

# Hermione Sessions: Dancing, *The Winter's Tale*, and the Kinaesthetic Imagination

Lisa Dickson, University of Northern British Columbia

Andrea Downie, EnhanceDance

*[The dance of life] is an expression that touches me deeply, for the instrument through which dance speaks is also the instrument through which life is lived — the human body. It is the instrument by which all the primaries of life are made manifest. It holds in its memory all matters of life and death and love. — Martha Graham*

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## Abstract

This essay traces the development of a solo modern dance interpretation of the final scene of *The Winter's Tale*, in which Hermione "awakens" to be reunited with Leontes and Perdita. Part diary, part dialogue between dancer and choreographer, the essay, like the dance itself, also conducts a critical analysis of Hermione's embodied history in order to understand the moment of choice and agency revealed in her final gesture, the open hand. Engaging with Shakespeare's play from the perspective of dancer-researchers, we take up Ann Cooper Albright's assertion that dancing is "physical thinking" and that the "kinaesthetic imagination" is a powerful interpretive tool. We draw on phenomenology and the history and philosophy of modern dance in order to explore the ways in which dancing, as an art that exists dynamically and ephemerally in time and space, opens up the possibility of feminine agency through a resistance to the reification and erasure that characterizes Hermione's representation in the play. The insistence of the body counters the power of Leontes' reifying language. To breathe in and as Hermione is to emphasize the insistent expression of her suppressed, embodied self.

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## Introduction: *The Winter's Tale* and Thinking with the Body

In March 2015, at the age of forty-seven years and some days, I danced my first solo. The modern dance piece, performed to Zoe Keating's "The Sun Will Set" (2005), was an interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, in which the disgraced queen Hermione appears to her reunited family as a statue. Her "resurrection" completes the shift from tragedy to comedy in a

moment of forgiveness and reintegration. What follows here is part diary, part dialogue, part critical analysis arising from the experience of engaging with Shakespeare's play from the perspective of dancer-researchers. Along with my choreographer, Andrea Downie (Enchainement Dance Centre), I will trace the process of making the dance and the ways that we were able to use the dance to demonstrate Ann Cooper Albright's assertion that dancing is "physical thinking" (2010, 110). The "kinaesthetic imagination" (103) is a powerful interpretive tool that allowed me to explore an aspect of this play that I had not considered before I began to breathe like Hermione. As Ros King notes, to attend to the experience of the body when engaging with Shakespeare's poetry, to use that attention as an interpretive tool, is to understand "[t]he difference . . . between observing a state and experiencing a process" (2007, 394) and "demonstrates a lasting answer to the old philosophical question as to whether it is possible to observe human consciousness from within a conscious human body" (399). Roland Barthes insists that kinaesthetic experience is integral to the pleasure of the text, "the language lined with the flesh" (quoted in Turkle 2007, 146). Together, Andrea and I embarked on the solo project with the aim of exploring the analytical potential of dancing and of kinaesthetic learning.

Suspected of adultery with her husband's best friend, Hermione, as both wife and subject of King Leontes, cannot escape her husband's reading of her pregnant body as proof of her guilt. Her own self is suborned to testify against her moral integrity, and her protestations of innocence are likewise unable to save her from Leontes' all-powerful, reality-defining assertions. Ultimately, it is only her death that convinces him of her innocence. But in the final scene in which she is reintroduced to the living world in a bit of theater — as a statue come to life — her transformation leaves the question of her status tantalizingly unanswered. As Lynn Enterline observes, "the one thing that the audience *cannot* do is 'go and see.' The truth of Hermione's body — its innocence and death — is always held from view" (2000, 214).

But, while seeing is believing in this play, it is proven to fall short as means of accessing "the truth of Hermione's body." After all, as Leontes protests, "I saw her, / As I thought, dead" (5.3.139-40).<sup>1</sup> James A. Knapp notes that seeing as a form of epistemological mastery is not in itself enough to ground a claim to truth, for it is defined by distance: "Shakespeare's tragic figures stand above, flattening the images they experience, unable to descend to the world of the living" (2012, 387). To the eye, Hermione's statue is a *trompe l'oeil*, a visual joke that asks Leontes to "see life as lively mocked as ever / Still sleep mocked death" (5.3.19-20). Sleep can only be mistaken for death at a distance. In presenting Leontes with Hermione's statue, Paulina acknowledges that, while an artistic representation might counterfeit life to the eye, it cannot lie

to the touch. To touch it is to dispel the illusion: "[G]ood my lord, forbear. / . . . / You'll mar it if you kiss it" (5.3.80-82). It is only when Leontes touches Hermione — "O, she's warm!" (5.3.109) — that kinaesthetic learning can replace the instability and untrustworthiness of the kind of signs that have, until now, so tormented the jealous king and led him to embrace horrors: "Leontes's redemption in response to Hermione's living image is figured as a break with conceptual mastery, a return to the world of experience, a return to the phenomenal" (Knapp 2012, 387). Knapp finds in the language of phenomenology a model of kinaesthetic participation appropriate to Leontes' moment of redemption: "The body unites us with things . . . which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world" (Merleau-Ponty, quoted in Knapp, 387). While it is true that, as Enterline asserts, Hermione's voice has the "power to unhinge her husband's sense of the world itself" (2000, 207) by making him doubt his place in it, it is the warmth of her hand that sets his world to rights again and re-replaces him within it.

This desire to find the body and to locate the body's knowledge is apropos to an analysis of Hermione, whose bodily reality is both emphatically at *the heart of the matter* and radically absent for the entirety of the play. As a form of expression that exists in time and space and whose ephemerality defines it "as that which continually plunges into pastness — even as [it] presents itself to visibility" (Lepecki 2004a, 127), dancing offers a particularly interesting way of exploring the tensions in the play between absence and presence, death and life, certainty and ambiguity, stasis and motion. Dancing Hermione's moment of awakening, I find that the insistence on her history and body reality exploits the ambiguities of the play's final scene to posit an alternative narrative that liberates Hermione from patriarchal reification and releases her into the dynamic motion of her own story.

#### DUALITY

Duality underlies the movement principles at the heart of the great modern dance techniques and dramatic concepts found in the choreography of their founders. Martha Graham stressed breath and the movement that results from the contraction and release of tension. Doris Humphrey highlighted equilibrium and the resultant fall and recovery as one submits to and defies gravity. Such dualities provide a framework for exploring the infinite movement possibilities that lie between the extremes. — AD

#### Diary Entry: Hermione Sessions #1, What You Carry

*"Take a breath. I want to see where it goes in your body."*

*It's the first day of choreography. I take a deep breath and Andrea watches how the air shapes me. This is the moment where I will find Hermione. This is what I bring to the studio on the first day:*

1. My favorite line from *The Winter's Tale*: "O, she's warm!" (5.3.109), Leontes says. In a play that is so robust with language, in love with it to the point of lugubriousness sometimes, Shakespeare hits peak genius in one three-word line. In the progression through those three syllables, Leontes, whose mad jealousy has led to the ruin of both his family and his kingdom, realizes that, against all hope and expectation, he has been redeemed. I love this moment because it's about making a terrible, terrible mistake and living with it. It's about finding oneself again through an act of grace. Leontes is saved by, well, perhaps by magic, certainly by art, and by his true repentance, but really by his wife's capacity for compassion and forgiveness.

#### AWAKENING

Although Lisa initially balked at my suggestion that she was ready to learn and perform a solo, she slowly warmed to the idea and (with some gentle nudging) decided to take on the challenge. She arrived at our first choreography session with a line from Shakespeare, "O, she's warm!" and relayed an intriguing story about Hermione and her "awakening." I was eager to explore the experience of awakening — both Hermione's and Lisa's. I decided the piece needed to begin with a simple breath for two reasons: 1. When we are born, and when we awaken, we take a deep breath. It seemed the logical place to start. It is how Hermione first knows that she is indeed alive; 2. Because Lisa was so nervous at the prospect of dancing a solo, I wanted her to feel competent in the first movement of the piece. I began with breathing because it is so simple and natural. I asked Lisa to take a breath to see how and where she initiated the breath. I observed its path so I could discover where we should go next. — AD

2. Print-outs of pages from Gilbert Austin's early nineteenth-century treatise on rhetorical gesturing, *Chironomia* (1725): *As I am a rather literal and pictorial thinker, the series of gestures depicted in the treatise provides me with a bridge between language and the body, a vocabulary that is both conceptual and physical. Invito, the upward-facing palm and curled index finger that invites the audience to engage. Explodo, a clapping and opening of palms to show angry repudiation. Despero, the drooping hands that express desolation and despair. (As the process of building the solo develops, these are the gestural keys that will allow me to shift my focus eventually away from Leontes and his experience of redemption to Hermione and her visceral confrontation with her history).*

3. Cerebral bias: *Watching video of my past performances, I can see myself thinking all the time. I have a cerebral bias. Dancing is not unthinking — there's plenty of thinking going on all the time — but the paradigm shift I'm seeking is from thinking in the head to thinking in the body, to get to "physical thinking." Ultimately, the idea is to create a smooth relationship between the brain and the body, in the heart, construed as both figurative ("heart") and the undeniably phenomenal (heart). To get to the heart of the matter, so to speak, is to allow knowledge to originate in the bones and muscles and the connective tissues that, in so many ways, also structure the metaphors and images that are, for those obsessively intellectual like me, the "natural" language of thought.*

#### AWARENESS AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Lisa's movement, at times, lacks flow. Part of the reason for this is that she is a novice. In the early stages of learning, sometimes known as the "cognitive stage" (Fitts and Posner 1967, 12 and *passim*), much conscious cognitive effort is required to execute complex motor skills like dance choreography. When attending to the step-by-step execution of choreography, movement is slower and tends to be abrupt. At the same time, some of Lisa's *unconscious* habitual movement patterns get involved. Inefficient patterns can impede the ability to dance effectively. I encouraged somatic learning by bringing Lisa's awareness to her soma, "the body as perceived from within by first-person perception" (Hanna 1986). In this way we could make conscious what is habitual and begin the process of altering inefficient patterns. The next step was to encourage the new movement patterns and choreography to become smooth and automatic through practice and repetition. My goal was to enable Lisa to attend to the experience of being Hermione, rather than thinking about the mechanics and sequence of the movements. I wanted her *dancing* instead of doing a dance. — AD

#### Erasure, Reification, and the Persistence of History

On the very first day of choreography, Andrea's interest in the breath made visible to me my particular orientation toward the core story of *The Winter's Tale*, that being the sacrifice of a woman's story for the purposes of her male counterpart's spiritual *bildungsroman*. I had assigned to Hermione's silent gesture — holding out her hand for Leontes to touch — a pre-given value that *has* value only insofar as it ratifies the masculine story: Hermione's forgiveness is the final sign of Leontes' moral triumph. He has learned his lesson and is therefore rewarded. To be sure,

this reading has ample support in the text, but it also enables the perpetuation of an erasure that begins for Hermione in the early scenes of the play when she, and indeed all women, are identified as the agents that introduce death into the homosocial, prelapsarian world. There, a man, trading "innocence for innocence" (1.2.69) with other men, could aspire "to be boy eternal" (1.2.65), had not women entered to "trip" men out of Eden and into the sinful world of carnal desire. Hermione forestalls the story Polixenes tells of this idyllic time with his friend, Leontes: "Of this make no conclusion, lest you say / Your queen and I are devils" (1.2.80-81). The only way to conclude a story that includes women is to demonize them. Thus, Hermione is doubly absent, exiled from the innocent existence that would be available to men "Had we pursued that life" (1.2.70), and is instead offered an existence that is predicated either on being a motivating antagonist in a masculine divine comedy or having no "conclusion" at all.

This association of Hermione with absence continues through her trial on charges of adultery, where her only defense is to point out that her words have no power to defend her: "It shall scarce boot me / To say 'not guilty'; mine integrity / Being counted falsehood, shall, as I express it, / Be so received" (3.1.24-27). Enterline argues that Hermione is the voiceless ground upon which Leontes projects his own subjectivity: "Nothing she says to Leontes diminishes the force of his projections; the language she 'understand[s] not' limits the field of her possible responses; and any answer she makes must still be read by him, a reading she cannot control" (2000, 233). Even the question of her death is informed by her absence from her own story, as she dies offstage, and appears later as a "ghost" but only in a dream reported by Antigonus (3.3.17-36). In the play, Hermione is always already absent, always already receding from view, always already dead. Throughout the play, she is the "cipher" that multiplies in the homosocial economy, "With one 'we thank you' many thousands more / That go before it" (1.2.6-7); that is, she is the zero that adds to the narrative of masculine identity its mathematical magnitude.

As Peggy Phelan notes, "the absence of women in our persistent myths informs our response to the absence we call death, the signifier of absolute alterity" (2004, 15). The feminine in this formulation is a sort of stillness, a negation of life, or, one might go so far as to say, a living woman rendered as a statue. In the final scene in which Hermione is "resurrected," her identity *as* Hermione is dependent upon her inability to talk back. Leontes fears that her statue will "chide" him for believing it to be Hermione indeed, but it is the statue's inanimate — and therefore speechless — nature that proves it to be his wife: "or rather, thou art she / In thy not chiding" (5.3.25-26). The crisis of the first half of the play turns on Leontes' inability to stabilize his wife's being, to reify it as either "guilty" or "not guilty." Paradoxically, in the scene of redemption and reconciliation, to be Hermione and not a statue, Hermione must remain statue-like. To be Hermione indeed, she must

ratify her husband's fancy, and her innocence and reintegration into the living world are predicated on her absence, figured here as statue-like silence.

Knapp asserts, however, that "[f]alse images in Shakespeare are false because they are static, inviting the illusion of conceptual mastery and leading to misguided action" (2012, 386). In the realm of dance we find a similar linkage between reification and mastery in the concept of dance notation or recording, where the attempt to subject movement to documentation, "in its optical-descriptive obsession[,] withdraws dance from the flow of its own materiality. All documentation provides is a stiff body" (Lepecki 2004a, 133). Such translations of "movement into cognitive systems," Cynthia J. Novak argues, "subsume the reality of the body as if people's experiences of themselves moving through the world were not an essential part of their consciousness and of the ways in which they understand and carry out their lives" (2010, 169). As a pictographic representation of affective and relational states integral to rhetorical disputation, Austin's illustrated handbook of gestures, *Chironomia* (1806), substitutes stasis for process, enclosing each gesture within its own discrete box. Likewise, the early modern transcriptions of choreography by, for example, Thoinot Arbeau (1589) and Pierre Rameau (1725), represent, Lepecki argues, a "project of dance's regulation and registry" rooted in "a perception of dance as unproblematically translatable from code to steps, and from steps back into code again" (2004a, 127). In a similar epistemological move, Leontes' reification of Hermione as an exemplary version of herself (that is, as a statue that cannot "chide") atomizes and makes available to scrutiny a lived experience that is otherwise elusive in its dynamism. The "innocent" or "guilty" wife, like the statue, is an object of mastery.

While she can be subsumed into her husband's comic redemption, the "warm" wife is, however, much more elusive. In the play, it is unclear whether Hermione is truly a statue or has been hiding in Paulina's house for sixteen years and only pretends to be a statue for reasons that are never made clear in the text. From a certain patriarchal perspective, there is no practical difference between these alternatives. Being a shut-in is not that much different from spending sixteen years in magical suspended animation, *if* we begin with the assumption that a woman's life is meaningless or non-existent unless and until she enters the sphere of patriarchal and familial duty. Indeed, Hermione returns to "life" in a scene in which all of the play's disturbingly eccentric, inappropriately vocal, disguised and "disappeared" women are reintegrated into the patriarchal economy: Perdita's true lineage is ratified by her marriage to Florizel; Paulina, a "boundless tongue" (2.3.91) and "mankind witch" (2.3.67) who "late hath beat her husband" (2.3.91), is safely yoked to the honourable Camillo, at which time her "worth" is "justified / By us, a pair of kings" (5.3.144-46); and Hermione is brought again into the royal family as mother and wife.

The choice between readings becomes more pointed if we consider that a Hermione in Paulina's house might experience a whole history of her own in those intervening years, or that history changes her even in a state of so-called suspended animation, and that it must be dealt with on the moment of waking. We are told that the statue bears the marks of time's passage, but, in the play, the ownership of this evidence of Hermione's own bodily history is rather bestowed upon the masculine sculptor who, in his "excellence" "lets go by some sixteen years, and makes her / As she lived now" (5.3.30-32). Hermione herself sidesteps the question of her mysterious persistence after death. She informs Perdita that she has "preserved" herself on the understanding that the oracle has predicted her daughter's safe return (5.3.125-28), but the means of this "preservation" are ambiguous and might as well refer to a life in hiding as to the "excellence" of a magical transformation. Unlike the patriarchal reading that collapses the difference between seclusion and dis-animation, hiding and solidification as a statue, there is something protected in this ambiguity that Hermione offers as her "explanation," something that refuses reification or reduction to a patriarchal narrative of feminine value. For Lynn Enterline, Hermione's silence on the matter is strategic: "After her theatrical metamorphosis, Hermione does not speak to the man who doubted her to the brink of annihilation. Her voice once triggered a terrible response; now she evades the problem by saying nothing to Leontes" (2000, 199). But she does not, in fact, say "nothing." She offers Leontes a gesture, an extended hand. To ignore this bodily speaking is to forget what Hermione cannot: the "some sixteen years" that "make" her "[a]s she lived now." We know what this gesture means to Leontes and in Leontes' story. The question we asked in building our solo piece was: What does it mean to Hermione? The conundrum for me and for Andrea, then, was how to honor Hermione's history without giving in to the reifying desire to pin the ambiguity of her existence to a definite concept ("really" a statue or "really" in hiding, "really" innocent, "really" dead). If you imagine a history for Hermione, the space between "Music; awake her — strike!" (5.3.98) and "O, she's warm!" (5.3.109) becomes alive with unexpressed agency.

### Diary Entry: Hermione Sessions #2, Breathing Stone

*So, the very first movement of the solo will be the exhalation and suspension of breath for a full eight counts, followed by a sharp inhalation and a slow exhalation. In that is a story.*

*I was explaining to Andrea what I love about that moment in The Winter's Tale when Leontes touches Hermione's "statue" and says, "O, she's warm!" She listened intently while the music played over and over in the background. She took notes. Then she said: "You've talked a lot about him finding his wife alive after sixteen years. But what about her? What does it feel like to wake up after sixteen years and find yourself back in the world?" We talked then about whether she*



was "thawing" or "escaping" from something like plaster or stone. We settled on "escaping." And then we got up and started to explore what that would be like, to move back into this particular world after sixteen years.

#### DIALOGUE AND DISCOVERING HERMIONE

Improvising and dancing are holistic processes that engage dancers physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially. When we improvise movement, we can discover and access all that we know, are, and have experienced. We can also engage in dialogue. Lisa and I asked questions about dancing and Hermione, and we discovered surprising answers. Sometimes we began with cerebral questions that found answers in movement. At other times we began physically, with movement questions that led us to cerebral answers. The dialogue of discovery happens easily in both directions and languages. Through it we began to find our Hermione. — AD

*The long exhalation creates stillness, allows the abdominals to cinch in for core support, and creates the need for breath. It creates a sort of impetus and imperative for the first breath, the waking. At the very extreme edge of that suspension, waking up is as necessary as breathing, part of the momentum of living. In "On Breathing," Irene Dowd says: "you can't commit suicide by holding your breath because after a certain point you pass out and start breathing in spite of your will" (1981, 1). The second exhalation is slower, more resigned, pulls the body from its momentary rise into a shallow contraction, the sternum falling inward as the memory of the world comes back.*

*"Oh, I'm here again," Andrea said as she demonstrated the motion. Carried into the world by the insistence of breath, Hermione has to decide how to respond.*

*The first moments of that response are about seeing herself as alive, beginning with one hand closely inspected, and then using that hand to clear the clay from her eyes. In doing so, she peers out into the audience and invites them in with a gesture: Invito. At that point, the music changes and Hermione "swallows" her story, "births" it again with a gesture, a child stolen from her, her own vibrant life solidified into a posture of loss. What will she do now? How does she move on from this? How does she get to forgiveness?*

*Now I see the problem with the images I've clipped from Austin's Chironomia. They convey states of being but cannot reveal transitions. They are static. What I need to know in order to understand Hermione is how to get from there to here.*

#### DANCING THE ARC

Doris Humphrey proposed in her book on choreography, *The Art of Making Dances*, that dancing is the transitions, the movement that exists in the "arc between two deaths" (1959/1991, 106): between standing still and balanced and lying on the floor motionless. Austin's images in *Chironomia* provided us with some visual stimuli, the beginnings and endings of arcs waiting to be discovered. — AD

*I had never before thought of Hermione this way. I had always thought of her either in hiding from the world or as enchanted into a statue, in both cases waiting for Leontes to get to the point where he can accept the forgiveness she has to offer. I never imagined her from inside the statue or in the long years of her exile, or considered what is at stake in that moment when she begins to breathe, or that the breathing into life might be an imposition, an imperative that takes hold of her in spite of her will. I had always seen that moment as always already written, the forgiveness already formed. It never occurred to me that Hermione had a choice to make about how to be in this world.*

*I found a much more complex Hermione in the breath.*

### Breath, Dynamism, and the Negative Hermeneutics of Refusal

For us, the answer to the conundrum of Hermione's history was to see the dance as a moment that liberates Hermione not *from* her story but *into* her story. To do this, we had to take for granted that Hermione had a history that was expressed in her bodily experience. Again, dance, an art form that exists *in the body* and *in time* and *in space*, offers a powerful mode of expressing the ambiguous suspension between life and death, motion and stillness, presence and absence, dynamic indeterminacy and the solidity of documentation and definition. Phelan captures this suspension in the figure of the comma, "the grammatical symbol that marks the space that separates and joins thoughts" (2004, 19). She observes:

The subtle caesura that opens between the end of one movement phrase and the beginning of the next claims our attention because it seems both to promise and to threaten our restless longing to be still. Dance, like all living art forms, emerges from the oscillation of our desire to be animated and our desire to cease to be. (18)

Impelled into the world, Hermione must recognize that the world she re-enters is not that much different from the one she left ("Oh, I'm here again"), for all its comic resolution. To step into her role, to be Hermione "indeed," is in some ways to accept the injunction not to "chide." The "how" of Hermione's "preservation" is not told in this play but remains "to be questioned" (5.3.139), deferred

to some offstage space and another time, "Lest they desire upon this push to trouble / Your joys with like relation" (5.3.129-30). The "joys" of the comic resolution are, it seems, dependent upon the silencing of Hermione's history. At the same time, however, the ambiguity that remains at the play's conclusion is akin to what Knapp identifies in the kinaesthetic experience as a "constant source of wonder" (2012, 386) that evades the reifying desire for a single answer. "We never are what we are," John D. Caputo writes, summarizing Foucault's "negative hermeneutics of refusal" that values "a certain capacity to resist the identities that are imposed upon us" (2000, 34) and raises the possibility of "being-otherwise-than-the-present" (35). In the refusal of a single answer, "something different is always possible" (35). This possibility of "being-otherwise-than-the-present" seems in some ways to chime with the experience of dancing, which is, by definition, always on the way to being something "otherwise" than it is in any artificially atomized moment in time.

In the dance, we considered what it would mean for Hermione to process in three minutes, or sixteen years, the experience of her own history. To make the assumption of a history that cannot be forgotten because it is lived in the dynamism of her bodily experience is to begin from the premise of agency that is embodied in the breath: "The intake of breath, which is normally an unconscious movement, can sometimes become a gesture in its own right, consciously signaling an intention to start speaking or to impart emphasis" (King 2007, 389). Propelled into the world by the breath, Hermione must choose how to move forward. Will she remain a cypher, a statue-like woman who steps, unchiding, out of her own history into that of her husband? Will she leave her past behind and unspoken? Is the patriarchal comic resolution that is effected by her resurrection a feminine tragedy?

I did not want to leave Hermione in the tragedy. I wanted to keep her in the suspended place of dancing. What she offers Leontes in her outstretched hand is more than forgiveness; it is history; it is something different; it is a story that is always in the process of telling, always already moving on. Karmen MacKendrick reminds us: "As Martha Graham was fond of noting, all dance begins as a continuation rather than as origin, each class opening on the *and*: 'And one . . .'" (2004, 151).

### Diary Entry: Hermione Sessions #3, Ambush

*We were working on a new section of choreography. Andrea was trying out this and that (She goes "inside" at these moments; it's very interesting to watch her thinking with her muscles, seeing but not looking). Sometimes she'll ask me: "Which foot wants to move first here?" I'll repeat the latest phrase of steps and allow the momentum of it to carry me over the end of the phrase, this way or that way, so that I can answer: "Left foot wants to go backward." We move on, building the next phrase. While that is happening, sometimes we'll talk through the narrative of Hermione's*

*journey from grief to forgiveness, seeing how the movement, the imperatives of shifting weight, balance and counter-balance follow or lead the ideas.*

*"I could go this way," I said to Andrea in answer to her question. "We haven't moved into this area of the stage yet."*

*"Hmm. True." Andrea paused, disagreeing in the Canadian way. "I know that typically choreography makes use of the whole stage but sometimes I like to impose a constraint by limiting the movement." Another thoughtful pause. "Like, maybe Leontes is over there," she said, pointing downstage right.*

#### LIMITATIONS AND LEONTES

Sometimes limitations are naturally present. For instance, the current abilities of a performer or the size of the performance space may limit my movement options and influence my choreographic choices. Sometimes I impose limitations to give form to an idea or to prevent myself from being overwhelmed by the near-limitless movement possibilities. The creation of a structure/framework for improvisation and choreography provides me with a manageable number of movements with which to experiment and manipulate. According to Frank Chimero, "limitations allow us to get to work without waiting for a muse to show up" (2012, Chap. 3, n.p.). Occasionally, however, a limitation ushers in the muse. Such was the case when I decided to have Lisa work with a spatial and focal pull toward the downstage right (established by the facing of the opening statue-like pose), only to discover Leontes standing there quietly waiting in the shadows, just as Hermione had been. — AD

*BOOM! Suddenly, the motivating element, the seductive/repulsing well of gravity that shapes the piece was there, and the entire emotional logic of the movement space was made viscerally present to me. The expansions and retreats that characterize the piece already had a grounding psychology for me: Hermione's grief, the story that she needs someone to see, impels her outward, but her fear of reprisal and rejection, and her fear of the intensity of her own emotions and memories cause a recoil; her limbs twining protectively around her, she retreats, becomes small and silenced, even as her anger and her own sense of self urge her to take up space, to move in larger, more expressive ways. Now that Leontes was placed on stage (figuratively, invisibly), there was an external interlocutor added to that internal struggle of centrifugal and centripetal forces, and the lines of travel and extension I had been following made so much sense. Here, Hermione's resistance breaks through constraint, but a glance to the right sends her collapsing backward, but*

*the arc of that retreat brings her closer to Leontes. Every retreat also impels her back outward on the force of her story, closer and closer to confrontation. She looks over her shoulder, finds him there, retreats in confusion only to face him with a magnified explodo (the rhetorical gesture that signifies an over-riding energy, a repudiation) that turns her entire body into a wide-open, screaming mouth. She collapses to the floor and rises again slowly to stand fully in his view: "See, this is the child you abandoned on foreign shores. This is the one you killed with grief and shame. This is me, who was your wife. This is me." Then, a swiftly traveling series of spins and rolls that culminates finally downstage right, with a repetition in brief of her own narrative and the main motions of the dance, arms reaching up and plunging into the past, pulling out the story and presenting it on palms turned outward: "This. All of this. And . . ." The hand extended on the final unresolved notes of the "8-and" count is not a rejection of this history, but an invitation. The insistence on a history that comes with her into the world turns her gesture into a true act of grace. All of this, and nevertheless, forgiveness.*

#### RISK-TAKING AND RISK-MAKING

Lisa found this section of choreography particularly challenging. I had her fall into a roll, only to quickly rise again for a dizzying series of continuous turns that ended in a sudden moment of near-stillness. She worried about stumbling and losing her balance or orientation. For me, this section was about Hermione furiously reliving her story and building the momentum and courage to take a risk. Could she forgive Leontes and move forward *with* him? She decided it suddenly with what an old runic saying would call an "empty-handed leap into the void." I wanted Lisa to feel off-balance and to embrace the possibility of stumbling and falling. I wanted to make her dizzy so that performing the final open-handed gesture would feel risky. — AD

### Modern Dance and Embodied History

As a form, modern dance is particularly apropos to such an exploration of a woman's embodied history, as the form carries in its own history just this desire. At its inception as a critique of the regulation and extreme idealization of the feminine body in nineteenth-century pictorial ballet, modern dance was female-centred and grounded (more than metaphorically) in the affective mode: "[Practitioners] inherited no practice; the techniques and the choreographic forms they developed were maps and reflections of the possibilities and propensities of their own originating bodies" (Dempster 2010, 229). While there developed a vast range and variety of styles, some of which focus on the external possibilities of shape and space, "[c]ommon to

these contrasting styles of dance . . . is a conception of the body as a medium and vehicle for the expression of inner forces" (229-30). In our dance, both the inward and external forces are at play. The psychological and social contradictions that shape Hermione's grappling with her history as she moves into the present moment of choice reflect as well the ethos of modern dance, where "the body registers the play of opposing forces, falling and recovering, contracting and releasing. It is a body defined through a series of dynamic alterations subject to moments of surrender and moments of resistance" (230). The "dynamic relationship with gravity" (230) that defines the form of modern dance is conceptually and psychologically mirrored in the push-pull of despair and resistance in our dance as Hermione struggles with both her own internal conflict and with the invisible Leontes, the dark matter gravitational body that simultaneously drags her into the world and demands her absence from it as a condition of her "innocence."

As the play of internal and external forces in the dance reveals, this emphasis on the kinaesthetic is no encomium to the body as a pure and "natural" site uncontaminated by language, culture, or history. Rather, just as Hermione's own affective experience cannot ignore the influences of the patriarchal world through which she moves when dancing, bodies are mobilized as a means of thinking and representing cultural experience. André Lepecki situates the phenomenological experience and embodiment of the dancer in the dynamic world of history:

[Dance] proposes a body that is less an empty signifier (executing preordained steps as it obeys blindly to [sic] structures of command) than a material, socially inscribed agent, a non-univocal body, an open potentiality, a force-field constantly negotiating its position in the powerful struggle for its appropriation and control. (Lepecki 2004b, 6)

Trapped by a system of gender relations and political power that renders her voiceless, Hermione is also an agent whose agency does not find expression in the discourses that govern her world, but is available only as a trace or disturbance, such as the perturbation of her husband's jealous mind or the revelation of the patently unjust operations of the justice system in her trial scene. Beginning from inside Hermione, the dance speaks to her indelible, irreducible, if officially negated, presence. Dancing in and as Hermione, I could *not* be absent. Accessing her story through dancing does not entail a simple "translation" of Shakespeare's words into movement, but rather engages with the materiality of her otherwise silenced self. As W. B. Worthen argues, this is the irreducible quality that defines theater: "Theater goes well beyond the force of mere speech, subjecting writing to the body, to labor, to the work of production" (2002, 9). Shakespeare's insistence on the materiality of Hermione's touch in the resolution of the play is a gesture toward what makes theater: the bodies that live knowledge into being, bodies that carry within them the traces of their own histories.

As a dynamic process, furthermore, the dance works against reification. In her discussion of her recreation of the works of the famous serpentine dancer Loie Fuller, Anne Cooper Albright emphasizes the critical efficacy of such "physical thinking": "The dance . . . taught me how to write history from inside the vibrations of its ongoing motion" (2010, 102). In choosing to engage her own dancing body "as a research tool or guide," Albright finds that she must "grapple with the relationship of [her] body to history" (107). In taking up Hermione's part but not her words (a topic for an entirely different essay!), I am forced to encounter her on different ground, one that mobilizes the "negative hermeneutics of refusal" relative to the powerful discourses that shape the possibilities of her spoken language. If, in the play's economy of language, "female voices indicate that they are betrayed by the very words they speak" (Enterline 2000, 207), one could posit the dancing body as a dynamic presence (the dance of life) and not an artifact, writing rather than something that is passively written-upon.

As a dynamic system of movement, dance is always and foremost the expression of the relationship between the past and the present; its ephemeral nature as an art form expressed only *in time* and movement *through space* means that the dance is predicated on and chased by its own disappearance: "Mostly movement disappears, [sic] it marks the passing of time. Movement is both sign and symptom that all presence is haunted by disappearance and absence" (Lepecki 2004a, 128). For Knapp, the rational codification of the world cannot fully engage with its living dynamism. "The image in this [dynamic] sense is not comprehensible," Knapp asserts, nor is it "able to be reduced to a concept (a bush or a bear), but instead proves a constant source of wonder: it is the something that 'grows' 'brief as lightning,' able to 'unfold both heaven and earth'" (2012, 386). To dance Hermione is to confront her history, her materiality and her agency in "always irretrievable, never fully translatable motion" (Lepecki 2004a, 127). *Take a breath. I want to see where it goes in your body*, said Andrea at that first meeting in the studio. In attending to the imperative of the breath when dancing, it is impossible not to put Hermione at the centre of her own narrative, a shift into the body that consequently opens a path of movement through an alternative narrative, one in which Hermione can present her story.

#### Diary Entry: Hermione Sessions #4: Language Lined with Flesh

*I don't know if Leontes had been there, downstage right, the whole time Andrea was building the piece, or whether his presence was created or revealed by the lines of force, weight-shifts and counter-balance in the movement, but he's there now and my solo has become in my mind a duet (Aha! There's something I wouldn't have noticed had I been typing instead of writing cursive: "duet" is just one crossed line from "duel." Not an original observation, but a fun one).*

*But I'm glad that Leontes only appeared so late in the process of building the dance. Because this is not his story, and while his invisible presence adds a new dimension to my understanding of the movement, he is not the point, and Hermione's story, while caused by him, is not his, is not about him. I don't want her to be just a reaction. Much of her story in the play is a reaction to things that are outside of her and beyond her control. In my mind, this appears in the movement in the way that, at a key moment that represents her thoughts about her lost children, the shifts in stance — grief, to avoiding, to giving in — all happen after the big emphases in the music, in the transitional spaces, as if in response to a series of blows. But the story is about owning a story and moving with it, ahead of it, bringing it along but not being lost to it. For this reason, I'm very happy that the dance begins with Hermione's awakening. First, she notices herself, the miraculous quickness of her limbs; then, as she wipes the dust of sixteen years from her eyes, she sees the audience. She offers them invito with a slowly opening hand and a beckoning curl of the fingers: "Come. Listen. See." And with a great gasp of breath, we all dive into her story together.*

*Running through the piece in my mind, in my car, listening with earbuds in while waiting for sleep to dawdle my way in the wee hours, I often find myself weeping. The stage actor Paul Scofield famously once said about showing emotion on stage that "the emotions are mine, but they're not real" (quoted by Hiddleston 2013). I feel myself in those moments, in my mind where my balance is more perfect than it ever is in real life, widening upward, arcing on cantilevered demi-point through the magnified explodo gesture and Hermione is there in the tension on the arch of my supporting foot, and in the spaces between the ribs that expand as her rage expands and her whole body opens like a huge howl: "This! This, Leontes, you have done to us!" The idea of Hermione becomes a person who, for that moment, uses my body to be. "This is me."*

## Notes

1. All references to *The Winter's Tale* are to the edition of Stephen Orgel (Oxford University Press, 1996).



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