

WEAK DANCE STRONG QUESTIONS

from the notebooks of Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema

In the beginning were Celan, Eliot and Thomas: poetry.

*THERE WILL be something, later
that fills itself with you
and rises
to a mouth*

*Out of the broken bits
of my illusion
I stand up
and look at my hand,
how it draws the only
possible
circle (Celan)*

He says that I should not want to prove anything with the movement, that I just ask questions, but how can one ask a question by moving? This is impossible. Every movement is a statement, this is what I learned when I started dancing. And unlike speech, movements are never something else than they are, they do not pretend. So how can I doubt about a movement which can only be clear to me?

Don't make gestures, let the skeleton make the movement, and don't lead your moving with your eyes from one point to another; then you try to rescue your body, and there is no rescue. Sink into the body, go from one moment to the next and ask question after question; question continuously.

He is talking about his dancing and he wants to say 'my body' and he says 'my money', and then he says 'when I dance my body seems younger', and I think, this is worrying, I wanted to dance with an older man.

He says he has to forget more of his trained body. He has nothing to forget, only to try. It's not possible for the body to forget, because the muscles can't forget.

I can only say, *there* we have been; but I cannot say where.

I should not think that life can take things away from me, things that I have an obligation to try and keep hold of, I should only think about the possibilities life offers. I should know that there are only chances and nothing to lose.

*I could be bounded in a nutshell and call myself
a king of infinite space were it not that I have
bad dreams. (Hamlet)*

He says that it is not about being fearless but about accepting fear, so don't practice the principles, don't exercise, just go for it, you will fail anyway, let your body remember it, endure your body, you can't escape from it.

He wants to dance but he gets stuck in an image of what he thinks dancing is.

He goes round in his house closing doors after himself and then he expects to open them when he dances.

*Images give us consolation for the suffering of life
And life gives us consolation for the fact that the images
Do not mean anything
(Godard)*

Usually I am not interested in what happens between departure and arrival, reaching the goal seems to be the only importance. I have to change this. I have to split big distances into tiny ones. Going to Moscow starts with locking my apartment door, taking the elevator, opening the outside door, walking to the railway station, and so on. This takes the fear out of the big trip. This is how I have to dance, from movement to movement and all the time face every change. At first only the bigger ones, and then slowly on, going more into details.

When he thinks about dancing he shifts around in his chair, and he starts to curl up again, starts to get small, as though he wants to disappear.

He says it's his shameless dance, but at the same time he feels a lot of shame, he says he wants to dance and at the same time he wants to disappear.

He is the most afraid person in the world, fear is his general state of being, he says, and a moment later he says he's afraid of nothing.

He says he has no fear, but if he really had no fear he would not mention it.
He says when the fear is in him he fights back
and so his feet are never on the ground.
He is always on the run.

Everything belonged to him, but the important thing was to know where he belonged to.

I lift him, I put him on my shoulder here, I throw him in the air, he even stays there maybe, I will always catch him, again and again.

He asks himself, how much of the tree I see in front of me is in me?
Do I have roots, am I grounded, do I give shadow, do I get new leaves every year,
do my leaves die too?
And how much of me is in the tree?
Can it dance, can it be happy, can it ask for social security, can a tree fuck, get cancer?
He says that by asking himself this, he feels he lives a bit less trapped in himself than he normally does.



When we walk in, and also during the performance, we should not negotiate the space, nor the time. To walk in and wanting to possess the space is a negotiation. It is so difficult not wanting to be interesting.

He says he wants to make his brain physical, in some way, he says this quite often. But his spirit is still afraid, and he starts to recite Dylan Thomas:

*Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not.*

You are an Orangutan, he says, when he observes me. There is a sense of anthropology about what we do. When he dances his mouth takes a certain expression and he suddenly looks like a priest. Why is he doing that?

Yes, I did it again. Because I think dance is something serious. But when my mouth is not a priest my arm is completely different. When I am a priest I show a problem and I am not offering anything.



We started by reading and reciting parts of poems to each other. Some stayed, like the T.S.Eliot (Four Quartets, Burnt Norton). Although we try to move 'neither from nor towards' we never stop in the performance:

*At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.*

Is it that we try to dance in a way in which every movement contains the possibility of all directions?

Is it the pleasure of recognising individuality as a product of all possible possibilities?

Is it then the celebration of individuality as Spinoza described it: 'the recognition of being composed by an ensemble of an infinity of infinite ensembles of extensive parts, inside or outside, which belong to me under characteristic rapports, these characteristic rapports express only a certain level of power which forms my essence, my essence according to me, so to say the essence specific to me'?

The feeling that we are composed by our life in which we perceive and experiment and are perceived and experimented on by other internal and external parts? And this in a chain of transformations and transpositions?

Is it the fascination for the shameless emptiness then? What some people called the 'courage' of being on stage without being covered by a context or meaning? Without what we call being under the roof of a task?

Is it the fascination for a thing that is so common that you tend to oversee it at the same time? A thing that is there and at the same time not? A thing you can think away easily, a thing you can forget because it will always be there, a thing you can erase safely without the fear for overseen consequences, a fearless thing because you know it so well, so well how to handle it that you as an audience can never fail?

Is it the seeming contradiction in this factory-of-movements-not-to-produce-specific-products which connects it more to nature, more to a landscape that creates the enjoyment of a profound purposelessness in which, again, it is fearless to travel?

Is it the relief about the absence of the spectacular and the excitement, not only for the sake of an exception but for some intrinsic reason not to be confronted with the stereotypes of impressiveness?

Is it the absence of music or any sound in the performance, only the daily noise from outside the theatre, which questions the source for the concentrated execution of the ongoing movements, and by this the drive behind all this moving?

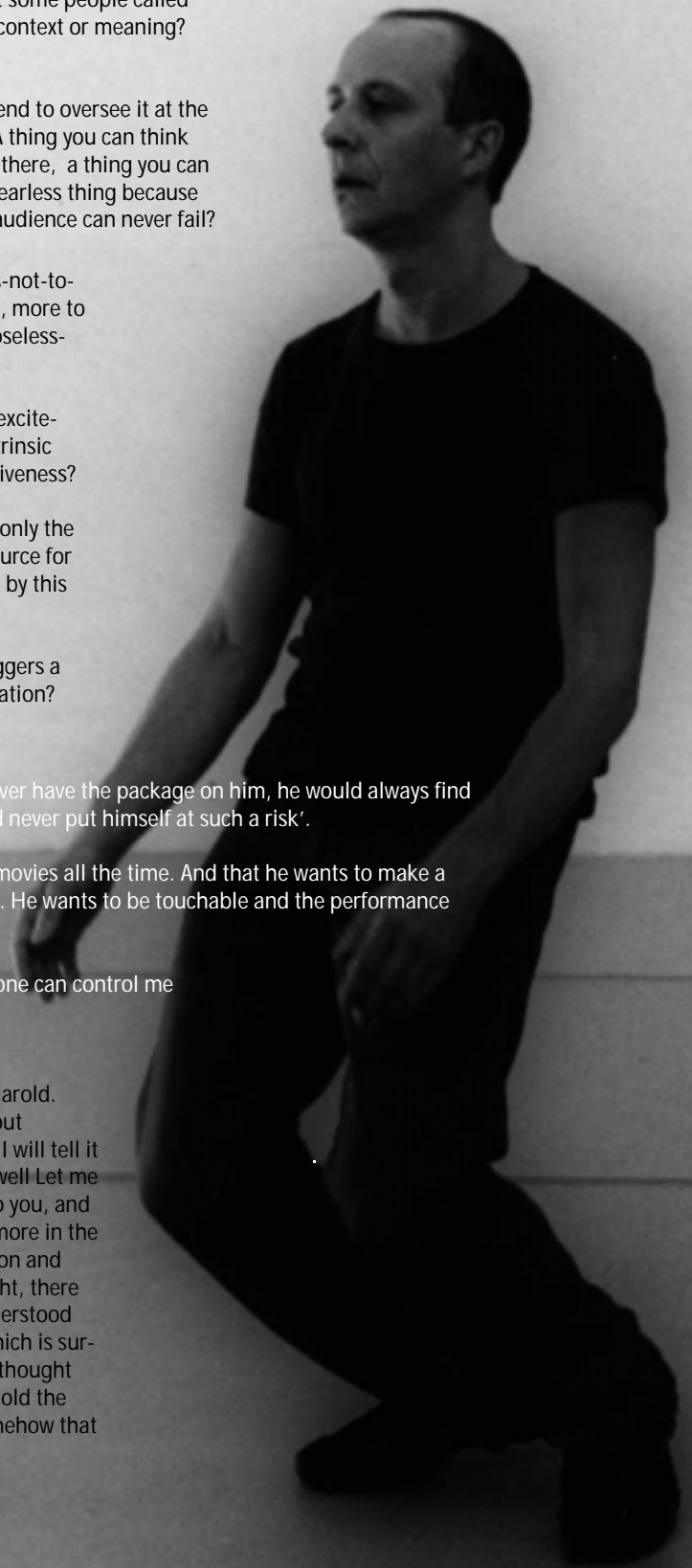
Is it the absence of any physical touch between us which triggers a longing of the audience to bring us together in their imagination?

He says, 'if he was in the resistance, in the war, he would never have the package on him, he would always find some way to keep himself safe, some odd way out, he would never put himself at such a risk'.

And he says that these days we live and play in each others movies all the time. And that he wants to make a performance that is a process in which it is easy to take part. He wants to be touchable and the performance to be touchable, which is something else than touchable.

He says 'I don't want to control myself but I want that everyone can control me (their understanding of what is happening)'.

I interviewed a monk once, a very old man, called Brother Harold. And it was quite a long time ago so I can tell this story without embarrassment. No, this is a lie, I am still embarrassed, but I will tell it anyway. And so of course at the end of the interview I said, well Let me ask you the really obvious question: what does God mean to you, and he said, straight away without any hesitation, he said: 'The more in the middle of'. He said it straight like that, without any hesitation and looking into my eyes. There was no need to pause for thought, there was a lifetime of thought behind his answer, and what I understood was that the more was now, here, the present, the isness which is surrounded by what came before, what I wanted to do, what I thought I should do, and the future, what I want to do next. When I told the story he thought I said 'the move in the middle of', and somehow that remains useful to him.



What age am I when I perform?

Is there a 'myself' in the performance? What other parts of me can I accept? Who do I want to be?

What do clothes feel like? Shoes?

How would I move if I dared? How do I move when I don't question how I am moving?

Is it sometimes humiliating to dance?

What does it mean to undress the act of performing?

What do I need to confirm about myself by exposing myself in this way?

How can I make something when I am doubting?

What do I do when I feel confused?

When I feel confused about boundaries I run to extremes, so shall I run or shall I endure the middle ground?

Is this a personal journey?

If the process is shared then what am I inviting the people to share?

How is performance different from my own life? How is it similar?
Since I am not ready to be less than perfect shall I accept the search for perfection?

What is the recurring image of 'open' movement?

Is it more eloquent not to speak?

What does 'too meaningful' mean?

Why alter language and expect understanding?

How do I focus the stage?

What does it mean to undress the performance space?

Am I asking questions that have already been asked?

Should I know what I am doing?

How shall I keep notes?

Can I accept the contradiction?

Can I simplify all this?

