

Photo: Naomi Scher



"I came across a quote from the painter Mondrian. I don't have the exact quote but I remember the little snippet of it that hit me. He said: 'Pure vitality is the true content of art'. I think of pure vitality as our livingness on a cellular level."

Releasing Aesthetic

with Joan Skinner

by ELIZABETH DEMPSTER

In t r o d u c t i o n "Skinner Releasing Technique is an innovative approach to dance training developed by Joan Skinner in the early 1960s. In 1966-67 Joan's teaching at the University of Illinois spawned the growth of what was to become several forms of 'release work.' As these new techniques spread across the country, and since 'release' has been a popular term in diverse approaches to dance training, there arose a need to attach her surname to the work she continued to develop, in order to preserve its identity and to give its unique emphases a recognizable name.

Skinner Releasing Technique (or SRT) utilizes image-guided floorwork to ease tension and promote an effortless kind of moving, integrated with alignment of the whole self. Tactile exercises are used to give the imagery immediate kinaesthetic effect; spontaneous movement is frequently evoked by imagery and movement studies. SRT smoothly integrates technical growth with creative process. Through the 1970s, Releasing technique was taught by Joan and the American Contemporary Dance Company, primarily in Seattle, Washington. The work continues to be taught and practiced today, deeply influencing many contemporary movement artists.'

— from the preface to "Releasing Dance: Interview with Joan Skinner" by Stephanie Skura,

Contact Quarterly, Fall 1990

Last year Joan Skinner undertook a two month long teaching tour, conducting workshops and classes in various centres throughout New Zealand and Australia.

The following interview was recorded in Melbourne in July 1994.

Joan Skinner: When I first started to try to teach what I was finding after working alone for about three years, I was at the University of Illinois. I was teaching a freshman dance major. Marsha Paludan was my teaching assistant. Mary Fulkerson, John Rolland, Nancy Topf and Pam Matt were in the dance program in other classes. Mary Fulkerson was in my Composition class. She has reminded me that she asked me to teach them what I was giving in the freshman class, which I apparently did in some form.

I did this work for only one year before leaving and going to the University of Washington to teach. It was an amazing year because I was discovering as I went along and that process of discovery just changed the way the class structured itself. Musicians appeared as if out of nowhere and began to improvise with the class and it was just really electrifying what we were finding. When I left after that one year, Marsha Paludan called me to say that Mary, John, Nancy and Pam wanted to continue this work with her and they wondered how I felt about their continuing. I said but of course, of course.

By the way, the students in the freshman class are the ones who coined the word Releasing. I must have been saying we're releasing this and we're releasing that and so they coined it the Releasing technique. The group with Marsha continued to work together and at some point they all worked with Barbara Clark, who was in her eighties then and living right there in Urbana, Illinois. Barbara Clark's work comes from Mabel Todd and it is more anatomical in focus. Then they went out, each on his own or her own, although I think they became quite a network; they stayed connected to each other. They called the work that they were doing release work and I continue to call what I do Releasing because it just seems to be more in process, to have a more dynamic connotation.

But the word release work is just everywhere and I notice that even my work here is called release work by some publications. I'm hearing the term ideokinesis everywhere here too so I think it's become broader as a term than the work of Zweigard and Todd. These terms seem to have become so generic. But I think it's good to make a distinction between my work and release and ideokinesis. The term ideokinesis, as you probably know, comes from Lulu Zweigard's work and she was also a student of Todd. Her book is called *Human Movement Potential: its ideokinetic facilitation* and I think that's where the term originated. People have found different ways of working with ideokinesis but by and large it is anatomically based, the imagery is anatomically based.

[The development of the Releasing technique]

Elizabeth Dempster: You've led a very rich professional life, as a dancer with Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham, as a choreographer, an improviser, and an educator. I would be interested to hear how your discovery of the effectiveness of imagery came about. Was your development of the Releasing technique prompted by the demands of a particular sector of that dancing life, by issues that arose in dancing or in choreographing for example?

Well the imagery part came late, that came late. As a very young child I had my first dancing lessons with a woman who was teaching interpretive dance. She had studied at Columbia Teachers' College with Mabel Todd so her class certainly had something about it that made you experience moving organically, and she used images for children. Of course as I grew up I forgot all about that. I started studying my Graham and my Cunningham and my ballet work but something prompted me to start questioning some of these ways of working with the body. Or rather I think that I really just wanted to have time outside the class to work on the body itself.

I was in my five flight walk up apartment in Greenwich Village and I went out and got an old banister and set it up across an alcove with a mirror on that wall and a mirror on this wall so I could give myself a barre and see the back and the front or the three-quarter angles at the same time. I kept a little notebook and I would ask myself questions. What teachers

used to say to you all the time back in those days was "pull up, grip, hold on." Some still say this, I know, but many do not now. But this was it, pull up, over and over, and hold on and grip and pull up and hold on and I wondered how you could do that, pull up and grip and hold on and breathe as I thought nature intends that we be able to breathe. So I would take apart things from class that I just wanted to work on. Even though I was dancing at the time with Graham and Cunningham there just was something in me that needed to do this, or wanted to do this. And I can't help but think that that teacher way back planted some seeds, even though I didn't remember at the time anything about that. Then there was the classical thing of the injury during a brutal tour, a gruesome tour, an injury that would not seem to heal if I wanted to go back into dancing. This was around 1954.

A musician friend told me about the Alexander technique and there were only three teachers in the country at the time and no other dancer as far as I know had stumbled onto this. I went to see her to see if she would give me a lesson and she didn't want to take me on because she said dancers are too set in their ways— which they were then. But I persuaded her to try me and I worked off and on for a year or two, I can't remember exactly how long, but it made sense to me. It made it possible for me to dance because it had that sort of multi-directional thing in the body which is the opposite of what you're trained to do. You know you're trained to pull everything in, you pull into your centre, you pull everything, and this was just the opposite of that and it took all the pressure off the injury, and made it possible for me to learn how to dance again. I could dance, and so I thought it was marvellous. But I didn't study it to the extent that some dancers are studying it today. Some dancers are really making it their life practice and are even learning how to teach it and so on. I just took some lessons and thought this makes sense.

When I left New York I was still teaching traditional classes and choreographing, performing, and taking class, mostly ballet classes. Again something prompted me to stop taking class and to work alone and I worked alone for three years. What I was doing. I thought at the time, was applying the Alexander principles to a ballet barre mainly because that was so logical. I mean it's difficult to work on principles with a Graham contraction, but standing there just doing a plie, you can work on something. So I started out applying the Alexander principles, where I could take my time, where I didn't

have to keep up with the pace of the class. I didn't want to go through this gripping, holding anywhere; I wanted to find the multi-directional balance. So I would wobble around on my standing leg and fall and wobble around and fall and get back on. Then the structure of the barre broke down and I just worked kinaesthetically. It was at that point that the images started to come. Everything just broke down into another level altogether of working. And yet after three years I did go back into a fast ballet class and had a wonderful time.

When I went to the University of Illinois and was to teach a traditional modern dance class I knew that I had to bring some of this understanding to how the students were learning their technique. The images came as the metaphor for whatever kinaesthetic experience I wanted them to have. I saw how powerfully they responded to the imagery and that gave me the energy and courage to continue. Pretty soon the traditional class broke down because I'd say well let's go across the floor now but some people would just stay on the floor working; they weren't going to leave the image because something was going on, they were learning something, something was happening to them. So that changed, that broke down the format of class to where it just became a non-linear structure.

Then you're dealing with pure energy and I feel that energy has its own form, organic to its primal source and that's what I'm interested in. That's maybe what is not recognisable yet when you see it in movement. But some people do see it.

Why is it difficult to perceive?

Well for one thing it's quick, the changes are very quick in the dancing and mercurial and complex, the phrasing is complex. There are few, if any, repeats. I would get so excited when I'd see it happening, but then I would talk to colleagues who came from Cunningham or Graham who couldn't see it at all; they couldn't see it and I realised that there's a big difference here, a big difference. I do think that process has its own form, and I'm happy to find, or to stumble on, the work of the new physicists who believe that even chaos has order. This is an order that we may not perceive yet.

In dance we tend to think of processes leading to product and of course choreographers use processes in this way. They use the processes of improvisation to find a choreographic idea, to find a form. But I am talking about looking at things differently and looking at process as a product.

[The Releasing dancer] Traditional dance

techniques as they are commonly understood are oriented towards the achievement of particular, already determined outcomes. I don't get the impression that the Releasing process is governed by predictable outcomes in that way.

In terms of form or technical skill?

I was thinking in terms of technical skill and the question of form is another. It seems to me that Releasing is an unfolding process, a practice that one is engaged in, irrespective of a particular set of outcomes.

That's right, it becomes an ongoing practice, yes. But people who have trained in it develop some of the same skills; they develop a deeper plie, flexibility in the hip, extensions, speed, fluidity, all of these things, but not through the means of a particular codified set of sequences of movement which is designed to develop those things. I like to think of it as dance that underlies dance forms, all dance forms, and that it can therefore, hopefully, be applied. One is available to learn any dance form, that's what I like to think is possible with it. But it takes time for that to be seen, for that to be realized.

For instance, there's a colleague of mine who has worked with me for about twenty years now, Robert (Bob) Davidson. He's taken Releasing airborne into low flying trapeze work and he has his own company now and does this choreography around trapeze work in a very unique way. When we had a school, we had a company and we developed a performance form out of the Releasing work and people would come to see the performance and they'd come backstage to Bob, espe-

cially to Bob because he was really the finest model of what the work can become technically. They would come backstage and they would say to him, where are you studying? Where are you getting your ballet class, come now, just quit the kidding, you've got to be moonlighting and taking a ballet class somewhere.

Because they perceived what? a degree of articulation, a certain clarity, line? Yes, technical brilliance and the kind of spiral thing in the body that occurs in the ballet; the ballet works in spirals, from the foot all the way through the torso, through the head.

But it takes time just as anything does; it takes time to have that work through the body and become dance. Although I haven't any sense of how much time or anything like that. As the work becomes more effective, as we find more effective ways of teaching it, it seems to take less time. But I don't know of anyone, as far as my work is concerned, who has continued to develop it into a performance form. What they usually do is just take it into their own dance practice, whatever they're interested in. There are dancers in New York who study this work and study it with me every year when I go there and they say that they use it directly in their own work and some of their work is very high impact. I've seen it and it's just crashing, you know, they crash into the floor or crash into each other, crash into walls. So that's another thing. They say they couldn't do that without the Releasing, but they're not examples of Releasing dance you see.

It's an intricate and interesting issue isn't it, that relationship between training and performance.

Well, the traditional training has the form already there. You're learning form, it's there and you see it. It becomes your model and you keep working with the body until it can conform to that form. You have the outer thing already. We've spent years developing our performance form of improvisation with musicians and the dancers, and to me when our performance goes well and they're really dancing well I see form, I see shaping, because that's what we worked at, how to do this. But it is so different from the look of a codified form, contemporary dance or ballet, because I think it's largely coming from energy, from a release of energy. So it doesn't look like a Cunningham or a Graham or ...

Does it look like Releasing though?

Yes it does, they say that it does. But if someone comes to see it who is looking for the other thing, they might not see it, they might not see

what kind of form it has. I mean it's not out there in the world where it can be perceived, although perhaps I haven't seen enough of what others are doing in terms of performance.

But for instance in relation to training, I understood when I was in Amsterdam that the release work, they called it, which was a requirement in the school (Eds: the School for New Dance Development) at that time for the first two years, did not lead to movement but was just mainly concerned with freeing the body and alignment. When the movement came in, it would be whatever each choreographer would be doing.

So there was an ideal projected of a perfectly aligned dancing body that would be created through the process?

That is an ideal, that is a possible goal, but again you didn't see it evolve, you didn't see the release process evolve into performance.

[The Releasing aesthetic] At the Dartington

Dance Festivals (held at Dartington College, UK) in the early 1980s Mary Fulkerson, John Rolland, Nancy Topf and Marsha Paludan all presented solo concerts. It was possible over a couple of years to see the work of that whole group of people who had begun their practice of releasing dance with you. There was some kind of commonality in movement, a particular quality which I perceived in their dancing: It might not have been what they held to be at the core of their performing or certainly their choreographing, but there was a lightness, a silvery, effervescent, Light quality in their moving, and they all seemed to do that or have that.

Did you say silvery?

Yes, silvery, as if it was hardly there, and soft. That seemed to be something that was privileged, that was highly valued. They're very different people, very different artists, and yet there was that distinctive quality in their moving.

Yes, I think that is there, that seems to have become a characteristic. Some of this work gets into high energy and very sudden movement, sudden explosive movement, but underneath it all is a kind of fluidity in the movement. When I was in New Zealand I heard for the first time the word 'soft', 'soft techniques', and I laughed. Maybe I'm just out of the loop so I don't know what some of these terms are that people have brought along, but 'soft techniques,' I haven't heard that before. I think that may have started with Eric Hawkins or something in his work but I thought that was funny to characterise them in that way. But maybe it's true.

Well I think that's a misunderstanding or it's an identification of a whole evolving process with a certain stage in which those qualities might be encouraged, especially if someone's been involved in a very brittle sort of practice. But it's powerful stuff you're working with and it would seem to me that it's not necessarily always going to produce a gentle quality. It's not going to do that.

No, no, but one has to go through stages, as you know, of letting go of fixity in order to allow something to transform. And so there is that stage of letting go and allowing, as I speak of it, and sometimes people get the misconception that this is a relaxation technique and I hasten to say that it's not, Releasing is not relaxation but that that is a stage to go through. Once you're available to the Releasing process, then you're releasing energy and power.

Ironically, softness could become a kind of fixity in itself, a sort of aesthetic fixity, a stylistic habit.

I think there are two possible issues here. One is that the softness can become a fixed thing and the other is that our culture, our western culture, hasn't embraced softness as a virtue and we're not necessarily thrilled by it on stage unless it's a limpid moment in a pas de deux, a romantic moment or whatever. But otherwise it would seem as if audiences and critics in the west really want to see dynamic movement. And there is the whole work ethic that we experience in the States, I don't know if you do here.

If the dancing doesn't look like it's difficult, hard work it's not valued? Yes I think that is true of Australia

as well.

It seems as if some of the new work is really going in that direction of hard edge and speed. It might be an expression of the times, this current sort of frenzy, it might be expressing something.

But as you were saying earlier the Releasing process doesn't necessarily produce just those qualities of softness and lightness does it?

No, no. Not at all. but I think it still has a little different look and I think it's because, at least in this work, one of our principles is to allow 'it' to move, allow something to move, to be released and allow the power to be released. When the power is released through the body it has a little different look than when you are making the power as you move. But you know, it hasn't been seen in the dance world and our company didn't continue because ...

Yes, I was going to ask you about the company.

[Releasing into performance] For several years, we had a studio, in fact we had two lovely spaces overlooking the waterfront. We were fortunate to have it for a few years and then that area went into a steep recession and the landlord tripled the rent overnight and we had to give up those spaces and our school for the time being. Meanwhile our dancers had reached the point where they were starting their own families and we just didn't have a school where there would be more coming along so we just turned our attention to other things. So I don't think it's been seen. What that potential could be I don't think has been seen anywhere in the dance world because it would take time to develop.

And you worked

principally in improvisation? That's how it evolved over time?

That's how it evolved. When I first went to the University of Washington, there was a group of dancers growing with the work, who wanted to perform. I was choreographing then, but as the work evolved improvisation became an organic, integral part of it. It just becomes that in the classroom. So the dancers said to me one day they didn't want to dance choreography any more. They wanted to improvise. Well, I was relieved that I didn't have to choreograph because it did seem like two different things going on. So then we just turned our focus to developing tools and exercises, studies for developing improvisation as a performance form and it did seem more organic to the work.

The last thing I tried with the group was to conceive of a full length piece and to have the shape of it in my mind and have it in sections and so I knew what the content was. I had a conception for the costumes and collaborated with the lighting designer and with the musician in the development of the sound score. But instead of choreographing the exact movements I created an image cluster. I call them, for each section. We worked for a year on this because it was an experiment to find out what would happen if they kept returning to the same image.

We met twice a week for a year and I found that they could return to that image and that it would keep changing and keep evolving. Releasing creates a very different presence than the presence that you present in a choreographed or even in an improvised form. We had been performing improvisation but I felt to myself even then there's something that breaks here, between the Releasing that we do to prepare for a performance and then the performance. There's a funny little shift that takes place there. The question became how can I bridge this. When they're working from an image they're really working in a kind of altered state.

So the image was the bridge?

The image, focused on during performance, became the bridge, because that's the way they work in class. But I'd never really tried to have them work in that way within a performance and we found that they could. Then the question came, well can they do this in front of others? So I just invited in some Releasers to a rehearsal and found they could do it with Releasers. Then a few months later I invited some Laban people who are colleagues and mutually sympathetic and mutually supportive to see if the dancers could work in front of them and they could. So we worked our way towards a

public performance and they were able to do it, they were able to do that.

But we didn't continue with that because we weren't in a school any more, we didn't have people coming along. Robert has taken it into his own form of trapeze work but that way of performing never really fully realised itself because right after I tried that one piece we stopped. After we performed those two performances our supportive colleagues came backstage and said, well, when are you going to do it again? I said, I have no idea, I have no idea, but at least I learned from this that it can be done. The question was will it become a form that people can perceive? Is it out there? And they felt it was. The people who came were very supportive and seemingly very excited. So there it is.

[Teaching, teacher certification and g images]

I've been going to New York for about 25 years every year teaching through Movement Research, but it was after I decided to take early retirement so that I could have more time to do my own work that the travelling and teaching started to happen more. Now I teach part time at the university for just two quarters and spend the third quarter travelling and we've always had our Summer Intensives where people have come from all over. We've done that every year at the university and we continue to do that. It's only just three or four years ago that I started teacher certification and I've only completed two groups so far. So that's also been an investment of time and energy.

And how long does the teacher certification program take? Well

it's for the introductory work, for people who have reached a certain level of understanding in the Releasing work. It's a six week process which is very packed; it could easily be extended. During the Summer Intensives they observe the teaching in the morning work and then they have afternoon seminars. They have practical sessions with the partner graphics (that's the tactile work that we do) and they have a lot of reading, writing and sound and voice work; because I think that a big part of the class is how the images are presented into the space. The class is shaped by where the musical sounds go in and out, where the voice goes in and out and there are periods of silence. An image cluster is given after students have been taken step by step on the floor to be available to an image. I liken the image clusters to haiku just because they're brief and poetic and hopefully they send out some kind of resonance or reverberation. So the way in which they're presented is important.

So there's a concern for the whole aural environment of the class?

Yes, yes. It is important. Preparing a class is like a composition; the shape of a class is like a composition. It takes time to prepare and the music that we use takes a lot of research, finding and then selecting for a given moment in the class.

So there will be some things that are going to facilitate the kind of letting go part and there are others that will be appropriate for other parts of a class? Would you also have sound for when people are introduced to an image cluster for example?

Yes, well the image clusters are of different kinds. There are kinds that foster deeper states of stillness, and deeper experiencing and there are others that are designed for higher energy releasing. Then we have image actions, I call them. We also have a category in this work called totalities, totality images, and that is the kind of image where the whole self submerges, and really when the image takes, they (the dancers/students) just totally blend with the image and become the image. It becomes real, another reality, not an imaginary one but another reality. So there seems to be a kind of step by step process, a check list we call it, that is part of the letting go and allowing process. Then the image cluster is given and that can be an image action which leads into movement or into a deeper state.

I can give you an example of an image that we do at the introductory level. We have roughly three levels of the work – there's the introductory and then what we call ongoing, which goes on until someone's ready

for more advanced work. Initially the images are more accessible and then they become more complex, more sophisticated. The ability for an image to have an impact on a human being grows with the doing, so it becomes more accessible and more powerful as one goes along.

I am curious about the distinction between an image action and a totality image.

Oh I can give you a distinction between those. Remember that everything is prepared for the image and we don't just leap into it. Physically and in every way we have step by step ways of preparing. But an example of an image action would be: starting out with breath; the breath moves very much like the sea, it ebbs and flows like the sea, the sea of breath and the whole self can melt into the breath and float in it. Then the bones begin to soften, as they are floating they soften into sea sponges. They've already been given this area in the solar plexus as a space and so that area becomes a nest of sea sponges and the legs trail from that nest high in the solar plexus as long, willowy fern.

So this becomes the dance, the dance of the bones floating as soft, moist, warm, sea sponges and the legs trailing from the nest of sea sponges, high in the solar plexus as long, willowy fern. That is an image action. There might be inner stillness with it for quite a long time but then they do begin to move and you can see the change in the way their legs are functioning. An example of an introductory totality image would be that the whole self is floating in a pool, a crystal clear pool and some areas of the pool are shallow and others are deep. Then the whole self begins to merge with the pool, blend with the pool, so that the outer edges of us become the outer edges of the pool and a new moon is reflected there. So that does not suggest movement.

Where do the images come from? You mentioned earlier that the images first came to you intuitively or organically as you worked alone and later you used images in teaching to convey kinaesthetic experience; the image functioned as a kinaesthetic metaphor. Have the images you draw upon changed much over time or is there a body of images which continues to be resonant and that you tend to return to?

There is a body of images that we return to. But the work itself keeps evolving – and the images evolve with it. Right now I'm working on the Ongoing material trying to get it ready for the teachers. I have to pull the Ongoing material out of 25 years of notebooks and I am trying to get that ready. So it's partially just my own work but it's always connected

to a principle of some kind. It's not just poetic cloud-nine stuff. Not that you can spell out exactly what the principle is; well you can, but at a given moment that may not be possible. There's so many facets to this. It's not linear of course so the way in which one grows in it is in a non-linear way and I liken it to a web-like process. Each facet of the class becomes an aspect of that web.

Maybe I can give you another example.

They might experience something with a partner graphic of some kind of floating of the skull while seeing the spaces open, space inside the base of the skull, deep behind the eyes, or the dome spaces of the skull; we have all kinds of spaces. So they might be receiving some kind of tactile experience on their feet with a partner or sometimes on the floor, and then I might give a poetic image for the skull. There's an image that has to do with a whole lot of spaces in the inner landscape becoming like dark caves and if for instance we've been freeing the arms and the shoulder and the skull – I like to work with both sometimes because they're so intimately related – then the skull becomes the moon and the arms become streams flowing around the moon. It just takes it into another context but they're connected, they're related to what we have been just working with. Or we might be doing some tactile work along the spine and I'll give an image at the same time that's it's like electrical impulses travelling on the spine and out through the arms. And we have gossamer threads between the hands and they become activated also, so that there are ways of having higher energy things going on. I can't think right off the top of my head of an image that has people just exploding in the space and I'd have to see if I can think of one. Yes – there is the image that the whole self transforms into a configuration of serpentine spines. Serpentine energy releases its power – no warning! But those images still come out of something on the floor that has taken them to another level.

There was one person in the weekend workshop here in Melbourne who said that she could feel her legs transforming with the image but that if she started to move then they would start to lose it, so what should she do? and I said, well you just stay with it, you just stay with it and let it do its work organically. Eventually it will lead to movement and you won't lose it, it will be there for you. It is a growing process.

What is the role of the teacher in that process, how do you see that?

Well I have thought of the role of the teacher as a catalyst and of course guide. To teach it one must

have experienced it and in fact I say to the teachers that I train, if you're not living it, don't teach it. If you're not practising it as a practice it in **your life**, don't teach it because it's a living, breathing process and as you're teaching you're releasing as you're teaching. Not that you're going into the floor and giving yourself the work but you are in a releasing state as you're teaching.

Yes, you were talking earlier about the importance of the voice and it would seem to me that if you are not in that releasing state as you speak or describe the image it's not going to resonate. You will not communicate the experience.

Well then it becomes academic. Nothing wrong with academic but this is something else, something else. In fact some people who studied the work before I did any teacher training would take it and teach it and would begin to bring anatomical things into it, you know, they'd bring in pictures and graphs and so on and I felt that that broke the flow of the class. The student gets the principles as we go along but it's always done within the ongoing context of the class. I liken the whole class to a dance in a way so to stop and think about things in that way, using the intellect in that way, gets in the way of experiencing it.

[Perceiving Releasing] When you were talking earlier about the **totality** image and the sense that the dancer has of becoming the image, of merging with it, it occurred to me that something similar is happening when one is witnessing the Releasing process in another person. There is perhaps a very subtle way of perceiving this process in another person which entails a kind of merging. Or a better way of expressing that might be to speak of tuning, tuning to the image and to the dancer.

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SKINNER

Yes, I think that would be just wonderful.

Well that seemed to be what you were describing when you were talking about teaching and the teacher's role and function in Releasing. Perhaps what occurs within the parameters of a class cannot be unproblematically transferred to a performance situation but this kind of interaction seemed to me to be precisely what you were describing. When you are watching someone and the process is working, you are in there with it; your energies and your attention are supporting and augmenting the dancer's process.

Oh yes, oh yes. It's an exchange of energy.

And in that exchange between a watcher and a performer the person watching has a crucial role. Their attention is productive; it does something, it has an effect upon the experience.

I think so, because I think so, I think so, because I think that an audience affects a performance. Also I think that in performance the Releasing dancers start picking up on each other on another level. Without even watching each other they're picking up in some way. There is a heightened state of immediacy in their dancing and I think an audience can perceive that. There's a word that I've used about what, ideally, the Releasing dancer becomes physically. They are almost in a state of transparency and when I am watching that it's almost as if I have X-Ray vision. I sometimes jokingly say in class that I'm watching what's going on with X-Ray vision and that's a little joke but...

Like all jokes it has some truth in it?

truth in it?

Movement practice, Helen Payne
Photo: Annie Pflingst



The art of
being in motion:
non stylized