

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT THE *LUNA* PERFORMANCES MEANT TO PARTICIPANTS: PERCEPTIONS, INTERPRETATIONS AND EVALUATIONS

At the epicenter of the dance event was situated the live performance of the *Luna* choreography, seventy-two minutes when what was happening onstage became the focus of everyone's attention (but for the box office staff and house manager who were busy accounting for ticket sales). Many months of preparation by artists and personnel had been leading to this "core" moment when the choreographic work was presented in the public sphere. This was the time when all were gathered together to bring the *Luna* performance "into existence by the ways they attend to, distinguish, define and act towards [this experiential essence]," as Prus phrased it (1996, p.11).

What notions did the *Luna* performance evoke in the minds, bodies and spirits of those who were dancing and watching? Were those who manipulated the technical effects and administrative tasks on the periphery of the performance drawn into the dance material, above and beyond the attention they paid to fulfilling their practical tasks? This chapter examines how perceptions, interpretations and evaluations of *Luna* were formulated by artistic, specialist and spectating participants, but also by the executive and technical directors of *O Vertigo*.¹ In view of exposing the widest spectrum of choreographic meanings, I have also included an interpretive reading of newspaper previews and interviews written before, and the critical

¹ The funding agents and board president are not included here because when asked, they offered general impressions of *O Vertigo's* work but nothing specific in reference to *Luna*.

evaluations written during and after *Luna* performances, throughout its first year of public presentations.

Yet another kind of evaluation of the *Luna* choreography appeared with persistence at various points throughout the research project. This was articulated as someone's estimation that, at a particular moment, the dance was "working" or "not working" (*ça fonctionne, ça ne fonctionne pas* in French). I will explore below a few of its contexts and senses, and how it was made manifest by various participants, according to their particular role and tasks in the event.

In the contemporary dance world of *Luna*, not only was there a wide range of views about what kinds of meanings were embedded in and emerged from the choreography and performance, but there also proved to be a lack of consensus (especially among critics and presenters) as to the value of *Luna* to its spectators, to the contemporary dance world and to society.

8.1 Choreographer's initial intentions and intuitive understandings

With her devotion to intuitive dance making, how did choreographer Laurin develop and articulate her own meanings for *Luna*, her choreographic vision? Chapter IV recounted how she co-authored a text with artistic collaborator Morgenthelar for the project proposal (Appendix I) and negotiated her desires and intentions verbally and non-verbally with dancers and artistic collaborators as they developed the work and rehearsed together. She also submitted herself to interviews about various aspects of *Luna* with researchers (myself and others), filmmakers and journalists, and had intimate dialogues with dance programmers, producers and agents. Rehearsal director Brisson provided an additional insight about Laurin's intended meanings when he told me that her understanding of *Luna* was

always evolving as the work advanced, like that of an Impressionist painter (I-AB/RB.)

When I asked Laurin directly about how she “crystallized her understanding and the meaning of the piece,” during our second and last interview (I-GL2), she once again insisted on the primacy of intuition, “the non-verbal,” and that her comprehension was a complex, on-going process:

I don't like to analyze or to comprehend too much. There certainly is a sense, but it will maybe be different from one person to another. There is an aesthetic, but I work a bit with the non-verbal. When I explain things to the dancers and tell them what I'm looking for, I don't think that my way of broaching the subject is like in theater, for example, where one is more precise with the character, the sense, the meaning, the psychology of the character. For me, it's much more important to move forward intuitively and that the dancer proceeds in an intuitive manner. And I sometimes make reference to the descriptive or visual aspects, the atmosphere or the environment. For me, *Luna* is the idea of the stars, the difference between infinitely large and small, the optical elements we have used that bring us back to Copernicus who studied the planets with his glasses, [but] in some future time when we would always be concerned about the environment or the universe. And it's a very complex environment which we are still trying to comprehend. The [idea of the] moon [is present] also for its poetry. So you see, these are the images that I suggest [to the dancers], and that I also suggest in the performance. For me, there are thousands of senses. Each spectator can read [in it] what they will. It's important to conserve this multitude. ⁱ (I-GL2)

The most explicit meanings expressed by Laurin about *Luna* were those she wrote into the project proposal (Appendix I). This seminal text contained her initial intentions and the seeds of her vision for the new work, even before she began the creative process in studio with the dancers. Here is a brief reminder of the principal intentions and ideas Laurin articulated in writing for this proposal, but reframed this time in the context of this chapter on meaning: (a) the use of the deconstruction principle; (b) revelation of the mechanics of manipulations in duets; (c) the desire to get closer to the dancer's bodies as if a camera executing a slow close-up; (d) the development of a (choreographic) language in which the human dimension springs forth; and (e) the use of technology that would give the audience a view of things they don't usually see. But there was not as yet a title and nor was there a single specific subject to bind the work together as a whole. She had already begun conversations with an astrophysicist and discussing astro-particle physics with dancer Weikart, but the master theme and title *Luna* were chosen by her only after the creative work was well-advanced.

It is significant to note that excerpts from Laurin's initial proposal also found their way into consequent texts: program notes given to the audience (Appendix F), the *Luna* press kit and website page. These were eventually read by audience members, presenters and dance writers and for some became part of their understanding of *Luna*. For instance, phrases that Laurin had written such as "the hidden face of the dance" and "a poetic and sensual work" reappeared frequently throughout the press articles. And so despite her preference for non-verbal intuitive understandings, Laurin's writing -- however scarce -- did in fact become an influential filter through which other participants interpreted the meanings of *Luna*.

It is to be remembered however that Laurin's commitment to intuitive forces and the creativity of her dancers that principally formed and informed the choreographic composition and her own understandings of the dance as

it was taking shape. And so in true Automatist fashion, despite fulfilling her obligation to write an initial artistic statement in the project proposal, she rarely sought to impose a definitive meaning on the dancers or dancing, preferring to evoke a plethora of ideas for *Luna's* artistic and spectating participants.

8.2 Insights on meaning from artistic collaborators

Light and image creator Morgenthelar spent more than two hours explaining his aesthetic philosophy of light (I-AM). As it turned out, his artistic ethos meshed easily with that of the Automatists, and so with Laurin's way of creating for *Luna*. In his frame of mind as in Laurin's, meaning is in the mind of the beholder:

[With] a video projector, you can look at it as just another light source, and you can go away from the purely narrative form of projection, and you can also bring it to a more abstract level, like set design. You bring it to a more abstract level where it's not a defined image where you attach a value to it. It's maybe texture that moves, or it's a ghostly image, where you can barely perceive a fixed meaning to the image, but it can work on the subconscious mind. (I-AM)

Like Laurin, he spoke of creating "a kind of universe" with his lighting, set design of projection surfaces and multi-media use of camera and projections. He injected many ideas into the images he brought to *Luna*, such as the fable of the woman in the moon from his childhood. Morgenthelar spoke of his personal account of how *Luna* made meaning: "This piece is very much like a poetic flow for me." He later called it "visual poetry." While the piece for him

has “a lot of abstract stuff,” he adds that there still “is a very concrete, almost literal environment where you can [...] build a sense from your personal experience.” In our interview, he never came to the point of interpreting content specifically, but continued to explain the qualities of the Luna universe through poetic metaphors: “I see [this kind of work] like a river, it flows. And it’s very much what I like in this show. The whole combined mix of music and visual, it’s a universe of frequencies.” These frequencies, he added, were sound and light. Light for Morgenthelar was “a visual” as was everything that stimulated the eyes and including the choreography and the costume. So then, finding meaning entailed having the senses stimulated, and then allowing the subconscious to work (I-AM).

Costume designer Lavoie took a look at Laurin’s long-term choreographic development and concluded that she was “advancing well” in her aesthetic because with *Luna* she had moved towards something less literal and thematic. But he also said that in all her works there had been something to capture and hold the public’s attention (*accrocheur* in French). Echoing Morgenthelar’s account of *Luna* in terms of the openness to interpretation (and so abstraction) of the content, he explained approvingly that:

Here she has come out with something more astral, and so it’s a little like...it leaves much room for the images, for we who watch the piece, for the public. And for me, to have a certain degree of openness in a work is good because it takes us towards something larger, stronger.ⁱⁱ (I-DL)

And so Lavoie was favorable to what he saw as a growing tendency for Laurin to become abstract, all the while providing a concrete theme in which spectators could ground their attention and understanding.

8.3 How the dancers and rehearsal director found meaning for every little movement (or not)

Although choreographer Laurin's vision has proven to be the driving force and final authority in affirming *Luna*'s form, style and content, the dancers inscribed their own aesthetic preferences and outlook, and motivations into the choreography from the beginning of the creative process to the end of the last performance. This was done in many ways, through subtle negotiations with creators and under Laurin's direction. I noted one day, for instance, that the dancers actually reshaped and retimed, actually making changes in the movements (FN: 9-6-00). There was also another time when they filled in some ambiguous details in order to finish a phrase (FN: 10-20-00), and yet another when they expressed their own aesthetic preferences about the shape of their bodies in the air as they were being lifted (FN: 11-15-00). They often "played" with movements they had been given, either with official sanction from Laurin or on their own time, hoping (it seemed to me) that the material they were developing would be noticed, and perhaps integrated permanently into the choreography. Sometimes it was.

I was struck quite early in the fieldwork by how committed the dancers appeared to finding motivation and meaning in the abstract movements of *Luna*. I wondered to what extent it was the choreographer or their own interpretations that determined the meaning. At what point did the meaning crystallize? Did they rehearse on faith for a while before they came to understand the motives that gave meaning to the movements? This seemed to be at the outset the most elusive part of the research project and I presumed that there would be as many answers as there were dancers (FN: 8-9-00).

Those *O Vertigo* dancers who taught *Luna* dance material to students at the company summer workshop had an additional opportunity to examine the choreography's form and content, and so to glean new insights about its meaning for them. It was while observing a class taught by dancers Long and

Barry that I realized these pedagogical situations for students and company dancers alike were times when the *Luna* movement aesthetic was reviewed and newly comprehended by the dancers through a collective pedagogical process with students. In this particular class, I also realized that for the dancers the *Luna* movements were now thought about as part of a fixed repertory, and that so there were right and wrong ways to dance them. A compromise was sought between the original dancers' interpretations and those of the students, and so the movements were changed and transformed. The fragments of *Luna* learned by workshop students were later integrated by Laurin into a new choreography for 50 dancers and performed in public at the end of the workshop, providing new perspectives on the choreography for Laurin as she later confirmed. (FN: 8-10-01)

The dancers have already described, in previous chapters, how it was that they began the creative process by first learning and mastering the physical work of *Luna* (a muscular and neurological process) while at the same time searching how to "find themselves in the universe of *Luna*" (as dancer Barry would say). Rehearsal director Brisson confirmed that "[*Luna*] was made quickly like most of Ginette's pieces" and then "much, much time [is given] to finding the essence"ⁱⁱⁱ (I-AB/RB). Brisson's notion of "*Luna*'s essence" was named and perceived in several ways by the dancers as the choreography's theme or through line (*ligne directrice* in French), an ambiance, a presence or state of being, "getting an image of the piece," "cultivating an inner garden," finding out what "is behind the movement."

All dancers clearly expressed a desire and need to find motivation for the movements they were dancing. Dancer Nguyen explained it emphatically:

I don't want to move, I want to dance. To simply execute movements is not sufficient. For me it takes something behind

that and behind the piece in its entirety, it takes a through line.
 [...] I need to know why I am doing a movement, even if it is
 not reasoned (logical). Often in dance, it's happens like that,
 one feels it or not and I need to feel it.^{iv} (I-KN)

Dancer Barry elaborated how the dance making operated for everyone from her point of view. She affirmed when working with Laurin on *Luna* and also on previous dances, that the work of making movement and sense was “different for each dancer [...] like a dialogue in that we propose [something] to her and then she can say if it's going in the direction she had imagined or not” (I-AB/RB). This dialogic approach, in which Laurin suggested but rarely imposed specific motivations and meanings, enhanced their sense of creative contribution to the work, as Rose and Barry confirm below.

In the course of fieldwork and interviews, six of the dancers and the rehearsal director spoke about their distinct strategies for motivating the movements by searching for probable interpretations from various perspectives. And it will be interesting to see in this section the way in which their understanding of the movement correlated directly with the life meanings they articulated in the previous chapter, or as Sparshott (1995) proposed: “How one dances may be expected to be governed by why one dances” (p. 53).

8.3.1 For Rose, the movement has to “speak”

While Rose didn't venture to articulate interpretations of the choreographic content, he did recall how it was that he came to motivate the movements he was given. Echoing his belief that it is the dance (and not the dancer) that reached the audience, Rose said he sought meaning from within

the movement itself: “The movement has to speak. There are moments when it’s like that. A nice opportunity for us.” By the latter comment he was referring to the fact that because Laurin rarely gave specific motivations, he was given a welcome opportunity to find his own. From time to time, he continued, she would give the dancers a “through line” by way of explanation so that they might better “understand why she was asking what she asked for.” But he affirmed once again that Laurin was a “really physical choreographer” and that his interpretations arose from the experience of the movements themselves. (I-DR, FN: 10-2-00, 10-6-00)

8.3.2 Riedes’s movement energies and human connections

Into the fieldnote book that I left on the a table in the *O Vertigo* kitchen, Riede inscribed her response to my question of how dancers searched for and found meaning for the movements they danced in *Luna*. (A few pertinent fragments of this text are cited below from the full text that appeared earlier in Riede’s biographical profile.) Echoing Nguyen, she explained that just dancing without knowing why was not satisfying. Like many of the other *O Vertigo* dancers, at first she strove to master the technical aspects of the *Luna* movements. Over the years of work with the company she had gleaned an insight about Laurin’s preferred movement qualities (or “efforts” in the Laban lexicon). As she explained it, Laurin seemed to “like things very natural without imposed introspection.” (I-AR). Later on in the process, Laurin would sometimes give her “more detailed directions, sometimes very specific, but mostly more vague. “ It was once the technicalities were integrated into her body that she began “to wonder about meaning” (from comments she wrote in fieldnote book, March 30, 2001). She also specified that meanings for the movements actually emerged for her at three distinct times: (a) when something new is experienced during a performance, (b) during the

individual work she does in small periods “on the side,” and (c) when she is able to experience the dance with exceptional intensity. Among other things, what she looks for are the appropriate “energies” for the movements, and to figure out the nature of her connection with other dancers. (I-AR) Then using the following personal guidelines, she undertakes to find meanings for as many of the movements as possible:

I go by what [the movement] means for myself and what I would like to express, even if sometimes it is only the joy of moving. In some sequences I search for meanings for every single gesture, but that takes a really long time and somehow never ends [...] since I keep changing or clarifying the meaning to stay interested and alive in the movement. (From comments she wrote in the fieldnote book, around March 30, 2001).

This testimony is a reminder once again that the meaning of *Luna* is never entirely fixed and stable, but ever-changing as the dance is inscribed with various interpretations by dance event participants and performed in new contexts.

She also gave a specific example of what kinds of meanings she eventually settled on when speaking about her duet with Rodrigue:

[...] dancing with Marie-Claude has changed for me a lot. I went through a lot of different explorations, but what I seem to be most comfortable with right now is having the image that she’s basically me as well. But, it’s another side of myself...it’s like, the dark creature inside myself. I need my shadow to be full and complete. So I’m just imagining that while I’m dancing with her, and how my relationship is with this shadow of mine, how it’s different from day to day but it’s very natural for me in

that moment. So the movements are inspired by the immediate experience with my relationship to my dark side or my shadow.
(I-AR)

Riede also offered her own general interpretation of the choreography as a whole. This proved to be coherent with how dance had finally given her a means, because she grew up within the restrictions of a Communist regime in Eastern Germany, to at last freely express what she felt inside:

[*Luna*] was about exploring all of what's inside me, so the movements that I received from Ginette triggered different emotions inside myself. And for me it was just flowing through all this, allowing [these emotions] to "be there." [There were] very different sensations, all that's inside. It's not very intellectual for me, it's very physical. (CD ROM, Appendix s)

8.3.3 The necessity of a binding thematic thread for Nguyen and Lamothe

The key to finding something "behind the movement", for both dancers Nguyen and Lamothe, lay in finding a concrete thematic focus. Nguyen was clear about his aesthetic orientation. He doesn't like a "collage" of little pieces, nor does he care for total abstraction in dance. He needs a proposition (*propos* in French) to support the dancing, elements that can nourish him and ultimately give the audience some elements to help them seize some kind of meaning in the dance. New to dancing with *O Vertigo* and on a limited-time contract, Kha admitted that there were sections of *Luna* that "spoke to him" more than others, especially those that were slower and more somber. In the latter he liked the possibility of having the time to feel things and to try and "say something" with the movement. He was not ready yet to

offer an interpretation of *Luna*, feeling that his work at the moment was to learn how to “feel good” and to like all of the sections so that they could speak to him. (I-KN). Lamothe had learned ways of giving sense to the movements Laurin imposed on him from being coached in dance interpretation by other choreographers, and from his growing understanding of the company style. The theme of *Luna* was close to his own interests: “Every evening I look at the moon. It speaks to me. I know that for Ginette it is not the mythical side that interests her, but it nourishes me. I use this because I find the moon magnificent and marvelous, a star that speaks to me!”^v (I-PL).

8.3.4 Perceiving *Luna* through Rodrigue’s spiritual lens

Rodrigue articulated a crystal clear sense of the choreography’s meaning through the lens of her spiritual beliefs and practices (described earlier in her biographical profile). Everything she does, and so also her dancing, she said had been an effort to “connect myself to universal, earth-bound and cosmic forces.”^{vi} One aspect of her connection was a desire not to become attached to anything and so allow herself to live in the present moment, to “empty out.” Because of this orientation, she alone among her *O Vertigo* colleagues didn’t search for a choreographic through line (*un fil conducteur*) and loved dis-continuities (*des coupures*). She found freedom by being in theatrical time and space. Rodrigue spoke affectionately about Laurin’s metaphor of an interior garden, that she explained each dancer must nourish by seeking its “odor, color and flowers.” Eschewing intellectualism and embracing an intuitive fatalism, she exclaimed: “I need to live it, dance it, breathe it and all of a sudden, it comes! I don’t impose anything.”^{vii} There were times when she claimed to have sensed an actual memory in her muscles, multiple layers of sense, or that one small movement gave meaning to all the rest.

What specific kinds of meanings did she actually perceive through the lens of her spirit? An example she gave of her spiritually oriented interpretations of *Luna*: “The story of the large lenses” was that “[they] make me feel how the stars, the elements and the seasons influence us strongly. They make me think about giving birth, and wonderment in the face of the Life Force”^{viii} (I-MR).

8.3.5 Barry looks for a state of being in which to find herself

Barry has worked with Laurin in the course of many new creations, and found that *Luna* was unlike the others. Rather than a theatrical impersonation, this new piece called for her to “create a presence.” Barry tried to articulate how this functioned for her: “It’s almost more a state of being, but it has to be cultivated and worked as well; because this piece has different changes in the states but it’s all part of one universe. So it’s all about finding yourself in this universe and sometimes it takes images.” (I-AB)

In her testimonial on the CD ROM (Appendix S) she spoke further and in a poetic manner, about her state of consciousness while dancing *Luna*, by way of astrological imagery suggestive of a narrative progression:

[...] just the fact of being there, being on stage and being open, and letting yourself bathe in the lights and music. It’s a bit like being in a very slow orbit in space, and you’re aware that there are other dancers or people that are in orbit around you. And every once in a while the orbits cross, or every once in a while the gravity brings us together and we dance, sometimes slowly, sometimes frenetically in space, with speed, with mass, and then the piece moves on. (CD ROM, Appendix S)

And so it appears that with *Luna*, Barry's scientific upbringing had finally served her understanding of dance.

8.3.6 Weikart's "imaginary kernel"

As previously revealed, it was Weikart's discussions with Laurin about astrophysics that partly shaped the scientific and philosophical underpinnings for *Luna* in her mind. It was in his testimonial on the company CD ROM (Appendix S) that he clarified his own scientific views and interpretation of *Luna* by describing the images he used to bring sense to his movements while dancing them:

You can find the universe in an atom, and so there's this kind of shifting reality. And for me that sort of imaginary kernel that I refer to somehow, the idea that in all these movements [is that] even if they are infinitely small or very, very tiny, there is still another universe at the end of it. I think that's something that I try to imagine throughout the piece, sort of that if we are in a section of the solar system, if we just kept going and going into this tiny image, then we'd find something really broad and huge. (CD ROM, Appendix S)

His were by far the most clearly intellectual and scientific interpretations of *Luna's* content, and bore witness to a belief in the power of dance to embody complex ideas and to serve as a metaphor.

8.3.7 Brisson listens carefully to Laurin and to the dancers

There were many times during studio sessions, rehearsals and performances that rehearsal director Brisson provided information to dancers that clarified not only how movements needed to be done, but what their intention might be. For instance, it is Brisson along with the dancers' input, who actually creates names for each section of the dance (see cue sheet in Appendix K), and also a notation for the movement phrases (FN:10-23-00). Or in another vein, at another moment, he spoke to Rose about the way he was turning his head and forcing his focus, saying that the extra glance seemed to give the movement a meaning it wasn't meant to have (FN:11-1-00). I asked him directly one day if he drew his understanding of the choreography from what he thought Laurin wanted, from his own sensibility, or something in between. He answered that it was the latter "in between" dynamic that best described the understanding of the *Luna* work-in-progress that he brought to rehearsals. But Brisson affirmed that most important of all for him was to "listen closely" to Laurin and the dancers, and in doing so to create a climate of trust (FN: 8-4-00).

In our interview, he offered a few key words to describe what *Luna's* "essence" was for him in a personal sense: light, peace and calm. (I-AB/RB). And on the company CD ROM (Appendix S) he developed a further interpretation of *Luna* through a series of metaphors that suggested an allegory: "It's based on a circle, it has no beginning and no end. It's like we want to communicate like a satellite, want to give some words [and] 'let go' some movements [in order to] catch some other human being [...] we put our feet on the moon to go further [...]."

8.4 Interpretations and evaluations of the *Luna* choreography by *O Vertigo's* executive and technical directors

The technical and executive directors, although not spectators nor specialists, also offered interpretations and critical assessments of *Luna* in the course of interviews. Their points of view, like the others, were tempered by personal aesthetic points of view but also sprang from their respective perspectives as those insiders who mounted and ran the technical systems of *Luna* (Proulx) and who managed the budget and marketing (Lagacé).

8.4.1 Executive director Lagacé: an enigmatic *Luna*

Lagacé's first response to the question of what he thought about *Luna* was that it was "so rich, full and enigmatic" (in the sense of complex, multi-layered), that it would take him more time to get to know it well. Every time he watches he "sees new stuff." Executive director Lagacé added that with this choreography he saw Laurin as renewing herself and pushing her own artistic boundaries. But he added the critical comment that the dancers still needed to "find their own space in this show." He reminded me that he watches in an atypical way, not for personal enjoyment, but through the eyes of potential dance presenters.

Several aspects and portions of the choreography had touched his imagination already, and he detailed three of them. For instance, he found that "the little (hand) sign language" superimposed over a spoken text "adorable" because somehow reminiscent of sweet images from his childhood. Some of the live film images that were fed through the large lenses and projected on the upstage screen were emotionally moving for him. And at that same moment, there was an "interwoven musical score" that he felt complemented the moving faces on screen quite beautifully. For the

moment, the meanings of *Luna* generally remained somewhat mysterious for him. Lagacé had and would continue to see the performances many times over, and so found that its meaning was not a fixed thing but would evolve even as did the dance (I-BL).

8.4.2 Technical director Proulx: a smaller, more humanistic piece

Proulx concurred that with *Luna*, Laurin had changed her choreographic “language” (a reference to style and syntax). From his backstage point of view behind the computers and lighting console, he saw the integration of new technologies as the trademark of *Luna*. Proulx provided a singular insight: that the choreographic structure and even the gestures themselves were formulated in response to the constraints imposed by body microphones and a smaller stage space. He observed that the movements themselves were actually smaller than usual and that vertical space was exploited more than in previous pieces in order to compensate for the lack of horizontal playing area. His point of view from the back of the house and facing the stage caused him to look down on the performance from above (*en plongée*), always seeing the dancing along with the stage floor and perceiving the entirety of the stage action (*l'ensemble*) because of his distance from performers. His comments reminded me that everyone who watches the performance has quite literally a different angle of view from all of the others. And in my experience, a change of angle when watching a performance for a second time really changes what is seen and so understood.

What about the meaning of *Luna* for Proulx? Did he like the work? In comparison with other works by Laurin in the past six years, *Luna* had touched him more emotionally than spiritually. Her use of restrained space and movement had the effect she desired in her project proposal, bringing him closer to the dancer and the humanity they exuded (*qui s'en dégage*.) On

the subject of abstract vs. concrete content, Proulx weighed in his opinion, on a historic note: “There are strong images that bring one into worlds that are a little more concrete, I would say, than towards a certain contemporary figurative abstraction.”^{ix} Not only was he emotionally moved, but also found that *Luna* had a “beautiful homogeneity,” and that he adored the sound composition. But he commented that even after six years with the company and with his interest in understanding dance, he conceded that he was still not fully able to understand the enigmatic visual aspects of Laurin’s choreography. (I-JP)

8.5 Audience’s strategies for apprehending and interpreting performance experience

What happened in the bodies, minds and psyches of the 22 focus group spectators -- sitting relatively still and silent in the dark -- as the performance of *Luna* unfolded in front of them? What kinds of sense and meaning emerged from their spectating efforts? In contrast to the dance professionals, the spectators spent a relatively limited amount time – two hours more or less – engaged in the *Luna* dance event. In this sense they might be thought of as interested onlookers, but were actually crucial to the meaningful outcome of the dance event. More than a year and a half of preparation was put into the outcome of a public performance. And various *Luna* participants in this study, particularly artists and presenters, expressed the belief in this chapter that artistic purpose and meaning came to fruition at the moment when the choreography was performed before an audience.

There was also empirical evidence from the audience focus groups, as well as from the interviews with other participants who attended the performance, that each spectator came to (and left) the theater with what phenomenologists have called “a horizon of expectations” (Fraleigh, 1987 and 1999). In terms of a dance performance like *Luna*, this refers to the lived

experiences and accumulated knowledge of lives lived outside the moment of performance and that served to shape the processes of choreographic interpretation. For instance, in speaking about the *Luna* performance she had attended during the *Festival international de nouvelle danse*, dance historian Tembeck described how it was that *Luna* had seemed as if a contemplative respite from the intense commotion created by the dense dance festival format and the recent terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in New York City:

I found [*Luna*] ...a bit contemplative. I found it ...peaceful. And I think it's a piece that I enjoyed seeing after September 11th. [...] There was in our daily lives, so much...violence, anxiety, disruption of world order, that seeing something that was more meditative, within the compressed thing of a three-week festival...(sighs with relief) Aaaahhh! You see? So it depends how you go to a piece, if you've come at the end of the last of a busy week. You know there are so many things that subjectively come into the way you see something. (I-IT)

Luna focus group members also described a certain range of meaning-making strategies and interpretive themes that will be identified in this section. At the core of each of their "modes of apprehension" (e.g. interpretive strategies) elaborated below there lay beliefs about what the arts meant within the on-going process of their lives. And so dance spectating was looked at here as a meaningful part of one's repertoire of life activities. Meaning making is considered as a process in which the live choreographic performance is experienced, apprehended and interpreted, to be finally understood (in some way) and evaluated by each spectator.

There did emerge one clear consensus about meaning among all spectators questioned: that what meanings the performance came to have

were a matter of personal interpretation. As has been seen in the previous sections of this chapter, the choreographer and dancers would concur. The youngest focus group member Andrea Simard told us how it was that she had learned this art ethos from her parents, also members of the focus group. She explained how it functioned for her:

I found it strange when at the end of the performance I heard people talking [during the post-show audience talk]. They spoke about the dark side of the moon, and things that I hadn't really understood. But I realized that it didn't matter because each person has their own vision of the performance and that there weren't better and worse ones. [It's] because each one sees it from [the standpoint of] what s/he is and what person they are. That's art! It reaches everyone, [and] each has their own vision. We watch according to what we live in our lives. That's all. x (Simard, FG3)

Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1998) explains this contemporary art outlook as one that “values the pleasure of the unfamiliar and the incomprehensible” and so “audiences [who] know how to yield to ‘experience,’ to sensuous immediacy, to presence, energy, and actuality” (pp. 231-2). These kinds of attitudes were present among focus group members, as will be seen.

In my interpretations of *Luna* audience focus group discussions, like Bennett (1997) I have considered spectators not only as “receivers and perceivers” of the performance experience, but also as active agents who sought to make the experience meaningful for themselves and for the companions with whom they attended the event. As participants engaged in the dance event I also see them as having contributed to the ever-changing meaning of the choreography, for themselves and others, as the performance occurred on a particular evening. In an earlier chapter, some of the dancers

reported actually feeling and reacting to the presence of the audience and their subtle reactions to the dancing.

It is also important to factor into these audience interpretations of *Luna* the particular environments in which the dancing took place, described in some detail in the chapters on event space and time, and activities. Each performance of *Luna* was framed for its spectators in the sense that Foster (1986) and Goffman (1974) gave the term: the social conventions which helped determine the viewer's perspective, and which aroused their expectations before, and influenced their interpretations during and after watching the dance. Among the "framing devices" pertinent to *Luna*, which were determined by the artistic and presenting organizations, Foster (1986, pp. 64-65) listed the announcement of the event (see *Luna* poster in photo 10), its location, its title, its beginning moment (and I would add the ending), and the contact that it makes with the audience through the focus of the dancers. Foster also includes other frames that are made apparent in this study: the reputation (and I would add the ambiance) of the theatre venue, assumptions about the dance genre and company because of the ticket price, the vantage point offered from where one is seated, and the way in which lighting and other devices signal the beginning and ending of the performance.

I have grouped the various interpretive perspectives that emerged during the spectator focus groups into three genres (each with its corresponding sub-themes) which I have called: (a) rational analysis, (b) emotional and/or sensorial arousal, and (c) intuitive perception. These perspectives can also be thought of as on-going modes through which a spectator undertakes a meaning-making process of the performance. Figure 8.1 below offers a schematic summary of these modes and their genres:

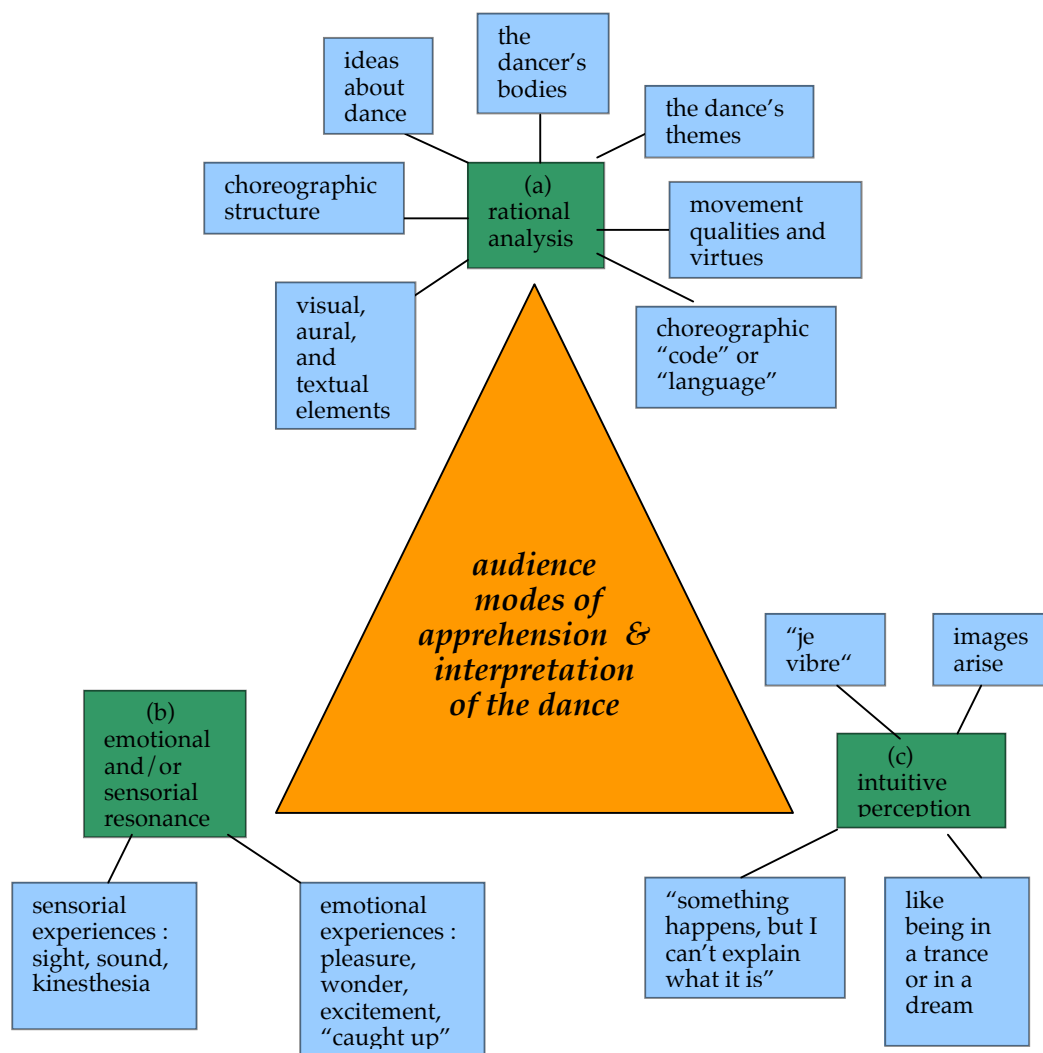


Figure 8.1 Audience focus group members' modes of apprehension and interpretation of the *Luna* dance performances. (The elements are presented in a random order and not a hierarchy.)

Before examining each mode of apprehension and interpretative strategy on its own merits, it is pertinent to mention that they were rarely present in isolation. Most focus group spectators described combinations of two or even three, as did Jimmy Simard: "My way of understanding and

being touched [by *Luna*] occurs on many levels. I am at the same time artistic and scientific “^{xi} (FG3).

Some kind of meaning making transpired for all spectators in this focus group. There was not a single example of non-sense reported, or lack of any meaning at all², perhaps because the post-performance focus groups tended to attract those with a strong interest in making sense of *Luna*. Even the most resolutely non-verbal and intuitive among them managed somehow to articulate in some way what the dance performance meant to them. An example of the urge to grasp meaning was vividly present, for instance, in this neophyte dance-goer’s declaration: “[...] there is a part of me that tries to understand what I feel and what is happening in front of me”^{xii} (Diop, FG1). Diop expressed his frustration at not being able to understand everything he saw, but then succeeded in finding the words to describe the personal meanings he had experienced that evening.

8.5.1 Rational analysis

Ample evidence of intellectual activity among the great majority of these focus group spectators belies one of contemporary dance’s essentialist myths: that dance is a resolutely non-verbal art form which cannot and even should not be explained through words. This non-verbal bias was especially prominent among those spectators who favored emotional and sensorial interpretations.

These rational spectators evoked the metaphor of dance as a language. The notion that dance is a code or language, acquired (or decoded) through repeated experience like any non-native language, or that can be appreciated for

² In my experience, those audience members who declare being unable to understand anything about the dance are usually referring to an expectation of narrative or story telling, and are confounded by the abstraction of most contemporary dance. Others who report disappointment with an evening of dance performance have explained to me that the aesthetics were not to their liking and so not “meaningful” to them.

it's poetic qualities, was discussed in diverse ways by five members of the focus group. In their own words, they spoke of dance in terms like "a theater of the body," a language which is not spoken, and as a "code with no story." Here are two diverse samples of this kind of rational meaning making:

I think everything we see in our daily lives we interpret. ... Everything has meaning. That's basic [and] 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. ... I think you have to maybe acquire a language...to have seen some of it before, in order to do it with more ease. I think it's kind of like speaking, a kind of body, visual language. (Kevin, FG2)

Tonight there were movements, movements that express those ideas. I guess because they are logical, you see them again and again. [There are] production clues that you recognize : shadows on the backdrop. Some of it [is] almost literal once you've seen it. It's just a language like any other. There's certainly something there to be understood. It's not random. (Cashing, FG2))

Visual artist Kevin thinks of choreography as "a metaphoric language composed of gestures" that he perceives visually, while Cashing interprets the ideas expressed by the dance's movements, ideas that she is now able to interpret quite concretely because a frequent dance-goer and dance student.

An intellectual interpretative process was also the choice of those focus group spectators who expressed a belief in art as way of gaining knowledge about the world and of better understanding oneself. Their statements revealed that as they watched, they projected and perceived ideas and

metaphors and made associations. They envisioned as well fragments of stories by way of certain aspects of the dance that had attracted their attention: gestures, relationships, costumes, images, and so on. They then voiced interpretations of various kinds that went running through their minds as they watched the performance.

Despite the title theme of “luna” (moon) chosen by the choreographer, the rational analyses of the focus group members remained in the form of a multiple fleeting themes and images rather than an all-encompassing coherent narrative. As one audience member remarked: “I won’t tell you everything that came into my head this evening [while watching *Luna*], but it touches on everything. It even included dying, birth and is full of life’s details”^{xiii} (E. Renaud, FG3). Here is a detailed monologue from spectator Logueux about how this kind of intellectual process functioned in her mind (as it did for several others):

When [the *Luna* dancers] gesture...at one point they were all in the back making repetitive gestures and I said ‘there, that’s about work, and they are caught up in everyday life.’ One makes associations...I don’t force it. I just feel at certain moments that that was it. But it wasn’t important. I don’t want to seize [the meaning] at any price. But whether [you do] or not [you try] ... like the large dolls...at another moment you have other images [like] the married woman, but that was also the illusion [image] for me. For a fraction of a second I saw that, but afterwards I let go of the movement and all that. In any case, one always has a little flash somewhere or other. You’re always in the material. There are objects, the bodies are there. And at one moment they were all in beige and the colored t-shirts arrived and you see that things move and change. Sometimes they were just men and women, and

already you feel something. To have the real meaning isn't important ... the relationships ... there was support, rejection, a little battle, love, tenderness. It's also important to feel what the body is expressing. You need to feel something. You can't only be in the abstraction of movement.^{xiv} (Logueux, FG3)

What came to light from a close reading of Logueux's explanation are certain beliefs and recommendations about the meaning-making process. Also notable was the role she ascribed to bursts of insight. Logueux told us that it was important not to force meaning but rather to *allow* oneself to feel something, and that it isn't important to find the "real" meaning, that finding meaning was a matter of making personal associations. She told us that meanings came from "being in the material" of the dance, the people, objects and images presented. It was a matter of letting fragments of interpretations come and go "in a flash." And one idea she had in common with many of the other spectators is that one cannot possibly remain only in the domain of abstraction, but that the mind and psyche are always striving to make concrete meanings. I also experienced this desire for meaning. As one of those who sought and found self-knowledge, Desnoyers explained that watching dance evoked for him a sense of self-recognition, a process in which he made personal connections to various aspects of the dance:

I let myself be seduced visually and that makes connections to other aspects of my being and from that beginning point there are details, elements with which I feel comfortable and I like that... it's as if what was in front of me was an extension of myself.^{xv} (Desnoyers, FG2)

One particularly intellectually minded focus group member was Normand Simard, a career psychologist. He capped the Chicoutimi focus group by elaborating a theory about creativity from the field of psychology.

Simard advanced the belief that we don't really need to know what the author intended. He thought that people tend to make occasional rational connections with the choreography in order to find pleasure. He explained further that two kinds of rational thought operate as we experience art. The first is an Aristotelian set of logical explanations. And the second is

the other kind of thinking which is analogical, and also a kind of thought. It's the thinking in which we make associations, and in that way we tap into emotion. And it also has its rationality, this kind of thinking, in which one thing makes us think of another, and another.^{xvi} (N. Simard, FG3)

Artist-geniuses like Picasso and Laurin, he added, are those "who have mastered a language that few have mastered, the language of analogy"^{xvii} (N. Simard, FG3). And so, as his theory went, choreographies like *Luna* give adults a chance to experience the pleasure of exercising what is the first and earliest kind of rationality: the analogical way of making free associations from what we see.

Not surprisingly, those spectators who were practicing artists or those with considerable arts experience, possessed well-developed points of observation, interpretive methods and analytic criteria. Their assessments of the performance were at times even focused in on small details of the technical craft of dance and choreographic techniques (e.g. whether or not the dancers' feet were sufficiently well-pointed, if the dance was too long to sustain interest throughout, etc.). Dancer Lamb, for instance, with her long experience and training in dance, was drawn to how the *Luna* dance material brought out the special qualities of each dancer and to structural levels, as she put it, being "more inclined to look at the parts than the whole [and at] small details rather than the whole" (Lamb, FG1). Her views even included a critical analysis of choreographic structure, and when it seemed to "slow

down” and she thought to herself “well, they could have cut that out, it could have ended five minutes ago” (Lamb, FG1).

Rational approaches to interpretation were characteristic of those who came to *Luna* as if to an educational experience, bearing further witness to their affiliation with the idea of art as a rational form of expression and idea-based art making.

8.5.2 Emotional and/or sensorial arousal

There was ample evidence of an emotional apprehension of the *Luna* performance among focus group participants as they watched the dancing. Spectator Jimmy Simard questioned why we should even seek a rational explanation of each dance gesture. For Simard contemporary dance is about the emotions he finds “inside” the gestures (FG3).

Many other focus group members concurred, and like Potvin expressed the belief that “you need to rise above that (the movements themselves) to feel the emotion, feel what is happening” and that “the code ... is about the emotion that happens^{xviii}” (Potvin, FG3). Villeneuve characterized this mode of dance-watching as “a flow of emotion that one enters into and is lived during the time of the performance”^{xix} (Villeneuve, FG1).

Not only did some of these emotionally-oriented spectators believe that meaning depends on detecting emotion emanating from the dancing and the dancers, and their own emotional arousal in consequence, but like Hobden they expressed a strong non-verbal and non-rational bias towards dance interpretation (ironically expressed verbally):

I think looking for meaning in dance is useless because dance is very nonverbal and the reaction we have to dance is also

nonverbal. [...] I think maybe if at the beginning of the performance people would be told not to worry about meaning and just enjoy the piece, I think it would make things easier for the spectator and for everyone. (Hobden, FG1)

Closely allied to emotional apprehension was a sensorial orientation to meaning making to the point where both emotional and sensorial modes were oftentimes expressed in combination. But there were at least three focus group spectators who spoke about having experienced the dance performance specifically through their senses by way of sight and sound, but especially in the case of dance, through the sense of kinesthesia. Dancers and dance anthropologists commonly call this latter way of perceiving “kinesthetic empathy” (e.g. Sklar, 2001). Like the other five, according to Fitt (1988, pp. 266-7), this “sixth sense” has its own sensory organs called proprioceptors and found in the skeletal muscles, the tendons in and around joints, and deep inside the ear. Fitt explained how they serve to provide feedback to the central nervous system regarding muscle contraction, relaxation, tension and stretch as well as joint position and velocity. The proprioceptors capture a stimulus in an environment, and then transform it into a nerve impulse to be conducted into a specific region of the spinal cord or brain that is then translated into perception. The kinesthetic sense is then the perception of both body motion and position (body position, position of the body’s segments and movements). As described in Chapter V, I observed in myself and other kinesthetically-oriented spectators the tendency to bring the emotional and sensorial stimulus manifested in the *Luna* performance directly into our nervous systems, resulting in small but visible, sympathetic micro-movements in our bodies as we watched.

A strong showing of belief in the primacy of emotion and sensation among *Luna*’s spectators in their apprehension of *Luna* came as no surprise. In over 28 years of experiencing the Québec dance world – among its artists,

students, specialists – my American taste for a formal body-based aesthetic has been confronted by what I have perceived as the highly charged physicality and emotion of Québec contemporary choreographers. In a 1992 essay for dance spectators I wrote:

In many ways these dancers are the recognizable great grandchildren of this artistic revolution. In its manifesto *Le Refus Global* dancer Françoise Sullivan (1948) declared that ‘Above all the dance is a reflex, a spontaneous expression of keenly felt emotions...one proceeds from the inside out...there are vital needs, irresistible forces.’ It is still true that a large number of Québécois dancers and choreographers can be distinguished by their introspective, emotionally saturated bodies and aesthetics. The exploration of ‘feeling states’ nourishes the gestural and even structural choices: there is no motion without emotion³. They seem forever to be seized and driven into cathartic states by external forces. And so a central theme seems to be embodied in this physical struggle, as inner and outer forces vie for control. (p. 16)

My own experiences and observations have also been affirmed in numerous writings of critics and historians, notably Tembeck’s definitive thesis (1994b) on the characteristics of the Montréal style of contemporary dance. In one section of her research she synthesized and analyzed various perceptions of 17 dance creators and writers from Québec through their writings, coming from the U.S. (New York City), Germany and France. Three of the nine features she isolated as “points of convergence,” and which refer to a marked emotivity and physicality in Montréal choreography, were:

³ This Expressionist art movement that made a fetish of emotion stands in stark contrast with a group of resolutely Modernist dance artists in the U.S. in the same period. An often-quoted credo of abstractionist choreographer Alwin Nikolais: “I am speaking of motion and *not* emotion!”

(a) the reflection and the result of social tensions, (b) based on emotivity, expression and intensity, and (c) dynamic, energetic and possessing immediacy^{xx} (p. 57).

8.5.3 Intuitive perception

Yet another way of apprehending *Luna* emerged from the focus group conversations, distinguishable from the previous two because subliminal. A small but significant number of audience members (five) gave replies to the question “what happened for you during the dance performance?” that implied a kind of a perception that I have determined as intuitive. Although intuition is a complex concept with many possible definitions, I am thinking here of those spectators’ responses to *Luna* that seemed to resist explicit verbal explanation and so suggested a kind of understanding through direct perception or apprehension, subconscious perception and immediate cognition. Here are two excerpts that illustrate these kinds of intuitive ways of apprehending *Luna*:

I don’t know what keeps me coming back to *O Vertigo*. ... It’s like having a dream except that it’s not your dream. It has the same amount of surprise and you can’t put it into words right away. (Kevin, FG2)

It [the *Luna* performance] impregnated me also at the level of the music, made me resonate enormously. There was a lot of music tonight that passed right through my body. All the while watching the images, I felt practically like I was in a trance at a certain moment. (J. Simard, FG3)^{xxi}

“Something happens,” “I resonate,” “it’s like being in a dream not your own,” “I fell into a trance,” “I drown in the magic of it.” Just a short enigmatic phrase was offered up at certain points by intuitive spectators to anchor their experience in the realm of the verbal. Whatever the experience was, it seemed (at least for these spectators) to be desirable, even pleasurable in the sense that “it” kept them coming back to performances, made their dance spectating worthwhile.

These intuitive spectators weren’t allied to a single dance view or motive for dance-going, but among them were those who admired (“I just enjoy”), felt (“I resonated”), and immersed (“like being in a dream”). Notably, none here associated themselves with the motives of escape or reflection. But intuitive apprehension might also be described as a non-rational faith in the existence of a subconscious that operates while watching a dance performance, outside of conscious effort and which functions as do dreams. Dance events for these spectators then are occasions in which they can allow their subconscious mind to come into play.

It is also possible to conclude that the speakers here simply felt inarticulate and at a loss for words. But at least two (Kevin and Tremblay) were practicing artists who proved quite knowledgeable and experienced about the art world. Jimmy Simard also had much to say about his rational side as well, and the Wilsons were well-educated professionals. Because they all articulated explicit ideas about art at other moments during the focus groups, I have concluded that they must have *chosen* intuition deliberately as one of their preferred strategies for dance spectating.

Dance phenomenologist Fraleigh (1987) slips into poetic metaphor when she elucidates the phenomenon of intuition as an “immediate grasp of the world” and the “insight (in-sight) (that is) light, graceful and effortless” (p. 168). She even ventured to claim that dances are created and understood *first of all* through intuition. But participants in the *Luna* study have borne

witness to diverse modes of apprehension and not only intuition, as they make meaning out of the dance performance.

As with the previous interpretive strategies, intuitive apprehension is anchored in a specific artistic school of thought. In the wake of the destructive forces of technology unleashed during WW II, the Dadaists called for no less than an artistic revolution against the tradition of science itself. They initiated a regime of irrational art-making procedures. This new art was to be “absurd and playful, confrontational and nihilistic, intuitive and emotive” (Atkins, 1990). The Surrealists who followed them drew on the Dadaist contribution of Automatism (pictorial free association), giving “a psychological twist which helped to popularize the Freudian fascination with sex, dreams and the unconscious” (Atkins, 1990, p. 70). It was the era of the psyche and the origin of the concept of a non-conscious domain of thought, variously called the unconscious, subconscious, pre-verbal, the id. As noted earlier, Québec’s own 1948 artistic revolution *Le Refus Global* also adopted Automatism as a central artistic strategy of which Laurin is a disciple. And so the idea of irrational, intuitive art making is still found deeply embedded within certain innovative arts practices today like those of Laurin.

8.5.4 Vocational strategies for interpretation

The focus group discussions revealed a notable correlation between spectators’ vocational skills and their strategies for choreographic interpretation. I am including all four samples that I found, because each presents a distinct and informative viewpoint:

From a hand sign interpreter for the deaf:

In this performance I was struck by the sharp and insistent gestures that kept reoccurring. And I said [to myself] ‘they will

explain this to us sooner or later'. And finally the explanation came. It was like a glorification of hand-sign language. It was great because that's the kind of gesturing that deaf-mutes do. It's a language that is not spoken, and it's great that a choreographer seizes onto that. (Roy, FG2)^{xxii}

From an osteopath reputed for treating dancers:

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. (Hobden, FG1)

From a psychologist :

To add something from my view as a psychologist, because we speak so much about rationality and all that. For me, creativity must be studied with much rationality. ... What we need in order to find a certain pleasure is to make rational links from time to time, and these performances permit us to do that. (N. Simard, FG3)^{xxiii}

From a language translator :

I have intense feelings at an evening like tonight that these people are speaking a language that I don't know much about but it's extremely eloquent. [...] I want to know this language more but I don't have to in order to enjoy it. (Wilson, FG2)

These citations demonstrate specific ways in which these spectators applied their work life skills and knowledge to various levels of choreographic interpretation. In these excerpts, interpretive strategies and orientations include a consideration of dance gestures as a non-verbal language, attention to kinesthetic empathy with the dancers and the flow of images, seeking the

pleasure in making rational links to the performance. In other words, for these *Luna* spectators, their vocational orientations provided a framework through which they came to understand and explain their experience of *Luna*.

8.5.5 How arts literacy is acquired

How had *Luna* spectators gained whatever knowledge they had acquired about contemporary dance? Since there is little formal initiation in Québec's primary and secondary schools but for a small number of programs headed by dance specialist educators, knowledge about dance is often gleaned in informal ways.

In terms of experience in dance going, five of the audience focus group members had attended *Luna* as their first experience of a contemporary dance performance. There were ten who spoke of attending contemporary dance only occasionally (including the responses "several times," "once in a while," and "many times a year"). In this group were also those who were practicing artists and those who taught in the arts field. Finally, five focus group members, including two dance professionals, were ardent dance-goers in the sense that they reported attending dance "regularly" and "frequently", some of them every week and as often as possible, even when it meant traveling great distances.

But in terms of getting an arts education, there is little formal training available in performing arts spectating, better known in English Canada as "arts appreciation" (the theme of certain university courses for non-dance majors) or "arts literacy" (Van Gyn, 1993, in title of study). In local educational institutions there do exist a small number of dance classes and artistic field trip activities for students and teachers of various ages and levels of experience. *O Vertigo* had performed for and given workshops to elementary school children in the past, as letters on the studio bulletin board attested. And there have long been opportunities to read about and discuss

dance performances with friends and specialists, some artists offer program notes about their work, and journalists write previews and reviews of dance performances in newspapers. But learning about contemporary dance for non-dance professionals in Canada is by-and-large an oral (or more appropriately perhaps a “kinesthetic”) tradition, passed on from parents to children, among friends and acquaintances.

From evidence in the focus groups, each audience participant at *Luna* had developed a perspective and meaning-making process gleaned from whatever formal or informal dance education they had been able to find. Some of their understanding of contemporary dance was acquired through their family, social and cultural environment, as witnessed by one seasoned *Luna* dance-goer:

My mother was a writer and she brought us very often to see artistic performances like dance, theatre, exhibitions, sculptures and paintings. Even when we were that tall [he gestures] and we hardly understood what was going on. (Hobden, FG1))

This brings to mind once again Cloutier and Provonost’s notion of “networks of sociability”(1996, p. 76) and finding in their study that one’s family, friends and co-workers can influence one’s art-going choices. In the same spirit I would add, from my own observations in and out of the field that those dance-going companions who accompany spectators inevitably contribute to how the performance is experienced and understood through a verbal and non-verbal sharing of reactions and impressions.

The *Luna* focus groups necessarily included spectators with enough interest in the arts that they were willing to devote an extra hour of their evening exchanging ideas about dance with fellow audience members and myself. This arts-positive attitude was confirmed by their behavior during the discussions. All of them without exception contributed ideas and

demonstrated spontaneous enthusiasm, proving eager to tell their stories and to have them on record.

Most likely because my focus groups included only these highly motivated arts aficionados, I recorded only two incidences of a negative attitude towards dance (childhood classical ballet classes in these instances) in the course of the conversations: “My mother dragged me to ballet when I was six years old. I wasn’t very fond of it at that age. I’d rather do things like climb trees.” (Dura, FG1) and “[...] a friend of my parents [thought I should go to ballet class. And so I did, and I was four and I hated it.” (Lamb, FG1). In the previous chapter I explained how it was that taking dance classes, even when the experience was unpleasant, had brought certain focus group members to continue a life practice of dance spectating.

In terms of arts literacy, the great majority of the dance-goers in these focus groups might be found somewhere around the mid-point of Van Gyn’s “Arts Literacy Continuum” (1993, pp. 262-265). This was part of a model elaborated within a cross-Canada study aimed at fostering a wider appreciation of the arts in Canadian society. According to her criteria, Van Gyn might locate most of the Luna audience focus group members in the category of spectators she called “perceptive.” In her study, she created a list of characteristic behaviors that were manifested by these perceptive spectators, which bore resemblance to my own findings as well. Van Gyn’s “perceptive spectators” and most of my audience focus group members were those who had: (a) expressed a need for the arts; (b) sought out arts experiences; (c) kept themselves well-informed about the arts; (d) enjoyed discussions about art (and so joined the focus groups); (e) took risks in their artistic choices; and (f) considered arts participation as part of their personal development. As Lorette Hubert exclaimed, when asked why she came to the *Luna* performance, after taking her retirement: “[...] why not initiate oneself to something different, to see, to open the spirit, to become initiated to something new? “^{xxiv} (FG3).

In Van Gyn's arts literacy continuum, the highest level of literacy is accorded to those spectators who feel that they are not separate from the art world, but in fact participating members of their arts community. Six of the *Luna* focus group members can be seen as belonging to this level: those who recounted having personal or professional arts practices of their own, an osteopath specializing in dancers' injuries, and season ticket holders who attended dance performances frequently.

Van Gyn's study and model are the outcome of a need for arts advocacy strategies in a society that has few venues by which the general public can educate themselves about the arts and in which the public education system puts a comparatively low value on the arts in their curriculum.

8.6 Presenters' analyses and critiques

It might well be called "the presenting gaze" or in other words, presenters watch performances with unique frames of reference that emerge from their functional role in the dance event. And I know that for myself, this presenters' spectating mode has become a permanent "occupational hazard" (or *déformation professionnelle* as the French say it).

How does it function? At the first level of this gaze, as recounted by Wexler, Boucher, Schwartz and Heun, *Luna* was watched as if through the eyes of their local audiences. Also at a first sitting, whether at a live showcase like CINARS or on the videotape sent to them by *O Vertigo*, the presenters were obliged to keep in mind the inevitable calculation of necessary stage space, number of hotel rooms needed for the touring company, cost of transporting the set, and other technical and administrative issues. And finally, these presenters inevitably linked the meaning of the dance performance to the larger world of current events and socio-cultural context in which it took place, as illustrated below by the testimony of Wexler and Boucher. It was only after this set of interpretations and evaluations were in

progress that the presenters moved on to a second level in which they could allow themselves to respond directly and personally to the artistic resonance of *Luna* itself.

In view of revealing the researcher's bias, it is pertinent here to remember that being a dance presenter myself, I know all of the presenters exposed here as professional colleagues and many of them have even become friends. We are all aware of these additional frames of reference we put into practice when watching and evaluating dance because of the role we play as those who select and mount dance performances.

8.6.1 Presenters' gaze: the functional 1st phase

In choosing whether or not to program *O Vertigo*, Wexler first had to determine whether the dance company would be able to draw enough audience to balance the expenses of self-presenting at his 600-seat theater in New York City, and if their aesthetic would complement his on-going dance season and attract the interest of his usual audiences. His assessment of their application to present their work at *The Joyce* contained many of his selection criteria, as he put it:

When they come to The Joyce, *O Vertigo* comes in under our rental program. They self-presented here, so they put in their application, and they seemed, or I determined that they were a company of quality. [...] The dancers were very exciting, they were very skilled dancers, the production values were very high. [...] I thought it would enhance the season, and expose the New York audiences to that style of work, very physical actually, I would sort of classify it in the European style. They are our neighbors to the North, from Canada, and I think there's some

appeal to bringing Canadian artists to New York [and that] people are curious about what is happening in Montréal. (I-MW)

He went on to explain that they were originally being presented in the context of the Québec -New York Festival, sponsored by the Québec government and which was ultimately cancelled because their performances were scheduled to take place only two weeks after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. *O Vertigo* decided to proceed with the performances in spite of the situation, and Wexler remarked: “I think they suffered a little bit [at the box office]. [...] it was very difficult circumstances just crossing the [U. S.-Canada] border.” But he concluded that “artistically, the event was well-received” and that although “a lot of New Yorkers were not prepared to go out to the theater quite yet”, so soon after the tragedy, those who came seemed to enjoy the performance.” But, he added, at more than seventy minutes in length with no intermission, it had been too long to hold the interest of some of his American spectators who tended to have short attention spans (I-MW).

As a Montréal presenter in the hometown of *O Vertigo*, Boucher had been watching Laurin’s work since her first choreographic efforts in the 1980s. Boucher had always thought of Laurin as “an extraordinary dancer with an extraordinary physical energy” among the 4 or 5 Québec choreographers who were early on identified by the collective dance milieu as having great potential and originality. Another advantage for a dance festival like the *Festival international de nouvelle danse*, Boucher explained, was Laurin’s choice of concrete themes that she believed were “easier for the public” to understand than many of those of her artistic peers. As for *Luna*, it was difficult for Boucher to speak of the sense of the work: “I didn’t really see much of it, because it was the middle of the festival. My mental state was a little crazy. [And so] I probably better remember the little excerpt I saw six months before, in her studio [...]. That festival, with [the terrorist attacks on]

September 11, was quite crazy”^{xxv} (I-DB). Like Boucher, some presenters were not even able to “see” the dance in terms of personal resonance and meaning beyond the needs of their venues and audiences.

In the context of the *Tanzhaus* season in Düsseldorf, German dance presenter Schwartz explained that *O Vertigo* fell into the category of “international appearance” in which they invite a company from outside of Germany to perform every two months. He had paired up with colleague Walter Heun to bring *Luna* to Europe for the premiere performance. He had already succeeded in developing an interest in the company from earlier performances, liked the technological theme and artistic collaborators (especially Swiss-born Morgenthaler), and had met with company agent Plukker just as he had been looking for partners for the first European tour (I-SS).

Another German dance producer Heun had been a long-time unequivocal supporter of Laurin’s work. He proposed being a co-producer and lending the financial and physical resources of his organization to help realize the premiere performance of *Luna* at *lucerntheater* in Switzerland. (He produced dance in both Germany and in his role as artistic director of the dance programming for the Swiss theater.) His view of choreographer Laurin was admiration for her role as a “pioneer of the art form,” as one who had “develop[ed] a mature form of presentation which addresses [itself] to larger audiences.” Like his colleagues Wexler and Boucher, as programmers with relatively large-scale theaters, all agreed that an important advantage of Laurin’s aesthetic was her ability to interest a wide range of spectators. They were, I am quite certain, implying that Laurin’s dances have proven to be more popular in their appeal than those of some other contemporary artists of her kind and so successful at the box office. (I-WH)

8.6.2 Presenters' gaze: personal assessment in the 2nd phase

But what did they think personally about the *Luna* choreography? These were four of the presenters who had decided to take the risk of presenting *Luna* when still an untested new work even before it was created. Their critiques, elaborated below, were generally positive with an occasional touch of reserve. (Presenters of the later tours had already been able to see the finished work in a performance or showcase before committing to its presentation.)

Wexler confided to me that he was “really responding to [*Luna*] as one of the first artistic works that [he] had witnessed after the terrorist attacks.” In the end, he found the piece to be beautiful and compelling, possessing in general a “beautiful quality.” He extolled the strong points of its moon theme and technical innovations:

[...] when you think about the moon, and how it is a universal image [...] it was unifying, and really brought people together. It was a beautiful [musical] score [...] the dancers were excellent and provided a lot of their own vocals [...] and it had some wonderful technical effects that were compelling. The video projections from hand-held cameras, and cameras that were hidden in different places on and off the stage, were very interesting to see. (I-MW)

He told me that he had been deeply moved and his agitated spirit soothed along with his audience.

Despite her “crazy mental state” during the *Festival de nouvelle danse de Montréal* “ in which *Luna* was presented, because of the agitation issuing from the terrorist attacks, Boucher was able to offer me a few impressions about the

work. But her memories of the work came mainly from the earlier *CINARS* showcase. The dancers were good, she said, and with *Luna* the choreographer was renewing her way of working (*sa démarche*) with an interest in new things. As always, Laurin had given her choreography a “strong structure,” beautiful décor and costumes. Some of the images she saw in the work had “stayed with her,” such as those created by elements of the set and the video projections, and the large white dresses. Concluding her assessment of *Luna*, Boucher said that all in all “it was a good piece.” (I-DB)

Schwarz seemed a little less enthusiastic than the others, perhaps even a little disappointed. He spoke mainly about *Luna*’s complexity, the large lenses, and an emotional coolness he had sensed in comparison to her previous works. As did Boucher, he also commented on the rigor of the compositional structure. But in the end he gave *Luna* a mixed assessment:

I cannot be very detailed, but what I felt is that *Luna* is a very elaborated choreography, really in terms of composition and vocabulary, movement in space. I think it’s a very well made piece – more in the craft sense. And also the idea with the lenses is a very nice idea. It [works] quite well visually [...] I was not so much taken like I was in a previous production like *The Beast Within*, which was more energetic, dynamic and touching. [...] *Luna* is not wild. It’s very accurate, precise, composed and constructed. (I-SS)

His colleague Heun knew the choreography more deeply and intimately, having flown to Montréal from Munich to dialogue with Laurin and Lagacé at length and to watch an in-studio creative session in fall 2000. Heun’s reactions to the piece were enthusiastic and complimentary. His analysis offered new insights into some of the virtues of *Luna*. Where some of the other presenters perceived only precision and rigor in the structural form of

Luna, Heun sensed sensuality and imaginative poetry. He also said he was enchanted by the use of large lenses that he claimed offered nothing less innovative than “a new world of perception” for spectators:

Luna is a great show! The way in which video projections and these optical lenses are integrated into a dance performance is very new and at the same time it makes great sense/sensuality. By enlarging parts of the body temporarily it draws the attention of the audience towards smaller details of the choreography, thus [sensitizing] the audience [to] the sensations that dancers have between themselves while dancing. It offers a new world of perception for the audience without being didactic. What I like is that Ginette is integrating these techniques in a very poetic way. *Luna* is a dance poem and the technique is not being used for its own sake. It adds another category of imagination to the piece. (I-WH)

So many factors then intervened in presenters’ choices of dance companies to be programmed. Not only had they honed personal artistic criteria, but they had considered the tastes of their audiences, the nature of the physical and administrative characteristics of their theatrical venues, and of course local arts policies and politics which determined the economic and aesthetic parameters of their operations.

8.7 What meanings and values the critics (and historian) attributed to *Luna*

Among the artifacts I collected, in chronological order were 41 newspaper and magazine articles, previews and reviews, written about the *Luna* performance and choreography of which the first 21 are submitted here

to interpretation (see the list of articles just following the bibliography). These texts were conceived (with a few exceptions) by dance specialists, and my collection spanned the period from the first five opening night critiques about the Lucern premiere on February 2, 2001 to an interview with Laurin in a Canadian dance magazine an October 2002 issue just as she embarked on her tour around the province of Québec. For the interpretations below, I decided to end with the Scottish performances, from a sense that a point of saturation had been reached. This section presents the sole case of *Luna* participants included in this study who I didn't actually meet in person and for whom the only evidence was their writing, but for the two Québécoise who were interviewed as well.

These texts were conceived on, for and about the occasion of dance performances like *Luna*. I believe they are worthwhile examining here because of their impact on public perception and also because they are rich with aesthetic points of view about *Luna's* meanings, and artistic merits and failings. These press and magazine articles were inevitably read by some of the audience members, as was made evident in the focus groups. A selection of these texts were also added to *O Vertigo's* press kit, to be read later by other dance specialists such as dance critics, researchers and students, but also by funding agents and peer jury members as part of the materials offered for judging a grant application to make future work. And so from my dance world experiences in all of these roles, I can predict with certainty that the evaluations and opinions of these specialist dance writers then would have an impact on the meaning and value of *Luna* not only for those spectators who chose to read them before and after the performance, but also in determining the status of *Luna* for dance funders, juries, historians, students, and more.

Two of the dance writers included here were in fact interviewed, and some of their dance views have already been revealed the previous chapter (Howe-Beck, Brody). And I have also had the chance to converse with three

of the others over the years, gleaning a sense of how they apprehend and interpret dance (Schmidt, Jowitt, Kisselgoff).

It was also interesting to note how some of the key ideas and phrases from Laurin and Morgenthaler's original project proposal became inscribed into the company press release for *Luna* (both in Appendix I), and were carried on into the texts of these dance writers directly or paraphrased – sometimes even forming the basis for their descriptions and interpretations. Among others, key words and phrases that appeared in the project proposal and reappeared in the specialists' writings about *Luna* were: “poetic and sensual,” “tribute to the human body,” “optical technology,” “moonlike,” “fluid and crystalline,” “reveal the hidden face of the dance,” “subtle expressions of the dancer's faces,” “isolation of parts of the body,” “infinitely small and large,” “daydreams,” “the landscape of the dancers' bodies.” Some of the writers even integrated elements of Laurin's statement from the press kit about “vertigo” as they discussed the company's artistic vision in general:

My dance is about vertigo, the allure of the abyss, exhilaration, free-falling emotion. (Ginette Laurin, from the first page of the *Luna* press kit).

I have examined the 21 texts in chronological and geographical order, exploring the idea that there may be commonalities having to do with specific performances of *Luna* and with a kind of national and linguistic kinship among dance writers in the same region.

8.7.1 Swiss and German critics

There were five reviews from dance critics in Swiss newspapers on the day after the premiere performance of *Luna* in Lucerne. They were soon

followed by four German critiques, one written about the Swiss premiere (but published a week later) and the others from the following performances in Düsseldorf.

This group of texts revealed several commonalities. They were all written in the German language, either the literary High German or in Swiss German. They all contained poetic descriptions and interpretations of *Luna's* themes, of its dancers and the dancing. These were poetic texts in the sense that sense-laden adjectives and adverbs colored the writers' observations and interpretations. There were also fragments of vivid movement descriptions, a generous use of imaginative metaphors and impressions about the dancing. Excerpts from Bucher's and Touwborst's sensual and kinetic interpretations offer a small sampling:

Again and again the stage seemed to be in a wide, peaceful cosmos. [...] Actually the dynamic and interwoven movements seem to follow their own laws. [...] While the dancers investigate every step, every rotation, every link of the body gently and playfully – as if they were miraculous – they seem to be goblins, who have slipped into a human body in order to discover it with pleasure.^{xxvi} (Bucher, 2001)

Nine moonstrucken ones move in beautiful, pale light. [...] Behind a gauze curtain, which separates the stage elliptically, the movement becomes blurred, synchronously doubled. Cool, reserved and precise, the women and men carry out their quick and small motions like a minimal dance. Their rhythmic breath underlies the sound score, their hands vibrate, pirouettes and hopping jumps try to suggest weightlessness. The gestural communication allows them to appear like extraterrestrials. A

starlit, atmospheric, misty moonlight choreography.^{xxvii}
 (Trouwborst, 2001)

American critics (like Jowitt and Kisselgoff below) have named this tendency “the descriptive school” of dance criticism in which there is an attempt to help readers actually visualize what the performance looked like. Shusterman (2002) wrote about a “descriptivist” approach to criticism in which the writer either claims to be describing the dance objectively “as it really was” or as subjectively “s/he saw it.” In this kind of writing, as with ethnography, there was also an attitude of immediacy, in other words “I was there and here is what I observed about what people said and did.”

The German language critics also seemed to share a common set of criteria and preoccupations about what composes “good quality” (and so valuable) choreography. Woven into their descriptions were evaluative adjectives and phrases such as: well-done, virtuoso, fascinating, magical, weak, marvelous, paralyzing, not very well trained, monotonous, visionary. In this sense they fall into Shusterman’s prescriptivist critical attitude as well, because recommending to readers how they should be looking at and evaluating the choreography. For instance, several commented on *Luna* as conceptualist (idea-based) “dance research” -- a current topic of interest in European contemporary dance -- because the work was seen to be posing questions about the body and technology. All of them discussed the virtues of *Luna*’s “dramaturgy” (a German initiated dance concept referring to dramatic flow and structure if choreography) and invariably found that *Luna* was lacking the attention of a dramaturg. It had weak points, they explained, where the action became boring and tedious. And they said that *Luna* was generally too long at seventy minutes with no intermission. But for Schmidt (2001), who judged that some of the dancers were overweight and under-skilled, these critics spoke of the dance, dancers and dancing as beautiful, strong and of high quality -- and so a dance to be treasured. They also called

Luna a high point in their local dance season. They described in detail various moments and aspects of the choreography and how it was supported (well or poorly) by other artistic media. They tended to put *Luna* into an art historical framework, making references and comparisons to other artists' work, for instance there were these comments from Blaser: "[It was] reminiscent of the aristocratic painting by Velazquez [...]" and "The light play on the stage floor reminds us of a curved and beautiful moon landscape, how *Le Petit Prince de l'Exupéry* might have experienced it" ^{xxviii} (Blaser, 2002). Each German language critic offered a personal and distinct interpretation of the choreography's possible meanings, usually beginning with a statement about the significance of the moon. Bucher (2002) claimed *Luna* to be about intellectual "body questions" and defined the body in *Luna* (in tune with Laurin's statements) as a landscape to be discovered; Blaser (2001) experienced *Luna* as a magical and fascinating space that inspires the audience; while Weber (2001) claimed that despite its stated intention to study the body through cameras, *Luna* was in the end really just a beautiful entertaining dance which celebrated the moon; and so on.

Finally, the Swiss and German dance critics almost always included local and nationalist contexts in their texts. They made references to *Luna* as a particular example of Canadian choreography and discussed the presentation of *O Vertigo* within the dance seasons of *lucerntheater* and *Tanzhaus*. In the case of the opening night reviews for the Lucern performance, five of the six dance writers told readers that their resident choreographer Rickard Wherlock had regretfully left Lucern for Berlin with some of his dancers, and the Theatre of Lucern decided not to engage a new ballet company but, as Schmidt put it, decided to try out a new model drafted by Munich impresario Walter Heun (Schmidt, 2001). In this new arrangement, as they told readers, Heun had converted the dance program into the *Choreographisches Zentrum* which offers their audiences guest performances as well as co-productions with national and international dance companies. The three German critics

who wrote about the performances at *Tanzhaus NRW* in Düsseldorf situated *O Vertigo* as of Canadian nationality at the beginning of their texts, and Trouwborst (2001) even described how the Canadian ambassador flew in from Berlin for the premiere performance and so the dance company “is considered to be the Franco-Canadian export number one”^{xxix} (Trouwborst, 2001). At least in the view of one Canadian diplomat and a German dance critic, *O Vertigo* is truly a national treasure.

8.7.2 Montréal hometown critics and dance historian

The four Montréal critics who wrote about *Luna*, having been natives to the home city of *O Vertigo*, had been watching Laurin’s work over the years and in at least one case (Howe-Beck) from the time of her first choreographic efforts. Montréal dance writers Brody and Howe-Beck were interviewed and profiled for this study. Two of the newspaper articles concerned the performance of a 10-minute excerpt of *Luna* presented by the Montréal Highlights Festival as one section of a larger showcase of 8 local dance companies, called “*Montréal Mène La Danse*,” on February 24, 2001. The other three critiques were written following the two performances of the complete choreography at the *Montréal Festival International de Nouvelle Danse* on September 22 and 23, 2001.

Martin (2001) and Brody (2001) wrote “survey” texts about this program of excerpts from 8 Montréal dance companies. From personal conversations with the directors, I know that the Montréal Highlights Festival was conceived as a cultural event in the middle of winter whose purpose was mainly to help draw more tourists into the city during the low season for tourism, by way of vaunting and popularizing both Montréal arts and cuisine. Both critics set their interpretations in the framework of the presentation with general discussion about Montréal choreography. Martin (2001) remarked

that the thematic program of local dance demonstrated that Montréal dance was in “top form” and reflected the kind of creative diversity that is the fruit of freedom of expression, while Brody (2001) praised it as a good survey of local dance “universes” (styles), but that it was only the “tip of the iceberg” of local dance production. With only enough space to characterize the short *Luna* excerpt in a few words, Martin summarized it as lyric and savage, while Brody ventured a few lines of description: “[...] a series of ‘flashes’ in which the dancers speak to us through a strange sign language, playful and jittery.” Martin is an aesthetic philosopher who attempted in her text to identify some common characteristics of Montréal dances which she identified as displaying vitality, strong bodies in motion, powerful dancing and charisma, quick and sometimes explosive movement, a love for choreographic complexity, and stylistic originality. Brody and Martin’s capsule previews of *Luna* were purely descriptive, as in Shusterman’s “true meaning of descriptivist logic,” reserving further assessments and interpretations for the fall premiere of the full-length work.

Howe-Beck (2001) wrote a preview on the morning of the first performance of *Luna* at the *Festival international de nouvelle danse de Montréal*. She offered a terse explanation of the “Grand Labo” theme, chosen for the festival by its director Chantal Pontbriand, as a “huge laboratory.” With only the space of a single paragraph in which to delineate the features of *Luna* before seeing the live work, she simply quoted a few sections from the company press release with an emphasis on the use of optical lenses to reveal details of body mechanics. Along with the accompanying photo of Demers and Riede dancing behind one of the giant lenses, Howe-Beck’s article suggested that the use of giant lenses was the central idea of the choreography, when actually it was one small part of the dance among others.

The two *Luna* performances at the *Festival international de nouvelle danse de Montréal* received substantial critical reviews from Brody (2001) and Poulin (2001), each one written immediately after one of the presentations and on the

same evening. Brody confided to me in a personal conversation (on January 21, 2005) that she had to write in this fashion during festivals, turning out a text in a hurry as if “in a single stroke” within one hour on a deadline for the *La Presse* daily newspaper and so affording her little time to mature her impressions. Both Brody and Poulin wrote with literary flair, in that they used evocative adjectives, adverbs, imagery and metaphors in their descriptions and evaluations of *Luna*. I am thinking here of richly endowed phrases like Poulin’s: “[...] these women carrying illusions who take over the stage with their white skirts puffed up with giant crinolines”^{xxx} and Brody’s “Exulting life, the dancers throw themselves into a veritable frenzy of gestures, punctuated by an almost violent contact of body on body”^{xxxi}. Their writing was poetic and clearly personal, giving them the status of subjective descriptivists within Shusterman’s schema of critic’s attitudes (2002).

Brody and Poulin’s *Luna* reviews contained several points of agreement: the dance’s ambiance was magical and dream-like, the dancers’ powerful interpretations were of primary interest, the pacing of the dance was exceptionally rapid, the public was pulled strongly into the action, and the dream-like qualities of the dance were wonderfully augmented by the sections with the large lenses, the silky moon dresses, and the camera hidden under Barry’s skirt. Both described the audience’s reaction as one of spontaneous enthusiasm, in Brody’s words: “the public stood up at the end in one single bound. The ovation was spontaneous and complete (I-SB).”^{xxxii}

It was in the prescriptivist interpretations they gave of the dance’s meanings that Brody and Poulin’s views differed with subtlety. Brody proposed by way of explanation that it seemed as if “a kind of enchanter blew life into the dancers. [...] Their entire bodies served to communicate among themselves in an unknown language that we can never truly understand and which envelops *Luna* in an aura of mystery”^{xxxiii}. In her interpretation, the dance was about what happened to the dancers and the strange choreographic world in which they interacted. In contrast, Poulin began her

review by pinning down a single master theme, which also served as a caption for the photo, included in the article, of Barry in the silky moon dress: “*Luna* is an exploration of the body of the dancer, a microcosm of the universe.”^{xxxiv} In Poulin’s explanation, the dancers’ “bodily landscape” served as a metaphor for the nature of the universe. It occurs to me that this is an interesting variation on the classical ballet’s historical function as a choreographic representation of the ordering of the universe through the configuration of bodies moving through space.

Included in this section on local dance writers is the sole newspaper article from the Chicoutimi tour, a preview written by Pelletier (2001). This is the performance at the *Théâtre du Saguenay*, described throughout this study. An entire half-page of space was reserved in the local paper, and three photos were included. Pelletier devoted most of her text to a history of *O Vertigo*, and an entire column of descriptive prose about the *Luna* choreography that she had culled from the press release. Assuming the role of prescriptivist arts advocate (as did also Chicoutimi *animatrice* Clément), her article reminded local theater-goers that *O Vertigo* was a note worthy company, having been regularly invited to the *Théâtre du Saguenay* over the years, and furthermore, that it was a prestigious company. She then rallied Saguenay audiences to the performance with a rousing prescriptivist sentence: “Ginette Laurin is reputed for her way of integrating and unifying movements, costumes, music and lights and for inventing original concepts [...] that are vibrant, sensual, energetic and which touch both the heart and the spirit”^{xxxv} (Pelletier, 2001).

Finally, although she didn’t write or publish a text specifically about *Luna*, Montréal dance historian Tembeck did have a few words to say in interview about the presentation of *Luna* she had attended during the *Festival international de nouvelle danse*. She remarked how it was that, for her, the context of a performance imposes subjective interpretations. As if to illustrate, Tembeck described how *Luna* had seemed a respite from the intensity of a

dance festival and the recent terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in New York City:

I found [*Luna*] ...a bit contemplative. I found it ...peaceful. And I think it's a piece that I enjoyed seeing after September 11th. [...] There was in our daily lives, so much...violence, anxiety, disruption of world order, that seeing something that was more meditative, within the compressed thing of a three-week festival...(sighs with relief) Aaaahhh! You see? So it depends how you go to a piece, if you've come at the end of the last of a busy week. You know there are so many things that subjectively come into the way you see something. (I-IT)

She explained that the way in which she interpreted a performance also depended on whether she was watching in order to write, or with the intention of talking about it in a class (university level dance history). And she also remarked that how she experiences a dance work also depended literally on her angle of view ("sightlines") and the space in which it was being shown. Her assessment of *Luna* was succinct: "I liked it [...] I liked the staging of it," but then critiqued the use of technology as a trendy choice and the dance as overly long despite the striking images. When asked if she still considered Laurin a key choreographer, she mused "I think so [but] she's now catering to a broader public internationally," and mourned the loss of the intimate humor in her earlier duet work *Olé*. (I-IT)

8.7.3 New York City critics

Deborah Jowitt and Anna Kisselgoff are two senior dance critics in New York City who wrote reviews of *Luna* performances at The Joyce

Theater. Each has been writing for over 25 years on a weekly basis respectively in the *Village Voice* “alternative press” weekly newspaper and the daily newspaper *The New York Times*. They both see themselves as part of an American “descriptive school” of dance writing in which reviewers attempt to recreate the moment of a dance performance including both stage action and audience reactions. Jowitt has also written a book that moves beyond purely aiming to describe, and which attempts the work of a historian and sociologist in that it situates art dances in their historical settings (Jowitt, 1988).

In my close readings of New York City critics over the years, in *The New York Times* and *The Village Voice*, I have often remarked that, perhaps more than any other group of dance writers, they seem to be interested in and excel at making minute and visceral descriptions of the dance movements themselves. By way of example, consider these depictions of dance movement from reviews of *Luna* reviews: “[...] they accumulate and accelerate sequences of knock-kneed pliés, taps to the chest, squats turned into handstands, mouths pulled into smiles and so on, along with more expansive yanks and lifts with partners [...]” from Kisselgoff (2001); and “Dancers tangle playfully, but just as often unite in crystalline patterns of big, smooth steps or stand and transmit cryptic hand signals” from Jowitt (2001). Both dance writers had also seen previous works of Laurin, and so offered historical perspectives on the evolution of her characteristic aesthetic. Jowitt proposed that *Luna* “is less explosive than her earliest pieces [...] a dreamier world.” Kisselgoff reflected that Laurin’s “old, daring acrobatic flourish has been replaced by an astounding concentration on small detail in gestures and isolated movements” and that although she “has always excelled in expressing fantasy through the physicality of dance technique, [...] here she relies more on technology.”

Both critics centered their seasoned prescriptivist interpretations of choreographic meaning on the co-habitation of science and fantasy, echoing Laurin’s statements about her work in the press release (Appendix I). Jowitt

advanced her view that “in this [choreographic] universe, science and imagination embrace [...in a] mood of serene exploration.” Kisselgoff proposed a more elaborate interpretation. She wrote: “ ‘Luna’ is a cross between a fairy tale and a scientific treatise,” adding that when it was considered as a story “ ‘Luna’ is less an allegory about the universe than a minute examination of matter, and matter in this case is dancing.” As for the fiery ending of the dance, Kisselgoff suggested that it might be seen either as apocalyptic or then again perhaps as representing “the chaotic turbulence of creation.” At several points, each critic also made subtle value judgments revealing some of their aesthetic preferences, agreeing that (as Jowitt wrote) the dance was “full of beauties” but that it sometimes became tedious. Jowitt also noted approvingly the presence of lightness and buoyancy, splendid dancers, and eloquent lighting (her own words). In a more doubtful tone Kisselgoff called the work sophisticated and imaginative, but that the 75 minutes of dancing were not adequately sustained by enough inventiveness and were lacking in “a deeper dimension.” In a similar fashion to their German colleagues above, they looked closely at the intelligence of the subject matter, whether or not the work was truly an aesthetic innovation, and if the dramatic structure was able to sustain the audience’s interest.

Jowitt and Kisselgoff fall most clearly into Shusterman’s subjective descriptivist genre (Shusterman, 2002), with a tendency to prescribe specific understandings for readers in a prescriptivist vein. To my mind, their writing assumed an attitude of “while I was sitting there watching *Luna* the other night and I noticed that...” in which the dance writer is situated as a particular kind of audience member reacting to a specific performance.

8.7.4 Scottish interviewers and critics

I was no longer doing fieldwork when *O Vertigo* toured *Luna* to Glasgow, Scotland, but continued to collect previews and reviews. And so I

recuperated traces of their performances as part of the *New Territories* Festival, where they performed in the company of another Québécois dance company *Sylvain Émard Danse*, by way of five newspaper articles. Among them were two previews composed of ideas offered in the press materials but also, in the case of Bowen (2002), from interviews he made with Laurin and Émard. Following public performances of *Luna* in Glasgow on March 15 and 16, 2001, three other Scottish dance critics wrote reviews: Mary Brennan (2002), Alice Bain (2002) and Mark Bowen (2002).

The previews contained information about the *New Territories* dance festival context, the choreographer, the dance company, the themes and style of *Luna*. Bowen gave his prescriptivist text a cultural slant at the outset, by discussing the ethnicity of the two Québécois choreographies. He began his article with a political insight on Québécois dance, perhaps a reflection of Scotland's own struggle for cultural autonomy within the hegemony of Great Britain:

The Canadian province of Québec is a society that has fought hard – and continues to fight – to maintain its language and identity within North America. It seems ironic, therefore, that this predominantly French-speaking community's most prominent cultural export (Céline Dion apart) is distinctly non-verbal.
(Bowen, 2002)

Quoting from his interviews with Émard and Laurin, Bowen offered further historical insights about how Québécois dance had (at least according to these two choreographers) so little ballet and modern dance heritage that local dancers had been obliged to invent their own style in isolation.⁴ Laurin was quoted as she voiced the common belief, shared by many Montréal dancers,

⁴ This cherished local myth has long been challenged by Tembeck's research and her writings on the history of dance in Montréal, especially in 1988 and 1991.

that the intense physicality of the Montréal style has been in part the result of the fact that “we’re more Latin. We love physical thrills. We drive faster than other Canadians” (Bowen, 2001). Bowen remarked that since *O Vertigo’s* Scottish debut in 1993, the company’s work had been recognized in Scotland as “explosive and dynamic.” In this preview, Laurin confirmed that her work was indeed taking a new turn with *Luna*, to her mind becoming more quiet, fragile and introspective than previous works. Chadwick’s preview (2001) limited itself to a few descriptive paragraphs about the choreography and Laurin’s creative sources, gleaned from the press materials. He assumed the role of arts advocate. His writing tone aimed to rouse the audience’s enthusiasm with adjectives like “suspense-filled” and “explosive”, and his article ended with a reassurance to the public of the choreography’s quality and value: “Luna is sure to be a tidy ball placed firmly in the audience’s court” (Chadwick, 2001).

Two of the three post-performance reviews began on a note of skepticism, with Bain (2001) contending that *Luna* “seems at first sight a little old-fashioned” and Brown (2001) portraying the opening scenes as cool and clinical, “reminiscent of a hospital respirator.” But all reported that in the end they became convinced of *Luna’s* quality because of the beauty of the visuals, high caliber of the dancers and dynamic (and so exciting) movement. Like the New York City critics, their critiques were composed of literary descriptions of the stage action into which they embedded their interpretations and evaluations of the choreographic composition. In the end, for instance, Brennan (2002) gave *Luna* a positive assessment, telling her readers that the choreography was “a kind of beguiling alchemy [...] fusing scientific text with processional hymn.”

8.8. When does the *Luna* choreography “work”?

Often overheard during fieldwork was the concept that the *Luna* choreography was “working” or “not working” (expressed by the verb *fonctionner* when in French). What did participants mean when they used the term? Like other contemporary choreographies, the current-day aesthetic climate in Montréal contemporary dance is one of individualistic experimentation and the forging of an original personal movement style (*une danse signée* in French, as if a signature). Local choreographers are under the influence of many differing schools of artistic thought: expressionism, Automatism, the integration of new technologies, neo-conceptualism based in the study of the body, and so on. So with no single set of artistic criteria, how and when can a dance be said to be working or not?

Early on in the fieldwork process I began to wonder why it was that a certain movement or image seem to ‘work’ for someone. I asked myself, for instance, what aesthetic criteria had led Laurin to decide that at various points in the creative process that the choreography “was working.” This seemed to me a question about meaning, for the choreographers and dancers and ultimately for audiences. I reasoned that “work” could be thought of as both a noun and a verb (FN: 9-13-00). These first thoughts continued to develop in my mind as months went on, as I heard different kinds of participants use the term “it works” on various of occasions. My thoughts were also tempered by advice from thesis co-director Sylvie Fortin when she cautioned that the idea that a choreography works or doesn’t (she used the French *fonctionne*) was not the same as it being meaningful (in the French sense of *être significatif*). But I asked myself, doesn’t the choreography ‘function’ when it is meaningful and communicates to its proponents? Most confusing of all, everyone in the study had a different angle of view on what it meant for *Luna* to be ‘working’ “ (FN: 12-16-00).

In the end, the meaning and use of the term “work” varied for each participant, dependant on personal criteria, artistic ethos and role in the dance event. What did become clear: when *Luna* worked well in someone’s view, it was in the general sense of having attained quality, value and artistic integrity. And some were also referring to the idea that the dance worked when it seemed to be “complete” and replete with the power to evoke multiple meanings.

Laurin was frequently heard to exclaim (or sometimes quietly confirm as she gave notes for instance) “yes, that works, keep it!” (*oui, ça fonctionne, gardez-le!*) during the creative processes, referring to either the technical and/or interpretive mastery of her dancers, or to her intuitive sense of “choreographic rightness” in movement choices according to the kinds of aesthetic preferences she revealed in giving notes to the dancers (clarity, sharpness, and so on).

As for Lagacé, he expressed his opinion at one point before opening night (during the filming session) that the *Luna* choreography would begin to “work better” once the dancers were able to integrate the choreography more fully into their bodies: “I’m confident, but it is still a bit mechanical. The dancers haven’t yet completely integrated it.” (FN: 8-8-01).

On the other hand, Morgenthelar and the other artistic collaborators were more concerned with how to negotiate and interject the material they had proposed to Laurin in the framework of a delicate union of aesthetic sensibilities. For instance, one day Morgenthelar projected a rapid stream of film fragments (fire, stars, waves, etc.) on a moon skirt, and for each image Laurin made quick choices, saying to Morgenthelar “that one works” or “that one doesn’t.”

In yet another sense, the presenters, writers and funding agents had each developed a specific and personal set of criteria, often conflicting with one another as seen above, which they applied when weighing various elements of *Luna* they had judged as “working more or less well.” Most wrote

that the dancers were strong and dynamic, but one felt they were overweight and under-trained; some found the choreography emotionally reserved and overlong to its detriment, while others perceived it as passionate and even thrilling; and so on. To judge whether the dance was working or not from these specialists' points of view was a decision about the relative value and quality of this dance work in light of Laurin's previous works, their own criteria honed over the years, and specific art world standards to which they subscribed.

8.9 Conclusion

It bears repeating that no single authoritative interpretation of *Luna's* form, function and meaning was found in the data. What did emerge from this account of participants' perceptions, interpretations and evaluations was a striking diversity of aesthetic points of view, assessments and personal meanings. As Laurin and some of her artistic collaborators explained above (I-GL1, I-AM, I-DL), this contemporary choreography was intentionally conceived according to Automatist conventions to be an abstract, poetic form that was open to various interpretations. In the end, all participants articulated some kind of meaning they had found in the *Luna* performance.

Although no common understanding emerged from the data, the choreographer's title *Luna* and project proposal text (Appendix I) provided motifs that contributed to the interpretations of participants. For instance, certain general themes and ideas from these sources reappeared throughout the interviews and focus groups: aspects of the moon, stars and universe, the primacy of the unconscious, the interface of art and science, looking closely at dancers' bodies, the poetry of the form and the physicality of the aesthetic, and the use of new technologies in dance. More specifically, sites of

consensus about interpretive modes and meanings were apparent within specific participant groups.

Members of *O Vertigo* were dance milieu professionals whose full-time engagement in the event gave them ample occasion to formulate interpretations of *Luna*. There were shared understandings, for instance, between Laurin and her artistic collaborators Morgenthelar and Lavoie that intuition and abstraction were key components of the *Luna* aesthetic and that *Luna* represented an “astral universe” open to multiple meanings (I-GL1, I-AM, I-DL). The dancers and rehearsal director voiced a common set of concepts, proposed by the choreographer, such as the cultivation of their inner garden and the inner smile, the idea of creating a presence or energy as they dance, the imperative to find their own interpretations by way of the intense physicality of the movements. Through these choreographic conventions specific to Laurin’s way of working, and their own aesthetic views, each dancer had formulated an essential metaphor (or two) with which to motivate their dancing: Reide’s energies, Barry’s presence, Weikart’s imaginary kernel, Rodrigue’s connection to the universe, and so on. The company directors, staff and agents who were engaged in mounting and promoting *Luna*, but whose work was not to interpret or assess the dance, offered only brief critiques and interpretations: Lagagé called it “rich, full and enigmatic” (I-BL) and Proulx recounted how it was emotionally moving for him and “close to the dancers and to humanity” (I-JP).

Luna’s spectators sat in still and quiet contemplation of the dancing, as contemporary dance decorum dictates, devoting only a few hours of their lives to the task of perception and interpretation during their evening out to the dance. The range of interpretations that 22 audience members expressed in the course of focus groups were discussed above in terms of three modes of apprehension and interpretation: (a) rational; (b) emotional and sensorial; and (c) intuitive. In other words, in order to formulate their reactions they alternately perceived *Luna* as a poetic kind of language, an emotional or

visceral experience or as a way of tapping into their subconscious imagination. They seized both general impressions of their 75-minute experience of *Luna*, and spoke about specific associations, sensations and emotions they had gleaned from specific moments in the choreography. As the focus groups revealed, most of these audience members had come to the performance with enough knowledge of contemporary dance to realize that no single interpretation or comprehensive narrative would be available.

The expressive specialists, like the dance company members, were dance milieu professionals. It was part of their role to assess and interpret *Luna* for audiences, artists and the population at large. In this chapter, the four presenters and 21 dance writers who were interviewed articulated precise and often elaborate meanings and critiques of *Luna*. The dance presenters were among those who had chosen to include *Luna* in their season, having already determined that *Luna* would be beneficial in their local seasons. They watched from the imagined perspective of their audience members and also from a personal point of view. All agreed that this choreography marked a more abstract and technological direction for Laurin, that the work was complex and tightly structured. And all presenters but Schwartz, who felt *Luna* was lacking in the emotional intensity he had expected to find, extolled the virtues of its beauty, poetry, inventiveness and the strong skillful dancing.

With few exceptions, the writers in this study were all newspaper journalists and critics, and radio hosts, who were specialists in dance. By presenting them chronologically and by nationality, it was possible to identify certain characteristics of “schools of critical thought” that formed a consensus about critical approach and writing style, as well as pinpointing the differences among their personal interpretations. They undertook various descriptive, interpretive and literary tasks in the course of their writing, from venturing to explain the meaning of *Luna*’s movements to assessing the quality of the performers. Although most extolled the quality and other

virtues of *O Vertigo* and *Luna*, there were some dissenting negative comments.

What finally became evident from this multitude of viewpoints, sometimes contradictory, is how interpretation and evaluation functioned for the *Luna* event in an intersubjective web of relationships. Each participant found sense in the performance through a strategic mode of interpretation they had developed in their lives over time, and according to his or her role in the event and general aesthetic outlook.

The original French texts

ⁱ “Je n’aime pas trop analyser et comprendre. C’est certain qu’il y a un sens, mais il va peut-être être différent d’une personne à l’autre. Il y a une esthétique, mais je travaille un peu dans le non-dit. Quand j’explique les choses aux danseurs et que je leur dis ce que je cherche, je ne pense pas que ma façon d’aborder le sujet est comme en théâtre, par exemple, où on est beaucoup défini avec le personnage, avec le sens, la signification, la psychologie du personnage. Pour moi, c’est beaucoup plus important d’y aller intuitivement et que le danseur reste aussi très intuitif dans sa démarche. Et, je fais référence parfois à des aspects plus visuels ou descriptifs, ou qui font référence à l’atmosphère ou à l’environnement. Pour moi, Luna, c’était l’idée des astres, la différence entre l’infiniment grand et infiniment petit, les éléments d’optique qu’on a utilisés qui nous ramènent à Copernic qui étudiait les planètes avec ses verres, au temps futur où on va toujours se soucier de l’environnement de l’univers. Et c’est un environnement très complexe, qu’on cherche encore à comprendre. La lune aussi pour toute sa portée poétique. Alors, tu vois, ce sont des images que je suggère, comme je pense que j’en suggère aussi dans le spectacle. Pour moi, il y a des milliers de sens. Chaque spectateur peut lire ce qu’il veut lire. C’est important de conserver cette multitude...” Ginette Laurin

ⁱⁱ “Là elle est arrivée à quelque chose de plus astral, alors c’est un peu...ça laisse beaucoup plus de place pour les images, pour le public, pour nous qui regardons la pièce. Et ça pour moi, d’avoir ce degré d’ouverture-là dans une oeuvre c’est bien parce qu’on va vers quelque chose de plus grand, de plus fort.” Denis Lavoie

ⁱⁱⁱ “[Luna] s’est fait rapidement comme la plupart des pièces de Ginette. Puis après ça avec beaucoup, beaucoup de temps pour aller chercher l’essentiel.” Raymond Brisson

^{iv} “Je ne veux pas bouger, je veux danser. Juste exécuter les mouvements ce n’est pas suffisant. Ça me prend quelque chose derrière ça et derrière la pièce dans son intégralité. Ça me prend une ligne directrice. J’ai besoin de savoir pourquoi je fais un mouvement, même si ce n’est pas raisonné. Souvent en danse c’est comme ça que ça se passe, on le sent ou on ne le sent pas et j’ai besoin de sentir.” Kha Nguyen

^v “[...] à tous les soirs je regarde la lune. Ça me parle. Je sais que pour Ginette, ce n’est pas vraiment le côté mythe de la lune qui l’intéresse, mais moi ça me nourrit, je me sers de ça parce que je trouve ça magnifique, merveilleux la lune, c’est un astre qui me parle.” Patrick Lamothe

^{vi} “[...] me connecter aux forces universelles, terrestres et cosmiques.” Marie-Claude Rodrigue

^{vii} “[Il] faut que je le vis, que je le danse, que je le respire et puis tout à coup, ça arrive. C’est pas moi qui l’impose.” Marie-Claude Rodrigue

viii “[...] l’histoire de la loupe” et qu’ “[elle] me fait beaucoup sentir l’influence qu’ont les astres, les éléments et les saisons sur nous. Ça me fait penser à l’enfantement, l’émerveillement devant la Force de la Vie.” Marie-Claude Rodrigue

ix “Il y a des images fortes qui nous amènent dans des mondes un peu plus concrets, je dirais, que dans une certaine abstraction figurative contemporaine.” Jocelyn Proulx

x “J’ai trouvé ça drôle [quand] à la fin du spectacle j’écoutais parler les gens. Ils parlaient de la face cachée de la lune, des affaires que j’ai pas trop comprises. Mais je me suis rendu compte que c’était pas grave parce que chaque personne avait sa propre vision du spectacle et qu’il n’y en avait pas de mauvaise ni de meilleure [vision] qu’une autre. [C’est] parce que chacun voit ça avec ce qu’il est et quelle personne il est. C’est ça l’art! Ça rejoint tout le monde [et] chacun a sa propre vision. On voit selon ce qu’on vit, notre vie. C’est tout.” Andréa Simard

xi “La façon dont je comprends [*Luna*] et que ça vient me toucher [c’est] à plusieurs niveaux. Je suis à la fois artistique et scientifique en même temps.” Jimmy Simard

xii “[...] il y a une partie qui essaie de comprendre ce que je ressens et ce qui se passe devant moi.” Noumbe Diop

xiii “Je ne vous dirai pas tout ce qui m’est passé par la tête ce soir, mais ça touche tout. Ça va jusqu’à la mort, la naissance, plein de détails de la vie.” Emma Renaud

xiv “Quand ils font des gestes... A un moment donné ils étaient tous en arrière à faire des gestes répétitifs et je me suis dit : ‘tiens, c’est le travail. Ils sont pris dans la vie quotidienne.’ On associe... je ne me suis pas forcée... j’ai juste senti à un moment que c’était ça, mais ce n’était pas important. Je ne voulais pas saisir à tout prix. Veux, veux pas... les grandes poupées... à un moment donné tu as aussi d’autres images... la femme mariée. C’était la femme mariée mais c’était aussi l’illusion pour moi. Une fraction de seconde j’ai vu ça. De toute façon on attrape toujours un « flash » quelque part. On est quand même dans la matière. Il y a quand même des objets, les corps sont là. À un moment donné ils étaient tous en beige, puis les t-shirts de couleurs arrivaient et tu vois les choses qui bougent, qui changent. Parfois ils sont juste les hommes, les femmes, déjà il y a autre chose que tu sens. D’avoir le vrai sens, ce n’est pas important... les relations... il y avait le support, le rejet, un peu la bataille, l’amour, la tendresse. C’est important de ressentir ce que les corps expriment aussi. Il faut ressentir quelque chose, on ne peut pas seulement être dans l’abstraction du mouvement.” Ginette Logueux

xv “[...] Je crois que je me laisse aller, je me laisse séduire visuellement et ça fait des connexions avec d’autres aspects de mon être et partir de ça il y a des détails, des éléments qui font que je me sens confortable et que j’aime ça. [...]

C'est comme si c'était une extension de moi qui est devant moi." Michel Desnoyers

^{xvi} "Mais il y a l'autre pensée qui est la pensée analogique qui est une pensée aussi. C'est la pensée où on fait des associations, c'est par ça qu'on va rejoindre l'émotion et elle a aussi sa rationalité, cette pensée-la. Une chose nous fait penser à telle autre, à telle autre [...]" N. Simard

^{xvii} "C'est un génie parce qu'elle maîtrise un langage que très peu de personnes maîtrisent, le langage analogique." N. Simard

^{xviii} "On doit s'élever au-dessus [des mouvements] et sentir l'émotion, ressentir ce qui se passe."; "Le code, c'est plutôt l'émotion qui arrive." Eric Potvin

^{xix} "[...] un flot d'émotions qui rentre et qui est vécu pour le moment du spectacle." Eric Villeneuve

^{xx} "Le reflet et le résultat de tensions sociétales, (b) basé sur l'émotivité, l'expression et l'intensité, et (c) dynamique, énergique et il possède de l'immédiateté" (Iro Tembeck)

^{xxi} "Ça vient m'imprégner aussi au niveau de la musique, ça me fait vibrer énormément. Il y a beaucoup de musique qui m'a passé à travers le corps ce soir. Tout en regardant l'image je me suis senti quasiment en transe à un moment donné." Jimmy Simard

^{xxii} "Dans ce spectacle-ci, j'ai été frappé par [...] ces gestes saccadés et insistants qui revenaient tout le temps. Je me disais 'ils vont nous l'expliquer à un certain moment' et l'explication est venue. C'était comme une glorification du langage sourd-muet. C'était génial parce que c'est des gestes que les sourds-muets font. C'est un langage qui n'est pas parlé et qu'une chorégraphe prenne ça au vol, c'est génial." Bruno Roy

^{xxiii} "Pour ajouter un peu en tant que psychologue, parce qu'on parle beaucoup de rationalité et tout. Pour moi, la créativité, on est obligé d'étudier ça avec beaucoup de rationalité. [...] Ce qu'on a besoin pour avoir un certain plaisir, c'est de faire des liens rationnels de temps en temps, et ces spectacles-là nous permettent ça." Normand Simard

^{xxiv} "[...] pourquoi pas s'initier à autre chose, à voir, à s'ouvrir l'esprit, à s'initier à autre chose de nouveau?" Lorraine Hubert

^{xxv} "Je n'ai pas vraiment vu grand chose parce que c'était en plein festival. Oui, mon état mental était un peu fou. [...] je me souviens probablement plus de l'extrait que j'ai vu en studio [...] ce festival-ci, avec le 11 septembre, c'était un peu la folie." Diane Boucher

^{xxvi} "Immer wieder scheint die Szeneriezeim welten, friedlichen Kosmos angesiedelt zu sein. [...] Überhaupt scheinen die dynamisch beseelten oder filigran sich verwebenden Bewegungsabfolgen eigenen Gesetzmässigkeiten zu folgen. [...] Während die Tanzenden jeden Schritt, jede Drehung, jedes Gelenk des Körpers sanft und verspielt untersuchen, als seien diese ein

Wunder, wirken sie wie Kobolde, die in einen Menschenkörper geschlüpft sind, um diesen genüsslich zu erkunden..." Eva Bucher

^{xxvii} "Neun Mondsüchtige gewegen sich in schönem, fahlen Licht, [...] Hinter einem Gazevorhang, der die Bühne ellipsenförmig teilt, werden die Bewegungen, nunmehr verschwommen, synchron verdoppelt. Kühl, distanziert und präzise führen die Frauen und Männer ihre flindken, kleinen Motionen, die Richtung *minimal dance* gehen, aus. Ihr Atem rhythmisiert den Klangteppich, ihre Hände vibrieren, Pirouetten und gehüpfte Sprünge wollen Schwerelosigkeit suggerieren. Wie Außerirdische lässt sie ihre gestische Kommunikation erscheinen. Eine sternenhelle, atmosphärisch neblige Mondschein-Choreografie." Bettina Trouwborst

^{xxviii} "Frauen in wolkeigen Roben, die an die von Velazquez gemalten Adligen erinnern [...]" Agathe Blaser; "Die Lichtspiele auf dem Bühnenboden erinnern an eine gewölbte, schöne Mondlandschaft, wie sie Saint-Exupéris kleiner Prinz erlebt haben könnte." Eva Bucher

^{xxix} "O Vertigo gilt als franko-kanadischer Exportschlager." Bettina Trouwborst

^{xxx} "[...] comme ces femmes porteuses d'illusions qui envahiront la scène avec leurs jupes blanches gonflées de crinoline géante." Isabelle Poulin

^{xxxi} "Exultants de vie, les danseurs se lancent ensuite dans une véritable frénésie gestuelle, ponctuée de corps à corps presque violents." Stéphanie Brody

^{xxxii} "[...] le public s'est levé d'un bond. L'ovation fût spontanée et totale." Stéphanie Brody

^{xxxiii} "Une sorte d'enchanteur semble insuffler la vie aux danseurs. [...] Leurs corps tout entiers leur sert à communiquer entre eux dans une langue inconnue que l'on ne saisira vraiment jamais et qui drapé *Luna* dans une aura de mystère." Stéphanie Brody

^{xxxiv} "Luna est une exploration du corps de l'interprète, microcosme de l'univers." Isabelle Poulin

^{xxxv} "Ginette Laurin est réputée pour sa façon d'intégrer et d'unifier mouvements, costumes, musique et éclairages pour inventer des concepts originaux et les mettre en œuvre dans des spectacles vibrants, sensuels, énergiques, qui touchent à fois le cœur et l'esprit." Pelletier