

# **MOVING THROUGH TIME**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

A phenomenological adoption of lived experience acts as a touchstone for my graduate project titled *through* and this supporting document. *through* is a contemporary dance work, performed by two dancers with original music, video, and animation.

Incorporating a prosthetic in the form of a single rollerblade on one of the dancers, I created a unique physical experience for both audience members and performers. With one bare foot and one rollerblade the familiar becomes strange: only to rediscover the familiar re-invented. Working from this premise offered the creation of new movements and possibilities, both within the choreography and the collaborative forms that I worked with.

First hand descriptive accounts of varying experiences in the studio, in performance, and from my past are included in this document and are used to ground theoretical discussions in my own dance practice and lived experiences.

**Keywords:** lived-body; phenomenology; performance; lived experience; body in time; body in space; social constructions of gender; prosthesis; phantom limb

**Subject Terms:** contemporary dance; choreography; phenomenology; creative process

## **DEDICATION**

*August 12, 2007.*

I am in a bed, inside of an old granary at my baba's (grandmother's) farm. This building has been restored by the typical hard work and labour that is customary to my family. A great deal of life has played out between the walls of this building and on the land that it sits.

Only a few months have passed since the day we buried my Aunt. Shortly after the burial my siblings and I, distraught, grieving, and overwhelmed by events sat together in this building and talked. In this structure, built in 1915, I sit to write this document. A lineage is here in these walls, a past still present.

I dedicate this project to my family and friends lost to time. To the experiences lived and shared with them.

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Figure 1: Roxoliana (Roxy) Prus in *through*

## **CHAPTER 1: MOVING**

### **Moving in the studio: an introduction**

When I enter the studio it is almost always empty. I prefer to schedule rehearsal during times that others would not want it, late at night and early weekend mornings. I do not turn on the fluorescent lights. I save those for later. I begin by putting on a piece of music, often the same piece as the rehearsal before. The music selection endures in phases. I change my clothes and I begin to move – I run, I skip, I bust out. I am thankful that others are not around to witness this display. My humorous imagination briefly concerns itself with thoughts of being committed, or at least not being considered a ‘serious’ artist/academic by others if they were to stumble upon this behaviour.

In the studio time shifts, hours can sprint by; minutes stubbornly persist long past their welcome. In the studio I feel. This is my art practice; this is what it means to be a performer. A new movement is being created; something fresh is being explored. I am aware of my physicality, of its shortcomings, and with patience I push myself a little further into what I am capable of. I am alive in the

moment where my muscles burn and tensions in various joints swell as energy with no place to go bursts to get out. I am alive in that moment before I crash to the floor. I am real. I am here.

The reality of life outside of these moments is slightly different. This other reality is real with a history: a past lineage of people, places, disappointments and experiences. These unfold in such a manner that my body, this body, can almost be forgotten and is eclipsed by everything else. This reality is too big, too entwined, and too complex. In the studio 'real' is only that moment, in that space. I strive to connect these two realities in life outside of the studio. Sometimes this is achieved; often I fail.

As a dancer and choreographer, the origin of my art practice is the exploration and understanding of the lived-body. My perception of the world and my lived experiences are grounded in my body. Perception, experience, body, and movement share the commonality of spatial temporality.<sup>1</sup> To understand the body I must begin to question and understand my relationship with time and space. The body in time and space does not exist outside of the social construction of it: social construction being the external subtext that consciously and unconsciously shapes and confines the body. Individuality becomes gendered, politicized, and processed through a variety of myths and stereotypes.

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<sup>1</sup> Spatial temporality refers to being in space (spatial) and in time (temporality).

This social reality affects my perceptions and my lived experiences. I wonder whether there is a way to re-configure the social constructions of my self. Does my art practice remain an active site of subversion, creativity, and re-presentation? Moving through time, retracing a few steps from 'then to now,' I will attempt to answer these questions, establishing a reinterpretation of my art practice and my own body in time and space.

## **Moving then**

*We come into the world already moving.  
We are indeed either movement-born or still born.  
Maxine Sheets-Johnstone*

In life, we are unable to fully escape our bodies: we are intrinsically connected. In her work, *The Primacy of Movement*, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone states that what all humans have in common is our natality. We all start out the same way: as infants.<sup>2</sup> She views this as a beginning, as a point of departure for living in the world and making sense of it. Our means of departure is movement itself. Sheets-Johnstone comments that "In the beginning we are simply infused with movement – not merely with a *propensity* to move, but with the real thing."<sup>3</sup> This leads us to ask what is movement, this 'real thing,' and how do we go about it? Sheets-Johnstone continues with this theme by saying:

...We learned without words. We learned without any kind of formal instruction from others. We were our own teachers. We taught ourselves – spontaneously—and at our own pace. We

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<sup>2</sup> Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. *The Primacy of Movement*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing. 1999. (224).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid (136).

learned directly from our own bodies what it is to be the animate forms we are. We learned by listening, by being and staying attuned kinaesthetically, in an on-going process of feeling the dynamics of our own movement: we felt the effort and shape of our movement; we felt its temporal flow.<sup>4</sup>

What Sheets-Johnstone describes above accurately describes aspects of my own dance practice, a practice that has taken years of work to create and to develop. My desired state of being in a performance mirrors this description of how we initially come into the world. If this is how I came into the world why must I make a return back to this state through performance?<sup>5</sup> What has drawn me away from what I comprehend to be an embodied state of becoming?<sup>6</sup>

## **The Body Inscribed**

*September, 2001.*

How exciting to be in a University dance class with so many other men. So often I am the lone male in dance class. This year, at Concordia, I am one of many. I am completing an undergraduate degree in Contemporary Dance. I have been dancing for many years and I believe that I have acquired a high level of skill.

In this particular class we begin an improvisation exercise. We begin to improvise, to move and dance freely however we choose. The instructor asks us

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<sup>4</sup> Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. *The Primacy of Movement*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing. 1999. (224).

<sup>5</sup> I am aware of the cognitive differences between myself as an infant vs. an adult. What is of particular interest to me is the mode in which learning occurs and the temporal elements associated with it.

<sup>6</sup> Embodied state of becoming, its definition and relationship to my art practice, will be discussed in following chapters.

to change and we are to significantly change the dynamics of our movement. We establish a new quality of movement, stay with it for a duration, then again we are instructed to change. After five or six alterations I am already beginning to repeat my movement. I can no longer change my movement significantly without repeating that which I have already done so I sit down and begin to observe the other dancers.

Observing the females, I sense a broader vocabulary of movement. I observe similarities but also differences. I continue to observe, focusing on the males. It does not take me long to recognise that all of the males dance in the same manner. Our movements are similar and the dynamic qualities are the same. I wonder how this happened. In moving freely it appears that the males are all bound.

The males in my class are from differing cultures, backgrounds, and age groups. We have gathered here from various geographies, economic landscapes, and past experiences to gather here and learn. We all dance in the same way, direct, powerful, and limited. We have one thing in common, our gender. I am an artist creating with the same prescribed palette as my contemporaries. I have been blindfolded to the reality of my body.

## **Understanding the Inscription**

As a young dancer my ability to choreograph outside of the confines of the masculine gendered body was unfortunately beyond my abilities. Balswick (1988) comments that:

Children, from the time they are born, explicitly and implicitly are taught the male and female role. Male inexpressiveness is based upon a lifelong, institutionally based, socialization process that begins in infancy when girls are taught to act 'feminine' and to desire 'feminine' objects, and boys are taught how to be 'manly.' In learning to be a man, the boy in our society comes to value expressions of masculinity and devalue expressions of femininity. Masculinity is expressed largely through physical courage, toughness, competition, and aggression; femininity is, by contrast, expressed largely through gentleness, expressiveness, and responsiveness. The male child learns that expressing emotions is not part of the male role.<sup>7</sup>

Like all individuals, the dancer is subjected unknowingly to gender socialization from an early age and throughout life. Attention and consequences are placed upon young bodies by outside forces. We are conditioned to desire the socially accepted by denying and avoiding behaviours and attitudes that do not belong in this paradigm. As a young male I am required by society to possess certain traits, and I must also protect them, to never put them into question; if I do so, I become other, the deviant to the norm.<sup>8</sup> These gender roles, with all of their expectations, conflict with my self-defined role as a dancer and dance artist.

I use my body as a medium to communicate, to overcome, to experience, and to express creatively. Such creativity, where choices are made in a contextual understanding, gives me an awareness of my own relationship to the social elements that have influenced my art practice. As a developing dancer and mover I was programmed through institutional training, into a certain style of

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<sup>7</sup> Balswick, Jack. *The Inexpressive Male*. Toronto: Lexington Books. 1988. (16).

<sup>8</sup> Here I am making reference to ideas from Larry May and Robert Strikwerda from the following text. *Rethinking Masculinity: Philosophical Explorations in Light of Feminism*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. 1992. (123).

movement, a style in accordance with a societal notion of masculinity. During this stage of development, I endured the social prejudices of being involved in the so-called effeminate activities of dance and figure skating from various levels of society including my family, community, and peers. As a result my movement preferences, deportment, posture, and my physiological and kinaesthetic development were strongly influenced.<sup>9</sup>

On stage and in class I became a representation of my social environment and the constructed masculine gender role. Ramsay Burt (1995) states that, "Choreographers are aware of the convention that, in order to represent masculinity, a dancer should look powerful."<sup>10</sup> I was taught to move and perform in such a powerful manner. Washabaugh (1998) adds to this idea by saying that, "The male dancer is aggressive and almost ferocious in his posture and movement. At the same time he is composed if not serene. Strange bedfellows, these qualities of ferocity and serenity."<sup>11</sup> This serenity was represented in my dancing by a quiet confidence. I can only wonder whether this trait was developed by choice or by limitation.

It only took me one improvisation class of observing the other male dancers, and asking the question 'Why do we all dance the same?' to become aware of the impact of the socially constructed masculine gender role. The

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<sup>9</sup> I was most comfortable and capable when I moved in a very direct, strong, and assertive style. My body was well trained and taught how to move in this linear, focused manner, embodying strength and aggression.

<sup>10</sup> Burt, Ramsay. *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*. New York: Routledge. 1995. (51).

<sup>11</sup> Washabaugh, William. *The Passion of Music and Dance: Body, Gender and Sexuality*. New York: Berg Publishers. 1998. (40).



moment of realization was the moment that I began the process of undoing. Through the action of asking the question why, I found agency as a choreographer. Working towards an understanding, I found choice, choice towards subversion, re-presentation, or a reworking of socially imposed constructs within my medium.

*Through* is performed by two dancers, one male and one female.<sup>12</sup> The representation of these two gendered moving bodies works against staid representations of the body. Both dancers perform movement qualities that belie conventional understandings of their gender role. Costumes created by Tracy Murray emphasise not the gendered body but the physical moving body. Highlighting the physicality, the movement, musculature, posture, deportment and intensity of the moving bodies takes precedence over gender roles. The male dancer is equally expressive and reactive as the female dancer. The relationship between the two performers is based upon physical movement in a shared space in a shared time. When the female lifts and supports the body and weight of the male or the male, in moments, embodies weakness, vulnerability and also by choice, composed ferocity, the gender of the body in action becomes of little importance. Of significant importance is the movement of the physical bodies.

The act of recognizing the restraints of the masculine gender role upon my body established a new set of parameters for my art practice. Recognizing how different social institutions and social constructions influence my individual

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<sup>12</sup> Roxoliana Prus as the female dancer, myself as the male dancer.

identity and lived experiences offers a position for personal growth and redirection.

## **The Social Body**

Elizabeth Grosz states, "Every body is marked by the history and specificity of its existence."<sup>13</sup> My body is no exception. I cannot escape the confines of my body, nor can I escape the environment in which my body is situated. Patriarchy, free market capitalism, and westernized ideals, are but a few of the influences on my lived experiences. They contribute to the circumstances in which I come to be.

The body is not outside of history, for it is produced through and in history. Relations of force, of power, produce the body through the use of distinct techniques (the feeding, training, supervision, and education of children in any given culture) and harness the energies and potential subversion that power itself has constructed (regimes of order and control involved in modern disciplinary society need the creation of a docile, obedient subject whose body and movements parallel and correlate with the efficiency of a machine or a body whose desire is to confess all about its innermost subjectivity and sexuality to institutionally sanctioned authorities.)<sup>14</sup>

Grosz states that the body is not outside of history, what is excluded are the variances in which the individual body can be 'inside' of history. The outcomes of the 'feeding, training, supervision, and education of children' are not

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<sup>13</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1994. (142).

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Grosz comes to this statement having discussed both Foucault and Nietzsche and their individual ideas regarding the body and its relationship to power. The body, as with Foucault, as a "resistant yet fundamentally passive inertia" or Nietzsche's body as "the site for the emanation of the will to power (or several wills), an intensely energetic locus for all cultural production." Ibid. (148).

always the same. We cannot be sure that the outcome was always that which was intended. The reaction of the individual to social conditioning leads to various results and implications. Subversion is present within this system simply because each individual is different. This model (as with other similar models of its kind) assumes that individuals are all the same; lived experiences the same, bodies are all the same; however, they are not.

Reducing the individual to a common unit, removing our subjective experience, is problematic. Depending on what the individual lends to the equation, the result will vary. The lived experiences in which individuals come to be cannot be objectively reduced. For example, individuals who are deviant<sup>15</sup> have in the process of becoming deviant learned and acquired skills to mask this deviance from authorities, if they choose. These individuals harness their own energies and potentials against regimes of order, to act as they choose.<sup>16</sup> The individual exists within a social context, a temporal existence composed of countless lived experiences that continue over time. These experiences test social constructions and also theories regarding the social body as it is lived. My theoretical inquiry into phenomenology emerges from the significance that I place upon the subjectively lived-body.

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<sup>15</sup> The term deviant, as I use it here, describes an individual whose actions/identity are considered different than majority culture, than prescribed social 'norms.'

<sup>16</sup> I believe that most social change has occurred due to the actions of these individuals and not because institutionally sanctioned authorities and structures of power wish social change to occur.

## Phenomenology, Recovering Individual Experience

Recent dance scholarship has situated the moving physical body within a wider context of cultural studies, placing movement firmly within the dichotomy of body and mind. Dance researchers have employed analytical and interpretive models from cultural, feminist, literary, anthropological, and sociological fields. Dance scholarship, in its infancy, has benefited from these multiple approaches by providing a range of academic perspectives on dance. This interdisciplinary and inter-textual work has primarily been the focus of scholars outside of dance. Reading the moving body as a text,<sup>17</sup> scholars have failed to incorporate the actual physical movement of the dance. My approach towards dance scholarship is a reading of the physical body that is both culturally situated within social experience and a physical body that is represented and lived through movement.

Jane Desmond furthers this debate by stating:

If we are to talk about dancing in anything other than the broadest terms, we must be able to do close analysis of dance forms, just as we might of literary texts. While most scholars have spent years developing analytical skills for reading and understanding verbal forms of communication, rarely have we worked equally hard to develop an ability to analyze visual, rhythmic, or gestural forms. As cultural critics, we must become movement literate.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The idea of reading the moving body as a text is observing the body in relationship to only socio-cultural elements. It denies the lived experience of the individual within the reading of the moving body.

<sup>18</sup> The author, Jane Desmond, furthers this statement with the following, "the academy's aversion to the material body, and its fictive separation of mental and physical production, has rendered humanities scholarship that investigates the mute dancing body nearly invisible." Desmond, Jane C. "Embodying difference: issues in dance and cultural studies." *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*. Edited by Alexandra Carter. New York: Routledge. 1998. (161).

Becoming 'movement literate' requires the adoption of an existential phenomenological approach. Movement literacy, using this approach, provides the ability to observe and experience movement beyond its historical considerations. As a dancer and academic, my own dancing body has become a subtext to my work. The incorporation of movement into my dance practice and my research has at times been taxing because of long standing barriers. Gay Morris confirms this by stating, "Scholars must heal the damaging dichotomies that have cut dance off from intellectual discourse, as if the mind were not somehow engaged in dance, nor the brain a part of the body. This is a kind of nostalgic primitivizing that will no longer do."<sup>19</sup> Existential phenomenology can bridge the Cartesian body-mind duality described above by Morris.

The term 'lived-body' that represents my being-in-the-world arose from the joining of existentialism with phenomenology. Fraleigh comments that:

The lived-body concept attempts to cut beneath the subject-object split, recognizing a dialectical and lived dualism but not a dualism of body-soul or body-mind. A phenomenological (or lived) dualism implicates consciousness and intention and assumes an indivisible unity of body, soul, and mind.<sup>20</sup>

Consciousness and the body are a unified entity contributing to the 'lived experience' of a phenomenon. Fraleigh extends this concept by adding that, "Phenomenology strives to capture pre-reflective experience, the immediacy of

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<sup>19</sup> Morris, Gay. *Moving Words: Re-writing Dance*. New York: Routledge. 1996. (11).

<sup>20</sup> Fraleigh, Sondra Horton. *Dance and the Lived Body*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press. 1987. (15). Fraleigh considers the lived body in two distinct capacities, the body-subject and the body-object. "The body-object can be known, in the sense that the body itself can become the object of our attention, but the body-subject can only be lived." Ibid. (15).

being-in-the-world."<sup>21</sup> These lived experiences and the experiential descriptions of such experiences are the basis of existential phenomenology.<sup>22</sup>

Sheets-Johnstone comments that, "Through the lived experience we discover that dance is first and foremost a created phenomenon"<sup>23</sup> a phenomenon created with the moving physical body in time and space. The dancer, spectator, or dance scholar who regards the moving body and movement with pre-reflectivity will engage in a different lived experience with the dance. Often after a contemporary dance performance one comment made is that an observer did not understand the work. This suggests a specific meaning for the work, or that the dance was intended to be understood in a certain manner. The lived experience of the work is subordinate to an understanding of the work.

### **Moving Through Perception and Becoming**

The phenomenological process of becoming and the reality of movement are similar in they are both a form-in-the-making. Movement, either danced or observed, situates a fundamental relationship between consciousness and body, be it the body of dancer or observer. For Merleau-Ponty the mind is always embodied. He begins from a place of embodied consciousness, not from a Cartesian duality of body and mind.

For Merleau-Ponty the physical body is not only the seat of perception, but the vehicle for the being-in-the-world or being-in-

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<sup>21</sup> Fraleigh, Sondra Horton. "A vulnerable glance: seeing dance through phenomenology." *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*. Edited by Alexandra Carter. London: Routledge. 1998. (138).

<sup>22</sup> As suggested by Fraleigh. *Ibid.* (136).

<sup>23</sup> Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. *The Phenomenology of Dance*. New York: Books for Libraries. 1980. (5).

situation of an embodied consciousness. The body is not something that simply is in space and time; it inhabits space and time in a truly physical sense and the individual perceives it by constructing a bodily schema out of memories and perceptions.<sup>24</sup>

Implicated in this is perception, through our bodies we perceive and receive information. The body is never simply subject or object. I live my body, it is a phenomenon experienced by me, and it provides my very means of perception. Body and mind connect in consciousness, and I have access to my body only by living.<sup>25</sup>

This concept can be explained in the following manner. A Caucasian male in his twenties spends a great deal of time, energy, and resources, exercising, monitoring his consumption of food and nutrients, and insuring adequate rest. This behaviour continues over a long period of time. Days are spent involved in this regimen combined with spending hours in a dance studio. His body begins to change as he loses fat and gains muscle. He becomes stronger and leaner. The form of his body begins to align with the image of male bodies seen in various advertising and marketing campaigns.

In coming to understand the actions of this individual, some might suggest that the individual is distorting his physical image, his natural body to conform to a cultural model of the body. This cultural body model valorises youth, slimness, and strength. This individual's consumer habits, his behaviours, and his identity are all intertwined with socially dictated stereotypes of the body. He is recreating

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<sup>24</sup> Macey, David. (Ed.) *Dictionary of Critical Theory*. London: Penguin Books. 2000. (248).

<sup>25</sup> This paragraph is a brief summation of ideas presented by Elizabeth Grosz. Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1994.

himself around a cultural notion of masculinity, or perhaps succumbing to heterosexual ideals of desire. His actions could be interpreted as a representation of consumer culture, or as narcissism. The actions of this individual could be subject to different readings, psychological, cultural, sociological, economical, or political to name a few. Each reading would suggest a theory, an understanding of his actions.

These readings are based on assumptions and implied social circumstances; these assumptions could change if we learn that this male is a dancer, recovering from injury and preparing for an upcoming show. His regime and resulting body transformation facilitate his desire to create with fewer limitations. The experience is one of overcoming, of directing his own powers into a medium that he values.

Reconsidering the above man's actions, the existence and phenomena of his actions precede their essence and objectification. A singular social reading of this individual's actions risks an objective reductionism that denies his lived experience, his subjective body. His creative aim could be to subvert the common portrayal of the body through his dance practice. This creative process could become a process towards self-discovery, a process of dismantling patterns of past behaviour, movement, and creative concerns. This act of overcoming could become uniquely weaved into the formation of his identity-in-flux. His embodied lived experience creates possibilities that propel him through life. The philosophy of Merleau-Ponty affirms the significance of this man's lived experience.





**Figure 2: Roxoliana Prus and Shae Zukiwsky in *through***

## CHAPTER 2: *THROUGH*

*By making the familiar strange,  
we familiarize ourselves anew with the familiar.  
Maxine Sheets-Johnstone*

### **In Ritual**

When I perform on stage I am almost unaware of an audience. I arrive at the theatre and the seats are empty. In attendance is the lighting technician and the other dancer surrounded by the empty seats. It is quiet as I begin my methodical warm up and prepare for the performance. I know what needs to be done and I attempt to do it. I focus on my breathing, my breath being the odometer to my body. My breath can control my pulse, it can release tension, and it can enliven areas of my body that may be at rest or fatigued. By focusing on my breathing I can become grounded and present in time and space, a state of becoming that may take time to achieve depending on the day and my emotional and/or mental state at that point in time. I am repeatedly pulled away from the theatre with thoughts of experiences that occurred earlier in the day. Stretching, breathing, and finding my centre bring me back to now, escorting me away from earlier time. Upon the completion of my warm up I silently say goodbye to the space and make my way to the dressing room.

Having all of my necessities already in their appropriate place, I put on my make-up and then my costume. This process is a ritual, one that has been finely

honed through years of practice, a ritual where I move through the actions clearly finishing one, before moving on to the next. I think there is a myth that performers love to be on stage. A myth that performers are alive under the stage lights and that the time endured between performances is a purgatory until they can get back into those stage lights. This desire and love for the performance supposedly make a performer. I am a performer yet in contradiction I do not like to perform. I can feel horribly anxious and afraid of an upcoming performance. Each movement of my warm-up, every separate action that constitutes the ritual of applying make-up and costume is a step towards succumbing to that fear, to the anxiousness. The ritual prepares me for the performance. The ritual creates a state of being where I come to accept things as they are in that moment, an acceptance necessary in order to get myself on the stage. The theatre now filled with people begins to buzz. The sound of voices and laughter make their way across the theatre, down the halls, and into the dressing room. I silently say goodbye to the space of the dressing room and make my way to the stage.

## **In Performance**

The moment before I step on the stage is when I often feel completely alone. Not lonely, just alone. This moment is brief because it is always interrupted by the call to take my starting position. The initial darkness is similar to closing one's eyes, removing the visual sense altogether. Heightening my reliance on the other senses and my kinaesthetic awareness, I move through the black space. The space I inhabit becomes a dance partner. I sense it, I feel it in the motion of air across my skin and I hear it through the sounds and the

silences. The adrenaline that courses throughout my body amplifies each sound, each action. The strips of Marley taped together on the floor create a grid. This black map blends into space but through foot and rollerblade, hand and body, offers possible assistance as I navigate through it. At times I am alone in the movement, alone in the struggle and in the focus of what is happening in my body, the trembling of muscle, the fatigue, the shifting of weight, the sweat upon my skin. When I eventually encounter the other dancer, my subjective self is still alone but the space is shared. This space is a meeting place, a shared time. Two bodies, distinctly different, yet linked by nature and environment, time and space; two bodies, one space.

## **Lived Bodies as Shared Experience**

I am a dancer and choreographer. The origin of my art practice is the exploration and understanding of the lived-body. Elizabeth Grosz in her essay *Naked* states the following:

A body reproduces itself not only biologically but through its self-representations and the rigors of its practice. At this point, art figures itself as a bodily practice. While much of art merely represents the body (depicts or pictures it) at its most provocative, art also contains the possibility of refiguring, transforming, and functioning at the very limit of the body's capacities – especially if (as Nietzsche outlines) the origin of art is the very exploration and use of the body.<sup>26</sup>

I consider how my body is re-presented through my chosen medium. Art and dance contain the potential to transform and refigure the body, but I am not sure how this transformation is achieved. Nietzsche outlines, 'The origin of art is

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<sup>26</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth. "Naked." *The Prosthetic Impulse*. Edited by Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra. London: The MIT Press. 2006. (193).

the very exploration and use of the body.<sup>27</sup> I wonder if this can be interpreted as both the body that makes art and the body that witnesses art. In the shared lived experience of a performance I wonder whether audience members undergo their own exploration of their lived-body.

Rediscovery becomes a site for revision and imagination of the body in time and space. My dance practice draws from my body experience and compels me to discover again through artistic re-invention, both within the choreography and the collaborative forms that I work with. For *through* this reinvention was facilitated by the use of a prosthetic in the form of a single rollerblade.<sup>28</sup> Incorporating prosthesis into my experiences re-invented certain movements. This re-invention in-turn compelled me to rediscover my subjective body.

## Through Structure

Setting a movement on my dancer for *through*, I try to place myself into a pre-reflective state, a state in which, as choreographer, I can observe the physical body in motion. The movement is not a product, it is not a text; it is a performed lived experience an illusion of force<sup>29</sup> created by the dancer that exists within the aesthetic context of the work being created. The dancer and his/her

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<sup>27</sup> The act of creation is a recurring theme in the work of Nietzsche as apparent in the creation of the heroic individual within a culture that is tragic. Within the individual "the divine element is revealed in the soul of the individual, in their eternal will to suffer and strive, to grow and create." Pfeffer, Rose. *Nietzsche: Disciple of Dionysus*. Cranbury: Associated University Press. 1972. (104).

<sup>28</sup> The rollerblade will be discussed further in pages to come.

<sup>29</sup> The idea of dance as an 'illusion of force' is put forward by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone from the following text. Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. *The Phenomenology of Dance*. New York: Books for Libraries. 1980. (41).

lived experience exist within that illusion, not as object but as part of the form of the dance. The relationship between dancer/performer and audience member is already, by nature, a shared lived experience. As the choreographer of *through* I aimed for an embodied experience for my audience and the performers, with this embodied experience being of greater emphasis than a meaning or understanding of the work.

Struggle and tension were two attributes that formed the basis for certain choreographic structures in *through*. The tension created in the physicality of certain movements was genuine and it could not be minimised or stylistically masked. The biomechanics at work required the body to endure tension and muscle fatigue, resulting in shaking, tremors, and particular movement qualities. To physically convey struggle over a prolonged period of time becomes physically enduring for both the body that performs and the body that observes. In direct contrast to this physical tension are movements, made possible by the rollerblade, that appear effortless, weightless. The body glides through space without the slightest of effort. By choreographically weaving contrasting movements within the structure of the work, I could begin to shape a desired experience for my audience.

As mentioned earlier, Merleau-Ponty positions the body as “a permanent condition of experience.”<sup>30</sup> I attempted to create and structure movement on my dancer that I could embody as an observer and thus reflect the presence of the body within this lived experience. Through this shared embodiment, an audience

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<sup>30</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. “The Body, Mobility and Spatiality.” *Phenomenology and Existentialism*. Edited by Robert C. Solomon. New York: Harper and Row. 1972.

can experience beyond the limits and history of their individual experiences. Movement, in this way, “can bring an audience to almost feel things they have never experienced.”<sup>31</sup> Thus bringing to mind Nietzsche’s claim that, “the origin of art is the very exploration and use of the body.”<sup>32</sup> An embodied relationship between performer and audience facilitates this exploration, not only for the body that performs but also for the body that witnesses. To strive for an embodied experience for the audience is to challenge the capacity of the observing body. I work with the ideas of existential phenomenology in my art practice and in my own attempt to become ‘movement literate.’

There is a texture to my body, different textures from my elbows to my cheek, the palm of my hand to the back of my calf. When I move, the space I inhabit comes to be, comes into contact, comes into time, and comes into these different textures of materiality. These textures are the signposts of my body moving in space, my points of orientation as I push forward, fall out of, and squeeze into the space that I inhabit. I coexist in this space with my textures and the texture of space inseparable, experienced together in time.

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<sup>31</sup> Marks, Dr. Laura U. Comments in Seminar 812/ Private Communication. Vancouver. 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth. “Naked.” *The Prosthetic Impulse*. Edited by Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra. London: The MIT Press. 2006. (193).

When an individual observes another body in motion she/he can virtually feel this interaction with space, their own textures of the body recognizing, living with and through the other. The space is shared.

An audience is like a small sea of seated bodies, each with his/her textures and signposts. A movement on stage can be felt, experienced by these parts, these elbows and cheeks, spines, and legs, registering through the shared space. I question if this is how people begin to virtually experience the movement on stage. This virtual experience is not mimicry of kinaesthetic energy, or static positions or deportment. It is also not a dull, empty copy of the original made mutable, less than, and then passed on. Time and space fill the porous textures of all the bodies, recreating, reconfiguring, and living an action from one through another. Performance. Shared experience. A sea of textures.

### **One Rollerblade, One Bare Foot**

*Through* has been a work in progress for some time. It began long before the first day I entered the studio with the thought of creating a contemporary dance piece on one rollerblade and one bare foot. I call it a rollerblade as this is the term that most closely describes the actual object. The boot is an old figure skating boot for the right foot that I competed in for years. The boot is well



travelled and worn down from years of practice and performance. In that boot I lived through countless hours of training, the pain of physical trauma, and emotions that strode the gamut of elite competition. The boot is fitted with what is called a Pick-frame which is a rubber stopper positioned at the front of the line of wheels that functions like the picks on a figure skate blade. A rollerblade has a brake on the back while the Pick-frame does not have a brake but a rubber stopper that one can trip over.

After a lifetime of figure skating my physiology has melded itself around this activity. My lower back is tight, my hips even tighter, and my connective tissue keeps me bound. I have heard that my body is not the ideal dance body. That said, my body does allow for the creation of a piece where I work on one rollerblade and one bare foot, with the alignment of my hips offset by approximately three inches. It is a precarious place to move from. I must break every thirty to forty minutes in rehearsal to avoid muscle cramping and/or muscle strain that will ache and persist for many days after. An earlier performance of an excerpt of this work resulted in a right-on-left rotation of my second lumbar vertebrae. Having lived through this injury once already, I strengthened my abdominal core, thereby improving my overall strength and altering certain movement pathways to avoid repeating this injury.

Perched on the rollerblade, I must be in tune to the inner workings of my body. If I remove pressure from the blade to the ground, I fall to the slippery stage floor. The wheels only turn front to back, back to front, and any movement sideways throws me to the ground. The negotiation of weight bearing from the

bare foot to the rollerblade has to be precise and aligned with the speed with which my body moves through space; if not I tumble to the floor. With practice there is considerably less falling. I must be mindful; I must be in the moment. With *through* I want to convey the moving body and its innate vulnerability. For the one dancer on the rollerblade there is little choice but to be aware of one's surroundings and the lived-body's positioning in time and space. This in turn affects the aesthetics and the creative choices of this work: an old boot, and an older body.

Grosz echoes my beliefs about the body:

I begin with an initial hypothesis: we don't know what bodies are capable of. This is not simply true because of the limitations of our current forms of knowledge, the lack of refinement in our instruments of knowledge, but more profoundly because the body has and is a history and under the procedures of testing, the body itself extends its limits, transforms its capacities, and enters a continuous process of becoming, becoming something other than itself.<sup>33</sup>

My dance practice is lived. The notion of an art practice is one that is ever changing, as is history, moving through time and experiences. My creative process is its own process of becoming. From it I garner knowledge of approaches and strategies to develop an outcome that in the beginning is unknown. As Marks states, "My body is potentiality, the virtual within my body as expansive as the virtual beyond the body."<sup>34</sup> I begin to recognize certain barriers that can be removed, extending beyond what was once capable. My body, within

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<sup>33</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth. "Naked." *The Prosthetic Impulse*. Edited by Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra. London: The MIT Press. 2006. (191,192).

<sup>34</sup> Marks, Dr. Laura U. In conversation. Vancouver. 2006.

my dance practice, functions at the very limits of its capacity. In this sense Grosz's argument that embodiment is a becoming, finds footing within the movement of my dance practice.

## **Two Bodies, One Space**

Two bodies, one space. An old boot, and an older body. What is it that Cindy said about this section? Oh yes, 'sad but hopeful.' Keep working, make a choice. Good, make another. This piece is not about the rollerblade, I cannot let it overshadow everything else.

Vivian Sobchack says that, "artificial limbs and prosthetics only disrupt what is commonly considered to be the naturally whole and able body."<sup>35</sup> For *through* I want to present two bodies, both whole and able. Both dancing bodies are unique with their clear movement qualities. The bare footed dancer extends her energy outwards. Her movements are rounded, grounded, flowing without obstruction from one movement into the next. The rollerbladed dancer internalises his energy, compresses it, harbour's it. His movements are more angular and sharp. His movements decay, unravel, come undone. Yet, even in their differences, the bodies are both able, both whole. At times the two dancers perform the same movement in unison. These moments highlight the wholeness and ability of both bodies as different yet the same.

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<sup>35</sup> Sobchack, Vivian. "A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality." *The Prosthetic Impulse*. Edited by Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra. London: MIT Press. 2006. (23).

In contrast, there are certain moments where there is a tension placed upon the body of the dancer with the rollerblade compared to the dancer without. I would ask myself, as the choreographer, do I make this tension visible to the audience or do I mask it within the performance. I chose to keep it visible, two lived-bodies: one with prosthetic one without. This sameness, yet difference, I found interesting. I would highlight this with the movement vocabulary and the dynamics of how the movement would be performed. I would keep this consistent. These two bodies share a space and time. The space is a meeting place, a sharing of time. Two bodies, distinctly different, yet linked by nature and environment, time and space. Two bodies, one space.

In her article *A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality*, Vivian Sobchack suggests that a prosthesis can occupy the space of metaphor. She makes this claim in a manner that emphasizes a certain responsibility on the part of those cultural critics and artists who work with and attempt to make sense of technology and prosthetics. Sobchack is a scholar who has a prosthetic left leg. Her approach is indirect to “both critique and redress this metaphorical displacement of the prosthetic through a return to its premise in lived-body experience.”<sup>36</sup> Sobchack argues that the theoretical use of a prosthesis, as metaphor can be problematic, particularly when used by those whose “point of view is positioned in some theoretical rather than practiced – and practical –

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<sup>36</sup> Sobchack, Vivian. “A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality.” *The Prosthetic Impulse*. Edited by Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra. London: MIT Press. 2006. (18).

space.”<sup>37</sup> Of particular concern for her is that “metaphorical usage does not owe any necessary allegiance to the literal object – such as a prosthesis – that generated it.”<sup>38</sup>

The concerns of Sobchack are echoed in regards to my own ideas around scholars who write about dance without an understanding of lived-body experience and movement. I argue that reading the moving body as a text by scholars outside of the tradition of dance may lead to misconceptions and the failure to incorporate the actual physical movement of dance into theories regarding the dancing body. The discourse surrounding the moving body is not tested or challenged by those who create and experience the movement itself. The bulk of documentation for dance comes in the form of dance criticism. The emphasis of these writings is predominantly on the body that is culturally situated. Completely overlooked are the movement of the dance, and often the lived experience of the performance. A dance critic who ignores the movement in a dance performance is like a food critic who never actually tastes the food. Of concern is this absence, which emulates Sobchack’s concern for the absent literal object – the prosthesis.

## **Prosthesis Towards Embodiment**

In the creation of *through*, I felt I was creating a visual metaphor with the use of the rollerblade. This visual metaphor resulted in part from the use of only

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<sup>37</sup> Sobchack, Vivian. “A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality.” *The Prosthetic Impulse*. Edited by Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra. London: MIT Press. 2006. (22).

<sup>38</sup> Sobchack bases her concern on Paul Ricoeur quoting Pierre Fontanier “Metaphor does not refer to objects; rather, it consists in presenting one idea under the sign of another that is more striking or better known.” *Ibid.* (21).

one rollerblade, which positioned the context of the moving body with the rollerblade somewhere between art and sport. It was as if the body as presented was akin to the aesthetics of figure skating, or contemporary dance. The ambiguity of this premise lends itself easily to visual metaphor. This ambiguity also disrupts audience expectation regarding how to observe the moving body, as it is re-presented. Initially, I did not consider the rollerblade to be a prosthetic until I reflected on how it impacted my physicality and my creative process, and also the lived-body experience of the movement being created and performed. I considered my use of the rollerblade to be what Sobchack categorizes as a phenomenological lived-body experience of those who “successfully incorporate and subjectively live the prosthetic and sense themselves neither as lacking something nor as walking around with some ‘thing’ that is added on to their bodies.”<sup>39</sup>

Sobchack describes how the prosthetic has altered her relationship with her body:

The way in which learning to walk and incorporate a prosthetic leg has made me more – not less – intimate with the operation and power of my body: I now know where my muscles are and am physically more present to myself.<sup>40</sup>

What Sobchack describes here is similar to my own lived experience with the use of the rollerblade. Donning the rollerblade makes my awareness of the inner workings of my body alter. My perception of my body shifts as my subjective self

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<sup>39</sup> Sobchack, Vivian. “A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphors, and Materiality.” *The prosthetic Impulse*. Edited by Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra. London: MIT Press. 2006. (23).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* (44).

incorporates a new reality. The process of becoming with the rollerblade facilitates certain kinaesthetic and physiological functions within the movement. The bare foot and the bladed foot together negotiate and assist in the movement they perform. This in turn creates new movement pathways and physiological connections that could never have been experienced without the rollerblade. Undisturbed is the form-in-the-making of the movement itself, “continuously projecting itself towards a spatial-temporal future.”<sup>41</sup> To use Sobchack’s words, “As I live them subjectively (and ambiguously), my two objective legs ‘form an ensemble, a physical [and] metaphysical whole, the existence [and] idea of one being included in the existence [and] idea of the other.’”<sup>42</sup> Sobchack further explains this concept as:

My “real” leg and my prosthetic leg are not usually lived as two absolutely different and separate things since they function as an ensemble and are each a part of my body participating in the whole movement that gets me from here to there. Thus they are organically related in practice (if not material) and are, to a great degree, reversible each with the other.<sup>43</sup>

Informed by this article, my understanding of the use of the rollerblade was challenged. Heard by others, and at times believed by myself, I thought the use of the rollerblade was a gimmick. I was tricking my audience and myself by manipulating the body. I no longer feel this way. I intended to develop this piece so that the rollerblade, the device, would become invisible. The prosthetic would be ‘seen’ in the movement as a body that is positional and static moves through

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<sup>41</sup> Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. *The Phenomenology of Dance*. New York: Books for Libraries. 1980. (36).

<sup>42</sup> Sobchack, Vivian. “A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality.” *The Prosthetic Impulse*. Edited by Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra. London: MIT Press. 2006. (26).

<sup>43</sup> Described here is not a metaphor but a synecdoche. Ibid. (26).

space. The prosthetic would be experienced within the shared lived experience between performer and audience. Combined with the elements of video, lighting, and animation, *through* works towards the creation of a physical reality. This physical reality is communicated in part by the dancers on stage and by the aesthetic form of the work. The choreographic structure intentionally negates a fixed meaning to the work. The primary relationship made available to the audience is the physical lived experience of the moment. Much like Sobchack's theoretical positioning of returning to the lived-body experience, *through* attempts to return to the shared lived-body experience between the performer and audience with the use of prosthetic.

## **Writing Through Dance**

Merleau-Ponty claims that the arts should not be considered as a collective whole because difference exists between art mediums. He states that "what a work expresses cannot be separated from its form, it obviously follows that he must hold that differences in that physical form constitute differences in what can be expressed."<sup>44</sup> Although I recognize Merleau-Ponty's claim to be true, I wonder if my personal interests within one art medium can carry into another. I am thinking in particular of dance and literature. It has been pointed out to me that my interest in choreography is both modernist and phenomenological. "Modernist in that the form of the work communicates how it should be understood; phenomenological, in that there is a gradual discovery of

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<sup>44</sup> Matthews, Eric. *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press. 2002. (140).



this form and thus the means to perceive the work, in the process of perception.”<sup>45</sup> Common ground between the two is found in the lived experience and the formal use of structure. Consistent between these two art mediums is the presence of the witness where the lived-body is present. I work in dance, but at times must also create with words. My interests do not change from one to the other; structure will inform, the process of perception will give meaning.

## **An Ending?**

I will begin with the lived-body. A body lived in experience. Grounded in existential phenomenology a contemporary dance practice takes shape, a performer afraid of performance, a body living its history. An idea. *Through* reinvention. *Through* shared embodiment. *Through* the “space where technology and humanity fuse.”<sup>46</sup> A formal structure lends these thoughts a form. A form-in-the-making is witnessed providing an ending where it all begins, with the lived-body.

I used the following quote from Martha Graham in my Graduate Project Proposal for *through*:

Living is an adventure, a form of evolvment which demands the greatest sensitivity to accomplish it with grace, dignity, and efficiency. The puritanical concept of life has always ignored the fact that the nervous system and the body as well as the mind are

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<sup>45</sup> Marks, Dr. Laura U. Comments in Seminar 812/Private Communication. Vancouver. 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Sobchack, Vivian. “A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality.” *The Prosthetic Impulse*. Edited by Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra. London: MIT Press. 2006. (19).

involved in experience, and art cannot be experienced except by one's entire being.<sup>47</sup>

An adventure is lived: it is not always understood. The relationship between performer and audience is similar to an adventure. It is a lived journey shared within space and time. I approach the role of choreographer with sensitivity, attempting to create work aimed towards embodied experience with emphasis placed on the physicality of the movement. As choreographer and performer, I recognise that trust is integral in order for the viewer to join me on my journey. I do so aware that the lived experience takes into account the lived-body that is inextricably tied to sociality. I believe and appreciate the above quote as I type it today as much as I did when I typed it before.

I worry about my efficiency of late; it seems as if everything is a struggle. Theatre, lighting designer, dancer, music, committee, the scheduling has me worried. Costume, I must remember to get the nude boot cover sewn and the metal covered before the video shoot. Confirm space for video shoot. Send notes to Gordon regarding the music section for the second solo, at least forty more seconds is needed. Remind him also that the silence in the first movement is now far too long. Get on the phone with Tracy and book her flight out here so we can have a final costume fitting before the weekend. (I am anxious to be

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<sup>47</sup> Graham, Martha. "Primer for Action." *The Dance Anthology*. Edited by Cobbett Steinberg. New York: New American Library. 1980.

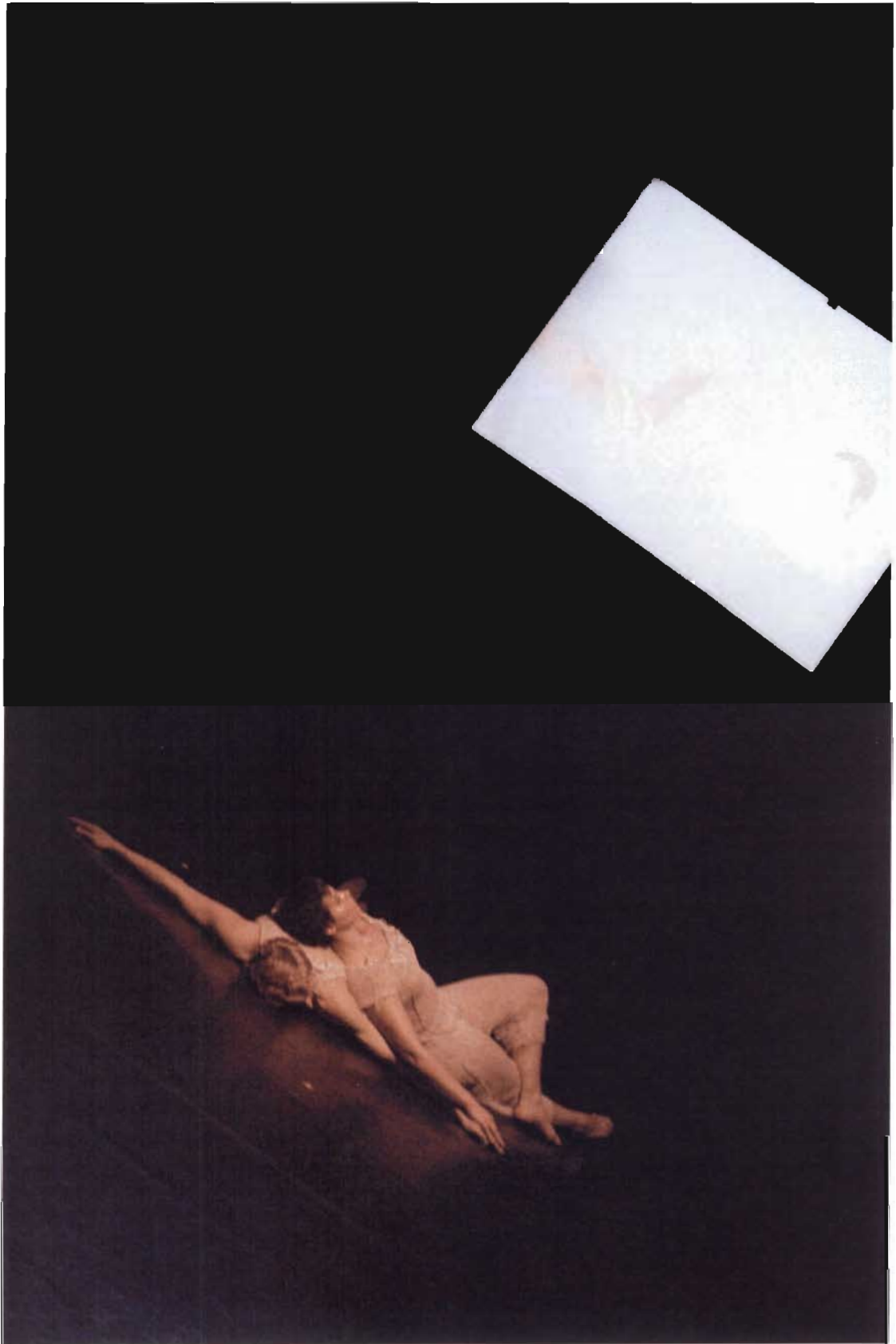
dancing.) I want to put more energy, and by energy I mean time, in the studio. Set up another appointment with the lighting designer, sooner the better. (Tick, tock. I have deadlines.) There is no watch on my body. The silent timepieces around me become louder.

It is empty when I enter the studio. I do not turn on the fluorescent lights I save those for later. I begin by putting on a piece of music, often the same piece as the rehearsal before. The music endures in phases. My worries and concerns begin to dissipate. I change my clothes and I begin to move.

I run. (Going)

I skip. (Going)

I bust out. (Gone.)



**Figure 3:** *through dance in time*

## CHAPTER 3: TIME

### A Moment

#### 2004 Canadian Figure Skating Championships

Each hair on my arm is a lightening rod; they stand to attention, active.

The space is brighter than usual; it registers like moving into the sun after a prolonged time spent in dim light. My eyes are situated at least two inches deeper into my skull; visual depth is perceived looking outwards from somewhere internal.

I move through a liquid space of light. My body and gravity take on new dimensions. I am lighter. I am porous.

The energy my body expends in the movement bleeds into the light that bathes us, surrounds us. I am buoyant, porous, and the energy flows. This is a different side of time, a lifetime in one moment. The ticking of a clock has no domain here.

I move through the space, space of a different matter, a space where everything is similar, everything is energy but in different variations.

A private tragedy, only weeks old, weighs heavily. Dreams slip away.

Complete emotional exhaustion matched with peak physicality. These elements come together and combine to form a remarkable moment.

I do not close my eyes to remember; this is unnecessary. I live it. I still burn from it. Charged. I am that moment as much now as I was then; smooth time stretching uncannily through space for that moment to exist, four years later.

## Space

I turn to space to step into time.

Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument, and when we wish to move about we do not move the body as we move an object. We transport it without instruments...since it is ours and because, through it, we have access to space.<sup>48</sup>

Access to space is through the body; the lived-body in time and space.

Grosz explains that “We do not grasp space directly or through our senses but through our bodily situation.”<sup>49</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari discuss space in their work *The Smooth and the Striated*. In their Maritime Model<sup>50</sup> the subcategories of smooth and striated are defined as follows:

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<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Grosz directly quoting Merleau-Ponty. Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies*. Indianapolis: Indiana State University Press. 1994. (90).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. (90).

<sup>50</sup> The Maritime Model is one of the many models the authors use to categorise the two spaces. Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: The Athlone press. 1988. (478).

Smooth space is directional rather than dimensional or metric. Smooth space is filled by events or haecceities, far more than by formed or perceived things. It is *haptic* rather than optical perception. A Body without Organs instead of an organism and organisation. Perception in it is based on symptoms and evaluations rather than measures and properties. That is why smooth space is occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities, as in the desert, steppe, or ice. The creaking of ice and the song of the sands. Striated space, on the contrary, is canopied by the sky as measure and by the measurable visual qualities deriving from it.<sup>51</sup>

To elaborate, striated space is space that is broken down into points. One travels from one point to another. Trajectory through striated space is subordinate to these points, moving from one point to the next. Smooth space is the opposite; the points are subordinate to the trajectory.<sup>52</sup> The trajectory through smooth space is directional, a journey and a vector through the space. Movement in striated space is of dimensional or metric determination. Changes in direction that occur in smooth space may be due to the nature of the journey itself.<sup>53</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari use the city as an example of striated space, as a city is a conglomerate of metrically divisible points. Metric feet form blocks of cement becoming a city block, a sub-division, and an increasing increment of metric space. Space in the city can be broken down into divisible units such as apartments, homes, city streets, and neighbourhoods. Smooth and striated spaces are not rigid; they do not define how one experiences them. Deleuze and Guattari explain that “it is possible to live striated on the deserts, steppes, or

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<sup>51</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: The Athlone press. 1988. (479).

<sup>52</sup> As described by the authors. *Ibid.* (478).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* (478).

seas; it is possible to live smooth even in the cities, to be an urban nomad.”<sup>54</sup> I recognise the smooth and striated in my own experiences with space.

*Through* was performed at the Firehall Arts Centre. The theatre has a seating capacity of 150 and is similar to other theatres of its size. Raked seating, row after row, faces a stage that is 50 feet wide and 36 feet deep. The distance from floor to ceiling is 15 feet. The lighting design and the use of animation will be guides to assist the choreographer in creating a journey for audience and performers through a smooth space, a space originally striated in nature.

All is dark in the theatre. A note sounds and resonates through the space of the theatre until again it is silent and dark. Another note sounds. Three single notes, slowly, with time lingering between, sound in progression. A simple black line is drawn onto a projection screen hung on the back wall of the stage. Another line is drawn, and another, and a shape begins to form: barren branches, a leafless tree. A body, crouched to the floor and barely visible in the low lighting begins to stand. In a small dim pool of light, a simple gesture of crouching to standing is performed. The figure is now standing tall, palms facing and feeling outwards, eyes closed. In the darkened area in front of the body light forms a visible space. Seamlessly and without any effort, the dancer moves silently into the light. As light illuminates areas of the stage the moving figure repeats the motion of entering into these created spaces. Palms outwards, his skin as eyes, he feels his way along a journey through the space.

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<sup>54</sup> Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: The Athlone press. 1988. (482).



A projected animation appears on the same screen on the back wall, the same tree as before, but now viewed closer and from above. A leaf buds, grows, and begins to fall to the floor. The lone dancer continues to move through the space until again a third animation appears. A leaf falls into a pool of water resulting in ripples that edge outwards towards the edges of the screen. Two dancers now appear on stage.

Animation can assist in orientating the moving bodies within a shared space of their own form-in-the-making. As the dance unfolds the animation attempts to reconfigure the space, positioning the viewer from above, away, and below the initial perspective. The process of discovering the performance space reaches a climax in the duet of *through*. Having patiently developed the initial encounter of one moving body with the other, the dancers begin to move quickly in a wide circle that engulfs the entire stage. Accompanied with a shift in the musical score this is the first time the stage is lit as a whole. The first time the dancers move in a spatial pattern that does not cut through the space but surrounds the entire space. For the first time, dancers moving side by side, the audience can experience the difference in the moving bodies. Two bodies, distinctly different, yet linked by nature and environment, time and space. Two bodies, one space.

## Phantom Limb

Can I use this idea of smooth and striated space and apply it to time?

Striated time would share the commonality of division, breaking down into points.

Time becomes seconds, then minutes, hours and days. Some wear their timepieces on their bodies, seconds ticking away breaking down the day into increments; morning, breakfast, lunch, afternoon, evening, dinner, time for leisure, rest, repeat. Days become seasons, followed by years. Years lend easily to categories such as childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, mid-career, retirement, and old age. Time appears striated, broken down into divisible units that I move from one to the next. The time of birth to time of death is the sum of these increments. Striated time is clear.

Theorists from various backgrounds and disciplines often discuss the phenomena of the phantom limb. A subject, either by surgical or accidental means, loses a limb. Where the limb used to be a phantom limb is experienced including sensations and pain from the previous limb's location. Grosz explains this phenomenon in the following way:

After the amputation of movable, functional extremities, the phantom limb seems to be experienced in close to 100 percent of the cases. The phantom most commonly appears shortly after the amputation but may take up to two years to fully emerge. Body

phantoms are not limited to limbs. In adults, phantoms have been noted to occur in almost every part of the body.<sup>55</sup>

In his book titled *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*, Eric Matthews claims that a physiological explanation for phantom limb accounts only for the changes in nervous transmission from the periphery to the cerebral cortex produced by the injury. A psychological explanation relies on what Merleau-Ponty calls psychic determinants involving consciousness; it is dependent on how the patient experiences the injury.<sup>56</sup> Lacan, Descartes, Schilder, and many more all contribute to the literature on the phantom limb, each with their own speculations on the phenomenon.<sup>57</sup> Quoting Schilder:

The phantom is an expression of nostalgia for the unity and wholeness of the body, its completion. It is a memorial to the missing limb, a psychic delegate that stands in its place. There is thus not only a physical but also a psychical wound and scar in the amputation or surgical intervention into any part of the body.<sup>58</sup>

Observed in these speculations is the situating of the phantom limb somewhere in between the mind-body dualism, and the duality of the physical and psychical being. Words such as 'nostalgia,' and 'memorial,' position the act of separation as something that occurred in the past. Elizabeth Grosz discussing Merleau-Ponty states the following.

In traditional psychological and physiological terms, the phantom limb is treated as a memory, a past experience reactivated in the

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<sup>55</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1994. (70).

<sup>56</sup> Matthews, Eric. *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. 2002

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Grosz quoting Lacan, "the phantom can indeed be regarded as a kind of libidinal memorial to the lost limb, a nostalgic tribute strongly cathected in an attempt to undermine the perceptual awareness of its absence." Ibid. (41).

<sup>58</sup> One idea of many presented by Schilder regarding phantom limb as referenced by Elizabeth Grosz. Ibid. (73).

present (hence, a hallucination)...It is as if the subject refuses to close off the possibilities of actions of which the body is capable. The phantom limb is not a memory or an image (of something now absent). It is 'quasi-present.' It is the refusal of an experience to enter into the past; it illustrates the tenacity of a present that remains immutable.<sup>59</sup>

This interpretation represents another duality, a temporal dualism between past and present called 'quasi-present.' Any experience that occurs enters into the past, but it could be that the actual experience of losing a limb endures longer than the separation of limb to body. The refusal of an experience to enter the past is similar to an experience that continues to endure into the present. My experience discussed at the beginning of this chapter continues to exist today. It has not ended with the perceived chronological end of that moment. The phantom limb is similar in nature. A lived experience continues long after the understood end to the moment. This is an example of smooth time, a time where the countless circumstances and parameters of an experience continue to come together forming a continuation of said experience. A lived experience can be considered to be the equivalent of a haptic journey through smooth space. These examples are of time resisting the temporal duality of now and then, past and present?<sup>60</sup> With such a blip in our everyday striated time, smooth time weaves its presence into lived experience that goes by relatively unnoticed.

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<sup>59</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1994. (89).

<sup>60</sup> Eternalism and block universe theory both suggest that there is no ontological differences among present, past, and future because the differences are merely subjective.

## Through Dance in Time

The ephemerality of movement might be said to mirror the ephemerality of time. Indeed, we say that time and movement both flow.<sup>61</sup>

It is said that time flows. Although time's arrow suggests a directional projection of time, theorists continue to debate between absolute and relational theories of time. Dance is considered to be an ephemeral art form. One might ask whether the dance truly ends once the dancers leave the stage and the house lights come up. A dance that is thirty-six minutes in duration does not end after these thirty-six minutes is over. As a performer I certainly continue to experience the dance after my final steps are performed. As an audience member I have taken works away from the theatre and continued to live them. I emphasize the lived experience of the dance, both for the performer and audience member. Within the lived experience smooth time is present. We continue to journey through an experience even after its understood end.

Two performers come together. They touch, self is other and other is self. Moving together, connecting with movement. The duet becomes the unison of one, two bodies, one space, sharing a moment in time. They separate and with no crescendo, no marked signal or event, one dancer leaves. The moment physically shared passes into time. Is this a good-bye? Is this an end?

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<sup>61</sup> Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. *The Primacy of Movement*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing. 1999. (154).

In the creation of *through* I imagined a smooth use of time. A video section in *through* projects movement performed earlier in the work and movement that has yet to be performed. The dancers react to the projected video, as the sound of ticking clocks grows loud. The ticking begins to layer and fold over onto itself, speeding up, and then decaying, fragmenting then fading away; striated time appears ruptured, altered.

The musical score for the opening and closing sections of this work were partially created with this premise of smooth time. Minimal in their composition singular piano notes are given time to sound through the space. As a choreographer I was interested in the silence between sounds. Silence is a place for the movement to make decisive changes in the direction of the journey through the space. Silence creates sites for moments to unfold. In collaboration with composer Gordon Cobb, the musical score would emphasize the choreographic form of the dance. From the opening solo the dancer with rollerblade makes an eventual return back to the original solo. Something is different, a change has occurred. Time has passed in between these two solos: a duet, a sharing of the space with another. The score for the closing solo is similar to that of the opening score. It is higher in pitch, yet similar in its silences. The movement in this final section becomes dire and of greater consequence. The projection of the animated tree appears again for the final time. This time it is viewed from afar, from a distance. Large black strokes, one after another begin to wipe out the tree, and the space begins to fade into darkness with a moving body that is intent, struggling, falling. Eventually the tree is obscured in

total blackness. Into black the figure silently disappears. A singular note sounds and fills the remaining space.



Figure 4: Animation in time

I hoped that for some, the lived experience shared in the performance of *through* would continue in time. Feedback from audience members ensures me that moments, images, thoughts and sounds continue to exist in the evolution of those experiences. With no artefact in hand, no documentation to remind, embodied moments linger, persist, and resist falling into a past.

## Dance in Time

Life is like a dance, a long dance of experiences layered upon each other, layer upon layer, playing out over time, ever racing, falling forward, projecting

itself into its own form-in-the-making. When does any one form-in-the-making begin or end? If indeed, it is always in a process of making.

My father is terminally ill, suffering from a degenerative nerve disease. He has frontal lobe disinhibition and this in turn is affecting his reality. When we talk together there are moments when we are separated by a veil of time, he in one space and time, myself in another. They are both real to us. Healthy or sick, normal or irrational, these terms do not erase the reality of these moments. I cannot reach him where he is. To recreate all of the endless, infinite circumstances and experiences that bring him to this moment and to recreate them for my own understanding is impossible. Together, we have fallen out of step with time. I look at the clock on the wall, and I want to take it down.

Again my thoughts wander into time and with them I follow. Triggers of memories fire one after another, each slight of fullness. I am aware of the construction of my memories: this is transparent. With my hands I still reach out for them, my hands cannot grip around them to pull them in close, in towards safety.



Now is my confidant, my partner. Now is fleeting. Now is an ephemeral dance. Still I find solace in now. Now requires a certain responsibility to present oneself to it; it will not come to you. In each moment lived experiences continue to exist, to unfold, directionally moving through time.

Two bodies for a moment share a space and time. The space is a meeting place. Two bodies, distinctly different, yet linked by nature and environment, time and space. Two bodies, one space.

## Conclusion

The Spinozist account of the body is of a productive and creative body which cannot be definitively 'known' since it is not identical with itself across time. The body does not have a 'truth' or a 'true nature' since it is a process and its meaning and capacities will vary according to its content. We do not know the limits of the body or the powers that it is capable of attaining.<sup>62</sup>

The body presents us with things we do not know. The debate between the absolute and relational theorists of time continues: there are things we do not know about time. My thoughts on time are mere suggestions, imaginings. The lived-body is a process in space and time. Both space and time are influenced by social constructs and I ask why, how. By asking such questions and searching for answers in my art practice, I push the limits of my body. Drawing upon my lived experiences, I consider my relationship to time and space outside

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<sup>62</sup> Gatens quoted by Elizabeth Grosz. Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1994. (12).

of rigid boundaries. My experiences can take many forms, often existing in ways unknown to me or to others, and completely unwilling to conform to my own lack of understanding. These experiences layered upon each other intertwine and blend together in potentially infinite ways. I direct my experiences into an art practice, a practice becomes a process, a process towards becoming.

## **An Ending of Sorts**

I can't see, not really. The shin lights are so high that the space is bleached and visually disorienting. There is definitely no primacy of the optic here. I rely on my orientation, my body becoming into space. The energy in the theatre is high tonight. My parents and family are sitting in the house. Always this changes things. I am pushing everything: power, kine-sphere, intensity.

I am thrown to the floor.

Heat rises up from my coccyx and flares up into my lower back. Stunned, breathless, disoriented, nowhere. Silence, the absence of sound, yet it deafens. (How bad is it?) Injury. Immediately tension, doubts, and fear arise in the heat in

my flesh. A hand. I grasp it, and I am back into the piece. I lapse from choreography to quick body scans. (I am okay, I tell myself I'm okay.)

Breathe. Just breathe, let Roxy help. Focus on her, blend with her and she will help me through.

The show is over and I am sitting in the dressing room. Again I am 16 years old, full of guilt, shame and disappointment. I have fallen when it counted the most. I have disappointed. I am too embarrassed to leave the room. A fall can bring me back to this. This moment does not remain long. I am older and I have fallen in a performance of my graduate work. The initial guilt transforms into something else, something palpable, almost refreshing. Vulnerable. Real.

That fall, the flush of pain, those emotions, and a hand that keeps coming back to me; I continue to live that experience, the assistance, aid, and comfort shared. It is guilt turned into something positive, enlightenment, an experience from 16 years old finally coming of age.

An emotional phantom limb grows small.

A journey, an experience that began before takes a change of direction.

Lived experiences, one, another, another, layered into the textures of my  
subjective body existing through time in space.



Figure 5: Two bodies, one space

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