Part One - Life as Interiority

It has been described as one of the defining moments of modern dance (Franko, 1995, p.1). Isadora Duncan stands alone in her studio, waiting for the spirit of dance to arise from the deep wellsprings of her being: ‘for hours I would stand quite still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus… I was seeking and finally discovered the central spring of all movement’ (Duncan, 1927, p. 75). Dance, for Isadora, begins in the dark region of interiority and rises to the surface as rhythmical movements that emanate out to the world.

The radical nature of Isadora’s gesture can seem diminished to us, accustomed as we are to the very personal and individualized nature of our various contemporary dance practices but, for most of its European history before Isadora, dance had been social and communal, embodying collective rather than individual identities. Isadora, however, seeks a dance that would break free of the artificiality of social convention. The return to nature is identified with a return to the interior realm. In her 1909 essay, ‘Movement is Life’, Isadora decries ‘movement imposed from without’ (Duncan, 1977, p.77) as being antithetical to the spontaneous movements of nature found within the human body.

Certainly, the emphasis on subjective experience was prevalent in the thinking of the time, especially in the work of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Friedrich Nietzsche, who in particular had an enormous influence on Isadora Duncan (LaMothe, 2006). However, Duncan was searching for something more than merely a subjective source of movement, and we need to reach back a little further, into the philosophical biology of the early 19th century, in order to discover the degree to which Isadora Duncan’s recourse to the experience of interiority draws upon prevailing tendencies in the understanding of biological life. There is no doubt that Duncan, who called her studio the Studio of Life, understood her waiting – ‘do you not feel an inner self awakening deep within you’ (Duncan, 1927, p. 76) – to be an attending on the arrival of the very essence of life itself.
Science and vitalism

From the late 18th century, thinkers, in France in particular, reacted against the mechanistic tendency in the biological sciences of the period and attempted to understand life in terms of some vital force that transcends the physical-chemical order. The glimmer of a firefly, the ‘flare’ in the eye of a person motivated by a strong passion were seen as manifestations of an ‘inner fire’, the vital force that guarantees the continued survival of the organism.

In response to this resort to spiritualist explanations, the French biologist Claude Bernard in his 1861 work, *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* (Bernard, 1966), endeavoured to account for the autonomy of living things whilst remaining within the fabric of physico-chemical causation. Bernard wanted to find a reconciliation between scientific and vitalist tendencies in the comprehension of life. His most famous articulation of this reconciliation was the notion of the *milieu intérieur*, the internal environment. According to Bernard, science till then had only been able to conceive of an exterior realm, but, he noted: ‘life does not run its course within the external environment, but within the internal fluid environment’ (Bernard, 1966, p.146). The organism sustains itself through a self-created and controlled *interior milieu* constituted by liquids, gastric juices, blood, lymph where cells and tissue bathe.

The maintenance of a stable fluid interior, directed uniquely by each living being, frees and protects the organism from the unpredictable and threatening external environment. The autonomy of the organism is, according to Bernard’s formulation, the result of the process of regulation rather than some mysterious vital force: ‘the constancy of the internal environment is the condition for a free and independent life’ (p. 146).

Dance and Life

Without necessarily being aware of the particular theories of Bernard, Isadora Duncan was no doubt influenced, through Nietzsche and the current and influential thinking of Henri Bergson, by the reconciliation between science and vitalism inherent in his thinking. Her own explanations draw on a similar naturalised vitalism: ‘If then one seeks a point of physical beginning for the movement of the human body, there is a clue in the undulating motion of the wave’ (Duncan, 1977, p.78). The sense of living movement was to be discovered by tapping into the primordial fluid interiority by which the equilibrium of life is maintained. This recourse to radical interiority, therefore, finds its source in an identification and an opposition: firstly, dance equals life, and secondly, life is the very antithesis of societal and cultural norms.
The French poet Paul Valery, writing contemporaneously with Duncan and under the same influences, affirms in his highly influential essay, ‘Philosophy of the dance’, that dance ‘is a kind of inner life, allowing that psychological term a new meaning in which physiology is dominant’ (Valery, 1983, p.62). The interiority of life gives Valery permission to state categorically that for the dancer there is no outside: ‘the dancing body seems unaware of everything else; it seems to know nothing of its surroundings. It seems to hearken to itself and only to itself, to see nothing as though its eyes were jewels…lights that serve no useful purpose’ (Valery, 1983, p.61).

Such ideas concerning dance’s complicity with interiority still prevail today. A question to our first year students upon their arrival at the dance programme where I teach in Auckland, New Zealand, as to why they want to pursue a study of dance, invariably brings the response, ‘I want to express my inner feelings’. Nor can such ideas be dismissed as the remnants of possibly out-dated notions of the dance studios of the antipodes. For the currently reigning master of French thought, Alain Badiou, dance is a metaphor for thinking, for the very reason that it has no engagement with alterity. Dance is autonomous and complete unto itself: ‘a wheel that turns itself: this could provide a very elegant definition of the dance’ (Badiou, 2005, p.58). Dance, asserts Badiou, presents a body in spontaneous play, turned aside from the demands of the practical world: ‘dance frees the body from all social mimicry, from all gravity and conformity’ (p.58). Every gesture and every line of dance must present itself ‘not as a consequence but as the very source of mobility’ (p.58).

Contemporary dance as individual production

If the ‘lone figure on an empty stage’ (Franko, 1995, p.4), as Mark Franko describes Isadora Duncan, inaugurated a tradition of individualised and isolated creativity which has remained largely dominant throughout the long century of modern and contemporary dance, it is, I believe, because it has been accompanied and bolstered by this notion of life anchored in autonomy and interiority. With its tradition of individual innovators, who generally found their choreographic voices and developed their techniques through long periods of intensely private research, modern dance finds its source deep within the creative life of the isolated artist. The French critic Laurence Louppe in her recently translated Poetics of Contemporary Dance, (Louppe, 2010) – and by contemporary she means dance since Isadora – lists as the chief defining features of the form, ‘the individualisation of the body and original movement, expressing a non-transferrable identity or project’ and ‘the production, and not reproduction, of movement from out of the sensible sphere of each person’ (p.17). Even from within the encampment of iconoclast Merce Cunningham, Carolyn Brown, a long-time collaborator, asserts that the only real tradition of contemporary dance is ‘to begin everything again out of one’s own resources’ (Quoted in Louppe, 2010, p.23).
In contemporary dance, Louppe notes in confirmation, ‘there is only one true dance: the dance of each individual’ (Louppe, 2010, p.23).

This self-referential tradition continues today. Though the Judson Church experimentalists of the 1960s challenged many of contemporary dance’s individualist presumptions and despite the innovations of disciplines such as contact improvisation, dancers generally begin their training in technique class seated or standing individually across the studio floor, often fixated by their own image in the mirror. Though the dance class certainly presents numerous opportunities for exploring both emphatic and subtle forms of ensemble and relational exchange, the admirable move towards the democratization of dance instruction has to some extent suppressed these possibilities in favour of more personalised and individualised learning processes and rhythms. The source of authenticity in movement is discovered by a return to the body in isolation.

The focus on interiority is perpetuated too in many of the somatic practices embraced by dancers today. Ideokinesis, for example, is premised on the notion that, to quote my former teacher Irene Dowd, ‘all human body movement is directed and co-ordinated by … our thinking’ (Dowd, 1981, p.2), an interiorised image that directs and organises our somatic functioning. The wide variety and versions of release technique currently influential in many dance training institutions take as their shared mantra the importance of moving from within. Not only in technique class but also in improvisation and composition class, the ‘method of moving from the inside out’ (Emslie, 2009, p.169) teaches a creative process which involves stopping, listening, and waiting; waiting still till something comes up, arises, emerges from the body. ‘Stillness is my starting point’ notes release-technique innovator Mary Fulkerson, “I remain still for a period of time and then allow thoughts to emerge from stillness’ (Fulkerson, 1999, p.4).

We have not come such a long way from the picture of Isadora waiting motionless and in isolation in her Studio of Life. If the major innovators who followed Isadora did not continue to dance only solo dances – though many certainly began their careers thus – they did continue to view the solitary artist as the axis around which the choreographic art is spun. In the programme to a colloquium on the solo dance at the Centre Nationale de la Danse in Paris in 2002, the solo dance was described as ‘the essence of dance’ (Quoted in Monnier & Nancy, 2005, p.87).

This focus on the solitary nature of the creative artist in dance does not reflect the only representation of the tradition. Scholars such as Mark Franko in The Work of Dance (2002) and Andrew Hewitt in his Social Choreography (Hewitt, 2005), have described a counter-movement in which the subject matter, if not always the modality of creation, is focused on the social nature of collective embodiment. However, in
terms of understanding the creative process itself, as Sally Gardner notes in her essay, ‘The Dancer, the Choreographer and Modern Dance Scholarship: A Critical Reading’ (Gardner, 2007), contemporary critical frameworks have often obscured the degree to which, in both the formative years of modern dance and since, innovative and distinctive vocabularies arose out of the process in which ‘the dancer and the choreographer danced together’ (p.36). Theoretical frameworks often derived from outside dance can ‘make the dancer’s and the choreographer’s dancing together invisible or unrepresentable’ (p.35), thus perpetuating the notion of solitary and internalised creation. Whether through the force of tradition or conceptual misalignment, the idea that the creative impulse lies deep within the individual dancer prevails to this day. In the dance institution where I teach, first-year choreographic projects are solo performances and group choreographies wait till the third year. In the theatre department of the same school the order is reversed: the solo, a much more demanding form, is left till the third year of training.

I noted earlier that for most of its history, the European tradition of dance meant social or communal dance. But there were exceptions. In the French Court, when the king danced alone, it was as a representative of God himself. The German theologian Meister Eckhart describes the divine as ‘that which is moved from within by itself’ (Eckhart, 1981, p.144). The solo dance, as a symbol of choreographic authenticity, is a declaration of creative autonomy, almost to the point of idolatry.

**Part Two - A Life Between Us**

Without necessarily challenging Duncan’s insight into the intrinsic relation between dance and the phenomenon of life, I would like to offer an alternative image from the world of dance that might usher us into a different way of conceiving life and consequently of framing our understanding of dance. This image comes from the documentary film by Francoise Prébois, *Genèse*, (1994) a history of the early years of tango. In one particular section of footage, perhaps from the 1930's, an un-known tango teacher’s instruction to his female student and dance-partner includes the injunction, ‘Don’t squeeze so tight, tango is danced with a *life between us*’. In this conception of life, the essence of life, and consequently the essence of dance itself, is not contained solely in interiority, nor for that matter in the realm of exteriority, but in the space between, in relationality, in the reach, or in this case, the point of contact, between beings. Such a notion of life has not featured strongly in the biological or even the philosophic literature till relatively recently; however, a current development in the phenomenology of life is articulating an understanding of life that suggests that the un-named tango instructor was unnervingly prescient.
A phenomenology of life

In his latest work, *Introduction à une phénoménologie de la vie* (Introduction to a phenomenology of life) (2008a), the French philosopher Renaud Barbaras has articulated a notion of life as the movement of desire that provides an important challenge to prevailing traditions. The problem with previous formulations, notes Barbaras, is contained in the tension between the scientific/historical notion of life as described in exteriority and the vitalist or experiential understanding of life as interiority. Traditional Western metaphysical paradigms confine our thinking of the modes of existence within the options of form or matter, subject or object. Life, understood within this framework, must be either subjective experience or something that can be objectively shared, i.e. understood and agreed upon within some notion of communal discourse like science. Yet as Barbaras notes, (p. 19) in the French language, the verb ‘to live’ (vivre) is affected by a fundamental ambiguity, meaning both ‘the feeling of being alive’, and ‘the experience of something other’. The same ambiguity exists in German with *Leben* and *Erleben*: ‘to live’ oscillates between an intransitive experience of the self as alive and the transitivity of the experience of things in the world. For Barbaras, this felicitous ambiguity is not merely an accident of language, but the mark of life itself, which transcends the difference between lived experience and the living being as an entity in the world. The solution to the problem of formulating a description of life rests, affirms Barbaras, in the recognition that life infers a new modality of being that is precisely the point of articulation between the interior and exterior, between personal and the communal, between univocity and equivocity (p. 20).

Life, therefore, is a phenomenon characterised by both interiority and exteriority: interiority that demands exteriorization and exteriority that implies interiority (2008b, p. 8). Human movement is the very mode of being that transcends the difference between interiority and exteriority. The act of the living being manifests its life as the movement of accomplishment that passes into exteriority because it is realised in the world through actual physical movements. Life for Barbaras is, therefore, the very phenomenon that reaches from self to that which is other than self. Rather than being that which confines the living entity within its autonomous existence, life is the very aspect of the organism that reaches beyond itself to an otherness with which it is co-original and upon which it is dependant for its very being. Life reaches beyond the living being to the world.

The movement of human life, therefore, is a movement that corresponds to the movement inherent in the manner by which the world presents itself to us as both present and absent. Things in the world give themselves to us only in the mode of partiality: they present only aspects of themselves to us, always holding something in reserve. Movement is necessary, either on the part of the perceiver or the thing itself, in order for this hidden dimension of otherness to be revealed. It
is this ‘other side of things’ that invites the living human to reach beyond itself in order to reveal aspects of the world that remain obscure. Human movement, as the movement that we both affect and experience as living beings to whom the world appears, is that which allows us to be a ‘going beyond’ in a way that, in opening ourselves to the appearing of the world, simultaneously enables us to affect the process of self-realisation.

**Life is desire**

If human life finds its realisation through movement in the world, then the living being’s unceasing rebirth in movement reveals an essential **incompleteness**. Life, therefore, affirms Barbaras, must be understood in terms of **desire**, since life is desire for manifestation in the world.

Life, as desire, then, could be said to be directed towards the fullness that lies hidden as a result of the fact that things in the world present themselves only partially. There is always a **more** to phenomenal appearances that calls the living being into movement. The dissatisfaction that characterises life and that founds its unceasing advance correlates with the movement of withdrawal of the world, the impossibility of the world ever being made manifest in its totality. Life’s insatiability correlates with the world’s inescapable withdrawal. In Barbaras’ gnomic formulation: ‘the living of life is the reverse of the leaving of the All’ (2008b, p.16).

Because, in Barbaras’ philosophy, the life of the living being is never complete in itself, because the movement of desire reaches for fulfilment in otherness, I believe we can, without doing an injustice to his thinking, declare that life is never anything other than entirely relational. The living being always has part of its being invested in the exterior realm. The relation is not conditional upon the life of the individual, but rather the life of the individual is constituted through the relation. Life is only measurable as the interval **between us**. The living being is always more than one.

**‘No lost islands’**

It is important to note that this move towards the exteriorization of life does not of necessity pose a threat to individuality; does not lead to the swallowing up of the life of the subject in the collective. Nor does the phrase a life **between us** invoke any such submission to the global. A life **between us** alludes both to the social realm, the life of the community, but also – since the pronoun ‘us’ invokes the individual speaking subject – acknowledges the identity of a singularity within the plurality of voices.

Here we can usefully invoke Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of the ‘singular-plural’ (Nancy, 2000), by which he seeks to remind us that the self is first and foremost one of us. By the conjunction ‘singular-plural’ Nancy
affirms that any singularity is inconceivable apart from the plurality of beings that both bring it into existence and support and sustain it in a network of signification. On the other hand, the plurality can never degenerate into a particular collective or essentialising identity – can never be totally globalised – because it contains within it the singular which will always prove to be an exception to any totalising trend. In contrast to Badiou (2005), who, as we have remarked, maintains that dance is completely marked off, excluded from social negotiation, Nancy (Monnier & Nancy, 2005) acknowledges that it is the very intercorporeal nature of dance that makes it vulnerable – as was the case in the German inter-war period – to being co-opted by fundamentalist and fascist ideologies. It is the personal dimension of the singular-plural, however – the individually felt experience of one’s own dancing body – that contains within it the seeds of resistance and opposition to totalising identities. The very tensional dimension of life, that which reaches from the unique experience of my life out towards a shared life-world that can never be grasped as a whole, provides the singular dimension necessary to resist totalization, and yet ensures the commonality necessary for a shared cultural life to exist in the first place. Gilbert Simondon, an earlier French thinker with whom Barbaras shares much, notes that:

to postulate that the sense of an interiority is coupled to a sense of an exteriority, that there exist no lost islands of becoming…is to assert that each gesture has a sense of information and is symbolic in relation to life as a whole and to lives as an ensemble (Simondon, 2005, p.333).

Part Three – ‘Who’s Zoomin’ Who’?

By returning to a fundamental equation that I have suggested is operative at the birth of modern dance – that which identifies dance with life and life with interiority – I would like to suggest that it is possible to affect both an affirmation and a differentiation. While acknowledging the wisdom of the assertion of a fundamental affinity between dance and the phenomenon of life, it must also be acknowledged that the specific notion of life prevalent at the birth of modern dance was representative of a particular historically-located scientific and philosophic tradition. The understanding and formulations of the phenomenon of life have, throughout the 20th Century, changed in tandem with our endeavours to extricate ourselves somewhat from the individualising tendencies of the Western tradition of the philosophy of consciousness. If we now understand life, particularly human life, as being qualified by an instability consequent upon a constantly changing relationship with alterity, then we would have to admit the presence of incomplete corporeal identities and couplings that are primary, not supplementary, modes of physical being.

While certain training practices in dance have evolved in keeping with this new perspective, on the whole, the philosophies of our training
institutions and the prevailing aesthetic theory concerning dance are still largely premised on the notion of interiority and expression. If our teaching practices and theories of choreographic authenticity are complicit with an understanding of autonomous and isolated creativity, we need to ask ourselves if we could conceive of a contemporary dance training that is founded initially on the notion of dance as the desiring gestures of a body that is already and always outside itself. What for example, might our dance classes look like, if we begin always engaged in movement with others, rather than, as is predominantly the case in most of our contemporary and ballet classes, in the company of others but working largely in isolation. How might our ideas of choreographic creation or our relation to an audience change if we understand the dance to be happening in the space of the exchange between choreographers, performers and audience? How might our viewing and participation in dance change if we experienced dance as the manifestation of ‘a life between us’?

A-subjective partner improvisation

Inspired by the work of Renaud Barbaras and Jean-Luc Nancy, and drawing upon my own experience of partner choreography, itself influenced by the study of contact improvisation, Capoeira, and tango, I have over recent years been undertaking research and developing an approach to dance training premised on the notion of what I call a-subjective movement. By a-subjective movement, I mean movement that finds its focal point, not in the autonomous subjectivity of the mover, but in the mover’s relation to alterity. The movement of a surfer negotiating a wave is predominantly anchored in the relation between her board and the movement of the wave. The movement of a surgeon’s scalpel is at every moment determined by the internal landscape of the body being explored. In the case of the partner-improvisation forms I have developed, the exterior dimension is the embodied life of another dancer. In the workshop situation as I have structured it, at no time does the dancer move from her own independent identity as a mover towards another dancer, but at all times her movement is the result of a tactile-kinetic exchange with another.

As a result of this research I have developed two partner improvisation forms, PILOTING and T.A.C.T.I.C.S., which could be described as tools of dis-identification: means for moving beyond the prioritising of subjective movement towards the realisation of relational movement. These two forms, PILOTING and T.A.C.T.I.C.S. are taught independently, but eventually combine and become the culmination of the workshop process, which I call ‘Who’s Zoomin’ Who?’

PILOTING

In PILOTING, the roles of mover and moved are clearly differentiated under the names Pilot and Passenger. While certainly responsible for
sustaining her own weight and for her own movement, the Passenger never initiates a new movement impulse, but is guided through the space by the Pilot. She is, in a sense, being choreographed by the Pilot. The Pilot can take the weight of the Passenger or send her off on a momentum path that separates the two. The Pilot can interrupt and change the momentum path of the Passenger. In fact, while the role of the Passenger is to find continuity, to discover the continuous line of movement connecting the Pilot’s movement initiations, the challenge for the Pilot is to bring the Passenger to life with interruptions and suspensions – techniques of discontinuity – while utilising a varied palette of spatial and rhythmical variation. The Passenger’s job throughout is to follow the directives of the Pilot: neither obstruct and constrain the Pilot’s initiations, nor add or embellish the movement that the Pilot directs.

I am here, of course, under the inspiration of Heinrich Von Kleist’s famous essay, ‘On the Marionette Theatre’ (Kleist, 2010). True grace is found, not in the dancer’s expression or representation of interior life, but in contending with an externally imposed problematic and resolving it through the challenge of maintaining a continuous line of movement. The singular identity of the dancer is revealed through her dialogue with alterity.

In the workshop process, the separate roles of Pilot and Passenger are learned by the dancers swapping roles and discussing experiences with each other and also constantly changing partners to experience the disequilibrium of always newly encountered movement possibilities. After a period of familiarisation with the distinctive demands of being both Pilot and Passenger we endeavour to move towards a free exchange of roles: first by swapping upon command, and then by changing when the movement determines when the roles should change. Always though, the roles of Pilot and Passenger are differentiated: one is never Pilot and Passenger at the same time.

**T.A.C.T.I.C.S.**

While PIOTING is premised on the notion of the Passenger finding the line of movement that connects the varied and often conflicting information provided by the Pilot (and sometimes multiple Pilots) – i.e Piloting is premised on the notion of trajectories – T.A.C.T.I.C.S., in contrast, turns upon the idea of the event: discreet and disconnected moments that have an independent reality unconnected to past and future.

In T.A.C.T.I.C.S., since both dancers take on the same active relation to the other, there is only one role, that of Tactor – an actor who touches. Each Tactor has a series of physical tasks or operations that she can perform on the body of the other dancer. The list includes, but is not exhausted by: Together, Away, Contact, Transfer, Investigation, Co-motion and Support. Each of these operations is done as a discreet
moment, isolated from any notion of the continuity of movement. Each action is both extricated from history and memory, and free of the agenda of future possibilities.

In T.A.C.T.I.C.S., each dancer is completely independent in terms of the order and, particularly the rhythm, in which these actions are performed. So, while Tactor A is focused completely on choreographing a series of isolated tactile actions on Tactor B, Tactor B is at the same time, though in a differently improvised order and rhythm, executing a series of actions on Tactor A. Here I draw upon the terminology of Roland Barthes, who in Comment Vivre Ensemble (How to live together) describes as isorhythmic the independent but intertwined rhythmical lives of the monks on Mount Athos (Barthes, 2002, p.139). Isorhythm, therefore, becomes the tool by which the Tactors affect independent and often contradictory intentions. As Barthes notes, ‘it is in putting together two different rhythms that one creates profound disturbances’ (note 33. p, 40). The ensuing choreographic duet that results from these independently intentioned, but physically interconnected corporeal actions, constitutes itself as a series of spontaneously acquired points of gestural contact, unpredictable weight shifts, and unimaginable dramatic encounters. As with PILOTING, movement is always both a-subjective and relational, but where PILOTING is reciprocal, the roles reverse in T.A.C.T.I.C.S.; the roles are reflexive; each dancer is both active and passive at the same time. As with PILOTING, an ever-changing self is being articulated through the process of contending with the challenges of alterity.

‘Who’s Zoomin’ Who?’

The third stage of the workshop process consists of bringing PILOTING and T.A.C.T.I.C.S. together. Dancers can at any moment change from PILOTING to T.A.T.I.C.S. and back again. Changes occur instantly or leisurely, by mutual agreement, or by seduction or determination. This, of course, opens up a raft of new relational dynamics which involve transitional and negotiated changes of intentional role: yielding, resistance, accommodation, defiance even aggression. One sees the determining self emerge even more comprehensively from the matrix of relational movement. The relation gives an account of the individual, not the other way around. As Donna Haraway notes in The Companion Species Manifesto:

Through their reaching into each other, through their ‘prehensions’ or grasplings, beings constitute each other and themselves. Beings do not pre-exist their relating. Prehensions have consequences...there are no pre-constituted subjects and objects and no single sources, unitary actors or final ends...The world is a knot of motion (Haraway, 2003, p.6).
While Haraway in her book is specifically describing the relations between humans and companion animals, there is no reason why human inter-subjective relations should be excluded from this intricate dance of co-naissance. As dancing subjects we are, from the beginning of our lives, and especially our lives in dance, intertwined inexorably with others. Perhaps if our approaches to training and the creative process in dance could acknowledge and anchor themselves in this primordial entanglement, this 'knot of motion', we might open up new realms of choreographic and social accommodation that are the richer for being premised on the discovery of a life between us.

Notes

1 To be published in English translation in 2011.
2 A-subjective, to the extent that though the Tactor in initiating her own movement, it is entirely focused and directed by her intentions upon her partner.

References


**Biographical Information**

Michael Parmenter is one of New Zealand’s leading dancers and choreographers. He has choreographed consistently for thirty years in New Zealand and internationally. His works span the spectrum from innovative solo works to large-scale opera-house productions.

Michael has taught throughout this period at New Zealand School of Dance and UNITEC School of Performing Arts where he is currently Adjunct Professor of Dance.

He is currently undertaking doctoral research between the dance department of the University of Auckland, New Zealand (under Dr. Ralph Buck) and (under Prof. Renaud Barbaras) in the philosophy department of l'Université de Paris-1 (Panthéon/Sorbonne), France.