

## “Toward a Poetics of Collaboration in Modern Dance”

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### Introduction

Dance has been fertile ground for collaborators, especially musical ones. Two Russians, Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky come to mind immediately as composers who essentially gained fame, at least initially, as dance collaborators able to infuse their music with dance sensibility (a poetic concern) and thereby make successful work in the dance medium. The effect of dance on composers has been profound, perhaps even equal to the effect of music on choreographers. In the cultural wake of the Judson Theater however, and especially with Yvonne Rainer’s manifesto “No to Spectacle,” traditional methods of dancing to music, of making dances that espouse a visual relationship to structural elements in music, were put to a test. This test has had a profound effect on modern dance making, and so, on collaborating with modern dance choreographers in the last 40 years. This period roughly corresponds to the advent of postmodern cultural theory. One could assume that postmodern ideas apply to postmodern dance. They do and they don’t.

One problem with applying ideas from general critical postmodernism is that dance has had its own strain of “postmodernism.” Indeed as Sally Banes points out in her ground-breaking book *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, there were even two schools of postmodernism in dance: analytic and metaphoric Postmodern Dance. Banes goes on to point out that “the key post-modern choreographic technique is radical juxtaposition.” (*Terpsichore in Sneakers*, pp. xxiii). Banes, later in her introduction says, “while the critical community in dance has not rushed to embrace semiotics and post-structuralism with the fervor found in other fields, choreographers (...) have been exploring some of the implications of this perspective.” Banes then talks about our human need to make order by borrowing the jargon of semiotics and literary criticism. She even says, what is considered postmodern in dance is just **modernism** for the other arts, pointing out the irrelevance of postmodern theories as applied to dance. She further admits in “Postmodern Dance Revisited,” that developments in the 80s have led people

to explore their interest in pluralism, politics, narrative and collaboration. The analytic postmodern dance seems to have affected the collaborative process profoundly. Some work in the 80s actually encourages the use of post-structuralist jargon. I am thinking now of Ralph Lemon and Steven Petronio (e.g. *Simulacrum Reels*). All this is to say that the relationship between music and dance in the context of postmodern modern dance changed in 60s and continued to change in the 80s and beyond. No surprise there, right? I might add that Banes perspective is based mostly on her experiences in New York.

We owe Banes a great debt in having elucidated an important perspective of dance within the overall context of Postmodernism. My interest, however, is not in discussing how postmodern theorists might view dance making now, as much as what the effect of postmodern dance is on us as collaborators. I will not take the bait of applying far-flung postmodern theories to dance wholesale. At some point in the future we will have to apply some for unity's sake. Instead, I want to discuss what sorts of creative modes are being offered by those who weathered the storm of postmodern thought outside dance, especially from the perspective the new Poetics of Italo Calvino, Octavio Paz and Umberto Eco. I want in the course of this paper, to look at some old models, some newer models and why they are important to the development of our ideas about collaborative work. I also want to embrace the New Poetics as described in Calvino's *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Paz' *the Other Voice* and Eco's *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* and *The Open Work* as a good means of approaching collaboration as an integrative practice in itself. These are not wounds needing to be healed. Music has not suffered because of analytic postmodern dance. On the contrary, I would assert that the postmodern choreographer of today is piqued again by music (especially popular music) and what it can do for them in the theater. What has changed is the *use of music* as a partner in creating theatrical moment. There is a legacy from the original analytical postmodern choreographers in the 70s, of distrusting both music and musicians. My own experiments in exploring musical composition with visual artists and in working with collaborators in a lab environment have led me to examine some models which rely on mutual investigation as opposed to denying the traditions. Denial of the past has been a tenet of all reactions to any modernism. We are then obliged to find new territory, a new language of collaboration to share; one that perhaps acknowledges dances own post-modernism and that

moves closer to a new modernism that is multiple. Clearly we are living in a multi-dimensional symbology. This new territory might be described as a new poetics of collaboration. First, let's look at some historical perspectives on collaboration.

### **Old Models**

For the sake of this discussion of modern dance collaboration, we can start with the Louis Horst Model. Louis Horst, who for years ran the *Dance Review* and desired and toiled to mastermind a collaborative model, was the chief protagonist of music as a functional accompaniment. His numerous scores in this style attest to his lineage as a "player" in the nascent years of modern dance. It was in this period that modern dance sought to break free from the traditional strictures of music and the Romantic Ballet. His taut scores for Graham are memorable as subservient if not dutiful creations to Graham's virile choreography. His protégés often followed the pattern as Lehman Engel did with Charles Weidmann. Some other collaborators made pieces that are now routinely performed as music standing alone. Stravinsky's *Firebird* and the *Rite of Spring*, Tchaikovsky's *Suite from Romeo and Juliet* are notable examples. Often these works were remade or re-orchestrated so that they could stand alone as musical works without dance. Even Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* for Martha Graham was recast to satisfy Copland's own ideas of that particular music without the dance. John Toenjes, my colleague at the University of Illinois, has written in an internet article, that there are two schools of thought on the function of music in modern dance. He says that there is the "functional music" school (gebrauchmusik) and the "complete music" school. For purposes of this discussion, Toenjes' categories fit nicely, especially as we move toward the model of two "complete music" practitioners - Balanchine and Stravinsky.

Balanchine and Stravinsky collaborated on many works forging a truly unusual and long lived kind of collaborative partnership. Balanchine knew Stravinsky from the Ballets Russes and knew some of Stravinsky's established methods, i.e. piano reduction drafts, plots and story lines from folk culture. Balanchine was a decent pianist himself and judging from the work these two produced I think it is fair to say that Balanchine erred on the side of the "complete music" School. The trilogy of neo-Classic pieces *Apollo* ['28-29], *Orpheus* [1948] and *Agon* [1954] are rich testaments to the desire to make as complete a statement as possible in both

the dance and the music. Together this trilogy spans some 30 years of collaborative commitment. Balanchine and Stravinsky spurred each other on to dizzying heights, which is not always the case when collaborating. By contrast, Balanchine's choreography in *The Four Temperaments* to a meager score by Paul Hindemith is more than the music can support, at least for me. One never hears Hindemith's *Four Temperaments* by itself. The structure and invention of dance are rich with novel vocabulary and interest for the time, something that cannot be said of the accompanying music.

A brief anecdote about Stravinsky's practices concerning collaboration with dance and his attention to detail, at least early in his career, might serve well at this juncture. The quote that follows is from *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* by Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft.

In May 1929, Aeolian released the *Firebird* played by Stravinsky on 'audio-graphic' Duo-Art pianola rolls. The left-hand side of each roll contained a running commentary on the development of themes, the instrumentation, and other technical aspects of the music, while the right-hand side contained a minute description of the action of the ballet. Program notes could hardly be made more explicit, information and music being perfectly synchronized: and in this case, the program revealed that originally, almost every measure of the ballet had been tied to a stage episode. Sometimes the composer is startlingly literary, as when he says that in *The Firebird* he had

[Stravinsky is speaking here]

'Not yet completely broken with all the devices covered by the term Music Drama. I was still rather susceptible to the system of musical characterization of different people or of different dramatic situations. And this system shows itself in the introduction of processes belonging to the order of what is called Leitmotiv....All that is concerned with the evil genius of Kastchei, all that belongs to his kingdom...is characterized in the music by what might be termed a Leit-harmony....'

I would be remiss if I didn't mention Doris Humphrey here. When one looks for writing on this topic, one is usually confronted with a paltry list of sources (one reason for this paper). Invariably one that pops up is Doris' chapter on music in *The Art of Making Dances*. In it she stresses the interaction of the two parties involved – a noble, if not humane bit of advice. Her *Water Study* never lacked because it had no accompaniment. She understood the relationship of music and dance in her world, i.e., the world of her own invention. This world is private and based on one's own ears or the aural experience and comfort of the creators of work. She

loved Bach (don't we all?) but if one had to choose a composer for collaboration, Bach is pretty far down the list in my book. The reason is that he is singularly complete in his thought. There is no room for visual input. Doris is well meaning but one has the sense that she has bitten off more than she wants to chew in the scope of the book. She gives solid advice about various combinations of music and movement styles. In the end, it is a dated but useful starting point for discussion not least because she bothered to write something down about her experience thus bucking the oral tradition of modern dance. A colleague and dance musician, Ken Beck asked me if this "is a *pro forma* repudiation of music visualization or just to music 'too good?'" It is the opinion of a living collaborator trying to make work and to counsel other collaborators.

According to Horst, for his contemporary early modern dance pioneers, "the only legitimate question [was] – is the music good for the dance?" (Toenjes pt. 1) The popular solution at the time for these collaborators was to support the dance with a spare score while creating some direct energetic relationship with it (the Functional School). Some tried to create fully realized pieces of music (the Complete School) which might stand on their own. Henry Cowell even invented a modular form he called "Elastic Form" to satisfy the problem of collaborative creation. Cowell's modular restrictions are pragmatic but limiting to us as collaborators now, though at the time they gave many composers a means to work in the dance medium in a way that was acceptable to most choreographers. These were days when many "new" things were tried until Merce Cunningham and John Cage led us to the truly new – collaboration at a distance. For a brief time postmodern music and dance were in sync. Merce is now viewed as classic modern and John as classic postmodern. Just to reiterate Banes point about the asynchronous ideas of postmodern in music and dance.

### **More Recent Models**

Merce Cunningham and John Cage created an idea of creative and performance simultaneity. Their aleatoric process is memorable for its pure creativity. I will never forget the summer of '88 when I saw the Cunningham Co. at the American Dance Festival five nights in a row with a different program each night. I was awed by the sheer dance spectacle. It was a florid display of creative combination. Their inclusion of various other collaborators in "rolling

the creative dice” with them has developed into a rich and vital body of work in both music and dance. These two giants of creativity resonate today in so many ways, a paper of this scope does not permit detailed discussion. Cage’s treatment of the collaborative environment is well documented in several books which have his writings on the subject: *Cage: Writer* and *Silence* contain excellent primary source material on the process in his collaborations with various art-makers. Others had resonating effect in the process of clarifying trends in collaboration with music. The perception of collaboration and what works with dance was permanently affected by their work. Another important creator who contributed to the on-going discussion of the process of dance making and collaboration was Yvonne Rainer.

### **Yvonne Rainer’s “No to spectacle...” Manifesto and its effect**

Yvonne Rainer wrote the “No to spectacle...” manifesto in ’65 as a statement of the necessity of a renewed vigor in the exploration of the primary material of dance – movement. It almost single handedly reinvigorated the ideological dedication to exploring pure movement. This was a current running through participants in Douglas Dunn’s Composition Class which attracted people from various disciplines, laying the foundation of postmodern dance, eventually manifest in the Judson Church Concerts. Rainer’s manifesto is important in that it doesn’t say ‘no’ to music *per se* but insinuates that music has an agenda like the other things she is trying to strip away from getting in the way of creating dance. In other words, ‘No’ to anything that might lead the dancer into making decisions not based on the movement. Her interest is in laying bare pure dance - pure dance language and meaning. The breeze was blowing creators in dance toward investigating movement as simply movement, and all that could be. The appeal of such dance is unmistakable and remarkable. Rainer’s emphasis is on creating a dance with a singular purpose – dance free of traditional accoutrements. More recently, Elizabeth Streb, the iconoclastic choreographer known for her intensely physical dances, has said, “music is the enemy of dance.” Her denial of music and music’s affect is so as not to distract from the dance. The effect is on both the choreographer throughout the process of making a dance and on the viewer in viewing the dance. The legacy of trying things while being leery of music’s power is evident throughout much of the dance of the 70s. Lest you think I am complaining, this perspective is one means of discovering the truth of dance movement. Haven’t we seen choreography leaning too heavily on music for form, emotional

content and those most difficult elements – beginnings and endings. By the 80s, things had changed again - anything goes. So where did that leave us as creators, as collaborators?

The list of people trying various relationships to music goes on and on: Laura Dean, Bebe Miller, Ralph Lemon, Irène Hultman and Steve Paxton come to mind as divergent users of music as partner. Paxton's *Golberg Variations* (1987) is an incredible juxtaposition of using a monolithic piece of music to create a structural trampoline. As a dance piece it is incredible for its improvisational virtuosity and daring. Mark Haim more recently in 1996 choreographed a set of solo variations to the entire piece played live! These are not foolhardy and off-handed ventures rather they make clear that music and dance are allied in multiple ways. These can in turn, be used together to make a moving theatrical moment. Banes says in her history of dance collaborations with music titled "Dancing [with / to / before / on / in / over / after / against / away from / without ] the Music: Vicissitudes of Collaboration in American Postmodern Choreography, "

*If in postmodernism anything can be used, why not old music, beautiful music, highbrow music – as well as the lowbrow, hackneyed, and despised? Why not canned music as well as commissioned? In other words all the contradictory sides of the dance-music debates seem to coexist comfortably in late eighties postmodern dance.*

Banes' excellent article sadly comes to a screeching halt in the late 80s. One may assume that the "anything goes" attitude still holds some sway. If nothing else it is the willingness to try different combinations of theatrical gesture that can lead us to meaningful dance making.

### **The Role of the Academy**

In this new century, we are ready for a new humanism. We have felt it coming for some time. I must avoid the discussion of technology as a catalyst for change. In academic dance there is an attempt to recreate some of the playfulness of the 60s and the analytical investigation of the 70s. Youthful choreographers being what they are, and composition teachers being what *they* are, old models tend to linger. There is little barometer except personal taste to lead young creators in these investigations. Yet, I think academia is surely

one of the places to try new ideas with impunity. My own explorations have led me to Poetics as a study of meaningful gesture. The models I have chosen because I see dance, music and other art forms as well, as sharing at their core, a poetic language. This shared language is both dance and music, but more accurately it is what I call “theatrical moment” created out of an understanding of a larger mutual goal of gesture. I don’t know the answer to the question regarding whether this or that music should be used. It is too simplistic a question and probably futile to answer except as an opinion. The answer I give most often is a question itself (Ah! the bliss of didactics) –“Does it work for you?” And then quickly – “Why?” I will not offer a formula for success in choosing music; there isn’t one. Rather I would like to point here to a body of literature that is, if interpreted in the language of creativity, very useful as inspiration. It fosters collaborative thinking by opening the analytical dialogue beyond the individual creator. It can spur new vistas of creation.

(And, guess what? I have bottles of it right here for \$15.00 a pop,...., if you will just step outside for a moment.)

I propose a different, syncretic perspective on collaborative creativity: one based on the Humanist Poetics of Paz, Calvino and Eco. It is a nascent model I have tested on various populations and one that has produced startling results even in populations unaccustomed to collaborative thought. A colleague, Donna Faye Burchfield, Dean of the American Dance Festival and a professor at Hollins College has also been using these text in composition classes. I wish to point first to Calvino’s *Six Memos* as a primer for getting to the essence of what makes art communicate to others, also Ms. Burchfield’s research. The emphasis is on process. Next, I propose that we examine Paz’ notions of ‘telling and singing’ from *The Other Voice* to understand scope. Finally, instead of stripping away potential layers of meaning for investigation (a minimalism, if you will), I instead propose an infusion, leaving the work open to steep in interpretive interaction as in Eco’s *The Open Work*. Not coincidentally, all three authors have won the Charles Eliot Norton Prize in Poetics. Norton Prize winners have included: poets, composers (notably Stravinsky and Bernstein) and many painters, writers and creators. I know of no choreographer who has won the prize – perhaps it’s time!

## Poetics and translating its language to creative endeavors

In reading Barthes and Derrida, et al., I am struck by a distinctly cool tenor. A steely and cynical analysis of art is not my cup of tea. I love making music and dances and I think that those of us who do it often wish to spend most of our time *making* and not *defending* our choices. This doesn't mean that criticism isn't welcome or that intellectual vigor isn't part of our process. I seek a warmer climate for my own collaborative art making. In poetics we find a body of work that relates directly to our art forms in a warmer, integrative way. In Poetics we can borrow an aristotelian language of description and apply it to our creative endeavors. Substituting the words "dance" or "music" as the object under scrutiny for the word "poetry" accomplishes this. There are certainly some pratfalls in this method. Not every poetics has so humanistic an angle. But the three authors I present to you here represent a unified triumvirate of the new poetics. Moreover, they have collaborated on these ideas with each other and surely have affected each other. They look at literature as a living language of gesture. Further, they tell the story of storytelling using examples from literature. The range of these commentaries is vast and encompassing. Calvino's *Six Memos* sets a tone for the group.

### Calvino's *Six Memos*

If I am the first to mention Calvino's non-fiction to you, I am glad. I have used his book, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* to great advantage as a text in many composition courses. His book is dedicated to the very proposition of finding literary values that will take us to the next millennium – our present one. Written in 1985 as lectures for the Charles Eliot Norton Prize in Poetics, Calvino sadly died before he could complete the sixth memo which was to be about "consistency" and there is evidence that eight were planned, the last to be about beginnings and endings. How sad we don't have these! His friend Umberto Eco, actually delivered the lectures at Harvard in 1985. His plan in the *Six Memos* is to discuss uses of his chosen literary values in writing from Ovid to Shakespeare to Paul Valéry. Throughout there is the humanistic tone that makes his fiction so penetrating. His eye for metaphor is that of a poet, so finely tuned that he almost never speaks of solely of content but rather focuses on the metaphoric gesture that is at the core of his memos. The memos are titled: lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility and multiplicity. The sixth would have been consistency as

mentioned earlier. Let's look at a few of his memos more closely and see how they might apply to composition.

In "lightness" he says:

*I do not wish to say that quickness is a value in itself. Narrative time can also be delaying, cyclic or motionless. In any case a story (dance) is an operation carried out on the length of time involved, an enchantment that acts on the passing of time, either contracting or dilating it. Sicilian storytellers use the formula "lu cuntu nun metti tempu" (time takes no time in a story) when they want to leave out links or indicate gaps of months or even years. The technique of oral narration in the popular tradition follows functional criteria. It leaves out unnecessary details but stresses repetition: for example, when the tale consists of a series of the same obstacles to be overcome by different people. A child's pleasure in listening to stories lies partly in waiting for things he expects to be repeated: situations, phrases, formulas. Just as in poems and songs the rhymes help to create the rhythm, so in prose narrative (dance) there are events that rhyme. [p. 35]*

Calvino testifies on the pivotal decision of formal rhythm – the confessional of a great writer. He is talking about the organizational rhythm and experiencing the piece – a time based medium, not unlike dance, as if asking: "What is it like to experience the music or dance of the piece?" He is holistic in his view of the work, or in even simpler terms, the weight and articulation of phrases. These two factors alone often define a dance or even a style of dance. We have not had many dance books which discuss the issue of how to treat weight in the creation of a work with such aplomb. I admit that the fact that this material is not primarily concerned with dance is a hidden license to take some liberty with interpretation as encouraged by Calvino himself in other parts of the book. Later on, Calvino comes to the main focus of his memo on "Lightness." He says of Shakespeare whose lightness he reveres: "I am thinking above all of that particular and existential inflection that makes it possible for Shakespeare's characters to distance themselves from their own drama, thus dissolving it into melancholy and irony." Lightness strung end to end is parody or farce; lightness in the midst of tragedy underscores the human condition by recreating human folly. Another memo which lends itself to dance is the memo on "Visibility."

In "Visibility," Calvino discusses his own creative process.

In devising a story [dance/collaboration], therefore, the first thing that comes to my mind is an image that for some reason strikes me as charged with meaning, even if I cannot formulate this meaning in discursive or conceptual terms. As soon as the image has become sufficiently clear in my mind I set about developing it into a story; or better yet, it is the images themselves that develop their own implicit potentialities, the story they carry within them. Around each image others come into being, forming a field of analogies, symmetries, confrontations. Into the organization of this material, which is no longer purely visual but also conceptual, there now enters my deliberate intent to give order and sense to the development of the story; or rather, what I do is try to establish which meaning might be compatible with the overall design I wish to give the story and which meanings are not compatible, always leaving a certain margin of possible alternatives.

This strikes me as being very useful advice for dance composing or composing of any kind for that matter. I am struck by the balance of problem solving while leaving room for some intuitive decision making. I must reiterate that this is not a manual for success, merely a breath of fresh air in the dialectic of creative endeavor. Octavio Paz adds his rangy poetics to this line of thought in *The Other Voice*.

### **Paz: *the Other Voice***

For me, Paz puts our contemporary dilemma, that of postmodern or post-postmodern, in perspective. He takes large chunks of history and thought, then makes assertions that are sometimes convoluted and depend quite a bit on some exposure to ideas and literature from the past. Chapters covering “Modernity and the Avant Garde” are coupled with chapters called “Breach and Convergence” or “The Few and the Many.” He firmly believes, as do the others, that we are at the dawn of a new art. Take a deep breath before launching into **these** chapters! It was while reading the very introduction that I first knew Paz had something relevant to say on the nature of artistic changes. His ideas come fast and furious. There is not quite the logical flow of Calvino. But his willingness to cross the disciplines is much more evident. “Reduced to its simplest and most essential form the poem is a song.” When his description of Symbolist poetry comes near the end of the chapter “Telling and Singing” we get a glimpse into the universality of some of his ideas. See if you think this could be applied to postmodern dance.

The symbolist poem [the postmodern dance] detests explanations: it does not tell or even say; it suggests. Its song borders on silence. One of the elements of the extensive poem was the continuity of its development, that is to say, the linear nature of the composition: episode followed episode, each linked to the one before and the one after, without break or rupture. The Symbolist poet destroys this continuity; he values the pause, the blank space. A Symbolist poem is an archipelago of fragments. The development is atomized. Finally, metaphors and symbols abound in the symbolist poem, while descriptions and narration are omitted. An encounter between extensive and intensive: the extensive poem becomes a sequence of intense moments. [*The Other Voice*, pp. 26-27]

Whether or not you think this is applicable to dance or collaborative thinking, it raises some questions about the nature of artistic revolution or in another light, the importance of the past in shaping our perception of what meanings are conveyed by what symbols or gestures. These are semiotic concerns. Most relevant is his idea that modernism is a reaction to forms and modes whose antitheses are sought, as in Rainer's "no to spectacle." Once that happens in any art form we are then dealing with a "modernism." This is why Banes admits in her "Postmodernism Revisited" article that the experiments of the analytical postmodern choreographers were really "modern" since we now call the early modern dance pioneers "classic."

### **Eco: *The Open Work* and *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods***

In 1994, Umberto Eco wrote a companion book to Calvino's *Six Memos* called *Six Walks in the Fictional Wood* as his Norton Lectures. It both resonates and continues Calvino's humanistic poetics with the metaphor of reading as a walk in the woods. It is a commentary on Calvino's poetics and confirmation of their importance. But I turn instead to Eco's fascinating book *The Open Work*. It was based on his dissertation and first published in 1962. David Robey's introduction tells us, it is from his "pre-semiotic period." His, approach, then as later, is entirely ecumenical. He is more attuned to performance than many aestheticians. It starts with an idea that makes collaboration in the context of a dawning new art approachable. He begins by describing "open work" with the example of four pieces of music by: Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, Pierre Boulez and Henri Pousseur. His pan-disciplinary vision is immediately on display. He compares closed and open works of music in this way:

A classical composition, whether it be a Bach fugue, Verdi's *Aïda*, or Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, posits an assemblage of sound units which the composer arranged in a closed, well-defined manner before presenting it to the listener. He converted his idea into conventional symbols which more or less oblige the eventual performer to reproduce the format devised by the composer himself, whereas the new musical works referred to above reject the definitive, concluded message and multiply the formal possibilities of distribution of their elements. They appeal to the initiative of the individual performer, and hence they offer themselves not as finite works which prescribe specific repetition along given structural coordinates but as 'open' works, which are brought to their conclusion by the performer at the same time as he experiences them on an aesthetic plane. [*Open Work*, p. 3]

The open work is one that is devised knowing that there will be several levels of performance, communication and interpretation going on. The design has taken into account that there will be an interaction with the audience. It is like telling a joke. You know the joke but you play around with the details every time you tell it to take the audience into account. You tell two different people the same joke in two different ways. This brings to my mind the cherished art of performance improvisation. As a dance musician the thing I do most is make open work as improvisation in the studio. Every technique is an exercise in theatrical moments.

Eco's discussion of popular media, like television as art, is particularly fervent and penetrating. In a chapter titled, "Chance and Plot," an exploration of those two pivotal creative concerns, Eco spends considerable time discussing live television [dance] with an emphasis on the juggling of 'natural' or 'spontaneous' elements as they are mixed with set narrative elements, which he calls "artifice." I only want to whet your appetite, but here are the titles of the other chapters in *The Open Work*:

"Analysis of Poetic Language,"

"Openness, Information, Communication,"

"The Open Work in the Visual Arts,"

"Chance and Plot: Television and Aesthetics,"

"Two Hypotheses about the Death of Art,"

"Series and Structure"

"The Structure of Bad Taste" (my personal favorite).

These gentlemen consider large aesthetic issues, issues of process and perception, most of which is pre-eminently applicable to dance. Occasionally what they have to say is not applicable to dance or collaboration, but this is rare if you read with the intent of examining art as gesture. Gesture is at the core of dance making or theater art of any sort, and I submit, at the core of communicating with artistic language of any kind whether that be a singular language (dare I say modernism?) or with a multiplicity of symbologies (postmodernism?). In my own experience as a practitioner of collaboration and as a teacher of composition, it is clear that any time spent on the nature of artistic gesture is well spent. In this context, a teacher of any art could teach gesture in any discipline. Eco says explicitly that, in Italian philosophy, the term aesthetics does not apply to specific disciplines, rather

*“it refers to the investigation of art in general, to the human act that generates it and to the overall characteristics of its objects. In order to apply the term ‘aesthetics to the technical discourses, stylistic analyses and critical judgements of a particular art, we would have to give it a different, more coherent meaning, as has already been done in other countries. On the other hand, if we want to remain faithful to traditional Italian terminology it may be preferable to speak of poetics or of a technical-stylistic analysis....” [p. 105]*

I like the term poetics because it's sexier than “technical-stylistic analysis.”

## **Conclusion**

What we label trends in analytic discourse is one thing; the trenches of collaboration are another. They exact a practical analysis, a means of communicating with another artist. You may think me crazy to have proposed this as a practical model. I assure you that this means of thinking about overall gesture is liberating. It promotes an incredible sensitivity to the poetry of living. This too is rhythmic and gestural. And we know there is a lot of improvisation. At the dawn of every modernism is immediately thereafter born a postmodernism. It happened with the Classical, Romantic and Modern Periods in European “art music.” It has happened with Bunraku and Butoh in Japan, with Baroque and Rococco in western architecture, and so forth. I think we are at a syzygy, a lining up of artistic planets. All three gentleman I have been discussing, say that it is here. I for one will be using these poetics to guide my perception of gesture in a new age of humanistic, friendly and understanding collaboration.