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Moving Mind and Body: Language and Writings of Simone Forti

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Abstract

This chapter investigates the interplay between movement, language, and choreography in the work of Simone Forti. Since the 1960s, Forti has examined movement and language in improvisational solo and group dance settings and has taught classes and workshops worldwide in her improvisational dance narrative technique called Logomotion. Forti’s abundant writings have not been thoroughly studied. I analyze how Forti theorizes “dance state,” “kinesthetic awareness,” and “animation” in her *Handbook in Motion: An Account of An Ongoing Personal Discourse and Its Manifestations in Dance* (1974) and *Oh, Tongue* (2003). On one hand, verbal language affects Forti’s dance; on the other hand, her movement explorations and heightened attention to language as a physical phenomenon enliven her approach to words and writing. Drawing upon various genres and modes of writing, Forti’s written works emphasize how language itself *moves* on the page.

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Introduction

In Doris Humphrey's landmark work on dance composition, *The Art of Making Dances* (1959), she described the dynamic between words and movement:

> Words can be fun, and with movement gain an added sparkle which is not found when they are used separately. At any rate, there is a special delight in their combination. I cannot remember any of these combinations of wordplay and dance on a professional stage, except by one choreographer who developed in my classes, but there have been plenty of them as a result of class work. […] This sort of thing can be great fun, and it is only in the combination of words with movement that the full flavor emerges. (Humphrey 1959, 129)

Using words with movement was in her view "an almost untouched field" that could be "a storehouse of treasure" with "much more room for exploration" (128). She saw "no reason against, and many for, an amalgamation of the spoken, sung or chanted word with movement" (125). She envisioned the "dance-plus-words form" as "a magnificent country for pioneering souls" (125).

A few years later, the dancers and choreographers associated with Judson Dance Theater such as Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Barbara Dilley, and with the 1960s and 70s avant-garde, such as Simone Forti, ventured on that relatively little explored land and began to examine the interplay between movement, language, and choreography. During *Ordinary Dance* (1962), Rainer spoke about the places she had lived in while performing a series of pedestrian movements; Trisha Brown's *Skymap* (1969) consisted of a taped recording of a monologue, and she spoke to the audience in *Accumulation with Talking Plus Watermotor* (1979). Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Simone Forti, and Steve Paxton contributed articles for *The Drama Review* in 1975 (Brown 1975, Childs 1975, Forti 1975,

Paxton 1975). These interests continued beyond the 1960s and 70s. Forti, who was not part of Judson Dance Theater but significantly influenced its key players and postmodern dance in general, developed “News Animations” and her practice and performance technique of Logomotion which combines simultaneous speaking and movement. Hay uses questions, riddles, or Zen Buddhism’s “koan-like” contemplations in her dance practice and performance. These explorations of movement and verbal language have led not only to innovations in dance performance but to intriguing approaches to mental phenomena, such as attention, concentration, and the flux of thoughts, while the body is in motion.

Much has been written on the cultural context of Judson Dance Theater, the dance works of the choreographers and performance artists of the era, as well as Robert Dunn’s composition workshop that led to Judson Dance Theater (Banes 1993 and 2001, Banes and Harris, 2003, Bennahum, Perron, and Robertson, 2017, Burt 2006, Perron 2012). However, these choreographers’ abundant writings ranging from poetry to nonfiction have received much less attention. Elsewhere I have examined the role of language in early twentieth century discourses on relaxation and improvisational movement (Saumaa 2016, 2017) and the inclusion of spoken and written language in the Tamalpa Life/Art Process, developed by Anna Halprin and her daughter Daria Halprin (Saumaa 2018). Here, I am developing the analysis between words and movement and applying it to a case study of the Judson era and the work of Forti in particular. I suggest that the voices and artistic choices of these choreographers as writers merit more careful attention. Hay, Forti, Dilley, Paxton, and Rainer have continued to write and publish since the 1970s, extending the discussion of their dance and choreographic aesthetics beyond the experimentation of the Judson Era (e.g. Dilley 2015, Hay 1994, 2000, 2016, Rainer 2012, 2013).

In this article, I will focus on the writings of Simone Forti. In *Handbook in Motion: An Account of An Ongoing Personal Discourse and Its Manifestations in Dance* (1974) and *Oh, Tongue* (2003), Forti theorizes "dance state," "kinesthetic awareness," and "animation" as they pertain to movement. I show that these concepts acquire another layer when applied to her writing. Verbal language affects Forti's dance but her movement explorations and heightened attention to language as a physical phenomenon also enliven her approach to words and writing. In *Oh, Tongue*, Forti says that *Handbook in Motion* is a "dancer's book" (2003, 141) and activist and artist Fred Dewey calls it a "dancerly" book (2003, 180). However, whether and how movement is present in these works is not as apparent a question as it might seem. I show that in Forti's writings, the speaker's actual movement qualities are largely absent: movement is evoked less in terms of Forti improvising in dance while speaking and more in terms of thoughts and language moving on the page. Most explicitly, Forti invites readers to imagine movement by conjuring up images of the movement of natural phenomena, such as plants and trees.

One question in dance studies has been how to "translate motion and gesture into a textual form without losing its embodied presence" (Albright 2013, 62). Ann Cooper Albright refers to "the ever-present stumbling in the dance field of how to 'write the moving body'" (2013, 77). Susan Leigh Foster similarly asks, "how to transpose the moved in the direction of the written" (1995, 9) and argues for a "writing-dancing body" and "a scholarship that detects and records the movements of the writer as well as the written about" (1995, 19, 16). Recent dance scholarship has embraced different modes of writing within academic prose itself: Albright (2013), Einav Katan-Schmid (2016), Kimerer LaMothe (2015), Alys Longley (2013), and Marta Savigliano (1995), among others, incorporate personal narratives, their own somatic experiences with movement or research, or record narrative scenes from the

practice studio. Performance studies scholar Barbara Browning lists dance scholarship, performance studies, and musicology as "fertile sites for scholarly writing that has espoused, if not explicitly novelistic, at least highly voiced personal narrative, which is often figured as 'performative'" (2017, 27). These accounts not only describe the authors' intellectual investments but aspire to make readers see and feel elements of these inquiries more somatically, in their own bodies. While the question of how to *write* in embodied ways is gaining attention, I suggest that the figure of the *reader* needs more emphasis. Next to the question of what approaches guide Forti's thinking when composing her experimental texts, I add the question of what it is like to *read* these works. Does her writing impact readers' ability to imagine movement, and if so, how?

In what follows, I will pursue the question of what form improvisation that attends to both physical movement and the movement of thoughts takes on the page. I will first discuss Forti's approach to language, the body, and movement. I will then analyze Forti's *Handbook in Motion*, *Oh, Tongue*, and the co-authored *Unbuttoned Sleeves*. I shed light on sites where Forti is evoking the mind and/or the body in motion and discuss how her sentence structures make her writing move. I demonstrate the different methods Forti has used to conjure up improvisational dance and speech methods in writing.

Inquiries into Speaking, Writing, Form, and Movement

Forti was born to Jewish parents in Florence, Italy, in 1935, and moved to the United States in 1939 to escape anti-Semitic persecution. After attending Reed College in Portland, Oregon, from 1953-55, she and her future husband the artist Robert Morris moved to San Francisco, where she met Anna Halprin (or Ann Halprin as she was known professionally until 1972) and was a member of Halprin's San Francisco Dancers' Workshop. Halprin's

improvisational explorations and her use of nature as a source for movement greatly affected Forti. Forti moved to New York in 1959 and, with Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton, became part of Robert Dunn's legendary composition class at Merce Cunningham's studio. She performed her "dance constructions," including *Huddle* and *Slant Board*, at Yoko Ono's loft in 1961 and participated in avant-garde Happenings. Since the 1960s, Forti has examined movement and language in improvisational solo and group dance settings and taught classes and workshops in Logomotion across the world.

Forti's explorations into movement and language were influenced by Anna Halprin's improvisational exercises. For example, in Halprin's classes, they would take a word, like "a strawberry," and investigate it "in time, in space, and with force. And then we would also explore with ways that we would shape our mouth to organize the sound" (Forti 1994, 2). They would choose a sentence and accompany it with a task, such as throwing balls: "So we would simply combine them and they would be delightful but meaningless according to cause and effect in a content way" (Forti 1994, 2). They would "free associate" with words like "time," searching for unexpected content and "things that you couldn't preconceive" (Forti 1994, 2). In the expressive arts practice called the Tamalpa Life/Art Process that Halprin and her daughter Daria Halprin developed based on Halprin's methods, spoken and written language are combined with movement and drawing practices to express a range of emotions, promote healing, and foster more embodied and creative ways of living (Saumaa 2018).

Forti has said that she developed Logomotion to grasp the world news and to know what is on her mind (Forti 2003, 136). In an article titled "Organic Telling," she notes that dancing "speculative images of news items" helps her think about them (1990/91,10). These "fleeting embodiments of the working images" give "wonderful shape to the dancing" (Forti 1990/91,

10). Instead of “working images out with words,” she blends words with movement (Forti 1990/91, 10). Her “News Animations” help her “recall the bits and broad strokes of information”: “running” the news through her body, she can see how it “falls together” in her mind, imagination, and feeling (Forti 1994, 2). Her movement “springs from her physical impulses in connection to her thoughts” (Hermann 2001, 21). She thinks in movement (see Morse 2016).

Forti does not pantomime words: movement gives her information on what she thinks and how these words *feel*. Speaking while dancing gives her a “deep feeling in [her] bones. […] You can say hard things because it’s just how you feel them in your bones” (Forti 2003, 126). Speaking while moving, running, or rolling seems to impact the way she feels language: it “gives protection to the speaking and makes it softer, deeper” (2003, 126), while in print these words appear harsher. Movement “seems to make the words so human, human as in bread-eating” (126). This practice led her to pay attention to instances of physical movement encoded in language: “I even see the news as pressures, wedges, and balance shifts, and anyway, so much of the language of the news media is in terms of physical dynamics: the dollar in *free fall*, Lebanon as a *slippery slope*… And that’s what I dance” (4), she notes. Forti reminds readers that movement images or physical phenomena lie underneath metaphors or turns of phrase that we do not necessarily perceive in physical terms. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have illuminated why many metaphors in our experience are based in bodily experience: “Because so many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience (the emotions, ideas, time, etc.), we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms (spatial orientations, objects, etc.)” (115). Along similar lines, the title of *Oh, Tongue* alludes to language as both a physical and abstract phenomenon. The tongue refers to language as a

mostly abstract system of signs as well as the physical organ that we can feel, sense, move, and use to eat and to utter words.

Forti's fascination with speaking while moving has led to a study and practice of writing. She would do a timed free writing before her Logomotion performances and draw upon images and words from her writing for the performance that night. Forti remarks,

> Although I have a deep understanding of movement, and the activity of thinking with words, and my use of words does feed my dancing, I now needed more understanding of how the literary medium could help deepen the discourse in my performances. I started to explore writing itself. (Forti 2003, 141)

She attended workshops in free writing at Beyond Baroque, collaborated with a group of artists, including Carmela Hermann, Jeremiah Day, Dana Hirsch, and Lisa Bruno, with whom they performed an evening of their individual work. While collaborating with Terrence Luke Johnson and Dale Eunson on a piece that included "a lot of writing, both spontaneous and deliberate," she sensed that "the writing began to take on a life of its own" (2003, 142).

One reason why the aesthetic qualities of Forti's texts have not been fully analyzed might stem from the challenge her works pose in terms of form and genre. Her writings, like her dance work, cross boundaries. As Wendy Perron has noted, "This disjunctiveness – one thing following another even though it may not make obvious thematic sense – is typical of the way Forti works" (Perron 2017, 110). *Handbook in Motion* (1974) incorporates the directions for her dance constructions next to her reflections on her life and dance career; *Oh, Tongue* (2003) includes poetry, an imaginary conversation between Forti and her father, and several pieces drawn from previous works: articles published in *Contact Quarterly* and the transcripts of two performances at the Dance Festival at Bates College in 2002 and a transcript of a

performance at Bennington College in 2003. *Unbuttoned Sleeves* (2006) is based on journal entries, improvisational warm-up writings, transcriptions of speaking while in motion, and deliberate writings that Forti, along with her collaborators Terrence Luke Johnson, Sarah Swenson, and Douglas Wadle, created for two improvisational dance/theater projects, "Unbuttoned Sleeves" and "101," featured at the Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater in 2005 and at Highways Performance Space in L.A. in 2006, respectively. The works attend to the visual: *Handbook in Motion* (1974) uses images of Forti's handwritten journals and photographs of performances; *Oh, Tongue* (2003) includes abstract sketches and drawings of the body.

Experimenting with form, different registers of writing, and verbal means of recording dance material is not unique to Forti. For example, in her *Lamb at the Altar: The Story of a Dance* (1994) and *Using the Sky: A Dance* (2015), Deborah Hay incorporates notes, journal entries, and poetic writings to reflect on and record her work of choreographing particular dances. In the foreword to *My Body, The Buddhist* (2000) she emphasizes that she is not a practicing Buddhist, poet, librettist, or archivist: "The literary forms used in this book are liberties I have taken to help me unravel a piece of the plot between movement and perception. The libretto, poem, score, short story, were co-opted by a flag-bearer in pursuit of the study of intelligence born in the dancing body" (xxv). Hay suggests that writing about the body and bodily intelligence necessitates these varied forms: in her view, bodily consciousness does not fit neatly into one genre.

The shifting perspectives and deliberate formal incoherence perform several functions. Forti's writings further the author's philosophical ideas about movement, language, and the mind; they include autobiographical and historical information, such as Forti's reflections on

her studies with Halprin and the milieu of the 1960s happenings and experimentation with pedestrian movement at the Judson Memorial Church; and by including poetry, lyrical writings, and drawings, they are works of art with their literary and visual aesthetics. They also serve as a type of archive: by including the transcripts and the scores for the dance constructions, Forti brings awareness of her dances to the reading public. The title of *Handbook in Motion: An Account of an Ongoing Personal Discourse and Its Manifestations in Dance* highlights a kinetic quality. The book is not "on" or "about" motion; it is actively "in motion," perhaps even "unfinished." The title suggests that new insights about these different genres and functions can emerge upon re-reading.

Writing the "Dance State" of Improvisation

We enter a particular "dance state" when we dance, Forti opines. In *Handbook in Motion*, she says, "there's a state of dancing, like there's a state of sleeping, or a state of shivering. Some people have a shyness towards entering that state, but everybody does it sometime. Often, at parties, people drop their shyness and enter a dance state" (1974, 108). In *Oh, Tongue*, she remarks, "I think it's a state of being. Like sleeping, figuring out, or panicking are" (2003, 130). Physical movements in that state are "enchanting": "[W]hen I'm in a dance state, the movement that comes out through me enchants me. It can be a very simple movement, but it always comes with a sense of wonder, and as one of life's more delicious moments. Melodies are like that, too. They just come" (108). The "dance state" is somatic in that the self is constantly tracking bodily movements and sensations. The dancer is not in a "trance" but is actively observing mental and physical processes. Even though at times Forti gets "completely lost in the movement or in the sound and rhythm of words," she maintains "all the concerns of space, of timing, of movement interest" (139). Similarly to the mental self-awareness practiced in meditation, the dancer's mind in the "dance state" observes its own

functioning (see De Spain 2014). From these descriptions, it appears that Forti's notion of the "dance state" refers to improvisational dance, as the dancer is open to movements that "come through" her and make her "wonder," rather than executing choreographed movements.

Paying attention to images, words, and inchoate thoughts in the "dance state," Forti is tapping into the "stream of consciousness," a term attributed to William James, who in his *Principles of Psychology* ([1890] 1910), suggested that we experience our minds as movement, as a constant flow or stream of thoughts. He observed, "Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly [...] It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life" (James [1890] 1910, 239). Forti notices mental stimuli that arise in the "stream of consciousness" and responds to them with words or movement: "there is a feedback and a responsiveness that is set up in my dancing body, in my dancing mind" (Forti 2003, 139). She says, "The thoughts and images seem to flash through my motor centers and my verbal centers simultaneously, mixing and animating both speech and physical embodiment. Spatial, structural, emotional" (136). By adding the layer of physical experience to James's term, Forti makes it applicable for movement innovation and highlights the presence of the body in discussions of mental processes: she explores the "stream of consciousness" not only as the movement of thoughts in the mind but as a phenomenon rooted in the physically moving body.

Free writing is one way to access the "stream of consciousness." In free writing, the hand is in continued movement for a particular amount of time, and the writer records the moving thoughts of the mind without stopping to judge or polish the emerging language. Forti often

starts with “I remember” and sees what surfaces or chooses random words from the dictionary and observes how “the thoughts that they stimulate begin to relate in surprising ways” (140). She comments on the kinetic aspect of writing: “I love how those moments when I would usually pause to reflect, I must keep going” (140). Instead of pausing to think about the next step, the writer must continue, which brings to the writing “the stuff that’s flitting though, with its own wild affiliation to the thoughts that came before” (Forti 1994, 2). Her mind “grabs at those thoughts” that are randomly passing through, moving with “jumps that are irrational but resonant”: these are her “shadow thoughts” that she might otherwise not express or be aware of (Forti 2003, 140-41).

Forti’s practice of free writing has been inspired by the works of the writer and educator Natalie Goldberg. Goldberg’s free writing practice reminds Forti of her own improvisational movement practice (Forti 1994, 2). In *Wild Mind: Living the Writer’s Life*, Goldberg encourages readers to “understand the journey of thought, how thought moves around in our mind” (Goldberg 1993, 190), thus underscoring movement as a key characteristic of thinking. She refers to writing as a physical practice and uses physical language to talk about the mind: free associating on the phrase “I remember” is a “warmup” exercise that “stretches” the mind and “limbers” the writer up before focusing on a bigger project. She observes that both writing and movement unfold linearly: writing is like “moving one foot in front of the other when you walk. The problem is we don’t notice that movement of one foot in front of the other. We just move our feet. Writing practice asks you to notice not only how your feet move but also how your mind moves” (1993, 6; see also Goldberg 1986, 2016).

Forti’s concern with improvising in words and in movement manifests on the page in several ways. In one section, Forti includes three takes on three words chosen randomly from the

dictionary. The writing style in these sections privileges chopped simple sentences and short, fast phrases. For example, she states, “Write about what you know about? How about barely knowing. You can barely know. Write about what you barely know about. A tough hand the dictionary has handed me. I hold it in my hand. My hand on pen on paper has three cards. Grass of Parnassus, retort” (Forti 2003, 52). Forti here writes “at the edge of knowing” (Longley 2017, 33). The text is not fully fathomable – thoughts move quickly from one direction to the next – but at times clusters of meaning do occur. Alys Longley opines that Forti “generates spaces of half-sense, where a known word or quality is pushed to a threshold and disassembled into component parts of sound, quality feeling, momentum. Words are reassembled into new forms that perhaps do not make literal sense, but which are nevertheless recognizable as holding the memory of former sense” (2017, 32).

A different aesthetic is in play in Forti’s depictions of the “dance state” in performance settings. In *Oh, Tongue*, she describes a movement scene:

> The stage. Walking out. “The see me now. Let them see me, get used to the sight of me. Quiet down. Open.” I choose a place. I stand there. I glance at the audience. To see them, for them to see my face, my whole stance, just a look of recognition that I consider a hello, I begin. With what presents itself. A memory, a shape in the performance hall. I trust this first thing and I begin. I hope that the audience, having met me, follows my interest, my involvement, I return in my mind’s eye to the northern slope of Bald Mountain in Vermont, I look around and pronto. Something happens. I see snow. I jump and curl in the air. Hands and feet in air. Heavy rattle winter wind smashes dry sunflower stalks. Again. Again, smash, jump! Snow thud falls from laden roof. Feet slide out, thud. Whole body, thud, flat to floor. (2003, 130)

Here, Forti gives a sense of both the physical motion and the mental landscape while she is dancing and simultaneously observing her mind. The passage records movement: the speaker walks, stands, glances, looks around, jumps, curls, slides, falls. It records mental actions: the speaker trusts, hopes, returns in her mind's eye to a memory; she "sees snow," "heavy rattle winter wind smashes dry sunflower stalks"; "snow thud falls from laden roof." The sentences are short, clipped. Syntactically, the sentences move forward as simple sentences or as coordinated units of equal status, rather than as complex sentences of interwoven subordinated clauses. A complex sentence "moves" differently from the more direct push of a coordinated sentence or a simple sentence. Although the thought jumps around, from one image to the next, the writing is nevertheless more linear than in the "Three Takes" section above.

Forti's fascination with not just the English language but her exploration of multiple languages is an overlooked area. The dynamics between two languages open up another way to think about movement, prominent in *Unbuttoned Sleeves* (2006). The "libretto" depicts Forti and her three collaborators improvising to their chosen area of interest, "with the assumption that any four topics, any four voices, would engage each other in particular ways" (1). Forti plays the character of "The Four Year Old (Child)." In her autobiographical sections, she recounts the experience of her family in Europe at the wake of World War Two. These sections are bilingual: the speaker slips into Italian, using what in linguistics is called "code-switching," or the alternating of two languages within the same text, sentence, or discourse (see Auer 1998, Gumperz 1982). Child says:

> Give me your hand. No! No! Mano. Pee. Like pippi. Mamma! Mama, that's English. Mamma. Mamma. Pippiii. Poppooo. The baby. Bebé is the baby. Mammie, I found un soldo! A soldered penny to give to a soldier. Soldato. Dato.

> Give. A solder with an “L.” Sold. I don’t know that yet, about the “L,” but I will. The soldato gets the soldered coin to report. Gets lots of coins. Pennies, that’s what makes him a soldier. Soldi. He gets money to go do it. (Forti 2006, 14)

She comments on how similar or distant English words and their Italian counterparts are. Child says, “Attention. Attenzione. It sounds the same and it is the same. […] Together insieme. In … sieme. Insieme sounds like more together” (14). She places English and Italian words next to one another in two columns: “babe bebé, crisis crisi, cricket grillo cri, soldier soldato, coin soldo, city città” (45). The spectator and reader can follow Forti’s improvisations without the aid of a dictionary, since the words are linguistically close. Forti leaves some sentences untranslated. Her playful exploration of Italian emphasizes sound: “Tree albero” leads to “alberoberobero brances rami” and “bero ramibero albero” (14).

This word play mimics an act a child might do – trying out a different language and how new words feel “on the tongue.” The fact that Forti is using movement while uttering these words emphasizes the idea that studying a foreign tongue or being bilingual is a process of embodiment, of making new or other words a part of one’s physical being through repetition. Repetition is also a part of sections rendered in English only, such as the following example:

> It was here, I took it. It’s a gift. I took it. I stole it, I took it, I got it, I hold it. I take it, I hold it. It’s not a gift. It’s a gift! It’s not a gift. It’s a gift! It’s not a gift. It’s a gift! Not a gift. A gift! It’s a gift, it’s not a gift. It’s a burden. It’s an oracle. It’s a lifting up of my voice. It’s a lifting up, of my voice. It’s a lifting up, a lifting up, a lifting up, a lifting up, it’s a lifting up, a lifting up, it’s a lifting up of my voice” (Forti 2006, 26).

Such examples remind readers of the work of another language innovator, Gertrude Stein. The title, *Unbuttoned Sleeves*, might refer to Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1914). Stein, similarly to Forti, explored repetition, was intrigued by automatic writing, cultivated a voice that "sounded" like a child, included in-text translation between French and English, and foregrounded Anglo-Saxon, rather than Latinate, vocabulary. While the writing style and wordplay in Stein's work might be lighthearted or playful, the subject matter often is not: she narrated her experiences as an expatriate in France and experiences of wartime in *Paris France* ([1940] 2013) and *Wars I Have Seen* (1945). Forti, too, is here writing about a traumatic experience of her family's escape from Europe. In Perron's words, "Although Forti has never said this, I think there is something about her work – the hunger for touch, the desire to feel the earth under her feet, the distrust of authority – that may be the legacy of being a four-year-old child bewildered by the haste with which her family had to flee their home country" (Perron 2017, 113).

"Animate" Writing and Nature

Animation is a term that resurfaces repeatedly in Forti's writings, visible even in the titles of her articles, such as "Animating the News: A Practice" (Forti 1990) and "From Animate Dancing to Writing" (Forti 2003). Forti has said that for her, "dancing has almost always been a way to explore nature" (Forti 2003, 131). She has studied the movement of animals, dances her gardening journal, and observes the movement of plants and trees. She calls her explorations an "animistic process" in that she is trying to get at the "spirit" of what she sees (2003, 131). Halprin, who conducted sessions on the outdoor deck of her mountain home studio, would routinely ask students to observe elements of nature and use their observations in movement.

"From Animate Dancing to Writing" in *Oh, Tongue* starts with a nature scene: Forti is sitting by a brook waiting for thoughts for writing. She says:

> At bottom of quiet pool, a green leaf. On surface, water striders. One scratching its hind right leg with its fore-leg. Shadow of something across a surface, a bird? A butterfly? No, a leaf. Sitting on rock, hardness getting uncomfortable even through folded towel. Later I'll bathe here. Waiting for a thought for writing, a thought in the context of a particular writing. From the pool here. To a reader maybe at the breakfast table, morning light slanting in east window, maybe snow. Water striders always so easy to see, over the years always so easy to observe, I don't take them seriously. If a little brookie, a little trout, were to show itself, now that would be something. Something. […] Light through pools, light through falling water, roots and rocks, little island beach pebble mound. And dancing? There's a function that functions in our sleep. So that as we dream we're running, we lie still. Sometimes a cat will twitch its paws, its face, in its sleep, but basically lie still. Seeing the fractured rock face shunting water one sheet here one there my eye follows sharp edges. My teeth try the stone, I breathe the falling water and am the soft air smelling of me, the bright tree root curve of sun-soaked moss, pulsing circles of light bopping water. And only by the grace of that which holds me still do I hold still. (Forti 2003, 129)

This paragraph illustrates what I call the "writing impulse," or the propulsion to write. The subtitle reads "Written at the brook, while thinking about this article" (2003, 129), which suggests that the speaker is waiting for an impulse for the thought to *move,* propel her toward writing. From readers' perspective she has begun writing even though her idea for writing "in the context of a particular writing" (Forti 2003, 129) has not arrived yet: she starts to record

the environment around her, the movements of water striders, the smell of fish, a bird or a butterfly moving, and her sensation of physical discomfort while sitting on a hard rock. While she is slowly teasing herself into writing while waiting for her main idea to surface, she paints the picture of her environment and the animate life in it: what she presents as a type of "pre-writing" locates readers in a particular place and creates a sense of the scene and mood.

This waiting for a thought for writing resembles the well-known description of Isadora Duncan standing in her studio and waiting for a movement impulse. In the words of Andrea Mantell-Seidel, "To arouse the 'motor in the soul,' the impulse toward motion, Duncan stood, sometimes for hours at a time, in silent contemplation and observation of her emotional and motor impulses, concentrating on the solar plexus" (2016, 31). In Forti's view, Duncan "reached across time and space to find a precedent for the dancing she felt she needed to do. She found inspiration and confirmation in the figures dancing with abandon" (Forti 2003, 133). She refers to the moment of Duncan standing still in the center of her studio waiting for a movement impulse: in Forti's opinion, Duncan was working with the particular task she had given herself, "of clearing the environment and listening for an inner impulse" (Forti 2003, 134). In the above example, Forti, too, is waiting for a "movement impulse" – one that would set thought in motion.

The passage above implies that it is possible to enter the "dance state" without dancing physically. Forti notes, "And dancing? There's a function that functions in our sleep. So that as we dream we're running, we lie still" (2003, 129). The speaker is standing still but her thoughts and imagination are in actively motion. Her eyes travel along the edges of the rock; her teeth "try the stone" (2003, 129); she "breathe[s] the falling water" (2003, 129), and she is the "soft air smelling of [her]" (2003, 129) and the tree root. She is still but feels herself as

these other substances and imagines moving like them. This is a dancing function. She notes, "only by the grace of that which holds me still do I hold still" (2003, 129), which suggests that being physically still might be a struggle: she would rather move. This passage is training readers to see movement and dance in stillness. By extension, it is a commentary on reading and writing – our reading and writing bodies are commonly in still positions, but in thought and imagination, we can move actively. As Forti's passage implies, these too could be considered as aspects of movement function.

Examples in which the speaker feels one with nature or natural phenomena demonstrate Forti's approach to "kinesthetic awareness." In the above example, the speaker says, "my teeth try the stone, I breathe the falling water and am the soft air smelling of me" (2003, 129). Forti *is* the "dry crumbly ground" (138) and "the cool round things of delicate russet skins, emerging miraculously clean" (138). She *becomes* "the ships, the lands, the peoples, the strategies, the connections" (137). In 1936, dance critic John Martin wrote:

> When we see a human body moving, we see movement which is potentially producible by a human body and therefore by our own; through kinesthetic sympathy we actually reproduce it vicariously in our present muscular experience and awaken such associational connotations as might have been ours if the original movement had been of our own making. (Martin quoted in Batson and Wilson 2014, 100)

Forti's vision of "kinaesthetic awareness" is akin to the concept of "kinesthetic empathy" in that both terms refer to ways one can sense in the body the feelings of others. While "kinesthetic empathy" is most often applied to a stage performance witnessed by audience members, Forti applies her notion of kinesthetic awareness more broadly. By observing and

feeling the movement of a living person or a thing, the observer can take on information about the states of their bodies, where they hold tensions and where they feel relaxed, and use information about these states in their own movement. In Forti's view, focusing on one's sensations is not enough: the "world" element needs to be part of the kinesthetic experience: a mind, body, world connection is "a state, among our human repertoire of states of being. […] Mind, body, world. Even grammatically it seems more vital. More full of surprises" (2003, 122-23).

Studying nature does not only "animate" Forti's dance: it also animates her writing. Her tone becomes more poetic and lyrical in these instances where she depicts movements in nature. Forti comments on how she draws inspiration for dancing from her gardening journal: "How to explain what I learn from the snow, from the compost bin, from the stars? When a fresh wind is blowing down the mountain, I absolutely gulp it down. Gulp it in. Or reaching into the dirt of the potatoes, my self dives into my fingers and I am the dry crumbly ground. And the cool round things of delicate russet skins, emerging miraculously clean" (2003, 138). In these moments, Forti is not recording, describing or narrating only: she is searching for a creative, lyrical way to express her connection to movement and nature in language. She tries to express the "rich scent of white clover blossoms" that "thicken the cells" in her body, while her hands "re-experience the coolness in the shade under the squash plant's umbrella leaves" (2003, 130). Some of these movement explorations indeed become poems: her collection titled *Angel* (1978) includes poems such as "In the company of the fern one can stand bending way backwards, hanging head and arms like fronds" (22) and "And in the company of the snake plant one can balance on one's back, reaching limbs, leg and arm and arm and head and leg reaching upward among each other snaking slightly" (23).

Conclusion: Absence and Presence of Movement

Forti's "dancer's books" invite readers to look for knowledge and descriptions of movement. However, Forti's books present a challenge for readers' ability to imagine improvisational movement. *Unbuttoned Sleeves* (2006) is presented as a "libretto": it includes words, dance, and music and is called a theater/dance project. The reader knows that the performers used movement and dance in this work. However, the work includes very little information about what the movement component might be like. Only in a few cases, most notably in Terrence Luke Johnson's section, does the reader get any information about the actual movement of the performers. Johnson's section includes some parenthetical notes, such as "Luke has been holding a piano bench, chest high. How he turns it this way and that" (Forti 2006, 25). He "bangs" his hand against the bench (26). But the rest of the libretto is lacking in movement description.

This refusal to encode movement gives liberty to future performers to come up with their own movement. It is a statement that improvisational movement does not need to be encoded, on and off the page, and it cannot be; there is no precise system, such as Labanotation, for it. From the perspective of the reader, the refusal to encode movement descriptions can serve as an absence. Readers are aware of how intricately tied movement and language are for Forti: the absence of allusions to the speaker's movements makes it hard for readers to envision movement as underneath or behind words.

For Forti, the need to create in readers' minds images of bodies in motion is less pronounced. The most direct way to make readers *see* motion in Forti's writing is not so much through images of the speaker herself moving but through her descriptions of movement in nature and animate life. She describes moving *like* a plant would move or embodying the stillness of a

woodpile. Her writing, then, emphasizes the importance of metaphors and similes for not only dancers' but also readers' ability to imagine movement.

Susan Leigh Foster has noted, "Describing bodies' movements, the writing itself must move. It must put into play figures of speech and forms of phrase and sentence construction that evoke the texture and timing of bodies in motion" (1995, 5). While Forti does not foreground the need to record the physical movements of bodies in motion, she does, like Foster suggested, make the *writing* itself move: drawing upon the stream-of-consciousness writing, abrupt, clipped sentences, and flowing prose – and using free writing, nonfiction prose, poems, imaginary dialogues, scripts, and essayistic writing, Forti's works draw attention to how language itself moves on the page. Her works make readers aware of how they move, or jump between different genres, registers, and tongues. Her works, then, remind readers of the movement – or dance – of their minds as they read.

This attention to processes of reading and imagining is likely to become significant in analyses of works by other contemporary choreographers who work with movement and language and who also use writing to record their dance performances. As I mentioned earlier, Deborah Hay often records her dance works in the form of writing, such as scripts. Karinne Keithley Syers, Annie-B Parson, and Paul Lazar have written an experimental text on the work of Big Dance Theater, titled *Another Telepathic Thing* (Big Dance Theater 2014). They start with a question, "How do we get this performance into the form of a book?" (2014, 15), and advise the reader, "Reader, it is your job to read expansively, to speculate a little, to sound out the speechless places, to embrace, with a little telepathy, the intervals between all these things" (11). In the fields of somatics and expressive arts therapy, a similar impulse to inspire readers to imagine movement as they read exists, as in the works

of the dancer and author Miranda Tufnell, who also studied with Forti (Tufnell 2017, Tufnell and Crickmay 2014). These writings show how dancers-choreographers-writers combine oral history, drawings, video stills, poems, and annotated scripts to record the processes and performances of their works as well as to delve deeper into the expressive, artistic, and healing potential of movement and language combined.

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