

Women's Bodies in Writing and Words in Motion

Gaps and Paradoxes in Writing the Body as a Text and in Dance Improvisations

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Abstract

This paper examines ways of bridging the gaps between body and language as they exist in two arenas: the first - creative women (from various creative arts) who agreed to "write their bodies", attempting to make present the experience of their bodies in a verbal text; the second - post modern dance artists, who utilize verbal language in a unique way to expand and enhance the physical language of movement. In both of these arenas women work in creative arts but it may appear that their actions move in opposite directions; the former "writing their bodies" as a text on paper, while the latter "put words into motion" with their physical movements. The movement each group makes in the transition from one field to another – from physical to verbal and from language

to body – is assessed in the framework of the discussion. I describe how the transition from one field to another brings the women from both groups into an uncertain intermediate space, lacking fluency and I claim that it is precisely in these tension filled spaces between body and language, where the activities of these women expands their language and makes it more flexible, that the body can be made present in innovative ways and be brought to "center stage". This facilitates a dialogue between two poles: between body and mind, between a personal, feminine language, and the predominant masculine language and a fresh look, from inside and from outside, at the body which experiences and dances.

*When I cannot see,
When my eyes
Are so blinkered,
It is best I stay within my body's sheath,
In the sack of skin within which I am,
And not in my thought clouds
Which, from my weakness
Capture me.
It is best that I lie
In bed
Collect my arms,
Curl up my legs,
Contract my anus,
And slip into sleep.*
(Agi Mishol)

Poetry is one of the forms of language which allows a certain proximity to the complex meeting place of body and language. It invites one to touch the "raw flesh" of the experience, in that it persistently conveys the physicality which lies at the base of thought, which is reflected in the meter, the texture and the rhythm of words as opposed to silences and encourages the mutual interaction between the conscious and subconscious,

between verbal and non-verbal ways of knowing. The medium of poetry is words, although non-verbal aspects also play a part in creating meaning and invite the physical involvement of the reader (Kristeva, 1987; Campbell, 1998; Charles, 2001).

The metaphors in Mishol's poetry echo the characteristic perspective of western thought, which divides between the corporeal and the rational; vision (depicted as clarity of understanding) and thought clouds (high but fleeting...) are represented in the poem as contrasting with the ever present body. The retreat inwards, into the body, is only possible when the narrator casts her thought clouds derived from her weakness away from herself. The connection to her body, the sack containing "the self", is a connection to a powerful source. This being said, in order to describe this corporeal experience the narrator needs words.

The academic discussion on the nature of the connection between body and language and on the significant divide between language and experience continues to engage many scholars and philosophers in various fields within the humanities and behavioral sciences (Ginsburg, 2001; Bion in Charles 2001; Bollas, Leavis and Ricoeur in Campbell, 1998; Marshall, 1996).

Ginsburg (2001) clearly describes the problem: language is based upon a linear sequence of words governed by rules of syntax and social conventions. Words do not have the capacity to describe the whole range of human experience, the existential chaos, the simultaneity of emotions, desires and feelings.

The hierarchical organization and dichotomous polarization which characterize western thought and culture can be added to this essential divergence between body and language; with the body being associated with nature and biology, and as such being perceived as inferior to language, which is associated with culture and the mind. This concept is systematically and profoundly embedded in western thought (Warren, 2000; Grosz, 1994; Bordo, 1993; Plumwood, 1993).

The first part of this paper is based on my research into writing the body amongst creative women. This was conducted as qualitative research combining phenomenological research with hermeneutics from the feminist viewpoint.¹ The results of this study showed that the practice of writing bodies is an interesting attempt to bridge the gap between language and body in that it expands the prevailling use of language, enhancing its flexibility. As someone who works with body and language I sought to take these conclusions further by returning to the world of dance, to the realm of improvisation and to investigate the encounter between body and language when it is approached from the opposite direction; looking at the place and role of language in the dynamic and vital specialty of teaching dance improvisation. What characterizes the verbal dimension of this discipline? What statements do teachers and choreographers use to direct the body towards creative investigation and how do these statements influence the refinement of the language of physical motion?

This section of the paper mainly relies on theoretical research: on spoken / written words of teachers and choreographers of post modern dance; on observations of improvisation workshops; on my activities in this field (as a student, dancer and teacher) and on ongoing discussions with my colleagues.

In the section on "gaps and lacunae in language and improvisation", which follows, there is an attempt to connect between the two fields and to extract from them threads of similarity and difference; I argue that both groups are working in the same intermediate spaces which could be termed "voids", empty spaces or lacunae wherein the body can be made present and language made flexible, although each group achieves this in its own way.

The discussion summarizes the importance of the women's activities within the "intermediate empty spaces" and offers a perspective on their practical activities within the body-language paradox, as having various socially significant aspects. The paper moves, therefore from one methodology to the next, creating a process of transition; from the field (writing the body as a text) to the academic realm and back to the field of dance improvisation. This process joins the other transitions with which the paper deals and turns the subject of "transition between

fields" to a central theme; transitions between languages (body-word-body), between ways of using language (writing-speaking), between feminine arenas (writing bodies – improvising movement) between physical domains (page-studio-page) and between methodologies(qualitative-theoretical).

A "transition" by definition signifies a temporary intermediate space, incorporating some degree of risk and vulnerability, with it being characterized by a lesser degree of stability and some uncertainty. It seems that the women artists in both domains agree and even ask to linger in these "dangerous" intermediate spaces and to act from within them.

Writing the Body

The exhortation to "write the female body" began to be heard from the late 1970s, originating from theoretical feminists including: Luce Irigaray (1985), Hélène Cixous (1976), Julia Kristeva (1987) Helen Marshall (1996) and Minh-Ha (1989) amongst others. According to them writing the female body is essential to the process of women's liberation within society; women must find the unique language which expresses their world, to write themselves from within their bodies and through their bodies. Their initiative stems from the dualistic perspective which divides between mind and body, but with an added element of gender, hardly surprising in view of the mythological connection between femininity and the corporeal and the ongoing repression and institutionalization of them both. These scholars identified writing and the body as two sites which women had been removed from throughout phallogentric history and claimed that women must regain both their writing and their bodies.

Writing is perceived to be a rational/abstract activity associated with masculinity, while femininity – perceived to be corporeal and contrary to rationality – is excluded from language. So, according to their view point, language is a central mechanism enabling male hegemony, and therefore language is also the main arena of the struggle within which women need to act. According to Cixous (1976, p.887) "if woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man,... it is time for her to dislocate this from "within," to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of."

The feminine body, outcast and censored must make her voice heard, to invent a language liberating her from the existing discourse. When the body can express itself and the infinite meanings within it, not one language but a multitude of languages will be enabled. As Cixous wrote; "She lets the other language speak-the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death. To life she refuses nothing. Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible" (ibid, p.889).

The writings of these feminist scholars is unique, diverging from the rules of academic writing; they combine philosophical/ theoretical writing with personal writing, characterized as being

"free", flooded with meanings, lacking cohesion, heading in different directions, using different conflicting voices, with broken syntax and word games (see, for example, the writing of Irigaray, 1985; Anzaldua, 1987; Cixous, 1976; Wallach in Ratok , 1997; and Griffin,1978).

The topic of this study grew out of their unique writing; I saw in the attempts of women "to write their bodies" a contribution to social studies thought and research. This is a contribution coming from "within" – from inside their world, from their subjectivity, their reality and their being alive.

The research examined creative women's experience of their bodies; how is the body experienced / perceived? What relationship do they have with their bodies? Is their view of their bodies liberated to some degree from the hegemonic gaze on the female body, as it is reflected in western art and culture, and what characterizes this gaze? This experience of body is examined in the way it is translated into words; the participants were invited to correspond with the idea of ‘writing the body’ and to give this their own personal interpretations. Accordingly the study sought to test whether writing the body creates a "different" language, which escapes the bounds of the predominant phallocentric language.

I approached women to "write their bodies" under my own initiative as part of my research. Considering the experimental nature of writing of this kind, I was amazed at the level of response. A fascinating dialogue developed with some of the participants on the essence of writing the body while others immediately knew what was intended. I felt that with all of them, despite the obscurity, that the proposal elicited curiosity and a desire to participate, resonating in a familiar place, as if my approach had awakened a dormant bud. In order not to influence the degree of exposure that the women allowed themselves, and not to impinge upon the textual authenticity which the research sought to find, I encouraged the participants to write a "journal" addressed inwardly to their own selves and to free use of language which does not necessary follow any particular rules of syntax or style.

Authenticity and Experience as opposed to Words and Language

Reading the body-texts and discussing them raises certain questions associated with language and different aspects of its experience. I relate here to some subjective aspects of language and to some fundamental concepts which rise from them: "uniqueness", "true self", "authenticity", "personal language" – concepts related to writing body - texts which turn out to be elusive.²

Bollas (in Campbell, 2002) posits the existence of "true self" as a system of potential identities which seek to expand themselves through significant objects, one of which is language, through which the individual expresses herself. It is commonly assumed that language is sufficiently stable to be an object of mutual experience. However, within the boundaries of agreed upon,

prevailing conventions each person uses language in a unique, recognizable way. A "personal voice" is not found through silent monologues with one's own self, but through actions (speaking/ writing). However, it would appear that it is actually impossible to find "true self" by writing/speaking and one can only aspire to this end. Allocating words to entities entails distancing the person from the experience, so that language can only be authentic when, like in poetry, it presents its inability to reproduce the writer's / speaker’s world of the experience (Heidegger and Wittgenstein in Sampson, 1998; Sampson 1998; Pateman, 1998).

Do we record an experience without its verbal script? The possibility that language molds the experience in its own image makes the term "authenticity" superfluous in that people create themselves in various narratives (Sampson, 1998). The Post-Modernist approach reinforces this concept, regarding the self as a multitude of narratives. The creativity involved in forming subjectivity is expressed in the ability to produce more than one narrative or meaning without focusing on one single "truth" or "authenticity"(Campbell, 1998).

Various approaches to the relationship between experience and language may be identified: some consider that experience precedes language, others negate the hierarchy between the experience and its expression while others claim that the two interact. The traditional humanistic approach of Leavis based the value of a text on its proximity to experience or to real life (Campbell, 1998),³ as in the course of our development as human beings, the experience of our senses does indeed precede our acquisition of language as a mediator.⁴ This approach emphasizes the gulf between language and experience, since it assumes the existence of a chronological sequence endowing experience with a twofold priority of both value and chronology.

By contrast, Bion (in Charles, 2001), suggests a relationship of dependence and enrichment in his description of the transformative processes by which sensory experience becomes verbal thought. At the one extreme there is the experience as it is. The sensation is a primordial experience, which cannot be lessened by description, even though we continually attempt to describe it. The experience does not occur it just exists. At the other extreme, there is the abstraction, which connects the experience to generalized concepts. While Bion (ibid) did contrast these two modes of understanding, he also considered the complex and essential interaction between them: if experience does not underlie the abstraction, it is in itself, void. On the other hand, the ability to form abstractions enables the utilization and verbal communication of knowledge. Charles (2001), Ricoeur (in Campbell, 1998) and Campbell (1998) also emphasize the interacting dialogues between the experiential physical self and the secondary level of symbolic narrative; in the action of verbalizing experience as it happens lies "the experience as it was experienced" in a timeless way. At the same time the sensory records expand; the process of verbal abstraction recreates the pre-verbal experience, changing and improving it. This is a feedback process – from the body's experience to the abstract and back to the experience.

Within this process poetic language appears as a mediator between body and language: Prose is more strongly associated

with representing thoughts while poetry with its more visual imagery creates more sensuality and is therefore closer to corporeal experience. The use of imagery and poetic styles representing the unconscious may break the linearity of the plot and bring the body to the forefront (Campbell, 1998; Kristeva, 1987).

Writing the body as a text therefore involves overcoming obstacles and paradoxes; the challenge in prioritizing and giving words to the experience of the body as well as the challenge of making existing (masculine) language flexible and "molding" it to the body. However it appears that the greatest complexity lies in acknowledging that these obstacles are also "rooted" within us, women, as we are a the product of the culture within which we live. Yet, it is important to rise to the challenge which this kind of writing sets; being intent upon and experiencing writing the body as a text gives rise to a "different" type of writing, enabling a fresh look at the female body, at language and at the connections between them (for additional reading on writing and gender see Sar-Shalom, 2007).

What is writing the body as a text?

Ya'ara: "To write the body is like trying to fit a circle into a straight line, to fit volume into the two dimensional, the simultaneous into the sequential..."
Merav: (opening words): "Pure body-writing takes place before the letters join together into written words..." (after two pages of persistent attempts at putting her body into words she summarizes): it's lucky that I give up"
Gilly: "While going into details my thoughts wander off. Why do I have to give landmarks? Have I got lost?..."
Alma: "Nothing stays in my head when my body starts playing its tune...."
Hila: "...These lists about my body are more remarkable for what isn't on them....and perhaps won't ever be. All the hidden secrets, the great embarrassments, the shame, the prohibitions and the pleasures..."

These examples taken from the texts examined in the research relate to the paradox inherent to writing the body as a text. Marshall (1996) distinguishes between two concepts: "having a body" and "being a body". To her way of thought neither statement is exact. The only certainty relating to a body is that the body is something material. As such there is an intrinsic difficulty in conceptualizing it through language. The attempt to "write the body as a text" is a form of translation. "Translation is incomprehensible theoretically, but possible practically" (Ricoeur, 2006:39). Ricoeur (ibid) discusses the essential difficulties of translation and notes the "untranslatable", and the impossibility of finding the perfect fit between the source and target languages. However at the same time he emphasizes that in practice solutions can be found resolving this essential difficulty. According to Ricoeur a good translation can only seek to reach some equivalence of meaning and not to attain an identical text; the equivalence can be sought after and worked towards.

If translation within the realm of language (from one verbal language to another) is such a complex activity, how will translation fare from

one ontological realm to a completely different one – translating the (language of) body to a verbal language?

Kristeva (1987) suggests substituting the symbolic discourse with one characterized by the semiotic stage when communication between mother and infant is based on body language, or at least to dissect and "break into" the symbolic and change it from within.

Theoreticians dealing with feminine language are indeed calling for the development of a different language. However, they also point out that "feminine writing" cannot be defined as it cannot be theoretically delimited or encoded. The most notable feature of writing that avoids censoring the body is that it diverges from the boundaries of hegemonic phallocentric discourse and from binary systems of thought. For this reason in itself it cannot be defined, but must be practiced.⁵

For the purposes of this study the discussion focuses on the texts of writing the body in three areas: The body (as content), the language (as form) and the connection between the two.

The body (content)

Looking at the content of the texts suggested many themes: relations between mind and body; boundaries of the body; interior and exterior; bodies in time and bodies in space; mortal and immortal bodies; the absence of body; active and passive bodies; perception of the body as an object; perceiving the body to be falling apart and being joined back together again or being whole, amongst others. Below are a collection of sentences taken from the texts which demonstrate the wealth and variety of body experiences of the writers:

Flexible, breathing body/ I don't feel my body/ the body betrays/ the body loses its weight/ the body writes/ to shrink into one's body/ my body is so familiar and so new/ my body as a burden/ the body is the trumpet of the soul/ the body records a new map of pain each day/ the mystery and the magic of the body/ a tired body, on its way down, to the earth, to disintegrate/ tattooed body/ to leave the body/ my body is not a sexual object/ my body has many founts, flowing and drying/ I never took my body for granted/ the body represents us/ the body which now conducts a new dialogue with me/ to bring the head closer to the body/ I have a beautiful body/ the body lies defenseless, writing itself in a non spoken language/ the screwing body/ whoever touches my body is imprinted on it/ I am not inside my body/ my body is a poet, waxing lyrical/ my body is my soul's container/ my body rolls in dust/ my body is all I have/ a full body, capable, incorporating, inclusive/ I detach myself from my body/ the fear that the body will suddenly write itself in an unexpected way/ a body that is too rounded, takes up an unpleasant volume in space/ control over the body and its movement/ to search within the body and on its surface, besides the body and beyond it/ the body isn't real, only the spirit/ this one body is composite, layers, segments and compartments/ each bodily organ has its own experience and is steeped in memories/ the

body is mine and it is me/ I'm so happy I have a body/ I am once more less and less body/ perhaps the body is one enormous cosmic woman?

An in depth analysis of the texts indicates a very complex experience of body, which deviates entirely from the hegemonic narrow view of women's bodies; it also reveals bold creativity in the ways this experience of the body is expressed. The gaze on the female body turned out to be sober and complex; the body is experienced and perceived as being multi-faceted, fluid and changeable, a body which elicits and brings to the surface diverse substance and emotions, simultaneously embodying various different voices which may sometimes be contradictory; the body is the body-mind complex, relations with it are complex and paradoxical; it marks the boundary between inside and outside, but its own borders are not always defined and continuous. It is close and familiar, almost taken for granted, while at the same time distant and obscure (Sar-Shalom, 2007).

In addition, the writers' opinions of stereotypical myths concerning the female body were assessed, for example: the association of women with physicality and nature, the female body as a receptacle, the myth of the beautiful female body, and the female body as a sexual object. Topics which are considered taboo were also examined, things that are repressed or regarded as contemptible. These were revealed in the texts as mention of various bodily secretions, physiological activities and physical deformities (Kristeva in Ratock, 1997) and specific mention of female sexuality. The degree to which writers were forthright or subversive about each of these was assessed.⁶ Whether the writing of the research participants on these issues was implied or explicit, direct/open or ironic/ provocative, the research showed that it was always characterized by great sincerity, reflecting a high degree of awareness amongst the writers; they are aware not only of the complex experience of their bodies and of the prevalent hegemonic concepts, but also that their bodies are a juncture, a meeting point where their own personal inner experiences make contact with and confront the narrow external concepts. It is possible that the complexity of experiencing the body is a result of the juxtaposition and intersection of these two perspectives, with the body acting as a site wherein the external and internal, the public and private cannot be clearly separated. This type of writing enables the subversive act; the exposure of myths and stereotypes, revealing them as devoid and naked and enables a fresh look at them (Sar-Shalom, 2007).

Language (form)

In the balance of power between body and language, the body usually subordinates itself to language. When writing the body as a text there is an opportunity to enter into an opposite, unconventional, process of "subordinating" language to the body. This is a process which may introduce a greater flexibility into language. In a similar way to the unique writing of the theoreticians mentioned above, within the texts assessed for the research the rules of language become more flexible and "are broken". The texts were written in a variety of genres and literary styles. There were various mixtures of registers, through which the

writers, and consequently the readers, skip between languages and different worlds. This challenges linear organized writing or reading. The participants used various devices including writing that was not always coherent, which made use of language with a strong rhythmic base; deviations of style and grammar; broken syntax; tongue twisters and word games. Many of the texts lacked an accepted interior structure and their graphic design, how they were structured on the page, was different: illustrations were mixed in with the text; there were gaps and irregular spacing of letters and words, there were "dancing" lines, there was a lack, or a plethora, of punctuation; there was also a heavy use of question marks and ellipsis together with fractured and repeated words.

Some examples follow:

The lack of punctuation creates the experience of taking a long breath, which accelerates and contracts towards the end.

Ya'ara: "... body stain a written body physical body inscription
body getting physical with the inscription true to itself who
is it what is it?..."

On the other hand the pauses created by the multiple dots allow the reader to experience a kind of break in the flow of breathing and flow of consciousness, to stay with the image and sense it: Thelma: "...I started to breathe in and out like a bellows. I perspired. I undressed to take a shower. I stood naked in front of the mirror. I hadn't done that for years."

The repeated usage of ellipsis creates different effects; it can hint at areas of uncertainty, hesitancy or stuttering, silence or silencing of the body's experience, areas which are absent in language (Ben-Naphtali, 2001).

The use of ellipsis may also intensify the physical experience, as it allows a pause and a lengthening of the breath, so inviting the reader to join in with the sensations of the writer:

Gilli: "...extend my neck and ventilate my vertebrae...and if it is arrogance...I choose to stop. It's not that I don't like to conduct myself with arrogance and to flap my hair and emphasize my curves..."

In the following example a unique morphology is created (the way in which the words are organized, the spaces between them, the emphasized words) a kind of visual dance which becomes a movement inwards:

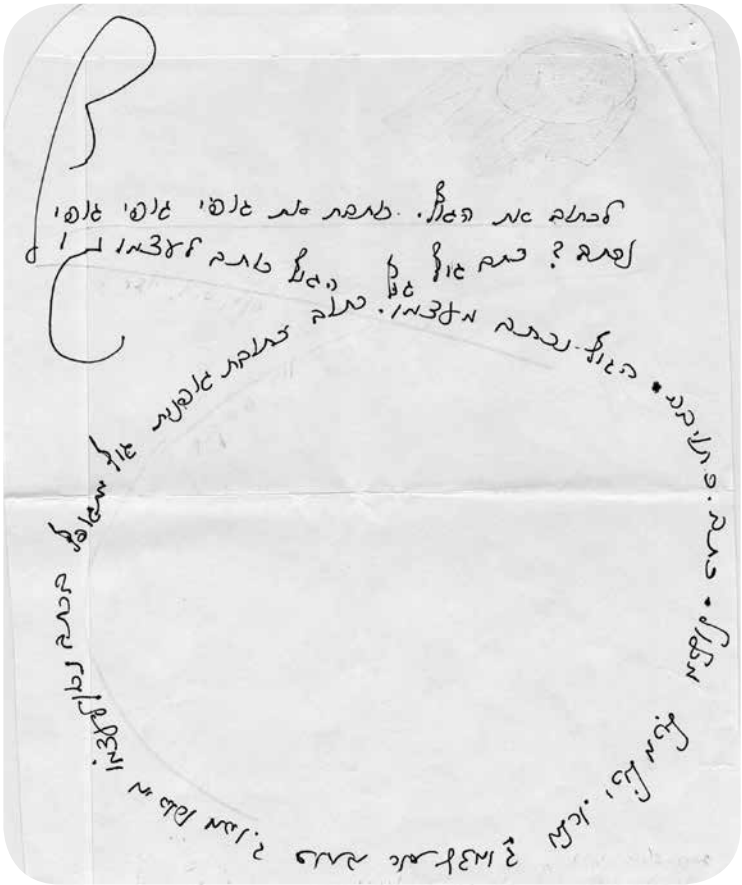
Adi: "My body swells and shrinks like a balloon

swells - shrinks / swells - shrinks
swells
swells
It hurts!
I am grey..."

These features are characteristics of associative writing, where the inner censors are diminished. They imply the writers' consent to linger in the hazy area of "no words" and attest to the degree of linguistic freedom they grant themselves when they come to

express this area. The unique graphic form apparently stems from the difficulty to give words to the body, but the choice to publically expose the nakedness (deficiencies) of language and to emphasize them is perhaps a way of overcoming the paradox. The result is a text that "dances", which invites a reading experience which physically influences the reader and creates an inwards movement. In this way the writing makes the body present, the body of the writer and the body of the reader (Sar-Shalom, 2007).

A good example of this can be seen in Yaara's text:



It is not only that the text "dances" on the pages, it also makes the reader dance, making him or her move, to turn the page around or to turn their head.

Body and Language – Connections

In some of the texts interesting attempts to deal with the paradox of writing the body as a text were discovered; in the following example the attempt to translate the feeling of the body into words takes an opposite direction: instead of forcibly subduing the body into language, the writer "leaves the body in its place" and lets the words come and enter into it. She chooses a familiar verbal expression, but instead of dealing with its meaning she tests how the words are experienced in their simplicity, in her body: Mika: "...'pure gold' for example, to feel 'pure gold' what should I feel first, the hardness or the shining or the potential to be shining?..."

The body is perceived here to be the essence which is influenced not only by physical stimuli but also by abstract mental stimuli.

That is to say, an essence that is not complete and solid, but is open and fluid, always changing (Grosz, 1994). This way of perceiving the body challenges the dichotomy separating mind from body.

In the following example the body and mind connection is clearly shown, and feelings are translated into body parts and organs.

Michaela: "...the path of my agonies that I thought:
Abandoning love, betrayal, expulsion and loneliness
Is now revealed as: finger, hand, arm, shoulder
And neck, that is all".

Sometimes even thoughts which are associated with rationality are translated into bodily sensations:

Gilli: "...Inside all of this the heart contracts and takes me to the starting point of thoughts...from there it supports and sometimes even pushes them, to carry on drifting onwards, at the speed of the blood flow and so are born, over and over and over again, thoughts which go out journeying through my arteries...and a thought floats and rises and bursts like a bubble...I feel my body less when I start describing my methods. The description has a purpose and the purpose makes me forget myself for the moment..."

Who is the "self" mentioned here that is in danger of being forgotten? Who is the "I" and who is the body? Who is describing the methods? So at the end of her words, the writer returns the discussion of the meeting between body and language to the starting point, to the paradox.

Improvisation in Dance and Language

Improvisation became accepted both as a practice exercise and as a performance art with the emergence of the post-modern dance which began to develop in the United States at the end of the 1950s.⁷ This movement brought with it fundamentally new ideas regarding the art of dance. Many of these were developed by Merce Cunningham. His contribution to the innovation of language, both of dance-movement and of performance-art was highly significant.⁸ In the context of this paper I will mention the innovations which correspond with the qualities which writing the body as a text creates: through his work he challenged linearity, the coherent and harmonious form, creating gaps in the continuity of stage productions, which invite active spectatorship. In addition, his interest in the raw materials of the medium itself (the human body moving in space and time), and his equal attention to all of the body's limbs made the dancer's body present in innovative ways. Cunningham's innovations were adopted and developed by dancers and choreographers following on from him, members of the Judson Church Dance Theatre in New York and later on members of the Grand Union improvisational group.⁹ These latter groups took rule breaking further, taking the blurring of boundaries and lack of coherence into other aspects; the use of improvisation spread, moving out of the studio appearing also on the stage, the significance of the performance and the presence of the dancer moved to the forefront.¹⁰

The development of improvisation and of different approaches of Body-Work¹¹ broadened the range of experience of and research into the corporeal. Along with this trend which was developing from the field the need arose to give words to the experience

of the body. Many people associated with post-modern dance also deal with speaking / writing the body which experiences and moves, including many women who are prominent in the experimental groups mentioned above.¹² In the context of this paper Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, Deborah Hay, Trisha Brown, Eva Karczag, Lisa Nelson, and Nancy Stark-Smith are worthy of mention amongst others.¹³

These women are active to the present day as teachers, choreographers and writers. Most work with improvisation either as a performance art or in tuition. They combine with this speaking / writing the body in different ways; some of them call explicitly for writing / speaking the body, while for others this is expressed more indirectly, between the lines, in interviews, in papers or books they have written, or through the way they use language in their workshops.

Stark-Smith (2003) an improvisational performer and editor of the journal *Contact Quaterly*¹⁴ identifies the need existing within the field of improvisation for verbal dialogue about work methods; she regards this journal as a kind of moving mouth, whose form is constantly changing, a mouth speaking about the experience of working with improvisation. She talks about the great pleasure derived from the sensuality of the written word and its potential to transfer the experience of dance onto the page. Words are perceived by Stark-Smith as an almost physical essence, and in this way she supersedes the dichotomy dividing body and language which casts them as opposing each other.

This approach corresponds with the trend of expanding the written discussion on varied aspects of dance and of the body, including social, political and cultural aspects, as the focus of discussions and studies. These trends, existing in both arenas – of dance and of academic research, contribute to an accumulation of body-knowledge; with insights, thoughts and new hypotheses being brought up. So that this body-knowledge will become a body of knowledge, a theoretical field that can be discussed, taught and researched – language is needed. However Steve Paxton (2003) a member of the Judson Church group and the developer of Contact Improvisation¹⁵, claims that paradoxically, this accumulation of knowledge on the body brings increasing difficulty in describing the corporeal and finding fitting language for it: "...it is no longer easy to describe the corporeal. It is in fact getting more difficult. We now know too much, or think we do; the corporeal seems to be a complexity of social, physical, geometric, glandular, political, intimate and personal information that is not easily renderable" (Paxton, 2003:175).

Verbal Directions as a Springboard, Anchor and Compass

Nativ (2010) explains that dance students are directed by the use of movement and words which move from the mouth of the teacher to the bodies of the students. The words used interactively between the teacher and students are termed "somatic codes" (Baron Cohen in Nativ 2010); they become familiar patterns which encode a certain practice in the body on the one hand, while enabling a reactivation within a process of independent learning on the other

hand. However, this is not a process of learning words. The learning occurs when the words trigger something in the moving body. Hilleli-Assa (2001) explains that being attentive to words in dance classes influences perceptions and bodily sensations and enables a space for personal investigation. She terms this process "discovery learning" which she contrasts with "imitation learning": while in the latter form the teacher was copied without allowing for personal expression by the student, in "discovery learning" there is space for searching and self discovery, with the attention not only being developed in an outwards direction, but also inwardly, which encourages work with awareness.

In traditional teaching of dance techniques (classical ballet and different types of modern dance) the emphasis was placed on imitating an external model of movement. This model, demonstrated by the teacher, symbolizes the "correct" and the ideal. The differences between the ideal and the movements existing in reality are visualized in the students' reflections in the mirror which tangibly demonstrate mistakes or "distortions". Gradually this ideal corporeal model is internalized by the students, so that it lives and acts even without the presence of the teacher or the mirror. In addition to this model, verbal instructions are also given during the practice; for example the accepted French terms: "plié" – to bend the knees; "piqué" – to stab. Instructions may also be given in the class's colloquial language (to stretch, to turn, to touch). Either way, these words are a kind of accepted code which are intended to prompt performance and not an investigation or interpretation. They may be called "closed" statements in that they are clear at the level of the action and at the level of implementation. Other words commonly used in these classes are "more" and "less", words which measure and mark progress towards the destination. The destination is acquiring a technique, internalizing it, perfecting it and owning it. However this process may be seen in an opposite way: the body must "deliver", it must be subdued and molded into the required forms, appropriated and overcome by the technique.

The aims are different in improvisation classes: extending the language of movement by finding unique personal solutions and expressing the individual by developing a "personal language". To these ends there is an investigatory process exploring the possibilities of movement and its qualities. The words "must", "correct" and "incorrect" are replaced by the words "it's possible" and "let's try". The emphasis on imitating an external model and attaining predetermined ideal results is exchanged for an emphasis on sensing and experiencing the moving body, within which the investigation is taking place. Within this process of guidance there is less demonstration by the teacher, with this being replaced by a more extensive use of verbal instructions.¹⁶

The verbal instructions in improvisation lessons play several roles: they serve as starting points for the movement activities, as a connection between external and internal space, a springboard into the world of experience (sensual, emotional, conceptual) of the improvisers and an anchor or compass if they go astray. For the purposes of this paper I propose to distinguish between two types of statements: those which are "closed" – with clear instructions and those which are "open" the instructions within

which can be given variable personal interpretations.¹⁷ Both types of statements may be used in improvisation classes. As with other aspects of teaching the use of "closed" or "open" statements is sometimes aware and subject to the instructor's choice and sometimes unaware.

The Significance of "Closed" Statements in Improvisation Classes

"Closed" statements may have a place in movement and dance: words indicate limbs and organs, body systems, senses or aspects of space, time and qualities of movement. They can also belong to the world beyond movement: images from different areas of life relating to objects, actions, textures, colors etc. Working with words in improvisation classes allows a range of personal movement interpretations, as the word is not directed to a single element of movement, but simultaneously applies to both the form and content (what is done and how it's done). Language relies on shared human experience, but the meanings of words vary from person to person (Wittgenstein in Sampson 1998). The word "food" for example is a "closed" statement, but it is charged with many different emotional associations. It may be connected with pleasure and lust, but also with restraint. Its interpretation through movement may also vary. Movements may be from the outside going inwards (taking food into the body) or the movement may originate from the inside and travel outwards (rejection / vomiting) (Naharin, 2000). "Closed" words used in teaching various dance techniques ("to fold", "to twist"), may also be used in improvisation exercises, but in this case their meanings are different; they are not a code for a particular action, but are a bridge to the immediate personal experience of the person moving; "how does the bend feel?" or going one step further "how does it feel to me at this moment?" Thus, even when the instructions are "closed" they allow space for interpretation, and enable listening and personal exploration which makes the body undergoing the experience present in the here and now. This kind of practice enables constantly changing movement in a constantly changing body, which is never fixed on one sensation or one solution.

Images, Similes and Metaphors enable an Intermediate Interpretive Space

"...to taste the floor with the sole of your foot / the body like seaweed in water / the spinal vertebrae like beads thread on a string / to move as if your body is an eye, vibrating, full of fluid, sensitive.../ to consume the space..."¹⁸ The use of images, similes and metaphors like these mixing semantic fields and joining different areas in an unusual way, may inspire new body experiences, and to bring the exploration beyond dealing with pure kinesthetics, inviting a mental and emotional presence, which is expressed in unique qualities of movement.¹⁹

Paxton (2003) explains why he chooses to use images when practicing improvisation: "In recognizing that we do not begin to move from zero, that we first have a desire or image to launch the system into action,

I decided that I had to work in the area of images, though cautiously..." (Paxton, 2003:176).

Images do not only serve as a trigger to launch the improvisation, as Paxton describes. They are also a result of it, which continues it and carries it forwards; Gere (2003) emphasizes in this context the unique quality of improvisation: "More than any other aspect of contemporary dance, improvisation calls forth images of a state beyond language, where images are plumbed from the depth of the human psyche, and where words do not suffice" (Gere, 2003: xiii). Rorty (1989) singles out the metaphoric within the field of language and argues that the distinction between literal and metaphorical is not a distinction between two kinds of meaning or interpretation, but is rather a distinction between familiar and unfamiliar use of words. Metaphors have neither cognitive content nor a particular message that the speaker wishes to convey or which the commentator must interpret. Therefore introducing a metaphor into a conversation is like breaking its flow in order to do something "else", which is not connected with conveying a message. These concepts can be applied to the world of dance; verbal metaphors entering into the studio can similarly break the ongoing flow of movement. The metaphor is not intended to convey a particular message but to serve as a catalyst in reaching areas which enable a more direct contact with the exposed experience. Actually words are used to arrive at what lies beyond them. Whether the image is taken from inside or outside of the world of movement, it always is addressed to the body, to the senses.²⁰ Karczag tries to distinguish between "image" and "sensation": "When I improvise I tend to let the physicality carry me along, so I am working less with images than with sensation... though sensation is also an image. Certain feelings or pictures or images will come up. A gesture will bring some kind of image with it." (From an interview with Karczag Holland, 1992).

In her experience the difference between image and sensation is blurred; attentive listening is inherent to the process of improvisation, bringing awareness to the different body limbs, opening up new areas for investigation, bringing to the surface feelings and images which intermingle and nurture each other. In work with images mind – body relations are in perpetual motion. Usually an image is thrown into the workspace by the instructor by means of words, or it is discovered in the process of individual practices (as with Karczag's description). Either way, in order to strengthen the image the instructor and the improvisers repeat it over to themselves, imagining it, feeling it. The instructor (and the experienced improviser) is often required to continue suggesting additional images in accordance with the situation. This task requires being present "internally" and "externally" at the same time, offering an opportunity to deal with the inevitable difficulty and frustration inherent to translating movement into words (Naharin, 2000).

In practice two actions are taking place simultaneously: the image "propels" the body while the body's movements "project" the verbal images which steadily multiply; the body's movements and thought processes nurture each other, giving rise to new qualities of movements and images.

The following passage gives an example of this type of mutual nurturing: the improvisers are asked to choose a limb and focus on the feelings or images that it awakens. They then are asked to let that limb "speak", to take the initiative, to lead the body in space and in quality while they continue "interviewing" it at any given moment. In the next stage those improvising are asked to write a letter in the name of the limb. Now the limb is "speaking" in words on paper; it is reporting, asking, contemplating, corresponding with another limb...the verbal text which is created serves as a stimulus for a new session of movements in various ways: the use of significant words from the text are a stimulus for movement; the texts are exchanged between the participants; the texts are used as a soundtrack for the movements etc. The mutual nurturing and feedback take place on two levels: between movement and language and between the instructor and those going through the experience; the instructor makes suggestions and the improvisers bring their own images from their inner worlds. This dual dialogue enables an interpretive space. As will be shown in the examples in the next section, these spaces actually grow when the directions are more open, to the point where they sometimes are hazy and ambiguous.

"Open" statements and hazy directions as intermediate spaces

Verbal instructions in improvisation classes are often hazy or filled with contradictions and they may be termed "very open statements" or "gaping statements".An improvisation workshop which I observed started with a very open personal warm up, and was accompanied by the following instructions:

...relax, feel comfortable, but also aware...what am I connecting with? (The instructor adds suggestions such as: space, limbs, breath, time)...do nothing, only flow, be open, stay – until the movement happens by itself, work in the stillness within the movement, don't push anything, give yourselves the opportunity, like in the moments before falling asleep or waking up...let this flowing continue and sometimes let it carry you..use the floor, the air – as a partner that you can trust...don't manage the flow, let it be...flow like a river – this is one river, it's not coming and going, it just flows onwards... the quality of nothingness...try to open your skin to the space...you only have to follow...open your presence...the dance is inside. Move on the inside...²¹

(From observing an improvisation workshop conducted by Emmanuel Grivet from France, part of the "Impulse" festival for improvisation, Kiryat Anavim: August 2009).

The directions are very open and even vague, but the participants are active; it seems that they move out of curiosity and interest. I argue that this personal exploration is made possible precisely because of the use of "gaping instructions"; the gap in the instruction is filled with the personal movement content of each participant. As a dance improviser and a teacher of improvisation I am aware, in my own body and in the movement of my students, of this fascinating phenomenon; at this strange meeting point between body and language an intermediate space opened up, within which each layer enriched the other ones. Furthermore, it appears that this meeting becomes more productive precisely when both

elements - language and body – are in a somewhat fluid state of awareness and of searching. The use of obscure directives may be sub-conscious. It is possible that it is conscious and derives from acceptance of the limitations of language. However many of those involved in teaching improvisation declare that they make a conscious choice to use obscure language (Nativ, 2010). This method gives those using it an interpretative agency for creating meaning; the obscure instructions are not in terms of "route directions" or landmarks, they are not intended to help the students find one uniform way, but are intended to help find ways of searching; searching for their own language, finding their own way, one could say searching for and consolidating their own identity.²²

Language as Creating Presence in Improvisation

"Improvisation is the practice of being present"²³ (Zapora, 1996:25). The word present has two similar but not identical meanings: "being present" and "present tense". In improvisation these two meanings are combined; improvisation essentially focuses on the immediate response to various stimuli, with the emphasis being placed on the person moving being present in their experience of the "here and now" (the present).²⁴

Nativ characterizes improvisation as a "state of uncertainty which creates accumulating moments of authentic self discovery" (Nativ, 2010:142). This uncertainty, by nature also entails a sense of lack of control. These areas of uncertainty and of being out of control, which are renewed from moment to moment, drive the improvisation forwards and can be imagined as the gaps between one "known" to the next. The work inside these gaps intensifies the meetings between the different levels, involves and challenges various parts of the participants' personalities. "...For it is while improvising that the body's intelligence manifests itself most ineluctably, and that the fast-moving, agile mind becomes a necessity. The body thinks. The mind dances. Thought and movement, words and momentum, spiral around one another" (Gere, 2003: xiv). The order of the words in this quote illustrates how thought and movement, the conscious mind and the body are enmeshed together during improvisation. The terms characterizing the two dichotomous fields appear in mixed couplets: "The body's intelligence", "agile mind", "the body thinks", "the mind dances". The practice of improvisation in this way allows a dynamic meeting, constantly changing and being reformed, between the moving body and words, images and obscure ideas which demand conscious mental activity together with physical kinesthetic and sensory activity. At the same time one dimension translates / interprets the other, with both mutually enhancing each other. This multi-dimensional activity summons complex and rich mind-body awareness.²⁵

It is this alert presence that those engaging in improvisation aspire towards, with this applying both to improvisation in the studio and to improvisation as a kind of performance art.²⁶ In improvisation the gap between practice and performance is reduced as

in both cases the purpose – making the moment present – is identical; practicing improvisation entails bringing dealing with the uncertain out into the open, or in other words – physically making uncertainty present through movement. When this wished for presence is attained, it is obvious not only to the performer but also to the observer; presence is so clear that it radiates from the moving body and is experienced in the body of the observer, being perceived visually and by the other senses and bodily sensations. These are critical moments in the relations being forged between the dancer and the observer, which express the essence of the art and its role as a form of communication.

What is the connection between the use of unclear instructions and the presence of the moving body? What words are used in order to summon presence? It would seem that it is difficult to describe and explain this in words. Attempts made by teachers and their students to talk about this "presence" are somewhat inarticulate; the expressions used are confusing, sounding judgmental with internal contradictions: "You were / were not there" (where?), "She has / doesn't have it" (what?), "I was / wasn't connected" (to what?). The dancer and choreographer Deborah Hay, ²⁷ who focuses on "Performance Skills" and on practicing "stage presence" claims that the way to keep the dance fresh and to maintain presence is by staying alert and curious; the structure of the dance is only a platform for the performer's curiosity. The changing perception of the dancer is the dance. To achieve this we have to identify in advance traps we must avoid – the same worn out patterns of movement / thought which no longer produce fresh presence, which is the very heart of the improvisational performance.

In order to escape from these traps we have to trick ourselves over and over again. Hay does this by chanting a verbal mantra with an obscure non-linear meaning. Here are some examples:

- Invite each cell of your body being seen, whole and changing at once, all the time.
- The potential of each cell in the body to dialogue with the unknown, and to chose for it again and again.
- Each cell is experiencing "Aha-Nada" at once.

(This last mantra expresses that each cell in the body experiences being discovered and being given up at the same time, or life and death at the same time, what indeed takes place in our bodies in every given moment.)

(From my personal notebook, from the workshop led by Hay, Holland, March 1994).

The practice usually starts with a kind of meditation using the verbal mantra, activity which has as little as possible connection to form, with the movement following later. Even though the instructions Hay gives are obtuse, the images and paradoxes bypass dichotomies appearing in the previous examples. They are an intriguing starting point for work and produce a unique quality of movement and body-mind presence. The use of flexible language, rich in images and paradoxes, which could also be called "dancing" language, is an effective practice for making body-mind present. It typifies both women practicing improvisation and those writing bodies as a text.

Gaps and Lacunae in Language and Improvisation

What is the connection between the efforts of women attempting to write their bodies, who tried to make their bodies present as a written text and the efforts of those practicing improvisation to stay inside their bodies in new ways, giving it an interpretive space and attaining a fuller presence? It could have been possible to assume that the task of making the body present would be simpler for those who dance, as the body, by its nature, is present in time and space. Why, then, is this "presence" also not simple for them to achieve? Is it possible that the difficulty of attaining this is connected, amongst other things, to the difficulty in conceptualizing it? It would appear that in experiencing "presence" in dance as for writing the body (as a text), there is a kind of peak of complexity in the mind-body relations, a multifaceted simultaneous complex, of body-intelligence, which language, or at least everyday language, cannot meet. All aspects of language including content, structure and form must be made more flexible to meet this end.

At this point it is important to note: while writing the body in a text offers up the existence of the body in the literary domain, for those working with improvisation the world of words is a generative tool in the body, so the words act on and within the corporeal. The directions of the actions are different, but both groups make use of words to extend a language: verbal or physical. One interesting tool used for extending language, which women in both groups used, is emphasizing the missing elements of that language (verbal or physical).

In the texts of the women writing their bodies, the difficulty of putting the body into words often caused them to look for alternative words; they made extensive use of the word "like" or of imprecise words such as the " thing which", "this thing", "the thingamajig". In addition there was heavy usage of the word "not" indicating an attempt, possibly a desperate one, to express by the negative something there were no words for. Shelley: "This 'thing' which felt like something bitter, like cold, like paralysed, silent, not angry, not crying, not breathing, not cold, not hot, not no, not yes..."

Alternative words, as with graphic spaces between the words, signify a kind of empty space, "black holes" in the fabric of language, areas which language does not succeed in touching. Alongside this, terminology indicating voids is often used in improvisation (using the word "not"/don't and directions like "do nothing". (see examples in the quote on p. 71 under the the heading "'Open' statements and hazy directions as intermediate spaces"). Ben Naphtali (2001) refers to the public discourse illustrating the absence of women's language within it. Being articulate, tailored and disciplined this public discourse rejects that which is hesitant, stumbles and stutters, containing embarrassment, voids and fissures. She questions the degree of authenticity and presence of the speaker in public discourse and wonders whether the possibility and the will exist to locate those areas of the unknown, of the "loss of self". Improvisation includes a stubborn, conscious and deliberate search for these areas; areas lacking fluency of physical

movement, gaps between one familiar and another, "empty places" – all of these are different ways of naming the sought after territory, which will place the work at the edges of the unknown, giving the improvisation its vitality.

"Where you are when you don't know where you are is one of the most precious spots offered by improvisation...I call this place the Gap...It is through the medium of these gaps – this momentary suspension of reference point – that comes the unexpected and much sought after 'original' material. It is "original" because its origin is in the current moment and because it comes from outside of our usual frame of reference (Stark-Smith at Eluned, 2000:22-23).

Occupying these gaps may be puzzling and confusing, but ongoing experience gradually brings confidence, to the point where the dancer may even search out these spaces where the dancer is most sensitive and available, from where new perceptions arise along with surprising and fresh movement (ibid).

The search for empty spaces, a kind of "tabula rasa" or reset of the body-mind tool, can also be found in the words of the theoreticians who deal with writing the body, according to Minh-ha, writing the body involves an emptying out: "writing myself into existence also means emptying of all that I can empty out - all that constitutes Old Spontaneous / Premeditated Me" (Minh-ha, 1989:259).

Cixous adds to this asking: How do you write in white ink (which symbolizes for her mothers' milk and the pre-linguistic stage of language) on white paper (which is new, empty and clean of "masculine language")? (Ginsburg, 2001).

However Mikhail Bakhtin (ibid) argued that every dialogue occurs in a linguistic environment and not in an empty space. Every piece of speech or writing comes into being with simultaneous reference to what has already been said / written and to what will be said / written in response. Following on from Bakhtin, Ginsburg (ibid) assumes that it is impossible to escape into a void that is not inhabited by language.

In the realm of dance, discourse (here in the form of movement-languages and body-images which have been internalized over the years through different techniques and styles) also has great influence, and here too the way to that same "empty" place is not simple. Many dancers and choreographers talk about this difficulty, emphasizing the need to "erase" what has already been learnt and incorporated in the body –" to un-do" or "to un-learn", to find new ways and motivations for movement and creativity. In this context of "erasing the unknown" and activating a "reset" of the mind-body system, many artists reiterate the importance of work in stillness (the absence of external movement).

(From interviews in Holland with Simone Forti, November 1991; Deborah Hay, July 1992; Eva Karczag, March 1992; Benoit Lachambre, March 1992).²⁸

Similar to the emphasis on the absence of language, a kind of absence can be seen in the work in stillness, a void between movements which creates a space for listening, presence and investigation.

Touching and staying within "empty" spaces, therefore characterizes the women in both arenas: those writing their bodies are forced into revealing the "holes" in the fabric of verbal

language, while they struggle to use them to describe corporeal experience. The dance artists have a double struggle: they need to use the "empty" areas in verbal language in order to arrive at a full physical presence, and when they reach this they have to struggle once more with the field of verbal language in order to conceptualize this physical presence which they have attained, to refine it and be able to teach it. Both of the groups meet at the edge of the same abyss: the abyss of what is missing, the missing language whether it is verbal or physical. Whether staying in these unstable areas is by choice or not, they are there, present in the gaping empty spaces between the signifying words and the known movements, illuminating and processing them. I claim that the absence of language symbolically represents the sought after place, the void; the practice of conceptualization in the context of the moving, experiencing body enables close contact with those "empty" places and serves as a means of renewal of both languages: that of words and that of movement.

Discussion

Dealing with the paradoxical meeting place between body and language, the attempt to make the body present and the willingness to "fall into black holes" of the unknown are therefore the common ground between the women in the two different arenas: those dealing with improvisation and those writing their bodies. I will try to examine several social aspects of the significance of these commonalities.

Inner Language and Public Discourse – Building Bridges

For the women in both groups dealing with the gaps between language and corporeal experience was significant not only from the perspective of linguistic innovation and vitality but also for social reasons. Despite the high level of paradox involved it is impossible to ignore the benefits harvested from the practice of writing the body; it without a doubt is a source of empowerment for those attempting it, as it brings them in touch with their feminine strengths. Furthermore, through this experience both language and the feminine body, two areas which women have been kept away from, gain a renewed point of meeting; the body which becomes the focus of the writing, "pulls" the language and "shapes" it to itself. In this way an active process of writing (and reading) occurs which makes the body present and brings it to the forefront of the discussion. If the concept of the body commonly held in western society is taken into consideration, then these actions have an element of daring and liberation (Sar-Shalom, 2007).

The body which is revealed in the texts written by the women writing their bodies is not characterized by the commonly accepted dichotomies: Body-mind, inside-outside, public-personal, form-content. In writing of this kind, when the fabric of the words expresses the fabric of body and mind, the form and content are intertwined. The way in which body and language meet empowers and emphasizes those very themes which appear in both arenas; both the experience of the body, and that of the language which expresses it are revealed as being layered,

multi-faceted, intertwined with each other. It would appear that these qualities come to light precisely because of the paradoxical aspects of writing the body (ibid).

Also within the field of improvisation there is increasing interest in the gaps between body and language beyond the realms of teaching and art; improvisation artists write, are interviewed and publish so that knowledge about the body will become a body of knowledge that is accessible to a wider audience. Deborah Hay emphasizes this arguing that writing by dancers is a kind of mission bearing cultural and social responsibility: *We keep saying: because we dance we don't have to write...We have got to be able to amass a volume of evidence, of what it is to inhabit the physical body, in a way that arouses the greater population, because we are such a bodiless culture. Dancers are prime for this. We spend so much time with our attention on it [the body], we have to find personal and vital ways of articulating what it is to inhabit the body, so people can begin to recognize that they have bodies and that they are fantastic and our greatest resources. Who would be better than dancers to start talking about this?* (From an interview with Deborah Hay, Holland: July 1992).

Instead of trying to subordinate the language of the body to the dominant academic language, Hay proposes to find "personal and vital ways of articulating what it is to inhabit the body" and to bring them to the public to give it something valuable which it is lacking, which it has forgotten (ibid). Bakhtin (in Ginsburg, 2001) discusses the social forces which act within living language underlining the problematic aspects of language from the point of view of marginal groups and weak sectors within society, including women.²⁹

Cixous (1976) concentrates on the aspect of gender arguing that it is within the power of writing to bring women into history, since it is through writing that women will leave their mark on written and spoken language. This could explain the high level of responsiveness of women invited to take part in the research "writing their bodies"; they received what was for them a tempting invitation to bring their experience of their body and their femininity to language, and in this way to gain for themselves a place within that language. Women dancers in general and those working with instruction and improvisation in particular may be regarded as a doubly marginal group. First of all – they are women, secondly – they are working within areas that are perceived as being feminine – the corporeal and teaching (Ophir, 2012). Being involved with improvisation intensifies their otherness, their strangeness or foreignness, because of the obscure areas within which improvisation operates.³⁰ In this way the feminine, the corporeal and the obscure all meet together, which are all already associated with the 'other' and the inferior in western culture. The women writing their bodies and those practicing improvisation belong to different cultural arenas, having different means and possibilities available to them. However in both groups the use of the written word is a subversive act, which validates the personal and distinct single experience and immortalizes the actions of the female body as a kind of history.

Kneading the paradox with your hands

The call made by feminist theoreticians to write the female body is a kind of demand for acknowledgement of feminine physicality as a source of knowledge and power, which therefore is an invitation to social struggle. Although it is based on scholarly research and thought, with reasoned theoretical arguments, in between the lines of their unique writing there is a sense of urgency, almost a physical impulse. I found a similar tone amongst the women writing their bodies: sensuality wafts through the content of these written texts and through the way in which they immediately and joyfully rose to the challenge of this puzzling task of writing their bodies, as if they were answering an impulse.

As stated above, for the dance artists the importance of speaking or writing their bodies is primarily interpreted as a means to impel the creative process, to perfect the body as an instrument of expression. Furthermore, it is my impression that there is also an urge amongst them; a tangible need of the body-mind to communicate itself, to be understood, perceived, to be revealed not only as a form of artistic expression, but also as an arena of dialogue; they are not satisfied only with their dance activities and do not relinquish the verbal articulation of their work with the dancing body, which apart from being a means for expanding the vocabulary of movement also has a wider role in bringing the body into language, academia and culture. So it appears that in both arenas there is a desire or an urge, together with an acknowledgement of the importance of bringing this desire into language, into the public social domain. The women in both realms therefore confront the paradox in a practical way; through their actions they combine areas which appear to be antithetical; investigating and processing the tension between the two opposing poles. It could be said that they "knead this tension with their hands" bringing it present into the world.

What is the nature of the relationship between the practical engagement with dichotomies and the tendency to remain in areas of uncertainty? It is possible that active involvement with polarity which is built in such a way that two elements which stand divided and opposed to each other, with a chasm between them, necessitates "falling" into that chasm. The work within these tension filled gaps, while making use of enigmatic practices which cannot be explained theoretically, enables a deconstruction and exposure of the deeply rooted cultural dichotomy and enables a dialogue between the poles; between body and language, between body and mind, between external and internal views of the female body, between the moving bodies – that which is observed and that which is experienced on the inside, between verbal and movement languages and between feminine / personal and the prevailing/ dominant language.

This kind of mapping which attempts to put movement or experience into words or to move words within the body, includes within its own process of description the internal paradox from which it is made. Maya Bezarano (2009) describes this well in the opening words of her poem:³¹

To write about dance
Is like
Wallpapering the sea.

End notes

¹The work examines the transitions between experience and verbal expression, dealing with interpretations of the corporeal experience in words and interpretation of the texts, by the researcher elucidating the perception of female body and language and the extent to which they digress from the hegemonic discourse. In the study texts written by 24 women were examined and analyzed; about half of these women are involved in dance and movement with the others involved in different arts. Their ages ranged from 26-70 coming from different nationalities, religions and ethnic backgrounds. For more details see Sar-Shalom, 2007.

²As is demonstrated further down, these terms are commonplace in the dance scene, improvisation instruction, choreography and dance critiques.

³As opposed to the later structuralism based on the linguistic theories of De Saussure and Levi-Strauss, which focused on the inner linguistic system of the text, closed off from history (Campbell, 1998).

⁴Bolas (in Campbell,1998), Bion (In Charles, 2001) and Charles (2001), who relate to the psychological aspects of the relationship between experience and language, emphasize the role of the early bond between mother and baby in the formation of these relationships.

⁵For more on masculine and feminine language, existing and innovative language see Irigaray, 1985; Ben Naphtali, 2001; Ginsburg, 2001; Bakhtin and Lubin in Ginsburg, 2001; Cixous, 1976; Wittgenstein in Sampson, 2002; Shacham, 2001; Rich, 1978; Marshall, 1996 and Min-ha, 1989.

⁶The degree of daring and subversion was assessed in relation to the hegemonic view of the female body as it is reflected in western art and culture. For further discussion see the reference list of Sar-Shalom, 2007.

⁷It is interesting to note that in this period theorists mentioned earlier in the paper begin to call for the female body to be written.

⁸Cunningham rebelled against the modern expressive dance of Martha Graham, breaking through into new methods and changing the very essence of dance; he liberated dance from narrative and from the traditional dependence on music, and rejected the idea that every dance has a define start, middle and end. Instead of this, his work was deliberately fragmented by breaking up predictable sequences, a dispersion of the dominance of center stage and use of random methods as a strategy for making aesthetic decisions. Cunningham was called "the father of post-modernism", even though his classification as a modern or post-modern artist is controversial among historians and dance critics (Banes, 2011; Jeanne Cohen, 1992; Copeland, 2004).

⁹The Judson Church Union – an informal experimental and protest group of dancers and artists, which performed in Judson Church in New York from 1962 to 1964. The members of this

group are considered to be the founders of post modern dance. Its importance in the history of modern dance was mainly in the creation of a new atmosphere, which opened doors to new directions and in the leading to of a deluge of creativity in the world of dance. The Grand Union was an improvisational dance group working from 1970 to 1976. Many of the dancers had been previously involved in Judson Church (Banes, 2011; Jeanne Cohen, 1992; Burt, 2006).

¹⁰The members of Judson Church wanted to challenge the traditional ways of performing breaking the mold in different ways: where events take place, the use of backdrops, the roles and relations between the sexes, also redefining the relations between the dancers and the audience. They regarded Cunningham's work as being open stage discussions on the nature and essence of dance and continued "discussing" these themes in their works (Banes, 2011; Jeanne Cohen, 1992; Copeland, 2004; Burt, 2006).

¹¹Bodywork is a term used in alternative medicine to describe any therapeutic or personal development technique that involves working with the human body in a form involving manipulative therapy, breath work, energy medicine, posture, and awareness of the "bodymind connection". Examples include: reiki, yoga, qigong, and t'ai chi. Alexander technique, Feldenkrais method, reflexology, Rolfing, shiatsu and re-balancing. Bodywork – alternative medicine, Retrieved February 2011 from.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodywork (alternative medicine)

¹²Dance has always been perceived as a feminine art, but until the end of the 19th century women were mainly performers (ballerinas) under the direction of male choreographers. With the development of modern dance women began to work as choreographers. Whether they were independent, choreographing themselves, or teachers / choreographers leading dance troupes and dance schools, they did ground breaking work, both from the gender perspective and with regard to their enormous contribution to the world of dance; they brought with them completely new concepts to dance, new techniques and new genres, innovative use of the stage and new approaches to teaching. This trend grew stronger with the development of post modernism in the United States.

¹³Anna Halprin, one of the pioneers of post-modern dance in the 1950s; Simone Forti, one of Halprin's students; Yvonne Rainer, Deborah Hay and Trisha Brown belonged to the Judson Church Dance group. Eva Karczag, Lisa Nelson and Nancy Stark-Smith started to work later on (Banes, 2011; Jeanne Cohen, 1992; Copeland, 2004; Burt, 2006). I discuss some of them below. For the sake of transparency I note that I was privileged to work with Hay, Nelson, Karczag and Stark Smith directly either as a student or as a dancer, and also with Steve Paxton whose work I will also mention below.

¹⁴ An American Journal of Dance Improvisation.

¹⁵Contact Improvisation – a movement technique where physical contact between the dancers serves as a starting point for exploration through improvisation. Its roots are in martial arts, in research into physical development and in the experiments of minimalism which characterized Judson Church. Originally this form was used for exercises and social interaction, but it is also presented on stage and has created a dictionary of movement

and choreographic principles which are a source of inspiration for many dance choreographers (Jeanne Cohen, 1992).

¹⁶It is important to note: verbal instructions and images are also used in instructing many techniques today. For example in instructing "Gaga" – a technique developed by Ohad Naharin; this does not emphasize mimicking an external model, as the participants are apparently invited to move freely, so to speak, following inspiration from verbal images. However, the teacher takes part in the movement, which may be considered a demonstration lasting throughout the class and "Gaga" is defined as "Ohad Naharin's language of movement".

¹⁷The terms "closed" and "open" are my own, and the distinction between them is not absolute; they are useful for the current discussion in order to signify the degree of interpretative space left available by the verbal instructions.

¹⁸These images are taken from my notebooks or those of my colleagues who teach improvisation. In improvisation class non-verbal images are also used: visual or audio images taken from the different arts, from nature or from daily life. The focus on verbal images is due to the topic of this paper assessing the connection between body and language.

¹⁹In her work "The role of images in teaching dance techniques" Hilleli-Assa (2001) argues that the image is a direction or an idea behind the physical movements which breathes content into it. It unites the different areas: physicality, thought, sensation and emotion, and brings a sense of "wholeness".

²⁰Image and imagine come from the same root: the expression "to see with your mind's eye" which describes the act of imagination, exemplifies the mind-body connection. The use of images may therefore challenge the mind – body dichotomy.

²¹Based on my own Hebrew translation of the original English (with a French accent!).

²²For more about the process of improvisation producing a space for the formation of personal identity and on its social significance see the doctoral thesis of Nativ (2010) " Body, ethics and gender in the Dance Departments in Israeli high schools".

²³Ruth Zapora- improvisation teacher who founded the teaching method "Action Theatre".

²⁴Improvise – to compose, perform or deliver without prior preparation. The Hebrew word comes from the same source as a word meaning "immediate"

²⁵Nativ (2010) uses the term "replete with attention"; a multi-directional and dialectic activity, which acts inwards, into the body and outwards from within the body occurring every moment throughout the dance.

²⁶Gere (2003) clarifies the place of improvisation in the history of stage dance: "Improvisation was fine in the studio but never in performance. Control of one's material has been held by many to be paramount, and improvisation connotes a lack of control" (Gere, 2003:xv).

²⁷ See end note number 13.

²⁸Benoit Lachambre - a Canadian choreographer, dancer, teacher and improvisation artist focused on the investigation of movement and its sources and on authenticity in movement. I had the privilege of working with him at the start of the 1990s.

²⁹Bakhtin (in Ginsburg, 2001) relates to living language within its

historical and social context; many different languages (social, ideological, professional, those of different speech genres and those of different ages and generations) exist and are active within each and every spoken language, and their usage varies in different roles and contexts. Inside every living language two opposing forces act: the centralizing force which is the result of social and historical forces, which safeguard the uniform inner core of the formal canonical language, and the environmental living polyphonic language, which pulls outwards away from the center. Both of these forces act on each other, with changes being made to language in accordance with the influence of the relative strengths of social groups opposing the centralizing force.

³⁰See the thesis by Alona Peretz "Teaching and Improvisation – the attitude of teachers in the Israeli education system towards the concept of Improvisation" (Hebrew) http://www.improvcenter.co.il/new/education_heb.phpgcus

³¹From the Poem "Ktav Yad shel Rakdan/it or Koreographia shel HaNefesh" (Hebrew) "A manuscript of a dancer or choreography of the soul" by Maya Bejerano inspired by watching the Bat-Sheva Dance Company rehearse and perform.

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Festive Dances: Collection of Dances within the Yearly Cycle

Composition: Tirza Sapir

Writing and editing: Shlomit Ofer and Tirza Sapir

MOFET Institute Publications in collaboration with the Research Center for Movement Notations and Dance, the Kibbutzim College of Education, Technology and Arts.

The book "Festive Dances: Collection of Dances within the Yearly Cycle" comprises 19 holiday dances composed by Tirza Sapir over a 50-year period, between 1961-2011. These dances have been performed in holiday ceremonies in Gat and Carmiya kibbutzim. With time, they have become study subject for various dance communities, such as students in dance teaching and theatre dance course in the Kibbutzim College of Education as well as in the dance course in Orot Israel College. The dances are written in accordance with the principles and perception of Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation. A CD is attached to the book with a recording of all the songs which accompany the compositions. The songs are performed by the choir of teachers

at the Kibbutzim College of Education, under the guidance of Shaul Gilad.

Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation is a written language for movement symbolization. The method was developed in Israel by the late Noa Eshkol and the late Avraham Wachman and was published for the first time in 1958. It involves a system of symbols which allow presentation of the human body movements in time and space. Sapir was a disciple and colleague of Eshkol and a member of the Movement Notation Society. She was the head of the School of the Arts of Dance at the Kibbutzim College of Education. At present she continues as a teacher