

SOMATIC ANACRUSIS:
AN EXPERIENTIAL POETICS OF DEBORAH HAY'S CHOREOGRAPHY AND
PRACTICE IN THE SOLO *AT ONCE*

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Abstract

This project is a kind of doingmovingthinking: a close study of iconic American dancer/choreographer Deborah Hay's choreography and practice through my particular dancing experience of her solo *At Once*. The resulting experiential poetics illuminates both the implicit critique of an instrumental/rational paradigm and also the ethical implications of the particular relationality enacted in Hay's work. I characterize Hay's work as a radical communication practice, one that moves language through the body in a dynamic torqueing process that both gathers toward and unravels from the edges of meaningfulness in a process of perception. I work at the interdisciplinary intersection of dance, performance, somatics and cultural studies, and my thinking draws substantially on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy and language. Aspiring to a balanced integration of moving and writing, of practice and theory, I follow a performance studies approach, attempting, as characterized by performance scholar Dwight Conquergood: "to live betwixt and between theory and theatricality, paradigms and practices, critical reflection and creative accomplishment" (318).

Through personal daily practice and performance of Hay's work allied with close description, I apply my devised method of emergent choreographic analysis to Hay's choreography and practice. This analysis, conducted from inside the practice of the work, reveals how Hay's complex and distinctly linguistic choreography operates as a constructed situation for the practice of perception and that, in performance, this practice moves language through the body in a dynamic torqueing process that engenders a unique lived experience of paradoxical simultaneity. I coin the term somatic anacrusis to articulate this underlying processual phenomenon. Reconsidering the dimension of relationality in Hay's work, I re-frame somatic

anacrusis as a pre-relational pre-disposing, a kind of suspended or “unconsummated relationality”. Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray’s thinking helps illuminate the ethical implications of Hay’s work as a practice of perception that opens a new way toward the other. I conclude by appropriating Hay’s own rhetorical interrogative strategy “what if...?” What if somatic anacrusis offers a possible answer to Irigaray’s call for a new way to approach the other that respects fundamental difference and yet allows encounter?