

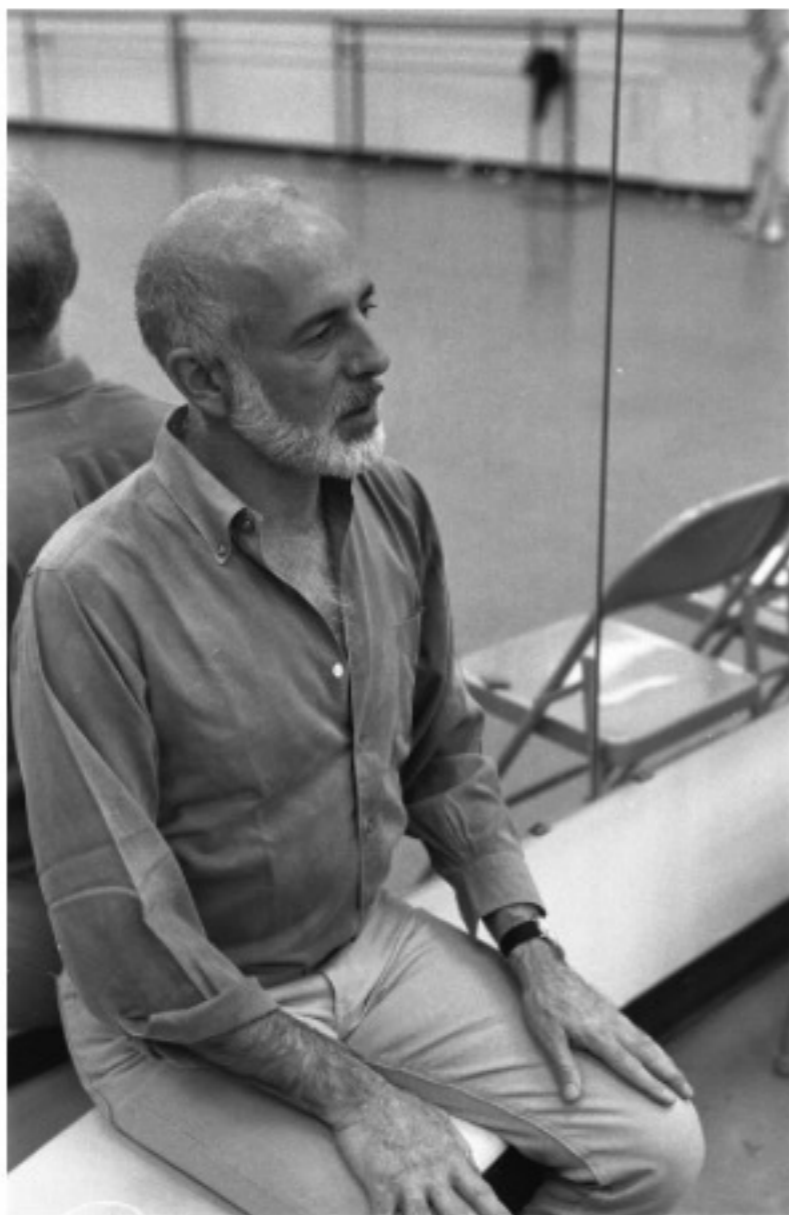


An Emotional Archive: Hiie Saumaa on Jerome Robbins

February 14, 2018

On January 26, 2018, six Jerome Robbins Dance Research Fellows presented at a symposium, focusing on Robbins' life and work and looking at his archival material in new and interesting ways. One of the fellows, Hiie Saumaa, Ph.D., presented her project called, *Jerome Robbins: Composer in Words*. Ms. Saumaa has a background in Comparative Literature and Somatics, and the following is a reflection on her research at the Library for the Performing Arts.

As I was sitting in the special collections reading room in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts in the summer and fall of 2017, perusing boxes of Jerome Robbins' personal papers, I noticed a physical sensation of stirring, softening, and aliveness in the middle of my chest. My somatic practices of dance and movement have taught me to attend to such sensations and contemplate their significance. "These writings connect me to my heart – they make me heartfelt," I realized.



Jerome Robbins at NYC Ballet rehearsal; NYPL Digital Collections, image ID: swope_1211602

I thought back to conversations with the archivists at the Jerome Robbins Dance Division over the past few months and recalled their words:

"Every time I read Robbins' archives, I want to hug and console him."

"I really fell in love with Robbins, not only with his works—though that too—but with him as an artist, especially through seeing him in rehearsals for his ballets. I felt connected to him on a very human level through the archive, that he's very alive and present in it."

"You don't even have to read through all of these journals but just see them, to feel how much he cared about them."

"He writes about how to be alive."

"Many archives are full of emotion because you see a person's life very intimately. But Robbins' is especially so."

Why do Robbins' archives elicit such responses?

From reading biographies on Robbins and from my interactions with people who had worked for him, I knew that he was considered a difficult man – demanding, quick to anger, and unpredictable. Yes, many of his unpublished writings are marked by anger, self-doubt, and mood swings. But Robbins' writings also show him in a very different light.

