

# POEMS FOR THE DANCE

Also by Scott Thurston:

*Figure Detached Figure Impermanent* (Oystercatcher, 2014)

*Reverses Heart's Reassembly* (Veer Books, 2011)

*Internal Rhyme* (Shearsman, 2010)

*Of Being Circular* (Knives Forks and Spoons: Newton-le-Willows, 2010)

*Momentum* (Shearsman, 2008)

*Hold: Poems 1994-2004* (Shearsman, 2006)

# POEMS FOR THE DANCE

SCOTT THURSTON

with a foreword by Camilla Nelson  
and photographs by Roger Bygott

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## Moving Words

### An Introduction to Scott Thurston's *Poems for the Dance*

Thurston's words dance an intimately corporeal investigation of a thinking, moving body in language. In an interview with Radio 3 presenter Ian McMillan for *The Verb*, Thurston describes himself as "a poet who moves" (27 November 2015). This may be a slight understatement. Thurston has been developing an exploratory movement practice for over thirteen years, working with Five Rhythms, Movement Medicine, Contact Improvisation, Authentic Movement, Qi Gong, Alexander Technique and Open Floor methods. He has attended poetry and dance workshops with Billie Hanne in London and Berlin, and with Sally Silvers and the celebrated Italian-American choreographer, Simone Forti in New York City. More recently he attended a workshop with OBRA Theatre Co., prior to their tour of *Gaudete* (a treatment of Ted Hughes' verse novel by the same name), whose work combines "psychophysical practice and heightened language" (OBRA). He has been collaborating with the dancer Sarie Mairs Slee since 2013, recently publishing a joint article on their work in *Choreographic Practices*, and with the improvising vocalist Steve Boyland since 2012, working on a series of movement and poetry performances. All this goes by way of introduction to the range of Thurston's commitment to and enthusiasm for exploring and developing his moving language poetics. But perhaps this is best evidenced in Thurston's own words.

The five-line stanza structure of 'A Dance', the first poem in this collection, pays tribute to the Five Rhythms dance practice that so deeply infuses Thurston's work. Beginning with an eight stanza 'warm-up' of all the parts of the body, it proceeds by devoting three five-line stanzas to each of the rhythms of the practice – flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical and stillness – with a slightly longer single verse for chaos, and a more dispersed 'open field' section for stillness. This poem finds its own logic, linking heart to skull, "a shoulder wing of bone tips" to "the voice sucking through each cell in turn". This work is deeply imaginative. Thurston thinks and feels his way through his body, undoes his body through this thinking, pulls at language as he breaks the form, pushes at the rhythm and formal organisation of the words. How does this feel? What does this movement do to my body? What does this feeling do to my words? He investigates the relations within himself – asking what this self means in this moving moment, in relation to other selves and to the space they find themselves in. *Poems for the Dance* records how these

muscular-skeletal-nerve articulations of space move within and without the body as they open and close, fold into and out of one another in a myriad of intricately varied interfaces.

A key part of Thurston's skill lies in his ability to monitor, examine and carefully express his experience as a dancing body in words. This is evidenced most clearly in the first part of the essay 'Dancing the Five Rhythms'. The level of detail he is able to recall of the seemingly fleeting emotional-physical relation of the moving body is impressive. But 'body' is not enough because, as micro-biologist Margaret McFall-Ngai has observed of her bacterial studies, as the focus of study narrows "it's difficult for scientists to even categorize what they are seeing" (2010:3). Things fall apart. That is the beauty of such fine observation. Thurston conjures a mirage of being able to think, move and write all at once. The impossibility of this miracle draws our attention to the absent body that haunts these texts; a stiller, more sedentary body aided by desk, chair, computer or notebook. It is this silent body that types out, writes up, edits, extends, polishes and finishes these words into the form you find before you. This practise links Thurston's contemporary movement poetry to a much older tradition that was also concerned with the relationship between active embodiment and the writing of this embodied self: "I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" (from Wordsworth's 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*). The sedentary, stilled and often silent self is easy to overlook, paring away the unwanted text to maintain a balance and momentum between these dancing words. The honesty of investigation not just into the emotional self but of the moving/moved self is laid out in longhand for us here.

Thurston's essay explores the careful, momentary, observation embedded and embodied in this writing self and offers words as so many pebbles by which we might imagine the formation of the rock. An ethics emerges, a continual questing of what is right and what is wrong. What is the answer? What is the truth? How is this truth subject to change? Thurston sorts the important from the unimportant. As an academic – embedded, embodied – his questioning seeps everywhere demonstrating a bravery and honesty in his commitment to this task. This sharing of both a ground of being and a navigating process encourages the reader to open up, to deepen their own embodied relationship to words. Thurston invites the reader to be alongside him in a movement with language that is both compelling and contagious. We follow him as he weighs, considers,



questions and counters the relation of feeling to nerve-twitch, toe-end, knee-bend, following the swell of emotion as it intra-acts with the scramble and sweep of abstract understanding. The intimate questioning of the relation between the many processes that make up the moving changing self in relation to other moving changing selves to spaces that have their own scale of change, is a questioning of equivalence, a registry of feeling and a searching for a language that would correspond now, now, and again now, to the perceived moment. How should this movement, this rhythm, this relation within and between this self, these selves, this space, both real and imagined, make its way into language? What is the language comparison, the linguistic counterpoint for this enquiry? This careful delving into the intimacies of muscular-skeletal nerve-ending emotion, real and imagined, is a continual asking as much of himself and his dancing partners – as they intersect and interact with the space – as it is an asking of us, his readers, his re-writers, his word dancing partners. How will we configure ourselves in relation to these words? How will we weigh ourselves against them? What is their weight? How are we moved? With what language movements will we respond?

In his 2015 interview with Ian McMillan for *The Verb*, Thurston emphasises the centrality of the word “turning” and the influence of Martin Buber’s writing on his thinking about the intersection of these two art forms: “Turning [...] has a currency in thinking about poetry with the turning in the sonnet [...] also the turn is etymologically linked to the word “verse”, being from the Latin “versus” meaning the turn of the plough as it reaches the end of the field” (2015; 51:15-51:45). ‘A Dance’ introduces this collection as a prolonged meditation on turning. The twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth stanzas of this poem explicitly map the change in dynamic from you to me // I to you // you to me. Each five-line stanza marginally repopulates a repeated formal phrasing to explore what each slight shift might bring, reorienting the words to investigate how these shapes we make co-ordinate our reality; how does changing our words re-order our world? This poem pushes and pulls, asks & answers, gives and takes in a complex and continual renegotiation, like a child relearning its boundaries. What is ok for me now? What is ok for you? What is ok for the tentative ‘us’ that we are here? What is this ‘us’ that we are here? In the fifteenth stanza, the lines run together into a seventeen-line verse before regrouping into the familiar five-line arrangement only to test the boundary in a different direction by separating into short phrases and occasionally single words. Shift change. Feel how your attention gathers and swirls around these isolated fragments. How does the relation alter when there is more space on the page? And so, Thurston’s words dance and swirl.

“Turning” is also an important word for Buber, Thurston says, in describing “the movement from the I-It to the I-Thou”. To offer a very simple reading of Buber’s thinking, the I-It relationship characterises how humans relate to the world as a series of discrete objects or things (including people), and the I-Thou relationship describes how humans can also relate to the world in an unbounded, relational way (including things as well as people). Thurston suggests that it is this constant state of turning or folding of I-Thou relations into and out of I-It relations (and vice versa) as humanity navigates its relationship to the animate world (animus, spirit) and the world of objects and things (traditionally regarded as inanimate) that fascinates and informs his work. Thurston acknowledges, in the final stages of this interview, that poetry provides a particular instance of this turning, from poet to poem, reader to poem and poet to reader. Poetry occupies a liminal condition between I-Thou and I-It relations. A poem can be transformed into an object, into the pages of a book or words on a screen, but it has no meaningful life without the animating force of the human being. The reader animates the poem even as the writer objectifies it (and vice versa). The fact that these two activities may occur simultaneously, within the same body, evidences the continual turning between modes. The poet as both reader and writer of these words is constantly “turning,” but it is as a result of his fascination with movement and dance that Thurston feels this connection most keenly. Thurston’s sense of this “turning in quite a physical way” takes on a “spiritual sense,” by way of Buber’s theological enquiry, as well as an “aesthetic sense” in the way the word resonates for him (51:45-52:13). And so, the moving poet explores the dancing body as both fleshy object – solid substance, thing-like, spatial material – and spirited agency for change and transformation, realising recombinations of body and world that may not have previously existed for either the dancing body or the world in which it dances.

As a poet who moves [...] I felt that the kinds of experiences I had in movement were not unlike the experiences I have when I’m reading or writing poetry. And somehow it’s something almost abstract but at the same time quite physical, that when you read a poem or listen to a poem, you get an impression of a feeling or a movement that maybe is an emotional journey that you go on. It might be that the poem has a particular sound pattern that draws you in. And I think that dance is quite similar. It works on these dynamics of movement and other qualities that are almost abstract but they’re also very physically present,

so, in the movement that I would experience in dance, I would think of the movement of a poetic line [...].

(Scott Thurston on *The Verb*, 27 Nov 2015: 52.25-53.24)

*Poems for the Dance* invites us to investigate how this language moves us, how we dance in words. Thurston threads pathways between parts of the self that may not yet have realised their silence. The breaks in *Momentum* incite you to jump, break, stop, stumble, stutter, gasp. This stop-start rhythm reawakens you to your moving language self in a way that might feel uncomfortable or destabilising. By contrast, the line breaks in extracts from *Reverses Heart's Reassembly* (2014) offer us space to pause and savour a series of micro-moments; an assembly of which presents a shadow outline of the scaffolding from which 'Dancing the Five Rhythms' may have grown. Excerpts from *Internal Rhyme* offer windowed opacity. These quadrilling quatrains explore a tension between absence and presence in the breaks and continuity of syntax as words are arranged across blank space. The arrangement of these texts tests the tension between words, bodies, selves: how far can you stretch this space before relation shatters? Even the relation between letters cannot be relied upon, as Thurston demonstrates in the slippage between words, present and implied, in the first of his 'Two Sonnets for Clare Backwell': should, shoulder, solder. Thurston's scrutiny is relentless and perhaps it is only this that threatens to collapse or explode the bonds between words. In the space between letters and words, in the absence of speech, Thurston attends. In both the prose and the poetry elements of this book, Thurston listens into that felt moment between question and answer. But where there is relation there must also be release. It is for the reader to make space in this text, to occupy a questioning of this conglomerate thinking-feeling self, to resist or to extend. Thurston's poetry offers to rewire you. How will your body respond?

Camilla Nelson 2017



## A DANCE

*for Gabrielle Roth and the Five Rhythms (2006)*

Blue fire taps its frame in my heart  
a surfeit of judgement beckons my self  
to a crisis – no other way out than to track  
its force begin to wake up the parts to call  
everything into account – nothing can be wasted

or held back, it must simply be used: bring it in your head  
invite it to crack a patina across the skull, cross the rush  
floor of a temple where grey shines cropped close  
a further beckoning into the future  
then shifts through neck vertebrae to open up in blades

of a shoulder wing of bone tips to stretch out a sphere  
promote a gain in spherical space not long to encounter elbow  
angular resistance traces it makes it a harsh demand against  
abuse you don't defend me when you have the power to you  
go to war on yourself and take us all with you – what my elbow

says before a movement takes me back into my hands' pliant  
gesture of giving, sudden shocking candour and articulacy – it  
designates a boundary then switches it right out again proposes  
love but supplements anger, careers out of fearful alliance, local  
propensities to release it all in joy facing us into

spinal approaches where the tower links lines up troubled  
continuities a serpentine conviction that establishes stance  
delivery from the motherlode to evolved competition you slink  
walk start and daring smirk to try it on for sudden legs awake  
bend this way enables the present and the past to brush each

other awake and drops into the hips' bowl your sole song determines  
my sexuality it holes me rocks me into a moment that stretches  
circular blasts out before and aft to skewer me pumping breathless  
in a shower of light there is so much room here to breathe and that is  
the other partner the voice sucking through each cell in turn

to take a knee each in hand the syntax builds a link between elbow now  
your thought begins to speak silently between hand and now foot  
trusted carrier through the floor the breath's rain now drops right through  
knees creak releasing memory neck cricks resisting trauma hips pulsate  
pushing the spine out elbows float several parts align in a new sentence

the whole races tries now to get back into its own time uncertain of  
its shadow in the room of its reflection determining a pattern of wings  
hissed gap a vision terrifying as an angel striding across the room brings  
back my palms to heart massage a breath talk and difficulties that there  
are so many ways of telling me to do it right this way and not that way

your flow mothers me to touch my toe tracing a tight trauma in the space  
behind my hips in between parts of speech love across the floor fills me  
with your fears of expenditure, frightening, unprecedented – the exhaustion  
of overwork, the treadmill locked into uphill gear to oblivion: the mirrors  
abounding by which one wants to trust reflect a different view I dare not

touch see me my other sense me touching your bones careered crazily through  
time to a dance hall here where you spun felt alive discovered what you  
thought you never knew existed shocked by desire your awakening connects  
us even through death in the dance a jest to touch our toes beckoning shadows  
into fullness into touch your presence just here aside me simple to look glance

across to push into the reflection nothing to be judged here to attack the cultural  
script implicit bring it in nail it right here rusted to the post that tells keep out or  
great misfortune desires you your flow my flowing gives way waste out to time  
shuddering drifting wallow to swallow kow-tow on the undertow sullen silent out  
of breeze to belie a hot stink of prayer a stink bomb a bowel releases gaseous light

now you're going to hit me now you're going to make me now you're going to strike me  
now you're going to take me now you're going to hate me now you're going to right me  
now you're going to slight me now you're going to bite me now you're going to trap me  
now you're going to like me now you're going to sip me now you're going to light me  
now you're going to have me now you're going to keep me now you're going to lift me

now I'm going to worship you now I'm going to treasure you now I'm going to  
hassle you now I'm going to father you now I'm going to harbour you now I'm  
going to open you now I'm going to close you now I'm going to further you now I'm  
going to lessen you now I'm going to pressure you now I'm going to worry you  
now I'm going to hurry you now I'm going to whither you now I'm going to hide you

you want to light me I want to dark me you want to mark me I want to touch me  
you want to follow me I want to lead me you want to love me I want to hate me  
you want to judge me I want to charge you you want to bill me I want to make you  
create me you I want your you to fold to I your hide to run to mine hold to top a  
pen to run a wall across your you to follow the shoulder of land back into breath

now back into the breath stands tall a shake begins your real ritual takes place writing  
in the dark right now you call those things down evoke it here right here now make it this  
space break it this way this sudden break to wreck to scape the grim gasp bold it  
back it over the sick the spit the sweat the stitch in your gut let the head go  
rock the momentum back always bring it back take it out follow it forward there is  
no other way to shake it take it down to the base of you your space in a score of full score  
then tapes on a window a murderous red night brings the knife to slit the  
thin spun thread of abandon take me how you want me I want your you how  
I want my my given it round to slice out a sudden shocking sadness of how it would be if  
it was always like this and who would it play if we always rounded it like this always held it up  
high like that always span it round held the shoulder to that forearm  
placed that foot beside that ankle traced that hip's edge across a shoulder's blade placed it all  
in relation external and internal your solidity taken right back in me down  
to our toes inside our skins the damn shape the damning shame accords to this shock  
of unrelenting unresisted unending destruction and it unends in a hush of a wingbeat  
don't end for me don't end on me don't quit on me don't determine me don't leave me here  
draw me out with discipline turn the dark back to what makes it light bright

and then we could join again each other in a solo my own duet with joy deepens the breath  
forgotten lover seeker travelled a long way in a dark time through a desert simple as a setting  
but not so easy to traverse: rest during the day travel at night where  
the vista stuns you into submission to your foot's desire to bend it to the road that stays  
still that never leaves turn into stone and tin roofs rap to the brain borne

in stringent echoes take me tarnish me up in a field for assessment, regulation refinement  
in at the strait wicker gate it hurts you know to be beautiful hooks up  
to the sun what hope for a warmer day perhaps a glimpse of the mountains emerging  
out of the haze a boat on the river a blackbird singing a few things chopped and heated  
in the pan to a flat mash for the tongue's dance and stomach's satisfaction



a beaker full of the warm sound washing it down something sharp to remind me of softness  
something sweet to remind me of bitterness something loud to remind me of quietness  
something touching to remind me of isolation something cold to remind me of warmth  
something rough to remind me of smoothness something rocking to remind me of stability  
something old to remind me of novelty something simple to remind me of complexity  
something of you to remind me of me something now

something soon must arise I break myself down into stillness I break  
break my  
self down into stillness makes the wind sudden

a gesture melts terrace into crevasse shoulder slopes to

a hill's  
delight makes me trace open tack into space

wind turns baffle into simple  
troubles me rough

triumph to simplify nothing all the very thing into

love  
to move

my body

say might say

give me to your turn light

you turn me

a way to

go to you

come to

into

you turn me

to you I turn

into you your

turn me into

you I turn

into you you

time me out

of you





# DANCING THE FIVE RHYTHMS

## Part 1

### WARM-UP AND BODY PARTS

I step onto the floor. The cool textured plastic of the mat meets my bare soles and I delight in the sensation, my feet still hot from walking up the hill. Adrian comes by and raises his palm to receive a high-five – our traditional greeting.

The dojo is still fairly quiet – seven of us are scattered around, warming-up in various states and stages. Some lie motionless whilst others rehearse the vocabulary of yoga or pilates to get themselves stretched-out and limbered-up, whilst a gentle pulsing beat oozes from the speakers. I'm trying to get used to the simple contact between my feet and the floor so I set off on a few experimental steps to test how my balance and weight feels. Even this is enough to threaten to totter me over today, so I bend my knees slightly and try to concentrate on visualising my weight's connection through my legs to the ground. I'm thinking of a dance workshop I did three years ago when I spent a whole weekend just trying to get a sense of connection with the earth, to get grounded, to shift the way in which I carry my weight more firmly down into my knees and feet. I long for that – I wish I could spend the whole session today just trying to stand and walk.

From my position with my knees bent I start to set up a simple swaying motion from side to side, feeling the shift of my weight and starting to get the rest of me involved. I'm distracted by a dancer I don't recognise talking to Carrie the teacher by the decks. I find myself measuring this new person up immediately – trying to gauge her experience, her background, her mood. The self-conscious pride of my own commitment and standing in this group surges up for a while, but I know this particular tendency in me and I try to let it go into movement. I lift my head and move it from side to side, feeling a few clicks in the vertebrae in my neck. As I start to find a connection between my head and my feet

my arms suddenly come into play, helping to extend my swaying motion and inviting the centre of my body into awareness.

I'm opening my attention to the rest of the group as more people arrive. Again I get distracted and a bit irritated by two dancers chatting loudly at the edge of the dance floor. I inwardly entreat Carrie to intervene, but she is rapt in conversation with the new dancer. Again I try to address my disquiet through movement – I start to fling my arms out further and allow them to draw my hips and knees out into the space and to move my feet across the floor. I'm spiralling around myself now and edge over towards the offending couple, not knowing what I'm going to say or do, but as I come within range they resolve their conversation and drift apart. I feel a pang of guilt and reproach myself for being so touchy today, but there's a lightness that immediately follows and I put this energy into my dance and shift up a gear.

Something starts happening at this point which takes me deeper into the process I've set in motion. I start going back over the day's events and thinking about a message I received at work that unsettled me; about an unfocused morning trying to settle to revising a document; about the steadily rising feeling of tension that became almost overwhelming. But I notice that the feelings that attach to these recollections – particularly the message – seem to have diminished somewhat. They are at a distance already and holding less sway. A space opens up, new energy rushes in, and I'm moving in expansive curves right across the floor, weaving in and out of the other dancers, as the tempo of the music picks up. My thoughts turn to the writing session I had before the class – the rough draft of the poem which feels broken now – if real – whilst there is a stronger sense of satisfaction from the reading that I undertook. A line of a poem by Gil Ott returns with great clarity and urgency: 'we / take the form / of our uncertainty'. It seems to speak directly to my dance, trying as I am to tentatively stake out the field of my concerns in movement, patterns for my energy to stir and trace. This thrills me and I dance with the line for a while, a glow of pleasure surging in my belly.

Turning across the room I notice the new dancer spring onto the floor: lithe, confident

and adventurous. There's a precision and control in her movement that reveals her training. She moves beautifully. Before I know it I've compared myself to her and found my own movement utterly wanting. This gets complex and thick. I slow down and draw my expansive circles into me, focusing on a spot on the floor in front of my feet. Coming almost to a standstill, I lower my knees to the floor and lie down on my side, finally coming to rest on my back. I am rocked by the oddly bitter and contradictory sense that the earlier pleasure I took in the dance is somehow down to an ego-state I determine as pride, lording it over everyone else. This tendency exposed, I'm left wondering what I've actually got to contribute here. Do I have to sacrifice that pleasure to really participate, or is it precisely a pleasure of self-expression that I needn't be ashamed of? What a lot of judgement and self-criticism. But there's not too much time to dwell on this as Carrie calls the group together to begin the taught part of the class. The first phase of the dance is over.

Standing in a circle we do a round of names and Carrie introduces the theme of this evening's class with characteristic humour and clarity. We'll be working on 'heavy and light' tonight, which awakens my curiosity. Carrie then invites us to prepare for the 'body parts' warm-up, a coinage which always makes me feel faintly uneasy. My sense of the phrase is as something akin to human remains – that body parts are what you find on a battlefield or at the scene of a disaster, and that what we are dealing with here is rather the *parts of the body* – body as an integrated, living whole. The first task is to walk around the room – a task far from straightforward with today's unsteady gait, even after half an hour of dancing. I concentrate on breathing into my belly, imagining I'm drawing up the breath from the ground through my feet, legs like hollow straws. I think of a tantric image of the dark reddish brown of earth energy taken up into the body from the ground, whilst drawing down a brilliant bluish-white light from the sky. As we're walking around, Carrie asks us to become aware of the empty spaces in the room and to move into them, whilst being prepared to yield the space to another's claim. The group's movement adapts and shifts and gently speeds up. I find keeping my balance easier at a faster pace and start to bob and weave through the group. We are moving quite quickly

now, whirling in and out of each other's paths, sweats breaking, a few gentle collisions, the energy threads starting to bind us together. A few of us start going even faster, taking ridiculous risks as we aim at tiny moving gaps between people, moving backwards, changing direction abruptly. Already the mood and energy of the room has lightened, has lifted. People are smiling, breathless, laughing, our boundaries and defences relaxing as we become a group, a provisional community.

After Carrie calls the time on the crazy whirling phase, she invites us to find a spot in the room and settle our attention in our heads. I close my eyes and bring my concentration to bear on my forehead, temples and the crown of my skull. My movement is simple – letting the weight of my head fall forward slightly, I then roll it round to the left, back and round to the right. I hear a gentle grinding of the bones in my neck and feel the tension there start to ease and release. I tune-in to the relationship between my head and the rest of my body – how its movement creates consequences through the shoulders, spine and torso. Carrie invites us to explore moving the rest of the body starting from the head and tentatively I start to do so, still cautious about my balance, especially with my eyes closed. I recall a proprioceptive exercise I tried once – trying to raise one foot at a time with eyes closed – and how difficult I found it. But it's a challenge, relearning movement from this more inward perspective.

In her 1998 book *Sweat Your Prayers*, Gabrielle Roth, the originator of the Five Rhythms practice, asks: 'do you have the discipline to be a free spirit?' I love this question and have adopted into my own personal poetics credo of 'practice – attention – intention – discipline'. The shadow side of this of course is my occasional lack of tolerance for those approaching the practice in a more relaxed way than myself – not difficult!

At Carrie's direction, I shift my attention into my shoulders and enjoy the movement I find there. It reminds me of having a plaster-cast taken of my back for a sculpture I made at college: the weight of the plaster, laced with threads of hessian scrim, as it went off and the heat – my skin lathered with cooking oil to prevent it from being lifted off. The attention shifts into the elbows, then wrists and fingers. I love the angular shapes my



elbows make, and I start to feel the beginnings of an energetic awareness around my hands, unusual for me this early in the dance. It was a workshop on Tantra three years ago that gave me my first conscious experience of my energetic body – electromagnetic field, subtle body, aura, call it what you will – and it has added a whole new dimension to my practice. It's something I want to explore further through studying T'ai chi or Qigong. Carrie invites us to enter into a movement dialogue with another dancer, starting with a focus on our spine. I look up and meet Patrick's gaze just a few feet away. Stepping towards each other we begin a kind of mirroring, gently swaying from side to side, exploring the range of the back and front of the torso. After a while we let this go and develop our own expressions, whilst still moving in relation to each other.

Pairwork takes the dance to the next level for me. It acts as a respite from the loneliness of a journey through one's embodied self but also crucially brings one's various psychological complexes into play and available for work. Sometimes it's also a mode of intervening in a passage of emotional stasis and repetition. As I'm moving with Patrick I suddenly notice that I've wandered off in my thoughts, and that our dance has lost its focus and urgency. As we regain eye contact, there is a corresponding increase in energy and attention to our conversation. We take more risks in mirroring and repeating our gestures to each other, and in exploring the space between us: coming really close and then separating so that at times we're on opposite sides of the room. It gets funnier too as it gets more intimate, revealing a kind of trust in disclosing the secrets of our presence to each other. It feels like the dance has really begun.

At Carrie's behest, we finally let go of each other, making *namaste* as we do so, and I follow the percolating energy into my hips. I visualise my pelvis as a bowl full of water and I move as if I'm trying not to spill its contents, making gentle circles to the left and right. Closing my eyes I get deeper into the movement and can almost start to see my skeleton in my mind's eye. The attention shifts again, now into the knees. My knees are a sore point of curiosity and tentativeness. I've had problems with my right knee for years – something about the way the joint is formed creates adverse wear and tear, a

creakiness, a lack of flexibility. I don't entirely trust it, and I think this affects my overall balance and stability, implicating the left knee as well. Today, however, as I settle into their shapes, my knees feel pretty good – comfortable and responsive. I move off the spot and feel confident in committing my weight to the floor, starting to appreciate the subtlety of Carrie's theme. I start to whirl about more confidently, but, as I ground my feet for a moment, my knee hits a particular angle and reflects back a sharp bark of pain. It's a familiar signal, but chastening, shaming even, and my body contracts as I slow and respond to this communication. I turn about more softly and try to relax my knees. Finally, as I'm still recovering, Carrie directs her attention into our feet. This is useful as a way of getting more settled again, but I'm surprised at the energy available to me here. It's an opportunity to reorient in the space a bit, so, straightening up, I take in the array of bodies passing me as I pass: different forms and colours, speeds and shapes, patterns of movement full of rich information ripe for reading as we thread through each other, weaving and knitting the space together.



## Part 2

### THE WAVE

Content that we are fully warmed-up and engaged, Carrie now invites us into flowing – the first of the Five Rhythms. For the benefit of a couple of newcomers, Carrie explains that flowing is a rhythm of long, continuous movements without end or beginning; earthy; connected to the feminine, but also expressing the emotional key of fear. On this occasion she proposes that we start by spending a few minutes simply attuning to our bodies and listening-in to what is happening there – physically, emotionally, energetically. Although the orthodox advice in flowing is to focus on one's feet, Carrie suggests to allow our whole-body awareness to lead us into movement – seeing if a particular part of the body presents itself as willing to start. I immediately think of my right knee and the impacted secrets it harbours – its history and the significance of its actions and reactions. I start to concentrate on how the knee wants to move. It starts to arc out quickly to the right and I'm surprised by its boldness, yet, as it comes back in, its tone is softer and it slows down. This sets off an emotional response in me which, if not exactly fearful, is a kind of gentle sympathy for my knee's pain. As the rest of my body starts to take itself up into flowing, following the knee's tentative but clear cues, I feel more aware of the energy field around me as my hips and feet engage and walk me off the spot. I'm fond of moving my arms in flow – casting them around in long, lazily curving arcs, at times whirling around and around on the spot with one hand held aloft towards the sky, the other pointing down towards the earth. Today, however, I resist the pull of my arms and try to keep my attention in my feet – how they pull, glide and turn, slightly awkwardly, across the floor; feeling into the rippled texture of the mat. I wonder if the Zen group that meets here senses something of the energy that we twist and twine into the floor, into the brickwork, the exposed metal struts of the roof? And whether we in turn benefit from an energy of quiet stillness instilled in the space by their meditation?

As my movement develops I start to feel the effects of momentum. Opened-up and more flexible, I'm allowing my body to let its weight carry it forward. It feels delicious and I'm about to let it take me away before I suddenly reconnect with my emotions. Something bites in here, something fearful. There is a set of tessellated situations, a knot of issues to do with the building where I live – problems with noise, rubbish and so on. Then there's a larger pattern around work – an impending battle I'll have to fight to defend an area of my activity. There is something common in these shapes which I focus on as a fear of confrontation, a fear of conflict which may not actually be realised but which still persists as an apparent possibility. Attending to the kernel of pain here – holding the fear tightly as a present reality – is not easy, but it deepens my movement in time with the momentum. As I move across the floor I start to feel the fear change in its intensity, and, as I note this I'm invited once again to take a partner.

I look up to find my gaze met steadily by John – a large, roundly-built man with piercing blue eyes and a shock of white cropped hair. We've shared a lot in our dances over the years and I know that here is someone I can be vulnerable with and be trusted for it. We start moving together in an almost impossible simultaneous attention to ourselves and each other. I love the fact that in facing John's huge frame with my own slight build I can rehearse an accounting for my strength and courage. I don't try to puff myself up to match his size – graceful and gentle though he is in it – but I let go into my slowness, finding a way in which I'm able to lightly hold my fear of facing a strong man. As we suddenly turn in the same direction, my hand grazes John's and becomes a cue for contact. Our movement is more engaged now and complex. We start to whirl each other about, following the momentum of flow, negotiating our respective weight and flexibility. There is no room for self-consciousness as our dance becomes a shared meditation. Although stray thoughts and reflections pass through, I recognise them as such and let them go. Part of a thought that grips for a second is that I almost miss the feeling of fear in my body now that it has changed into something else. Because I'm no longer pressing on my wound I can't quite sense its lineaments: the depth, extent and urgency of the damage. But another part of me is quite willing to accept, and even

celebrate, the shifting of this feeling. I understand it as part of the alchemical work of the dance – how getting more fully into the present relativises these other aspects of experience, allowing them to settle back into proportion, bringing a new perspective into play and a corresponding sense of calm control. John looks into my eyes with his wicked but compassionate expression and we take our leave of each other as we disappear back into the mind of the group.

The edge into staccato is announced by a thumping breakbeat: bass and snare in syncopated rhythm creating a pulsing start-stop movement. Carrie invites us to feel the beat in our hips and explore outward directions. This rhythm is associated with the masculine; its energy direct, demonstrative, assertive; but it's also a gateway into the heart, staging successive planes of encountering and opening to otherness. I sometimes find the transition from flowing into staccato awkward and today is no exception. I peel off the dance floor to go to the toilet, and even though I try to remain in the beat, when I return I find my presence somewhat diminished, and a kind of disgust at myself emerges, critical of me for breaking my attention. Perhaps this is what defines my sense of moving between the feminine and the masculine? I take staccato for granted, despite the fact that it can easily unseat me. I love its precision, its hard, clear edges, but it is exactly these qualities that can crowd out my softer, more receptive side before I'm quite ready. It's as if I find it hard to let go of flowing and I need to interrupt the transition into staccato to let fluid flow out of me. Eventually I'm able to see myself mired in this pass and this acknowledgement allows me to shift my attention and become more present in the beat.

Nearby I'm suddenly aware of the sharply exhaled breath and flashing limbs of Michael. As the call comes to take a partner, we step closer towards each other and engage. There's a lot of history to this relationship as well. Mike's youthful energy and enthusiasm in the dance extends at times to loud shouts which pass right through me, turning me to distraction and anger. One of the bravest things I've done in this class is to tell Mike that his shouting upsets me. Once I had expressed it to him, I became more

capable of managing my feelings about it, and I've since become more tolerant altogether. Although Mike is fifteen years younger than me, he takes me in and absorbs me in his youthfulness. He is pure staccato. Tall and sinewy, his beautifully tanned limbs are lithe and flexible from his articulate yoga stretches in the warm-up. His face angles into a strong aquiline nose, a staccato gesture in its own right, and we quickly fall into an intense pattern of expression and return – throwing shapes with our elbows and wrists like punches. I recall dances when my feelings towards Mike were still raw and painful and I struggled to meet his energy with grace. Once I brought myself to a complete standstill, holding out my palms as a barrier, forcing him to meet me on my own terms. What ethics unfold in such a gesture? It wasn't right to try to contain Mike, to control him, freeze him, shame him in order to meet my needs. I might as well have tried to catch the wind in a net. All that has passed between us has created a more liminal sense of self – made it present that what 'I' am is, at least for this moment, part of something which is in the air, in the entangled energies between Mike and myself. It crackles. The energy expands, our attention and commitment so intense I can feel others in the room attending to us. There are moments that occur deep in a wave when the energy of the rhythm being danced seems to collect and pool in a particular part of the room. You notice when it happens to you – that the rhythm has gripped you so tightly that you no longer feel any effort, any self-consciousness. It might only last a few seconds, but these moments crystallize as intensities strewn across the map of the wave.

Mike and I are sweating now, grinning, blasting out air and slicing across the room as if engaged in mortal combat. Staccato is unsurprisingly quite a martial rhythm and requires keeping one's ground as much as throwing out energy – a difficult balance to maintain at times. The music changes and we are requested to take our leave of each other, which I do with a breathless, moved tenderness mixed with grateful delight for the transport we have shared.

By myself again, I settle back into a more inward mode, trying to connect to anger – the emotional key of staccato. It's not too hard to find a ready object for this, although I

often feel it's a little artificial to call up triggers for emotions, as if I'm manipulating myself. Images flash up of bullies and autocrats, and they get dispatched by the crack of a sharp elbow directly into the centre of the face as I whip myself up. I don't like feeling anger, it overwhelms and scares me. But this practice has taught me greater familiarity with it, and how to form a more flexible relationship to it. It is the opportunity to bring the anger into this more physical arena of action and reaction that tames it. It's not about shutting it off, but giving it room to express itself and to change into something else. As Roth puts it in her teaching – the way is through, not around. I know from experience that if I can't get this feeling moving in staccato there's a real chance I'll get stuck in a nervous, tentative, self-disgusted place where anger is not addressed, but is widespread and where it paralyzes me.

The next and final exercise in this rhythm takes the sparking one-to-one encounter and raises it. Dancers in pairs engage with each other as before, then find other pairs and before we know it we're in three groups of eight in the room. Carrie's invitation is for one person to begin with a simple, repetitive movement, and for the rest of the group to join-in with that action. Louise steps up and begins by raising her arms into the air from a lowered position by her sides, without bending her elbows, her fingertips coming together at the apex. The rest of the group, one by one, starts to fall into movement around her. From the space under which Louise's arms come to a momentary rest, John, crouching on his knees before her, sweeps out his arms backwards towards Patrick who eagerly seizes this energy and concentrates it in-between his palms. Whilst he holds it there, I approach, and swinging both arms above my head as if wielding an imaginary sledgehammer, I bring its full force to bear on the small space between Patrick's hands. A coin has been struck, and having delivered the blow, I raise my arms back up again in time as Patrick collects the energy once more, that John has passed to him. After I strike the second coin, Jan reaches deftly into the space and plucks it out. She passes it to Sarah who then stacks it neatly on a small pile. Mike swoops on the pile and collects it, racing across the room towards Alison, who, with a gentle gesture, completes the cycle by lifting



each newly-minted coin into the space between Louise's palms as she raises her hands. We've become an assembly-line, folded-in on itself, but efficiently drumming out shapes of air and energetic envelopes. As the process continues it becomes hypnotic as we sweep, gather, strike, pluck, stack and lift in perfect time, manufacturing crystalline chunks of scorched, solid air in our foundry of the collective heartbeat. The pattern lifts out of the room and becomes a model for collective action. There is joyousness mixed with rapt, focused attention on everyone's faces – we could literally keep this going all night. As the dance deepens however, the mechanism starts to adapt itself as parts of the machine become bored of a particular action. Stepping out of sequence, Jan starts to act as a co-hammerer with me. Sarah takes over the plucking out, but then throws the coins to Mike instead. I withdraw from the hammering and, as I do so, Louise suddenly radically alters her movement by lying down on her back. With each new variation, a new function is created and everyone turns to service this new development. The whole machine keeps reconfiguring itself inside-out, so eventually all semblance of the coin-minting has transformed into other exchanges and shapings of energy. In the five minutes or so that we have been in operation I feel as if we have created a whole series of solutions – imagined products for real problems. There's a shape in the air for solving a dispute between neighbours over a party wall; a transference mechanism for emptying a bookcase; a construction for expressing guilt without fear of criticism (glass case supplied). This is nothing less than pataphysical production; machines working on the infrathin of everyday life, tools shaped by the movement of human hands.

The tempo picks up and we enter chaos: the rhythm of letting-go. Chaos feels like being on the crest of the wave, the peak of the evening, and for many this rhythm comes to epitomise the archetypal Five Rhythms experience – a form of ecstatic release.

Carrie asks us to take a partner as a way in. I sidle up to Jan, and, shoulder by shoulder, we build up a gentle sideways swinging motion, whilst keeping our feet rooted. Slowly we relax our neck muscles, faces and jaws, and let our heads fall into the steady rhythm. After this loosener, we detach ourselves from each other and the group forms a large

circle in the centre of the room. In this ritual, dancers enter the circle as many times as they like – some staying there for the entirety of chaos – to experience a more intense, focused form of release. The circle closes behind one who steps forward and opens again to absorb them as they return – all the while remaining intent on what is happening in the centre.

I feel stirred by the pounding tribal rhythms and I throw myself into the circle over and over again. Everything is in motion. I've taken off my glasses so they don't get thrown off. As I go deeper I can start to feel changes in my body. I'm on the edge of entering into trance and the emotional complexes that I negotiated earlier hover in the background of my awareness. There is that raw fear and anxiety about a lack of control over my surroundings that I cycled through in flowing, and the white-hot anger that I touched on in staccato. But the charge of these emotions is less intense than before. What I do come up against, however, is an ancient and familiar adversary. Whilst I'm thrilling to the beat, flying through the air, a terrible sense of self-disgust suddenly overwhelms me. I'm judging myself wanting. All kinds of thoughts crowd-in. I'm critical of the practice, I'm critical of the importance I attach to it, I'm critical of the amount of time I spend doing it. This deadly train of thought starts tearing into other compacted uncertainties – that I don't read enough to develop or sustain my own body of knowledge, that I'm dull intellectually, timid politically, that I waste my time doing things for others whilst neglecting my own development. Even my poetry doesn't escape the onslaught. It's a full-on offensive that I've come to know as a Demon. It doesn't have a face, or a name, but this creature emerges on a regular basis, particularly when I'm run-down. As ever in the dance though, the only way out is through.

A short while later I become aware of Payton, deep in her own chaos a few yards away. I've never had a conversation with her off the dance floor but we have danced together many times, often meeting in the midst of chaos. Payton's demeanour is modest and self-contained, but always present and committed. Her short hair gives her a slightly boyish look. Right now she holds up a mirror to qualities in me I sense but don't always

acknowledge, and I wonder, literally, what she might see in me. All this swirls about in the heat, noise and sweat of chaos. We aren't dancing explicitly together, nor communicating overtly, but we share the space lightly, lending each other permission and support to go deeper. As this dance develops, I feel the claws of the Demon loosening their grip on me, and even find myself actively able to parry its onslaught. Suddenly a wave of relief washes over me and I shed a few tears as it does so. The cruelty of the attack, which I know comes from part of myself, leaves me weeping with pity for the innocent young child who has been its object. The emotional key of chaos is sadness, and whilst it's not always a key I arrive in, I'm surprised by how this sadness is structured – as a kind of wise, gentle pity for vulnerability, rather than a more general, existential melancholy. I believe it is the innocence I sense in Payton's dance of release that helps me to encounter this aspect of myself, and my heart opens in gratitude towards her.

We're asked to let the circle go and Payton and I pass out of each other's orbit. I find this difficult but rally back into myself and keep following the beat further and further into trance. I'm now a completely lithe shape of quivering, gyrating limbs, hovering above the floor. There's no longer any effort in my movement – I'm strung out, laid-back in the beat as if being tossed in a torrent of white water. But the Demon still has another trick in store and flashes up a mirror of my self-satisfaction in my movement. 'Egoist!' it whispers and I baulk, the nimbus of energy sliding around me suddenly punctured, inert. I increase my pace in the dance, trying to throw off this image, to strike back into the less individuated bliss I inhabited before. But trying to outrun ego seems to just make it go histrionic, calling more attention to itself as it screams and kicks. Just as I'm beginning to despair of finding a way back into the rhythm I catch sight of yet another mirror – Carrie – over by the decks. Often in my dance I find that there is part of me that gains pleasure from feeling that I'm doing a good job, that I'm participating, that I'm committed, that I'm a well-disciplined dancer! But I tussle with this self-consciousness, bordering on pride, just as I now tussle with the Demon holding up a mirror for my ego to get mesmerised by. It's a leap of thought, but suddenly I feel myself throwing a life-line across to Carrie which she catches psychically. In this gesture it's as if I'm acknowledging

the existence of that pride, that egoism – it's part of me – but I'm placing it in Carrie's hands for safe-keeping. This realisation releases a huge amount of energy and I start to reclaim my rhythm in the dance. When I'm under that attack, it's as if no other state of affairs could possibly exist, and yet, as I keep coming back to this passage through chaos, I slip the net of the ego a little more easily each time. It's as if I'm getting a taste for the new state of awareness that lies beyond. It feels and looks so similar but something crucial is different. It's as if the seat of my conscious processing is no longer settled down

in my chest, but floating just above my forehead, part of the larger field of energy shared with those around me.

The music shifts again and we enter lyrical. The transition between chaos and lyrical used to be really difficult for me. The emotional key of the fourth rhythm is joy, but I would often find this lightness hard to take after the dark intensity of chaos. As my practice developed I started to realise that this difficulty was telling me something about my attitude to happiness. Sometimes I would just get stuck in a resentful funk, finding it hard to join in, getting angry at what I saw as others' levity. Then I'd start feeling sorry for myself, at my inability to participate. In lyrical, as throughout the wave, there is the renewed potential for tracing the patterns of movement of one's many sub-personalities. I started to notice that a key aspect of getting stuck was a sense of remaining too attached to a reduced, but familiar sense of self that had undergone a dramatic transformation in the abandon of chaos. How to negotiate this transition without getting bogged down?

Part of the answer came from Roth's own account of managing this change whilst teaching a class in *Sweat Your Prayers*. She describes a class in Munich, deep in the throes of chaos:

When it came time to shift into lyrical I didn't want to stop the energy by pausing to introduce the new rhythm, so instead I made adjustments through the music. Robert eliminated the bass tom and established a new foot pattern

using the two toms with the highest tones to lift the dancers, to lighten their steps. Sanga switched from using his hands on the djembe to using timbali sticks, but he kept the energy going with an intense, notey, highly accented song. My voice soared with them into this airy, light place. All at once, the entire tribe of dancers crossed the threshold into lyrical. (p. 158)

For me, I found the key was to keep my feet moving when chaos ended, instead of stopping dead and beginning again. I allow the pounding, rooting beat of chaos to persist a little longer before gently starting to elongate my stride, shifting my weight and slipping into a lighter-than-air, twisting, turning movement, that I sometimes liken to the balletic thrusts of the muscular thighs of speed skaters, or a figure skater moving backwards.

Allowing one rhythm to emerge from another allows my energy to stay fluid. Lyrical is the rhythm of shape-shifting, and, as the group enters it, Carrie invites us to find simple movements which we can repeat over and over again, leading us deeper into trance. She asks us to allow each shape to grow, to get bigger and bigger until it reaches its peak of expansion, and then to let it contract or shift into another movement. I find my attention drawn to my hands and I start to gently clasp them inwards, towards my heart, feeling the movement from the inside out. Through repetition the shape deepens and I begin feeling a corresponding energy object forming in front of my chest like a sheen, a dome, a blister. The impulse is to expand from this point, so I extend my arms outward and back. As this movement repeats and repeats, it gets bigger and more dynamic until I suddenly feel like I am evoking the shape of an eagle in flight. This is the shape-shift – a *man-becoming-bird* which has its equivalents in the shamanic rituals of many cultures, caught memorably for me in Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* where he describes the performance of a Lizard song in a version of aboriginal ritual story-telling adapted for an outsider. In a shamanic healing that I underwent once, I 'became' a snake – allowing an insight about flexibility and adaptability to be embodied and integrated. This becoming strikes me as one of the most powerful tools of the practice. Its essence lies in putting

into action a deep empathy – not just with the different patterns of energy and behaviour symbolised by animals, but with those of the other members of the group. And yet our apprehensions of animal energies provide templates for the shapes of desire and its internal and external objects – like constellations. The lineaments of our characterisation of animal movement, when inhabited in the dance, start to turn about on themselves as we inhabit them. The perception of the movement, and the movement itself are altogether different things and the passage between them can be revelatory.

As I am finding myself in the shape of a flapping eagle, I'm aware of John nearby and I'm shocked by the vividness with which I suddenly perceive him to be inhabiting the shape of a bull. With his robust build, this vision of John seems entirely apt as he stamps out his ground and addresses me with an alert, quizzical stare. As I move around the room I also receive a host of further visions, little glimpses into the symbolic transformations that are taking place all over. A crane rears up in the corner as a gazelle slips by, scattering a cluster of sparrows. The room is a shifting, pulsing menagerie.

Gradually Carrie sets up the invitation to deepen this process of mutual mirroring. Another kind of shifting out of self starts to occur where we take on the shapes of others' patterns of movement – borrowing a thrust-out thigh here, a lengthening neck over there, a rotating ankle from somewhere else. The group presence gathers in intensity and we start to weave in more closely with one another. An arm goes up to the ceiling and half a dozen arms respond in unison. At some point it starts to become unclear who is initiating movement and who is responding to it.

Finally, a silence steals in and the group starts to break down into stillness. This is a gear shift of particular sweetness if one is tired, but it would be missing the essence of stillness to see it as repose after exertion. I close my eyes and focus on my breathing, feeling the sweat drip from my brow onto my feet. My movement slows right down, in time with my breath, and I pause as each shape reaches a point of clear expression and extent. The work on energetic awareness I've done in studying Tantra has really deepened my experience of stillness. As I bring my open palms together in front of me, I

feel for the resistance of my energetic field. It feels solid, as if I'm wearing two thick gloves. I start to explore the rest of the field, focusing on the areas emerging from the chakras from the root upwards. I'm still very much a novice in this area of awareness, stumbling in the dark as I feel my way, but there is a huge pleasure and beauty in negotiating my subtle body. In particular there are moments when my movement seems to float on the energy, and it feels effortless. On other occasions the energy sends a limb quite forcefully in a certain direction, only for it to meet resistance and stop in mid-air. In Roth's teaching, the advice in stillness is to explore the relationship between moving and not moving, and, once a movement has formed itself, to hold oneself in that position like a statue, feeling into the shape's meaning. When I feel the energy itself almost dictating where movement starts and stops, I think I understand Roth's rationale. But I'm still slightly perplexed by it, still not fully aware of how the energy body operates: its forms and lineaments, its properties and qualities.

The emotional key of stillness is compassion, which I link to the way in which this rhythm engenders a sense of spaciousness. Through focusing on the breath I become sensitised to the space both within and without, and its interconnection. As I encounter elsewhere in the wave, that liminality arises again – a less centred sense of self. I often find myself visualising members of my family – both living and dead alike – sending and receiving energy through this attention. If there is someone towards whom I've felt particularly angry or hateful, then my attitude softens and there is a letting go of the hardened feelings, a clearer recognition of our common condition and our animosities as transient, like wind passing through a cornfield and making the ears stir like the sea.

A few years ago I was on a day workshop on stillness when we took the statues aspect to the next level and started to sculpt the body of a partner into shapes, ranging from the fantastic to the subtle, to explore what they could express. Once we were formed in this way, we moved with that shape to investigate its meaning further. My partner put me into a shape which, when I started to move, felt like I was holding a sword in one hand and carrying a shield in the other. It instantly reminded me of the elegance and power of

fencing postures, as well as making me more aware of the continuities between stillness and martial arts practices such as T'ai chi. My maternal grandfather used to fence after the war, during which he served as an infantryman. In his amazing scrapbook-cum-memoir – a treasured family artefact – he spoke of what he learned from his fencing tutor, Ernst Froeschler: 'co-ordination of mind, eyes, feet and hands – all these things he taught me...' I think about my grandfather often in the dance, and he is a strong presence in other visions. I certainly had a close relationship with him in childhood and young adulthood, and once stayed with him for a week in London during the summer I left school. When I think of him now I'm interested in the way he combined what one might think of as the tough, self-sufficient characteristics of a soldier – living alone in his retirement – with a softer, more receptive side shown in his hobby of painting with watercolours and gouache. Even the range of his subjects as an artist was broad – from the charm of little pen and ink renderings of characters and scenes from the illustrated children's stories of *Brambly Hedge* by Jill Barklem, to the brooding, uneasy cityscapes of Maurice Utrillo, most memorably a copy of 'The Passage (The Dead End)' (c.1910). Somehow, finding myself tracing imaginary feints and parries in the air brings me back to my grandfather and makes him present in my dance.

Some time later I actually enrolled on a fencing class, a big sacrifice because it clashed with my regular Five Rhythms class. I had one lesson only! Everything was going well and I was enjoying feeling my way into the techniques, and realising I had a good level of fitness for the sport. I was delighted to learn of the use of the word 'cadence' to describe the rhythm of a fight, and I felt all set to explore a parallel poetics of prosody and fencing. However, in the last minute of my first bout with an opponent, I rolled my attacking right ankle over my foot and sprained it. Although I was okay within three weeks, some part of me took it as a sign, and I didn't return to the class.

An intrusive thought in stillness is why play at feinting when you could learn the real discipline of fencing, of T'ai chi? There's the onset of a depressed, dispirited feeling, almost of disgust, as I regard myself in this moment. It takes a while, but eventually



another thought emerges in the movement to counter this – the appealingly paradoxical notion that Five Rhythms is a discipline without discipline. This speaks to anxieties I had in my early twenties when, although I'd been writing poetry for six or seven years by then, and publishing it for four years, I was troubled by the fact that I'd never mastered a grasp of regular metrical patterns. When I lived in Poland I set myself to a study of meter and worked up some compositions in more formal measures. And then I abandoned them. Whatever it is, I reflect, that gives my poetry its integrity, it is something which is measured in terms other than regular rhythm. And somehow this stands for what I find beautiful in the Five Rhythms practice: its pragmatism, its democratic, un-dogmatic openness. It's a space in which one seeks – and occasionally finds – one's own sense of what it means to be disciplined. One perhaps also glimpses the way in which moving through the wave, time and time again, throws into relief the jagged outlines of the soul as it shape-shifts its way through life, so that one becomes acquainted with a much larger vision of the potentials of selfhood and humanity.



from *Momentum* (2008)

what does it belong  
to if it doesn't belong  
to you  
momentum a wave through a  
body  
makes some starting places dart  
and smart  
a glistening ache immaterial  
at last  
gasp a stage to mount a  
hope that  
there is no remedy for all  
that trust

this parallel  
                    dance in a tradition  
cages in  
                    parodic circles your self  
circumscribing  
                    encircles you encloses you  
in a repetitive  
                    orbit a puncture wound  
into which  
                    you ceaselessly pour  
and recast  
                    your dark materials  
in your own  
                    image

four people long  
                    dead in a ring around  
me appear first  
                    in recognisable guises from  
the old snap  
                    shots then transform into  
something  
                    ideal without being abstract their  
hands stretched  
                    out towards me the already  
no more  
                    becomes the already there  
in the dance

how to organise  
a body without organs  
you use  
the energy you have already  
moving  
so you don't have to start  
from scratch  
every time expand out pick  
up speed  
then slow it right back  
down so  
it is internal feel movement  
re-organising  
your body without organs  
within organs  
without

can't you fake it  
showing up at the page  
for a deep  
sexual core burning through you  
the school  
of involuntary impressions becomes  
a rebounding  
curse to split productivity from  
authenticity  
when all that you want is  
held in  
a bowl all ready to tilt  
and spill  
its contents to find its  
own level

the unwitting  
                    shadow is one that doesn't  
dance but  
                    stiffens in a grip across belly  
and throat  
                    and can barely shift weight  
in a sway  
                    here at home we polarise  
what otherwise  
                    disperses in the public fountain  
it is another  
                    version of a practice parallel  
like a moiré  
                    effect where objects change  
into spiritual  
                    matter



pour falls to  
                    flow into respect only  
the next day  
                    following a room full  
of bodies  
                    intense questioning difficult  
answers  
                    you are bent into another  
shape  
                    not by another's administering  
touch  
                    in the field not by your  
own  
                    but by the blank screened  
enormity  
                    of construction

in winter in  
the body of a spring  
something  
remembers something feeling  
not fear  
in your solitude a body  
passing  
unseen to an authentic  
scene  
dancing alone in the upper  
room  
the music barely audible  
your  
chest thrust forward shapes  
some  
thing shapes some thing  
shapes  
something

before you  
                  sign you know your  
signal  
                  taking your arms in hand  
handing  
                  you a sign that doubles you  
up you  
                  in turn reshape me suddenly  
taking  
                  hold of shield and sword  
releases  
                  a succession of stalking  
instants  
                  brilliant you healed  
in a word



from *Internal Rhyme* (2010)

I'm hearing shadow  
so violently  
without empathy  
my excess cruelty

where I meet you  
thinking you  
turns back on me  
with impunity

holding to what  
visible desire  
only me in  
that not shadow

cannot be completed  
embarrasses not  
the dance judging  
but shatter yourself

are we so  
we need to  
not transcend it  
when desires

scared of infinity  
traverse it  
we can't transcend it  
presence is absent

absences desire is  
the right to be  
the witness to  
dance as if life

present as  
acknowledged as  
your own self  
depended on it

from *Reverses Heart's Reassembly* (2014)

#### IV: RELATION

You're going for high-fives. I can't match them, can't coordinate, say: 'I'm useless at this.'  
You, addressing the group as well as me, say: 'Oh, so you might need a new partner then,  
go back to someone more predictable.'

\*

To enter a circle not knowing who will step forward to be one's partner. It's difficult  
dancing with you, but after a time we reach a point where our hands and arms are fully  
outstretched in front of us, palms touching. We stop moving, but once we pass this  
point, the dance changes.

\*

I suddenly see that the gesture of a hand could be a poem – like the mark it might leave  
impressed in a surface.

\*

With you, our hands so articulate that I feel we are communicating in a form of sign language.

\*

I put my ego in the hands of the teacher for safe-keeping.

\*

The tension between intention to move and moving; between dancing by oneself and with others.

\*

Starting just by softly standing, feeling into my hands. Focusing on the palms, other parts of the body become available to enter into movement.



\*

I recognised I'd brought a demon with me which I named 'Without Knowledge I Am Nothing.'

\*

Approaching knowledge as an encounter.

\*

Dancing with my foot and leg in your hands.

\*

'I couldn't fall in with you today, not like the last time when it was perfect.'

\*

Our hands touch very lightly. I can feel your strong energy.

\*

Strong, profound eye-contact, intensely maintained, dissembles into smiles.

\*

Crashing into despair but I realise this is a gift – material to work with.

\*

We almost bump into each other and you slap my behind – both of us suddenly shocked.

\*

Dancing with you as if I am your parent and you my child.

\*

If you don't join in you stand out more.

\*

The four point foot.

\*

Imagining that I could give permission to you to be as you are, and that you could validate how I am.

\*

I felt that there was another unseen person in the room.

\*

I want to dance with you, but you imitate my slow movements in a way which I feel is critical. I see your need for space, mine for connection.

\*

How do I provoke those who provoke me?

\*

Right there on the edge of chaos and I'm more tolerant of your expressivity. If we're about to die together, whatever is happening needs acceptance.

\*

Trying to inhabit ego so strongly that it changes into something else.

\*

Realising that at the point I got annoyed with you, I had stopped loving myself.

\*

Our dialogue: mirroring, contrasting, interrupting rhythm, exploring levels, changing speed.

\*

Realising there is all this movement in my hands and I need to use it.

\*

I am focusing on you then realise that I am you.

from V: TURNING  
after Buber's *I and Thou*

How swift the moral equilibrium of the universe  
when you take too much responsibility.  
Out of isolation comes cut-throat rhetoric –  
past wounds unworthy of your death.

The difference between release and acceptance,  
the relation between feet and hands,  
between everyone watching and no-one –  
your dance just something happening.

Joy in the struggle with others,  
taking responsibility for a stillness  
disguised as a person.

Do not give into despair. Listen with the whole  
body to the silence of objects – how different  
movements refer to one another.





from *Figure Detached, Figure Impermanent* (2014)

\*\*\*

Configurations of self: physical places as emotional correlates, knowledge as resistance. No longer identifying with the source of the voice, closed in the front, open in the back. To surprise your opponent, interrupt your rhythm. How to write whilst dancing.

\*\*\*

Not being personal in the dance, in your tuition. We hurt we move. Wave wash shore of myself, scratched in the heart. Questioning the city's celibacy: stars, child, snake, scythe, birds. Empty space inside oneself draws down light. 'This is not the worst great image of authority: wrongs do not lose the knowledge of themselves.'

\*\*\*

Raise an arm on stage as a strategy of address – movement as a ground for sense. Evoke a brave temperance where every little gesture is punished, promised exile. Get a good stock of cards then draw on them in the facility of a mobile approach to a moment's crisis: turn on a fine. Savour and circulate the un-settled meaning of a settled statement where reinsings of material continuities recall commercial massacres. Not internal consistency but the right self at the right moment in the flash of a trembling glance.

\*\*\*

We can move faster than we think – it's not intrinsic, belonging to some such shapes and summonings. One's own categories of understanding forced back up by a closed door. How many kinds of thinking, of speaking? Your physical ability a thigh bone dipped in honey. The point of mass integration of all movement is the one who watched, the one who moved.





## TWO SONNETS FOR CLARE BACKWELL

If the permission you give yourself were equal  
To that which others grant you, where would  
You be? If shoulds should fall away suddenly  
To take an original initiative, what would your  
First move be in taking on the responsibility?  
You should shoulder the should not along  
With the burden delivered direct from the  
Manufacturer. It shouldn't have to be this way,  
Should it?

    You twist through an arc, slip  
across a membrane and it turns out all right  
wide over the open socket savoured with the  
labour into the harbour. Mind you solder that  
should white hot against your now breached  
discarded abandon.

In the presence of poetry, we inch down through  
five types of rhythmic touch until we start out  
from the bone. What we call home is a robust  
cauldron tended by your firm gentleness.  
You keep us coming back to basics in the  
freedom of discipline – snaring a stuck  
habit in the thicket and kneading it with  
attention ‘til it totters upright on unsteady  
footing.

                    If at times we haven’t a body,  
you turn us to returning it to a rightful  
owner – your imagination plotting  
a route in air to navigate invisible  
territory. In your care we are suddenly  
reshaped, moving and being moved.







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## A NOTE ON THE PHOTOGRAPHS

Roger and I met at a Five Rhythms class in Manchester in 2014, and, when I learned that he was an artist and photographer who'd worked with dancers in the past, I knew I wanted to collaborate with him on this book project. As it turned out, Roger's studio was only a few minutes' walk from my office at the University of Salford and our dialogue began by visiting various locations within a half-mile radius including the banks of the River Irwell, the forecourt and interior of the New Adelphi building at the University and the back streets and building sites near the studio. Although our initial and guiding intention was to make an image for each of the five rhythms (and it's possible we've still managed to do that!), the scope of this collaboration became far more than we expected. One important discovery was the sense that going to a particular space and moving under the watchful and inspired eye of Roger's choreographic direction became a mode of epistemological enquiry in its own right, an embodied research methodology which enabled me to gain all sorts of micro-insights into the nature of each environment in which I was working. The final eight images chosen for this volume have been selected from approximately eight hundred photographs – the fruits of a genuinely inspiring collaboration. Thank you again Roger for your generosity, your vision and your willingness to experiment that made creating these images with you such a rare pleasure.



