

Gabrielle Roth talks and dances

with Anne Hagen, Siri Hagen and Vivian Milroy
Graham Young took the pictures.

. . . she saved my life. I was lying on a lawn at Esalen between two houses with a temperature of 102 and no one took any notice. Gabrielle saw me and was furious. She got a boy-friend and drove me into the ward of the local hospital. When I came back I moved in with her, and we just found . . . an incredible closeness. And we went through a lot of involvements together. Got into Arica together . . . and got out of Arica together.

. . . when I first saw Gabrielle I just ran away in the middle of a gestalt sentence and joined her class. You could do both. So I took every movement class that Gabrielle ever did.

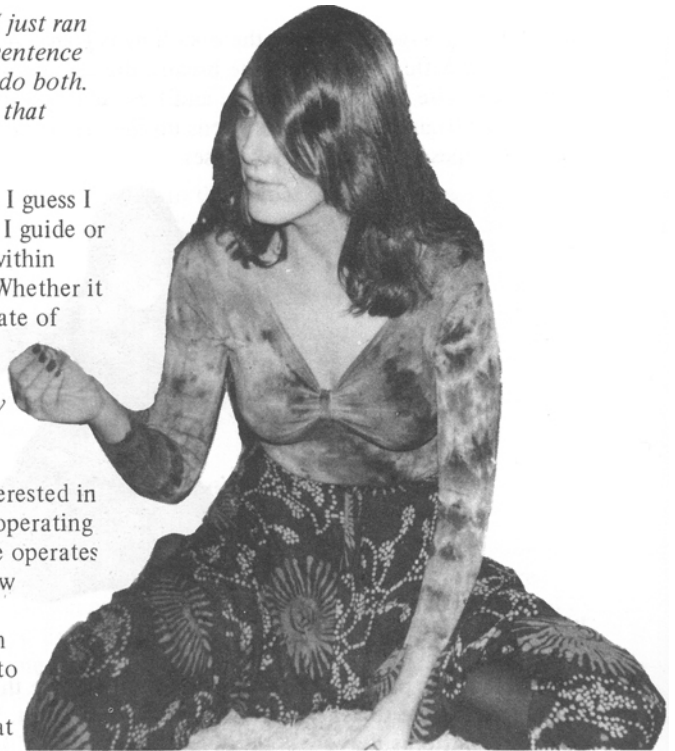
What I do is, I teach movement. I guess I don't even teach movement but I guide or inspire people to discover that within themselves which moves them. Whether it be a feeling or a memory or a state of being.

Is this physically or emotionally that you reach them?

There isn't a separation. I'm interested in people's feeling. Basically I am operating on the premise that all of nature operates spontaneously and that somehow man has made himself an exception. And I'm interested in exploring how we can get back to that spontaneous feeling of self and still maintain everything that we've learnt.

How do you begin?

I start with that particular truth and from that I'm moving to . . . its very different for me with each group. Sometimes I'll move directly into the experience of that - that I am straight, uptight, out of my body, afraid of relaxing and create a space for everyone to realise that right out in front. Or sometimes I'll make it very safe and secure and start by working directly to help the individual concerned to connect to himself. Usually I start with the breath because that's the movement without which



there is no other movement - so to speak, the primal movement. I begin with that and begin with how that's moving through your body, what type or rhythm it's sending up. Whether it's a deep rhythm or a shallow rhythm, whether it's a steady rhythm, a percussive rhythm. What type of rhythm is your breath sending out because generally it's the same rhythm as your life.

So what do you do?

Well I would do something with it probably to induce it to come a little bit deeper perhaps - belly breathing, breathing like children or like cats.

And there are many ways to help the person to get to that state. One is using sound. One is using my hands. It will depend on the individual.

And the next stage - assuming the breathing is going. Actually with groups I always start with breathing - unifying the breath, the sounds and the physical movement. I have an exercise which I really like and I use that for about twenty minutes to half an hour at the beginning. And this opens up the being and from there we move into different types of movement exercises.



What does it look like?

Well, we have to consider that we have in our culture that everything is sit down and shut up. So I have to get people to stand up and shout. Essentially to start breaking out of the patterns that are conditioned into the boy like, *sit down, shut up, be good, be seen but not heard*, you know all these lovely cliches which have been embodied by our Western man - the sexual repression the mores and attitudes about sex are obviously stuck away in the pelvis. All the attitudes about not showing your emotions, not letting anyone knowing how you feel and they're all stuck somewhere in your chest where your heart lives. Basically they're not at all connected - to open this area we then open up a lot of feeling - and very deep feeling can come up. The easiest, the safest and the cleanest way of working with this is to work with the breath, with the sound and the movement and begin to unify those three forces right from the very beginning. There's a sense of security that comes with that. That an only be realised

by experience and suddenly there's that feeling of being - of being connected. Many people have emotional outbursts after doing that particular exercise. And my attitude toward the emotional outbursts is one that is very positive. Initially I would set this attitude up so that we take a look at it. All of nature operates spontaneously - to have a body without feelings is like having a day without weather. It's unimaginable. In one day the weather might change seven times in one day to the next. And we're just like that and so when these feelings come I see them as a dance and as a song and by letting the body totally experience them with the sound with the movement - to become completely one with the experience - if one moves from space to space through feelings - through anger, sadness, fear, whatever feelings are there. It becomes a total experience and then there's an incredible relief - everyone usually laughs, quite hard, after they've let go.

This is essentially non-verbal?

Oh yes.

Just feeling and breath and noise.

Yes, I mean I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to think that I knew what somebody was experiencing because the subjective labyrinth is completely unique as is the body which is expressing it. So that my only thing is to be there and to accept and to love like *I know you're beautiful, I know that you have a very unique and extraordinary dance to do and song to sing*, and I know that so it's very simple for me. I sit here and wait and I love. That's essentially my position.

Yes - and after the breathing what then? - do you leave it to them to develop what they develop or do you encourage them?

No I don't encourage anything unless there's something happening and then I will usually be there with the person and I encourage them more in rhythm; like if they're expressing a rhythm I'll get them to express it bigger and louder and watch it kind of ebb and flow as it changes - you know if I can in anyway support their experience I will. But on the other hand one person can let the whole experience go like that and another person would take several times to work up to that opening. It's not necessary to have an emotional release. Some people have to have it because they have a great emotional block. But it's not necessary. There's another exercise where I'm just going into the energy of opening and closing the body. I tend to pattern it more conceptually. I will give an idea to be explored.

It's a very personal journey for me. I realised at some point I had done the American success package - I'd been agitating about and terribly disjointed, disillusioned, disintegrated. I suppose because I had grown up to a large degree with black people and they had transferred to me something in rhythm which I couldn't even articulate at that time but in my own private desperation I knew that the answer had to be moving towards my body. I subconsciously knew that I was very disconnected. And so I began to enter this space of really trying to experience my body, creating ways to do that - working with other people and, in order to work, in order to teach, I had to

constantly be doing it myself and they would teach me what they needed and what they needed and what I needed were one. And for a long time it was like that. I mean, I feel very integrated now. I feel anything that I do is in tune with my mind, my body and my emotions. That's all actually just one participation in life. But I didn't begin there at all. I began in a very schizophrenic way a very strong mind/body split created by my society, the church, my parents and just all the contradictions and paradoxes which I came up with as a sensitive being I think the more sensitive you are the more split you can become.

Basically, one of the things that I've been very interested in is breaking down the conviction, patterns of moving in the body and I do that by working the separate parts like just working with head and working with the head in an attitude. Working only with the right hand, only with the right arm, and just finding all the movements that are there. Only the two arms or maybe just the legs.



Life is a series of opening and closing: you're constantly doing it, we do it with people. With some people we open up to them right away like this, then very slowly we close our consciousness to them. With other people we open up very slowly, very cautiously: maybe we'll very quickly close. With some people we're completely open or completely closed or completely open and very gently retreat from them. In fact we're doing this all the time and we're doing it very unconsciously. And if we're not doing that then we're really robots because that means we have such a pattern that we're opening exactly the same with each person and closing exactly the same with each person that, by nature of energy is impossible. You will find that some day you just prefer the close dance and that's wonderful, you get the experience of really

experiencing your own withdrawal and you can find there's a dance inside your withdrawal that goes on. On other days, you want to stay away from the closed type rhythm and you feel so good really wonderful. And just by exploring a simple concept like that some people would discover that they were extraordinary dancers. And the body itself will begin to express all the various rhythms and all the various postures of being and being closed, just rather naturally and spontaneously - I don't know how it works but it works. It's as if you're opening up - or you're saying it's all right for what's already there to do and express.

I was going to ask you about music. How and when do you use it?

Constantly. I use it a lot - I use all kinds of it. And I also do work without it. I like to see the body as an instrument and learning how to tune it first. So I rarely use music initially. I would be more likely to start with sound and the breathing and just one movement as people get comfortable in that and they see that they don't even really need music then I'll add music.

Another aspect is play. Just remembering how to play with someone - something that many of us have completely forgotten about. so that even if we do get into touching then we think it's serious and we simply transfer that same kind of intellectual idea on to the touching and then it becomes a very serious sort of deal. We forget, you know, that touch itself has thousands of levels and it can be very serious and very deep and it can also be very playful very spontaneous, very light. So I have a tendency to create lots of situations where people can explore the range of touch from very deep connections between the two bodies and the two breaths to the very playful spirit of movement. I like going through the whole range. I call it the choreography of the human soul and I find very little resistance to my way - very little resistance. It seems to be that people just really want to play. They really want to feel, they want to touch, they want to explore, they want to be spontaneous, they want to be creative, they're tired of being up-tight.

Is there one group of people rather than another or is this absolutely appropriate to anybody? Do any kind of people come to your classes?

All types of people - all kinds of people.

I mean how about stockbrokers and business men?

Oh lots - a lot - I mean most of the work that I've done has been with professionals - you see even professional people have bodies and have a reason to want to use them. And in fact in some cases more prone to realise this identity with their bodies than others. Because at some point - in order to be a professional - you go through enough changes to realise that that isn't enough. Whereas maybe initially one thought it was - like I can remember thinking well once I'm a teacher - once I'm this and that - everything will be perfect. And that's part of the conditioning. But sometimes in real life I'm all this - I'm successful - I have this and I have that and - I'm not happy - I'm not happy in bed - I'm uptight, I mean it's all in the body - your body can't lie.

I use a lot of natural sounds just to get the energy moving and to allow space where aggression can be expressed because it's natural - aggression - it's not meant to be suppressed. And at some level I think this is all bull-shit because really and truly I just like to dance as freely as imaginatively, as creatively and as spontaneously as possible. And I like to have this body. And that's truly when I *feel* - and the rest of it is trying to appease everyone by making them think that there's something important going around. I will stay awake at night and make up a theory. So that it sounds good. I'm intelligent enough to do that but really and truly I don't think it makes any difference.

But Gabrielle, you do think its important that someone makes a breakthrough.

Surely I do. I mean its wonderful - It's like thunder like lightening, and it's fantastic but I don't think *I understand* it - I think that I accept it. In other words its enough. In the name of freedom they've got some patterns that they've learned and they're just repeating it, repeating it, repeating it, just like they do with the rest of their lives, And once any music comes on they'll repeat their pattern to the music but if they can't get their patterns to fit into the music they sit down. They never think that they could possibly do something else. In fact they've only got to be in the rhythm. When they have more responsibility for their bodies, they'll be much freer to express their uniqueness - which is what we're all here to do as far as I know.



Can I just briefly talk about theory? For example Reich's work on armoured personalities and the role of the orgasm being a freeing of spontaneity - how much do you go along with this?

Well, I evolved entirely on my own. I think Reich's work is very good, but I haven't done that much with it. I am just exploring another avenue. I am not terribly concerned with the orgasm although I agree with him.

It is a very parallel avenue. After all many of your movements just now were very like some bio-energetic movements.

Well, I don't think anybody can claim of these movements. They are part of the human body. They are part of the human soul. So like I have developed those movements from African dance not from bioenergetics which I have never taken. But the truth is the truth, and many people will hit on it in different ways.

On the point of spontaneity and civilized men having to some extent moved away from spontaneity, do you know the work of Alexander? Which again parallels a lot of

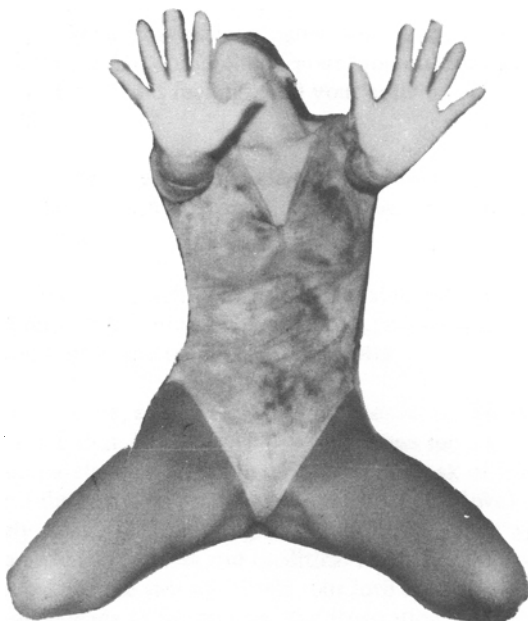
the things you are saying? Where unctious man is in the position of acting completely spontaneously and also feeling completely spontaneously.

Well the greatest difference between myself and these other methods is that my method is spontaneity, not a method to create spontaneity and that's the only method I have. I don't have ten exercises that if you do them, then you will end up as C or D. It's not like that at all. It changes all the time. I work very much with what's there, the energy that develops in the room, where I am at?, and engage people in the energy of the now which is what I am really concerned about. So that my method is spontaneity and spontaneity breeds spontaneity. As opposed to having an approach, the end result of which is spontaneity. I used to say when I grew up I'd get a method. But then I found my method is spontaneous. I have no real purpose beyond that.

Your method is 'no method?'

Yes. You see I have the funny feeling for me that the day I have a method, I am finished.

After this Gabrielle danced for us, a most wonderfully evocative and moving performance. Eyes closed and unaware of us as audience, she yet included us in a virtuoso display of flowing and exquisite movement, now tender and gentle and delicate, now violent and passionate and alive with a pulsating sensuality. Her beauty and openness and spontaneity spread to us the secretaries and recorders and the interview ended with all of us dancing together, including the cameraman.



I lost myself in a total indentification with Gabrielle and the music and the moment. It was disrupting and wonderful. For a normally controlled and organised man not given to peak experiences, this was probably the highest I would get, short of artificial aids to transcendence.

