

Aidos

Douglas Dunn

Shame at looking with pleasure at shape, color, moves, without demanding to know sense; shame that I would invite significance to obtund the sensational intensity of immediate perception.

Shame at being an older dancer; shame at being ashamed of being an older dancer.

Shame that I have become focused on what's interesting more than on what's true, the latter evasive, changeable, the former less abstract, always present; shame at hubris of presuming to see beneath the actual.

Shame at my reluctance to believe in art as artifice only (imagine my success!); shame that I ever left California fields for New York City stages.

Shame that I don't accept what is; shame that I accept what is.

Shame that I am not accepting gracefully no longer dancing youthfully; shame that I did not appreciate the adjustment to old age that adults around me when I was young had the dignity to disguise.

Shame that my dancing is impotent to right wrongs; shame that I would consider that it could or should.

Shame to believe I dance by my own strength and will; shame not to credit my role in the play.

Shame at caring what others feel about my dancing; shame that I would prefer not to care.

Shame at underestimating the value of inner conflicts, sidestepping them by living them out vicariously in societal forms of competition; shame at the result: handling worldly conflicts inappropriately, including turning the other cheek in cowardly escape.

Shame to upbraid choreographers for ugliness or sloth or aggression; they're just striving from intuition as am I, and don't really know, nor should be obligated to know, in some fixed rational way, what it is they are formulating; simply offering, as they do, what comes up for what it's worth; shame that I would ignore my upset at dancing that diminishes or discards its *a priori* condition as a visual medium, presenting instead limp limbs, text, confessional tears, topical content; departing, in large part or small, often by considering the experience of the dancer or the choreographer over that of the viewer, from the immaculate ecstasy that comes with daring exploration of the human body's limited range of rhythms and shapes; simplicity allowing room for honoring and giving range to the dancer's imminent radiance.

Shame when the next move involves consideration of approval; shame pretending not to be disappointed when dancing unseen.

Shame that sometimes when improvising I tip the balance away from shape toward kinetic momentum; space around me begins to disappear; as if I've consumed it; it's inside me; the context in which I was a figure swallowed up; now I'm the whole world; gone the separation that allows for "I and thou"; shame that my Libran nature keeps me from attempting and experiencing radical divagations from classical proportionality.

Shame to dance forcing body beyond natural behavioral patterns; shame to consider natural behavior patterns anything but kinesthetic habit developed through repetition.

Shame that I presume to ask another to move in a prescribed way; shame that I would forgo the opportunity to see what a consenting adult has to offer as glint within my Terpsichorean celestial prism.

Shame if I want you to see my dancing in a certain way, as that could mean I'm wanting you to be someone you might not be; shame if I allow fear of your judgment to enervate my urge to excite your brain's kinetically empathic neuronal web.

Shame to escape to an imagined infinite; shame to bank on present finitude as security.

Shame, perhaps, at my trusting to studying dancing first and foremost from the point of view of physical technique, leaving myriad other aspects to intuition and blind faith; it's that my love of the form was jump-started as a way to avoid other kinds of human exchange; thus it never occurred to me to address rationally what kind of interaction moving in front of others might be taken to be; it's a sign, for sure, that I cringe on behalf of Terpsichore when I see concerts generated from

conscious manipulation of ideas of performance; shame, then, at anything but a hoped-for implicit innocence of honed moves in open space? wittily modest dancing with no explicitly expressed desire for or expectation of response? sole focus a dedicated penetration of opportunities available within the elements of the medium itself, without consideration that the results will be seen? plus, after the fact, paying as little attention as possible to positive or negative reactions?

Shame at how insignificant is best effort at making interesting beautiful dancing; shame to consider not continuing doing so.

Shame at style: it's exclusionary; shame at non-differentiating lazybones.

Shame that my inward turning tendencies lead to failure to secure sufficient work for those who dance with me; shame that I would wish for more job offers as a result of talking rather than just showing dancing.

Shame at allowing liking/not liking to get in the way of smart judgment; shame at smart judgment obliterating liking/not liking.

Shame at highlighting dancing while permitting mundane tasks of living to push minute-to-minute gratefulness for existence into background; shame at making these distinctions.

Shame at doubting what Terpsichore offers; shame at attempting to seduce from her more than she vouchsafes.

Shame to be modest from fear of, rather than from respect for, others' sensibilities; shame not to imagine sensibilities beyond those I imagine.

Shame at on occasion ignoring things and people around me while speculating on the reality of reality; shame at reluctance to follow suggestion offered by mind's reflexivity that it might be able to fool itself into knowing more than it already knows . . . of itself . . . of something else.

Shame at temptation to treat dance as a subject of study; art begetting art; the push toward "understanding," with the goal of coherent momentum of taste resulting in culture, a commodity able to be packaged, advertised, distributed and sold to the as yet aesthetically uninterested ("After all, it's good for them, and if convinced they will pay, thus improving the economy") as well as to the insatiably interested; shame if, giving into this temptation, I were to abandon as primary inspiration observation of the world apart from its previous representations.

Shame that I don't want dancers to appear on stage as regular folks; but then I don't want to read novels with McDonald's in them, either.

Shame when radical dances disrupt communal rapport; shame when ingratiating dances generate low-rent consensus.

Shame on those who never told me that the path to honesty is through mental/emotional acceptance and daily re-acceptance of the body; shame to cozen myself with credit for an MO arrived at through necessity.

Shame at useless aesthetic excrescence; shame at all-consuming utility.

Shame when emotions don't fit external circumstance: shame when emotions fit external circumstance oh so neatly.

Shame just to dance when there is so much to say; shame to downplay the upshot of the unsaid.

Shame when glad surrender to the will of moves themselves is missing; shame at mortification when good yielding is not selfsame in kind and degree with another in the same dance.

Shame that my dance, striving for crystalline purity, is not our cultural mainstream; shame if successfully realized aesthetic idealism is as damaging as some successfully realized political fix-it-all policy.

Shame at not understanding how my dancing embodies, if it does, a poststructural aesthetic; if it does not, shame on Critical Theorists for not explaining to me in what ways the work is ideologically retrograde.

Shame at not having resisted western MO of aesthetically productive self-examination; shame at forgetting temptations to vanity and frequent ineffectiveness of attempts to contribute directly to the happiness of others.

Shame at slipping occasionally into operating as if mind is not embodied; shame at my envy of people whose minds are so strong their bodies seem irrelevant.

Shame to agitate; shame to accept.

Shame, the human brain having evolved as a tool for survival, that I would engage it on behalf of non-pragmatic gestures; shame that I have not developed a convincing argument for the usefulness of aesthetically generated movement.

Shame that I'm back, as at the beginning, forty-five years ago, to simple geometries on stage; shame not to trust what intuition offers.

Shame that I would exclude politics and other forms of content that might stimulate audience interest; shame that I would neglect the apprehension that form itself carries moral weight via delight.

Shame that I chose dancing, the most material of art forms, to elaborate impressions of unreality; shame that I don't tremble in anticipation of thaumaturgic sparks arcing across this body/spirit gap.

Shame at promulgating forms of kinetic idealism that have no chance of affecting the overwhelming momentum of social processes; shame at doubting the value of small beauties and the ability of many Americans to make use of divergent initiatives, or at least to abide them without lethal retribution.

Shame to be a willing participant in *The Modern Dance*, an anti-tradition that demands constant change amid a mad-dash culture that cries out for stability; shame to contemplate denying myself the ironic pleasures of useless invention.

Shame at using dance as escape into a timeless present; shame at not having learned to dwell within this disposition also in non-dance moments.

Shame if my dancing fails to transcend materiality; shame were I to elaborate an idea-field that would presume to define what might constitute ethereality.

Shame at the urge to detach from the virtues and perfidies of fellow human earth dwellers; shame at the dishonesty and fustiness of conforming to consensual concerns to avoid rocking the boat.

Shame at the desire to be different; shame for any day I don't strive for excellence.

Shame to dance; shame to be still.

Shame that only understatement takes my breath away.

Shame that its being labor-intensive locates refined dancing in a financially stratified environment; shame to oppress kinetic questing because of the ways doing so fits or not current economic circumstances.

Shame at fear to approach madness as way to know fullness of human mind; shame to consider ousting reason, a wondrous gift seemingly holding the key to humans finding right place and proportion on earth and in the universe, though acting, oddly, just as often, as nemesis to such endeavors.

Shame to suppose there's anything new under the sun; shame not to invent beauty for our time.

Shame that I have not done more to correct material social inequality; shame that I would allow my sense of fairness to compromise my avid support for fully realized individual expression and ambition toward excellence.

Shame to enlist classical elegance as a means to avoid feeling; shame to parade feeling not wrought to readable form.

Shame on you if you take my day-to-day immediacy of dance activity and avidity for invention as equivalent to business's short-term profit-taking-thinking; shame that I do not more often argue against such politicizing of the arena of dance-making, where consenting adults work in pursuit of aesthetic innovation within hierarchical structures and other arrangements anathema to radical political correctness.

Shame at caring too much what others think; shame at caring too little what others think.

Shame at having failed to become an active repository and expositor of aesthetic and historical knowledge; shame at being timid in standing up for intuition, imagination, impulse.

Shame that I feel sentimental toward species we kill off, as if any one of them given our opportunistic brains would not just as quickly devastate the planet; shame not to revere and protect each and every manifestation offered up miraculously by a universe even our layered consciousness cannot comprehend.

Shame at expecting anyone to pause to watch me dance; shame at forgetting the adventuresomeness of New Yorkers, at least a few of whom will sally forth to eye no matter what.

Shame at not finding a way to dance a political statement without compromising formal values; shame at not taking the time to research and develop verbally the point of view that defends formalist art as potently political.

Given the baseline twofold attitude toward art in the USA—one, that it is irrelevant to our pragmatic ethos, two, more emblematic, that it is out to hoodwink us—shame that I am not willing to urge the *a priori* directness of dancing in the direction of sincerity, a much used aesthetic trope that plays at outrunning the artifice of art, and does indeed, in certain hands, at times succeed in wooing a credulous viewer into ecstasies of false security and gratuitous acclaim; shame that though human nature historically speaking advises against doing so, I still look offstage for signs of good faith in others.

Shame to demand of an object or a person or a moment more than it offers; shame not to make hay from the pith of this disparity between certain desires and the evident impossibility of their fulfillment.

Shame to be convinced that dancing for its own sake adds to the good; shame to be convinced that dancing for its own sake adds not to the good.

Shame that my dances refer first and foremost to themselves; shame that they refer at all.

Shame that it must be the case, given how I behave, that I take the aesthetic as more important than, or as some sort of substitute for, the political; shame that in the sixties I considered them identical.

Shame to talk; shame to be silent.

Shame that I dance without considering the aesthetic and entertainment needs of others; shame at the suggestion that I would presume to know what those needs are.

Shame at dancing's lack of utility; shame at comprehensive unabashed efficacy.

Shame that I don't forgive us humans for the once seemingly necessary and defensible but by now unconscionable mishandling of the planet, its flora and its other fauna; shame that I don't feel deeply enough the obvious: that this corruptive domination is of self, is slow motion suicide, the ultimate biting of the hand that feeds.

Shame naively ever to imagine that dances of artifice might advance a progressive agenda; shame that, having noticed powers greater than Terpsichore's reducing even her best steps to nothing more than opiate entertainment, I continue.

Shame that dancing as generous giving is dogged by an urge toward heroism; shame that valiance has been highlighted as negative because of knavish versions within patriarchy.

Shame that as I undergo shattering of consciousness with each new piece, I cannot help wishing viewers to experience comparable fracturing; shame to presume that a spectator might consider a psychokinetic paroxysm edifying.

Shame at not increasing performance opportunities for the dancers by advertising to the hilt what the dancing is and why everyone should see it; shame at considering compromising potential surprise by giving away in advance any iota of the substance of the work.

Shame that I fear being artistically ignored because I am a white heterosexual male dancer; shame that I fear being artistically endorsed because I am a white heterosexual male dancer.

Shame how rarely the desire to love and the desire to be loved burn with equal heat to produce a dance aesthetically perfectly counterpoised.

Shame at every negative emotion; shame at squelching any source of psychic energy, human mind able when rightly honed to channel all sorts of primal forces toward the good.

Shame at expending so much life force on impotent artistic adventures; shame to deign to decide what life force might be for.

Shame at being a member of the ever-seeking-to-be-new Modern Dance when most people need and want things to be the same; shame at forgetting momentarily that we proceed if at all by imagination.

Shame if my dancing ever were to arrive completely to believing in itself; shame not to be striving daily for such belief.

Shame that I insist on a dance language that does not translate to reason and verbal consciousness; shame that I don't go all the way and cease to speak.

Shame to put the experience of the dancer first; shame to put the experience of the viewer first.

Shame at going for attention by pretending not to want any; shame at wanting any.

Shame that while Rembrandt expanded his interest to include slabs of meat and wrinkled elders, I remain committed to youthful beauties, with the excuse of their facility in articulating ample variety of moves; shame were I to alter my dedication to clarity and crux for the sake of necessary and favorable social transformations.

Shame to behave as if the disintegrative body could personify the infinite luminence of mind; shame . . . I forgot . . . they're inseparable.

Shame at presenting dances I love rather than dances everyone might love; shame at posing an "everyone," and to boot charging her with paucity of curiosity.

Shame that I wish my dancing to be able to satisfy my desire to be oddball as well as my desire roundly to be loved; shame to assume that the two are necessarily incompatible; but if they are not, would their coincidence dissipate an energy source? If the motive to work is based on consistent reaffirmation of lack of success . . .

Shame that I allow my desires to influence my interpretation of reality; shame were I to prune what blossoms my needs do grow.

Shame that I allowed for a long time an imbibed middle-class promise of immortality to keep me innocently complacent and misguidedly happy day-to-day; shame that I would impugn my parents' well-meaning and successful mission to provide a secure nest for us fledglings.

Shame at how limited my work is; shame at sitting here writing when I could be in the studio pushing the limits.

Shame that I cannot rationally justify the intuition that more truth inheres in stylization than in realism; shame at my reluctance to attempt to spell out why to me the obvious beauty of everything is not auspiciously transferred to the stage without hearty doses of stylization.

Shame at "self-expression," and any use of consciousness other than clearly to perceive outer reality; shame to pretend to recognize anything but own mind.

Shame at questionable value of organizing a perfect niche world unaccountable to the bigger real world; shame at anger when the big real world gets in the way of the little niche world.

Shame at my dedication to highly stylized non-narrative dancing, putting the work out of reach for those who prefer performance built on tropes of topicality and notions of humanity associated with the untrained body enacting mundane behavior; shame that I would denigrate the heroism, no matter how attenuated, of aesthetically motivated extreme physical challenge.

Shame to decorate dissatisfaction with a patina of optimism; shame to brandish the albatross.

Shame at preposterousness of proposing anything new in art or otherwise; shame at denying each moment's potential for revelation.

Shame at not retaining dancery slenderness of youthful body; shame to suggest that Terpsichore's values do not exceed anatomy.

Shame at being unable to censor certain thoughts more suited to viewer than doer: *There are no principles of choreography separate from dances. There are no axioms to teach, only conventions to observe. There are, it follows, no good or bad dances. What we have, instead, are arrangements of bodies, of greater or lesser interest, at one time or another, to various individuals and groups;* shame at impulse to limit conversation.

Shame that for years I acted in such a way, intentionally and I believe successfully, that made it difficult for people in positions to help me to have access to anything but the aesthetics of the work itself; shame that now I'm ready to remove the straitjacket in order to garner more opportunities for the Company to perform.

Shame at acting out anger arising from shame; shame at hiding shame.

Aimlessly wandering the internet, I came across Aidos, the Greek goddess of shame. Bang, like an explosion, my mind turned inside out. Suddenly, all my behavior, artistic and otherwise, and that of others, too, seemed pretense, fake . . . as if there existed another, truer world we could be inhabiting, but inexplicably and perversely we aggressively deny and avoid it. I wanted immediately to work from this inversion. However, because my sense of how bodies come alive on stage precludes exposition of idea and suggestion of narrative, the dance, which premiered at BAM Fisher in February 2015, took its shape as usual from my sense of the dancers' potential for visual dynamics and textural variety. On the other hand, when I asked myself to respond verbally to these importunate insinuations of radical mortification, words came rolling out. All pressing thoughts shaped themselves readily into a poor man's compendium of original sin. The account includes greater acknowledgement than heretofore at how intractable are the matters I care about most . . . thus the text's frequent neutralizations by way of counterpoised assertions, leavened with an implicit, newfound acceptance of such either/or irresolutions. Thankfully, the writing did not compromise the dance, any more than it directly enhanced or explained it, so that my perennial preference for the discrete integrity of media, especially the salutary church-and-state-like separation between talking and dancing, once again held sway.

DOUGLAS DUNN is a dancer and choreographer living and working in New York City. Winner of many awards and commissions, he recently presented *Ruins* at 92Y in Manhattan.