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I To begin to understand the gorgeous fever that is consciousness, we must try to understand the senses. . .

To understand, we have to “use our heads,” meaning our minds. Most people think of the mind as being located in the head, but the latest findings in physiology suggest that *the mind* doesn’t really dwell in the brain but travels the whole body on caravans of hormone and enzyme, busily making sense of the compound wonders we catalogue as touch, taste, smell, hearing, vision.

(Diane Ackerman - *A Natural History of The Senses*, NY NY Vintage Books Edition 1995, p. xix)

I was struck by these lines some years ago while reading Ackerman’s book. Her thoughts parallel my approach to moderating post-performance conversations. I started out as a performer, and perhaps that’s why I’ve maintained a commitment to prioritizing the integrity and autonomy of performance, itself, over and above the commentary, criticism, reviews, structured discussions—the brain-centered mind—that precede and follow it. For me, the question is: how do we go about “talking dance” without drowning or diminishing the lived experience in an ocean of intellectual musing/theorizing—when neuroscience tells us that *mind is not brain alone*? How do we keep the performance, itself, alive and at the forefront—the visceral, kinesthetic or sense-driven reactions it stirred in us—without diluting those experiences with our words? How do we talk about dance without talking the dance away?

I believe discussions following performance can be useful in putting audience members in closer contact with the act of performance, whether or not the performing artists participate in the discussion. The format can also be helpful for the artist who shows a work-in-progress and specifically requests audience feedback. Other than that, I am dubious as to what the artist gains from these discussions—although audience contact is always good publicity. As I recall it, the pre- and post-performance formats were rare before the 1990’s. I surmise that the impetus to “explain” a performance did not come from the artists themselves but from producers and presenters who hoped to enlarge audiences by adding additional events—and “talking head” moderators of some renown—to the ticket-buyer’s night out.

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What are we looking for that wasn't supplied by the event? Although I am an author and scholar, writing books, research articles, reviews, and program notes, my dancer self privileges live performance over commentary. If I sound anti-intellectual, actually I am not! Nevertheless, I firmly believe in a sentence I created that aptly expresses my approach—*“Dance is a literature that is illegible in literal translation.”* In our modern, postmodern, contemporary cultures we depend on “authorities” to explain performance for us. For many audience members, the performance isn't reified until they read the program notes; or read a review or feature article; or attend a discussion session with a pundit dissecting the performance.

Yet, performance is a culture's way of thinking a culture's thoughts. Even when the meanings may be enigmatic (as in, “I can't quite get it,” or “I couldn't quite put my finger on it”), there can still be another kind of clarity—one that cannot be reigned in by verbal afterthought. Frankly, if we could say it all in words, there wouldn't be a need for the performance. That's the realm that Diane Ackerman touches upon in my opening quote. In the same vein, novelist Milan Kundera said the role of the novel is to say what only the novel can say. And I posit that the role of a performance is to say what only a performance can say. The language of performance is affective, and I don't see it useful for the post-performance conversation to focus on the cognitive. I know that many reading this will disagree. That being said, I believe I have fashioned a way to talk about dance performance in a variety of pre- and post-performance formats that keeps the performance itself alive and can lead the audience into a deeper, even kinesthetic, reflection on the event.

The most common format I moderate is the post-performance discussion, otherwise known as the “q-and-a,” (question-and-answer), and more recently the “talk-back.” Honestly, I'm not interested in either one, so I've invented my own alternative: I encourage those attending to engage in what I term a post-performance *reflection*. I try to connect spectators directly with the performance *event*—to guide them deeper *into* the dance, rather than having them remove themselves to a critical distance. I aim for the affective reflection, rather than cognitive statement—not because I'm against critical thinking, but because the cognitive loosed from the affective basically is an assertion of superiority. The moderator whose aim is to verbally encapsulate what a dance performance does (or

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means) privileges words and cognition above the lived experience of the dance itself.

So the question remains, how do we use words in the service of *dance*, rather in the service of words? That is, to me, the true value in these feedback sessions. Besides Ackerman and Kundera, another source I turn to for inspiration are various comments made by other artists, including Bill T. Jones, whose talent as a wordsmith is largely unsung. An article in the *Sunday New York Times* (April 14, 2013, Arts Section, p.8) features an interview with Jones and writer/neurologist Oliver Sacks who were partnering in a movement theater festival at New York Live Arts. Asked about the connection between his and Sacks's work, Jones says ". . . that person onstage, who has a body similar to ours is using that body in proxy for us." He continues, citing ". . . how an idea about movement can actually be felt." Sacks's life work has been on the mind as a part of the entire body—not just the brain. Sacks then adds, "Language is only a little thing sitting on top of this huge ocean of movement." Now, that's where I want to go, what I want to show, when I facilitate a post-performance reflection! I try to do what my husband, choreographer-dancer Hellmut Gottschild said, "to not give the word the last word!"

With these, and a variety of other guiding thoughts that I've gathered over the years, I set the frame for a reflective and reflexive conversation. I orchestrate the session to progress in a circular fashion from my comments, to the group, to specific images, movements, moments, or words in the performance itself. Why did this or that stand out for a particular audience member? How did that instance resonate with his/her own experience, desires, or wishes? The aim is to set up a conversation that retains the perspective of the bodies onstage as our proxies, as Jones explained. So if that is the case, how did we see it that way? Or not? And why, whether we did or not? I also attempt to make the session flow in a spatial circle, rearranging seating in the round whenever possible to break the linear, proscenium, teacher-student spatial dynamic and the assumption that there's a canonical privilege to interpreting this performance from my perspective. In keeping with this, I'll ask the audience not to address their responses to me, but to begin talking with one another, and to look to each other to keep the discussion moving, rather than using me as the one-on-one referential. Small silences are also good.

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On the other hand, of course I am an expert. I lead these sessions because I have made the practice and study of dance my life's work. I join in frequently, probing and questioning or throwing out leads to keep the energy flowing and to allow reflections time to bubble up. Nevertheless, how I can help individuals to "get" dance is not by showing off how smart I am, but by leading them deeper into the dance, the choreography, the whole event. I want those who participate in my sessions to feel—regardless of how inscrutable or even disgusting a dance may have seemed to them—that there is some way that it resonated with their own experience—even if negatively. Thus, deepening experiential understanding of performance is my aim with post-performance conversations, and that's why I call them *reflections*—not talk-backs. For me, it's about seeking and acknowledging our shared humanity.

I also facilitate pre-performance conversations, some with participating artists present and others with only audience members in the room. Each format has its own requisites. In every instance my aim is to gain a *deepening into*, rather than *intellectualizing about*, a performance. Without the artist(s) present, I sometimes request those who are willing to try out movements with me that I know we will see in the performance, and I'll give background on the artist(s)' history and/or influences—so it actually becomes a workshop-discussion. In every iteration—pre- and post- performance, with or without attending artists—I do my homework: watching videos of the dances and artists' interviews; reading reviews, bios, and artists' statements; analyzing performance photographs (that is, "reading dancing" in another way), all before the audience session. I collect my own historical/cultural/theoretical/analytical data on a particular artist or choreography, but I don't allow this research to overtake the live performance, or my session with the audience. And I have found a way to do that—a way of "talking dance" as an extension of the dance itself. It is my background. The performance event, the dance concert, is the foreground.