

*This book is played in many ways. One*

## CHAPTER 5

# Movement

IN INTERROGATING THE MATERIAL OF MOVEMENT, THE VIEWPOINTS once again look beyond the established systems of magnificent techniques that have been codified into training methods. The goal here is to discuss the essential nature of Movement so that the performer may have a one-on-one dialogue with it. We are seeking the absolute core in order to define this material that lies so close to the bone. The interrogation:

*The core nature of dance is Movement.*

*The core nature of Movement resides in our ability to experience kinetic sensation.*

Beginning with a deconstructive, pre-movement/natural approach, in which the performer is able to read and generate kinetic sensation, we can interrogate Movement to begin to build a physical dialogue free of cultured confines. This may seem like a very internal, almost anti-performance, but on this level dance and theater are fully connected. And with the rather recent discovery of mirror neurons, we know that the brain of the observer is stimulated in exactly the same manner as the person performing a movement. Neural interconnectivity between performer and viewer functions as a profound element of both acting and dancing. The kinetic sensation of a fall is felt by all.

Stripped of Shape, Space, Time, and Emotion, Movement still contains a world of infinitely subtle communication.

I first witnessed the direct tie to Movement as kinetic sensation while attending the performances of Grand Union, the improvisation performance group initiated by Yvonne Rainer. She concocted kinetic situations, such as running with a mattress held between all the performers in a full-out celebration of kinetic sensation. In a later performance, a member of Grand Union, Steve Paxton (the inventor of Contact Improvisation) decided not to move a muscle for the duration of a performance. Standing in complete apparent stillness, in the absence of movement, the kinetics of this material oozed throughout the entire performance, asserting its power and place in the SSTEMS.

This seventies, SoHo view of movement as kinetic sensation helped performers get past "the performing bear world," as innovator Yvonne Rainer once condemned traditional dance in *Time* magazine. She wanted to do away with the confining definition of dance as a type of physical/artistic sport. Rainer deplored the idea of dance defined by how high dancers could lift their leg, spin or jump. She rightly realized that these "requirements" reduced the art form to something close to a carnival show. Her inclusion of pedestrian movement as dance flipped the genre upside down and allowed it to fully enter the art world. She reduced dance to its essence of kinetic sensation, and this separation from traditional technique allowed every dancer to be an artist in possession of their own medium. The impact of including walking in her dance vocabulary, encouraged individual dancers/artists to use the materials (Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement and Logic) to serve their own means. In my opinion, this embrace of the materials set in motion a revolutionary and lasting contribution to dance.

In this new interpretation of dance, dancers themselves decided what materials they worked with, no longer obligated to use an arabesque in every performance to prove they were indeed performing dance. Dance can now include falling, rolling or crawling and the performance of these kinetic motions requires a different type of physical training. Different techniques came to satisfy this need—Alexander Technique, Kinetic Awareness, Body-Mind Centering and Feldenkrais Method, to

name just a few of the more well known training methods. Physical training on this level develops a direct connection to the forces affecting our bodies internally and externally, and as a result the performer's movement articulation is enhanced.

During the sixties and seventies, dance artists stopped studying the body through traditional techniques and went straight to the body itself. This is the "rolling on the floor generation," taking the body out of its formal dance training systems and deconstructing movement through anatomical study and improvisation. Steve Paxton's Contact Improvisation is one of the best examples of this type of new training methodology. This is a method of movement generation based on two bodies using one point of balance. His work is invaluable to both actors and dancers because it achieves a familiarity with kinetic motion that interfaces directly with the physical sensation, breaks the formal social barriers between bodies and carries the understanding of movement into a universal, deeply natural realm.

In this environment I came to the conclusion that to be at the fundamental source of Movement you must study motion as sensation. Like me, many young dance artists had individual, laboratory-like studios. These laboratories sprang up throughout SoHo. Each contained its own wizard/chemist, with their experimentations and new perspectives. This changing approach to Movement influenced not only the training and repertoire of dancers, but spilled over into the way contemporary actors were, and are, trained. Suddenly everyone, theater artists and dancers alike, was concerned with locating the sensation of the spine, the ability to roll and return to standing with efficiency, etc. I regard this sensual movement training as reflecting the beginning of an explosion in human physical achievements that also ran through the sports world, developing into extreme skiing and hang gliding, and bursting out into the street as breakdancing and hip hop.

You can see this quality of Movement and physical sensation in the work of actor Willem Dafoe. In plays such as *The Hairy Ape*, directed by Elizabeth LeCompte, his physical kinetic movement onstage almost obliterates the rest of the SYSTEMS. Space, blocking, timing, line delivery, the visuals of the set and even the story are left clinging and fighting for dear life, threatened by the raw presence of Movement. Another example is the sensuous movement of the Pina Bausch Company in

choreographies such as her Café Mueller. Here the performers present a heightened visceral iteration of dance. You feel you are breathing with them rather than simply watching them. Their ability to communicate directly through kinetic sensation casts that energy right into the audience. Our mirror neurons are dazzled. Every performance they give is experienced as a hyper-kinetic event. A performer who has a full awareness of the kinetic sensation of movement can communicate this quality even in stillness. When a dancer or actor who is aware of sensation merely stands, you feel their muscles ripple and sense their blood, warm and fluid.

In the Six Viewpoints approach, to truly come into its own, Movement must be removed from form constraints. As a practice method I return to the haiku form, using Movement as the material so that my students can experience and witness pure kinetics at work without any preset forms or interference from exteriorized Time or Shape. Eliminating those two design elements/materials, a body moves from pure sensation, and is a transcendent joy to watch. Movement stripped away from the other artful languages allow the students to see its impact and carry it into performance with confidence in its raw beautiful quality.

Much physical training precedes this haiku practice. To enter the material of Movement, students must learn falling, rolling, standing and walking until they find the kinetic core of their movement. If you want to be a strong and independent performer, you alone must reclaim your physical identity, stolen from you by social restrictions on Movement. You must remove the blocks that stifle physical contact with others, cause the fear of falling and the shame of physical sensation in general. In the end, just as with the other SSTEMS, kinetic sensation must be discovered as a one- on-one dialogue. As all great movement performers know, you must fight all barriers to sensation. You must conquer these limitations inside your own body. Finally, you must get past formal exterior movement training in order to own your movement.

Much of my exploration into movement training for actors took place in the studios of the Experimental Theatre Wing (ETW) at New York University. At the core of this training program I applied this concept of movement through sensation via a technique I call the Hamilton Floor Barre. This system was invented by Jean

Hamilton, who deconstructed ballet to find what could help students who were of attention paid to the functioning of the joints and articulation of the body in alignment—an astonishing amount of knowledge contained in directional intentions of movement resulting in performative strength and control. Toward the middle of my classes at ETW, in the third or fourth week of study, I pair this training with Contact Improvisation to round out the student's sensory radar. I believe that these two training components impart an acute ability in students to create their onstage actions from sensation rather than from exterior/learned/repetitive systems such as those taught in modern dance or the martial arts.

The responsibility we shouldered in those early days at ETW was staggering and thrilling. Our faculty meetings were absolute shirtsleeves-rolled-up work sessions. There was to be no hierarchy in the training. We would coexist and contribute our techniques and experiments to one "pot." This pot would be the students; no one would own or dominate. The students' growth would be our goal. No one was even tempted to use the studio to build an unchallengeable domination, an exclusive leadership. No one was right and no one was wrong. I first encountered the Grotowski Plastiques there, with the horizontal experimental environment of the 1978 art world raging just outside our doors. The Plastiques and the Viewpoints became the natural foundation for the school at a very early stage of development. Through this combination the movement and acting faculty brought kinetic sensation to the table.

Of course this coexistence was not always comfortable. I was irritated by the Grotowski training because I felt that the Plastiques were unnecessarily stressful on the body. They did not provide enough visceral anatomical information, such as alignment training, proper stretches, and careful joint strengthening. From my own postmodern perspective on Movement, these Grotowski neighbors were loud, frenetic, stressed, narrow, mindless, and lacking subtlety. In comparison to the Plastiques, my classes had the atmosphere of a Buddhist temple. In the end I came to appreciate the viability of the Grotowski work as invaluable acting/physical training and found it amusing how well these two forms fit together in the end. Since that faraway time, two very advanced forms of actor training have evolved

that, in the capable hands of brilliant actors/directors Erica Fay and Rainer Von Walden, who combine Viewpoints and Grotowski.

As a child I devoted myself to running up and down hills, bicycling, mountain climbing, balancing on anything precarious—conducting an interrogation of the earth's forces in a celebration and love of my muscles. To this day I tend to be a muscle-centric dancer. At nine I understood that dance would be my profession. I cannot recall how I got to this determination since I had not seen any dance. Perhaps it was my attachment to Greek mythology and the stories of the bull dancers. I began studying ballet at Robert DeWeese's painting studio.

A former dancer, Harvey Jung had returned to Montana to attend Montana State University in Bozeman and fallen in with the DeWeese art circle. Longing to be near dance he asked permission to teach at Bob's studio. He had attempted to choreograph after years of performing as a child star and later as a company member of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet in New York. His creative efforts caused him to have a nervous breakdown and he was in the process of redirecting his life by going back to school. I joined four other students in his classes, which were strictly conducted and did not include any learned movement beyond the ballet barre. He had concluded that it was all that learned movement that had caused him to be inhibited as a creative spirit. I thought that improvisation and ballet barre was "ballet" until, at 14, when I received a scholarship to spend one summer studying at Cranbrook College, "back east", in Michigan. I took a real ballet class and when they started center floor I was amazed at how everyone was doing the same movements. I kept bumping into dancers until I retreated to the corner.

Even with the terrifying concept that dance was based on learning movements that were performed in groups, I nonetheless ran away from home. I was 17 years old with 50 dollars in my pocket, hopping freight trains to get to "the dance." Nothing could slow the urge and thrill of my love of sensation and my commitment to the vocabulary of communication through movement. I pursued more ballet, then modern, then Cunningham and finally postmodern, improvisation, Contact Improvisation and a plethora of alternative studies of the body. I retooled my body yet again at age 30 with ballet training from a system invented and taught by Jean Hamilton (who danced with

## MOVEMENT

Pavlova on the South American tour), then choreographed more and trained other dancers and actors. This is my family: the dancers, the kinetic artists.

# Standing in Space

*The Six Viewpoints Theory & Practice*

Mary Overlie