

No time to fly

2010

A SOLO DANCE SCORE WRITTEN BY DEBORAH HAY

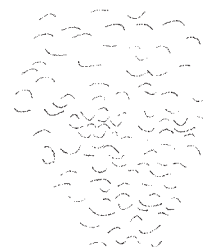


AUSTIN, TEXAS
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PREMIERE:

St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, New York

March 25 – 27, 2010

text, choreography, and performance: **DEBORAH HAY**

light: **JENNIFER TIPTON**

Joy and sorrow in the audience

In my body

How I see

Onstage

In time passing.

Joy and sorrow in movement

Choreography

Performance

My voice

Dance

At once turning

Rhythm

And work.

Joy and sorrow in history

Language

Reform

At once

Complexity

Fanfare

Prayer.

four questions for the dancer

What if the question “What if where I am is what I need?”
is not about what I need but an opportunity to remember
the question “What if where I am is what I need?”?

What if dance is how I practice my relationship with my whole
body at once in relationship to the space where I am dancing
in relationship to each passing moment in relationship to my
audience? What if the depth of this question is on the surface?

What if my choice to surrender the pattern, and it is just a
pattern, of facing a single direction or fixing on a singularly
coherent idea, feeling, or object when I am dancing is a way
of remembering to see where I am in order to surrender
where I am?

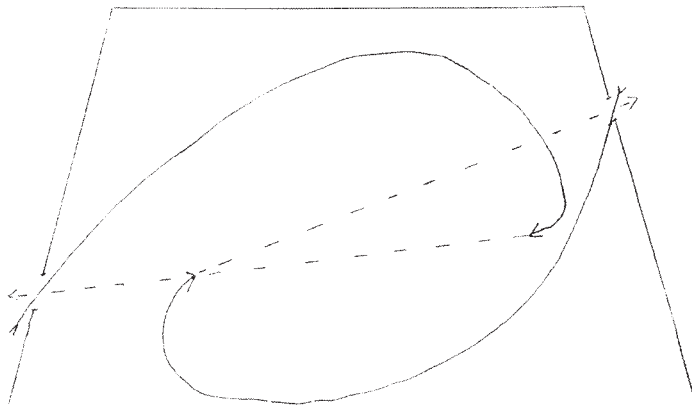
What if how I see while I am dancing is a means by which
movement arises without looking for it?

three reminders for my practice

Remove my sequencing from the sequence of movement directions.

Remove hesitation and reconsideration.

A word or short phrase in **BOLD CAPS** is a warning to avoid my
automatic response to be creative or to fall into habitual behavior
regarding the words I use. Instead, I immediately dis-attach' from
those impulses by noticing the whole body at once as my teacher,
thus assuming the cellular intelligence of my body.



audience

2 examples

...a broad curve that ends with
a little curl, so that
I face the exact location
of my entrance.

I appear at the edge of the stage as the last few audience members take their seats. My behavior is matter-of-fact. I have a lot of choices to make in advance of my entrance. I decide on my entrance site and the direction I will travel in relation to the audience, plus where that path will end. Then the light fades.

The moment the light returns I step onto the stage, walking in a stride and style not mine, as foreign as a foreign accent, recognizable but odd. The path is a singular broad curve that ends in a slightly accelerated little curl, leaving me facing the portal through which I stepped onto the stage.

Note: Nothing about my performance ends at the end of the curl.

I am held by an imagined cord linking me to the portal.

Note: I attend to the exactness of the single broad curve so that when I face my entrance site it is as if I complete the stringing of an archer's bow.

Note: I deliberately create this space within a space, separating me from the audience.

An ancient voice quietly advises me to remember the audience as well as the space beyond my tightly contained space.

Note: The ancient voice is me from 10,000 years ago or from 10,000 years in the future – a compassionate voice bringing the experience from the past or from the future into the present.

In response to the guidance received, I select the right moment to break the string and notice at once how the inclusion of the theater and my audience enlarges my dancing. It is like a real opening, and I begin again.

Note: My choice to perform this material requires catastrophic acts of perception. I associate catastrophic with images of great loss. The magnitude and reoccurrence of choreographed behavior that I need to first recognize and then dis-attach from, again and again, is a personal loss of tremendous proportion.

My body is still while joy and sorrow wash across my face like a stream of instances. A full smile or frown is never fulfilled. When not streaming, my face may briefly return to normalcy, or it may sustain a single reflection of joy/sorrow for longer moments.

Note: I am not limited to my personal experience of joy and sorrow. It is a relief to know that it is in and about the audience, this theater, and the world beyond its doors.

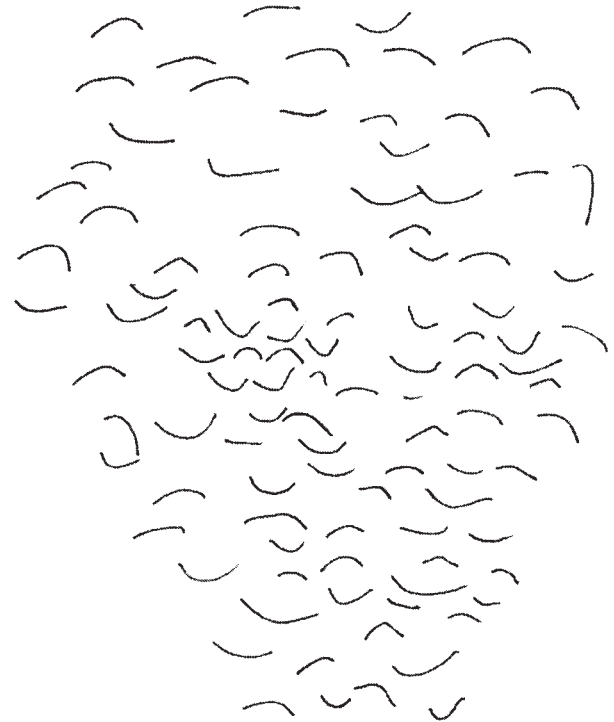
Note: As I perform, I try to remove my tendency to embody the images I use to describe the movement material.

I sing a wordless song that arises from and combines joy and sorrow into a single melody that resonates through my stilled bones. Barely suppressing a sense of personal history, my face reflects the transience of joy and sorrow.

Note: I hear the song as my voice leaves my body. I am intentionally unguarded because I rarely allow myself to partake in unprotected experiences.

Note: I am not translating the written language into movement, i.e., joy and sorrow. I actually aspire toward a bodily speechlessness by noticing my visual field, which includes what I can and cannot see, as well as minute associative instances that rise spontaneously.

Note: I understand that joy and sorrow are always present. I do not have to instigate them.



joy and sorrow at once

The song's duration is determined by how much time is required for it to impress itself on my body and the audience's memory.

The phrasing of the song can expand and contract.

Note: Singing a song of joy and sorrow is a challengingly simple way for me to engage my perception of space and time.

I attach rhythmic movement to the song, my dancing obviously influenced by my singing. I establish this continuity of relationship before using it to navigate a slightly complex path to the edge of the stage.

Note: I strongly maintain the role of the choreographer, overseeing the particularity of the path I travel and making spatial choices without becoming too artistic.

Partway, my audible singing disappears, yet the dancing adheres to its reliance on the now unheard rhythm of the song.

And finally my dance shifts outside of the prevailing memory of the song, and I move across stage in a straight line while erasing my destination.

Note: While dancing I make an effort not to hesitate. Learned behavior suggests I slow down or listen more in order to get things right. That is a belief that limits my dance.

At the edge of the stage, with a 1-minute allotment to turn in place a single time without moving slowly or continuously, I perform the joy and sorrow in restraint and sing a fraction of the joy/sorrow song on two or three occasions during the turn.

Note: My head is free to look down or away or to turn. It is not fixed.

If the sparsely singing turn is like a lock unlocking, then **WORK** is my deliverance into space after one minute.

*Note: I accept any movement that arises spontaneously and call it **WORK**.*

WORK is a variation on a 2-part, 2-second spontaneous movement used to cross the stage one time. Because of the banality of the choreography, **WORK** is also how I manage the choreographic tools I need to maintain both my interest and that of the audience. Those tools are the perception of my movement as music, my perception of space, the use of stillness and duration, and the perception of joy and sorrow to deepen my practice of performance.



Note: During this movement it is helpful to enlarge my perception of space beyond the theater.

Note: There is no repetition in live performance.

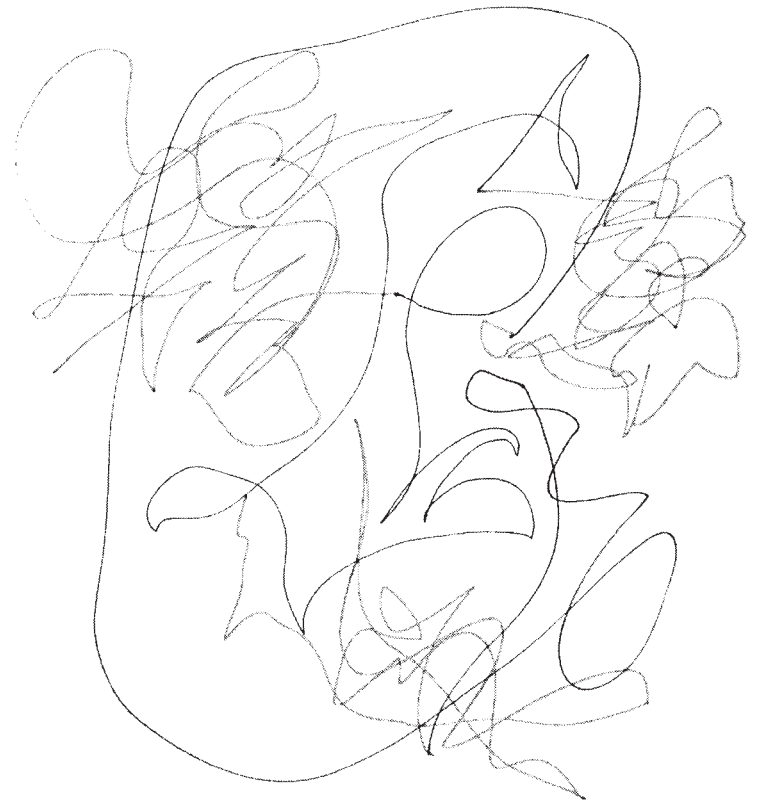
*Note: **WORK** comes easily. Maybe it is because of what is required to survive as a dancer in contemporary western culture. It can be difficult to dis-attach from the habitual physical response to what "work" looks like, i.e., striving, reaching, pushing, dragging, busying, flailing, hauling.*

Note: I neither hurry nor linger.

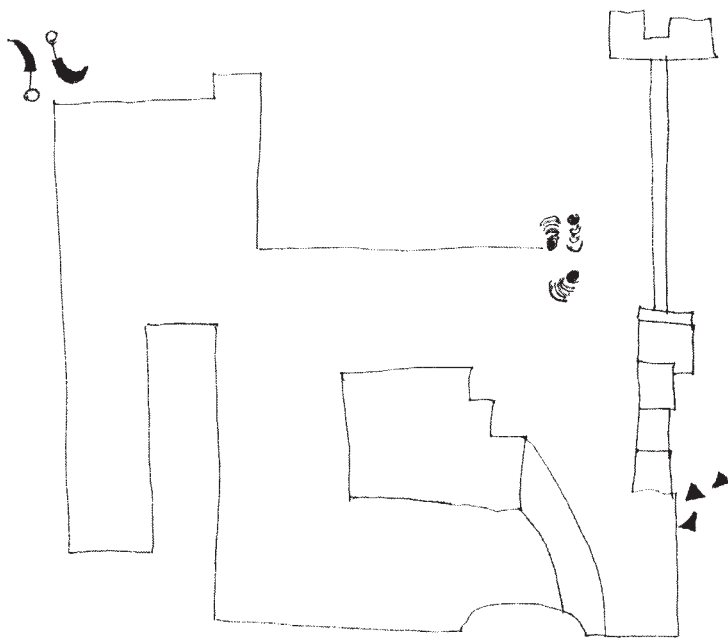
COMPLEXITY arises. I play havoc with how I perceive time and how I perceive space rather than creating complex body movement. **CLEARING THE DANCE OF COMPLEXITY** is as abstruse, yet here I am, the two occurrences weaving back and forth several times. The duration of the two directions is choreographically challenging.

*Note: The movement is not difficult just because I use the words **COMPLEXITY**, havoc, abstruse, choreographically challenging. And **CLEARING THE DANCE OF COMPLEXITY** does not necessarily require flowing movement.*

Note: If I can manage my perception of time and space to inform my body, then I do not have to think about what movement to do next. What I mean by my perception of time is that it is passing. And what I mean by my perception of space is that I include it in my dancing so that I am not seduced by the intelligence, past experiences, patterns, limitations, and/or sensuality of my moving body.



complexity and freedom from complexity



mall and object

I perform market, a contemporary market, **A MALL**. Without creating **A MALL** I notice it wherever I am.

*Note: I attend to my perception of space and time in order to distract myself from predetermining the outcome of this choreographic direction. It is an effort to refrain from creating a literal mall. Instead, copious instances of **A MALL** appear and disappear as I dance.*

A single **OBJECT** reveals itself in **A MALL**. I perform several views of **OBJECT** for the benefit of the audience. **A MALL** and **OBJECT** alternate their appearances. As in **COMPLEXITY** and freedom from it, the duration of the two directions is challenging.

*Note: I do not create **OBJECT**. I learn its attributes from my body and actually take pleasure in identifying the object for myself in each performance.*

Note: I remember to notice that my whole body is producing unimaginable instances of specificity.

I start spinning, not literally but as a part of an onstage counterclockwise spinning vortex that only I perceive. I am a speck, a dot, a flake, endlessly spiraling toward center stage, and absolutely no one can possibly identify me as such.

Note: The movement may change, but the choreography itself does not change.

At center stage I reverse direction and turn in place while lifting my arms incrementally, building up my torso, to signify the construction and architecture of **A HOLY SITE**. At the same time my shoes lightly tap the floor under me as if to imply the sporadic thwacks of a hammer, striking in the distance.

*Note: I am **A HOLY SITE** and to perform as such requires the catastrophic loss of how I otherwise perceive myself.*

A HOLY SITE is completed the moment my hands or fingers touch overhead. I open my mouth and hear **A HOLY SONG** rise up out of me.

*Note: I am not a singer and cannot carry a tune. Nevertheless I call what I hear **A HOLY SONG** and notice the feedback from my whole body as it yields to that direction.*

Unable to sustain itself, **A HOLY SITE** collapses. My hands, still touching, drop before my eyes. I contemplate the symbolism of the gestural demise.

Then my arms, in relation to my torso, shape a really primitive resemblance to **A TOTEM POLE**. Resourcing whatever bits of prior exposure to an American Indian chant, I reproduce it as best as I can while rhythmlessly bouncing to beating drums that only I can hear.

A TOTEM POLE collapses, and the chant dissipates under the weight of the gestural obsolescence. Back and forth, **A HOLY SITE** and **A HOLY SONG** and **A TOTEM POLE** with an American Indian chant collapse. And I rebuild, using the sound of my tapping feet to symbolize a hammer. I travel in fading light.

Light returns and I am tiptoeing, not wanting to disrupt the space already created – a task I hold in high regard. I experience space parting, with little to no disturbance, hoping that the audience will see this too, before arriving somewhere that is not center stage. My actions are obvious.

When I imagine the stage is still, the fingertips of each hand instantaneously clutch and attach to two different points on my body, creating a sculptural resemblance to a totem pole, which I may be the only person in the world to realize. An intermittent return to the American Indian prayer/chant arises, punctuated by beating drums that only I can hear. My basically upright torso bounces rhythmlessly with the supposed drums. I alternate the prayer/chant with silences of different duration and incrementally lower each arm without anyone noticing... while continuing to maintain the movement of the totem pole/drum beat. In this manner I keep myself alert.

Just before my right arm relaxes completely, I lift and point my right index finger in the air and, speaking in a Southern accent, say, “Strictly speaking I believe I have never been anywhere.” [Beckett]²

With my finger still in the air, I leave time for the Beckett quote to sink in.

Note: The quote’s impact on my body is mind-boggling.

My right index finger lowers as I sing the tune “Oh, they don’t wear pants in the sunny side of France. But they do wear grass, to cover up their ass.” My perception of joy and sorrow guides the singing. The lifetime of the song is how long it takes for my finger to lower. My standard for “lower” is my own. It is possible to travel and add movement within the finger/song dance cycle. I sing, and my finger, corresponding to the song’s phrasing, moves in a downward direction, or I am silent as the finger moves downward, or the duration of my singing and silences are juxtaposed as the finger lowers.

At the end of the finger path I perform a generous instant of **A 5,000-YEAR-OLD MARKETPLACE** – primarily still.

The finger/song dance is repeated the instant I return my finger above my head in order to lower it for a second time.

Note: My finger can be a trap. I do not fixate on it – deliberately hiding its function in determining my movement.

I am unquantifiable instances of **A 5,000-YEAR-OLD MARKETPLACE** before sunrise, while it is still dark and quiet. I depend on the image at first, and then I get rid of it. This is not a narrative. Maybe a wind moves the air around a makeshift pole, flap, cover, knot, uneven surface. My hand occasionally thrums my body for sound, or I make short intermittent sounds that are barely audible.

Note: It is an effort to refrain from creating a marketplace. Instead, copious instances of predawn marketplace live and die spontaneously. It is all I need.

It is the same for a single item, like a particular utensil, crafted tool, or ornament – an **UNTRADITIONAL OBJECT** in a 5,000-year-old marketplace. There is no name for the item, fortunately. I depend on the poetry, but I get rid of any imagery as soon as I remember to notice that my whole body is producing unimaginable instances of specificity. I learn the object's attributes from my body and actually take pleasure in identifying it for myself in each performance. I provide several views of an **UNTRADITIONAL OBJECT** for the audience.

The marketplace, with its goods, like a 40-camel caravan embarks on a clunkety journey through a limitless landscape. Think sand, then forget sand. I travel several directions at once, proceeding along a single path. The movements of my hips, legs, knees, and feet symbolize obstacles along the way.

Note: The movement is not difficult just because I use the word "obstacles."

Note: I am not translating the written language into movement, i.e., marketplace, goods, caravan, empty landscape, obstacles. I actually aspire toward a bodily speechlessness so that I can notice and appreciate the abundance of materiality that can surface momentarily.

I perform counterintuitive travel somewhere at the edge of the space. A cranky voice provides continuous accompaniment.

Note: The term "counterintuitive travel" is not any different than "clunkety journey," in that it is what it is – another way. Counterintuitive reflects possibility, not intention, psychology, or effort.

Note: I do not become cranky. Cranky describes my voice.

I **MEND** the field.

*Note: Accepting any movement, I call it **MEND**. At the same time it is an effort not to automatically produce comforting arm or hand movements or behave like a mother hen.*

I build a road with my feet used to smooth and design its surface. My work is clear and evident, without rest. I make a rhythmic sound, like an engine, to create a counterpart to the work of building the road. My arms, held out from my body, symbolize the shape of the engine.

Note: I strongly maintain the role of the choreographer, overseeing the design element of the road. I think of the road's surface as a mosaic, without getting too artistic.

I turn and turn and turn, as many times as I remain interested in turning on this big new road, bringing separate parts together in a whirling whole that becomes **A HOLY SITE** at the center of the stage. The turning is happening in my perception of the whole stage, and my body is just a part of it.

My arms are above my head, and they function as the architecture of the temple, shrine, church, mosque, etc. My hands, like antenna, draw **A HOLY SONG** down through **A HOLY SITE** and out through my mouth. It does not have to be anything other than holy – holy being different for everyone.

I close my lips, and the song enters my mouth. My cheeks enlarge, but the song does not escape. I let go of the now compressed sound, in two increments that correspond to the collapse of my arms, poised like a mound of rubble in front of me. Holding my body still, I step toward the audience to offer them several views of the former holy site.

To return to center stage I rebuild the road, using my feet and voice as I did while building the road the first time. At center stage, my arms again lift above my head to symbolize the architecture of **A HOLY SITE**, and **A HOLY SONG** returns.

A second abrupt fall with its single compressed sound destroys the holy site, turning it back into rubble.

My ancient self's voice guides me back to a standing position. Everything seems in order. I am standing straight, except that I am facing away from the audience. The final encouragement I receive from my ancient self has me turn to face the audience once more.

Pause.

When my face begins streaming with joy and sorrow, that is the end.

Three novels by the author Jim Crace, *Quarantine*, *Gift of Stones*, and *Pesthouse*, significantly inspired the early development of ***No Time to Fly***. His descriptions of pre- or post-societal communities and landscapes felt bizarrely familiar, revealing a sensual vocabulary I did not know I could access.

1. My use of the word “dis-attach” instead of “detach”: to detach has become a generalized concept that, at this time, often loses the experience of the personal. To dis-attach requires more action on my part as a practitioner. I need to recognize where I am before I can choose to dis-attach from where I am.
2. This is the third consecutive time that this simple sentence, “Strictly speaking I believe I have never been anywhere,” has been appropriated into my choreography. It has been spoken in *I’ll Crane for You*, *Up Until Now*, and *Market*.