

## CHAPTER VII

### WHY THE *LUNA* DANCE EVENT: ITS MEANINGS FOR THE LIVES OF PARTICIPANTS

[...] the perception of something important in either particular works or in the arts generally moves people to talk (and write) about them incessantly. Something that meaningful to us cannot be left just to sit there bathed in pure significance, and so we describe, analyze, compare, judge, classify; we erect theories about creativity, form, perception, social function; we characterize art as a language, a structure, a system, an act, a symbol, a pattern of feeling; we reach for scientific metaphors, spiritual ones, technological ones, political ones; and if all else fails we string dark sayings together and hope someone else will elucidate them for us. (Geertz, 1973, p. 95)

As if bearing witness to Geertz' contention that the arts are meaningful because much attention is given to explaining them, participants (and this researcher) explained in a multitude of ways how their engagement in the *Luna* event carried resonance within the process of living their lives. Each section in this chapter begins with short "meaning profiles," drawn from their own way of speaking about it, and according to their background and perception of their identity and role in the dance event.

Those who articulated their views about these "life meanings" were variously permanent, frequent and short-term inhabitants of *Luna's* contemporary dance world. In the first and third sections, respectively about

artists and dance specialists, I have grouped together *Luna's* vocational artistic participants who gave their lives over to working in the art world. Non-artist personnel are treated in the second section in order to keep them in proximity to the other dance company members. Drawing from data in the interviews and fieldnotes and also from dance writing, these sections discuss seven genres of meaning that full-time engagement in this dance world had given to their lives, and which caused them to continue participating. These genres of meaning are physical, psychological, spiritual, intellectual, socio-cultural, economic, as well as the all-encompassing notion of "holistic" which included several or all of the genres at once.

In the second section concerning the *Luna* event personnel, I examine why they chose to spend their work life in this performing arts milieu rather than any other enterprise. From out of their explanations and my casual conversations with them in the field there emerged a series of both deliberate and unexpected life choices they had made and that led them to working with the *Luna* dance event. These were the participants, neither artistic creators nor spectators, who labored to support the stability and development of the dance company and theatrical venue structures and fortunes, and also who set up and operated the technical systems for the performances.

A fourth section examines briefly several negative cases that emerged from the data, excerpts from the words and writings of participants that questioned the meaning and value of *Luna* in several manners. In the fifth section, all of the ideas previously elaborated in this chapter – from artists, personnel and specialist participants – are pulled together and regrouped as common themes. The same six genres of meaning as in the first section are once again charted and looked at separately, but without the seventh "holistic" category.

Yet another and sixth section identifies and discusses 5 distinct but also interrelated motives along with the underlying views of dance that

brought the 22 audience focus group members to the performance of *Luna* and gave meaning to their dance spectating.

## 7.1 Life meanings for the vocational artistic participants

*Luna's* artistic professionals are those who had dedicated the largest part of their daily lives, and for whom it is their life work's to conceive, create, interpret, teach and learn, evaluate and study the *Luna* choreography and theatrical setting. Discussions about personal life meanings will be fleshed out below by and for *Luna's* choreographer, dancers and rehearsal director, artistic collaborators, expressive specialists and dance students. The dancers will be discussed collectively, even as their individual voices are inscribed in the text, in terms of the kinds of meanings they expressed. Into this artist grouping I have also placed the *O Vertigo* dance workshop students whose role in the event was more that of engaged on-lookers, but who were equally dedicated to living out their lives as dance professionals.

Perreault's proposition (1988) that passion must be considered a primary motivation for professional dancers choice of vocation is certainly reconfirmed below. But it is here that particular varieties of that passion are identified and examined in detail.

### 7.1.1 The choreographer

Although by her own admission not prone to conscious explanations and intellectual analysis, I found choreographer Laurin lucid and articulate during her interviews with Szporer, Barras and myself. She revealed motives for her engagement with dance that were psychosomatic, social and spiritual in nature. Several fragments of conversations with her also gave clues to the

world view that guided her practice, that is a belief in dance as a universal, cultural, and at the same time highly individual, phenomenon.

At the psychosomatic level, Laurin declared having and displaying an enduring attraction and fascination all her life long, with physical exercise and with movement itself. Her first childhood experiences of this kind awakened her love for “physical work”, and so she pursued gymnastic and dance training as a matter of personal interest long before imagining a career in the professional dance world. She continuously sought out after-school activities throughout grade school and high school, activities that brought her “close to dance” and to creating physical expression (*expression corporelle* in French). The sheer pleasure she found in movement training was sufficient motivation to continue. In her own words:

[...] in the elementary school I went to, the teacher left the gymnasium open after school and I went in every weekday. That physical education professor came from the circus and he had already done acrobatic acts and mounted performances with young people. So then those were without a doubt the first contacts that I had with the world of the performing arts, in a situation of physical work, and I liked it a lot.<sup>i</sup> (I-GL1)

Although she became the only member of her family to be attracted to the arts, and in her small village there was limited exposure to dance, her father provided her with her first artistic experiences, music concerts and piano lessons, that she felt had somehow “stayed with her, entered [my being]”<sup>ii</sup> as she expressed it (I-GL1).

Laurin’s views of her artistry as a social and even spiritual practice were also clearly expressed. Being an artist, she ventured to say in our interviews, entails a form of work that carries responsibility as well as proposing an intangible, abstract way of “doing good” for people in a general

sense. More specifically, Laurin declared an urgent need to “speak” about human and spiritual aspects of the world in her dances. In consequence, she explained that her choreographic intention was not to be provocative, but rather to touch audiences emotionally by way of the large themes (e.g. love) that run across the history of all societies. As she told it, her Catholic girlhood had left traces of spirituality in her mind as well as her heart. She explained that these traces made their appearance in her work through the notion of a soul, a conscience or “call it what you will,” which could be found for instance in the subtle images of angels in many of her dances (I-HB1). (Laurin did in fact use the term “angels” (*ange* in French) in our interview; and I am immediately reminded of Aquin’s photo from *Luna* of Riede behind the giant lens with palms together suggesting prayer and eyes rolled upwards (Appendix S.) She further told me that it was a matter of fate that led her to be a dancer and choreographer, and that the career path that brought her into the dance world was a series of lucky, accidental occurrences. She even mused about her good fortune in having become a dancer: “I had a good star watching over me” (I-GL1). She recounted the intuitive, fateful way that she began creating dances in this manner:

[...] it wasn’t a very precise or rational choice. I didn’t decide to become a choreographer. I wanted to continue my work as a dancer but at the same time open myself to the facet of creation. At the moment when I began to create I didn’t think about becoming a choreographer. It was just another way to open up and try things. I had an attraction, a curiosity for the creative aspect [...]. It’s as if things happen and I say ‘I’ll try that, it’s interesting, I’ll go see [what’s there].’<sup>iii</sup> (I-GL1)

At the core of her social beliefs about artistic practice lay a paradox, perhaps in practice more like a tension, between the universal and the

particular. In her interview with Szporer she declared, “I see dance as being an art form that is very universal” and “I think there’s a universal culture of dancers.” And in the project proposal (Appendix I), when speaking of revealing the mechanics of duets, Laurin once again revealed her universalist leanings when she wrote: “I have articulated a language in which the human dimension will spring forth with power and insistence<sup>iv</sup>”. She explained that through her experiences with dancers in other countries she found that it was very easy to connect with them no matter what their training, and that culture is no barrier to this mutual understanding. For instance, she added, German dancer Riede has proven to “fit well” with the other company dancers because of her personality and not her nationality. Yet in the public conversation with Szporer in English for an American audience at Jacob’s Pillow, Laurin also spoke of her desire “to create with my roots” in Québécois culture. She articulated the role of cultural identity in her dancing in this way:

The political and social atmosphere, I could feel it more from my childhood. I’m Catholic. I always liked [the fact that] that we had to keep our identity. As you can hear, I’m French, French Canadian. And even if we don’t use words in the dance world, I think it totally influenced a lot that feeling that we had to find our identity. (I-GL/PS)

She explained to me as well that it was important for her that her dancers were given the chance to impose their specific, individual views (“*un certain regard*” as she put it in French), and that she considers this to be an important form of exchange with them that in turn enriches her choreographic work which in turn displays distinctions between the dancers (I-GL2).

And so Laurin seeks to “communicate with everyone,” even while “taking from my culture” (I-GL/PS). In other words, Laurin is a protagonist

of a current-day society called postmodern by some, in which many are quickly becoming connected and mobile in a network of “world culture,” while seeking to ground their sense of self in their local and cultural identities. Perhaps in an effort to balance the unifying forces of so-called globalization, Laurin’s sense of what it means to her to be Québécoise and her connection to the Automatists of the *Refus Global* serve as a crucial counterpoint.

### 7.1.2 Dancers and rehearsal director

Oh, yes. For me, dance is my life and my life must be in my dance. It’s not my job, oh no not at all, it’s my life.<sup>v</sup> (I-MR)

The dancing participants (and some whose role in *Luna* was not to dance but who were also vocational dancers) spoke of a wide array of ways in which their dancing métier had brought meaning to their lives. Like the audience members in focus groups, they discussed the nature and purposes of contemporary dance that lay at the root of these meanings. This section includes those who were interviewed: six *Luna* dancers, the rehearsal director and the company apprentice. The various kinds of life meanings expressed by them will be illustrated in their own words and discussed in seven categories that emerged out of the coding process: physical, psychological, spiritual, intellectual and socio-cultural, economic and the notion of dance as “holistic.” Drawing again from the interviews, certain beliefs they expressed will then be recounted and fleshed out, beliefs about the effects of dancing in their lives and the role of dance in society. Links will also be drawn to certain theories about the effects and meaning of contemporary dance practice.

### 7.1.2.1 The meaningful physicality of dance

In praise of the physical sensation of dancing, the dancers described the effects on their bodies, and often minds at one and the same time, in diverse terms such as “a feeling of fullness” (I-KN), “feeling more real in all my body” (I-PL), and “very sensual” (I-AB/RB).

Nearly all offered a story about how they had danced spontaneously during early childhood. They recounted how they had channeled an irrepressible desire for physical motion and expression into participating in childhood activities like amateur dance clubs (Rose and Riede), social dancing (Rose and Demers), gymnastics (Greaves) and ice dancing (Rodrigue). Demers expressed what several others had also articulated about her perception that the urge to move is innate: “I think that as for the desire for movement, I think I’ve always had it”<sup>vi</sup> (I-MD). Rodrigue then recalled a photo of herself at two years old, watching an exercise program on television while mimicking the animator’s movements, and how she began ice dancing as soon as she could walk. As a young child, she would make choreographies in the basement with neighboring children, and when a teenager she put on public performances in the village (I-MR). As a constant performer in children’s dance companies from age three to 12, Riede recalled memories of that period: “[...] it was so intense, so exciting, uhh, very exciting! [...] I think I have always loved dance, I enjoyed it so much” (I-AR). At 18, Barry’s father had already proposed to her a career in dance because “he said this was the thing I would do spontaneously – dancing around the kitchen” (I-AB).

They also described to me the physical (and emotional) intensity of their professional dance training as being both exciting and difficult. Some began taking dance classes later in life for sheer pleasure and enrichment, and many described their pre-professional training as a passionate one, when they had danced “like maniacs” (I-MR) to develop their dance technique and



to see if they were good enough (I-AR) to dance in a professional company. For Barry: “In the beginning, it was a way of exploring, [...] it was very alive and passionate, yet very demanding. I had never been confronted with that type of physicality [...]” (I-AB). The young apprentice Greaves also hinted at how demanding it was, but added that the rewards of the hard training were personal as well as physical (I-IG). And it was Riede who vividly described the relationship she experienced between the pain and pleasure of her arduous training. She explained how it was that through the hard work of dancing she had acquired the now desirable sensation of having an “open body”, one that “closed up” when not dancing for an extended period:

I’m not sure if I would say the body suffers... (pause)... because, when I’m not dancing for awhile, I feel my body is...if I’m not dancing for let’s say a month, my body starts to relax and all of a sudden I feel no pain anywhere. Which is really excellent, right? Like, nothing hurts! (Riede and Davida laugh together.) But once it exceeds one month I start feeling stiff and not alive anymore. Things start closing up in my body. [...] it takes me a lot of consciousness then to still keep my body open and available for anything that comes in (I-AR).

Is this apparent physical need to dance – a desire for bodily exultation -- the sign of a hyperactive metabolism, a genetic predisposition for expressive movement, or a cultivated taste for meaningful motion introduced by a teacher-mentor? The scope of this research project and evidence from the data cannot address these questions which merit further study, which belong to fields of study such as dance medicine, neurobiology, and genetics.

### 7.1.2.2 Psychological reasons for choosing to dance

These dancers made what I felt were sweeping claims for the beneficial psychological effects of dancing. Among them were the generation of emotions like happiness and love, the feeling of freedom to express their “true” inner selves, the sense of “being real” in the social world, and that dancing for them was a way of fulfilling their need to live “fully and intensely,” as they put it. In close relationship with these psychological states, they viewed their dance practice alternately as a form of communication (with other dancers, with audience members), a mode of self-expression and discovery about and for themselves (and for others), the thing they love best and felt driven to do. And some of them declared that it was in their role as professional dancer that they had finally found a way for themselves to “fit in” with their social environments.

Many of the dancers spoke of how feelings of joy, happiness, love, and passion brought meaning to their dancing. The maintenance and promotion of happiness within oneself, among co-workers and audience members through their dancing has even given Demers and Rodrigue a sense of social purpose. As Demers explained, she has always been happy, and now sees it as her first responsibility to make her fellow dancers happy as well. It is only then, she explains, that this positive chemistry among them can be presented to the public and felt by audiences (I-MD). In a similar vein, Rodrigue believed that if she is dancing she is happy, and that her happiness in turn helps promote harmony to those around her. She extrapolated that if she wasn't dancing, she would probably become frustrated and begin “not to open her heart” (I-MR). Believing that dance is “very much a celebration of life, and dancing is living it to it's fullest” (I-AR), Riede goes on to characterize her notion of celebration through dance as an expression of “being happy to be in this body and to move and be with others” (I-AR). Rose exclaimed unequivocally that dancing was, for him, “in every way...L-O-V-E, love! You

know, you just want to share yourself!! You just want to share life. This is personal. This is why I am dancing” (I-DR).

For Riede and Lamothe dancing in the contemporary dance world provided a crucial chance to feel free (at last) and to live their lives fully. And this was what made their lives worth living! (I-DR, I-PL) In Riede’s case, she recounted how East German society was restrictive and didn’t “allow [her] any individuality or any freedom to express [herself].” She credits a dance improvisation workshop in having “for the first time [...] freed [her] inside” and that “something came out of myself [during that workshop] that I never [had known but] was inside somehow.” What ensued was an unstoppable process “of feeling freer and more spontaneous and more full and more alive” (I-AR). In a similar fashion, Lamothe had also felt restricted by the demands of mainstream society (albeit capitalist in his case). He saw himself as a misfit who found that while performing dance he could finally “be ‘real’ [...] live things fully, intensely” [...] and permit himself to express strong emotions.” He felt fewer barriers to living these “real things” onstage than in the street, in the everyday world (I-PL). They both spoke as if their psychic survival itself depended on continuing to dance.

For many of the dancers it was also imperative to communicate the self-knowledge and discovery they had gained through dancing to others. As with Demers above, it was a matter of presenting the results of these inner discoveries to audiences and the conviction that spectators “could feel it.” Rodrigue spoke of a dance performance as a kind of spiritual rite in which she feels “a general ‘opening up’ “ so that her sense of well-being can be shared by the audience” (I-MR). Riede said that dancing was about “what’s inside [her] and how to express that, and how to make it available to other people. And how to give a part of myself, or what I believe life is about.” And so it not only gave meaning to her life, but she offered her own life meanings in turn to audiences and fellow dancers. In fact, she thought of dancing as a form of “constant exchange,” adding that she had long been “starving for

communication with people, very intense exchange of energies, ideas [...]” (I-AR). Rose expressed his belief that it is the dance and not the dancer that reaches the audience. He stated that from the beginning of his performing experiences “I want to communicate with people,” but puts that in the balance with the imperative to “be true”-- when in the role of the choreographer -- to whatever choreography has to “come out.” To his mind, the dance created will intrinsically communicate to (and please) certain people but not everyone, and will reach wider or more restrained publics according to its own nature (I-DR).

For rehearsal director Brisson, participating in this dance milieu was a way of being in the world. He confided to me that one of his reasons for choosing to work with *O Vertigo* was actually the chance to travel and so to “meet people everywhere in the world [...] which opens enormous horizons for me and constantly stimulates my curiosity [...]. It constantly augments your will to dance, and especially, to communicate.”<sup>vii</sup>

And finally, it was within the dance milieu dancer that Barry found herself at home among peers who “share a certain perspective toward the world that corresponds to how [she perceives] the world, or how [she wants] to live in the world. [...] It’s a way of life, as well, that you grow into. It’s difficult to imagine functioning in another world after a while.” (I-AB/RB.) And so for Barry, her co-workers were like-minded colleagues, and it was through dancing together they had come to share a common way of looking at the world and of living in it. In fact, Barry expressed the belief that she could no longer imagine living anywhere else but in the dance studio and onstage. This is a vivid example of Sparshott’s reflection on dancing as a way of life and thought: “One may reflect here that learning to be a dancer at a professional level must involve adopting as part of one’s very substance a set of values and the language in which those values are articulated [...]” (Sparshott, 1988, p. xxi).

### 7.1.2.3 Dancing as a spiritual practice

Embedded in the biographical profiles of most artists in this study there is a story about how a series of fateful circumstances led them to their artistic vocation. The choice to be an artist was usually characterized as a calling rather than an employment. It was often through the intervention of a mentor (parent, teacher or friend) that they entered the dance world. And for many, the sense that they were destined to be a dancer came to them one day in a “flash of insight”. Nguyen called this moment an epiphany (*un declic* in French) (I-KN), Lamothe talked of “a sudden discovery” the first time he danced in a theater piece (I-PL), Rodrigue’s fateful turning to dance came to her in a moment of rage against the costs of professional ice dancing (I-MR), Riede fell upon it suddenly when she finally “felt free” during a first improvisation class (I-AR), and so on.

Both Rose and Riede spoke of dance as engaging their spirit as well as bodies and minds (I-DR, I-AR), and perhaps Nguyen was also alluding to spirituality when he described the “feeling of fullness” (*sentiment de plénitude*) that was made manifest when he was dancing (I-KN). But it was Rodrigue who ventured most deeply into describing the spiritual fulfillment she attained when dancing. Through her practices of Tai Chi, Taoism and Chi Kung, she had come to believe in the importance of certain ways of being in the world that she had brought into her dancing: letting go to open a door to what is new; living the present moment by not becoming attached to anything; emptying out to let go of things, allowing it all to flow, finding neutrality and entering into something else. She spoke of Laurin’s “open heart” and “inner self” as “beautiful energies” that Laurin exuded and offered to the dancers. When dancing, Rodrigue revealed how she feels “the awakening of life and the forces to which people are subject and by which they are nourished”<sup>viii</sup> (I-MR). She described a performance as a time when she is:

[...] listening to the emotions of the other dancers, exchanging energies with them, sharing together the 'states of their souls' in the form of a choreographic ritual, giving and receiving the interior light which radiates from each of us and then generally opening up to share this well-being with spectators.<sup>ix</sup> (I-MR.)

For ex-ice dancer Rodrigue, making and performing dance was an integral part of her spirituality, that which gives meaning to her life on earth and beyond.

#### 7.1.2.4 Intelligent dancing as a path to understanding

The *O Vertigo* dancers interviewed for this study discussed only rarely the intellectual aspects of their dance practice. But five of them (Rose, Nguyen, Rodrigue, Gould, Weikart) had undertaken university studies in not only dance and but also in the sciences.

It was dancer Weikart in particular who displayed an avid intellectualism by delighting in his search for *Luna's* scientific texts. In a capsule monologue on the company CD ROM (Appendix S) he explained the way in which he interacted with Laurin to help create intellectual underpinnings for *Luna*:

[It was] about different issues in physics. She (Laurin) had spoken to a friend of mine who was an astro-particle physicist. And I was doing stuff, trying to find the texts about particle physics, and this sort of brought us into a long discussion about the phenomenon that in physics when you start going infinitely fast, [...] the infinitely small becomes infinitely large. (Weikart, CD ROM)

I also found two allusions to dance as a way of thinking and coming to understand one's place in the world. Four years after our original interview, Demers told me that she had matured some of her thoughts about how dance for her was a means to express her deepest thoughts about the meaning of her existence. While re-reading the transcription of her interview, she wrote on the copy she sent back to me that she sometimes thinks of dance as a language. She elaborated the linguistic metaphor further by discussing the fact that she had learned contemporary dance before becoming interested in the Haitian dance of her native heritage: "It's like a native language. We have the impression that it is the only one that can express the depth of our thinking. But by learning a second and third language, you realize that certain [other] words or concepts are even more adequate to translate one's reality" <sup>x</sup> (I-MD). From another point of view, Barry considered dance training, creating and performing a form of self-knowledge, as she said, "It was a whole discovery of myself as a woman [...]" (I-AB/RB).

#### 7.1.2.5 Socio-cultural motives for dancing

Although self-discovery through dancing was a dominant motif in the explanations of the dancers, they also spoke of the moment of performance as an important time when they communicate (often spoken of as "sharing") with audiences. In this contemporary dance world, dancers are commonly spoken of as the vehicle, the material and the instrument through which the choreographer expresses her vision. Because there is a human being onstage expressing the dance (and not an artwork in a gallery or a book in a library), a meaningful relationship of some kind necessarily arises with those who gather at the theater to watch the dancers. It is in this sense that I think of presentational dance as a social art. Demers went as far as to claim that the

value of a dance itself is that “it exists for people, for those who will be touched by it.”<sup>xi</sup> (I-MD)

As discussed in the theory chapter, sociologist Becker (1982) built a case for artistic practice as a particular kind of social work, and “art work” as the outcome of a network of cooperation. A few of the dancers’ remarks hinted at this perspective, but from differing points of view. From another angle, Barry described her dance work as a way of life and a set of perspectives that she shares with co-workers, bringing to mind once again Novack’s idea of “a community of experience” (1990, p. 15). Riede spoke of her early training in the healing art of dance therapy, recalling Laurin’s idea about dance as something that “does good for people.” A more sweeping statement by Rose envisioned contemporary dancers as among those who “build culture.” Then he exclaimed with a laugh, “ You know, culture isn’t just railroads!” (I-DR).

As for Lamothe, he spoke of what he saw as the “social barriers” that were obstacles to being “real,” by which he meant the possibility of “living things fully and intensely.” He said that:

There were always these walls, and me, I didn’t want to have a ‘steady’ job, I didn’t fit in that place. I was unhappy [there], that’s for sure. Since I was a child, my imagination was elsewhere. I wanted to do something in life that would allow me to do real things.<sup>xii</sup> (I-PL)

For these *O Vertigo* dancers, dancing was a place in society where they fit in, a form of communication and sharing of knowledge with audiences, and a way to “do good” in the world.



#### 7.1.2.6 Not dancing in search of economic security

It was Lamothe and Rose who chose to dance partly as a form of counter-cultural resistance, an alternative to perceived social pressure to get a job strictly to make money, as Lamothe explained above. Dance was the kind of occupation that had finally allowed them to “fit in” somewhere. U.S.-born Rose put it this way:

[...] when I was young, there was a part of me that didn't feel American because I didn't feel like most of what people were thinking and [how they were] driving towards things. And that was 'just get a job and make money.' [And] the force of society says, you know 'you gotta get a house, you gonna get a wife, you gonna have some kids, and to do this, what do you need? You need a job!' [...] Certainly, by choosing dance, I made the choice to not worry about that. (I-DR)

Barry also confirmed that, although her father supported her artistic aspirations, in the community in which she was raised dance was not seen as a serious vocational choice. She said that having grown up in a small town full of scientists, “art was seen as a passion, a hobby, not as a way to make a living” (I-AB/RB).

#### 7.1.2.7 Dancing as holistic phenomenon

Many of the dancers interviewed spoke of being drawn to dance in the first place because it was a practice in which they could exercise their body along with their emotions and even intellect at once and the same time.

Rose told me, for example, that his choice of dropping out of university and deciding to dance had “everything to do with connecting the mind with the body. [...] And for me, certainly, it’s the spirit also.” (I-DR) Riede discussed her need to dance as a physical one, but also as a matter of releasing her emotions so that they “don’t get stuck” (I-AR). When Nguyen proposed his poetic perception of dancing as “a feeling of fullness,” he went on to say that “it was mental as well as physical at one and the same time. It’s quite whole as an art form. It implies body and spirit. That’s what attracted me.”<sup>xiii</sup> (I-KN)

In fact, the neatly delineated life meanings discussed in the previous six categories were rarely in evidence in isolation, but the dancers reported experiencing two or several at one and the same time, as a holistic phenomenon.

### 7.1.3 Artistic collaborators

Costume designer Denis Lavoie and visual designer Axel Morgenthelar articulated differing views on the meanings their artistic practice held in their lives and in the world. For Morgenthelar the significance of exercising his *métier* as a visual designer of light were psychological, intellectual and even socio-political in a certain sense. Conspicuously absent were physical desires and satisfactions, perhaps because Morgenthelar had never been a dancer. As for Lavoie, like many of his Québécois colleagues, he felt there was a fateful destiny at work that had guided him to costume design. But he also recognized the presence of certain psychological, social and—having been a former dancer himself -- physical factors in his meaningful relationship with the creative arts.

*Axel Morgenthelar, the visual designer.* As Swiss-born Morgenthelar explained, his choice to join the “small circle” of visual designers for the

performing arts was a careful, calculated set of professional choices he had made in conjunction with a few accidental circumstances. Morgenthelar's career path took him from electronics into visual design after he had recognized the psychological need to "not be lonely, [...] to express our feelings to people," a need fulfilled when we "share our ideas" through the creative arts. He went on to explain that he first tried playing the saxophone and acting, but finally found himself literally and figuratively drawn to light. In working with light he "found within the visual range [he had] developed that [he could] very much define a personal, almost a personal kingdom of expression" (I-AM). This ephemeral and seemingly intangible medium became for him a language with which to express himself, aspire to proficiency, and then hopefully one day through which he might inspire others:

But the main thing is, I look at it as, for me, light became a language. And it is ... for me, it's a voyage towards being more eloquent with that language. And you start up with understanding that alphabet, and you keep going, babbling first words, and eventually, eventually, you might write a novel with light. And, well, some very fortunate people might be the James Joyce of lighting, of light. (I-AM)

Visual design with light for Morgenthelar was a specialized niche that allowed him "fertile ground to be able to liberate creative juices" and also "a sense of freedom." About the medium of dance in particular, he develops ideas through intuition because: "I'm in a physical space, it's all very abstract" (I-AM). Although he believed, as did Howard Becker (1982), that the arts are not really "free" because "there are a lot of conventions and dos and do nots," he claimed it had been easier to have the personal freedom of doing things the way I think that they are right [...] in an environment where you're the only

one who had the expertise" (I-AM). And again in a sense similar to Becker's network of cooperation, Morgenthelar thought of his arts practice as occurring within "a complex landscape of interactions" (I-AM).

Morgenthelar was also well aware of the social, and even political import of his creations. He spoke of light design as a profession with a professional code of conduct, to which one brings the expertise of an artistic sense, and a way of working with other people. He also advanced the social idea that the universal aspect of the performing arts is in fact the audience and the moment of public performance. As did dancer Rodrigue, he ventured as far as to say that putting art onstage in front of audiences is "the reason why we do it." In his scheme of things, the audience was the client. He said that for him "it's the audience, [...] it's in the end effect, it's always...somebody goes from home or from work, into a theater, and pays money, and sits down to see something, and that's what counts most."

In a sly nod to the political implications of his light designs, political in the sense of the power to control it gives him over what is seen, he explained:

I often said that light is not just something to make you see things, it's something that can be extremely political, and just to illustrate that, it can change the meaning of everything. So, I look at it like that, as a personal playground of, if you want, political expression (both he and Dena laugh). (I-AM)

Morgenthelar was one of the few *Luna* participants who acknowledged the politics of aesthetic meaning within his own creative work.

*Denis Lavoie, costume designer.* By this point in the document, Lavoie's kind of story is becoming a familiar one! So many of the Québécois artists above spoke of a belief in an inevitable destiny that brought them into the

dance world, fateful circumstances that had prepared the way, and finally described an epiphany one day that marked their realization that they were meant to dance. In the case of Lavoie, he was born into a family in which his mother was a seamstress and he was raised around sewing machines and cloth, leading to a familiarity and skill for clothing design. He affirmed that things “just happened to him,” that he was certainly not a driven careerist. And so it was that one day in a fateful first ballet class in Vancouver, as a young man, it came upon him that he had to continue dancing.

As a dancer who gravitated gradually into costume design for dancers, like most of the other dancers above, his physicality manifested itself in early youth. For Lavoie it was into the physical performance of sports that he channeled his need to move, specifically hockey and competitive swimming. As he revealed, it was during that first dance class that he found a physical outlet in which his latent artistic side could also find expression. Also in the physical sense, but this time of the small motor variety, the *métier* of costume design felt like quite a natural skill for him after his childhood experiences of living with a seamstress: “The first time I sat at a sewing machine, immediately I knew, because visually I had always seen my mother do that, about the dexterity...”<sup>xiv</sup> (I-DL).

Beyond the physical desire to move expressively, like his dancer colleagues at *O Vertigo*, Lavoie found intense psychological satisfaction in having done work in which he “can find within it all that is good in myself” and in which he continued to find interest and pleasure. He felt that a part of him still dances, if only vicariously, through costume design for dancers and that is what keeps him in the dance world. (I-DL)

#### 7.1.4 Dance workshop students

During the focus group with 10 *O Vertigo* dance workshop students (FG4), four expressed views about the meaning of dance in their lives. All were dance professionals, from 23 to their mid-30s), and came from Mexico, English Canada and the United States (Table 5.4.1). Although living and working in dance communities outside of Québec, the views they offered bear resemblance to those of the *O Vertigo* dancers and so suggest commonalities among North American dancers.

Love and freedom were the stated psychological motives and meanings for two of the students. Rubinstein is a mature Mexican dancer, creator and dance theorist. His spontaneous response during the focus group echoes the emotional one voiced by *O Vertigo* dancer Rose. He compared dance to a lover in a turbulent love affair: “[...] either you like it or you love it or you hate it. And I love it (he laughs) and I’m still loving it. So that’s why I’m here!” And reminiscent of East German dancer Riede, Mexican dance student Mora described a sense of feeling free through the expressive creativity of contemporary dance, in stark contrast to her earlier ballet studies: “I began with the ballet, so it was very stressful for me. And then I discovered the contemporary dance. I just felt free, and I loved it.”

Two other workshop students spoke about the importance of dance as a way for them to communicate, to connect with other people. This form of psychological meaning took on a social sense for them, as it did for Rose and Brisson. Dancer Poole, from the U.S., described her life in the dance world as “an incredibly beautiful experience” that gives her the sense that she is not only connecting with other people, but that she becomes “more than who you are as just one person.” For Canadian Bardai, being in the art world is “the only way I know to live my life. She concurs with Poole that working in dance is an “honest way to live” that, as Poole added, “doing a nine-to-five kind of

job thing just, just isn't about." Like Lamothe, it was through their work in contemporary dance that they had found a way to fit into society.

## 7.2 Life meanings for event personnel

Let us now turn to some of the non-dancing participants who didn't participate in the artistic creation of the *Luna* choreography, but rather contributed to the technical and administrative work "behind the scenes" of the dance event. All but the local technical crew members, working at the various venues, professed love and passion for the performing arts. As a group, the personnel's attitudes about the economics of the work they do stand in stark contrast to those of the dancers. Personnel working on the payroll of *O Vertigo* felt that they had finally found the economic stability they needed (and desired) in the art world with this relatively large-scale and successful company. The following ideas from various *Luna* personnel are culled from fragments of fieldnotes, but largely from three interviews with the *O Vertigo* executive and technical directors, and a dance *animateur* who was hired on contract for the *Théâtre du Saguenay* in Chicoutimi.

### 7.2.1 Executive director and his staff

The rewards of Lagacé's dance world vocation were for him both psychological and economic. He had been heading towards a career in architecture when he "was dragged into" the performing arts through his friend Pierre Paul Savoie's invitation to do a set design for his choreographic composition. One day it happened that Savoie's company *PPS Danse* made a popular, marketable performance piece called *Bagne*, and Lagacé knew he "had to move in and start working on the development." And so he considers

that he was drawn into the field of arts management through accidental circumstances.

Later on, accepting the contract as *O Vertigo's* executive director provided his first chance to have economic stability, but he also relished the challenge to develop his skills further and to “touch another level” of the presenter’s network. He loved the non-verbal medium of dance and how it evokes feeling for him “on a gut level.” Lagacé had a deep admiration for dancers, who he considered as well-disciplined, ultimate athletes. Enthusiasm about his work brings him meaning and makes him a “happy man.” In his own words: “[...] I’m very passionate about what I’m doing and I wouldn’t do anything differently.” (I-BL)

Lagacé told me how he was trying to create more collaboration among artist and staff members at *O Vertigo* to help them understand each other’s work and to make it all more meaningful for everyone. He told me “I spoke with Georgine [Vaillant] recently, I mean she’s passionate about...she wants to see what we’re doing. She doesn’t just want to go through shuffling papers and papers, you know. Because then, it makes sense, it’s meaningful.” (I-BL) Various staff had been interested in the arts since their youth, having some training and experience in various artistic practices before settling on an administrative vocation in artistic companies. For example, *O Vertigo's* receptionist Faucher recounted her story about childhood and her studies at the circus school in Montréal in contortionism and trapeze, skills she later taught at summer camp. She was proud of her background, and so I asked why she had stopped practicing circus skills. She replied that she had started gaining weight when she took birth control pills because of the toll the circus life takes on the body. (FN: 6-7-00)

One thing was evident, the choice of working in the arts was not only an economic one for *O Vertigo* staff members. It was clear that they were committed proponents of the dance company and its work.



### 7.2.2 Technical director and his crew

As *O Vertigo's* technical director, Proulx recounted how it was that he fulfilled, in a holistic fashion, the needs of his body, spirit, and heart. This work also gave him economic stability and even a certain, if intangible, sense of social meaning.

As seen in his biographical profile, Proulx came to choose his present-day *métier* in a moment of epiphany, as did many of the dancers. It happened all in an instant when his eyes fell upon the course offering of Theatre/Production in a CEGEP catalogue. It was then that his life “all came together,” because in the *métier* of theater production his dexterity and desires seemed to converge, as he put it. He now felt pride in having found purposeful work life in a field for which he was skilled: “It was the period of my life when I almost had a career plan. [...] I decided to bring something to fruition [and] to be the best”<sup>xv</sup>. As he explained, choosing the arts meant also the self-esteem gained from the energy and personal investment it demanded, and the impression that “[...] you are doing something interesting, a little glamorous, that means something to society”<sup>xvi</sup> (I-JP). After his training he moved from job to job in various theatres. He found the long days and small paychecks exhausting, and so was excited and relieved by *O Vertigo's* offer to become their technical director: “The monetary conditions, the working conditions, the structure of the institution, seemed absolutely ... perfect”<sup>xvii</sup> (I-JP). Because his economic satisfaction was assured, he had the chance to have a normal family life and spend time with his daughter.

Proulx is someone who “trips” on all of the performing arts, but admitted to a special relationship with dance. Dance for him was something that spoke more to his instinct and intuition than his intellect (although he did rationalize the meaning of the arts in society). And he unexpectedly revealed to me that, “physically, I have always had a sensibility inside my body. I am someone who is very physical, who has a particular contact with material and

space “<sup>xviii</sup> (I-JP). What he loves about manipulating the technical systems for a dance performance is the concentration it takes but also the physical investment required, if only to move a lever with his index finger. And so he also found that in his work with *O Vertigo* the chance to travel out into the world and meet people was almost like a pleasurable social hobby.

Proulx has been constantly questioning the value of the performing arts in society. Sometimes he concludes that it doesn't offer much in a quantitative way, but rather in the intangible sense of bringing something to “the soul of society”<sup>xix</sup>. He believes that performances are a “tribune for creators”<sup>xx</sup> in which “one creates not only images, but one creates content, one creates something to say” in which “I am touched and made to reflect, and so then I tell myself it is worth something.”<sup>xxi</sup> (I-JP)

What about the technicians? Did the work of “running” technical systems for the *Luna* performance, while invisible to the audience, bring meaning to the lives of these technical personnel beyond affording them an income? Two different kinds of crews were observed and considered in the course of this study: (a) the *O Vertigo* technicians who are members of the dance company, and (b) the permanent and often unionized “house” crews of the theaters to which *O Vertigo* toured. Because of extended fieldwork with the dance company, it is the former group of technical crew members who I was able to know best. House technicians in rental-based venues like the *Monument-National* and *Auditorium Dufour* are generally required to work in a very regulated and business-like fashion in accordance with union rules. They rarely get much extended contact with the artists and the performances they mount and run. From my extensive insider knowledge as a dance presenter I know, but also observed during fieldwork, that the technical crews in the venues have little or no personal stake in the performances themselves. There is no time in these situations of one or two night performances, “booking in” at a theater, for the in-house staff or crew to get to know the dance company other than for the space of a day or two. At best, I observed some who took

pride in a job well done, but at worst there was a certain level of boredom with the whole enterprise. For instance, I watched technicians amusing themselves with computer games to pass the time as *Luna* was being set up at Auditorium Dufour. On the other hand, I experienced the passion and enthusiasm on several occasions of *O Vertigo* technical assistant Alain Ouelette and wardrobe mistress Danièle Lecourtois. Both of these dance company crew members were former dancers who had studied in the Dance Department of the *Université du Québec à Montréal*. They spoke to me about feeling fortunate to travel, to be making a living backstage in the dance world, and so to stay connected with the milieu they had come to love. I caught Lecourtois off guard one night, as the dancers prepared to go onstage, amusing everyone by creating theatrical characters with crazy wigs. (FN: 11-3-01) And Ouelette “loves the chance to travel and the excitement of being part of a performance” (FN: 12-15-00). As for the house crew whose limited contact with *O Vertigo* gave them little opportunity to develop a sense of belonging to the dance event, the meaning of their work at the *Luna* performance appeared to be generally limited to the economic opportunity to hold a stable job. For the dance company crew members, working for *Luna* was a passionate stake in the dance world to which they belonged.

### 7.2.3 Dance *animatrice*

Lise Clément was hired as a dance *animatrice*, but had only recently had her first experience of a contemporary dance performance (a film dance of Montréal dancer Margie Gillis). She said it was like “love at first sight [...] a real discovery”<sup>xxii</sup>. In the work she did for the *Théâtre du Saguenay* in Chicoutimi in view of increasing audience interest and size for the upcoming *Luna* performance, Clément was convinced that a key element was to arouse the spectator’s “spirit of discovery” as she put it. In continuity with this kind of psychological motivation, she spoke of the rewards of talking with the

spectators after the performance, when she was left with the impression that they had indeed made an extraordinary discovery while watching *Luna*. She also mused about how it was that destiny drew her to an artistic vocation, and her sense that life “carries us somewhere” (I-LC). Clément expressed the meaning of the arts in society simply: the arts are not only part of her life, but they *are* life... for everyone.

### 7.3 Life meanings for expressive specialists

This group of professional dance world specialists did not dance at the *Luna* dance event, but nevertheless had dedicated their lives either to creating the contexts and conditions in which *Luna* was performed, or to creating interpretations and evaluations through which others could come to understand dance performance’s meanings and value. They proved to be as emotionally passionate about artistic practice as the creative artists. But the specialists described current pleasures that arose more often from intellectual, emotional and kinesthetic, rather than physical engagement with dance, although some of them had been dancers. A single case of spiritual motifs arose in the interviews with presenters, in Boucher’s longing for “the sacred.” And all of these expressive specialists, but some of the free-lance writers, were finding economic stability in their dance world jobs.

#### 7.3.1 Dance presenters

The dance presenters had all arrived at a point in their careers where they were enjoying the economic stability of a steady, well-paid job. The ways in which this performing arts work gave meaning to their lives took different forms: spiritual & intellectual, social, physical and psychological. The four *Luna* dance presenters below offered their thoughts about the particular kinds

of meaning their *métier* holds for them and their views on contemporary dance performance: Martin Wexler, Diane Boucher, Stepfan Schwartz and Walter Heun.

*Martin Wexler, programming director at The Joyce Theater in New York City.* Wexler initially found Modern Dance so “enjoyable and interesting” that he took up a double major in university of dance and economics. The pleasures of dance may have begun as a physical impulse, but later became a vocation and even a social mission for Wexler. His choice after graduation to take up the work of arts administration rather than performance was strictly an economic one. As he put it, “I chose to, uh...stay in the dance world, but hopefully work in a field or an area where jobs were a little more secure, and more long lasting...” (I-MW).

He later put this remark about job security into another perspective by saying that he might, of course, be making a much better salary as a lawyer, but that he drew fulfillment from working in the non-profit arts sector. “We feel,” he continued, “that we are providing something that’s valuable and worthy to the public. And it is, you know.” Then he told me the deeply emotional story of having organized a dance benefit performance for the families of firefighters who died in the bombing of the World Trade Center, as well as the presentation of *Luna* at The Joyce, very soon after the tragedy. (Our interview in his New York City offices took place only six weeks after it happened.) For him, these evenings of dance taking place in dire circumstances proved particularly moving. They “really helped affirm and to see very clearly the power of the arts, the power that the arts have to heal.” He spoke of the power of the arts (and of dance in particular) to heal, even as they entertain, by way of uplifting the spirit and soothing the soul. And he also said that he had found great personal satisfaction in facilitating performances and helping to promote artists to “get their work out” to audiences. (I-MW)

*Diane Boucher, associate director of the Festival international de nouvelle danse de Montréal.* At the core of Boucher's interests was the idea of "the sacred" in the larger sense, not in reference to the idea of God or religion. Boucher never wanted to be an artist, but would rather be close to artists who, she senses, are "very, very close" to that which is sacred. Her studies led her into the interdisciplinary territory of anthropology and art – the art of "others" from cultures unlike her own. Like so many of her Québécois colleagues in this study, Boucher also believed in destiny, and that it was a series of fateful accidents that brought her to work in a museum and finally to run a dance festival. (I-DB)

As well as being drawn to sacred phenomenon, Boucher took great pleasure in intellectual pursuits and especially relishes her conversations with artists about the meaning of art. Through the years she has developed a personal philosophy about art and its function as a way of understanding the world. Among her views: "For me, art is something important. And so, by being in contact with artists, I am more in contact with works of art [and] they are able to give us insight on life, another perception of what is happening in the world" <sup>xxiii</sup> (I-DB). It was through her talks with artists that she feels that she has been able to participate in shaping choreographic meaning. During these dialogues, she spoke of how she would:

[...] discover things that are sometimes unknown to the choreographers [themselves]. Especially with young choreographers. They do things, and when you pose questions they realize that 'Oh yes, maybe I did that thing for that reason but didn't see it at the time.' And so, it is in that process you can discover the sense, or give it a sense. <sup>xxiv</sup> (I-DB)

Does this mean that Boucher believes the meaning of art lies in the mind of the creator? Would she refute the arguments of those intentional fallacists (see Lavendar, 1997) who contend that artists' ideas about their own works are of no consequence in determining the meaning? To these questions Boucher replied that there is always some kind of message in an artwork, and that each one is made for a reason. (And, she chided, that if there is no message they might as well stay at home!) "Sometimes," she explained, "[the meaning or message] is difficult to find. [...] There are things to discover in the work that may be unknown to the artist. [...] But at the same time I find it interesting to speak with the artist who has his/her point of view" <sup>xxv</sup> (I-DB). Boucher is among those specialists who Shusterman (2002) might call performativist in that she contributes her own creative perceptions and thoughts to the understanding of choreographic works. She has always found it extraordinary to be helping artists discover the meaning of what they are doing, and declared that this is reason enough for her to continue.

*Stepfan Schwarz, Tanzhaus programmer in Düsseldorf, Germany.* Dance is a very physical desire and need for Schwartz. As a form of social rebellion against a technically-minded family with little interest in the arts, Schwartz entered the art world. He already showed a marked preference for physical activities, as is true with the other dancers in this study.

It was initially through his body, training and experiences with the dance form Contact Improvisation that Schwartz entered the dance world, later to become a programmer. He regrets the loss of "body-feeling" he gained from dancing now that he is an administrator, and still tries to find time to take dance classes. "It's another – this is important I think – it's another access to art if you have the experience in the body, out of dance. [...] It's another access which I think is important for my work and which makes my choices more substantial" (I-SS). Schwartz is among those dance

programmers who have danced and so who bring a dancer's perspective and kinesthetic empathy to bear in their work of dance presenting.

*Walter Heun, dance producer with Joint Ventures in Munich, Germany and the Lucern Theater in Lucerne, Switzerland.* Emotional affinities with expressive movement, but especially social motives, instigated and have long guided Heun's work as a dance producer.

He was attracted to dance performance even as a teen, venturing into dance classes as a young adult. And in his email responses, he admitted to having always been able to "feel this strong impulse to express my emotions through movement."

But it was that fateful night when he was "in the right/wrong bar at the right/wrong moment [...] (whichever way you may want to see it)" that what he had to do finally became clear. He began writing down the complaints of Munich dancers about the misery of their funding situation and heeded the social calling. And so he decided that he would be the one to find a way to improve their economic situation.

### 7.3.2 Funding agent and board member

Both the funding agent and the board member who were interviewed had been creative artists in their own right before coming to their current vocations. But the *Luna* event held specific meanings in each of their lives, tempered by their backgrounds and views about art.

*Line Lanthier, dance funding agent for the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec.* Lanthier's studies and career in professional dance produced a physical and psychological bond with the dance world that has sustained her love and interest for the field. When she was a dancer, it had been the sheer



pleasure of moving, dancing and exchanging with fellow dancers, and being inside an “imaginary world” that captivated her. Moving from the métier of dancing to the administrative work of dance management happened “without taking a formal decision, but rather like following the flow of a river,”<sup>xxvi</sup> she declared with a metaphoric flourish (I-LL).

Although embroiled in the politics of dance funding in her job as dance agent for the province of Québec, Lanthier admits she is not on a social mission but “it is for personal satisfaction that I do it”<sup>xxvii</sup> (I-LL). And it so it was that Lanthier followed the path of destiny to find meaning in her life at first from the bodily pleasures of making dances, and later to continuing to work in the dance milieu she loved through her role in the political and economic development of the Québec dance milieu.

*Claude Gosselin, O Vertigo board member and founding president.* The *O Vertigo* dance company as a legal entity was actually born in the basement of his home. Board member Gosselin’s bond with the company as a founding father had spanned its lifetime, and is emotional as well as intellectual, and part of his social mission as an arts organizer.

Arts curator Gosselin was drawn to the organization of cultural activities since he was young. As well as running a cultural arts organization of his own making, the annual event *Les cents jours d’arts contemporains*, he has always worked on multiple levels of the art world contributing to its political, economic and social development. He considered his auxiliary work he does as an *O Vertigo* board member as a form of solidarity with the artistic milieu. He feels that it is a collegial exchange, in which he speaks about Laurin’s work to others in his world of the visual arts, and in turn she speaks of his projects to those around her in the dance world.

But apart from his deeply felt social motivation to bring contemporary art to everyone, Gosselin admitted to the emotional and intellectual pleasures he draws from conversations with choreographer Laurin. He put it this way:

[...] I see how it functions in dance and learn more about it, and we give each other ideas sometimes. And [it's also] for my personal satisfaction as well, of course. For the pleasure in knowing how things function, how one mounts a choreography, what are the ideas of choreographers. So, I learn, and it's very pleasant. <sup>xxviii</sup> (I-CG)

As was also true for Boucher, and exemplary of Shusterman's performativist model (2002), Gosselin felt that not only does he learn from these dialogues with artists, but even sometimes is able to contribute ideas to the artistic process.

### 7.3.3. Dance journalists, critics, educators and historians

Four dance writers spoke about the meanings that their engagement in the dance world held for them. All had developed careers in dance writing after having experienced dance training and performing. And all were performativists, in Shusterman's sense (2002), in that they understood their writing practice as literature and a form of creative contribution to an understanding of dances. They saw themselves as art world insiders, not as outsider commentators.

*Philip Szporer, dance critic and reporter, scholar and amateur.*

To Szporer's mind, nothing speaks about contemporary society as vibrantly as contemporary dance. He has given his life to its observation, critique and interpretation. The meaning of dance in his life took the form of intellectual stimulation, but also a quest for the emotional catharsis (an ecstatic state) he finds when engaged an artistic experience that manages to attain the level of depth he finds satisfying. (I-PS)

Szporer did some dancing himself as a younger man and has always sought out active participation in dance beyond the act of writing. For instance, he had relished the invitation of choreographer Irène Stamou to join her company warm-up class, attend her creative session and critique the work-in-progress. Despite his early physical training in dance, it seemed to be especially the intellectual processes of dance inquiry that excited him, leading him towards scholarship, and invitations to serve as resident scholar at a dance festival and speaker for conferences. He loves “developing ideas, finding ways around something,” often asking the question “why am I seeing this?” (I-PS). During our in-depth interview, he analyzed and evaluated historical occurrences in Montréal dance during the late ‘seventies and early ‘eighties, what he felt was a fertile and seminal period.

He also talked about performances that had evoked a sense of discovery: “I remember feeling that I was watching something that I knew I was never going to see again.” And for Szporer, “well-edited” art that “works well” can have the power to “mark” someone, bringing them into an ecstatic state that is “almost spiritual.” Referring to the Romantic poets he described how this state was manifest in his life:

[...] this ecstatic state is where you...it's this heightened  
 ...heightened [moment when] you forget where you are. You  
 forget who you are for several minutes. [...] Then you leave the  
 theater, but it's ruminating in your system. Comes into  
 your...filters, into your day. It comes into your sleep patterns. It  
 affects you at such a profound level [...]. (I-PS)

Whether communing with dancers as they perform from his vantage point in the audience, or speaking to his radio listeners, Szporer seeks the “difficult place to get to” when all those who are present “really go deeply...to some state, some inner state, psychic state, psychological state” (I-PS).

*Linde Howe-Beck, dance writer and critic.* Howe-Beck's engagement with contemporary dance was an emotional one, a matter of providing an outlet for the personal need for expression. But to her mind, the meaning of the performing arts is also a question of maintaining "social balance."

She had studied ballet and musical theater dancing since childhood, until choosing the career of journalism as a young adult. Then one day she decided to write about dance. "It was a total falling in love [...] I really felt, when I began to write about the dance, that I began to satisfy some need in myself [and] fell in love [with dance] all over again" (I-LH).

Like a long-term loving relationship, Howe-Beck explained that contemporary dance "requires commitment and head work" from the audience. She claimed that this is why some audiences feared the work involved, preferring the ease of simply being entertained. Howe-Beck was so in love with this way of dancing that she couldn't understand why it seemed to appeal to so few people! On the other hand she observed that those who do come regularly to contemporary dance performances "are very faithful." She further explained her personal passion: "Whether it is for myself, for me as a viewer, I can't imagine being without it. As a viewer. The professional in me is the professional in me, but the personal me is an addict." (I-LH)

Underlying this unbridled passion lay her belief that art as a means of expression provides society with "a kind of balance in itself." And then almost as an afterthought, she mused, "It's an expression of the soul I suppose." She found that in the current period in Montréal dance, choreographers were moving beyond the endemic physical risk of an earlier time and so had been able to "find their own voices." With this larger diversity of styles she had found that "there comes a greater insight [and] that people are going deeper into their own... not only their own ways of expressing, but their needs to express." (I-LH)

*Stephanie Brody, chroniqueur de danse.* For Brody, it was the physicality of dance that touches body and psyche that enticed her, but her professional raison d'être was public education through dance writing and radio hosting.

Although her work involved doing choreographic analysis and criticism, Brody admitted that for her watching dance is “ more about emotions. [...] it's my senses that are looking at something, much more than my brain [...] a much more physical experience than an intellectual experience.” Reminiscent of Sklar's kinesthetic empathy (2001), she described herself as a filter for which movement itself is the primary point of view for observation. “Movement moves me,” as she said. She expanded this idea in her written comments after reading this text: “I can get excited about a leg turning in its hip socket”. This personal feeling level of engagement hasn't diminished for her through the years despite her long-time work as a researcher doing social analysis of the arts with Cultur'Inc., or working as an arts administrator. Her description of deep emotional attachment to contemporary dance and complete surrender to the choreography when watching dance performances, was reminiscent of both Szporer and Howe-Beck:

I do it because it's a passion. [...] I cannot imagine my life without doing this, since I've started. [...] When I sit down, and I see the dance, everything goes away, and I love it and I enjoy it [...] I love being...in the room, I love being in the theater [...] the meaning is so open, and that's what I like about it. And the physical aspect of it, too [...] (I-SB)

Not yet able to “figure out how” to make a living from dance writing, Brody pieces a living wage together from several other kinds of work in the cultural sector. But at the heart of her engagement is the vocation as *chroniqueur de danse*. What she meant is that she preferred to think of herself as more of a

“conduit for the public” than an arts critic who, through her writing, was able to promote the social goal of public education in dance. She expanded her beliefs about dance as a social mission in her later written comments:

I am also proud that I helped, even in a minor way, turn other people on the path to a career in dance. [...] Frédérique Doyon, Marie Lamoreux, Julie Lebel all found meaning and drive, like me, from their close proximity with and total freedom to explore this universe of dance on that [radio] show [at CISM that I hosted.] I think our ability to access the creation process and artists in such a fun and informal manner helped shape our idea that dance is a gift to be shared, not an elitist art form to be preserved in stone. (Brody’s written comments on the transcript of the thesis, August 2005)

Written into the text of the *Luna* document as she gave it an official last reading, Brody began to muse about her view of the function of contemporary art in general in a democratic society. She wondered if it might actually serve as “a space for freedom” (*un espace de liberté*) where one “can get lost and reclaim some of [their] lost individuality – even by saying ‘I don’t like this and this is why’ and that’s the beauty of it.” (I-SB)

*Iro Tembeck, Québec dance critic and historian.* Being a dancer was at the core of Tembeck’s life story as she narrated it in our interview, a story in which she recounted strands of meaning that were of a physical, intellectual, psychological and social nature.

Like the other dancers in this study, the physical imperative to move appeared in early youth. Tembeck’s urge for physical expression caused her to “jump up and down as a child.” Her parents recognized this moving about as

a talent for dance and sent her to dance classes in which she felt “the feeling of freedom” and in which “personal expression or emotion always managed to creep into my dancing” (I-IT).

As a cultural hybrid of Greek origin, but who lived in Egypt and later emigrated to Canada, Tembeck told me that dance was the one constant in her life. She considered it as her “continuity” and so an important part of her identity. “It is professionally how I present myself, as somebody involved in dance.” (I-IT) And she took pride, in the course of our conversation, in her social role as dance pioneer who was a dancer and choreographer, educator, historian and researcher. As she said “I find it is more important to keep writing [...] with different shifts in perceptions, depending on what’s happening around, depending on what’s happening to yourself as an observer and to...mark your different stages of your perception of things.”

As a discipline that had contributed to forming her character and direction in life, Tembeck claimed that dance had served as a source of life-long knowledge for her: “On a professional, human level, it has taught me a lot of things. Discipline, precision, quests. And it continues to teach me things.” (I-IT) It was when she began teaching the first history class on Québécois artistic dance that she reconciled her two interests: the written word and the knowledge of dance, the “thinking and the doing.” She felt strongly that writing is one way of preserving the elusive history of dance so that the past can be remembered. This devotion to historical writing was nowhere as apparent as in the final moments of her life, when she penned her memoirs (as yet unpublished) in which she reviewed her life in dance in a philosophical and poetic mode.

#### 7.4 When the dance event's meaningfulness is questioned

There were a few comments within the interviews pointing to the perception that every choreography and dance performance is not necessarily as meaningful as another to each and every participant. Dancers Rodrigue and Demers hinted at a social critique of *Luna's* status in the opera house, critic Szporer felt that current-day large-scale dance presentations lacked the inspiration of earlier works, and dance writers Howe-Beck and Tembeck concurred that contemporary dance as yet had meaning for relatively few Québécois.

In a negative turn to those stories of contemporary dance as a beneficial social force, Rodrigue and Demers each confided to me that they sometimes questioned the elitism of dancing to opera house audiences. They are both socially minded women whose self-worth, as I came to understand, depended on helping others. They wondered who might be in the audiences of the large-scale venues where they performed with *O Vertigo*, where high-end ticket prices tended to exclude those without the means to buy them.

In direct response to my question of why she dances, Rodrigue told me that she sometimes wonders how “useful” her dancing might be to society in general. She spoke of her desire to help those who live in poverty, and her admiration for how people dance on every occasion in the poorer countries where she had traveled:

[...] sometimes one wonders why we dance, what does it bring to the people, to society? [...] Because I feel preoccupied by the world. I have traveled a lot in Third World countries. I tell myself that there are so many things to be done to help people. [...] I find it sad [that we think of dancing as a luxury] because in poor countries they really dance! I went to Brazil, to Argentina, to Venezuela, to Mexico, and do they ever dance! That's why at



festive occasions, I always dance with people, I go to tango, I find that necessary. <sup>xxix</sup> (I-MR)

And so alongside dancing with *O Vertigo* and going to tango, Rodrigue had also taken up a teaching practice called Gyrotonic© as a way of helping people to feel better in their bodies.

Reminiscent of aesthetic theories that consider art as a non-utilitarian phenomenon, Demers mused that the kind of contemporary dance she was doing didn't seem to be really of practical use to others: "Deciding to make sense through dance, I think it is a decision to make something that is not useful and to accept that. [Dance] is not useful for society like being a doctor or social worker [...] [But] I think we need that which is not useful" <sup>xxx</sup>.

Thinking further about the audience, she exclaimed that everyone had a right to like contemporary art, and deplored that it seemed to be reserved only for people with certain interests and so inclined because of their studies (I-MD). In her later annotations of the interview, she had matured yet another social viewpoint on dance. Demers made reference to an elitism she found embedded in the attitudes of contemporary dancers themselves who see their dance form as the point of reference for all others dances in the world. As a result of these reflections, Demers began spending part of her summer break in her native Haiti, volunteer teaching for the dance community there. In her own words:

In a condescending way, we [contemporary dancers] regard the dances of the world with amusement, saying 'how pretty it is'...it's so folksy. At the same time we consider contemporary dance as THE dance, forgetting that it also has a long alliance to cultural references that might in turn seem folkloric to my friend Tahirow! I don't know if mixing is a solution, but my preoccupations are now turning to the fact that I want my dance to

find a public not only in Montréal, but in Ouagadougou.<sup>xxxii</sup> (I-MD)

I came across Demers one evening at a dance performance on December 10, 2004, and she had in fact fulfilled her desire, having just returned from a voyage to Ouagadougou. She had just performed one of her solo choreographies in a new dance festival there and the audience, she felt, responded with enthusiasm.

Dance writer Szporer felt that many of the contemporary choreographies he had been attending lately were losing “the spark of what they need to do” as he explained it. He wondered if it might not be the result of artists being driven by funding systems and co-producers to create large, elaborate productions. He spoke of a trend to bring contemporary dance to ever-larger performance halls and audiences, and though this “gives an opportunity for a larger number of people [to see the work]” he feels that it “takes away from the art form.” He recalled his earlier work as a dancer, a time when he was “developing ideas, finding ways around something, and the joy of doing that.” And Szporer lamented the lack of dances that “mark people” in which they were “people doing movements I had not seen before [...], a sort of ecstatic moment, feeling I was watching something that I knew I was never going to see again.” (I-PS)

As a self-professed “dance addict”, dance writer Howe-Beck pondered the low social status of dance performance, especially of the contemporary variety. She had been on a fast-track career as a journalist when she chose dance criticism as her *métier* and became consequently marginalized among her journalist colleagues for whom dance held “zero status.” She cited “a fear that they might not be entertained” and “having to do some head work” as a reason for the relatively youthful, “small, slow-growing audiences” for contemporary dance in Montréal. Why, she sighed, does this kind of dance performance appeal to so few people? (I-LH) Howe-Beck’s colleague

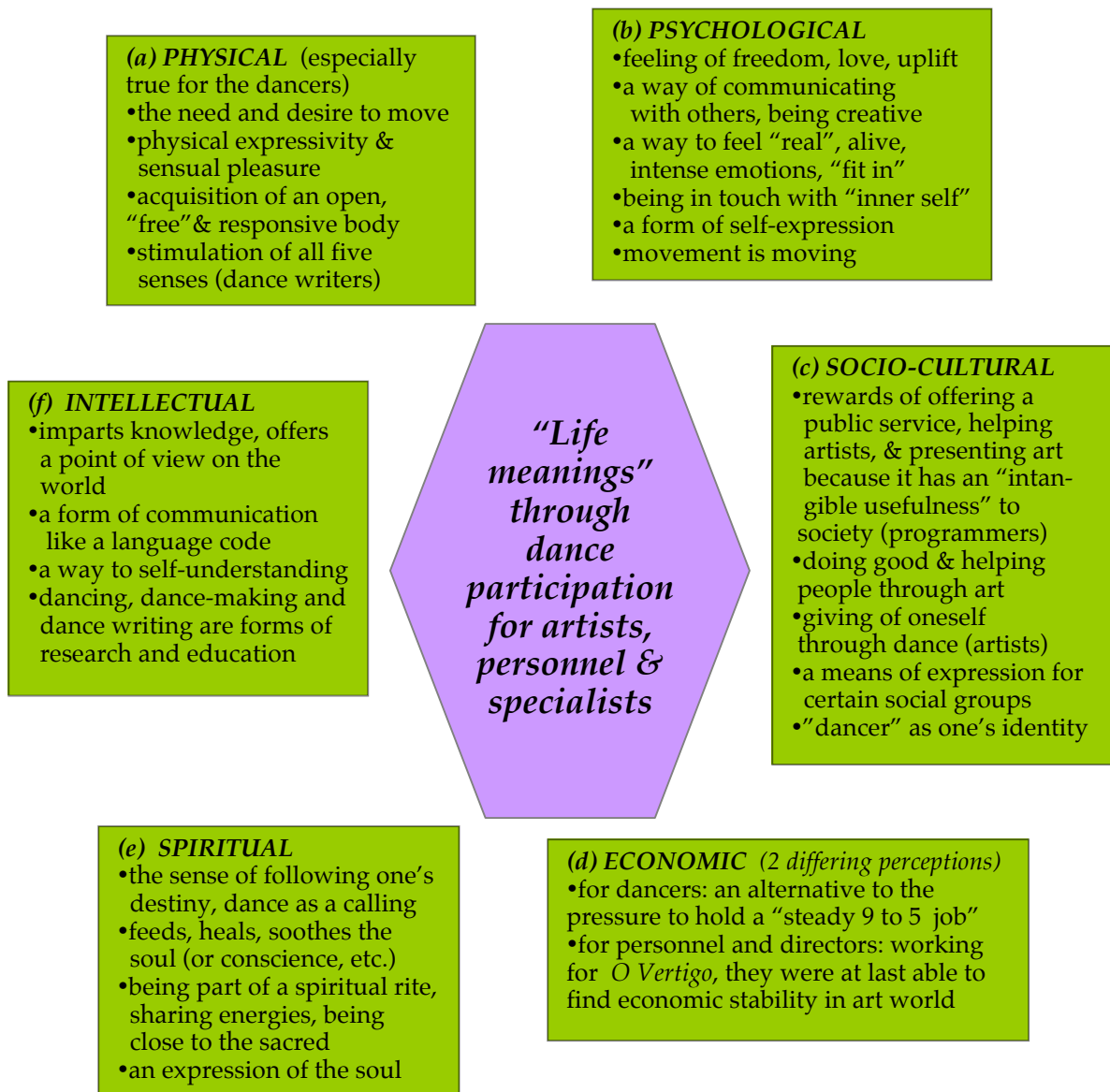
Tembeck, in a similar vein, concurred that dance had found little place in public discourse, in the daily lives of people. And so she had “always been wanting to make people, or to help make people, perceive dance as an integral part of society.” Like Howe-Beck she deplored the lack of consciousness of dance of any kind in Montréal society:

Just make a little analysis of how often dance is seen in our dailies. Only before a show, or after a show. That upsets me a lot. It’s as though dance doesn’t exist, dance, dance, [...] I’m saying that dance does not exist in print for everyman. But music does. And theater does. And, you see where in the paper it arrives. (In] *Le Devoir*, it’s the last page. The last page! (I-IT)

From their perspectives as specialists who spend the greater part of their lives observing and analyzing contemporary dance, Howe-Beck and Tembeck wondered why it was that so few members of Montréal society-at-large chose to participate, and so find meaning, in this expressive art form they have found so engaging.

#### 7.5 A synthesis of life meanings for artists, personnel and specialists

How to make sense of the many varieties of life meanings expressed by these artistic, personnel and specialist participants? I feel it is pertinent once more to remember that the undertaking of *Luna* was guided by artworld conventions but carried no single prescribed set of meanings for all participants.



**Figure 7.1** Genres of life meanings that artists, personnel and specialists found through participation in the dance world and the *Luna* dance event. (The order of elements is random and not a hierarchy.)

I have clustered evidence about the life meanings expressed in this chapter into six genres which are charted schematically in Figure 7.1.

They were rarely present in isolation of each other but were expressed in clusters of two or more for each participant. These meanings were also sometimes correlated as cause-and-effect, as with for instance a participant who found that physical sensation evoked an emotion, or another who felt that exchanging intellectual ideas with artists brought her closer to that which was sacred.

The in-depth interviews yielded a rich and varied set of life meanings. This is likely due not only to the depth of conversation, but also to the fact that almost all of the participants interviewed – artists, personnel and specialists -- lived their lives inside the contemporary dance (or art) world from which they drew both livelihood and “vocational identity”. The dance event’s influence on their lives was more pervasive than “having an evening out at the dance” as was the case for most spectators.

Various theories about art and (personal and social) life emerged among the artists, personnel, specialists and theorists of the *Luna* event. Through this study (and especially the interviews) I have discovered that these notions were fashioned out of a complex matrix of factors such as: the resources available in one’s immediate environment, guidance of a mentor, views and beliefs about the arts inherited through ethnic and/or national identity, educational background, opportunities encountered, parents’ attitudes and the home life that was created, social life with friends and co-workers, and so on.

The nature of each of the six genres of life meaning is briefly looked at below, with reference to relevant dance theories and beliefs. The genres have been identified throughout the above texts, but here they are synthesized and some of their implications are discussed for the ensemble of vocational event participants.

### 7.5.1 Physical

An expressive body in motion (and in stillness) is the trademark of dance, it's distinction as an art form among others. Physical life meanings were most apparent among those who had danced or had some kind of body training.

Whether or not there is a genetic predisposition for certain people to move their bodies expressively (and so to become dancers if the circumstances are right) is a question yet to be answered by geneticists and perhaps neurobiologists. But what emerges clearly is that all participants in this study who had trained and performed in dance showed signs of an irrepressible physicality as a toddler. Their stories bear witness to a desire and need for a kind of physical activity they often described as exhilarating and sensual. Many spoke about their physical training as an intense experience, and I observed during fieldwork how they consistently pushed their own boundaries of strength, skill and stamina. Several dancers spoke of becoming accustomed to feeling their bodies "open" and responsive through dancing, and that the contemporary dancer's way of moving procured for them a sense of living fully and of freedom, especially to "be oneself." Some described the artistic dancing they do as a form of body-to-body communication. Dance programmer and former Contact Improvisor Schwartz called it the "necessity of body-feeling" (I-SS) which he gained when moving his own body in dance classes, as if a necessary enrichment of his understanding of the dance that he brings to his audiences.

As for those *Luna* participants who had never studied or performed dance, but had chosen the performing arts milieu as their workplace, most mentioned a special affinity they had found for the physicality of dance. This affinity took many forms, from the visual designer's fascination with imagery of moving bodies to the technical director's special kinesthetic sensitivities to the manipulation of lighting instruments.

The physical imperative to move vigorously and expressively and the benefits it reaps, have been cited by dance theorist Laban throughout his writings (e.g. 1988). And ethnomusicologist Blacking (1980) proposed that “performances of dance [...] can [...] help to bring coherence to the sensuous life, the ‘intelligence of feeling’ which in turn can affect motivation, commitment, and decision-making in other spheres of life” p. (65). But it was aesthetics philosopher Shusterman (1999) who has been defining a body-centered method for understanding the arts, and to whom I now turn for theoretical grounding on the physical satisfactions and somatic meanings of dance. He initially defined this new branch of aesthetics as “the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory aesthetic appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning” (p. 302). One of the dimensions of somaeasthetics would be then to “describe the basic nature of our bodily perceptions and practices and their function in our knowledge and construction of reality” (p. 304). I am thinking here of how the *O Vertigo* dancers spoke about their body’s openness, fullness and responsiveness, and the way in which these perceptions reflected a set of values by which they had chosen to live their lives and apprehend the world.

### 7.5.2 Psychological

Many of the dancers (and this is true for myself as well) declared that it was when they discovered contemporary dance they finally found the place where they belonged in the art world, and even in society. As a member of the dance world they could “feel real” as Rose (I-DR) and Lamothe (I-PL) put it, and could express their emotions with the necessary unbridled intensity. The practice of sports had satisfied their need to move vigorously early on in their youth, but it wasn’t until they came across what they felt was the relatively less competitive, but challenging, ethos of contemporary dance

creation and improvisation that they felt at home with themselves. With dancing, they had also found a particular way of communicating with others that they could understand. Most declared that their dance training had brought them emotional growth and that by dancing they came into touch with their “inner selves”. The kind of dancing they did with Laurin, especially during the creative process period of *Luna*, called upon not only their physical abilities, but also their own creative ideas and impulses. Also among those participants who were *Luna*’s dancers, and also others who danced or had danced, were several who spoke of contemporary dancing as a way of being what they termed as the “freedom to be themselves.”

Many of the artistic and specialist participants who had chosen dance as their vocation, spoke in euphoric terms when describing their relationship with dance. They declared that working in the dance world had brought them feelings of happiness, ecstasy, and even love. Several likened their first experiences with contemporary dance to that of falling instantly in love and consequently making a life-long commitment. The darker side of this emotional (and physical) engagement, at least for the professional dancers, was the pain and frustration I observed during fieldwork stemming from dance injuries, both chronic and occasional.

These psychological motivations are also reminiscent of theories from dance anthropology about how dance functions as a form of non-verbal communication (Hanna, 1980), or as Blacking (1980) wrote, “the notion that ideas and feelings can be expressed collectively through dance and music before they are articulated in speech” (p. 65). And dance historian Jeschke’s account of German Expressionist art in the ‘20s (1989) seems particularly kin to the emotional testimony and outlook of *Luna* participants in this section: “[...] art [for Expressionists] is no longer what is generally considered beautiful, but directly expresses what moves artists emotionally, what appears necessary, ‘true’ to them”(p. 19).



### 7.5.3 Socio-cultural

Some of the artistic participants in *Luna* expressed their belief that contemporary dance has beneficial social purposes, but also that it serves as a form of cultural and social identity.

Peter Brinson (1980) asked “Can dance itself, using the powers of imagery, directly stimulate political and social action?” (p. 208). Substitute electronic age for industrial society in 2005 at the time of this writing. Although a few expressed some doubts, all *Luna* participants articulated the belief that the dancing they do “does good” in some way: helps people (in a general sense), has the power to heal, has value and worth as an important part of social life, and that it has an intangible but certain usefulness to society. In their view, dancing was thought of as a “cultural resource” or, as dancer Rose put it an act of “building culture” (I-DR). Those who managed the various aspects of the dance event were inclined to think of their work as a public service, because helping artists and bringing art to audiences. In this vein of social service, dance writer Brody described herself as a public dance educator, and historian Tembeck perceived her role as that of a self-described dance pioneer bringing the culture of dance to Québec society-at-large. Some of the dancers spoke of their performances as a time when they shared themselves with others. They shared their knowledge, self-discoveries and even “energies” (as they put it) with the spectators and among themselves even as they danced.

Some *Luna* participants affirmed that being a dancer or working in the performing arts served as part of their social identity. I am particularly fond of Demers’ metaphor of dancing as a “meticulous métier like that of a jeweler or a watchmaker” (I-MD) in the sense of honing a precise and useful skill, and Barry’s description of dance as “a shared way of life” (I-AB/RB) and so a way to participate in a community of dancers. Their chosen vocation meant more to them than just a form of employment, they shared together a mission

to create and bring dance to audiences. Rehearsal director Brisson and technical assistant Ouelette loved touring as a way of life, bringing them the chance to travel, meet new people and so expand to their views (I-AB/RB and FN: 12-15-00). Like Novack's Contact Improvisors, they all felt part of a community of experience (Novack, 1995), an international network of contemporary dance event participants linked by common experiences and understanding but without geographic boundaries. Choreographer Laurin even advanced her view that there were universal characteristics in contemporary choreography, allowing her work to tour and be understood throughout the world.

At the same time, Laurin introduced the idea that her choreography always bears the marks of her Québécois culture (I-GL1). As discussed earlier, these markers include her affiliation to the Automatists of the *Refus Global*, a personal sense of the soul gleaned from her Catholic upbringing, and the politics of her need to articulate and so affirm her identity as a Québécoise through dance. The expression of cultural or national characteristics by way of dance also came to light at various times throughout the study. Examples are Riede's discovery of dance improvisation as the pathway to freedom from the internalized restrictions of her East German past (I-AR), Demers' desire to bring her dance knowledge home to her Haitian homeland (I-MD), and the effects of Tembeck's multiple national identities on her critical views of Québec dance history (I-IT). For the dancers, not only were these identities somehow inscribed in the dance and into the dancing itself, but the socio-political circumstances in which they were raised and studied dance had contributed to their beliefs about the place of dance in society. Not only does the *nouvelle danse* event of *Luna* bear the markings of being made in Québec by a Québécoise choreographer, but inscribed into the dance even were the traces of the various cultural origins of its participants.

#### 7.5.4 Economic

A surprising divergence of views arose about the economic meanings of working in and for the *Luna* dance event. The dancers generally considered their engagement in the dance world as a welcome alternative to the daily grind of a regular nine-to-five job where they felt that they couldn't "fit in." In contrast, directors and personnel said that their job with the *O Vertigo* dance company had given them a chance at last to have a stable employment situation in the art world. This dichotomy of views is an echo of the two metaphors that arose in discussions about the company: that it was at once a large-scale corporation and a family-like group. A synthesis below of the differing attitudes of dancers and personnel, gleaned from earlier texts, sheds light on how it was that the contemporary dance world and a successful company like *O Vertigo*, could function both as a productive and viable cultural enterprise and as a refuge for the artists from whom it draws its vision.

Dancers Rose and Lamothe were quite clear that their choice to become dancers was not one of seeking economic stability and comfort. They decided to dance because it was in this kind of work that they had found a way of life alternative to that of society-at-large and the pressure they had felt to get a "real" job (I-DR and I-PL). Rodrigue left the field of competitive ice dancing for contemporary dance as an economic choice because it simply cost less to train and work in the performing arts (I-MR). Dancers Nguyen and Barry left behind career choices in the sciences with jobs that might have provided them with more financial stability, for the uncertain income of a life in dance (I-KN and I-AB). Although *O Vertigo* provided relatively high salaries, Québécois dancers as a group are reported to have the lowest of incomes among their artistic peers in other fields, and reported an average income of 20,200\$ a year in comparison to the general average of 28,708\$ (Baillargeon, 2004, p. C8). Dance writers belong in this category of low-

income earners as well, with the exception of university professors like Tembeck, and spoke of piecing together a living wage with difficulty by working at many jobs to support their vocation (I-SB, I-PS, I-LH).

From their point of view, the directors, managers, staff and technicians perceived their contracts with *O Vertigo* to be a welcome possibility of a steady, stable income with good working conditions in one of Québec's largest and best-funded dance companies (I-BL, I-JP and FN: 12-15-00). This was also true for those working in the large-scale venues to which *O Vertigo* went on tour with *Luna*. I recall programming director Wexler's calculated choice to stay in the field of the dance he so loved, but at the same time to seek a way of earning a better income than that afforded dancers (I-MW). So he left behind the choice of dancing for that of administrating dance. And for at least dance specialist Tembeck, a career as a tenured professor had provided financial stability and a respected social status that few dance professionals had attained.

Linking the divide was one certainty: none of the (non-audience) participants working in the *Luna* dance event considered their métier as the ladder to great economic fortune. But all of them hoped to attain at least some kind of basic financial stability.

#### 7.5.5 Spiritual

Spiritual beliefs of several kinds proved to be a subtle but pervasive kind of meaning for *Luna* artists, personnel and specialists (although lacking in the conversations with the focus group spectators below).

All Québécois participants, and some of the others, told me that they believed the force of destiny was at work in bringing them to become dancers – suggesting the intervention of “a higher power”. They recounted how it was that a fateful series of events had brought them into the dance world. Dancing for them was “a calling”.

Fragments of several conversations also made reference to spiritual beliefs: Szporer always sought “a state of ecstasy” at performances (I-PS), Howe-Beck mused that dance was probably an expression of the soul (I-LH), Boucher felt that artists were close to the sacred (I-DB), and Riede intimated that dancing “was what her soul wanted” (I-AR). Rose and Nguyen thought of dance as a holistic practice, a way to connect body and soul. In the wake of the 9/11 World Trade Center catastrophe in New York City, *Luna* programmer Wexler told me how his audiences seemed to find in the *Luna* performances way to “soothe of their spirit” (I-MW). And choreographer Laurin spoke of enduring traces of her strict Catholic girlhood in her belief in a soul or conscience, imprinting images of angels in her choreography (I-HB1).

It was dancer Rodrigue for whom the practice of contemporary dance had become a spiritual one under the influence certain Eastern mystical beliefs she was practicing. She characterized live dance performances as “rites of energies, souls and light.” In this “frame of soul,” she thought of the meaning of dance as if having been given a gift to promote harmony in the world (I-MR).

Although this modest collection of remarks about spiritual meanings doesn’t point to the conclusion that the *Luna* event was generally recognized by artists, audiences and specialists as a kind of spiritual rite, but neither was it devoid of spiritual meanings for its participants.

#### 7.5.6 Intellectual.

At the core of the intellectual meanings expressed by *Luna* participants, particularly Francophones (and including audience members), were the metaphors of contemporary dance choreography as a kind of language, code, and as a form of research.

Some participants claimed this non-verbal “dance language” as a form of communication in which a point of view about the world was exposed. They also put it this way: that dance has a message to give, something to say. As technical director Proulx said, “ [...] the performance remains a tribune for creators. One doesn’t just create images, one creates content, one creates something to say”<sup>xxxii</sup> (I-JP). Since by definition contemporary artists are discovering and creating innovative choreographic material, the creative artists in *Luna* talked about their practice as “choreographic research” in the sense of seeking new knowledge in the field of dance. This status of choreographic creation as research in the academic sense is actually enshrined in university dance departments like that in which Tembeck worked, at the *Université du Québec à Montréal*. This very research project is part of a doctoral level program that recognizes the academic viability of graduate studies in art-making processes.

Thinking about dance as a literary text has so deeply impregnated the French language at the present time that the notion of choreographic style is frequently called *écriture chorégraphique* among Francophones, literally meaning “choreographic writing” (a term that has not impregnated the English-speaking dance world). And Francophones call the innovative contemporary choreographer an *auteur* (translating literally as author), under the influence of the French genre *cinéma d’auteur*. An entire academic theory of language and meaning, but not subscribed to by all dance theorists, is behind a way of seeing artistic phenomena in terms of language-like code: semiotics.

It was among the dance writers, programmers and board member (also an art curator) that conversations with artists were described as one of the great intellectual pleasures of being in the dance world. Boucher and Gosselin felt that these intimate and wide-ranging discussions were a way in which they had enhanced their own knowledge of dance and also contributed to the artists’ own understanding of what they are doing in their artwork.

These conversations took on the form of more formal interviews for dance writers and radio hosts Brody and Szporer. Both of them were passionate about having long and in-depth talks with artists for their written articles and radio broadcasts, even if only a small portion of the material was made public (I-SB and I-PS).

## 7.6 Life meanings for spectators

The section about the audience comes last and takes a somewhat different form than those above for several reasons. Since they numbered literally in the thousands, it was only possible in the end (as seen in the methodology chapter) to sample the ideas of a small group of spectators in the context of post-performance focus groups. In this context, where they each were only able to contribute a few ideas, there was less time for in-depth development as in the interviews but it did mean that a lively exchange of ideas occurred among them. And unlike the vocational event participants portrayed in the previous sections, their engagement with the Luna event was of a short duration, in general about two hours or so, a relatively short period in which to observe them.

During the focus group sessions, the 22 spectators spoke about various motives that drew them to attend *Luna* in the first place (and also to dance performances in general). They also recounted the kinds of meaning that dance spectating had given to their lives. Also revealed during the discussions were particular views and beliefs about dance as an artistic phenomenon that they carried with them as they entered the theatre. Some of them explained the way in which their ideas on dance were gleaned throughout their lifetimes from sources such as discussions with friends and relatives, educators, television programs, previous exposure to the arts, reading about dance, taking dance classes and talking with dancers. With

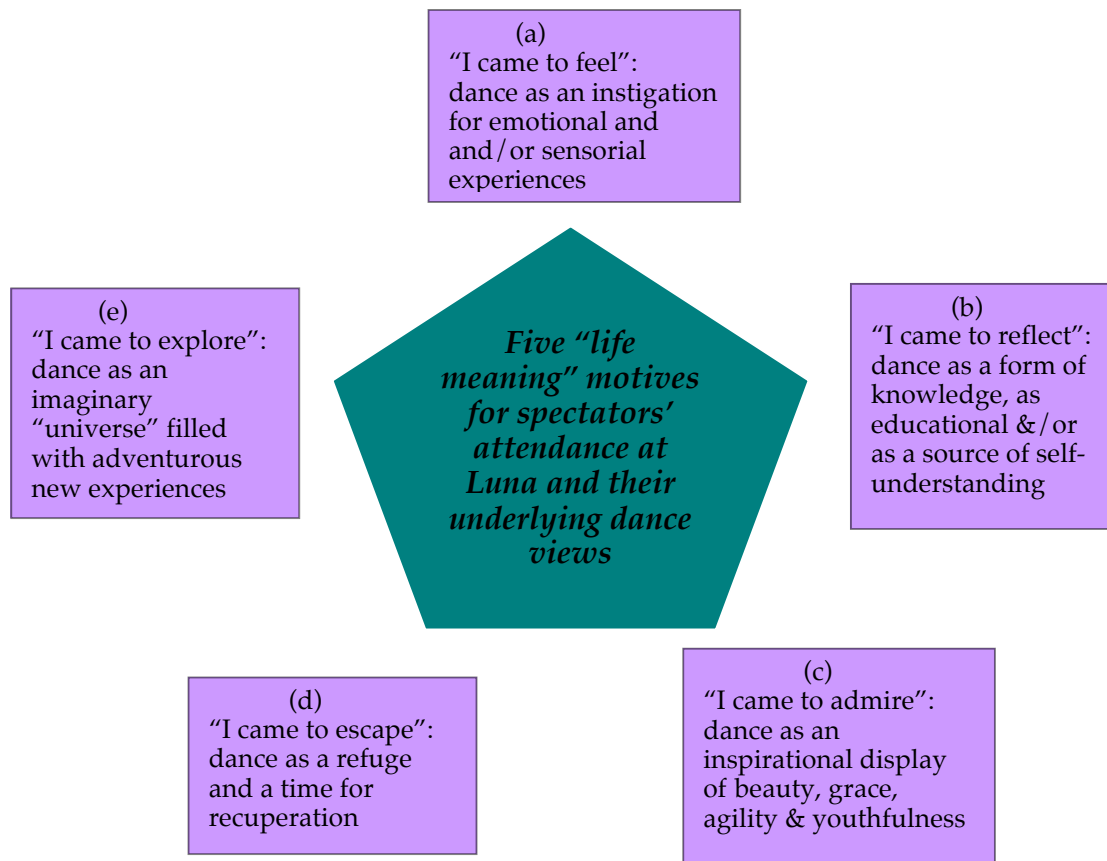
their interest in the nature of human experience, phenomenologists call this predisposition a “horizon of expectations” (Fraleigh, 1999).

Because this study is a portrait of only one dance event in a specific, bounded time and place, it is important to recall that the practice of dance spectating is not static. As Cloutier and Provonost (1992) discovered in the course of their Québec arts audience study (1992), and the *Luna* focus group members confirmed, various points of view -- knowledge, attitudes, opinions -- about professional dance are acquired within a socio-cultural context throughout one’s lifetime and remain in continuous flux. For example, bearing witness to this ever-changing perspective, *Luna* spectator Antonyk offered this account of how his perspective on contemporary dance performances had shifted over time from one of simple pleasure with the dancing to an interest in understanding the content communicated by the moving bodies:

I found in the beginning it was just pure enjoyment of watching movement, body movement. But I found as time went on ... that communication through the body became more interesting to me than communication through words. (FG1: Antonyk)

Synthesized schematically in Figure 7.2 below, I have distinguished five genres of motivation for dance-going, which can also be seen as life meanings, which arose from the focus group data. These meanings were oftentimes expressed as having been experienced in combinations of two or more.





**Figure 7.2** Life meanings that motivated the attendance of 22 audience members at *Luna*. (The order of elements is random, and not a hierarchy.)

Each category is aligned with a corresponding underlying view about the purpose that this kind of dancing and dance experience held for them. Each of these five motivations and dance views is further elaborated below in the context of this particular performance of *Luna*, and in reference to Québécois culture and Occidental arts practices.

### 7.6.1 I came to feel

Six of the 22 focus group members expressed a belief that dance performances were meant to display and evoke heightened emotions and

sensations, a clear correspondence with the intentions of dancers like Rose (I-DR) and Lamothe (I-PL). Spectator Jerry Antonyk, for instance, spoke emphatically about his emotional orientation:

I guess basically I watch to feel emotions. If I feel emotional with the piece I am watching then I feel like I am gaining something from the piece. [I asked a friend] Did you get any feeling, emotion? Did it take your breath away sometimes?  
(Antonyk, FG3)

From three decades of immersion in the Québec dance world as teacher and arts presenter, I expected and found a significant number of spectators who “feel” the dances they are watching. Occidental art historians have named this aesthetic orientation Expressionism, an artistic school of thought based on the belief that emotions are necessarily the driving force behind artistic creation and interpretation. As Tembeck’s historical thesis (1994) on Québec’s contemporary dance movement brings into evidence, many of the key Québécois choreographers (including Ginette Laurin) who began their careers in the ‘eighties, have indeed subscribed to this emotional approach of choreographic creation.

It is possible to distinguish the motive and view of sensation from that of emotion, the former being allied to a physical, kinesthetic perception and the latter to a psychological phenomenon. On the subject of sensorial motivation and apprehension, here are two experiences of this kind that were described by focus groups members:

... I guess I’m more interested in feeling how the dance flows, the images and the kinesthetic reactions I have in my own body when seeing the dance. ... So it’s really more a physical

appreciation of the dance than a search of meaning in the dance. (Hobden, FG1)

But this [the message of the dance] is not important. It's the beauty of the gestures. The beauty one looks at. Looking at those people (dancing) there. Me, I would have liked...even though I don't know how to dance...but I almost had the urge to go and dance with them. <sup>xxxiii</sup> (Logueux, FG2)

Both spectators consider this physical body-to-body appreciation of dancers preferable to an intellectual search for a particular meaning or message.

Are the spectators who spoke about sensation during the focus groups reacting in kind to a sensorially saturated aesthetic (under the influence of some sense oriented dance or movement training)? Or are they simply sensually sensitive (kinesthetically-oriented) dance watchers? Or both? As I have frequently observed in situ and witnessed in my fieldnotes, close observation of these sensorial spectators often reveals them actually producing empathetic micro-movements in their seats as they watch, a physical reaction to the dancer's movements. It is ironic that for these sensual audience members that the current-day decorum of most contemporary dance performances requires nearly complete stillness and silence from the audience. As a kinesthetic viewer myself, I often myself producing small sympathetic micro-movements during the performance, and I am left wondering if I am disturbing less physically emphatic spectators sitting nearby.

It is commonly stated by dance theorists that it is the presence of expressively moving bodies that distinguishes dance from other art forms. It was during the Expressionist period that proponents of this dance movement began to analyze dance in terms of "dynamics", a move towards the "felt

qualities” of the movements. This notion took a particular postmodern turn with the dance form Contact Improvisation, a way of dancing based largely on attentiveness to physical forces and inner sensations at play within one’s own body through a point of contact with another dancer (Novak, 1990 & 1997). Attention to bodily sensation is currently a widespread component of dance training, and also embedded at the core of a field of body techniques called somatics.

### 7.6.2 I came to reflect

In the *Luna* focus group conversations no fewer than 16 of the 22 speakers revealed some level of intellectual reflection and interpretation. Ironically, I found that even those who declared themselves to be against interpretation of a self-consciously mental kind did so articulately! For these intellectually inclined spectators the dance performance embodied in some way ideas about the world, metaphors, a language or code, and/or evoked various kinds of self-reflection and self-identification. Among the many instances, here are two varieties:

As a human being, I recognize myself in that [dancing] even if I don’t dance with my body ... it’s as if it was an extension of me.<sup>xxxiv</sup> (Desnoyers, FG2)

First of all, I think everything we see in our daily lives we interpret ... everything has meaning, that’s basic, a kind of fundamental thing about being a human being. And I think we are quite able to turn gestures into metaphors, just kind of like a language. (Kevin, FG2)

Like Desnoyers, some saw aspects of their own lives and identities reflected in the dancing, or in their thought in the aftermath, as if watching *Luna* had been a journey of self-discovery. Discussed in more detail in the next section, these rationalizing audience members spent at least part of their spectating time in the throes of analytic mental processes.

It is not surprising to find so much intellectual apprehension of the dance performance in light of the relatively high educational level of *Luna* focus group members. As well as a tendency towards intellectualism, they articulated the notion that art is composed of, and that at least one of its purposes is, to generate ideas. Whether consciously or not, they have likely benefited from the lore of Western aesthetic Enlightenment philosophy and its proposal that art is meant to be apprehended rationally as a source of knowledge about the world and path to self-understanding, whether it is seen as an aesthetic object requiring distanced contemplation or an engaged social practice. And one of the pivotal occidental artistic movements in the last century, Conceptual Art, based its credo entirely on the viability of idea-based art practices.

### 7.6.3 I came to admire

Seven focus group spectators expressed emphatic admiration for the artistry, skillfulness and beauties of the dance, dancers and dancing. For these admiring focus group members, watching the *Luna* performance was a matter of, in their own words: a moment of pure enjoyment (Antonyk and Dura, FG1), seeing the body moving so freely (Simard, FG3), admiration for hard-working agile young bodies (J. Hubert, FG3), a chance to be inspired by the beauty of the gestures (Logueux, FG2; Dura, FG1). This attitude of admiration was clearly articulated by the youngest focus group spectator:

I'm 16 and it's true that this is the first time I've come to see a dance performance. [...] And why I chose to come tonight to see a performance is that I have always been fascinated by dance. I find there is something magnificent, a kind of grace in the movements, and I find that quite beautiful. <sup>xxxv</sup> (A. Simard, FG3)

As evidenced by Simard above, and all 5 admiring focus group members, admiration serves to procure pleasurable aesthetic experiences for its proponents, who have come in anticipation of this effect. Foster (1995) points out in her theory of choreographic paradigms that this attitude renders the dance performance a celebratory occasion (pp. 42-43). And so for these spectators, an admirable performance might be thought of as a kind of celebration of the human body's capabilities and ideal proportions. To put it yet another way, the *Luna* performance offered them a display of exemplary physical skills, beauty, gracefulness, emotions, movements and bodies. Cultural theorist Carole Becker (2002) proposes that this particular image of artists as admirable beings is a matter of living vicariously: "[...] At times we have been known to revere artists, to think of them as unique or even superior beings who live deeply inside their creative selves, while the rest of us often forfeit these more ephemeral aspects of ourselves for jobs that we may find less fulfilling [...]" (p. 12).

Admiration of these characteristics (beauty, skill, artistry) can be said to be widely shared values among Montréalers because often revered as well in the performances of other kinds of popular Québécois public performances such as competitive sport meets and popular singing concerts. Dancers, for instance, like elite athletes are seen by the public at large to be ideal models of health, harmony and fitness, serving to push the limits of human physical capacities. (It is ironic that dancers are particularly prone to severe health problems and physical injuries, even deformations because of the demands of

the profession.) Spectator Jeannine Hubert remarks that she doesn't even try to understand what is happening. Instead, she prefers giving her attention to the agility of the dancing bodies on stage, suggesting to my mind as well that admiration may provide a point of meaningful entry for those spectators who either can't or prefer not to "make sense" of the choreographic content.

An ever-changing notion of beauty and pleasurable aesthetic experience has long been associated with the very idea of art itself, notions whose hegemony is in dispute in particular since the advent of postmodern art. And the quest for beauty in dance apparently persists among some, if not all, of the *Luna* spectators. Shusterman (2002) would reconcile the opposing views of those who would admire the superficial beauty and those who would seek deeper meanings for art. He points out that attention to the immediacy of surface appearances, as he calls the love of beauty, is allied etymologically to the idea of aesthetics. He explains that it is typically "associated with the pleasure of sensuous form" which stresses the "impassioned immediacy of experience" (p. 1). All the while arguing for deeper interpretations of content and context, he also advocates the very necessity and interrelatedness of this superficial aesthetic apprehension "as it cultivates, the rich and productive power of sensory appearance" (p. 27). Spectator Ella Dura bears witness to this productive power:

Well, it's so meaningful, any kind of beauty in the world! I just go because I want to enjoy and I think that's what gives meaning to the world. (Dura, FG1)

#### 7.6.4 I came to "escape"

Several Francophone focus groups members spoke of dance-going as a form of escape, an imperfect but near translation of the French word *evasion*

that they used. These three excerpts indicate differing and particular forms it took:

And so, each time that I come to see dance performances, it's to change my routine, to air out my spirit and to fill up with energy. The dancers literally empty themselves and fill you up with energy even as you watch them.<sup>xxxvi</sup> (Villeneuve, FG3)

I would say that it's a little like going to theatre. Maybe to forget, to flee, to escape, to escape from one's self, to experience new sensations.<sup>xxxvii</sup> (Tremblay, FG3)

You might say that what it brings me is a good time to relax. It's the visuals, the expression, the freedom.<sup>xxxviii</sup> (Hubert, FG3)

Contemporary dance performance as what form of escape? In the three citations above it is implied that the demands and routine of everyday life were countered during a dance performances. These dance occasions provided Villeneuve with change, and for spiritual and energetic renewal; for Tremblay, it was an opportunity to "flee and forget one's self" through the experience of new sensations; while Hubert considered dance spectating as a time in her life to enjoy recuperative relaxation.

The idea that going out to an artistic performance is a form of leisure-time activity and escape from everyday life is culturally pervasive in Montréal. In the English language, the concept of entertainment (and also amusement) is a close corollary to *évasion*, the French term used in the focus groups, referring to those pleasure-filled activities that take place outside of the everyday world of family responsibilities and work life. These functions for art also emerged from a spectator's point of view in both the massive cross-Canadian (*Cultur'Inc. et Décima Research*, 1992) and a small-scale



Québécois study (Cloutier and Pronovost, 1996). In the former, the researchers found that more than 2/3 of Canadians who go to performances (of all artistic genres) do so above all to be entertained and to relax (p. 44). As well, among those who had recently attended a performance and would like to do so more often, 67% were entirely or somewhat in agreement with the idea that the arts provide a welcome change from everyday life (p. 57). As for the smaller, local research project with 20 performing arts spectators in Québec, the desire for escape and relaxation (*evasion* and *détente* in French) was pervasive. These were the only motives mentioned by all respondents in seeking contact with seven out of the eight art forms including dance but with opera as the exception (p. 68).

The belief that the arts essentially serve society as a leisure-time activity, with which to counter the pressures and dreariness of work and everyday life, is also at the core of a lively debate among those Occidental aesthetic specialists who have concerned themselves with the definition and authenticity of art. It has created a split between those who, on the one side, identify innovative and contemporary art-making practices (the “avant-garde”) with revolutionary political and educational goals. And at the other side of the debate, so it goes, are those cultural studies’ scholars who advocate for artworks that are “popular” and so less elitist because they have more widespread appeal (and economic viability). Reception theorist Bennett (1997) explains these aesthetic positions as a series of competing political visions within modern theatre practice: escapism/illusionism vs. realism, bourgeois vs. more widely relevant values, sedate vs. actively engaged spectators (as co-creators), and text-centered vs. artist/audience meanings. In this view, as Bennett explains it, escapism is an undesirable bourgeois pastime involving sedentary spectatorship and mediation by expert texts (p. 6).

It is not the aim of this study to advocate for one or the other of these positions. The reality of the *Luna* spectators in this study proved to be a

complex phenomenon revealing the coexistence, within the same group of spectators, of multiple and overlapping points of view about the purpose of dance performances.

#### 7.6.5 I came to explore

For several spectators in the focus groups, the illuminated stage space with its imaginative choreographic goings on became an evocative self-contained “world” or “universe” (a metaphor commonly used by the spectators and other participants) that existed for the time of the performance. Two focus group excerpts described variations on this perspective:

What I experienced (from watching a dance performance) is related to living in a “world”. As if the dancers allow me to enter a world into which I don’t have access in everyday life. By gaining access to this world, I can live things, I can feel things.<sup>xxxix</sup> (Diop, FG3)

I would say that it’s a little like going to theater...going to abandon oneself to the world of images perhaps. Especially with modern dance which doesn’t take us into a narrative – or sometimes it does, but in any case – it allows our imagination to run free. To escape reality maybe, or to let us get inside some fantastic images, dreams that we don’t have in reality, that are in front of us. Things that we haven’t been able to imagine.<sup>xl</sup> (Tremblay, FG3)

For Diop, it was the dancers who give him entry into the world they create onstage, a world which enables him to feel and live things absent in his

life outside of the theatre. And Tremblay, himself a dancer, went to dance with the intention of abandoning himself to what he hopes will be fantastic non-realistic images, and so escaping the “real world” for a certain time. The way they described their experiences suggested to my mind a psychological voyage into a dreamlike time and space that an artist has invented, kin perhaps to the non-realistic literary genres of fantasy or science fiction.

The spectators who viewed the performance as an adventure in to a fictional land with its own imagined behavioral codes, expressed the advantages of this experience as being able to live and feel things not possible otherwise. Others explained it as the sharing of someone else’s vision and so an expansion of one’s own. They assumed the outlook of explorers venturing into fantastic choreographic landscapes hoping to discover new dance terrains. This view of dance performance also brings to mind the Western illusionist theater tradition calling for an audience’s “willing suspension of disbelief” as it is commonly called by theater professionals.

At first thought this attitude bears resemblance to that of escape (in the previous section), because both are characterized by a flight from everyday life. In contrast to the adventurous audience members who “came to immerse”, the escapees came looking for respite and a comfortable, familiar experience. On the other hand, those focus group spectators who came to *Luna* for an immersion into an imaginative world, sought the rousing excitement of exploration, even that which might be destabilizing and uncomfortable.

With *Luna*, choreographer Laurin has in fact created a non-narrative and symbolic “universe” through invented movements, light, costumes, spoken text, electronic images and props. Non-realist and abstract contemporary choreographic performances like *Luna* have historical roots in the modernist art movement, initiated at the end of the 19th century. I am thinking here of the imperative to bring art-making away from naturalistic reproductions of real life into the realm of imaginary, intuitive impressions of

the real world (for creators and audiences alike) in artistic movements such as Impressionism, Surrealism, Dadaism, and Automatism.

It bears mentioning that dance-like behavior like that in the *Luna* performance, rarely resembles and only occasionally refers to, the way people actually move and express themselves in the “real” world. In the early 20th century, Occidental Modern Dancers set out to distill everyday movement and so to create symbolic movement metaphors, which in time became codified through diverse schools of dance technique, fashioned by the visions of their creators (Graham, Nikolais, Cunningham, Limon, Horst, and so on). And the postmodern dance movement that followed it no longer based dance-making in the aesthetics of training techniques, but called for the continual reinvention and innovation of choreographic material and concepts each time a dance was to be made.

And so, the focus group spectators who were delighted by the chance to immerse in the imaginary choreographic world of *Luna*, whether knowingly or not, were the kinds of active and curious spectators envisioned by modernist and postmodernist choreographers as they created their fantastic and poetic compositions.

#### 7.6.6 Cross-genres of these modes

It is important to note that these five modes of apprehension, were not necessarily exclusive of one another. The vast majority actually described experiencing a combination of modes, either in the form of an attention that shifted from one to another, or as a fluid mixture of several that occurred simultaneously. For instance, Diop experienced many modes at one and the same time:

[I came for] the experience, to see the bodies in motion! It's something that I didn't know very much about and so I had the urge to know, to feel, to see. <sup>xii</sup> (Diop, FG1)

And Villeneuve recounts a process by which one mode of apprehension led him successively to another:

[...] there is an emotional flow that occurs and which is lived during the performance and which fills one with energy, as I explained earlier. It's really this flow of emotions being mixed inside that causes reflection. A performance brings me to reflect on myself, on what I am living. <sup>xiii</sup> (Villeneuve, FG1)

As this sample of 22 spectators suggests and illustrates, there is currently no single predominant set of ideas or principles that constitutes a common understanding for all audience participants about contemporary professional dance in Montreal. Diverse schools of thought about art, artists and art practices co-habit the landscape of the current-day pluralist postmodern art world in Montréal.

## 7.7 Conclusion

To different degrees of intensity and despite occasional doubts and displeasures, evidence from these testimonials confirms that participating in the *Luna* event was indeed a meaningful part of the repertory of activities in the lives of participants. In the stories above this meaning took on the form of various kinds of pleasures and satisfactions, tempered by their role in the event and the dance views they carried in with them as they entered the dance studio, office and theater.

It is now clear that although how participants behaved was governed by established conventions and even contracts, there was no single way in which the event functioned to give meaning to their actions. But even if this small subculture of dance event aficionados did not share a common motive for their engagement, I was able to isolate various sites of consensus and particularly among the members of each participant group. The most striking example that comes to mind is the way in which the dancers and the choreographer reported the physical delights and powerful drive to move expressively that had long been a primal force in their lives, leading them finally to chose dance as their profession.

Returning to theoretical models about the meaning of dance events discussed in the theory chapter (Hanna, 1979; Kaeppler, 1985; Lange, 1975; Schechner, 1977; Spencer, 1985) it can be seen that this kind of contemporary dance event was a cathartic venting of tension for some, while for some it served as a spiritual rite, or again as a form of communication like a specially coded language for yet others. But as I also discovered while in the field with *Luna*, participation brought its proponents very personal rewards such as a sense of doing good in society, an experience of the extra-ordinary, or a way to enhance their understanding of the world. And so it might be said that the *Luna* dance event served many functions at once, in various ways for different participants.

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The original French texts.

<sup>i</sup> “[...] à l’école primaire où j’allais, le professeur laissait le gymnase ouvert après l’école et j’y allais toutes les fins de journée. Ce professeur d’éducation physique venait du cirque, il avait déjà fait des numéros d’acrobatie et montait des spectacles avec les jeunes. Alors ce sont sans doute les premiers contacts que j’ai eus avec le monde du spectacle, dans une situation de travail physique, et j’aimais beaucoup. [...]” Ginette Laurin

<sup>ii</sup> “[...] c’est resté là, c’est rentré.” Ginette Laurin

<sup>iii</sup> “[...] ce n’était pas un choix très précis, pas rationnel. Je n’ai pas décidé devenir chorégraphe. J’ai voulu poursuivre mon travail d’interprète mais en même temps, m’ouvrir à la facette de la création. Je ne pensais pas, au moment où je commençais à créer, que je deviendrais chorégraphe. C’était une autre façon de m’ouvrir, d’essayer. J’avais une attirance, une curiosité pour l’aspect de la création [...]. C’est comme si les choses arrivent et je me dis, ‘je vais essayer, c’est intéressant, je vais voir’.” Ginette Laurin

<sup>iv</sup> “[...] j’articulais un langage où la dimension humaine ressortait avec force et insistance.” Ginette Laurin

<sup>v</sup> “Ah oui, pour moi, la danse c’est ma vie et il faut que ma vie soit dans ma danse. C’est pas ma job, oh non pas du tout, c’est ma vie.” Marie-Claude Rodrigue

<sup>vi</sup> “Le goût de bouger, ça, je l’ai toujours eu.” Mélanie Demers

<sup>vii</sup> “[...] j’ai commencé à rencontrer les gens un peu partout dans le monde [...] ça t’ouvre des horizons énormes, ça pique ta curiosité, ça augmente constamment ton vouloir de danser et surtout de communiquer.” Raymond Brisson

<sup>viii</sup> “C’est beaucoup l’éveil de la vie et les forces auxquelles on est soumis et nourri. Marie-Claude Rodrigue

<sup>ix</sup> “Être à l’écoute de l’émotion des autres danseurs, échanger nos énergies, partager nos états d’âme sous forme de rituel chorégraphique, donner et recevoir la lumière intérieure qui irradie de chacun de nous, et s’ouvrir généralement pour partager ce bien-être avec les spectateurs. Marie-Claude Rodrigue

<sup>x</sup> “C’est comme une langue maternelle. On a l’impression que c’est la seule qui puisse exprimer le fond de notre pensée mais en apprenant une deuxième ou même une troisième langue, on se rend compte que certains mots ou concepts sont encore plus adéquats pour traduire une réalité.” Mélanie Demers

<sup>xi</sup> “[...] elle existe pour les gens...qui vont être rejoints par ça.” Mélanie Demers

<sup>xii</sup> “Il y a toujours des murs et moi, je ne voulais pas faire une “job steady,” je ne rentrais pas là-dedans. J’étais malheureux, c’est sûr. Depuis que j’étais enfant mon imaginaire était ailleurs. Alors, je voulais faire quelque chose

dans la vie qui puisse me permettre de faire des choses vraies.” Patrick Lamothe

<sup>xiii</sup> “[...] c’est mental et c’est physique en même temps. C’est très entier comme forme d’art. Ça implique tout le corps et l’esprit. C’était ça qui m’avait attirée.” Kha Nguyen

<sup>xiv</sup> “La première fois que j’étais sur une machine à coudre, tout de suite j’ai su, parce que visuellement j’ai toujours vu ma mère faire ça, la dextérité...” Denis Lavoie

<sup>xv</sup> “C’est la période de ma vie où j’ai eu presque un plan de carrière. [...] j’ai décidé de mener quelque chose à terme [et] d’être le meilleur.” Jocelyn Proulx

<sup>xvi</sup> “[...] tu fais quelque chose d’intéressant, d’un peu ‘glamour’, qui apporte quelque chose à la société.” Jocelyn Proulx

<sup>xvii</sup> “Les conditions monétaires, les conditions de travail, de structure de l’entreprise, m’apparaissent absolument...c’était parfait.” Jocelyn Proulx

<sup>xviii</sup> “Physiquement, j’ai toujours pensé que j’avais une sensibilité à l’intérieur de mon corps. Je suis quelqu’un de très physique, qui a un contact particulier avec la matière [et] avec l’espace.” Jocelyn Proulx

<sup>xix</sup> “l’âme d’une société” Jocelyn Proulx

<sup>xx</sup> “tribune pour les créateurs” Jocelyn Proulx

<sup>xxi</sup> “on ne crée pas juste des images, on crée du contenu, on crée quelque chose à dire” et “il arrive à me toucher et à me faire réfléchir, alors là je me dis que ça vaut la peine.” Jocelyn Proulx

<sup>xxii</sup> “Ça a été comme un coup de foudre [...] comme une découverte.” Lise Clément

<sup>xxiii</sup> “Pour moi, l’art est quelque chose d’important. Donc, en étant en contact avec des artistes, on est plus en contact avec des oeuvres d’art [et] ça nous éclaire sur la vie; et ça nous donne un autre aperçu de ce qui se passe dans le monde.” Diane Boucher

<sup>xxiv</sup> “[...] découvre des choses qui parfois sont même inconnues du chorégraphe. Surtout chez les jeunes chorégraphes. Ils font des choses, ou ils essaient des choses, et quand tu leur poses des questions, ils se rendent compte que: ‘Ha, bien oui, peut-être que j’ai fait ça pour ça mais sur le coup, je ne m’en suis pas rendu compte.’ Alors, il y a toute cette démarche-là, découvrir des sens ou donner des sens.” Diane Boucher

<sup>xxv</sup> “Des fois, c’est peut-être un peu plus difficile à trouver. [...] On peut découvrir beaucoup de choses dans l’œuvre que l’artiste ne sait pas. [...] Mais en même temps, je trouve ça intéressant de parler à l’artiste qui a son point de vue.” Diane Boucher

<sup>xxvi</sup> “[...] sans prendre de décision formelle, mais plutôt comme on suit le courant d’une rivière.” Line Lanthier

<sup>xxvii</sup> “[...] c’est par satisfaction personnelle qu’on le fait.” Line Lanthier

<sup>xxviii</sup> “[...] je vois comment ça fonctionne en danse et j’apprends de ce côté-là et on se donne des idées aussi des fois. Et pour ma satisfaction personnelle aussi,



bien entendu. Pour mon plaisir de savoir comment ça fonctionne, comment on monte une chorégraphie, quelles sont les idées des chorégraphes. Donc, j'apprends, c'est agréable." Claude Gosselin

<sup>xxix</sup> "[...] des fois on se dit pourquoi on danse, qu'est-ce que ça apporte aux gens, à la société? [...] Parce que je me sens préoccupée par le monde. J'ai voyagé beaucoup dans les pays du tiers-monde. Je me dis qu'il y a tellement de choses à faire pour aider les gens. [...] C'est triste je trouve [que nous pensons à la danse comme un luxe], parce que dans les pays pauvres, on danse! Je suis allée au Brésil, en Argentine, au Venezuela, au Mexique et on danse! C'est pour ça que dans les fêtes, je danse toujours avec les gens, je vais au Tango, je trouve ça nécessaire." Marie-Claude Rodrigue

<sup>xxx</sup> "Décider de faire du sens avec la danse, je pense c'est décider de faire quelque chose qui est inutile, [et] de l'accepter. Ce n'est pas utile pour la société, comme être médecin ou comme faire un travail de relation d'aide [...] je pense qu'on a besoin de l'inutile!" Mélanie Demers

<sup>xxxi</sup> "De façon condescendante, on regarde les danses du monde avec un air amusé en disant 'c'est joli...c'est folklorique.' Et du même coup on considère la danse contemporaine comme LA danse en oubliant qu'elle possède tout un alliage de références culturelles qui pourraient paraître folkloriques pour mon ami Tahirow! Je ne sais pas si le métissage est une solution, mais mes préoccupations tournent maintenant autour du fait que j'aimerais que ma danse puisse trouver un public autant à Montréal qu'à Ougadougou."

Mélanie Demers

<sup>xxxii</sup> "[...] le spectacle demeure une tribune pour les créateurs, on ne crée pas juste des images, on crée du contenu, on crée quelque chose à dire." Jocelyn Proulx

<sup>xxxiii</sup> "Mais ce [le message de la danse] n'était pas important, c'était la beauté des gestes. La beauté à regarder. Regardez ces gens-là. Moi, j'aurais envie...remarquez que je ne sais pas danser...mais on aurait presque envie d'aller danser avec eux." Ginette Logueux

<sup>xxxiv</sup> "En tant qu'humain je me reconnais là-dedans même si je ne danse pas avec mon corps [...] c'est comme si c'était une extension de moi qui est devant moi." Michel Desnoyers

<sup>xxxv</sup> "J'ai 16 ans et c'est vrai, c'est la première fois que je viens voir un spectacle de danse. [...] Et pourquoi j'ai choisi de venir voir un spectacle c'est que j'ai toujours été fascinée par la danse. Je trouve qu'il y a quelque chose de magnifique, une espèce de grâce dans les mouvements et je trouve ça très beau. Et je voulais voir ce que c'était que d'être là en direct, devant une scène, et de voir les danseurs." Andréa Simard

<sup>xxxvi</sup> "Et puis, chaque fois que je viens voir des spectacles de danse, c'est pour changer la routine comme vous l'avez mentionné, aérer les esprits et faire le plein d'énergie. Les danseurs vraiment se vident et vous remplissent d'énergie quand vous les regardez." Eric Villeneuve

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<sup>xxxvii</sup> “Je dirais que c’est un peu comme aller au théâtre. Peut-être pour oublier, fuir, évader, s’évader, vivre de nouvelles sensations.” Georges-Nicolas Tremblay

<sup>xxxviii</sup> “Disons que ce que ça m’apporte c’est une bonne détente. C’est le visuel, c’est l’expression, la liberté.” Laurette Hubert

<sup>xxxix</sup> “Comme si les danseurs me laissaient entrer dans un monde auquel je n’aurais pas accès dans la vie de tous les jours. En ayant accès à ce monde-là je peux vivre des choses, je peux sentir des choses [...]” Noumbe Diop

<sup>xl</sup> “Je dirais que c’est un peu comme aller au théâtre. [...] Aller s’abandonner au monde des images peut-être. Surtout avec la danse moderne qui ne nous amène pas dans une histoire – ou parfois oui, mais en tout cas – ça laisse libre cours à l’imagination. Pour fuir la réalité peut-être, ou se laisser aller à des images fantastiques, des rêves qu’on voit un peu en réalité, qui sont devant nous. Des choses qu’on aurait pas pu imaginer.” Georges-Nicolas Tremblay

<sup>xli</sup> “[Je suis venue pour] l’expérience, c’est de voir des corps en mouvement! C’est quelque chose que je ne connaissais pas énormément, que j’avais le goût de connaître, de sentir, de voir.” Noumbe Diop

<sup>xlii</sup> “[...] c’est qu’il y a un flot d’émotions qui rentre et qui est vécu pour le moment du spectacle et qui remplit d’énergie comme je l’ai expliqué tantôt. C’est vraiment ce flot d’émotions qui se mélange à l’intérieur et qui fait réfléchir. Un spectacle me porte à réfléchir sur moi-même, sur mon vécu.” Eric Villeneuve