grant>.
- Dixon Gottschild, Brenda. "Racing in Place: A Meta-Memoir on Dance Politics and Practice." In *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Politics*, edited by Rebekah J. Kowal, Gerald Siegmund, and Randy Martin. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199928187.013.21>.
- . *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Dreyfus, Andrew. "Faculty Show Eclectic, Energetic." *The Boston Herald*, July 25, 1987.
- Dunning, Jennifer. "Dance: A New Ailey Hit, Elisa Monte's 'Treading.'" *The New York Times*, May 8, 1981, sec. Theater. <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/08/theater/dance-a-new-ailey-hit-elisa-monte-s-treading.html>.
- . "Daniel Nagrin Dies at 91; Modern Dancer and Choreographer." *The New York Times*, January 3, 2009, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/03/arts/dance/03nagrin.html>.
- . "Elisa Monte: Choreographer Seeking Ancient Beginnings." *The New York Times*, February 14, 1988, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/02/14/arts/elisa-monte-choreographer-seeking-ancient-beginnings.html>.
- . "Tyr Throne Company." *The New York Times*, June 30, 1986, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/30/arts/dance-tyr-throne-company.html>.
- Dwyer, Dialynn. "Green Street Studios Says It Will Close This Month After 28 Years of Programming Due to a 'Significant' Rent Increase." *Boston.com*, March 10, 2019. <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2019/10/03/green-street-studios-closing-central-square-cambridge/>.
- Eliot, Karen. *Dancing Lives: Five Female Dancers from the Ballet d'Action to Merce Cunningham*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

- Ellis, Carolyn, and Arthur P. Bochner, eds. *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1996.
- Fanger, Iris. "Interview with Marcus Schulkind." Boston Dance Alliance, n.d., last accessed April 17, 2009, n.p., Marcus Schulkind personal archive.
- Foster, Susan Leigh. *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- . "Choreographing History." In *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, edited by Jens Richard Giersdorf and Yutian Wong, 3rd ed., 377–88. London: Routledge, 1995/2019.
- , ed. *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- . "Dancing Bodies." In *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, edited by Jane C. Desmond, 235–57. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Fournier, Lauren. *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2021.
- Franceschi, Betti. *Ageless Dancers*. Exton: Brilliant, 2024
- Franco, Mark, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199314201.001.0001>.
- Franco, Susanne, and Marina Nordera, eds. *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- , eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2026.
- Friedman, Jeff. "Fractious Action. Oral History-Based Performance." In *Handbook of Oral History*, edited by Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless, 465–509. Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2006.
- . "Oral History a Go-Go: Documenting Embodied Knowledges." In *Are 100 Objects Enough to Represent the Dance?: Zur Archivierbarkeit von Tanz*, edited by Janine Schulze, 168–93. Munich: epodium, 2010.
- . "Oral History, Hermeneutics, and Embodiment." *The Oral History Review* 41, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2014): 290–300. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43863589>.
- . "Spiraling Desire: Recovering the Lesbian Embodied Self in Oral History Narrative." In *Bodes of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, edited by Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, 73–94. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Frisch, Michael. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.
- Gabriel, Mary. *Madonna: A Rebel Life*. London: Coronet, 2023.
- Garafola, Lynn. *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1998.
- . "Tchernicheva, Lubov." In *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen and Dance Perspectives Foundation. Oxford University

- Press, 1998. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-1718>.
- George, Doran. *The Natural Body in Somatics Dance Training*. Edited by Susan Leigh Foster. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Gergen, Kenneth J., and Mary M. Gergen. "Narrative and the Self as Relationship." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 21 (1988): 17–55.
- Giersdorf, Jens Richard. "Dance Studies in the International Academy: Genealogy of a Disciplinary Formation." In *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, edited by Jens Richard Giersdorf and Yutian Wong, 3rd ed., 429–44. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Giersdorf, Jens Richard, and Yutian Wong, eds. *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Gilmore, Leigh. "Jurisdictions: I, Rigoberta Menchú, The Kiss, and Scandalous Self-Representation in the Age of Memoir and Trauma." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 2 (2003): 695–718. <https://doi.org/10.1086/342594>.
- Gluck, Sherna Berger, and Daphne Patai, eds. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Gore, Georgiana, Géraldine Rix-Lièvre, Olivier Wathélet, and Anne Cazemajou. "Eliciting the Tacit: Interviewing to Understand Bodily Experience." In *The Interview: An Ethnographic Approach*, edited by Jonathan Skinner, 127–42. ASA Monographs 49. London: Berg, 2012.
- Govinda, Anagarika (Lama). *The Way of the White Clouds: A Buddhist Pilgrim in Tibet*. London: Hutchinson, 1966.
- Graham, Martha. "I Am a Dancer." In *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, edited by Jens Richard Giersdorf and Wong Yutian, 3rd ed., 120–25. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Greskovic, Robert. "Baryshnikov, Mikhail." In *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen and Dance Perspectives Foundation. Oxford University Press, 1998. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0159>.
- Guest, Ivor. *The Romantic Ballet in Paris. With Forewords by Dame Ninette de Valois and Lillian Moore*. 2nd ed. London: Dance Books, 1980.
- Gusdorf, Georges. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." In *The Routledge Auto|Biography Studies Reader*, edited by Ricia Anne Chansky and Emily Hipchen, translated by James Olney, 24–30. Routledge Literature Readers. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Gyrotonic Headquarters. "GYROKINESIS® Method." Last accessed February 14, 2025. <https://www.gyrotonic.com/about/gyrokinesis-method/>.
- . "Learn About Juliu Horvath." Last accessed February 14, 2025. <https://www.gyrotonic.com/about/juliu-horvath/>.
- Gyrotonic Media Team. "History of the GYROTONIC® Equipment with Creator Juliu Horvath." Last accessed February 14, 2025. <https://www.gyrotonic.com/history-of-the-gyrotonic-equipment/>.

- Hamilton, Christopher. *Middle Age*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009.
- Hammergren, Lena. "Many Sources, Many Voices." In *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*, edited by Lorraine Nicholas and Geraldine Morris, 2nd ed., 136–47. London: Routledge, 2018.
- Hardt, Yvonne. "Grasping Practice: Reflections on Practices of Knowing and Researching in Dance Education." In *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, edited by Jens Richard Giersdorf and Yutian Wong, 3rd ed., 107–19. London: Routledge 2019.
- . "Mit biographischen Quellen arbeiten. Zu einem tanzwissenschaftlichen Problemfeld und seinen Potenzialen." In *Yvonne Georgi. Tagebuch und Dokumente zu Tanztourneen mit Harald Kreutzberg (1929–1931). Eine Andere Recherche zu den Potentialen einer kritischen Nachlassforschung*, edited by Yvonne Hardt and Frank-Manuel Peter. With assistance from Anaïs Rödel, Luke Aaron Forbes, Dwayne Holliday, Sandra Paulkowsky and Katharina Geyer, 79–83. Cologne: Wienand, 2019.
- Haubl, Rolf. "Autobiographisches Erzählen: Sprechen und Schreiben." In *Das eigene Leben als ästhetische Fiktion: Autobiographie und Professionsgeschichte*, edited by Dietrich Erben and Tobias Zervosen, 333–46. Bielefeld: transcript, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839437636>.
- Hay, Deborah. "My Body, the Archive." In *The Sentient Archive: Bodies, Performance, and Memory*, edited by Bill Bissell and Linda Caruso Haviland, 198–99. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018.
- Hermer, Carol. "The Personal as Primary Focus. Reviews in Anthropology." *Reviews in Anthropology* 28, no. 4 (2000): 383–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00988157.2000.9978243>.
- Hilari, Johanna, Nadja Rothenburger, Elizabeth Waterhouse, and Julia Wehren. "Auto_Bio_Graphical Urgencies. Vier Tanzwissenschaftliche Perspektiven." In *Matters of Urgency. 15. Kongress Der Gesellschaft Für Theaterwissenschaft*, 481–96, Berlin: Berlin Universities Publishing, 2025.
- Hunter, Rick, and Jerome Robbins Project Staff. "Guide to the Jerome Robbins Papers, 1930 – 2001." New York: The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts New York, 2003. <https://archives.nypl.org/dan/19771>.
- Holmes, Kathryn. "2023 Dance Teacher Award Honoree Hilary Cartwright Brings Ballet and Bodywork Into Perfect Alignment." *DanceTeacher*, July 7, 2023. <https://dance-teacher.com/2023-dance-teacher-awards-hilary-cartwright/#gsc.tab=0>.
- Imhof, Dora, and Sibylle Omlin, eds. *Interviews: Oral History in Kunstwissenschaft und Kunst*. Munich: Silke Schreiber, 2010.
- Ingold, Tim. *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. London: Routledge, 2013.

- James, Daniel. *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Jelinek, Estelle C., ed. *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.
- Jeschke, Claudia, and Gabi Vettermann. "Germany: Between Institutions and Aesthetics. Choreographing Germanness?" In *Europe Dancing: Perspectives on Theatre Dance and Cultural Identity*, edited by Andrée Grau and Stephanie Jordan, 55–78. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Kane, Angela. "Taylor, Paul." In *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen and Dance Perspectives Foundation. Oxford University Press, 1998. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.010001/acref-9780195173697-e-1713>.
- Kirstein, Lincoln. *The Book of the Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing*. Garden City: Garden City Publishing Company, 1942.
- Kisselgoff, Anna. "2 Dance Concerts with Common View." *The New York Times*, November 14, 1977. <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/11/14/archives/2-dance-concerts-with-common-view.html>.
- . "Kazuko Hirabayashi, Choreographer and Dancers' Mentor, Dies at 82." *The New York Times*, April 5, 2016, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/06/arts/dance/kazuko-hirabayashi-choreographer-and-dancers-mentor-dies-at-82.html>.
- . "Kazuko Hirabayashi Company Performs The Stone Garden." *The New York Times*, June 21, 1971. <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/06/21/archives/kazuko-hirabayashi-company-performs-the-stone-garden.html>.
- . "Mark Ryder, 85, Former Dancer in Martha Graham's Company, Is Dead." *The New York Times*, July 21, 2006, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/21/arts/21ryder.html>.
- . "Ruth Ann Koesun, Versatile Ballet Theater Dancer, Dies at 89." *The New York Times*, February 14, 2018, New York edition, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/14/obituaries/ruth-ann-koesun-versatile-ballet-theater-dancer-dies-at-89.html>.
- . "Yuriko, Keeper of Martha Graham's Flame, Is Dead at 102." *The New York Times*, March 12, 2022, New York edition. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/12/arts/dance/yuriko-dead.html>.
- Koren, Leonard. *Wabi-Sabi: For Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers*. Point Reyes: Imperfect Publishing, 2008.
- Kraft, Susan L. "Private Lives in Public Places—Oral Histories of Performing Artists: How Much Do You Really Want to Know?" *Journal of Archival Organization* 2, no. 1–2 (2004): 55–61. https://doi.org/10.1300/J201v02n01_05.
- Lakes, Robin. "The Messages behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogical Legacy in Western Concert Dance Technique Training and Rehearsals." *Arts*

- Education Policy Review* 106, no. 5 (May 2005): 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.3200/AEPR.106.5.3-20>.
- Landwehr, Gabriele. “Open for Everything: Als Kulturmanager im Goethe-Institut.” In *Kultur und Management: Eine Annäherung*, edited by Raphaela Henze, 2nd ed., 111–25. Wiesbaden: Springer, 2014. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-05871-5_13.
- Layson, June. “Dance History Source Materials.” In *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, edited by Jens Richard Giersdorf and Yutian Wong, 3rd ed., 19–28. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Le Monde and AFP. “Hugues Gall, ancien directeur de l’Opéra de Paris, est mort.” *Le Monde*, May 26, 2024. https://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2024/05/26/mort-a-84-ans-de-hugues-gall-ancien-directeur-de-l-opera-de-paris_6235530_3382.html.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. Translated by Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Lentz, Carola. *Das Goethe-Institut: Eine Geschichte von 1951 bis Heute*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2022.
- L’Hotellier, Sanja Andus. “The Bennington Summer School of the Dance Oral History Project, 1978–1979: A History of Sensibilities.” *Dance Research Journal* 50, no. 1 (April 2018): 24–46. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0149767718000025>.
- Linde, Charlotte. *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Liu, Glory. “Mind and Body. The Domineering Logic of Ballet.” *The Nation*, March 20–27 2023, 34–38.
- Lvov-Anokhin, Boris A. “Ulanova, Galina.” In *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen and Dance Perspectives Foundation. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-1780>.
- Macaulay, Alastair. “Paul Taylor Dies at 88; Brought Poetry and Lyricism to Modern Dance.” *The New York Times*, August 30, 2018, New York edition. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/30/obituaries/paul-taylor-dead.html>.
- Maletic, Vera. *Dance Dynamics: Effort and Phrasing*. Workbook and DVD. Columbus: Grade A Notes, 2005.
- Manning, Susan. “Dance History.” In *The Bloomsbury Companion to Dance Studies*, edited by Sherril Dodds, 303–26. Bloomsbury Companions. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
- Marcus, Laura. *Autobiography. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Mascia-Lees, Frances E., ed. *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

- McCarthy-Brown, Nyama. "Dancing with Race: A Multiple Case Study on the Use of Critical Dance Pedagogy in Dance Making." *Whiteness and Education* 6, no. 1 (2021): 19–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23793406.2021.1879668>.
- McDonagh, Don. "Dances by Bowyer Are Small Dramas with Core of Truth." *The New York Times*, January 28, 1975. <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/01/28/archives/dances-by-bowyer-are-small-dramas-with-core-of-truth.html?smid=url-share>.
- . "Fragments' at St. Clement's." *New York Post*, January 26, 1979.
- Menchú, Rigoberta. *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. Edited by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. Translated by Ann Wright. London: Verso, 1984.
- Miller, Robert L. *Researching Life Stories and Family Histories*. Introducing Qualitative Methods. London: SAGE, 2000.
- Minh-Ha, Trinh T. *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Minister, Kristina. "A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview." In *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, 27–41. New York: Routledge, 1991. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203819371>.
- Misch, Georg. "Conception and Origin of Autobiography." In *The Routledge Auto|Biography Studies Reader*, by Ricia Anne Chansky and Emily Hipchen, 15–23. Routledge Literature Readers. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Missinne, Lut. "Autobiographical Pact." In *Theory and Concepts*, edited by Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, 222–27. Vol. 1. of *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110279818>.
- Mol, Annemarie. *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*. Science and Cultural Theory. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822384151>.
- Morris, Gay. "Dance Studies/Cultural Studies." *Dance Research Journal* 41, no. 1 (Summer 2009): 82–100. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/34/article/263297>.
- Morris, Mark, and Wesley Stace. *Out Loud: A Memoir*. Illustrated edition. New York: Penguin Press, 2019.
- Moyano, Marcelo Isse. "Araiz, Oscar." In *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen and Dance Perspectives Foundation. Oxford University Press, 1998. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0070>.
- Myers, Thomas W. *Anatomy Trains: Myofascial Meridians for Manual and Movement Therapists*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 2009.
- Nakajima, Nanako, and Gabriele Brandstetter, eds. *The Aging Body in Dance: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Ness, Sally Ann Allen. "Being a Body in a Cultural Way: Understanding the Cultural in the Embodiment of Dance." In *Cultural Bodies: Ethnography and Theory*, edited by

- Helen Thomas and Jamilah Ahmed, 121–44. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470775837.ch5>.
- Nettl-Fiol, Rebecca. "Somatics: An Interview with Martha Myers." In *The Body Eclectic: Evolving Practices in Dance Training*, edited by Melanie Bales and Rebecca Nettl-Fiol, 101–25. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- Nicholas, Lorraine, and Geraldine Morris, eds. *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2018.
- Nohl, Arnd-Michael. "Narrative Interview and Documentary Interpretation." In *Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research*, edited by Ralf Bohnsack, Nicolle Pfaff, and Wivian Weller, 195–217. Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2010.
- Nugent, Ann. "William Forsythe and the Lost Stuttgart Ballets." *Dance Chronicle* 29, no. 1 (2006): 17–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01472520500537919>.
- Nur Amin, Takiyah. "African American Dance Revisited: Undoing Master Narratives in the Studying and Teaching of Dance History." In *Rethinking Dance History: Issues and Methodologies*, edited by Lorraine Nicholas and Geraldine Morris, 2nd ed., 44–55. London: Routledge, 2018.
- O'Connell Whittet, Ellen. *What You Become in Flight*. New York: Melville House, 2020.
- Okely, Judith. "Autobiography, Anthropology: A Personal Historical Recollection." *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 31, no. 1 (2022): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.3167/ajec.2022.310102>.
- . *Anthropological Practice: Fieldwork and the Ethnographic Method*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- . "Fieldwork Embodied." *Sociological Review* 55, no. 1 (May 2, 2007): 65–79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2007.00693>.
- Okely, Judith, and Helen Callaway, eds. *Anthropology and Autobiography*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- O'Reilly, Karen. *Ethnographic Methods*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Passerini, Luisa. "Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism." *History Workshop Journal* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 82–108. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/8.1.82>.
- Peacock, James L., and Dorothy C. Holland. "The Narrated Self: Life Stories in Process." *Ethos* 21, no. 4 (December 1993): 367–83. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/640577>.
- Peltonen, Matti. "What Is Micro in Microhistory?" In *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, Revised and Augmented edition, 105–8. Ego documents and History Series, Vol. 7. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 2006.

- Phillips, Victoria. "Martha Graham's Gilded Cage: Blood Memory—An Autobiography (1991)." *Dance Research Journal* 45, no. 2 (2013): 63–84. <https://mus.e.jhu.edu/pub/122/article/523989>.
- Pink, Sarah. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2015.
- Plummer, Ken. "The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research." In *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland, and Lyn Lofland, 395–406. London: SAGE, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608337.n27>.
- Portelli, Alessandro. "A Dialogical Relationship." *Expressions Annual* 14 (2005): 1–8.
- . *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997.
- . "What Makes Oral History Different." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 3rd ed., 48–58. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. "'I, Rigoberta Menchú' and the 'Culture Wars.'" In *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, edited by Arturo Arias, 29–48. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Prichard, Robin. "From Color-Blind to Color-Conscious: Advancing Racial Discourse in Dance Education." *Journal of Dance Education* 19, no. 4 (2019): 168–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2018.1532570>.
- Puente, Lauren. *A Singing Body*. Published by the author, 2025.
- Raman, Priya Venkat. "Indian Dance Criticism as Decolonial Post-Performance Performative." *Dance Chronicle* 47, no. 2 (2024): 185–213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01472526.2024.2309037>.
- Reed-Danahay, Deborah. "Autobiography, Intimacy and Ethnography." In *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland, and Lyn Lofland, 407–25. London: SAGE, 2001.
- , ed. *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*. Explorations in Anthropology. Oxford: Berg, 1997.
- . "Bourdieu and Critical Autoethnography: Implications for Research, Writing, and Teaching." *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 19, no. 1 (2017): 144–54. <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v19i1.1368>.
- "Review: Michael Sullivan and Marcus Schulkind Dance Companies." *Dance Magazine*. (October 1978): n.p. Marcus Schulkind personal archive.
- Rodrigues, Reanne. "A Recap of the 2023 Dance Teacher Awards: An Enlightening Evening." *DanceTeacher*, August 17, 2017. <https://dance-teacher.com/recap-2023-dance-teacher-awards/>.
- Rothenburger, Nadja. *Autochoreografie im Zeitgeschehen: Wie Selbstentwürfe Tanzgeschichte schreiben*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2026.
- Ruprecht, Lucia. "Tanzhistoriografie." In *Theater und Tanz: Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium*, edited by Beate Hochholdinger-Reiterer, Christina Thurner, and Julia Wehren, 361–70. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2023.

- Sachs, Curt. *World History of the Dance*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1937.
- Samuel, Raphael. "Perils of the Transcript." *Oral History* 1, no. 2 (1972): 19–22. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40178377>.
- Sarkar Munsii, Urmimala. *Mapping Critical Dance Studies in India*. Vol. 2. Performance Studies & Cultural Discourse in South Asia. Singapore: Springer Nature, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-7359-0>.
- Scaravelli, Vanda. *Awakening the Spine: Yoga for Health, Vitality and Energy*. New York: Harper Collins, 2015.
- Schaik, Eva Van. "Netherlands Dance Theater." In *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen and Dance Perspectives Foundation. Oxford University Press, 1998. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-1241>.
- Schneider, Rebecca. "Performance Remains." *Performance Research* 6, no. 2 (2001): 100–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2001.10871792>.
- . *The Explicit Body in Performance*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Schütze, Fritz. "Biographieforschung und narratives Interview." *Neue Praxis* 13, no. 3 (1983): 283–93.
- Schwezeoff, Igor. *Borzoï*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935.
- Seibert, Brian. "Steve Paxton, Who Found Avant-Garde Dance in the Everyday, Dies at 85." *The New York Times*, February 24, 2024, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/24/arts/dance/steve-paxton-dead.html>.
- Servos, Norbert. "Folkwang Tanzstudio." In *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen and Dance Perspectives Foundation. Oxford University Press, 1998. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195173697.001.0001/acref-9780195173697-e-0629>.
- Shadle, Caroline. "Carol Paumgarten, Founder of Steps on Broadway, Passes Away." *DanceTeacher*, October 2, 2020. <https://dance-teacher.com/carol-paumgarten/>.
- Sherman Heyl, Barbara. "Ethnographic Interviewing." In *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland, and Lyn Lofland, 370–83. London: SAGE, 2001.
- Shilling, Chris. "Embodiment." In *Handbuch Körpersoziologie 1: Grundbegriffe und theoretische Perspektiven*, edited by Robert Gugutzer, Gabriele Klein, and Michael Meuser, 2nd ed., 27–34. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-33300-3_5.
- Shopes, Linda. "After the Interview Ends: Moving Oral History Out of the Archives and into Publication." *The Oral History Review* 42, no. 2 (2015): 300–310. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/ohv037>.
- . "Editing Oral History for Publication." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 3rd ed., 470–89. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Siegel, Marcia B. "An Art Form Poised on Threshold of Rootlessness?" unknown publication, (1972): 40. Marcus Schulkind personal archive.

- . "Ones and All: Marcus Schulkind at Green Street." *The Boston Phoenix*, December 17, 2004. <https://bostonphoenix.com/boston/arts/dance/documents/04331776.asp>.
- . "The Green Table: Sources of a Classic." *Dance Research Journal* 21, no. 1 (1989): 15–21. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1478610>.
- Siegmund, Gerald, ed. *William Forsythe: Denken in Bewegung*. Berlin: Henschel, 2004.
- Smith, Richard Cándida. "Popular Memory and Oral Narratives: Luisa Passerini's Reading of Oral History Interviews." *The Oral History Review* 16, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 95–107. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3675073>.
- Smith, Sidonie. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- . "The Impact of Critical Theory on the Study of Autobiography: Marginality, Gender, and Autobiographical Practice." In *The Routledge Auto|Biography Studies Reader*, edited by Ricia Anne Chansky and Emily Hipchen, 82–88. Routledge Literature Readers. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. "Introduction." In *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 3–56. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.
- , eds. *Woman, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998.
- Summerfield, Penny. "Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice." *Miranda [Online]* 12 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.8714>.
- Svašek, Maruška, and Markieta Domecka. "The Autobiographical Narrative Interview: A Potential Arena of Emotional Remembering, Performance and Reflection." In *The Interview: An Ethnographic Approach*, edited by Jonathan Skinner, 107–26. ASA Monographs 49. London: Berg, 2012.
- Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822385318>.
- Temin, Christine. "Dance Review. Schulkind Creates Beautiful, Brief Bits of Truth." *The Boston Globe*, September 28, 1996.
- . "Marcus Schulkind Helps Keep the Dance Faith Alive." *The Boston Sunday Globe*, September 17, 1995.
- Thoms, Victoria. "Martha Graham's Haunting Body: Autobiography at the Intersection of Writing and Dancing." *Dance Research Journal* 40, no. 1 (2008): 2–16.
- Turner, Christina. *Erinnerungen tanzen: Autobiografien als Quellen der Tanzhistoriografie*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2024.
- . "Time Layers, Time Leaps, Time Loss: Methodologies of Dance Historiography." In *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*, edited by Mark Franko, 525–32. Oxford Handbooks. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199314201.013.45>.

- Vadukul, Alex. "Carol Paumgarten, 'Den Mother' to a Dance Scene, Dies at 76." *The New York Times*, October 9, 2020, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/09/arts/carol-paumgarten-dead.html>.
- Vaganova, Agrippina. *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet: Russian Ballet Technique*. Translated by Anatole Chujoy. New York: Dover, 1969.
- VanderVaart, Sondra, Violette M. G. J. Gijsen, Saskia N. de Wildt, and Gideon Koren. "A Systematic Review of the Therapeutic Effects of Reiki." *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 15, no. 11 (2009): 1157–69. <https://doi.org/10.1089/acm.2009.0036>.
- Wagner-Egelhaaf, Martina, ed. *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*. 3 vols. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110279818>.
- Warren, Gretchen Ward. *The Art of Teaching Ballet: Ten Twentieth-Century Masters*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996.
- Wasserfall, Rahel. "Reflexivity, Feminism and Difference." *Qualitative Sociology* 16, no. 1 (1993): 23–41. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00990072>.
- Waterhouse, Elizabeth. "An Autoethnographic Spiral: Dancing 'Showerhead.'" *Mimesis Journal. Scrittura Della Performance* 13, no. 1 (2024): 17–36.
- . "An Ethnographic Spectrum: Writing on William Forsythe's Choreography." *Forum Modernes Theater* 36, no. 1–2 (2026).
- . "Ethnografische Ansätze." In *Theater und Tanz: Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium*, edited by Beate Hochholdinger-Reiterer, Christina Thurner, and Julia Wehren, 243–50. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2023.
- . *Processing Choreography: Thinking with William Forsythe's Duo*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2022. <https://www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-5588-9/processi-ng-choreography/>.
- Wehren, Julia. "Écouter les mouvements de la mémoire de l'autre." *Recherches en danse*, no. 12 (December 15, 2023): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.4000/danse.6718>.
- . "Kleinteilige Strukturen und globale Einflüsse: Zu einer Oral History des Schweizer Tanzes." In *Housing the Temporary. Zugänge Zur Eigenen Geschichte. Tanz, Performance, Archiv*, edited by Micha Purucker, Daniela Rippl, and Katja Schneider, 76–84. Munich: Allitera Verlag, 2023.
- . *Körper als Archiv in Bewegung: Choreografie als historiografische Praxis*. TanzScripte 37. Bielefeld: transcript, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839430002>.
- . *Oral Dance History. Eine translokale Geschichte zum Freien Tanzschaffen in der Schweiz*. Bielefeld: transcript, forthcoming.
- . "Oral History." In *Theater und Tanz: Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium*, edited by Beate Hochholdinger-Reiterer, Christina Thurner, and Julia Wehren, 251–56. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2023.
- Wilkin, Karen. "Remembering Balanchine." *The Hudson Review* 46, no. 4 (1994): 705–12. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3852134>.

- Williams, Simon J., and Gillian Bendelow. *The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Winkler, Ingo. "Doing Autoethnography: Facing Challenges, Taking Choices, Accepting Responsibilities." *Qualitative Inquiry* 24, no. 4 (2018): 236–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417728956>.
- Wittmann, Gabriele. "Historical Context: Lance Gries. Release and Alignment Oriented Techniques." In *Dance Techniques 2010: Tanzplan Germany*, edited by Ingo Diehl and Friederike Lampert, 274–78. Leipzig: Henschel, 2011.
- Wong, Kevin, Nicolette Wong, Bernice Chan, Po-lam Yeung, Miu Law, Joanna Hoi-yin Lee, Heyee Lam, Rose Hunter, Andy Lo, and Wilfred Wong. *The Unspoken Dance: An Oral History of Hong Kong Dance 1950s–70s*. Hong Kong: City Contemporary Dance Company Limited, 2019.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1954. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118299210>.
- Wortelkamp, Isa. "Namen und Geschichten. Lesarten des Tanztheaters im biographischen Zyklus von Jérôme Bel." *MAP – Media | Archive | Performance* 5: Archiv / Prozesse, no. 2 (June 2014). <https://perfomap.de/map5/verkoerperungen/namen-und-geschichten/namen-und-geschichten.pdf>.
- Wulff, Helena. "Instances of Inspiration: Interviewing Dancers and Writers." In *The Interview: An Ethnographic Approach*, edited by Jonathan Skinner, 163–77. London: Berg, 2012.
- Yamazaki, James N. and Louis B. Fleming. *Children of the Atomic Bomb: An American Physician's Memoir of Nagasaki, Hiroshima, and the Marshall Islands*. Asia-Pacific, Culture, Politics, and Society. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822396307>.
- . "Why Does a Pediatrician Worry about Nuclear Weapons?" *Amerasia Journal* 27, no. 3 (2001): 153–66. <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.27.3.g2344850g74201j8>.
- Young, Harvey, and Queen Meccasia Zabriskie. *Black Theater Is Black Life: An Oral History of Chicago Theater and Dance, 1970–2010*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014.
- Yow, Valerie. "Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research." *The Oral History Review* 22, no. 1 (Summer 1995): 51–66. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4495356>.
- . "Interviewing Techniques and Strategies." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistar Thomson, 3rd ed., 153–78. London: Routledge, 2015.
- . *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3rd ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.
- Zeller, Jessica. "Teaching through Time: Tracing Ballet's Pedagogical Lineage in the Work of Maggie Black." *Dance Chronicle* 32, no. 1 (2009): 57–88. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25598191>.

Films and Digital Video Sources

- Balanchine, George. *Symphony in C*. New York City Ballet, 1973, YouTube Video, <https://youtu.be/Fn1ZVGpople?si=yycv4cE1oERl29Bj>.
- Force of Nature*. Katrina McPherson director, Kirstie Simson performer, produced by Goat 2016, streaming video, <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/forceofnature/2851084>.
- Martha Graham Dance Technique: Beginning Level*. Jeanne Suggs director and editor, Miki Orihara dance director, New York: Dance Spotlight, Inc. & Martha Graham Center of Contemporary Dance, 2018, streaming video, <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/grahambeginning>.
- Let's Dance!: Carlos Bunga/Hilary Cartwright, "Movimiento Como Fluir Del Tiempo" [Movement as Flowing of Time]*. Carlos Bunga visual artist, Hilary Cartwright performer, Pedro Ruiz video recording, Bombas Gens Center of Art in Valencia, performance on July 7, 2023, trailer video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxozkFDxSbE>.
- Schulkind, Marcus. "'Back to the Marley' with Marcus Schulkind – Class#1" June 14, 2020, Zoom lesson video, <https://vimeo.com/429747558>.
- . "'Back to the Marley' with Marcus Schulkind – Class#2" June 20, 2020, Zoom lesson video, <https://vimeo.com/431300326>.
- . "'Back to the Marley' with Marcus Schulkind – Class#3" June 21, 2020, Zoom lesson video, <https://vimeo.com/431642283>.

Appendix

A. Interview Agreement

This document confirms my understanding and agreement with Dr. Elizabeth Waterhouse (“Interviewer”) with respect to my participation in a series of interviews conducted for the SNSF Project “Auto_Bio_Graphy as Performance” at the University of Bern:

With these interviews, Dr. Elizabeth Waterhouse would like to create and collect recorded interviews (video and audio recordings) as source material to better document and research dancers’ lives.

I hereby confirm my willingness to participate in such an interview and agree that the interview will be recorded and processed by the person responsible. Dr. Elizabeth Waterhouse will create a raw version to be archived for further evaluation and use. I have the right to see this raw version and, if there are any discrepancies, to withdraw or adapt parts of the interview or the entire interview. Any revocation of the interview or individual statements must be made within twenty-one days of the raw version of the interview being sent to me for review and examination.

I consent to give the Swiss Archive of the Performing Arts (SAPA) the right to make the interview documents (video and/or sound recordings, film stills, and interview transcript) with my name available to users of the archive.

I also agree that the interview documents (video and/or sound recordings, film stills, and interview transcript) may be broadcast, published privately or published publicly for further purposes of ongoing research and for disseminating the content and methodological findings.

Additional Usage

I consent that the interview documents (video and/or sound recordings, film stills, and interview transcript) including my name, be made available online to SAPA users through the online catalog and archive website.

☐ Yes

☐ No

I consent to give SAPA the right to use the interview documents (video and/or sound recordings, film stills, and interview transcript) with my name available for use in its own projects.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Full Legal Name of Interviewee:

Location and Date, Signature

B. Biographical Data

Personal Data

First name:

Last name:

Artist name (if different):

Date of birth:

Place of birth:

Gender:

Nationality:

Race:

City, country of current residence:

Religion:

Occupation:

Education level/institution:

Family History

Mother's name:

Nationality:

Profession:

Education:

Father's name:

Nationality:

Profession:

Education:

Siblings:

Language(s) spoken at home:

Notes on home context/artistic influences:

Describes their family class as:

Marriages:

Children:

Immigration History

Please list the cities that you have lived in with dates to the best of your memory.

C. Life Story Interview Questions for Dancers

Beginning to Dance

- When you consider your biography, what initial events or experiences led you to the arts and dance?
- What are your most vivid childhood memories of dancing?
- How did your family members react to your dancing? Was anyone in your family also an artist?

Education

- What are your most vivid memories of learning to dance?
- What dance styles did you explore? Do you remember the rooms or contexts where you practiced?
- How did your body change during your dance education? Can you remember the feeling of dancing as a child or young adult?
- Were there any events, positive or negative, that stand out as seminal in your development as a young dancer?
- How much did dance lessons cost at that time?
- Which teachers had a seminal influence on you and why? Can you show me some movements you remember learning?
- Do you remember any specific artists or performances having a particular impact on you as a young adult?
- If you could change your dance education or do it over, what would you have wished for?
- How are dance teachers today different than the teachers you had? Or how are dance students today different from how you were?
- How did you adapt when your family moved from [city] to [city]? Were your dance lessons different in these places?

Professional Experience

- When and why did you choose dance as your profession?
- Where did you work initially?
- How did your body, or your sense of others' bodies, change while working in that context/company, or with that choreographer?
- Were there any specific training practices that had a strong impact on you? Can you show me or dance together with me, as you remember it?
- Did any performances that you witnessed as an audience member dazzle or disturb you?
- How did you arrange your finances?
- How did you train and care for your body during that time?
- Were there any difficult moments or turning points in your dance career that you would be willing to discuss?
- Did you feel like you belonged, when you worked in [that context] as a dancer?
- Can you please show me, or explain to me, some examples of the dances you remember?

Choreography

- When was your first impulse or invitation to choreograph?
- Where have you produced and presented your choreographic work, and when?
- How would you describe your choreographic process?
- What qualities were important to you in choosing your performers?
- How did you work with your dancers?
- How did you approach the other aspects of the production, such as music, costumes, and lighting?
- What do you wish for the audience when you present a work?
- How have critics responded to your work?
- How has your work as a choreographer been remunerated financially?
- Did you experience any failures or challenges that you would be willing to discuss openly?
- Could you describe one key piece in your evolution as a choreographer?
- How do you define the art of choreography?
- How are dance performances today different from the ones that you choreographed?

Dance Teaching

- When and why did you decide to become a dance teacher?
- In which contexts have you taught?
- Can you show me some of your exercises, or demonstrate aspects of movement that are important to you?
- What is your teaching philosophy and approach? How do you structure your lessons?
- What aspects of your dance heritage do you strive to pass on when you teach? What bodily principles or competences are important to foster in young dancers?
- How are your students' bodies different, both from one another and from how your body was when you were a younger dancer?
- How has your work as a dance teacher been remunerated financially?
- What challenges have you faced as a teacher?

Documentation

- How have you approached archiving your work—as a dancer, choreographer, and dance teacher?
- Are there any photographs, videos, or teaching notes that you would like to share within our discussions?

Health

- Were you ever injured or seriously ill during your dance career?
- How did you heal or get well again?
- Do you remember the feeling of your body during the injury or illness, and the changes you experienced thereafter?
- Did you receive workers' compensation? Were you part of a union?
- How did these challenges impact your work and career?

Embodiment

- What bodily capacities are most important for dancers to develop, as children and then as young adults?
- How would you describe your body—to another dancer, as well as to a nondancer?
- What senses or skills have you developed as a dancer? What came easily to you, and what was more difficult?
- Are there any bodily experiences or events outside of your dance career that you would be willing to discuss that shaped your understanding of your body or strongly influenced your dancing?
- Do you consider the body primarily a physical or a biological phenomenon?
- Has bodily knowledge or have practices outside of dance (such as studying anatomy, sports, or somatic practices) influenced your understanding of your body?
- Are there other people whose bodies have strongly influenced you?
- Can you describe the feeling of dancing to someone who has never danced before?
- If you could change your body, what would you wish for?

Identity

- In what ways has your dance career influenced your relationship with your body and your sense of who you are? How do you think you would have been different if you had pursued another profession?
- Have you experienced or witnessed authoritarian practices, harassment, or discrimination within the dance profession? Would you be willing to discuss the impact of these events on your life stories on record, or by anonymously describing persons or institutions?
- Do you see changes in how dancers are able to gain access to career opportunities today compared to when you were a younger dance artist?

- Were any aspects of the body and sexuality taboo during your dance education?
How are these different today?

Family

- How have you balanced family or caregiving responsibilities alongside your career?

Aging

- Is dance a profession for the young, or for all ages?
- What has been your philosophy of aging as a dance artist?
- How has your dancing body changed with age?
- How is the dance field different today compared to when you were active?

Life Review

- What are the major turning points in your life and career as a dance artist?
- If you could relive aspects of your life, either for pleasure or to change something, what would they be?
- Do you have any regrets you would like to discuss?
- Would you like to clarify any of the stories that we have discussed?

