

Becoming Choreographic Fruits of the Womb

I. Introduction

This article will explore four western concert dancers' responses to and interpretations of their pregnancies. All concert dancing while pregnant is disruptive of western constructions both (public) art dance and (private) pregnancy. Art dancing maintains boundaries around accepted body shapes and sizes, and while later twentieth-century images varied greatly from earlier twentieth-century images, still certain images fall outside a limited range of domains. Similarly, pregnancy maintains boundaries around accepted activities, and while later twentieth-century activities varied greatly from earlier twentieth-century activities, certain activities still remain incalculable in public social settings. This article will explore how four dancers challenge normative definitions of dance through the fecund public body.

In the early 1970s, Twyla Tharp maintained a transparent denial of her physical pregnancy. She was determined not to let her condition enter the public arena nor interfere with her daily routine while acknowledging her pregnant body as a valuable partner in acquiring a new perspective on movement information. Ten years later, Jane Comfort made a political decision, consciously refraining from becoming pregnant until she took agency over her own choreographic work. Thus, she was free to explore her pregnant body on her technique which, in turn, trail-blazed for other dancers.

By the early 1990s, Sandy Mathern-Smith and Jody Oberfelder embraced their pregnancies within their continuing artistic commitment, framing these temporary bodies through poetic selection, arrangement, and organization of movement material. Mathern-Smith and Oberfelder revealed themselves through these dances—not only to an audience, but also to themselves.

II. The dances and their creators

Twyla Tharp, renowned dancer and choreographer, is best known for her “wit, inventiveness, complexity, and physical rigor” (Shapiro, 1998: 151). Tharp has been described as “glamorous and daring,” exhibiting “scrupulous logic,” and practicing a “demanding technique.” Having trained with Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Alwin Nikolais, and Erick Hawkins, Tharp subsequently danced with the Paul Taylor Company before beginning to choreograph independently in 1965. Although she was clearly sympathetic to non-proscenium spaces, she believed in classical technique and distinguishable dance movement/vocabulary while many art dancers around her, (reflecting the Judson influence), more often subscribed to pedestrian movement and blurring boundaries between trained and untrained performers. In 1970, sandwiched between and around *The One Hundreds* and *Eight Jelly Rolls*, she created *Attic Series* rooted in an “American past: personal, theatrical, musical.... There I was,” she reflected, “up in a farmhouse attic in a family way, and I made family dances filled with my feelings and references to the old guys” (qtd. in Shapiro, 1998: 151). Later Tharp remarked, “[A]s my body changed, I documented what could I could do with my new sense of weight, ways of moving that I had known nothing about before” (Tharp, 1992: 141).

Attic Series appears on Tharp’s *Scrapbook* videotape. Dancing solo, she is dressed in a bulky, white, V-necked, sweatshirt-like top and dark pants with white jazz shoes. The work appears to be improvisational, swaying musically as if marking casually on the sidelines, much the way a social dancer might absorb and reflect music while standing near the bar with a live band in the room. Small gestures, intimate little movements, tiny steps to each beat, she swings and waddles and prances. Then there is cut in the taping, and we seem to be in a new section—a “drunken sailor” section. Here Tharp throws her weight around, appearing more defiant about her body’s condition. She loses her balance and regains it, folds her arms across her chest and misplaces them as they fall open and down, and twists and turns as if the room is spinning underneath her. She appears to be just-more-than marking the work; she is imagining. Unlike the first section where she is contained, internal, speaking to herself, here she is passionate and newly aware of an audience’s perspective.

One of the trademarks of this exhibition is the release we notice in her knees, hips, torso as she drops and then catches herself, allowing her body to give in to the additional weight, the limiting range of motion, the vertical drop between fall and recovery. Light-weight¹ and its opposite “passive weight,” (a situation of giving completely into gravity), fluctuate and mix with a sustained/urgent blend so that suspension is created. Ultimately, the dance takes on a free-flow, light-weight movement (a kind of dreamlike inner state) with bursts of urgency interrupting smooth and sustained attention to time, and then a sudden and momentary release into the earth’s gravitational pull from which she recovers as abruptly as it appeared.

The dance is a discourse of denial. While Tharp acknowledges her preg-

nancy provided her with a “new sense of weight, ways of moving that I had known nothing about before” (Tharp, 1992: 141), still the work was performed in an attic, not in public, and not included in the lists of Tharp’s influential works of the time, and denied as “important” entirely in a conversation 20 years later.

Jane Comfort is a postmodernist who has performed at Lincoln Center, Dance Theater Workshop, Performance Space 122, The Danspace Project at St. Mark’s Church, and Movement Research among others. Formerly dancing with the Merce Cunningham Company, Comfort began making her own work in the early 1980s, stating she waited until she was a choreographer herself to become pregnant (“Jane Comfort and Wilhelmina Frankfurt”). Comfort’s training, indeed the nature of Cunningham’s work in the early 1980s, is highly structural, radiating strength from the center of the body. Movement is fortuitously machine-like with a leg brushing high off the ground, a large tilt of the whole torso, a series of quick steps grapevining, or the upper body curving, dropping and recovering to a darting outstretched leg-now-arm-now-leg in the front-now-side-now-back. The shaping and fleeting positions created by this randomness seem astonishing, not at all expected, physically fascinating but narratively meaningless. Cunningham was not interested in telling stories, nor was he interested in selecting and then portraying an emotion. He celebrated movement for movement’s sake. His choreography was known for its aleatoric nature. Comfort’s pregnancy dance, *For A Spider Woman*, celebrates this same philosophy: movement/technique is, by itself, enough to explore.

Beginning just weeks after conception and finishing just weeks after birthing, Neelon Crawford filmed Comfort about every month dancing a violently energetic minute-long phrase. As her body gets larger and larger, the movement is forced to adjust, shift, then change. The phrases are grounded with turns and fast, intricate footwork, twisting and contralateral movement, and immediate changes of direction and facing. Punctuated with small, precise jumps, feet replacing feet, torso addressing the audience-the ground-the side, there is a connection between the core and the limbs; no, the feet and the head; no again, the upper and lower torso. In the film/dance, Comfort is costumed in simple leotards and sweatpants, each month a different color combination. The clothing clings to her, swaddling her, revealing her dancer’s body. At first she looks like Any Dancer, but as the months stretch out, so does her belly, and the protrusion of her pregnant shape is highly visible. Her work is frenetic, demanding, and strong. As the pregnancy imposes itself on her body, she yields, but maintains the passion. She is letting go: letting go of the wild, the frenzied, the irrational. She is becoming: becoming more careful, more precise, more placed, more exact. The film/dance concludes with soft sensuous movement phrase, newborn baby in arms.

“I believe there is a cat-like trust of the body,” Comfort asserts in an interview with Celia Ipiotis and Irene Dowd (“Jane Comfort and Wilhelmina

Frankfurt"). She is commenting on balance, but the comment applies equally to turning, falling, dancing in general. Her greatest movement-pleasure while pregnant was turning.

"Hardly anyone in my community had children," she said in this interview. "I wanted to make a statement to other women that I could continue ... and it would make my art much richer" ("Jane Comfort and Wilhelmina Frankfurt"). This dance presents a discourse of powerful politicizing.

Jody Oberfelder lives and works in New York's downtown dance circuit as well. She has been supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Harkness Foundation for Dance, Meet the Composer, Manhattan Community Arts Fund, New York Foundation for the Arts and other leading foundations. Beyond her live professional work, she choreographed the opening sequence for *Nightline* in "Primetime—Brave New World," and has done benefit performances for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS at the Palace Theater, The Women's Health Initiative at the Marquis Theater on Broadway, and Paul Newman's "Hole in the Wall Gang Camp." When she was pregnant with her first child, Oberfelder (1993) made a deliriously physical work called *Duet*, "to believe in who I was, and not to let the moment be lost."

In this eleven-minute film/dance, Oberfelder is eight months pregnant and stark naked with hair falling curly around her face and shoulders. She dances alone in an apparent endless space—no walls, no windows, no floors. She begins lying on one side, gently swaying with her back to the audience as we hear the pulsing of amniotic blood through an umbilical cord. Eventually the camera comes around the body as the body itself turns toward the camera to reveal the pregnancy in full bloom. Coming to sitting, then flipping to a pseudo-bridge or arch supported by both hands and feet, belly high in the air, she then turns over again, crawling on hands and feet, allowing each foot to cross far over the centerline until finally a zig-zag pattern is formed. Coming to rest, stretched out from hands to toes, belly hanging toward the earth, Oberfelder propels herself up to a handstand of sorts, waving her legs in the air, exposing her vulva and pubic hair.

In the next cut, we see her lying on her back engaged in minimal movement while the *in utero* child dances against the mother's side. Eventually Oberfelder rolls to her left side, her left arm tucked up over her head while her right arm wraps around her belly/baby. Scooting around an imaginary lateral axis by pushing with her feet, Oberfelder then kneels on one leg, continues the spiral to standing, and walks away from the camera. The accompaniment of light percussion instruments seem to bring her back. She throws herself to her hands, lowers herself to the floor, and lurches forward on one knee, turning and twisting her whole body. Forming a peephole with her hands, we see the head snuggle through a too-small opening and emerge. Oberfelder twists and turns—is she the mother or the infant?—until she thrusts herself in a partial back roll, legs up over her head to a momentary shoulder stand, then back down again, like a body spilling and tumbling out of a tunnel. The dance ends as she

balances on her back, waving her arms and feet in the air, as an infant unable to control its limbs yet fascinated by the movement entertainment they provide.

Oberfelder's choreography bridges intimacy with awe. It is startling in its innocent nakedness, the very private made audaciously public. We see her take agency over her large body, moving it with vigor and gusto through shoulder stands and backspins, feet in the air, or wide second position pliés and hand-foot crawling, weight into the earth. She awards agency to the new life as her hands and feet thrust her belly in the air, undulating and rocking the child while it moves and responds and directs our attention. The back and forth between audience and performer and between mother and belly shows us the new life must find a place amongst the competing demands, but that it is a welcome addition. This is a duet. This dance presents a discourse of avowing.

Sandy Mathern-Smith is an independent choreographer and a university professor working in a temporal simultaneity with Oberfelder. Mathern-Smith's work has been supported by the Greater Columbus Arts Council, the Ohio Arts Council's coveted Individual Artist Fellowship for Choreography, and a recent Arts Midwest Meet the Composer/Choreographic Project Award as well as many other grants and fellowships from around the United States. In 1991, pregnant with her second child, she created and performed *Making*. "I wanted to know what it was like to dance/perform while in the state of being pregnant. It just seemed important because my body was so transformed and I was in it. It was me and it wasn't me, or 'just me.' I was inhabited" (Mathern-Smith, 1997). Her dance is a blending of improvisational structures and tightly choreographed sequences. "I suppose I could have danced in just some dance, but it seemed important the dance/ the movement/ the work be related to my state, my experience inside my body. Just performing wasn't enough. If I was going to perform, it was important that I was not hiding my body, but revealing it, that I wasn't negating the state I was in, trying to simply overlook it. I wanted the performance, the dancing, the work to be intimately connected to me and to my body."

Center-stage in a pool of light, she begins shifting, joints circling in large fluid forms, sometimes interrupted by bent elbows or small turns to another direction, but always moving, moving to another shape.² Like a child squirming, trying to find just the perfect position, she shifts and holds a while; shifts, shifts and holds again; shifts/shifts/shifts/shifts and holds, until finally she is moving more than she is holding. A sound cue, ("My body is an empty vessel ..."), initiates walking around the edges of the pool of light, deliberately and methodically, staying on the cusp even as she twists and turns in, casting in one body part or another—an arm, a leg.

There is a quick energy spurt, lively but very short-lived, during which Mathern-Smith jumps, prances, even runs, although covering no space. She then spirals: first in the most obvious ways of winding up the body, feet planted in open positions; then in less obvious ways, allowing an extended leg or a mid-limb body part (elbow or knee) to initiate the spiral. Finally, the spiral shifting

to other axes, she ends with swinging initiated by the upper body cycling in the frontal plane, spiraling in large body swings, ending in successive dropping, like coughing, down into a squat, arms stretched down, inside surfaces exposed.

Mathern-Smith returns to the lighted center stage, this time flailing her body, falling, falling, almost able to stand but not quite, like a Halloween “fun-house” floor has been installed on the stage. But we are not reassured the dancer is having fun as the singers confirm “my world tips.” She races around the stage in a huge circle, as big as the stage will allow. From the down-stage right corner, she takes poses that could be from classical ballet and modern dance—arabesques, odd twists, deliberate arm positions, one pose melting into another, shifting, transforming. While her body is presentational and frontal, she never looks at the audience, her gaze not just down, but “away.” From this corner, she is flung backward upstage left, head arched over the back surface, leading. It appears awkward, off-balance, and uncomfortable, like she is being sucked by a force the short distance upstage as the singers reveal “I am losing track, losing track of who I am.” The work closes with running, running, running in large circles around the stage, reminiscent of the earlier race, but this time an occasional loop in the circle allows her to re-envision a pose or a spiral or an arm circle before continuing to run as the light folds down. Sandy agreed to a partnership; she merged. This dance presents a discourse of collaboration.

III—The body: physical, social, political

In the most recent 15-20 years, to think about bodies, their social meanings, and political forces, dance scholarship has turned to cultural studies. Americanist Jane Desmond claims: “Not only can the judicious adoption and adaptation of critical theory enable increasingly sophisticated and complex analyses of dance as a social practice; at the same time, the investigation of dance as an extremely under-analyzed bodily practice may challenge or extend dominant formulations of work on ‘the body’” (1997: 1-2). I agree with Desmond. I find myself influenced by an equality and active reciprocity between the dance/r and myself; by the imagination to question what seems unquestionable; by the buoyancy to reshape my sensitivities through conversations and dialogue with the dance and dancers; by a dynamics of play that does not progress toward a predetermined goal; and by an ontologically open interpretation.³ These guidelines of hermeneutic behavior, when applied to the dances of pregnant women, set up for me the potential for exposing the physical, social, and political body. Circulating back to Desmond, I wonder if the cultural, aesthetic, and medical practices permitted the multi-dimensional story of pregnancy to be told through the form of dance, would they be allowing too much power to pass directly from woman to woman, without having gained social and political affirmation from male institutions? That is, is the story of physical pregnancy actually a story of pregnant physicality—one that is too aggressive, too vehement, too powerful to be told, uncensored, and in this case even unspoken, by women alone?

We cannot deny the path from transparent denial through powerful politiciz-

ing to avowal and collaboration reflects the cultural path traveled by “body” feminists from the 1970s through the 1990s as well. From exploring our selves through consciousness-raising, we have now accumulated an immense body of literature and its dominant formulations in our western culture on the female body itself. Very early in this second wave feminist movement, Tharp shielded herself from public view—not necessarily *because of* the pregnancy but because she refused to yield her dreams to the pregnancy; it was not to re-shape her patterns of behavior. With the support of a decade of feminist activity, and after having gathered information, experience, and legitimacy during that decade, Comfort committed herself to the “creator” arena, constructing knowledge⁴ and taking agency over her own body and its power. Ten years later, Oberfelder focused on pregnancy as inspiration-begetting-movement-vocabulary; it provided her the sensation of herself from the inside out, something she chose to share with other women in a public arena against the grain, against the advice of her mentor.⁵ Mathern-Smith (1997) demanded that her pregnancy *is* herself; she will explore this body as she has explored other challenges, constraints, opportunities. Undaunted by a cultural rejection, we must hold open what it was that supported Mathern-Smith’s decision.

Is it the *dancing* or is it the display of the *pregnancy* that disrupts? These are the everyday experiences of pregnant woman, here placed center stage to make explicit our attending to them. Pregnant women are constructed as private, reserved, respectful, and certainly less physically active than dancers. Media has taught us to coddle pregnant women, care for them, be sensitive about their condition, and guard them in order to guard the child. Our public images are of specific women: in caring and monogamous relationships, upper-class, educated. Pregnant women are not expected to educate themselves or others about this temporary condition. Early pre-natal care is advised so that a doctor rather than the woman can take charge of the health of the unborn. Women thinking they make decisions about their own pregnancy are read as self-absorbed, narcissistic, irresponsible.

We know also that in the last 35 years, the arenas of modern and postmodern concert dance have expanded the accepted single image of dancery bodies, and that shift has altered our expectations of the paper-thin waif who magically displays exquisite physical strength. Yet simultaneously, we have been taught through the media that long necks, protruding collar bones, and willowy limbs are sexy. Women voluntarily putting their bodies on public display are supported most easily if they submit to this “publicly sexy yet privately distanced image,” a visible/invisible illusion.⁶ Her sheer bulk is not easily tolerated, and that is discounting the importance of confirming this potentially attractive woman is clearly no virgin. Bringing the invisible to visibility is problematic.

In her denial, Tharp downplayed the public relevance of dancing pregnant. “That work is not important,” she retorted to a question about it at a social gathering in Columbus, Ohio. Perhaps due to Tharp’s own denial, dance critics

do not seem to recognize where her signature style was derived. Nancy Reynolds and Susan Reimer-Torn state “her movement style seems to have *come from nowhere* (1991: 282 [emphasis mine]). Similarly, Deborah Jowitt reported, she:

began to meld black dance moves with ballet, athletics, and *who-knew-what* [italics mine] to produce a distinctive style that refined antielitism into a quizzical principle. Her dancers, obviously pros, executed demanding and rigorously structured choreography while retaining the spontaneous edge, the casualness, the occasional *inelegance* [italics mine] of people dancing for pleasure. (1988: 336)

In spite of her reluctance to connect her pregnancy with her signature movement style, Tharp (1992) says this period of her physical life taught her “ways of moving that I had known nothing about before.” To make pregnancy explicit as teacher was not encouraged in the early 1970s.

Comfort presented a version of *For A Spider Woman* at the Dance History Scholars Conference in California in the early 1980s. In this version, the film was shown on a scrim at the back of a small stage. Not an unusual arrangement for a dance conference, Comfort introduced the film, then moved offstage while the film was running. At the end of the film, Comfort reemerged in dance clothes with young baby in hand, dancing the last segment live. The audience was aghast. Comfort was willing to make certain statements about what she knew unequivocally as a female, and the richness of her art would surely develop from her feminist perspective brought alive through her embracing of not only Jane-the-skilled-performer, but also Jane-the-woman.

“The men in the audience were struck by concern for the baby,” Comfort reminisced in a telephone conversation. “The women seemed comfortable, but the men were afraid I would drop the baby.” Comfort was unwilling to relinquish teaching others about the richness of merging her creative self/ves—both mother and choreographer—and she made this political statement powerfully to a limited audience.

Oberfelder continued her discourse of revelation. According to her, artists take on the role of bringing to public awareness, sometimes even attempting to “universalize,” personal interpretations of the world. To dance in this way, to make this statement, reveals Oberfelder’s commitment to experiencing a place deep inside from which to work *and* her desire to have that experience revealed to others. “I was working from a center I had never felt before. I thought it was worthy of sharing. That’s what making art is about,” exclaimed Oberfelder. This physical form, bulbous with creativity, challenges our conceptions of social appropriateness.

Imagining her dance with curiosity and awe, we notice Oberfelder seems to sit at Rebecca Schneider’s vanishing point, a place where we are conscious of insatiable desire, imagining ourselves like-her and not-like-her simultaneously (Schneider, 1997). This socio-political space, where Oberfelder takes control of

her own body (much like Carolee Schneeman placing her own body in her images⁷), then becomes a bold statement of agency. She specifically calls onto question the relationship between the pregnant body and its capabilities, the pregnant woman and her right to continued presence in her pre-pregnant relationships, and the pregnant state and its framing as diseased or medically challenged, worthy of delicate care and extraordinary considerations. Instead, Oberfelder claims responsibility for her body and lays it open for all to share its wonders.

One of the sections is Mathern-Smith's *Making* is about the activity of losing control. Mathern-Smith is center stage, in the spotlight, accompanied by chanting, tambourines, and a clear voice command from the soprano accompaniment: "Our histories collide. My world tips." Mathern-Smith throws herself into the air and collapsed as if the additional weight attached to the front of her torso is pulling her down in the right direction. Like a Vortex—the children's toy football with a tail—she always falls belly down, and protects herself at the last possible moment with a twist, a spiral left over from the previous section, or a cushioning/ flexing of her arms. Through four movements, four choruses, a breathtaking 1:10 minutes, the audience gasps and shrieks, worrying she might hurt the baby.

When I ask whether she is aware of this reaction, Mathern-Smith (1997) is offended. "Why would I want to do that?" she quirks, "As if the baby's health weren't more important to me than to any of them? Of course I wasn't going to hurt the baby!" Later she expands her response. "I hated the idea that someone else could even suggest that I, who has spent my life ... investigating my own movement, my own body, my own physical limitations, could suggest that I did not know my body well enough to make my own choices about what I could and could not do physically, and that there were even rules about what I *should* and *should not* do." I ask what those rules seemed to be. "When you are pregnant," she replies, "health practitioners recommend that you do not run, jump, play soccer, dance with abandon—you know, jump around, move with quick, strong, aggressiveness—as it may hurt you or the fetus or both. I found that I did not feel constrained in that way until much later in the pregnancy, like the eighth or ninth month. At the sixth or seventh month, I felt like my body was not sending me any negative signals regarding this kind of movement. I wanted to explore it; I wanted to discover my own boundaries, ... trust myself wholeheartedly." While (like Comfort) Mathern-Smith refuses to assign to someone else the responsibility for the well-being of her self/child, for her the lesson is one about trust, trusting herself, trusting herself in a culture where only a licensed doctor is to be trusted with the well being of a pregnant body.

From learning to move differently, to teaching others about the richness of merging creative self/ves, from opening the intimacy of your experience for others to share its wonders to trusting yourself against the grain of medical advice, each of these women tells tales of pregnant physicality that disrupts both

concert dancing and pregnancy. In this powerful arena, women learn directly from women about their own bodies.

IV—Academia: unusual encouragement for women's experimentation

In the past 30 years literally hundreds of pregnant women have created concert works and performed (in) them against cultural, aesthetic, and medical advice. Initially this move was made during an era when the popular image of a women's body was appearing thinner and thinner; during an era where the Balanchine ballerina was taller, longer-legged, and moving with lightening speed; and during an era in which the medical sciences were circulating specific and digitized images of *in utero* fetuses, which in turn authorized doctors to campaign for what they promoted as "safe and responsible" behaviour (see Duden, 1993; Martin, 1993). It may seem, then, that to perform in concert dance while pregnant would be so unpopular—the dancer is neither thin nor quick nor acting in the best in interest of the child—that it would be simply unrealizable.

Yet several other conditions supported this bold and personal decision. The inception of the second wave women's movement suggested a fuller awareness of the female body coming into the purview of the individual woman herself (see Linden-Ward, 1993; Broude and Garrad, 1994; Rapping, 1996; Fonow and Cook, 1991).⁸ The move away from Modernism, visible in the dance world through the inception of a freer, less technical form now known (in sweeping terms) as "postmodern dance" was publicly embraced, making room for variations on the standard body type sought in Western concert dance.⁹ As well, individual dancers of this era found work in the newly-receptive university setting (Kraus, Hilsendager, and Dixon, 1991),¹⁰ an environment that—at least theoretically—encouraged legal and procedural equality of responsibilities.¹¹ These conditions encouraged personal explorations, promoted their political value in public spheres, and insisted employees meet similar if not identical criteria in the workplace regardless of biological differences.¹² This last condition—that universities were transforming from bastions of patriarchal knowledge via varied and fledgling interests in the female in their student bodies, their curriculum, and their inclusion of dance faculty—likely contributed enormously to a fascinating meditation on public performance and pregnancy.

College and university settings, by choice and by law, began acknowledging few distinctions between their male and female faculty, asking that teaching, scholarship, and community service meet certain criteria for promotion and tenure. Dance faculty whose scholarship was dancing/ performing/ choreographing were just as responsible for continuing their engagement with performance as their peers who engaged in other forms of scholarship (e.g., written forms), regardless of a pregnancy in the middle of a tenure clock. Consequently, as dance departments and women faculty in them grew in the

United States, many isolated examples of women faculty dancing while they were pregnant appeared in the 1970s. This practice grew in the 1980s. It veritably exploded in the 1990s. While outside the university, it is still rare that the general public has seen these dances performed live, within the ivory towers, communities of people, quite by accident, colluded in the exploration of the female body, in its physical, social, and political promise as literally hundreds of dance faculty displayed their dancing and their pregnancies simultaneously.

Every now and then I hear that feminism is passé; that “these days” all opportunities are equally available to men and women, at least in the United States. In the 1960s and ’70s, the inception of the second wave women’s movement celebrated an individual agency over one’s own body. In the 1980s, women made great strides in body politics and theorists documented or analyzed feminist power over and over again. Yet by the 1990s, a backlash seems to have reiterated that pregnant women are not sufficiently responsible for making decisions about their own bodies. The Supreme Court tentatively favors the right to privacy. These dances, however, are in public domain. Through the unintentional support of colleges and universities, we come to understand women know more about their own bodies than they are allowed.

¹I am referring her to the Laban system of movement analysis, where dynamics is labeled “Effort.” See Dell (1977) or Bartenieff (1981).

²Although surely there is a translation and consequent interpretation everytime one attempts to describe a physical event in a two-dimensional, linear format (e.g., words or a score), this section means to minimize excessive interpretation and highlight named action in order to help the reader “imagine” the moving dance rather than draw conclusions about a meaning of the work. It is offered like a “dance review” rather than a “critique,” hoping to comment as non-evaluatively as possible on the movings and pausings of the dance. The images are offered as a way of locating common movement experiences to help the reader sense the action of the dance.

³These conditions come to me through a reading of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) translated and edited by David E. Linge.

⁴This is a term defined by Mary Belenky *et al.* in *Women’s Ways of Knowing*.

⁵When this work was first shared, it was in a choreographic workshop with Bessie Schönberg. Schönberg advised Oberfelder not to show this work publicly, suggesting to do so would not honor the audience’s discomfort.

⁶For an outstanding discussion of this concept, see Rebecca Schneider’s *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997).

⁷See, for example, her film *Fuses*.

⁸See also the videotapes *The American Experience* (Alexandria, VA: PBS Video, 1993) and *Reclaiming the Body: Feminist Art in America* produced and directed by Michael Blackwood (New York: Blackwood Productions, 1995). It should

be noted, however, that the Women's Movement focused on the body as it is experienced in "everyday life" rather than in the constructed performance. As often as the body was written about in feminist writings of the 1960s and 1970s, rarely was it considered in the midst of concert performance.

⁹Sally Banes has been identified as a prolific writer on this era in dance. Her books include *Terpsichore in Sneakers* (1980 [1987]); *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962-64* (1980 [1983]); *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (1993); *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (1994). See also the videotapes "Beyond the Mainstream" produced by Merrill Brockway and Carl Charlson and directed by Merrill Brockway and "Retracing Steps" produced and directed by Michael Blackwood (New York: Michael Blackwood, 1988).

¹⁰While the first university dance program is reportedly Margaret H'Doubler's at the University of Wisconsin-Madison circa 1916, with the first dance major there in 1926, and while there is a flurry of activity in connection with Bennington in the 1930s, there was a blossoming of dance activity in the late 1960s and early 1970s and departments offering majors were initiated at the Ohio State University (in 1968), SUNY Brockport (1969), Connecticut College (in 1971), and Denison University (in 1972). The variety in these institutions helps to establish the range of curricula that enveloped dance as a disciplinary study within the context of academia.

¹¹Of course this is not to deny that in practice these conditions may be quite different. Nor is it to say that these equity issues ought to be gender-blind. Substantial arguments have been made on both sides of this issue. See, for example, controversial work by Hewlett (1986) and the feminist work edited by Hartman and Messer-Davidow (1991).

¹²I am purposefully sidestepping the issue of whether women and men are sufficiently biologically different that those differences ought to be accounted for.

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