

Guest Editor Note

Outside In: A World View

There is a soft and consistent pleasure to the act of writing which is quite other than the high of performing dance. There is, for me, an ongoing listening—to sound, voice, rhythm of language, and also a looking—for visual juxtaposition, striking image, humor. This is its own high, but it's not a very high high. After ten years of near total immersion in the spikier peaks of dance and performance, when the rhythm of my life was built around rehearsals, classes and performances, I am now looking at dance from what feels like something of an outsider's perspective. I am no longer defining myself to others as a dancer. This has been a willed change, at times a rushed and heady one, at other times slow and awkward. And as yet, it is not complete, but nonetheless... It is not the birth of my son two years ago that did it, or marrying. It is that now I write, don't dance. But I *do* dance. And I often don't write. Yet it is true that in my perceptions, in my body, if not always in my daily activities, I am living these days like a writer.

Now I find I look towards words, rather than movement, for comfort, challenge, excitement, renewal, and pleasure. I fall into a private absorption in language at odd times throughout the day—a slow shifting of experience into phrase or sentence. And the slight distancing of self from self when I observe my own thinking/writing is in such contrast to the often emotionally charged, immediate experience of dancing, that at times it seems an enormous reorganization of personality has taken place.

Once, about ten years ago, after a particularly frustrating afternoon of dancing in Nancy Stark Smith's "States" class at the A Cappella Motion workshop, where I could not seem to make anything I did matter and improvising had that empty, dry, false feeling which can put you to sleep in the midst of moving,



photo: Bill Arnold

I stayed after to talk with Nancy about it. This was a new "bad" experience for me. I was a relative beginner at improvising and had thus far mostly enjoyed a new sense of authority and freedom in my dancing, and had fallen completely in love with making things up on the spot and seeing them coming to surprising and immediate fruition with other people. I had not yet had more than a bad half-hour, and this had been a whole day, perhaps a few days, where I couldn't make sense or meaning out of my or anyone's actions. It felt like a large failure, a betrayal.

I described all this (tearfully) to Nancy, and to my amazement, she listened for a long time and seemed to think it mattered! She offered (here in my words) the following metaphor: Imagine your dancing as a globe. All the land masses fit together nicely with the bodies of water. There are no gaps. River runs into ocean, ocean meets its shore, land masses are stable, known, dependable. Now imagine the globe expanding. Suddenly, lands are torn apart. Their shapes and relationships are altered. Perhaps there is water where there was none before. Perhaps there is now a ravine where before there was flat land.

Her point, as I understood it, was that this feeling of awkwardness, of disorientation and confusion, was part of the process of expansion. That as my dancing was growing, I was less able to make clear sense of it as a whole, but that I would again as I adjusted to the new range. I was infinitely comforted. Suddenly, what had felt like failure was now success!

These past two years, though not as hard, have been like that day for

me—as I've been getting used to being a mother, to being married, but especially as I refigure my working life from one of a dancer into that of a writer. As I get used to spending more time in chairs, less on wood floors. As stages, back stages, post-show celebrations fall into the gray realm of memory. As old competitions lose their tug and some old friendships also slacken. As the physical needs and habits of years of dancing begin to feel less pressing, and the need for hours with pen and paper becomes more and more so...

Lately things seem to be making a kind of sense again. Rivers flow in predictable paths, islands are islands, and they don't strain towards the mainland, oceans don't batter the shores.

Editing this issue of *CQ*, I feel a strong connection to the ideas and concerns in these articles. But they do not, as they once might have, describe the center of my life. This insider/outsider perspective I've adopted affords me a detachment I have long wanted, yet carries with it a measure of sadness too. Standing on one globe, I'm looking out at the other—with interest, some longing, much love.

Julie Carr

Julie Carr is a poet who teaches creative writing to children in the New York City public schools. From 1988–1999 she spent most of her time studying, teaching, and performing dance and dance improvisation. From 1991–1997 she codirected and curated (with Sondra Loring) the Improvisation Festival/NY. She can be contacted at: 11 Schermerhorn St. #5FE, Brooklyn, NY 11201; email: george_lewes@msn.com.

Editor Note



photo: Bill Arnold

Outer Reaches

One of the stories that often comes to my mind during times of change is the one about the Cup and the Quart. It comes from Richard Heckler, a friend and colleague, pioneer in the field of psychophysical training and education, and is written about in his book, *The Anatomy of Change*. Somebody is drinking from a cup, a cup of “life,” you could say. It’s an amount they are comfortable holding, taking in. All is well and then one day the cup begins to feel too small; they want more. Just then, they notice a quart container across the table. It looks good, the right size. But they have to put the cup down first, and let go of it, to reach for the quart. In between, they have nothing. Except, perhaps, the reach.

There’s a lot moving under the surface of *CQ*’s pages these days, and not only the dancing of which it speaks. Something powerfully small and central—a seed, a stirring, a change.

Making *CQ* is an intimate process, one that Lisa Nelson and I have shared, with each other and with all the authors of all the articles that have appeared in the magazine over the past 20-plus years. The process, for me, is tremendously fulfilling, wildly demanding,

extremely painstaking and offers a precious opportunity to learn and exchange with my colleagues, to dialogue closely about the work, about life, about bios and commas, about what’s important and what’s not, about how to translate these enormously personal ideas and experiences onto a page.

As *CQ*, and what it takes to make it, has grown and changed over the years, Lisa and I have stretched in all dimensions, within limited resources, to keep this “vehicle” on the road—with a commitment and tenacity perhaps beyond a healthy norm. It is a meaningful endeavor—fun, funny, enlightening, tedious—that results in a product that lasts well beyond our labors. For dancers, used to having our work disappear as soon as it’s made, this alone is an extraordinary gift—for everyone involved, writers and readers alike.

Spurred on by a series of serendipitous events, coupled with the clear need to change, the old order has released. Letting go without giving up, we’re happily making space, gathering resources, opening and clarifying the vision, and designing new models and structures for the inclusion of more hands, minds, and hearts in the making of *CQ*. We’re inviting guest coeditors,

designers, and encouraging more year-round in-depth editing, curating, and developing of materials. The potential is enormous and intoxicating. How this will affect the content is unpredictable, and a very welcome adventure.

I had a dream the other night that Lila (who’s been designing *CQ*’s pages these last four issues) and I were lying on a blanket falling through the sky, looking up at two skydivers who were falling through the air right above us. Awed and absorbed by their flight, we watched their every move, studying their technique, marveling at the beauty of each subtle stretch and change in shape that affected their descent... So completely absorbed were we in their seemingly effortless, ecstatic freefall, that it was the furthest thing from my mind when Lila said we were about to land. And in that fraction of a panic of realizing I hadn’t prepared, we were down. Just like that. Full-weighted, no impact. Soundless. Remarkably, impossibly, soft.

Nancy Stark Smith

