

Life Dancing: Birthing the Body

Caroline Born

When you move to express rather than to achieve, when you move to raise your awareness of the motion of your body, you wake up *in* your body, in the present, and in your life. Many of us scarcely exist in our bodies — we are not even in our heads in terms of being conscious of the weight of them resting on top of our spine, or the sensation of blood and bone. We are outside our bodies. For where our attention is, so we are. The body is forgotten in space, or pulled along behind as we focus on thoughts about the past or the future.

The subtitle of this piece, 'Birthing the Body', describes my role as a teacher of creative movement and dance, and as therapist/midwife to other people's creativity. 'Midwife' makes it clear that my work is to do with birthing what is already there, but hidden. My work is based on no particular system but, like a midwife, I have applicable skills for guiding each individual through his or her own creative process. When I teach I have no pre-determined form, but use a language that has come into being out of the work. Feeling confident about being empty in this way relies upon good training, experience and resources garnered over a long period of time. I use a variety of techniques and mediums as well as movement, in direct response to the needs of the moment.

When asked what exactly I do, my answer varies. I get bored repeating the

same thing, and need to surprise myself so I can enjoy listening to my answers. If I work without intention or expectation — if I know nothing, and can sit through my fear of the unknown — I am more able to receive the presence of an individual or a group. I want to be open to the full reality of the present — who this person is and where they are in their life — because what unfolds is unpredictable.

More experience provides more possibilities to apply to any situation, yet, paradoxically, a good teacher or therapist uses fewer and fewer. How I am in myself is what I teach. Spaciousness inside me can reflect someone else back into their own body, their own space, and therefore their own self-responsibility. If I present lengthy systems or teachings, people look to me for the answers rather than trusting themselves.

Working with Groups and Individuals

With groups I usually work with a maximum of ten, so there is time and space for individual work, and an opportunity for me to take people in. When I first began facilitating groups, I needed structures for my own support and confidence. I have gradually recognised that I have an instinctive understanding of how the body and emotions work together in expression, which I have forged out of my own journey of movement. Seeing when the



dynamic of a group is inappropriate to a particular structure and responding to that, I can play with different possibilities. Instinctively I pull out what is needed in the moment.

In individual work I offer an empty

space — nothing but four walls, a floor and yourself. And I offer no 'right' way of movement. There is simply yourself, showing yourself who you are. Any movement you make, or any that is absent from your body, is potentially

revealing of who you are in the moment. The emptiness of the room, the emptiness of structure, makes entering this work alone a courageous act. A decision to take charge of your own life, to enter the universe of yourself, provides the opportunity for an endless life-giving dance to be danced. Your movement can bring you understanding about yourself and the way you live, in the form of insight grounded in your body, rather than as idea or concept. If you want your body to tell you the truth, and delve between the onion-like layers of your defences, it will.

Inner and Outer Change

Bodily movement is outer change, and can be a metaphor for inner change. When you move, you make changes every second. Movement that is unplanned and open demands a series of choices. How you express yourself now, now, and now. Any movement you make, however simple or familiar, is utterly unique and unrepeatable. Every movement is new, as the combination of your being — physical, emotional, mental and spiritual — comes together into a particular synthesis of yourself in that moment, expressed in your own dance, special only to you in the moment.

Of course we are not usually conscious of our movements as a series of choices — moving or dancing takes the body along a continuous stream through all the countless decisions of direction, force, speed, tone, gravity, quality and momentum. Too much consciousness can be unhelpful. It depends on how you

need to move. What we think is awareness can sometimes be a past awareness we are holding on to from movement we have just made, because it is easier to know than not to know.

Perhaps you need to move very strongly, like a volcano erupting, to express accumulated energy or emotion, and this expression is not familiar and therefore difficult to make. The more you can just do the movement that comes naturally to your body, the more you can drop your fears about it. It may not appear graceful in your eyes, and it may feel strange, but it will be an expression of yourself that your body needs to speak.

When you move for no other reason than to move, then the process of moving your body is a journey into the unknown. A child who feels safe lives this: she has no need to preempt the next second's experience or to hold deep body tensions. As you open to your dance, your body expresses areas in your being only half-sensed or unrealised, and presents them to you in the quality and shape of your dance. If you aim for consciousness as a goal, you can block the subtle or diffuse areas of feeling and expression emerging from the unconscious. Through exploring movements the body brings unconscious fact to visible activity. The conscious and unconscious mingle. Knowing and not-knowing are both necessary for our growth and, given good soil, consciousness grows of its own accord, like a tree.

I hope this makes you want to dance! Please do. Now.