

<http://www.du.ahk.nl/people/susan05/dailiness.html>

DAILINESS

By Susan Rethorst

[published in Choreographic Encounters, Cork, Ireland: Institute for Choreography and Dance, No. 1, 2003 pp. 28-33]

"You have to love the daily working" Merce Cunningham

HHHMMMM...(ZOOM OUT)

Dance making takes a long time. I once calculated the amount of hours I normally spend, to find that it's 400 on average, sometimes as much as 500, in the making of a piece. And the first 100 or so get thrown out after they have served to eliminate and narrow and home me in. Daily work has to be seen and engaged with in the light of this. An awareness of where you stand on that time line is always present in the mind, but it has to inform and take a back seat, both. Dailiness is both necessity and blessing.

Dailiness requires a simultaneous tuning in to time and the absence of time. One has to know and not know, prefer and not prefer, empty oneself and acknowledge one's fullness, be passive and charged. It has to happen to you and from you. It has to be too fast for you to take in and done in baby steps... one leaking into the other.

Dailiness allows for the endless finding of a reason, for curiosity, ongoingness, tedium, for humor, perspective, for working with the unclassifiable, for the work of work, for embracing the excitement of being led by that stranger, the unmade dance.

The reason to make one decision vs another is also the pleasure in the work, is also the interest in the work is also the mind of the work is also the play of the work...the goals of the artist are all contained in that moment by moment ongoingness which occupies the reason, intellect, curiosity, hunger, patience, regard. It is a sober regard, not led first and foremost by adrenalin and endorphins, but every bit as much of the body and about the body.

But on what do you base your decisions; how are you led by that stranger, the unmade dance, regarding with curiosity and modesty where the dance will go, as how a child will grow up, as how any experience will unfold?

WHAMO (ZOOM IN)

There's nothing in the world like the feeling of being in the studio, working along and whamo, something starts to take off, to go wowowowow, juice up. But it doesn't happen right at the get go and it doesn't happen all the time and it doesn't happen from working yourself into a tizzy of wanting it, or from anything to do with how you feel or what you plan. It comes along when it comes along. In the meantime you have to be in there, trying a bit of this and a bit of that and staying with all those semi moments, all those ho hum kinda moments, trying something else and doing it over and maybe like this and working but also waiting. You have to keep yourself available, keep the work available.

And work up to those whamo times, then with them, also after them, till the next, till the whole thing takes off, tells you it's done, it is.

You have to spend time

..... placing the foot somewhere, tossing an arm, shifting the balance, shifting a limb, adding a curl, a tic, teasing out the answers to how fast and how tense and what next, when join, when exit or pause....watching and allowing the mind to roam and consider and take inventory; to hum with decision, next, change, pause, repeat, test, test, ...feeling the heart beat with the possibilities, feeling the internal eye on the alert, senses tuned in to the seconds of this that, here or maybe here.

The alerted senses operating, finding each moment, holding the moment until it is perceived, keeping the accumulation of moments until something is happening, something starts to kick in - the dance begins to squeak a little interest at you. To tingle with a perhaps we have here... the beginning perception of its budding personality, regarding it with modesty, always modesty, taking a back seat so it can reveal itself to you... all the while coaxing another decision and another moment, searching and sniffing, getting acquainted. Your state of mind is heightened, alert, watchful, respectful, sitting on the edge of its seat.

And all the while perceiving it, perceiving the 'just this'-ness... contextless, floating, ill attached and ill defined. The larger whole will come in ways both similar and dissimilar to this hum. It's not a well lit activity, decisions happen in the semi darkness, not burdening these bits with the responsibility of the grand idea. Letting them accumulate, be tentative, fascinatingly partial, staying open to a little bit of another feeling ooh aah, just right.

And staying there; allowing the involvement in the hints of meanings and communications to be what holds you. Staying with nerves of steel in that poorly lit place... not in spite of its lack of light, or any other lack, but for its own singular reality; its own singular engagement, the minuteness of it, the curiosity in it, the buzz of your attention, the small communications of the choices - staying not to put up with it as a necessary tedium, a bore on the way to the good stuff, but with the alchemy of turning fear into thrill, finding right there in the hum and tingle of those choices talking, right there in that immediacy, finding right there the reason for and passion of making.

The great thing is that the minutiae of where you are is not only plenty, as in consolation. It is where the action is. Those small unattached bits are jewels; the trick is the frame of mind that allows for their perception - it's not patience, it's attention. Alain Robbe Grillet said 'if you leave an object, don't impose on it, it will speak'.... Look at it, taste it, sense it, bathe in it, essentialize it, and leave it... let it come to you, acknowledging the enormity of your task by not taking on everything in every moment.

All the lusciousness, all the sense and sensibility of the final, performed dance... let that goal go for now. Let it go in order to reach it, keep the focus on the baby steps; they are your reason for doing this.

But of course I lie a little bit. A dance is more than a collection of greatest hits. Parts get next to each other and act on each other, they combine to communicate something else/more/different from what they do on their own. They and their cumulative sense do something to you.

Dance does, acts, affects. Part of how it does, acts, affects is how we act on it... the perceiving changing the thing perceived. We invade it by watching, bringing all of our selves to it, as we do that, it affects us; it does something by being something... a tree can do the same, can do something to us in the ways it does and does not resemble us, in the ways our culture has made stories about trees, in the way our mother looked at trees, in the way we did or didn't have trees in the yard.

When you watch a fifteen or whatever minute section of a dance, it leaves you somewhere; emotionally and psychologically you are in a particular state. There are things then that could reiterate that state, interrupt it, mock it, transcend it. If you find just the right next thing, it can feel exquisitely 'right'. And not because it is the most fab little piece of movement you've ever made, but because of how it interacts with what the previous movements have left you... and they have left you there because of their nature. The state is unclassifiable, not as reduced as 'expectant' or 'happy', or 'soft'... but something more subtle and multiplicitous. The next thing has the power to affect because of the affect of the previous thing.

Sequence is more than an ordering of unchanging entities. Sequence is a cooker, an alchemy... eventfulness comes into it, consciously put there or not. Time is more than a container; time participates.

The job is to get the distance required to perceive, to divorce things from whatever initially informed them or made them; the mood that accompanied, the instructions that were followed, the notebook notes etc etc. tune in to its itness; squint, fast forward video in your minds eye, tune into the dance's 'hum', walkey talk through, watch the eventfulness, the rhythm, the sweep, the what happens?... look, wait, watch, try and retry until you recognize that you have something 'right'; that you have something, in the words of a student, 'the way you never knew you wished things always were'.* You have to find it, not make it happen and you find it by making; making and waiting, making things that are and are not close; by reading, listening, tasting, humming that what it is-ness.

Try, try, try and trust that which is operating; that part of yourself that is waiting for that sureness, that yes! of recognition.

INWIT (from middle English, in meaning interior, wit meaning knowledge)

A friend's daughter at the age of 3 or so wanted to sit on things, on things meant for sitting and not, with others and by herself. When she spied a likely spot she'd stop, back herself slowly and carefully on to the step or hydrant or whatever she had found and sometimes instruct others to join her.

Did she want to survey her world, to punctuate the sequence of events, to feel her family and friends in this sort of still gathering, to accent the day, measure her body in relation to sittable things? She wouldn't perhaps be inclined to say if you asked her, but she wouldn't be inclined either to find it necessary to say, nor to convince any one of the rightness of these actions and decisions.

The parent can tell you that you see the child in the grown person, that that interest is not 'arbitrary'; something is operating there that continues to be a part of who that person is. It is that wonderful specificity of personhood that we say no to when we say we have to 'know' the reason for the choice to do this movement or that one, when we try to justify from some objective point of view. And it's that part of the person that speaks to the viewer; art that works with this, from

this, to this, acknowledges that part of being human that is not the analytical rational explainer of phenomena, but the experienter, receiver of phenomena. Dance making responds to and effects from this part of self.

A single decision/response can feel inconsequential and arbitrary and make you think you'd better back up and discover in language why you're going to do that particular thing instead of any of the infinite other possibilities. But if you watch yourself make 500 decisions, you will see interests and patterns and issues; those same things are by extension operating in each decision... that which is the intuitive imaginative self is interrogating and making a world, using equal parts circumstance and choice, responding to and being effected by, what is found there and what is internal, both.

You can think you don't know what next or how next, because you can't say. But you do know, the way the 3 year old knows her own mind; the part we come not to trust. It is an effort and a leap of faith to find it again.

CHOREOGRAPHIC MIND

There is so often a surprise when something done 'spontaneously' is seen to 'work'. The surprise is so often accompanied by 'but I wasn't thinking, I didn't have any idea, I don't know what it is'. And, just as often, the moment thus found is then abandoned because of this accompanying feeling. The not knowing leads to not believing in its worth? The ill contained nature of it (then what? what's it about? what does it mean?) leads to its feeling too unclassifiable to keep? it brings more questions than answers for sure.

BUT, this is I would say, an example of intuit at work. As much as you might feel out on a limb, working without a thought in your head, something has to be operating, leading you to make the decisions that result in the thing you make that is from you, of you, about you. That is the choreographic mind at work.

Tere O'Connor once told me a childhood memory. His sister slept in a room in the front of their house, while he and his other siblings, (all boys I think) and his parents, had rooms at the back. This in his mind left his sister's room feeling like a kind of an appendage thrust out from the safety and togetherness of the others. The road, though not close, ran by the front, and he being very fond of his sister, would lie awake in discomfort and anxiety thinking of her in her front bedroom, her isolation in relation to the rest of them; her seeming exposure in the vulnerability of sleep to the public sector of the world. When he told me this I immediately said, 'oh, that's the mind of a choreographer'. The mind that had a kind of spatial emotional map of a situation, the emotional psychological reading of place, and of people in relation to that place and each other - in this case its relation to the road, to others, to aloneness, to sleep, is the same mind that now looks at people and movements in the studio/theater with an eye to arranging their various essences, how they speak and combine.

... the mind of a choreographer operating outside the studio, applying the same modes of perception that are both inclination and tool.

END/ END/ END