

Louise Wagner

[www.louisewagner.com](http://www.louisewagner.com)

## DANCE THOUGHTS

My artistic and empirical research involves studying the act of movement-formation and movement-invention.

It is my wish that this research is deepened by knowledge gained from the human sciences and the humanities.

The empirical knowledge of dancers is rarely investigated, yet it offers an extraordinary resource for perceptual research and should be moved increasingly into the focus of scientific attention.

For me, it is also a matter of emphasising the relevance of artistic research in order to change the image of dance in our society.

A confluence of art and science seems all the more necessary to me at a time when art is endangered through its interconnections with economic interests. A dialogue with the sciences offers scope and time for the arts to deepen research and to emancipate them from the market.

My artistic work addresses the process of a continuous inventiveness in movement, aligned to a “bodily exchange of ideas” with the environment.

“Bodily exchange of ideas” means that the visualisation of a process happening at the interface between the perception of inner and outer reality and which we could describe as “thinking in movement”.

From the choreographic perspective, I am interested in the spatial and temporal composition of complex, individual, rhetorically brilliant languages of movement, which developed out of training their “thinking in movement”.

Objects, space and sound are equal partners in this interplay of movement-thought, which varies infinitely and yet can never be repeated exactly – a fascinating idea and the basis of the inspiration in my work.

### Experiential Report

We perceive through movement. The more complex the movement the more multi-layered the awareness.

A space, which I only know through everyday movements – in which I go to bed or sit at a table, which I rediscover anew when I dance in it, that is, when I am aware of and then apply the many possibilities of moving myself through this space. The *complexity* of my everyday “simple” or unconsciously executed movements becomes palpable only when I magnify the intermediate steps of such movement processes, “deconstruct” them, in order to be able to reflect them in the context of the provided spatial characteristics.

Seen this way, dancing is a process of continual forming, finding, inventing and refining of movement variations and combinations that reflect outer impressions.

\*

The invention of movements doesn't follow rational considerations. A language grows within me following a specific inner rhythm, a language that I myself can follow without having to guide it – as if my body is thinking aloud in its language.

My body integrates and processes outer stimuli in its movements. It communicates with itself and others, finds movement combinations, rejects, interrupts and reinvents.

It is a rhetorical game with a trained vocabulary of movement, which, thanks to constantly changing perceptions, is enlarged and refined.

The outer stimuli inspiring the movements and cause us “to think” can start out from very different sources: from the movements of other people, from objects, sound, music or speech. Many things can be involved in the movement material. I perceive these stimuli through my movements and these perceptions form my way of thinking. My thoughts on the other hand influence my movements. This creates a reciprocal interaction in both directions: sometimes my decision for a movement only occurs to me after the event, sometimes I know with full certainty what I have to do and execute this movement accordingly.

\*

When I move, I find myself in a state that makes me continually aware that I am surrounded by infinite possibilities. There are infinite possibilities of perceiving something, and there infinite variants of responding to and processing these perceptions.

After a while, we can detect a structure in decision-making, which I follow in order to orient myself in space and time. This structure keeps to a certain aesthetic, which thanks to my experiences has become part of my thought.

It is present, but I don't use it as a pattern organising my movements and their principles.

In interrupting body thinking, for example through lack of attention triggered by a rational train of thought, the danger can very rapidly occur of lapsing into this learned canon of aesthetic movement patterns.

Then the movements feel empty and without meaning; forms without content. The zest to move vanishes, I lose the access to myself, I am alien to myself in my movements – an unpleasant, numbed perplexity arises within me.

To end this state and find the way back into body thinking, pausing is often the best method. By practising meditation it is possible to let distracting, rational thoughts and associated “unthought movements” diminish.

The important thing here is to wait until a state of detached concentration sets in again and body thinking can unfold once more. Pausing in this sense is a very active process – as if through a filter of movement we can sense intentions to move. I allow unthought movements to elapse until – mostly unpremeditated and very surprising – movements become perceptible that lead me back to a feeling for myself.

Sound can play an important role in this context. The resonance of a sound releases an impulse to move that is faster than my rational thought. Instinctively I surrender myself to this and through it pick up the threads of my thought in movement.

Letting go of familiar movement patterns is a permanent learning process, which is a kind of mental contest. At the start this learning process might seem very disturbing. It's as if you have to learn your mother tongue anew in order to use it differently. Each movement has to be felt afresh so that it is appreciated as authentic and not as other-directed. This process resembles a wilful splitting of consciousness: the work-out of one's own perception leads to a reshaping of the feeling of identity.

\*

Sometimes a movement impulse is so fleeting within me that I cannot transport it into action in the same instant. It flips by me, I register it, let it elapse or retain its effect in my memory in order to unite this feeling in the next moment with another movement.

It is as if I were a kinaesthetic sculpture, which creates itself anew without cease. It produces and displaces certain focuses, a dialogue takes place between arms and legs; sometimes the backbone leads, other times it is led by improvising with the extremities. Many variables add up to a complex interaction.

Being aware of these possibilities is a very pleasant state. We feel distinctly that the movement architecture is potentially in tune with this kind of kinaesthetic sculpture, when the body has taken over the decision about it.

It is interesting to note how individual movement languages crystallise over a specific interval of time. I was able to observe this on myself and also on my colleagues. Just as a musician develops his/her unmistakable sound or a painter develops his/her unique gesture, dancers produce their own specific qualities of movement transcending trained languages of forms.

Recognising and working out these movement identities is one of the most important and finest tasks of a choreographer.

The quality of a choreography depends as well on the skill of the choreographer in working out movement identities and placing them harmoniously in space and time.

\*

Speech is also an element which enters into relationship with body thinking and can generate movement. Movement experience and speech experience can influence one another.

Through dancing you can learn how clear and simultaneously how complex a speech-thought can be. Sometimes it can be grasped and named, other times continues working within us and will perhaps take on another shape at another point in time.

On the other hand anatomical knowledge conveyed through linguistic analyses and concepts can be used to spark off a movement status. For instance, in the somatic practice of *body-mind-centering*®, the explanations about anatomy usually occur orally. I concentrate on such explanations in order to allow the body to explore the perceptions associated with this. The body remembers words, movement concepts, while it moves. It is aware of them and lets them flow into its thinking. In these terms, speech is part of the infinite possibilities from which body thinking draws its source.

\*

Dance is itself language, movement language. Dancers, we might say, communicate in codes drawn from improvisation with an actively enhanced perception. The difficulty for the observer now lies in the fact that every dancer develops an individual coded language, although most dance languages are shaped by similar basic forms. It demands attention to and experience with dance in order to read into the individual dancers' codes. Dance is a language that exists only in the form of an infinite number of dialects. In order to be able to appreciate the beauty of each movement dialect, you need to be aware of your own movement language. In this complex diversion we have the possibility of transcending our perception of reality.

The abstract rhetoric of "thinking body language" has an affinity to the forms invented by Surrealism. It is a similarly virtuoso, abstract language, a narrative mode that is close to dreaming and to an enhanced vision and understanding.

\*

Two important aspects influence body thinking, thinking in movement: firstly the awareness of the audience and secondly, touch.

Each observation from outside influences the dancers' movements, is absorbed movement thought. You hear and feel that the others are watching, the body thinks these perspectives into its movements.

And everything revolves around touch. In this context we are simultaneously instruments and resonance bodies.

We work with touch in order to train our body knowledge and to experience the bodies we can communicate or dance with.

It is a matter of transporting the feeling of tactile contact onto other sense levels. In an increasingly digitalised world, however, touch is disappearing; it seems more and more difficult to transport touch.

\*

### Questions put to science

In conclusion, I would like to formulate several questions for the human sciences and humanities that have emerged from my ideas and which could serve as basis for collaboration.

1.

How do movement, rhythm, speech and sound work together on the neuronal level? Can we perhaps identify patterns or connections that might give us information on this?

Are there connections between a verbal and a body rhetoric? While dancing, can we divert consciousness onto verbal rhetoric – how does dance change through this?

And, vice versa, what happens when verbal speech is thought by the body?

What are the aesthetic results of such an experimental arrangement?

What happens when I talk while dancing – in contrast to an “onomatopoeic”, abstract vocal intervention? How does movement change when I speak a text I have learned by heart in comparison with an improvised text?

How different to this is an abstract poem without meaning? And how is it if dance interacts with spoken words or vocal noises from the outside?

What about rhythm in this context? Is there a basic rhythm for the body, subject to speech, movement, singing? Or are there different parallel rhythms in the body?

Which ones can we control and use consciously, which ones control us unconsciously?

Which rhythm is the strongest? Which rhythm dominates us? Can we re-educate a specific rhythmic purpose? How do our inner rhythms correspond to outer rhythms?

Could we have voice, speech and movement communicating together as equals?

What happens when singing as opposed to speaking while dancing?

2.

How and through what does movement identity develop in a dancer? Examinations on movement identities in dancers might possibly inform on questions of identity in general.

Through their multi-layered treatment of movement, dancers “magnify” their preoccupation with themselves as if acting under a magnifying glass – can we expect answers to more general anthropological questions through this?

3.

Observations on aesthetic harmony:

What happens exactly during a creative moment which is in absolute harmony with itself? What exactly happens to a dancer when he or she feels movements as completely harmonious/“right” or in tune? Is such a moment of aesthetic fulfilment comparable with analogue moments in other genres?



What is the difference between an aesthetically fulfilled experience permeating me from the outside in comparison with one produced by myself?

4.

What exactly starts moving when I have the feeling that the movement I have within me is “right” – harmonious? Movement is not always moving. I can move without having the feeling of being moved. In dance we say: the movement is dead – soulless. What inner movement releases in me the feeling of movement?

5.

The wish for order in a creative process.

Why? Why struggle against chaos? Why do we strive in art to create a certain order? Is this a basic characteristic of art? Physics tells us: entropy is increasing with time everywhere in the universe. Is our yearning for structure and order linked to this fundamental physical law? Or is it an archetypal attempt - doomed to failure – of human beings trying to hold back time?

6.

What about other basic physical laws and dance? Can we recognise such basic laws in improvisations? For example; mass and opposites attract one another? How do electro-magnetic fields affect movement?

Might we possibly gain knowledge here, too, by using the “magnifying glass” of dance to gain knowledge about more general patterns of human behaviour?

7. Where does the limit lie in the awareness enhancement through movement research? When does it start becoming dangerous, because it doesn't point the way back into “normal reality”? How close does awareness enhancement through movement lie to schizophrenia and other awareness disturbances and changes?