Midwifing Transitions: The Labour of Publishing in the History of Dance and Dance Studies in Canada

Megan Andrews

In the study of media and culture, much has been made of cultural differences and transitions between orality and literacy (Ong 2002). These transitions—from the salon to the printed page and subsequently to the digital network—alter culture and people's engagement with it (McLuhan 1964). This performative essay takes Canadian dance and dance studies as a composite subculture born from an embodied, oral practice and brings a media studies lens and feminist perspective to bear on a recent history of dance writing and publishing in Canada. My objectives are to first recognize and then critically frame this activity: as part of a subcultural transition from orality to literacy and beyond; as a catalyst in constituting a critical public for dance in Canada; and as a labour that has, in itself, played a role in midwifing the field of dance studies in this country.

On the premise that both public congress and mediated discourse contribute to the constitution of communities and the flow of ideas, this research maps some of the individual and organizational vectors that run through the field over time—marking a provisional genealogy. It allows us to ask such questions as: How have these vectors in part configured the field as we know it today? How have the related forces and flows helped crystallize the issues that face us now? What (and who) might remain unrecognized in the gaps and interstices between these vectors?

This reflection also considers the conditions of possibility and the inherent DIY ethic involved in these efforts. The nicheness of the subject matter and the small, geographically dispersed population have always limited the potential scale of these initiatives, in both community and academic contexts. The labour (of love?) in Canadian dance publishing has involved material engagement between bodies and technologies, which underscores an implicit lived (and gendered) tension in the field. How does this nuance our understanding of this history?

I am implicated in the evolving history of this particular activity as founder, editor, and publisher of the *Dance Current* magazine. As such, this research involves an autoethnographic gesture. I draw on and synthesize from a number of previous research projects while integrating new inclinations and perspectives in a future-oriented glance.

The following performative essay should be read alongside the Matrix of Canadian Dance Periodical Publishing, which follows the essay as an appendix. This matrix presents a chronological mapping of organizations, initiatives, and connections between them from the mid-20th century to the turn of the millennium. Most nodes on the matrix are annotated with comments providing context, references, and the names of key individuals involved in these various projects.

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

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This is a score (and a musical hystery). There is also a supplement (there always is).[1] I am director of this particular performance and also one of the many players.

The story told is a story of a birthing process.[2] It has been a long and challenging labour (of love) with many transitions, and many midwives. By now, parenting has definitely begun.
A corporeal discourse is being born: of movement and language; of bodies and stories; of practices and theories; of spaces, places, people, affects, and ideas. This particular corporeal discourse has Canadian citizenship; but it travels, internationally. It does indeed move—it is unruly, defiant, involves discipline and interdiscipline, requires flexibility and strength, will define and redefine itself, has family and a growing circle of friends. After all, it takes a village to raise a child.

> (ALL DANCE: Hold hands and circle right, then left)

Premise: That a community of practice or field of discourse forms through passion for, engagement with, commitment to, and public circulation of expressions and perspectives.

> (ALL SING: "Love and marriage, love and marriage . . ."[3])

Premise: Shared experience of expressions and perspectives creates connections.

> (ALL SING: "Try, try, try to separate them, it's an illusion . . .")

Conclusion: Public circulation of expressions and perspectives (through presentation or publication) is necessary for the formation of community or field.

> (ALL SING: "You can't have one without the other . . .")

Labouring.[4] *Work. Physical effort involved in making something. Often involving tools. Rhythm of exertion. Process of intensifying contractions, requiring a gathering of energy, inward focus, and physical/mental stamina.*

From at least the 1950s through the present day in Canada, individuals involved in (professional) dance have repeatedly come together in order to establish and sustain community. Usually, these meetings have been precipitated by an issue related to the professionalization of labour in the field—as dance enters into the art-market economy—and by an impulse toward unity and advocacy.

These intense events—which are labours of love in themselves to produce—create a collective gathering of energy and generate an inward focus. Building on this force of togetherness, individuals have subsequently exerted immense effort to repeatedly establish national advocacy associations, educational programs, and public circulation strategies including festivals and, significantly in this story, periodical publications.[5] The publications are not necessarily tied directly to the initial precipitating factor but to the general need for communication, coverage of the field, and discussion of pertinent issues beyond the particular in-person congress, perpetuating the engagement through time and extending it across Canada's geographically disperse space.

In creating these publications, yet another kind of labour ensues. Individuals ("early adopters" as they'd be known today) interact materially with new technologies—from mimeographs to printing presses to early desktop publishing.[6] The DIY ethic and willingness to engage in bodily labour is familiar to these dance people in developing publications—which, in this story, play the role of the

midwives to the corporeal discourse. However, the momentum of these publications gradually and inevitably wanes: historically, most of these publications eventually close due to lack of funds and stamina on the part of the labourers (Bowring 2000, 104). Contractions abate.

> (ALL DANCE: Hold hands in a circle. Move toward the centre in a tight cluster then spread out to the full reach of the group. Repeat several times, eventually spreading too far and breaking apart)

This is the illustrated story of a series of contractions and the matrix of looping, spiralling, interweaving pathways of the many individuals involved in the labour of birthing this corporeal discourse, primarily through print periodicals.

Transition. A change in thought and/or action. The space-time and/or movement between. A passing from one condition, form, or stage to another. After active labour, before pushing. The hardest part of birthing.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* ([1962] 1989), Jürgen Habermas describes the way in which a critical public develops across space and through time via a process that originates in live public discussion (salons and coffeehouses) and moves slowly into print (pamphlets, newsletters, and eventually periodicals) via a *transitional* stage in which there is a close dialogic relationship between conversation and writing (51).[7] A Marxist-influenced thinker, Habermas's theory ties the establishment of a critical public to a capitalist economic framework in which art becomes a commodity on the private market—a context underpinned by the professionalization of production, processes of labour, and the reckoning of use-value/exchange value. This birthing story is legible partly through Habermas's theory, which helps frame the role of dance writing and publishing in constituting a print-mediated and thus geographically sustainable critical public for dance in Canada. Elsewhere, I have proposed that in the Canadian dance past, we have witnessed a repeated pattern in which labour issues and/or challenging economic circumstances have precipitated in-person gatherings out of which evolve periodical publishing initiatives—usually in tandem with national advocacy organizations. These initiatives respond to the pressing need for recognition and valuation of the labour of the art form and the desire for sustained communication and discourse across geographic distances (Andrews 2006).

In his book *Orality and Literacy* (2002), media and communications theorist Walter Ong builds on scholarship that significantly distinguishes between oral and literate (writing and print-based) cultures' modes of communication and transmission. Not only does he establish differences between the characteristics of these modes, he argues that these characteristics structure consciousness differently. Ong discusses how cultures *transition* from orality to literacy and notes that, in certain situations, while a culture may have contact with the printed word it yet retains characteristics of orality—remaining a residually oral culture (29). As I presented in a 2006 paper, when considered through the lens of Ong's theory, dance culture can be considered "residually oral" in terms of its oral and embodied modes of communication and transmission (Andrews 2006). I argue that the effort to constitute a print-mediated critical public for dance in Canada has repeatedly been arrested due to the challenge in fully transitioning the residually oral culture of dance to print-mediated modes of communication.

However, in contrast to residual orality, Ong's secondary orality characterizes the electronic age, in which a new orality via technological devices is created, based on and sustained by processes of writing and print. Ong's theory has been extended into the digital age, with some scholars

subscribing to his theory of secondary orality and some seeking to adapt it in terms more specific to digital, texting, and social media. Soffer offers both "digital orality" and "silent orality" (2010, 387–88). In this context, for a residually oral culture such as dance, secondary or digital orality presents the possibility of "full dilation," in which the modes of communication and transmission effectively facilitate and support the natural flow of the corporeal discourse.

(ALL SING: "Ain't nothin' gonna break-a my stride . . .")

Pushing. Active directing of strength and flow outward and away to initiate movement or sustain momentum in another body or object. Pressing (also of pen to paper, of ink plate to page, of finger to keyboard or screen). Producing a body, bringing a being into the world. The final stage of birthing.

(ALL CHANT: "Let the uterus do the work. Let the womb do the work. Let the wom(en) do the work. Uterus, uterus, uterus. . . ." Repeat until the word morphs into "you to us, you to us. . . ." Fade out.)

In the late 1990s, a desire for togetherness arises once again and leads to another series of contractions. This time, the contractions are closer together and more intense. The focus is more specific and directed. A first series of pushes focuses on the creation of a national dance publication. A second series of pushes focuses on the formation of a national dance advocacy organization. Quoting from "Notes from Meeting on Dance Publications" held in Montréal in October 1999: "There is nothing binding Canadian dance professionals together; there is an urgency for *action* as quickly as possible to restore what has been lost." And: "The content of a dance magazine/journal needs to provide a record for historians, not just 'the kicking of legs,' but dance as a legitimate object of study" (Andrews et al. 2000, 84).[8]

Also in the late 1990s, Internet access starts to become commonplace. With the advent of email and the increasing economic availability of hardware and software (particularly for desktop publishing), the communications and publishing environments are entirely transformed. Secondary/digital orality opens the way for the residually oral culture of dance to make the transition into mediation. Arguably, this moment marks the birth of the corporeal discourse, which has been continuous since, nurtured and cultivated by a few (now longstanding) organizations and publications.

Abjection: Casting off. Disavowal or dismissal of that which disrupts convention. Sense of revulsion at the fragmenting and splitting of the body.

We can certainly look at this birth story and ask what has been abjected in this process. What is forgotten, missing, refused? Possibilities arise on at least three levels: a casting aside of the "mother" (*hystery*, that which came before and created the now); a dismissal of various expressions and perspectives that may be situated outside the established corporeal discourse; and revulsion at the division and separation of the corporeal discourse itself through digital orality as it becomes both isolated and self-generating through a proliferation of relatively disconnected individual and collective initiatives.

With respect to the history of Canadian dance and dance studies, this birth story reveals a group of family members and friends who have continued to gather around this corporeal discourse, working to ensure it is fed, dressed, and has a roof over its head. These are the writers, researchers,

historians, and scholars who have the most vested interest; this corporeal discourse is their progeny and ensures the continuation of the line.

It becomes clear that the majority of these publication initiatives have been catalyzed and/or undertaken by individuals within, or with strong ties to, the academy. These publications have also provided an editorial process and platform for both emerging and established Canadian dance writers and scholars, midwifing the public circulation of their expressions and perspectives, thereby contributing to the constitution of a community of practice and field of research in Canadian dance.

> (ALL DANCE: Form a circle. Drop hands. Circle to the left in collective rhythm. Following individual impulse, branch off from the circle at any time to mark a spatial pathway of personal design. Complement the rhythm of the circle. Eventually return to the circle. Maintain the circle with no fewer than three people and not always the same people. Anyone may join. Continue moving . . .)

Notes

1. As noted in the introduction, this text accompanies a provisional map of issues, events, publications, and people who play roles in this story. The text tells a meta-story. The "living" map provides details. The map accompanies this essay as an appendix, with corresponding citations included in the references list below.

2. It is also a decidedly Canadian version of an existing and oft-realized narrative.

3. Musical lyrics throughout are credited in the Source List.

4. Definitions of labouring, transition, pushing, and abjection are my definitions, supported by external references in *Gage Canadian Dictionary* (1983), givingbirthnaturally.com, and feminist theory, specifically referencing Julia Kristeva's work on the abject (1982).

5. While book publishing has played a substantial role in midwifing the corporeal discourse of dance in Canada, it does not play the same kind of ongoing role as periodical publishing does. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that book publishing also increased in the 1990s with the creation of Dance Collection Danse Press/es (book *and* periodical publisher, and of course dance archives), to which is due significant credit as a senior and mentor midwife in this story, as others including Allana Lindgren have acknowledged (Lindgren 2016). For a list of Canadian dance books and periodicals published between 1967 and 2000 see Bowring (2000, 105–10).

6. From the inception of *Dance Connection* in 1987, "Doolittle, Flynn and Elton [worked] tirelessly in the computer lab at the Sport Technology Research Centre at the University of Calgary. It was a learning process for all of them as a university colleague, Larry Katz, taught them how to use Macintosh computers for publishing, still a new concept at the time" (Bowring 2000, 100). Speaking personally, in the process of founding and running the *Dance Current* magazine, I have learned desktop publishing and all manner of digital file-transfer methods, built several databases, collaborated on designing website administrative infrastructures, learned multiple digital content management systems and social media interfaces, all in their early advent—primarily because there were no financial resources with which to outsource properly.

7. In the context of this article, a cultural or subcultural community of activity and body of engaged discourse will constitute a critical public.

8. Between 1995 and 1998, the national dance community had no Canadian-specific publication of record to "embody" the corporeal discourse. Furthermore, the Dance in Canada Association disintegrated in the late 1980s (Andrews 2001) and *Dance Connection* ceased publication in 1995. While the Canadian Association of Professional Dance Organizations (CAPDO) still existed, it was relatively dormant and was safeguarded within the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT). Having changed its name in 1994, *Dance*

International continued publication but was not recognized as the publication of record for dance in Canada because of its distinctly international focus (Andrews et al. 2000, 5).

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Appendix

Matrix of Canadian Dance Periodical Publishing (1950-2000s ...) Originally created by Megan Andrews, April 2016

⚠ IMPORTANT: Please read the attached note (mouse over the icon to the right inside this box) for important context about the development of this map.

❓ NAVIGATION: Read from left to right, top to bottom starting each pass with the starred Issue boxes. Causal links begin at the small open circle. Explore icons to right of text for notes and links. Be aware that for further information try scrolling down in the yellow pop up notes.

First Canadian Ballet Festival 1948

❌ Canadian Ballet Festival Association est. 1948-1954

❌ Bernadette Carpenter's Spotlight Newsletters 1951-1956

★ Issue: professionalization of ballet dancers in Canada 1950s

★ Issue: training of professional modern/contemporary dancers through university-level dance degree programs 1970s

🟢 York University 1970

Conference at York University 1972

❌ Dance in Canada magazine (Toronto, Dance in Canada Association) 1973-1989

❌ Dance in Canada Association 1973-c1989

🟢 Simon Fraser University 1975

❌ 15 Dancers/15 Dance Lab 1972/1974

❌ York Dance Review (York University Dance Department) 1973-1978

🟢 University of Calgary 1976

🟢 Halifax Dance 1973

❌ Spill (Toronto, 15 Dance Lab) 1976-1978

🟢 Dance Ontario (est. 1976) incorporated 1985

❌ Dance Ontario Newspaper 1977-1982

🟢 Concordia 1978

🟢 UQAM 1979

❌ Canadian Association of Professional Dance Organizations (CAPDO) 1978-c2001 (dormant from mid-1990s)

🟢 Vandance (Dance International) (Vancouver, Vancouver Ballet Society) 1977---

★ Issue: rise of independent contemporary dance artists and need for professional standards, working conditions, services and support for an expanding community (both professional and recreational) 1980s

🟢 Dance Saskatchewan 1979

🟢 Dance Manitoba 1983

ENCORE!, ENCORE! 1983-c1986

❌ Canadian Dance News (Toronto, 15 Dance Lab) 1980-1983

🟢 Alberta Dance Alliance 1984

❌ Ré-Flex (Montréal) 1981-1986

🟢 The Dance Centre 1986

🟢 Regroupement québécois de la danse 1984

❌ Dance Connection (Calgary, Clear Running Water Presentations Society) 1987-1995

🟢 Dance Collection Danse 1986

🟢 Dancer Transition Resource Centre 1985

🟢 ⚠ Dance Collection Dance: The Magazine (Toronto, DCD) 1997

🟢 Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists (CADA) est.1986 (incorporated 1988)

❌ stepTEXT (Toronto) 1991-1993

🟢 CanDance Network of Presenters est. 1985 (incorporated 2001)

❌ Dance News (Toronto, DCD) 1996-1997

🟢 The Dance Current (Toronto, Dance Media Group) 1998---

★ Issue: rapid expansion and diversification of the professional field – significantly including practice and theory, the need for communication and advocacy for dance and to establish a solid and sustained presence for Canadian dance and dance studies 1990s/2000s

CanDance Network roundtable on touring at Canada Festival, Ottawa, June 1998

Roundtable on Dance Publications in Canada at Foothills and Footsteps: New Writing in Dance Studies Conference at University of Calgary Jan. 1999

Meeting on Dance Publications at Festival international de nouvelle danse, Montréal, Oct. 1999

Meeting on Dance Publications at Not Just Any Body Conference, National Ballet School, Toronto, Nov. 1999

Formation of Dance Media Research Group, Toronto, Feb. 2000-June 2000

Dance Publication Working Group Meeting at Éstival 2000 Conference, UQAM, May 2000

Login: danc/se Forum hosted by Canada Council for the Arts at Canada Dance Festival, June 2000

Blazing the Dance Trail Conference under the auspices of CAPDO, National Ballet of Canada, Toronto, May 2001

🟢 Society for Canadian Dance Studies 2000

❌ Canadian Dance Studies Quarterly 2000-c2006 (?)

🟢 Canadian Dance Assembly 2002

🟢 Dance NL 2009

Publisher of — Initiator of