



Reading Deborah Hay

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Myrto KATSIKI
Laurent PICHAUD

Slightly revised version (with some updates from Deborah Hay) of "Lire Deborah Hay", postface to the French translation of Deborah Hay's book *My Body, the Buddhist: Mon corps, ce bouddhiste*, extended edition, co-translation: Laurent Pichaud and Lucie Perineau, Dijon/Lausanne, Les presses du réel/La Manufacture, coll. Nouvelles scènes, 2017.

READING DEBORAH HAY

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Deborah Hay writes. Since in the field of French choreography one can "write" [écrire] dance composition, we specify here that Deborah Hay "writes" both choreography and texts. Deborah Hay is prolific. She has published four books (and there is an additional unpublished manuscript in her archives), has almost twenty articles to her name, and has elaborated numerous scores for her pieces in textual form.

Deborah Hay also speaks really well. One only needs to look at all the videos available online of her conferences, interviews, and post-performance discussions to know it. Her unpublished book from the 1970s, which was supposed to be entitled *The Grand Dance*, is composed in part of transcripts of her recorded talks after having just danced. And this orality, which is also a part of the history of transmission in dance, invites us to ask our first question: why does Deborah Hay choose to write, or what more does she have to say by writing?

My Body, the Buddhist, 2000. Deborah Hay talks about her writing and therefore dates the moment when she became aware of its potential role in her choreographic process: "In 1988, a Laban Institute graduate offered to translate *The Gardener* into Laban's system of dance notation and analysis. [...] A month later, she handed me the notated dance, admitting to critical choreographic omissions because of elements in the choreography that did not have a counterpart in the notation system. At that moment dance documenta-

¹ The research and translation were supported by two different grants: one, an aide in writing and patrimony in dance from the Centre national de la danse, Pantin in 2015 in relation to the project: *Traduire Deborah Hay* [Translating Deborah Hay]. Laurent Pichaud traveled several times to study Deborah Hay's personal archives in Austin, Texas with this grant. The second was from the Manufacture of Lausanne in 2017: *Traduire/Documenter/Transmettre* [Translate/Document/Transmit]. This allowed the two translators to finish their translation.

tion began to interest me. Video and film, done in a way that could approach the mystery of live performance, was out of my price range. Writing dances began to open the boundaries of my personal experience of dancing. I discovered that prose would help determine how my dances were transmitted.”² Let us take down key words from this quote in their order: *notation, documentation, transmission*. We note that these all belong, so to speak, to a single activity: experiencing movement. Hence, we could be content for starters to stay with this simple logic: a choreographer writes in order to dance and to make dancing happen.

Deborah Hay has no memory or at least this is something she claims and remembers to tell us repeatedly. [Coming back to this statement today Deborah notes: “I exaggerate.”] In an interview in the 1980s, she was already pointing this out: “One thing that I’m really afraid has died is my memory. I think that I went too far in practicing letting go. I’ve lost all capacity for that function, and I just hang on by my teeth whenever somebody asks me a question because I can’t remember anything. So that’s one control that’s gone. What also had to die was the idea that there was something that I had to create. I talk about that a lot when I’m teaching: ‘You don’t have to create anything!’ Creative dance, creative movement is such a funny idea because the creation is the doing, is the perception.”³ Leaving aside the question of writing in order to remember, we instead take from the quote above the parallel actions of losing memory and forgetting to create, which liberates a sufficient field of perception.

In *Lamb at the Altar: The Story of a Dance*, published in 1994, Deborah Hay insists, “My unfitting movement combinations feel awkward and thankless to the person dancing them because there is no prescribed way to do them. *They are juxtaposed to inhibit your desire to learn them.*”⁴

Deborah Hay is not (yet) well known. Although she started her career in the early 1960s as part of the Judson Dance Theater, she did not choose the same professional path as her peers afterwards. She took a different road, the need to question constantly the contexts of her work. Also different tools, such as the written word. “The choreography happens as I am writing the experience of performance,”⁵ she would later say. Hence, the creation of the scores. Writing is an empirical phenomenon for her, emerging from the desire to articulate the choreographic particularities of the work while participating in the choreographic process itself. When Hay “reappeared” on the American and European choreographic scenes in the beginning of the 2000s, the maturity of her work was unmistakable.

2015. Our first encounter with her personal archives augmented our discussions with her. We tried to construct an artistic biography of her relationship to the written word. It was not a simple thing to do: as stated above, Deborah Hay has little memory... although... we liked this unintended assistance that left us some space as researchers. We had to investigate the empirical written and oral language in her video, audio, and paper archives for ourselves, while able to ask questions of Deborah, whose expansive commen-

² *My Body, the Buddhist*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2000, p. 27.

³ Linda M. Montano (compiled by), *Performance artists talking in the eighties*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001, p. 371.

⁴ *Lamb at the Altar: The Story of a Dance*, Durham (NC), Duke University Press, 1994, p. 64.

⁵ Discussion with Deborah Hay, Paris, September 2015.

taries went beyond the sole context of memory.

Deborah Hay has verbally supplemented what she said in *My Body, the Buddhist* regarding the origin of her writing, from which we can add three other catalysts to the Laban Institute student experience.

First is her close relationship with her brother, the poet Barry Goldensohn: "I was influenced by his use of language, not having his intellectual skill myself – what's more, I've never known how to use a library! – I chose my cellular body as my teacher, and to learn from this body instead."⁶

Next came a particular context in the 1990s. Not finding any relevant criticism for her work, she asked herself if it wouldn't be better to "write her own work"⁷ to shed light on her process. To her it was a question of survival: "I started paying attention to my language. The more articulate you are, the closer you are to surviving [...] It is so important to be able to put in linear form the non-linearity of the experience of dancing. In the 1960s, it was New York City artists who were writing art criticism. They were giving the art world a frame [through which] to look at their art [...] You have to do that in terms of audience, to help move dance forward."⁸ From there have come the articles, books, interviews, and program notes she writes herself to accompany her work up until today.

Finally, in those same years the National Endowment for the Arts⁹ began furnishing specific grants for choreographers to invest in documenting their work. Inspired by the idea even though she did not apply, writing as documentation suggested new potential to Hay: "I learned about other dimensions of the dance that I did not know were there until I wrote them down."¹⁰ This evolved into: "I need writing to learn what I am dancing."¹¹ Writing therefore gave a level of awareness to the dancer's experience while also accelerating its potential.

From this excavation of memory through Deborah Hay's archives, public writings, and her own commentary, we find ourselves discovering the emergence of a singular quest: the necessity to say better, to say as a dancer, to write as a choreographer, to make dancing happen through words.

We will continue to dig into all of this, but first, an account of certain turning points that will bring us to *My Body, the Buddhist*.

*

The first is in 1964 after the first Judson period: a dancer for Merce Cunningham's world tour, Deborah Hay recognizes her fear of performance. Even if we have little record of how she was thinking at the time,

⁶ From a post-performance discussion after the premiere of *Figure a Sea*, Stockholm, September 2015.

⁷ From a talk given at the Masters program **exerce**, Centre Chorégraphique National of Montpellier, September 2015.

⁸ Words spoken at a panel discussion as part of the Solo Performance Commissioning Project in Findhorn, Scotland in August 2009.

⁹ The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), charged with distributing a relatively limited quantity of funds across disciplines, is the major federal agency in the USA for supporting the arts. The USA has no Ministry of Culture.

¹⁰ « Horse Rider Woman Playing Dancing. Ann Daly interviews Deborah Hay », *PAJ. A Journal for Performance and Art*, n° 63, September 1999, p. 20-21.

¹¹ From a talk given at the Masters program **exerce**, Centre Chorégraphique National of Montpellier, September 2015.

today she speaks of a feeling of inadequacy during her Cunningham experience, and in some of her writings from the 1970s she describes the anxiety of being onstage: "In 1967, thoroughly disinterested in watching trained dancers moving, I decide to choreograph exclusively for untrained dancers, thereby eliminating myself from my dances. In 1971, my *Ten Circle Dances* eliminates the need for dance audience. Fear finally leaves my experience as I have known it until now."¹² Leaving New York, Deborah Hay goes to Mad Brook Farm in Vermont where an artists' community remains today (affiliated with names such as Steve Paxton, Lisa Nelson...). Hay is the first dancer to move there in 1970, led by the hippie wave. There, she burns her papers, practices only an hour a day, experiments with psychotropic drugs, and gardens.

The *Ten Circle Dances*, made for non-dancers in different places, museums and art galleries in particular, allow Hay to financially support herself and family while living in Vermont. This community practice influenced by Tai-Chi and her experimentation with the cellular body, within which dancers are not transported by a performative state, lasts until the mid-1970s. One should note that it is some time before Hay talks about choreography, preferring the term "dance". In 1974, the cycle of *Ten Circle Dances* is the subject of her first book, *Moving Through the Universe in Bare Feet: Ten Circle Dances for Everybody*.¹³ "I wanted to write a how-to book"¹⁴; Deborah Hay writes instructions for the dances and gives them to Donna Jean Rodgers who illustrates and co-signs the work.

Her second cycle of work with non-dancers takes place in large workshops: *The Grand Dance*. Though they are no longer in a circle, the participants remain in a large group and take part in three or four evenings of communal experimentation, now without music and still with no spectators.

The Grand Dance, a "funny and presumptuous title," was also meant to be a book. The transcripts of her words spoken after dancing could be qualified as, to use the dance researcher Isabelle Ginot's expression, *writing-sensation*.¹⁵ "As dancers, we need to write, because no one can do it in our place." The book's manuscript rests with all the solicited publishers' rejection letters in her personal archives in Austin, Texas.

Her move to Austin in the Fall of 1976 marks the second turning point. She had discovered a new need: to leave the confines of Mad Brook in order "to show others the dance practiced alone in my room in Vermont for six and a half years." In Austin, the workshops were multiplying, "I was a good teacher," but there emerged a desire to go beyond these uncertain and ephemeral groups, to dig for a longer and deeper immersion with the same people. Austin is therefore also the return to stage projects. In 1980 (until 1996), Hay began to lead annual workshops of five, then four, months for large groups of trained and untrained dancers. In general, said one of her friends and dedicated dancers in Austin Beverly Bajema, the workshops took place in the mornings, five days a week, in spaces secured with varying degrees of ease each year.¹⁶ A small series of performances were organized at the end of each workshop. Also in 1980 the Deborah Hay Dance Company (DHDC) was founded: this attempt at creating a professional company with four dancers lasted only four years. "We built up a lot of expectations. There was enthusiasm, but ultimately we booked no tours..." Alongside these workshops there was one constant: solo practice. In this way there was an

¹² *Lamb at the Altar: The Story of a Dance*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹³ Athens (OH), Swallow Press (Ohio University Press), 1975, 234 pages.

¹⁴ All Deborah Hay quotes in this account, unless the contrary is mentioned, come from an interview in Austin, Texas on December 19th, 2015.

¹⁵ Discussion with Isabelle Ginot regarding the elaboration of journals by choreographers, June 2014.

¹⁶ Discussions with Beverly Bajema in Austin, Texas, December 10th, 2014 and July 31st, 2015.

“economic model”: long term experimentation with groups leading to adaptation and distillation in choreographic solos.¹⁷ Or perhaps duets, if one includes the musical contributions of composers such as Pauline Oliveros or Bill Jeffers.

It is her work with non-dancers that seems to have solidified and anchored her writing and her particular attention to language. “I could almost describe my process as a search for a language that will communicate as effortlessly, and as simply, and as quickly as possible, directions for movement,”¹⁸ she remarked in a televised interview in 1993 that sheds particular light on this “search” and its origins going back to the 1970s. Having people dance that are not used to being watched demands very specific tools: to name, specify, and set bodies into movement through choreographic images; to invent a vocabulary for Hay to use, and then to devise their, dance. In certain pictures from that time, we notice that there is often a tape recorder present in the work space. Her second book was published in 1994, *Lamb at the Altar: The Story of a Dance*¹⁹, a magnificent monograph of a piece by its author that synthesized and poeticized this balance between orality and text.

Written as an insider’s account, this book reconstructs the process of large group practice during the workshop called *Playing Awake 1991*. Reflections transcribed from recordings by Deborah Hay herself and Beverly Bajema, her participating assistant, are interposed with the score and choreographic diary of *Lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb...*, the group piece that emerged from the workshop. Finally, the book allows one to follow the construction of the solo that Deborah Hay “distills” for herself, from which the book takes its title.

Third turning point (that is, if we should still be counting – Hay no longer counts all the letters she’s written to announce her exit from the dance world): lacking participants, the annual large group workshops stopped in 1996. The demanding nature of her type of transmission, however, found momentum again with the *Solo Performance Commissioning Project* (SPCP). For four years on Whidbey Island in Washington State, then nine years in Findhorn, Scotland, Hay welcomed twenty artists at the end of every summer to teach them a solo she had prepared for the occasion. Out of this apparatus of transmission through creation emerges a principle that will become determinant for Hay: *adaptation*. After spending ten days together learning and practicing the solo, each artist entered into a contract with her stipulating that they would continue to practice the dance material alone at home five days out of seven for a minimum of three months. From this sustained daily practice was born an original adaptation of the solo particular to each artist.

At the same time, desiring to continue refining this precise and rigorous choreographic process and aiming to work on the quality of the relationship between those who dance and those who watch, Hay started cultivating relationships with experienced dancers. It was when she saw the Australian dancer Ros Warby perform an adaptation of her solo *Fire* (1999), that she began to experience a new drive, unders-

¹⁷ Elements about the process of fabricating a solo from the experience of the group work is found mainly in Chapter 13, “my body trusts the unknown,” in *My Body, the Buddhist*, p. 64.

¹⁸ Interview between Deborah Hay and the dancer Meg McHutchison, filmed and distributed by Austin Community Television on May 21st, 1993. Transcribed with the amicable authorization of Meg McHutchison and E. Donna Shepherd. Thanks to David Skeist for the transcription.

¹⁹ *Lamb at the Altar: The Story of a Dance*, *op. cit.*

tanding anew with whom and how to continue working. She subsequently created a quartet in 2004 *The Match*, that premiered at Danspace in New York City. This event signified Hay's successful return among a new generation of dancers and programmers.

My Body, the Buddhist, published in 2000, is an account of that new drive, of the gathered requirements for transmission, and of a need to open up new compositional tools for the stage. It exposes the end of a cycle and in a certain way anticipates what will happen to Hay in the 2000s. Description and analysis of the choreographic process itself, personal accounts of artistic experience, textual scores, explication of the desired state of being-on-stage, biographical examples, humor . . . this book is an introduction to a project-manifesto: "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. I will try anything to help bring some attention to the truth born here."²⁰

*

The book is a project of literary experimentation as well. *My Body, the Buddhist* clearly shows the complexity of Deborah Hay's writing; or its difficulty, to put it another way. We know, for example, that some readers have stumbled over the chapters dedicated to the scores of the pieces. The book contains six of these scores interposed in full within the body of the text. They are not explanations of the choreographic process like other chapters, nor are they narratives – even if they do seem to be closely describing a sequence of situations –, nor are they a list of instructions that one should execute, such as certain dancers are used to reading. The scores sometimes seem mystifying to the reader, who can have a hard time connecting with them in the flow of the book.

Furthermore, are these texts meant to be read or spoken? The score for *1-2-1* in Chapter 3 is presented as a text one should speak aloud . . . but is it by the reader of the book or by the actor and dancer that wishes to be a part of the piece? Are these texts addressed to the readers or to the dancers that might "activate" them? In the caption of one of the photos in the book, we learn that the dancers Scott Heron and Grace Mi-He Lee "over this past year learned *Voilà* exclusively through the prose score."²¹ Or, are they addressed to Deborah Hay herself who is seeking through them to prolong the choreographic experience? It is in effect disorienting to note that the scores for *Voilà* and *Fire* are written in the third person singular by the choreographer describing the soloist that she was. Should we understand from this that the texts are addressed to spectators rather than readers?

Maybe we can appreciate that we have no single definitive answer and can simply observe the range of hats these texts can wear. We named three at the beginning of this article: *notation, documentation, transmission*. The published scores in *My Body, the Buddhist* serve, in effect, several purposes: often written in the past tense with the most precise possible descriptions, they seem to be an eye-witness account of a dance/choreography already realized and presented onstage. However, the fact that they are accompanied

²⁰ *My Body, the Buddhist*, p. XXV.

²¹ *My Body, the Buddhist*, p. 40.

by photos representing an identical action done by different dancers leads us to deduce that these same scores were used as a tool for transmission.

We could also remark that these scores, even if they serve similar purposes, are written in changing styles – not just different, changing. Whether they are, in effect, documentation, a tool for transmission, or, why not, even texts to dance, they all belong to a variable literary register; they read neither as choreographic “methods” nor as instruction manuals. They can be written in either poetic verse or descriptive prose; above all, they employ multiple points of view. We sometimes think it is the choreographer who is speaking, but it could also be the dancer recounting the lived experience from inside the practice. Or it could be the audience member describing what she sees in the most laconic way possible. Or the most imaginative. Or mystifying. In a certain way the initial project-manifesto of the book itself – “to use different literary forms” – reproduces itself even from within the scores, where different literary qualities are convoked.

*

Let us investigate.

Exit. Solo by and for Deborah Hay, 1995.

The solo is mentioned three times in *My Body, the Buddhist*.

In chapter 2, we learn how it came to be: during a workshop at Wesleyan University a student made a solo to the music of Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*. In the same class another student seemed to be dancing a staged “exit,” two situations that Hay comes to see as a potential choreographic project for herself. We follow all the problems that this concept creates for the choreographer who had vowed never to choreograph to music. All of this forms an account.²²

At the end of the same chapter, there is a photo of the dancer Scott Heron performing *Exit* at Judson Church in New York City in 2000. We take this as a clue.

Then in Chapter 14, “my body feels weightless in the presence of paradox.” After a quote by Italo Calvino, the first paragraph describes *Exit* from the point of view of the spectator, the second and third the point of view of the dancer, the fourth reconstructs the costume fabrication process through biographical situations, and the last takes the dancer’s point of view again but the very last phrase is that of the spectator. We alternate therefore between description, account, biography, and choreographic explanations, and between different points of view.

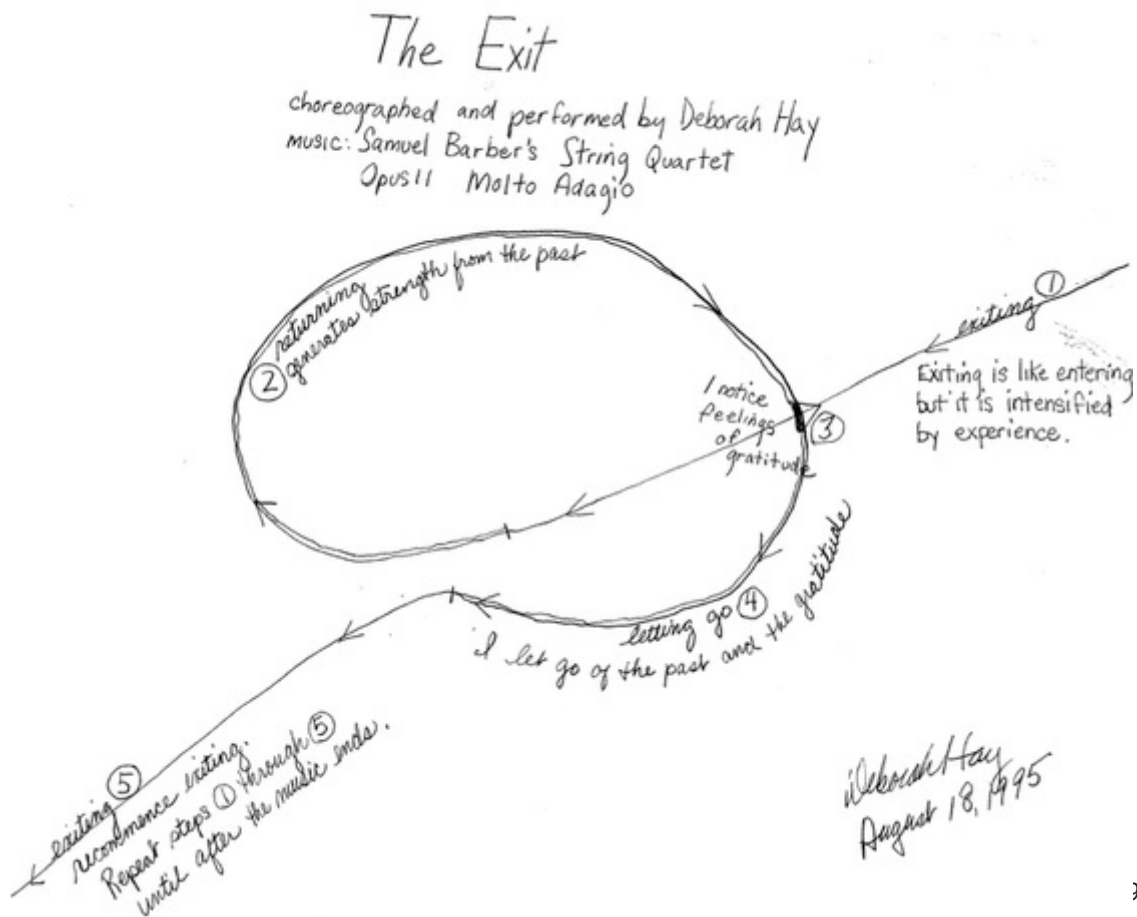
A photo, an iconographic clue, ends the chapter. From the description of the costume, we can deduce that it shows Deborah Hay performing *Exit*.

We can also find other elements for our investigation beyond the book. In 2015, we tried to make a list of all the pieces and possible written scores by Hay. We asked her, “Was there a score for *Exit*?” She responded: “Yes, it’s in *My Body, the Buddhist*.” That was a surprise. We therefore understood that Chapter 14 is also the score for the solo. (Or part of the score? Why is the first paragraph in bold and not the rest?)

²² *My Body, the Buddhist*, p. 4-8.

At the end of 2016, we searched through Deborah Hay's personal archives once again and found new clues. In a large sketchbook, placed in a box entitled *Photos*, we found several drawings.

There are two principal drawings for *Exit*. Here they are in order:



195.

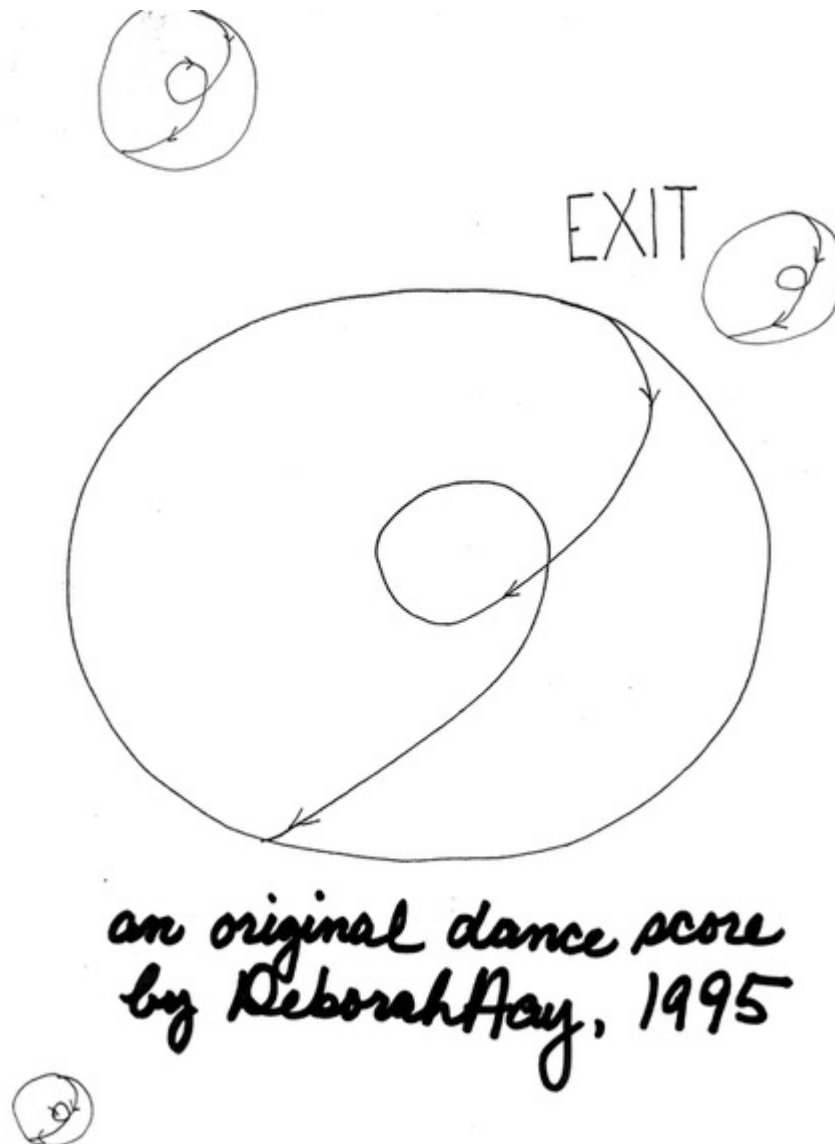
The first is an annotated and signed drawing by Deborah Hay (is it a work of art?) with her recognizable handwriting. We can see that the same pen was used throughout; the drawing could therefore have been completed in one sitting. It is signed August 18th, 1995, which corroborates what was said in the last sentence in Chapter 2, according to which, "On an early afternoon at the height of summer [1995] [...] a new solo, *Exit*, was born."²³ At the top of the drawing is mentioned: the title – except that here *Exit* is preceded by the article "The" –, the music, and what seems to be a sketch of the dancer's trajectory onstage rhythmically divided into the following sections:

- 1 – exiting – Exiting is like entering but it is intensified by experience.
- 2 – returning – generates strength from the past

²³ *My Body, the Buddhist*, p. 7-8.

- 3 - I notice feelings of gratitude
- 4 - letting go - I let go of the past and the gratitude
- 5 - exiting - recommence exiting. Repeat steps 1 through 5 until after the music ends.

Followed by the second drawing:



Deborah Hay, 1995.

We could say that this is a "simplified" drawing with the same trajectory, but this time inscribed within a circle. It is without annotations other than the title: *EXIT* - in capital letters, clearly imitating the exit sign that one would find in any building. The drawing includes a large signature made with a marker pen: *an original choreographic score by Deborah Hay, 1995*.

The same drawing-trajectory is reproduced three times on the page in smaller format, with apparently

the same pen. Moreover, the fact that it is signed with a different marker makes one wonder which element was done when. Did the signature turn a drawing into an official score after the fact? Graphically, in any case, the emphasis of the signature highlighting the words dance score is appended to the sketch.

This rapid investigation shows how dynamic the notion of a score is in Deborah Hay's work.²⁴ The score is *manifold* – because texts and/or drawings can be scores simultaneously; there is no single *model* – because several different score formats can exist for the same piece; the score is *signed* by its author – it is therefore not a generic notation system; it *documents* all or part of the dance (the trajectories, the intentions, the states of being...) and all or part of the choreographic process (the intentions, the necessary tools for its fabrication, the work on oneself that it implies...); finally, to say it in a concise manner while looking at all the evidence: a score is as much a choreographic as a literary project – through the language that it invents, it is at the same time a *trace* of a danced *experience* and a *potential dance* to come.

*

From *My Body, the Buddhist* up through recent writings, it appears in effect that Hay is experimenting mainly with this idea of potentializing dance through textual scores.

She sees it first as a way to respond to the question of transmission: "Can you pass dance on without telling anybody how to move, but by giving them a whole other set of parameters? Can you provide conditions for recreating the dance that are not about telling the body how to move? And is it still that dance? [...] Then a whole world could open up. Handing people bodies of material to work with that's not simply about the manipulation of the physical body but involves the whole person in translating this material."²⁵ Initially conceived as translation, Hay would eventually come to name this process *adaptation*, which she will never cease to clarify, revisit, and nuance in order to tune the modalities and better grasp the issues.

In this extract from an interview in 1999, two elements stuck out to us; the idea of offering in the place of movement "another set of parameters" to activate; and the curious expression "physical body," which reappears persistently in Hay's vocabulary, as if she wants to insist upon a piece of evidence that sometimes escapes us. This "physical body" also recalls what Hay often refers to as the "choreographed body": "History choreographs all of us, including dancers. The choreographed body dominates most dancing, for better or for worse."²⁶

This body, the bearer of historic cohesion and accumulated ways of doing and modes of being²⁷, is what Hay seeks, in effect, to reconsider. Writing and language will serve as tools to help her divert the "choreographed body" and the reigning habits – "undoing habits," she often says to describe her work –, and to

²⁴ For an analysis of Deborah Hay's approach to scores see: Myrto Katsiki, « Étirer le partitionnel. Quatre notes sur les partitions de Deborah Hay » ["Stretching scoring. Four notes on Deborah Hay's scores"] in Julie Sermon and Yvane Chapuis (dir.), *Partition(s) – Objet et concept des pratiques scéniques*, Dijon/Lausanne, Les presses du réel/La Manufacture, coll. Nouvelles scènes, 2016, p. 409-418.

²⁵ « Horse Rider Woman Playing Dancing. Ann Daly interviews Deborah Hay », *op. cit.*, p. 22.

²⁶ « How do I recognize my choreography? », document published on Deborah Hay's website: <https://dhdcblog.blogspot.com/p/archives.html>.

²⁷ We follow here Isabelle Ginot who uses this idea of the body's historical cohesion to illuminating effect in her article "Rosalind Crisp: Dance of the possible" in Erin Branningan & Virginia Baxter (eds.), *Bodies of Thought: Twelve Australian Choreographers*, Wakefield Press, Real Time, Kent Town, 2014, p. 23.

call upon perception to be the principle material.

Since the 1970s, Hay has progressively elucidated a collection of discursive tools that first of all invite potential for a dancer's perceptual activity in dance. For example, the set of the *what if* questions – certainly one of her most well-known tools²⁸ – serve to trigger the impulse to act by stimulating an imaginative potential: “My body, dancing, is formed and sustained imaginatively”, she says in the introduction to *My Body, the Buddhist*.“ Such imagined conditions, changed periodically, are necessary for me even to begin dancing.”²⁹

Thus, how one perceives as a tool for starting to move. Hay turns writing into a game with language, sometimes so literarily peculiar in her scores, where she seeks to articulate in the most precise terms her experience of dancing and making people dance, *through writing*. Her scores are not predetermined-dances-to-be-reproduced; they offer themselves rather as playgrounds for the attention, sets of parameters that invite the dancer to a shift in attention – from movement to the work of perception.

“In the context of my work, what matters is not what you do but how you are *choosing* to engage in the moment”³⁰, Hay insists. Because these choices, she would further insist, are visible onstage. Expanding on her question from 1999: “And is it still the same dance?” she refined her thoughts while watching adaptations of the same scores: “How do I recognize my choreography?” since her scores do not offer “choreography” strictly speaking, but perceptive modalities that nevertheless seek to produce a certain way of performing. We can hear in this last question a recurring preoccupation with identifying that which is specific to her work. What is supposed to be put to work? And what is to be shared? What does her choreography give us to see? She will answer: “I recognize my choreography when I see a dancer’s self-regulated transcendence of his/her choreographed body within a movement sequence that distinguishes one dance from another.”³¹ An attempt to name the specificity of her choreography; and an awareness that language is the only tool at her disposal to articulate this specificity and, *in fine*, to preserve it: “All my work,” she said recently, “is ultimately but a question of language.”³²

*

Using the Sky: a dance, 2015: last book to date, published fifteen years after *My Body, the Buddhist*.

On the first page of the introduction, Deborah Hay attempts to summarize the whole of her work: “I wanted to *choreograph a spoken language* that would inspire a shift in dance away from the illustrative body, despite its intense appeal to dancers and audience alike, to a non-representational body.”³³ She speaks of her “fascination [with] a choreography of language” that can expand the dancer’s resources and their potential onstage.

²⁸ We find the “What if...” questions commented on and explained in several passages in *My Body, the Buddhist*.

²⁹ *My Body, the Buddhist*, p. XXIV.

³⁰ Emphasis added. *Using the Sky: a dance*, London, Routledge, 2015, p. 103.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Discussion with Deborah Hay, Paris, May 2016.

³³ *Using the sky: a dance, op. cit.*, p. 1.

This book, which allots equal space to the textual scores, explains and prolongs the project introduced fifteen years earlier: "My dance practice continues to seek less stable instances of being and I try to identify those capricious moments through the structure of language, working and reworking that language to best describe the learning taking place in my spewing multi-dimensional reconfiguring non-linear embodiment of potentiality."³⁴

Just as the dancer must reckon with the scores, readers of Hay's body of literature must first incorporate this playful, unsettling, and "spewing" way of reading. Since this stimulation of being constantly solicited and displaced – and in this way dancers and readers are part of the same project – allows one perhaps to observe how the language of Deborah Hay unbinds our reading bodies.

Translated from French by Jacqueline Cousineau
Thanks to David Skeist for his generous contribution to the editing of the text.

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³⁴ *Ibid.*