

Beyond “Somatophobia”: Phenomenology and Movement Research in Dance

In this article, I articulate a phenomenological and feminist methodology for researching lived dance experiences,¹ and include a short narrative representation of some of my findings.

The development of phenomenological research by feminist and dance researchers has provided a means to finally shift beyond Western “somatophobia”, and towards understandings that account for the integral nature of lived movement experience and body in knowledge. Phenomenology, together with a feminist consciousness, provided a means to focus on the description and study of women’s lived experience. Phenomenological description of lived experience has become increasingly popular with dance researchers, and I discuss the research of Dorothy Coe, Sandra Fraleigh, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, Susan Stinson, and Ruth Way.² I extend this dance research to outline a methodology and specific methods that allow an exploration of individual lived experiences in dance. My research also required the development of alternative narrative ways of writing that more appropriately represent women’s lived movement experiences, and I conclude with a narrative excerpt.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON MOVEMENT

Phenomenologists study lived experience, describing phenomena and exploring the experiential meanings as lived by particular individuals.³ In lived experiences, individuals are fully engaged in and aware of their world.⁴ Lived experiences are immediate and pre-reflective. Integral to lived experience is the notion of the “lived body”: a non-dualistic understanding of the conscious, intentional, and unified body, soul and mind in action in the world.⁵ Affected by dominant Western culture’s denial and repression of the body, and of experience as a source of knowledge,⁶ lived movement experience has only recently been studied academically. Feminist Elizabeth Grosz commented that Western culture and knowledge has been profoundly affected by “somatophobia,” or fear of the body.⁷ Prior to the twentieth century, few Western philosophers attempted to theorise the body, and the lived body simply tended to be taken for granted⁸, or considered “absent”,⁹ despite the significant contributions of phenomenologists

Baruch Spinoza,¹⁰ Martin Heidegger¹¹ and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.¹² These phenomenologists provided alternative understandings to the Cartesian dualistic notion of a separated mind and body. Merleau-Ponty stated that embodiment was the existential condition of being in the world,¹³ thus attempting to draw the lived body and lived experience into understanding.¹⁴ For Merleau-Ponty, the lived body was at the centre of experience, as it was the body that understood and experienced the world, rather than the mind.¹⁵ However, the lived body remained typically represented as a male body, and individual embodied difference was unrecognised in these early phenomenological accounts.¹⁶ Feminist researchers¹⁷ development of phenomenological understandings within their critiques of Western knowledge allowed the body and lived experience to figure more centrally in contemporary theorising.

Alongside the development of feminist critiques and theorising has grown a substantial body of research in dance. In a number of examples,¹⁸ dance researchers have utilised phenomenological description and understandings of the lived experience of the dancer.¹⁹

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone²⁰, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's work, wrote: "One of the promising features of a phenomenological approach to dance is...the possibility of bringing movement and philosophy, creation, performance and criticism into some kind of meaningful relationship."²¹ Phenomenology provided a method of description that focused on the wholeness of dance in the immediate encounter, in lived experience.²² However, while being a method of description, Sheets-Johnstone also saw phenomenology as a mechanism for reflecting backwards and illuminating the structures of consciousness. Through description, phenomenologists were "elucidating lived experience, the world as it is immediately and directly known through a pre-reflective consciousness. This initial and direct knowledge constitutes the foundation upon which all knowledge is built."²³ In this sense, lived dance experiences are a source of self-knowledge, a way of knowing about the world, and a way of generating knowledge.²⁴ Dance is of profound epistemological significance.²⁵

Sheets-Johnstone offered a phenomenological account of the experience of dance improvisation.²⁶ Within a dance improvisation, the dancer dances "this evening's dance"—whatever is created in the moment through perceiving and exploring the world.²⁷ The dancer perceives the possibilities of her environment, the possibilities within her own body, and responds by instantaneously integrating her perception, exploration and responses in dancing.²⁸ There is no level of premeditative decision-making in the dance, but an immediate response to the specific information present in the moment. The dancer is not separating thinking and doing, or not thinking, but instead she is "a body that is thinking in movement and that has the possibility of creating a dance on the spot."²⁹ Sheets-Johnstone's understanding of dance as thinking in movement lends itself to specific research, using phenomenological description and interpretation of lived dancers' movement experiences.

I will continue to refer to Sheets-Johnstone³⁰ throughout this paper, as I discuss understandings of women's movement, phenomenological dance research, and present my own phenomenological methodology.

UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

As I noted above, phenomenological understandings of lived experience such as offered by Merleau-Ponty,³¹ tended not to acknowledge gendered and embodied differences. A valuable contribution to understanding women's movement, as distinct from men's movement, was Iris Young's³² research on movement experiences aimed at achieving specific tasks, such as throwing a ball. Much of her research can be fruitfully applied to dance movement, as I outline below. Young³³ drew on the work of Merleau-Ponty³⁴ and Simone de Beauvoir³⁵ to articulate the specifics of women's lived movement experience and embodiment. Young outlined what she described as the basic modalities of feminine body comportment. She argued that a common experience of many Western women was being simultaneously an experiencing subject, and an object external to herself. Women tended to mediate their actions by imagining how they appeared as objects to others, at the same time experiencing their actions as intentional subjects.³⁶ This produced a discontinuity between intention as a subject undertaking a task and action as an object seen in the world from an external perspective. According to Young, feminine bodily experience was intentionally inhibited (by perception of inability to achieve the task undertaken), ambiguously transcendent (by concentrating action in one part of the body while the rest remained uninvolved), and had a discontinuous unity (by breaking the connection between intention and action, or between the possibility of and actual bodily achievement). Young wrote:

An essential part of the situation of being a woman is that of living with the ever-present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject's intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of action and intention.³⁷

For dance researcher Ann Albright,³⁸ Young's research provided a means to critique the dance performances of Louise Lecavalier and Jennifer Monson. While both of these women engaged in strong expansive movement, Albright demonstrated that Lecavalier nonetheless followed patterns of feminine movement. Despite Lecavalier's muscular body, she continued to exhibit the existential ambiguity of typical feminine movement and bodily comportment. Albright concluded that: "While her built-up body radically challenges a conventionally feminine body or movement style, Lecavalier's disconnected intentionality reinforces her traditionally gendered role within the spectacle."³⁹

According to Albright⁴⁰, Jennifer Monson was an example of a female dancer who, in contrast to Young's descriptions, transcended the typical feminine movement. She used physical dance as a basis for her choreographed and improvisational performances, rather than for display of strength and muscularity. In contrast to Lecavalier's movement, Monson's movement had a clear and directed energy, clarity of weight, spatial intention and movement flow. Albright wrote:

Because her whole body is affected by her movement, she seems to ride the currents of the air around her, emphasising the spatial flow of her dancing rather than directly placing her limbs in a shape. This clarity of weight, spatial intention,

and movement flow allow Monson to dance in an explosive, raw manner that is both physically subtle and pleurably rambunctious. She is strong but contained.”⁴¹

As Albright outlined, while Monson was strong and powerful, she was not framed in her performance as having either a fierce aerobicised physicality, or a feminine delicacy. Monson was able to move beyond the norm of feminine movement through her explorations, according to Albright. In this way, Monson’s dancing was responsive, enduring, able to accommodate change, and could offer the audience a profound connection with her dancing experience.

While it is relevant to offer a critique of the movement of other women dancers as Albright has done, her application of Young’s work does not include a descriptive phenomenological first-person account of movement experiences and meanings as they are lived by the dancers themselves. Rather, Albright positions herself as an external observer in using the modalities of feminine movement to understand other women dancers. In addition, Albright assumed (as did Young did) Merleau-Ponty’s account of body comportment, motility and spatiality in her work on feminine movement.⁴² While supposedly abstracted from gender differences, Merleau-Ponty’s account was nevertheless based on male experiences of movement, and on an instrumentalist view of the person.⁴³ As Young commented herself: “The instrumentalist-purpose model of action privileges plan, intention, and control. These are attributes of action most typical of masculine-coded comportment and activities.”⁴⁴ In this sense, both Young and Albright accepted a masculine model of action for women’s movement. Rather than looking for plan, intention and control in women’s movement, a different understanding might be found by looking for “specifically feminine forms of movement that cannot be brought under the unifying instrumentalist model but are nevertheless about work or accomplishing goals.”⁴⁵ Young asked: “What might a phenomenology of action look like which started from the mundane fact that many of us, especially women, often do several things at once?”⁴⁶ This is a question I argue can be explored within a first-person descriptive phenomenological investigation of a dancer’s lived movement experience which I will develop below. Before outlining my methodology for such phenomenological research, I discuss other examples of dance research utilising first-person phenomenological description.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION: INCLUDING THE DANCER’S VOICE

Sandra Fraleigh, Dorothy Coe, Ruth Way and Susan Stinson all undertook phenomenological research that allowed the dancer’s lived experience to be clearly represented through inclusion of the dancer’s voice. They recognised the need for methodologies that allowed the researcher to describe, understand and represent the richness of lived movement experiences, using first-person phenomenological description. Each used different methods of research, including written reflections and personal descriptive accounts, vignettes, and interviews, to understand and represent lived experiences.

Sandra Fraleigh⁴⁷ focused on creating an aesthetic perspective of dance, using the phenomenological method “to describe the experience of dance as it is lived, necessarily, through the body.”⁴⁸ Fraleigh stated that she “wanted to weave the intuitive voice of the

dancer into a descriptive aesthetics, slipping from the first-person experiential voice to analytical third-person theory, as phenomenology does"⁴⁹. Through inclusion of short personal vignettes about her own learning experiences, and segments of writing from her dance students, Fraleigh validated embodied experiences and demonstrated her appreciation of dance as a way of knowing. Describing the intentional basis of dance, Fraleigh wrote from her own experiences:

When I dance, I am acutely aware of my movement, I study it, try out new moves, study and perfect them, until I eventually turn my attention to their subtleties of feeling, and meaning. Finally, I feel free in them. In other words, I embody the motion. When I make a movement truly, I embody it. And in this, I experience what I would like to call 'pure presence', a radiant power of feeling completely present to myself and connected to the world...These are those moments when our intentions toward the dance realized.⁵⁰

Within her writing, Fraleigh also included quotations from her student's work. The following example indicated her student's growing self-awareness: "I lived in response to my body from others, detached in the clouds, in the physicality I was so shy of. Now my body lives within me, I have called it to me. My body is beautiful."⁵¹ Fraleigh moved toward a less analytical style of writing to represent lived dance experiences with her inclusion of personal vignettes and quotes from dance students. These poetic vignettes and reflections allow the lived experiences of embodied ways of knowing⁵² to be expressed in more vital and rich ways than traditional third-person texts such as Young's⁵³ and even Sheets-Johnstone's⁵⁴ allow.

Dance researchers Dorothy Coe, Coe and Jane Strachan and Ruth Way integrate dancers' voices reflecting on lived movement experiences in their research. Dorothy Coe⁵⁵ encouraged written reflections from students, both for their own development, and in order to evaluate the effectiveness of her dance pedagogy. Coe also wrote personal reflections on her own teaching practice. Her conclusions indicated that the students responded differently to learning within different pedagogies, and were able to find their own means of expression through movement experiences.⁵⁶ Coe's phenomenological methodology and methods of written reflection, while focused on the value of reflection in effective dance pedagogy, might be applied to investigate other lived dance experiences.

Coe and Jane Strachan⁵⁷ considered the inclusion of the dancer's voice in the research, outlining options such as those described above: "the dancer's narrative," "writing the dancing," and other options including "visual phenomenology," (combining CD-Rom or video of dancing with text and voice-over).⁵⁸ Again, the researchers' voices, theoretical discussion and quotes from the dancers all mingle together in the research publication. The dancers' voices are quoted to highlight and effectively illustrate the researchers' arguments.

Ruth Way⁵⁹ interviewed professional choreographers, rather than encouraging written reflection as Fraleigh and Coe had done, or observing a performing body as Albright had done. Way investigated one choreographer's lived experience of dance making through interviews, hoping to "begin to form an authentic picture of the methodologies and artistic sensibilities which nurture and inspire these creative processes and choreographic practice."⁶⁰ Way's conclusions

indicated that the choreographer's experiences were of rigorous investigation and processes of distillation to extract "the living moment from the kinetic, aural, somatic, spatial and emotional dimensions."⁶¹ Way's research into choreographic lived experience described a dancer living every moment of performance, infusing movement holistically with kinetic, aural, somatic, spatial and emotional aspects. Her descriptions of the dancer's lived experience relate to Sheets-Johnstone's⁶² understanding of thinking in movement, and to my understanding of dance making as an embodied way of knowing.⁶³ Although Way was specifically interested in the collaborative processes of choreographer and dancers, her methodology and method could be applied to investigate other lived dance experiences.

According to Susan Stinson, dance research required thinking in movement, or embodied knowing, or "knowing in my bones."⁶⁴ Researching and reflecting on her own movement experiences, Stinson described "knowing in her bones" in poetic vignette form:

As a person whose professional home has been dance for many years and whose personal home has been my body, I experience thought as something that occurs throughout my body, not just above my neck. Until I know something on this level — in my bones so to speak — the knowledge is not my own, but is rather like those facts one memorises which seem to fall out of the brain the day after an exam.⁶⁵

Susan Stinson argued that her lived dance experiences contributed to her development of representational forms of writing, such as the example above. When thinking about how to represent her own and other dancers' experiences in words, Stinson advised telling a richly descriptive story of lived experience. She commented: "I look for words that do more than communicate abstract ideas. I want to use sensory-rich images in hopes that a reader can feel the words and not just see them on the page."⁶⁶ Stinson concludes that through cultivating the kinaesthetic sense and using kinaesthetically rich words in stories, the dancer may more appropriately represent dance and research experiences, and thereby allow the reader a better understanding of embodied ways of knowing.

Each of these dance researchers indicated that investigation of lived experiences required the development of methodologies and specific methods that allowed the researcher to understand and then represent the richness of lived movement experiences. They chose to encourage written reflections from students, wrote descriptive and poetic vignettes about their own experiences, and interviewed other dancers to hear their descriptions and interpretations of movement. Nevertheless, their research findings were reported in a traditional qualitative research style, with dancers' descriptions of movement experiences framed by and mingling with the researcher's introduction, theorising and conclusions. Thus this research still moved between first-person and third-person accounts. Vignettes and quotes from the dancers reflecting on their lived experiences illustrate the theorising done by the researcher. As other qualitative narrative researchers have argued,⁶⁷ it is possible to represent lived movement experiences in even more engaging ways, where the distance can be shrunk between author and reader, and where emotional and kinaesthetic empathy⁶⁸ can grow with "characters" in the story, while the story is revealed and interpreted by the reader.⁶⁹ I move

towards a more narrative approach to representing lived experience based on interview research, creative journaling, and dance making methods, as I outline below. I conclude my article with an excerpt from my narrative writing, suggesting that narrative research representations more appropriately reflect lived experiences.⁷⁰

RESEARCHING LIVED MOVEMENT EXPERIENCES IN DANCE

Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience — the study and explication of phenomena, and the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them.⁷¹ Investigating lived experience involves turning to the nature of lived experience, and in describing lived experience, acknowledging that any description is only one of the possible interpretations of this process.⁷² This type of investigation is “a process of deepening and extending the quality of our coming to know; a process of changing the way we understand the phenomena of our experience.”⁷³ Phenomenological methodologies, created with a feminist consciousness, provide a way to focus on women’s lived experience. While considering research methodology, issues including reflexivity, intersubjectivity, power, objectivity, trust, rapport, empathy and voice may arise and must be addressed within the research.⁷⁴

I argue that three specific methods are particularly relevant for investigation of lived dance experience: interviewing, creative journaling and dance making. These methods allow for both a focus on personal and on others’ lived experiences. I focus more on general issues around interviewing as a method for researching the lived experiences of others,⁷⁵ and also briefly outline my creative journaling and dance making methods.

Interviewing is a research method that can enhance understanding of other dancers’ lived movement experience. According to Max Van Manen,⁷⁶ interviewing is both a method for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material, and a vehicle for developing a conversational relationship. One of the fundamental ideas behind the use of interviewing is that people have individual perspectives and experiences. In-depth interviewing allows the opportunity to find out more than is possible from simply observing women’s solo dances.⁷⁷ For my research, conducting in-depth interviews guided by the interviewee, but also working with an interview guide of topics, meant that a balance could be established between following the other woman’s interests, and exploring my own topics of interest. In-depth interviewing involves a commitment from myself as researcher, and from the interviewees, to developing rapport, forming a relationship and to participating in the construction of meaning.⁷⁸ It also requires a high level of trust and willingness. As Sandra Jones⁷⁹ commented, while a researcher aims to be faithful to the stories women tell and to enter into a genuine dialogue, researchers also need to retain their own voice as researcher. One method I used to achieve this was to include myself as a research participant within the research process, and as a “character” in my narrative representation of findings. Being a dance maker also enhanced the development of empathy and shared understandings with research participants, allowing intersubjectivity as “the mental knowing and emotional sensing that something is mutually shared and understood.”⁸⁰

Using in-depth interviews, I focused on the processes associated with a particular solo dance, prompting the dance maker to talk about the experience of making her solo dance. During the interview I encouraged the dance makers to reflect on and talk about their dance making in their own ways, through telling stories about experiences or describing choreographic tasks, or in other ways. Noting the specific words and topics the other woman used, I constructed prompts and specific questions as the interview proceeded. In some cases, framing questions from my point of view allowed me to share some of my experiences and to use self-disclosure as a way of contributing to the process of creating shared knowledges.⁸¹ Consequently, both the other dance maker and I contributed to the direction of the conversation and the construction of shared meanings during the interview, thus breaking down traditional power relationships between researcher and researched.⁸² We were both engaged in the analysis and construction of meanings, through listening, questioning and clarifying until we understood together. The process of clarifying and developing shared understandings continued between us beyond the interview. Having interview transcripts with additional clarifications from each of the women, I was then able to begin the task of creating a narrative construction of our discussions which helps to interpret each of our experiences.

My own creative journal contributed to the research process. Writing in a creative journal can be a method of personal inquiry into research and into lived dance experience.⁸³ A creative journal is a personal document⁸⁴ that contains creative and artistic processes: a collection of writings of varied styles, notes, lists, images, drawings and more, all organised as the journal keeper sees fit.⁸⁵ Creative journal writing can be used as a method to look and reflect, to include material on the assumption that everything might be relevant, and to research with intent.⁸⁶ I used this specific research method to record descriptions of my own experiences, both as a researcher and as a dance maker. For example, following interviews I wrote descriptive accounts of each of the other women. And as I created my own dance, I recorded movement activities and understandings I gained from them, which I was later able to incorporate into my research narrative.

Like creative journaling, my own dance making contributed to researching movement. Dance making can be a method to research personal lived movement experiences. I use the term “dance making” to refer to a plurality of practices utilised in creating and performing a solo contemporary dance. “Dance making” reflects more than just choreography – “the tradition of codes and conventions through which meaning is constructed in dance.”⁸⁷ Dance making can also be an embodied way of knowing,⁸⁸ or a way of analysing, understanding and resolving personal experiences when embodied through movement. For example, in my dance making, I discovered new relationships between theoretical concepts, my writing practices, and my movement practices, and I came to understand personal experiences through moving. Dance making allowed me to experiment with integrating the intuitive knowledges I felt were important with theoretical knowledges I had studied, and to consciously attempt to embody them. Dance making also allowed me to understand more about myself as a solo dance maker and as a researcher.⁸⁹

Undertaking phenomenological and feminist research using the specific methods of interviewing, creative journaling and dance making, raised issues regarding the most

appropriate way to share research findings.⁹⁰ I wished to develop a narrative context in which the reader had a sense of who all the “characters” were, and how we constructed meaning together. I wrote to avoid continuing the dominant Western practice of representing lived experiences as objective, “real” knowledge that was discovered by a neutral researcher. Instead, I wanted to draw attention to the constructed nature of representation and to my role in representation, being reflexive about the way in which my assumptions and experiences impacted upon the research.⁹¹ Hence, I created a group narrative about a day spent discussing solo dance making with the research participants. The narrative included excerpts from the interview transcripts, my creative journal notes about the dancers’ solo performances and about my research experiences, and any written material the other women gave me. I considered direct quotations from the women’s words as interpretations and commentary that allowed me to construct meaning as a researcher.⁹² I also included my understandings of dance making from reading and developing the work of feminist phenomenologists and dance researchers, and also from my own experiences in solo dance making. However, rather than using quotations from these varied sources and embedding them in a traditional research report, I selected and placed the material in a narrative frame, writing in context, with characters and plot. Through the use of literary practices, such as placing characters in a story, I hope to provide a framework which allows the readers the novel experience of positioning themselves within the richness of the lived experience. I provide a short excerpt from my narratives as an illustration of both method and findings below.

I do not intend my methodology and chosen methods to stand as a model for phenomenological research into lived movement experience. However, I hope to validate the role of embodied ways of knowing and lived experience, and to stimulate interest in alternative ways of researching and representing research. I include a narrative excerpt below to both demonstrate my method for representing my research findings, and to share some of my findings as I attempt to articulate embodied ways of knowing in words.

*REVEALING OURSELVES*⁹³

Discussion flows as we sit in my home overlooking the river, sipping herbal tea and talking openly about our solo dance experiences. We have this day together, lounging in the sunny, comfortable room. I look around at my friends and colleagues⁹⁴ : Jan – a confident leader and educator in dance, strong and resilient despite living with cancer; Raewyn – a soft-spoken, empathetic teacher, always ready to engage in a sophisticated discussion about patriarchy or femininity or anything else; Ali – opinionated but quick to laugh at herself and at life, and keen to debate education, art and politics; Susanne – thoughtful and quiet as she considers her opinions about dance and choreography, and at times infectiously bubbly; and Bronwyn – alert, engaged and intensely committed to her own investigations in dance and history. Their words and laughter fill the room. And myself, well, I’m prone to ask many questions as a researcher and to listen with admiration, at times voicing my dance experiences in earnest. Already, we agree that we share an understanding, or perhaps more accurately, an experience, of embodiment from our dancing. Picking up on her earlier comments, Raewyn says thoughtfully:

I realized that my body has been the most affirming and accurate source of knowing who I am. In the embodiment in my work, there has been a much greater sense of the meaning of life for me. A sense of physical pleasure, personal satisfaction, of being more fulfilled and happy in my life, and of being more fully myself. So my body is totally involved with my knowing. So that the knowledge gained... well, as an example, it enabled me to be much more effective in self-sustainable physical processes in my life. I feel I do actually come to a clearer state without the denial of body, without the denial of emotions, without the denial or absence of a sense of spirit.

I am particularly interested in the way that Raewyn describes her life as becoming more meaningful and self-sustaining through her embodied knowing. Raewyn's solo work, "Sensual Ensemble,"⁹⁵ and the understandings she derives from bringing her different knowledges together, seem to me to demonstrate the importance of her embodied ways of knowing.

Ali, contemplating embodiment in her dancing experiences, expresses her sense of how dance teaches us about embodiment.⁹⁶ She speaks slowly, aiming to find non-dualistic terms I think, becoming clearer as she continues to talk:

I think maybe, in performance improvisation, we might understand a little more when we actually sense everything working together suddenly in the moment. Maybe this notion of wholeness, of embodiment, is more about being in relationship with ourselves and others and the environment, all at once. It's a total kind of awareness, where all your 'antennae' are working in those directions. Maybe you understand something that might not even yet have words for you. You understand what integration means, or what that whole idea of mind/body/spirit means. And you can exhibit as a dancer, this fabulous organization in the moment, of intricate movement patterns, emotive expression, spiritual states of being, and qualities of energy. Basically revealing the kind of fantastic brilliance of the human animal at its best. You can articulate that extraordinary intelligence of humans in dancing.

"Yes, yes," agrees Jan, "dancing is intelligence in action, kinaesthetic intelligence!" I feel like cheering, listening to Ali and Jan speaking. I hear her trying to articulate and explain the embodied ways of knowing that are so relevant to my dancing and my research! Everyone is smiling at Ali, who immediately starts laughing and we all join in. As our laughter subsides, Bronwyn asks me if I can clarify further what I mean by dance as an embodied way of knowing. I reply that I feel Ali has just managed to articulate her experience of embodied ways of knowing, but I try to describe to her what I think in my own words:

I guess I am still trying to articulate what an embodied way of knowing is Bronwyn. But I do mean knowing and understanding yourself and your world through the process of personally integrating and experiencing different knowledges. This way of knowing and understanding does not leave out your individual embodiment, and the sense of wholeness and integration that comes through moving, but instead focuses knowing through moving, or thinking in movement. I think about embodied

ways of knowing in terms of the ‘dancerly’ ways of knowing – the things we have been discussing, and other processes that we each individually have been exploring in making dance. Earlier, you described how your solo “Housework”⁹⁷ gave you a focus that allowed you to interpret, understand and know something new – hence an embodied way of knowing. And you have expressed your embodied knowledge in your solo.

Considering my comments, Bronwyn responds:

I think it is all art really... something that lets you interpret what you see and hear and feel. Anything that helps you interpret is giving you more knowledge isn't it? In dance making, I find out what is really moving me, what is motivating me. It's teaching me something about myself. Again, referring to “Housework”, I look upon that as a progression, a coming to terms with something, and learning a new perspective about myself, and the world. And sometimes it's about finding my roots. It is an ongoing process that reflects my life, when I am doing my own work and what really interests me. I think this idea of dance as a way of knowing is very valid.

There are murmurs of agreement with Bronwyn's comments. I agree that dance making is like most art in allowing interpretation. I see differences too, in the way in which dancers, as opposed to painters, understand and communicate in an embodied way. I realise that through this discussion I am becoming more able to articulate the integrated, embodied understandings that come for me in the moment of moving. Together we are creating an understanding of embodied ways of knowing in dance making, as we ask for clarification and challenge ourselves to express our lived experiences.

Susanne draws on comments she made earlier in the day about bringing her lived experience into her solo “Someone else's weirdo.”⁹⁸ Susanne considers the idea of dance as an embodied way of knowing in relation to understanding and resolving her personal experiences. She explains:

In the past, making solos has been a way of dealing with whatever is the big issue in my life at the time. And if there is a big issue in my life at the time, dance is a good way of expressing it. It's cathartic, getting it all out, a way of expression. It was another way of expressing my relationship with the world, or how I felt about relationships in the world. My solo “Someone else's weirdo” looked at me and my uniqueness. It affirmed my ‘right’ to be weird or silly in public, and stated that being me was okay, if not fantastic!

Susanne continues, telling us about how her solos have been a way of dealing with and expressing whatever is going on in her life at the time. But she had also been able to delve into her own experiences and understand something new, rather as Bronwyn described it to us. So dance making enabled Susanne to look at herself, her relationship with the world, and to both understand it, and to express her knowledge. This process might simply have been a cathartic outpouring for Susanne. However, creating her solo work had not only been a release and expression of emotion, but it had also become liberating and powerful and a source of knowledge. As she performed she also came to new understandings of herself and her world.

Aiming to make their experiences relevant to others, rather than only being cathartic, was something Jan and Susanne both worked towards. Jan had commented that the power of dance was likely to be diminished if it remained purely personal. She mentioned that she had become more introspective about her movement, finding richer ways to express herself more meaningfully in her dance. Perhaps recalling these comments, Jan details her experiences in making “Off My Chest,” offering further understanding of dance as an embodied way of knowing:⁹⁹

I really do have a strong sense of connecting threads of my life. And some of those threads are physical threads, as well as emotional and intellectual ones. My work has to be concept-rich for me to sustain it. I have learned through study about the process of finding and distilling ideas, and I bring some of that to the way I work in dance. I’m interested in internal movement coherence and phrasing of movement – actively playing and finding new nuances. Concepts inform my creation of movement. And movement feeds back to me in a constant search for clarity and subtlety. It is a cyclical thing. Dancing is intelligence in action, or kinaesthetic intelligence. So I can relate to dance making as an embodied way of knowing.

To me it seems quite clear that Jan has come to understand, to know more about herself and her experiences with breast cancer and to deal with her experiences through her dance making. I know too, from having read Jan’s writing, that she is able to express and share her experiences with others in written words.¹⁰⁰ I suggest that dance offers us opportunities to reflect on, understand and express our experiences, like Jan has. Ali comments:

I can see that dance is a way of thinking about life generally. The working processes of dance making help me to understand something about where my movement is coming from and what is going on deep down in the silent place where I live, in my subconscious, if you like. So it is a way of understanding and knowing that. I see life in a particular way, through the eyes of a dancer, and I have acute sensitivity to things and particular knowledge because I am a dancer. And you know, knowledge in itself is of no consequence unless it finds a means of expression, and dance is one means of expressing knowledge, isn’t it? And you have to express yourself.

I see the other women nodding at Ali’s words. I’m trying to weave together the many insights I’ve had over the course of the morning talking with Raewyn, Jan, Ali, Bronwyn and Susanne. There is richness in our individual manners of expression and the depth of knowledge that we each have from our embodied dancing experiences. I realize that for me, it is the individual understanding that matters in what we have discussed, that knowledge is connected to our personal experiences and embodiment. I comment:

You know, I have this sense that I am my body of knowledge and I am the site of my research, as a solo dance maker embodying feminist theory. My interest is in having my dance be me – I recognize that I am an embodied knower and in dancing I am sharing my knowledge in my solo dance¹⁰¹ ... does that make any sense?

I get nods and smiles in reply. While I have struggled myself to articulate my experiences of embodied ways of knowing, I feel that the other women understand what I mean in some way, and we are becoming clearer and creating more sophisticated understandings together.

We each have individual embodied understandings and experiences, yet we all share some interests in making wider social, political and feminist commentary through our dance making. We also come to understand ourselves, and our relationships in the world, in new and rich ways through our embodied ways of knowing. As I'm pondering this further, Ali muses out loud, touching on something that I feel in my bones is at the heart of embodied ways of knowing:

I'm thinking about myself as a place to store knowledge, a kind of diary or running journal. A place to store knowledge, a place to extract knowledge from, and a place to exhibit knowledge. And that exhibition is revealing the organized integrated mind/body/spirit. Ultimately, that is what a great dancer can reveal, not just for their own sake, but as a kind of 'calling'. I think that the most we can do for humans, as a contribution toward life and peace on earth, is to reveal ourselves fully in our wholeness. And to try to realize our potential in whatever way we can. Maybe what is most important is this embodiment and wholeness – the exhibition of a person at their most whole and beautiful.

With Ali's last comments, I can't stop myself cheering this time! The room fills with smiles and as we bring our discussions to an end, it seems that we are all encouraged through this process of sharing and constructing knowledge together.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

I began this article by commenting that the development of phenomenological research by feminist and dance researchers has provided a means to shift beyond somatophobia. Dance and movement researchers are now able to develop understandings that account for the integral nature of lived movement experience and body in knowledge. Extending phenomenological and dance research methods enabled me to develop a methodology that provided not only further understanding of dance experience, but also of the nature of embodied knowing. I hope to have stimulated interest in new possibilities for researching and sharing lived movement experiences. In particular, I encourage researchers to allow their theoretical and embodied understandings to be revealed through rich narratives of lived movement experience.¹⁰² Movement is of central importance in understanding ourselves, our relationships with others, and with our world. Research that investigates lived movement experience can contribute to knowledge.

- 1 Karen Barbour, *"Embodied Ways of Knowing: Women's Solo Contemporary Dance in Aotearoa New Zealand"* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Hamilton: The University of Waikato, 2002); Karen Barbour, "Researching Embodied Ways of Knowing in Women's Solo Dance," *Tirairaka: Dance in New Zealand* (Wellington: Wellington College of Education, 2003); Karen Barbour, "Embodied Ways of Knowing," *Waikato Journal of Education*, 10 (2004): 227-238.
- 2 Dorothy Coe, "'Dance Has Connected Me to My Voice:' The Value of Reflection in Establishing Effective Dance Pedagogy", *Waikato Journal of Education*, 9 (2003): 39-49; Dorothy Coe and Jane Strachan, "Writing Dance: Tensions in Researching Movement or Aesthetic Experiences," *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15, (5) 497-511, (2002); Sandra Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987); Sandra Fraleigh, "Good Intentions and

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 - 4 Van Manen, 1997.
 - 5 Fraleigh, 1987.
 - 6 Barbour, 2002; Bonnie Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body -Mind Centering* (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1993); Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994).
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 - 9 Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
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 - 11 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).
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 - 13 Merleau-Ponty, 1962.
 - 14 Grosz, 1994; Simon Williams and Gillian Bendelow, *The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues* (New York: Routledge, 1998).
 - 15 Merleau-Ponty, 1962.
 - 16 Barbour, 2002; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Grosz, 1994; Iris Young, “Throwing like a Girl,” in Iris Young (ed.), *Throwing like a Girl* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 141-159; Iris Young, “Throwing like a Girl’: Twenty Years Later,” in Donn Welton (ed.), *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 286-290.
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- 19 Fraleigh, 1987.
- 20 Sheets, 1966; Sheets-Johnstone, 1999.
- 21 Sheets, 1966, 8.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid, 13.
- 24 Barbour, 2002, 2004; Ruth Foster, *Knowing in my Bones* (London: A&C Black, 1976), 112; Fraleigh, 1999, 2000; Sheets-Johnstone, 1999; Stinson, 1995.
- 25 Barbour, 2002; Sheets-Johnstone, 1999.
- 26 Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, 486.
- 27 Ibid, 489.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid, 487.
- 30 Sheets, 1966; Sheets-Johnstone, 1999.
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- 34 Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964.
- 35 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, H.M. Parshley, Trans. (London: Cape, 1972/1953).
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- 39 Albright, 1997, 50.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid, 51.
- 42 Albright, 1997; Young, 1980, 1998.
- 43 Young, 1998.
- 44 Ibid, 288-289.
- 45 Ibid, 289.
- 46 Ibid, 289.
- 47 Fraleigh, 1987, 1993, 2000.
- 48 Fraleigh, 1987, xiv.
- 49 Ibid, 54.
- 50 Fraleigh, 1993, 104.
- 51 Fraleigh, 2000, 59.
- 52 Barbour, 2002, 2004.
- 53 Young, 1998.
- 54 Sheets-Johnstone, 1999.
- 55 Coe, 2003; Coe & Strachan, 2002.
- 56 Coe, 2003, 47.
- 57 Coe & Strachan, 2002.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Way, 2000.

60 Way, 2000, 51.
61 Ibid, 60.
62 Sheets-Johnstone, 1999.
63 While I provide a definition of “embodied ways of knowing” below, I chose to embed the development of this definition and an understanding of embodiment in narrative form later in this article. “...embodied knowledge — woman views all knowledge as contextual and embodied. She experiences herself as creator of, and as embodying knowledge, valuing her own experiential ways of knowing and reconciling these with other strategies for knowing, as she lives her life. An individual woman using an embodied way of knowing...attempts to understand knowledges as constructed, and further, as something that she embodies, that she experiences and lives.” Barbour, 2002, 59. For further discussion see also Barbour, 2003, 2004.
64 Barbour, 2002, 2004; Foster, 1976; Sheets-Johnstone, 1999; Stinson, 1995.
65 Stinson, 1995, 46.
66 Stinson, 1995, 52.
67 Denison & Markula, 2003; Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bohner, “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject,” in Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 733-768; Fraleigh, 2000; Laurel Richardson, “Writing: A Method of Inquiry,” in Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (eds), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 345-371.
68 Stinson, 1995.
69 Denison & Markula, 2003; Richardson, 1998.
70 Barbour, 2001, 2002; Denison & Markula, 2003.
71 Van Manen, 1997.
72 Ibid.
73 Angela Brew, “Moving Beyond Paradigm Boundaries” in Joy Higgs (ed.), *Writing Qualitative Research* (Sydney: Hampden Press, 1998), 39.
74 Barbour, 2002. It is outside the scope of this article to discuss these issues in great detail here, although I make brief comments about each point.
75 For a detailed description of my methods see Barbour, 2002.
76 Van Manen, 1997.
77 Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
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79 Sandra Jones, “Reflexivity and Feminist Practice: Ethical Dilemmas in Negotiating Meaning,” *Feminism and Psychology*, 7, 3 (1997), 348-353.
80 Maureen Glancey. “Achieving Intersubjectivity: The Process of Becoming the Subject in Leisure Research,” *Leisure Studies*, 12, 51 (1993).
81 Reinharz, 1992.
82 Reinharz, 1992.
83 Richardson, 1998.
84 Mary Holly, *Keeping a Personal-Professional Journal* (Melbourne: Deakin University Press, 1984).
85 Robin Grove, “In the House of Breathings,” in *danz research forum collected papers* (Auckland: Auckland College of Education, 1999); Holly, 1984.
86 Brew, 1998.
87 Susan Foster, “Choreographies of Gender,” *Signs: Journal of Women and Cultural Studies*, 24, 1, 1-33 (1998), 5.
88 Barbour, 2002, 2004.

- 89 See Barbour, 2002 for more detail.
- 90 I focus here on ways in which I was able to share the research I undertook into dance making with other women.
- 91 Brew, 1998; Jones, 1997.
- 92 Ellis & Bochner, 2000.
- 93 Sections of this story from my thesis (Barbour, 2002) appear in my article (Barbour, 2003).
- 94 I chose to work with five women whose work I found personally interesting and inspiring because of their commitment to reflecting lived experience, and who I thought might be willing to engage in discussion about their dance making. I included myself as the sixth participant. Alison East is a dance and improvisation lecturer at the University of Otago in Dunedin. Bronwyn Judge is a dance teacher and mother of school-age children living in rural Otago. Jan Bolwell is a dance educator and writer, policy advisor and performer based in Wellington. Raewyn Thorburn is a Skinner Releasing Technique teacher and body worker living in Auckland with her partner, and has grown children. Susanne Bentley is a freelance contemporary dancer in her late twenties. At present she is dancing in Europe. I am a dance lecturer at The University of Waikato and a contemporary choreographer and feminist researcher.
- 95 Raewyn Thorburn, "Sensual Ensemble," in *Dress Sense* (Lopdell House, Auckland, 10 August, 1997 – dance performance).
- 96 Alison East, "How Being Still is Still Moving," in *Four Women Dance* (Watershed Theatre, Auckland, 29 May – 1 June, 1996 – dance performance).
- 97 Bronwyn Judge, *Housework*, (video available from Bronwyn Judge, PO Box 351, Oamaru, New Zealand, 1998).
- 98 Susanne Bentley, "Someone else's weirdo," in *Red Shift* (Bats Theatre, Wellington, 1-4 March 2000 – dance performance).
- 99 Jan Bolwell, "Off my chest" (Mary Hopewell Theatre, Dunedin College of Education, Dunedin, 15 September, 2000a – dance performance); Jan Bolwell, "The pink nude" in Margaret Clark (ed.), *Beating Our Breasts: Twenty New Zealand Women Tell Their Breast Cancer Stories* (Auckland: Cape Catley, 2000b).
- 100 Bolwell, 2000b.
- 101 Karen Barbour, "This is after all the edited life" (WEL Energy Trust Academy of Performing Arts, Hamilton, 10 October 2001 – dance performance).
- 102 Such narratives can avoid the need to slip between third- and first-person research representations, as I have done in this article.

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