

A Conversation on the Aesthetics of Improvisation and Some Other Things

Rossella Mazzaglia: What were your experiences with improvisation before dancing with Anna Halprin?

Simone Forti: Before I met Anna Halprin, when I was in high school, I had the choice of either do athletics or modern dance. So, I took modern dance. The teacher was having us improvise and she would bring music and would develop some improvised pieces that we would show in the school. We would have a theme, like an African hunt, and I think we worked with *West Side Story*, but we would develop our movement with improvisation. And at that time, still in high school, I had a friend who was writing poetry. I remember that, in my house, she used to read her poetry and I would dance to it. So, it was already somehow in the air.

R.M.: So, would you say that a need for this kind of spontaneity was maybe felt, besides what Halprin was doing?

S.F.: If there was a teacher in high school teaching us, there probably was. So this existed.

R.M.: If so, what did Halprin bring to your dancing?

S.F.: She completely focused her attention on it and really developed the practice. I think that where there was improvisation, that it had a very low profile, and there wasn't that much serious work happening in it and she made an enormous difference that way. She really took it as her work.

R.M.: The impression I get from readings is that she focuses more on a kinesthetic, rather than theatrical approach to improvisation. Could you explain some of the principles of the work you met while working with her?

S.F.: You mentioned kinesthetic and I think the way some painters emphasize seeing and some composers emphasize hearing, she really emphasized sensing movement and she talked a lot about the kinesthetic sense. I think, aesthetically, when we would watch each other, we would watch not so

much how it looked, but just from seeing, we could see that there was a kinesthetic awareness. I think there was the sense that if you see that someone is sensing, you can perceive that, you can understand that, and you can feel it. You can identify with me and feel what I'm feeling.

So, that was what was being communicated, that's where the aesthetic was. Another thing was sensing internally and also being open to the world around you, so that you are responding also to your visual impressions. For instance, I look at that truck [Simone Forti points at a truck outside the window] and I have a feeling of weight in my body, very naturally getting from the visual to the kinesthetic sense, and we were working with that.

R.M.: What kind of practices would lead to this kinesthetic sense?

S.F.: Anna Halprin's studio was in the open air and she would say: "O.K., now, go away for a half hour everybody and find something that catches your attention and spend time with it and maybe you can do some moving right there and then come back and, somehow, give us a sense of it". And, with that, we would get some ideas of forms, some ideas of texture. She also would say that every movement has its own quality and you can work with that quality and that any movement quality can be interesting. Almost filmically, any quality is interesting. Juxtapositions of qualities, too. So, we would spend time observing in the woods or in the town, or in the bathroom, and then come back to the studio, maybe have another half hour to work with our synthesis of what we had observed. Then, we showed each other improvisations concerning this experience.

R.M.: And what was the response of the others supposed to be? Criticism, analysis?

S.F.: I think that just from seeing, seeing, seeing, we learned a lot and if something was really interesting, we talked a lot about it. We would encourage each other and if something really worked, we would analyze it.

R.M.: Going forward to Dunn's composition class, did you ever practice those same kinds of structures, combining movements together while at Halprin's studio?

S.F.: What I just described was for the afternoon. In the morning, we had certain warm-ups. Anna was even thinking of it almost as a ritual. There were

some movements of Graham and there was really just some stretching, some getting our metabolism going, some running. I don't think we ever did combinations of movements. So, there was this warm-up and, then, there was also some anatomical study. So, she would bring books, studying more and more bones than muscles and we would look at, maybe, a joint, at the way it could move, and then we would explore it. And Anna would always remind us that the whole body supports that exploration, even as I'm exploring the freedom of the shoulder blade, for instance, and how it connects to the other parts of the body, to the arm, continuing its momentum or in response to gravity, etc. And she would also encourage us, if during this exploration we just started to feel great and want to find that we are dancing, and find that our kinesthetic awareness is bringing us to a state of inspiration with the movement that we are really interested in the movement aesthetically, enthusiastically. She would encourage us to just go ahead and play, so that it would go from looking at the anatomy books to dancing and, then, back to the anatomy book, so that there was a back and forth. That was the second half of the morning.

R.M.: And how about performances?

S.F.: About once a year we would do a performance. And this would involve bringing some music and, so, we were working with the recorded music of this composer and also she had a friend, Joel Landers, a woman, who was a designer and who would make costumes for us. And thinking back now, this was very important to me, but this only happened once or maybe twice a year. We were showing to each other every time, but basically it was an experience of exploring and learning. And I say this especially because I felt I was always upset when we did the performances, because all of a sudden the interests would change.

R.M.: In what way?

S. F.: For one thing, these costumes all of a sudden had nothing to do with what we were doing. I remember one time, especially, there were these hats that were heavy and that completely changed the kinesthetic situation. I remember one time, a little later in the years, I had worked on a duet with A.A. Leath, who was a very important figure in her group. He also was teaching. He was

like her disciple. I feel that, maybe, two thirds I've learned from her and one third I've learned from him. And A.A. and I had developed a duet. We had spent some time on a very steep side of a mountain and then, working with that in the studio, we had developed a piece. And she was very generous, always to let the students show some of their work in the performances. We had developed a piece and there was one part where I was on my hands and knees, crawling across, and she told me: "But you should point your feet as you crawl", and we had a fight about that and then she let me just go with my feet just hanging however they were, stupid hanging feet, but she wanted things a little more clean and it was clean from an old aesthetic. So, I don't know if she didn't have the courage or what it was, and of course the younger generation felt "this is it", what we are working with, this is what we want to show. But that only happened once in a while.

R.M.: And what did A.A. Leath teach you, since you said you learned one third from him?

S.F.: I feel that kinesthetically he was very pure and very wild and that he really would take in impressions and throw them right out without any thinking of how he looked. Anna was already, maybe, 35 years old and had studied Graham and had been in some Broadway shows. Her training was more in her body, so, theoretically and what she had us do was very pure, but what was in her body was always mixed with her training.

R.M.: Was going to New York liberating, then? After you moved, I believe you created your own pieces, such as *See-Saw* or *Rollers*.

S.F.: First of all, I want to say a little bit of that transition. A few things were happening. And I think I had worked with Anna for 4 years, and what I'm seeing very much when I have a disciple is that at a certain point we have to break up, we have to have a fight and break up, and then, later, there is a rapprochement. It's almost like mother and daughter, once you have your feet on the ground, then you have to jump out of the nest and you have to kick a little bit to jump out.

And I was feeling problems with improvisation. By then, we were improvising all night almost sometimes and I was dizzy with it and, by then, also we had done a lot of work with language. We were improvising speaking

and moving and always with the aesthetic of surrealist theatre. So, I remember many things would come to my mind to say and, before I said them, I would look if I could see a logical connection, why I wanted to say that and I would censor it. Then, something came that I thought: “Oh my god, how did I come out with that?!”. Then, I would say that and I think I remember one of the last evenings of improvisation I was shouting: “Say what you mean! Say what you mean!”. I was finding ways to fight her. Partly some feeling, I don't know, of someone meaning something else. And she had a magazine with photographs of the work of the group Gutai and I was so moved to see these pieces, like one piece was with some logs put together like a pyramid with their top part resting together and the bottom part to the ground, just balanced, and the artist standing in the middle with a hatchet was ready, in the photograph, to swing around and hit them all. And you know they will all fall down on him. So, it's very violent, but I found it very beautiful: that one action, and so much happens and, then, it's finished. And I thought: “how beautiful in one action!” And at that point, as I was looking at those photographs, it was also a moment when I was married, at that time, to Robert Morris and he really wanted to go to New York and wanted really to see the paintings of De Kooning, of Abstract Expressionists, of Pollock. So, we were moving and I was ready to go and, looking at the Gutai, I thought: “That's the kind of work I want to make”. So, you can look at the roller box in *Rollers* as a little bit from that influence.

R.M.: I would have, personally, imaged a much bigger influence from the happenings rather than from Gutai.

S.F.: My looking at Gutai was there and, I came to New York and, at first, I didn't find my group. It took some time. So, for some time, I remember that Bob and I were adjusting to New York and he made this adjustment by taking one year to just read. He had a job, he was working in the post office and he was reading, he wasn't making art. He was spending every hour that he had either looking at painting or reading. And I was taking a few classes. I even took some Graham classes and I realized that that wasn't for me. I took some Cunningham classes. That wasn't for me, but there I found that class with Robert Dunn and, immediately, I saw the connection of the possibility of the Gutai work. I found that line, that there was a possibility for me.

R.M.: I don't see the connection between the work of Gutai and the Robert Dunn class. He was giving assignments and that makes me think of a planned structure and composition.

S.F.: I realized that, basically, Cage was interested in hearing sound and he found a way of taking these chance methods to go past the sense of expectation of what sound you might hear next to, by chance, bring a sound that comes from outside of your expectation. Expectation hearing: you are already hearing the sound within a patterning. And he wanted just to hear the sound from a Zen emptiness, just to see the sound, and he found this method that allowed him to just precede the sound. And I realized from Dunn's class that, if you need to proceed something, you can get an idea, and you can find a way to create a possibility to proceed that. So, if you need to just see someone move, you can find a way to allow that perception. That's, basically, what Dunn was teaching us. So, when I made the *Huddle*, in a way, if I look at my psychology in that moment, I had come from San Francisco, from working in the woods, I found myself in New York, where everything I saw had been designed by the human mind, except if I looked up at the sky, and the only thing that I felt was my weight. So I had volume and I had weight, still clean from human stylistic ideas and designs, as clean as the woods in San Francisco, and I wanted to work with that. And I wanted to find a way to work with that. So, I made the *Huddle*.

R.M.: So, I understand the physical and psychological motivation for creating the *Huddle*, but I still don't see the connection between the Gutai you first mentioned and Robert Dunn's class?

S.F.: In looking at how I felt the connection between what Robert Dunn was teaching us and the Gutai, it was that if I see a photograph of the Gutai of a man completely immersed in clay, writhing in the clay and throwing clay, I realize this is what he wants to feel, this is what he needs to feel, and he knows how to create a frame where he can do that and present it. And Dunn was teaching us to get an idea and to very simply make a frame for it and do it.

Then, of course, I was bringing my sense of surrealist theatre, which I think was very present in the *See-Saw*.

R.M.: In what way?

S.F.: Well, for one thing, the piece begins, the light goes on and off rhythmically, so, there is darkness and light, darkness and light. The man comes in with a black coat and first he carries the support for the board, which is a sawhorse, he puts it down, the light is going on and off, so you see black, then you see light, then a moment with a man with a sawhorse, and then the sawhorse and no man, and then he carries the board and, then, he connects the elastics, so that there is just a zigzag in the space, and this little sound making toy that goes moooh every time.

R.M.: It does sound kind of surreal.

S.F.: Kind of surreal... and also the set, often is more active than the people. He is reading and the set is going moooh. That's non-sense juxtaposition. The *Huddle* is more like sculpture, whereas in the *See-Saw* it begins to make sense, so then it can become non-sense...

R.M.: At around that same time, Robert Whitman was making mixed-means performances, like *The American Moon*, in 1960, and he later made other happenings in which you participated, such as *Flower* (1963). In what ways your performances connected to these works, if they even did?

S.F.: For one thing, I remember one thing I did with Anna Halprin, I don't remember how I came to it, but maybe just kinesthetically: I would lie down, though not belly up, more with my knees bent and my arms bent and from there I would just throw myself up in the air and then, again, through myself up in the air, and I was always black and blue. I think that one of the qualities I enjoyed was just throwing myself around and I saw that also in Whitman's work. In the first piece that I saw, he had a woman on a swing and somehow the rope of the swing went up to the ceiling and then it went down to the ground and it was somehow attached to some iron on the ground and at one point, again with a hatchet, he breaks the rope and she goes flying. Kinesthetically, I felt the connection with images of this kind. It was very kinesthetic. And Lucas Samaras, who was the one who told me that my work wasn't poetic, and he also told Bob Whitman when he saw me moving: "she is a female you". He had a maniac quality that I also liked and also an iconoclastic, meditational slowness. Kinesthetically I felt that we were family. And also it was very kinesthetic that he often threatened the audience. And

that was almost what my character finally had become with Anna Halprin. Later, when I was sharing a rented space with Trisha Brown and Dick Levine, and Dick was a very big strong man, and one thing I explored in that space: I wanted Dick to hold me a little bit standing outside of the space and to throw me into the space, I wanted to appear like that, that I was just thrown into the space and then I would land. Like I said, I was always black and blue... So, at that time, that was one of the qualities that I had a desire for, and I saw that in Whitman also.

R.M.: Could you tell me more about the impact of the dance connections at that time?

S.F.: I think that one of the strongest things that came from there were the rule games, because, going back to the classes with Robert Dunn, at the very beginning we started working with the scores of John Cage, applying them very directly to the body. So let's say we take a piece of paper and we make a grid, so that if we count down is seconds or minutes, if we count across is body parts, let's say at three minutes the hand goes to the left, at three minutes and 10 seconds the head has to tilt, then angle, and we have to walk forward one step. Then, it becomes more complex. Steve Paxton and Trisha Brown would decide a home base and movements like circling or other and have the radio on. When they heard a word starting with their initial, they would do a set movement, if the word started with the surname initial, it would be another movement, while still interacting with each other. So, we tried to make it more and more difficult, and what we found is that we had to go fast by reflex and we were noticing the composition, but we didn't have an aesthetic control over it, though in a way we did, because, if we said, well, that wasn't very interesting, then we would say: "what was missing? It was too easy... all right, so we have to add another element that would make it more difficult". And we would change the rules, so that the chances of something interesting happening would be better.

R.M.: Did you go to see other people's work?

S.F.: Certainly, I remember already with Anna Halprin, towards the end, she was bringing in some musicians, especially I remember La Monte Young, and I think also Terry Riley. So that, when Robert Morris and I came to New York,

we were already friends with La Monte Young, and he was very close to the whole Fluxus, to the work of Jackson Mac Low.

R.M.: Did you go to see any dance outside of this group?

S.F.: If I did not, I'm sure the others did. And James Waring, I'm sure we went to see James Waring. There were other dancers that my colleagues were aware of, I saw a lot of painting, I saw a lot of abstract expressionism, and, there again, that's the kinesthetic connection, because I never went away from the kinesthetic, even when I was working more minimally and conceptually, it was always kinesthetic.

R.M.: How this kinesthetic involvement relates to the expression of the self? I'm thinking of Pollock, for instance, for whom it is usually stated that the action of dripping, which is not totally controlled, allows for the subconscious to come in.

S.F.: Are we applying this question to improvisation?

R.M.: I was thinking of dancing in general, but you can apply it to improvisation, if you want.

S.F.: I think this generation had really separated from expressing the self, but because there was no difference between the self and the movement it came through anyhow. It's like when you go into the ocean and the wave takes you, and you are going up and down with the water. We are not expressing how it would be being in the ocean; you are just in the ocean. So, it's not your self that it's being stressed through the movement, you are just moving, but at the same time, your complete self is involved in the movement, you're living that moment.

R.M.: And how about when you started doing improvisation in New York? Did you do it in the same way?

S.F.: Not in the same way. It was very different. It was always within a structure. For instance, the *Huddle*. That's improvised, because we know that we have to stand very close together, and that we are five or six or seven, and that one by one climbs over the top and then again becomes the mass that supports the one that climbs. So, we don't know who is going to climb next. When I climb I don't know where I'm going to put my hand, where I'm going to put my foot, so I'm improvising, but we are improvising within a very strict

structure. So, that's how we were improvising in New York in the 60s.

R.M.: Why did you quit the group after Dunn's class?

S.F.: Because of my personal life.

R.M.: Did you think of performing in some other places, other than with the Judson group?

S.F.: I started working with Robert Whitman and eventually married him and he didn't want me to do my own work. And I was trying to have a family and worked a lot with him. After, the people at the Judson took me back, so, I did participate in the last few things that they did and then I started my own work.

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Mentre si discute da più parti, nell'ambito della storiografia teatrale, del recupero della memoria e della trasmissione orale, mi ritrovo a ripensare a un'intervista rilasciatami nel 2002 da Simone Forti in un caffè parigino, ora pubblicata per la prima volta in «Danza e Ricerca. Laboratorio di studi, scritture, visioni»¹. Rileggendola, ne riscopro il valore rispetto alla riflessione metodologica odierna e al ritratto, ancora parziale, di questa danzatrice, nonostante il continuo e rinnovato apprezzamento in Italia, paese da cui emigra bambina, per sfuggire alla persecuzione antisemita, e che, negli anni, torna ad accoglierla per laboratori e *performance*².

Diversi gli spunti che emergono da questa conversazione, anche se due sono quelli di maggior rilievo. Innanzitutto, il trasferimento di Forti dalla California (e perciò dal lavoro con Anna Halprin) a New York, ovvero dagli spazi aperti alle pendici del Monte Tamalpais ad un contesto urbano spersonalizzante. Questo spostamento, talvolta inteso in maniera provvisoria nella crescita di quest'artista ha, in realtà, un peso decisivo nella sua formazione, come si evince

¹ La trascrizione, lievemente rivista e abbreviata, è stata sottoposta a Simone Forti ed è pubblicata con il suo consenso.

² Anche per quanto riguarda il riconoscimento scientifico, il recente volume di Elena Randi, *Protagonisti della danza del XX secolo. Poetiche ed eventi scenici*, Roma, Carocci Editore, 2014, le dedica un capitolo, eleggendola a figura rappresentativa della danza postmoderna americana del secondo Novecento (pp. 183-203).

anche da quest'intervista. Il personale spaesamento indotto dal cambiamento e le frequentazioni del tempo incidono, infatti, sulla sua pratica di danza al punto da rinnovarne la concezione dell'improvvisazione in maniera definitiva.

Secondariamente, la percezione cinestetica, che qualifica le esplorazioni con Halprin e le sue *performance* mature, è da Forti usata come lente di osservazione dell'arte figurativa e del nuovo teatro: nelle sue parole, intravedo un'indicazione di metodo, per l'individuazione delle qualità di movimento della danza nella storia, attraverso uno sguardo critico transdisciplinare.

Rispetto all'esperienza newyorchese, l'enfasi storiografica sul Judson Dance Theater, con cui formalmente Simone Forti non collabora, ha eclissato il peso della sua figura nell'individuazione delle personalità della nascente danza postmoderna americana, emersa nell'alveo creativo di Greenwich Village. In realtà, tanto Sally Banes nei suoi numerosi scritti sulla *postmodern dance*³, quanto i protagonisti del collettivo da me personalmente intervistati (penso a Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton e Yvonne Rainer) hanno, a più riprese, riconosciuto l'incipit di Forti. L'impressione di una sua minore rappresentatività nel definire le linee di rottura della nuova danza è probabilmente data, oltre che dalla divulgazione schiacciante dell'operato del Judson Dance Theater, anche dall'assenza di una produzione continuativa negli anni che vanno dal 1961 al 1967, in realtà riconducibile a ragioni personali. Così come la pratica principalmente solistica cui si dedicherà dagli anni Settanta (a confronto con Trisha Brown o Lucinda Childs, che consolidano delle compagnie) finisce per restringerne la fama fuori dall'ambito specialistico di chi fa, studia e vede la danza con assiduità o per lavoro. Eppure, le sue prime elaborazioni creative forniscono delle indicazioni di metodo e di approccio alla composizione improvvisata di Forti in parte riconfermate da suoi lavori successivi e illustrano le tensioni creative dei primi anni Sessanta meglio di molte altre opere coeve. Non a caso, la *performance Five Dance Constructions and Some Other Things*, esibita nel 1961 nel loft di New York di Yoko Ono durante una serata organizzata dal musicista, amico e collaboratore La Monte Young, è stata riproposta dal Museo

³Tra le sue pubblicazioni, si veda, in particolare, Banes, Sally, *Tersicore in Scarpe da tennis*, Macerata, Ephemeria, 1993 (ed. or., *Terpsichore in Sneakers. Post-Modern Dance*, 2a edizione, Middletown [Connecticut], Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

di Arte Contemporanea di Los Angeles nel 2004⁴ e funge ricorrentemente da riferimento nei laboratori coreografici di Forti, nonostante gli sviluppi della sua arte nei decenni successivi (dalla pratica della *Logomotion*, che unisce parola e azione fisica, alle *News Animations* con cui le improvvisazioni sono sviluppate su spunti di attualità, alle *Animations* ispirate a temi e ambienti differenti e aperti).

Oltre alla descrizione della collaborazione con Anna Halprin, in quest'intervista leggiamo della volontà di Forti di allontanarsi dalla pratica conosciuta, accanto alla maestra, tra il 1955 e il 1959 in California. Le sue dichiarazioni rivelano, cioè, sia gli elementi di continuità da cui non sentirà mai la necessità di affrancarsi (come l'enfasi sulla percezione cinestesica), sia i primi passi di una ricerca autonoma, frutto anche di una rielaborazione individuale di altri stimoli e confronti.

Giunta a New York, nell'arco di un anno Forti diventa una presenza attiva e influente attraverso la partecipazione al corso di Robert Dunn, da cui scaturisce il Judson Dance Theater; tramite la frequentazione degli *happening* (si esibisce, infatti, nelle opere dell'artista visivo Robert Whitman, che sposa in questi stessi anni, dopo avere sciolto il legame con Robert Morris), e, in seguito, per mezzo di esplorazioni motorie condotte, pressoché quotidianamente, con Trisha Brown e Dick Levine⁵.

Diverse sono, inoltre, le analogie rintracciabili con altri movimenti, artisti e tendenze culturali del tempo. Le prime opere di Forti mostrano, infatti, un lavoro strutturato che ricorda l'approccio esperienziale di Fluxus e il

⁴Le riprese sono documentate nel DVD *Simone Forti. An Evening of Dance Constructions*, Artpix, Houston (TX), distribuito da Microcinema International, 2009. Materiali d'archivio relativi, invece, agli *happening* di Robert Whitman, cui partecipano sia Forti che Trisha Brown, sono riproposti nel DVD *Robert Whitman. Performances from the 1960s*, Artpix, Houston (TX), distribuito da Microcinema International, 2003. La serata originaria e la sua ricostruzione comprendono i pezzi: *Huddle*, *Slant Board*, *Platforms*, *See-Saw*, *Rollers* e *Accompaniment for La Monte's 2 sounds and La Monte's 2 sounds*. Di questi, *See-Saw* e *Rollers* sono prima esibiti alla Reuben Gallery nel 1960 accanto a contributi di Jim Dine e Claes Oldenburg.

⁵Simone Forti ricorda queste collaborazioni quotidiane anche in *Handbook in Motion*, libro composito che riunisce appunti, descrizioni degli spettacoli, racconti autobiografici e disegni. Pubblicato in inglese nel 1974 (New York University Press) è stato tradotto in francese per la rivista belga «Nouvelles de danse», n. 44-45, autunno-inverno 2000, con il titolo *Manuel en mouvement*. A conclusione del testo, compare anche il saggio *Danse animée. Une pratique de l'improvisation en danse* (pp. 209-224) originariamente tradotto in francese per il volume collettaneo *Improviser dans la danse*, Alès, Editions du Cratère d'Alès, 1999, pp. 14-28. Scritto su richiesta della studiosa Anne Cooper-Albreight nel 1996, resta inedito in inglese fino al 2001, quando viene pubblicato sulla rivista «Contact Quarterly», vol. 26, n. 2, estate-autunno 2001, pp. 32-34 ed è, infine, ripubblicato con il titolo *Animate Dancing* in Cooper Albright, Ann - Gere, David (a cura di), *Taken by Surprise. A Dance Improvisation Reader*, Middletown (Connecticut), Wesleyan University Press, 2003, pp. 53-65.

coinvolgimento fisico del pubblico itinerante degli *happening* (fine anni Cinquanta e primi anni Sessanta), al tempo stesso in cui indica una funzionalità del gesto tipica delle *task dance* di Anna Halprin e del Judson Dance Theater. Nelle *Five Constructions* del 1961, Forti sviluppa anche una capacità di azione-reazione, secondo la logica pragmatica che ritroviamo, poco dopo, nelle azioni di determinazione spontanea caratterizzanti molte *performance* del collettivo newyorchese (definita una regola, a ciascun “agente” è dato scegliere quando e come svolgerla rispetto a una rosa di possibilità).

Queste negoziazioni tra spontaneità e determinazione dell’azione in scena, che impegnano contemporaneamente Forti e i suoi coetanei, rivelano, inoltre, l’influenza della corrente di pensiero behaviorista, facilmente riscontrabile nell’approccio minimalista di Robert Morris e presente, sin dal college, nella sua formazione. Ci racconta, infatti, la danzatrice, di essersi interessata alla psicologia sperimentale e di avere imparato a vedere le variazioni di comportamento di ogni singolo elemento posto in due situazioni inizialmente identiche e di cui le componenti sono mantenute costanti in un caso, mentre si altera volutamente un fattore nell’altro, per analizzare i cambiamenti che ingenera e stabilire dei confronti. Retrospectivamente, Forti riconosce ed esplicita l’impatto di questi studi sulle prime *performance* newyorchesi:

The *Huddle* and the *Slantboard* are each a unit defined by its own uniformity of process. They are more closed systems that not, arrived at by abstracting and reordering elements of one situation to create another which is of a new order. The elements of the situation are elements of its definition and of cultural agreement.⁶

Al tempo stesso, la funzionalità delle azioni e l’enfasi sulla percezione proprio ed esteroceettiva, ovvero su fattori pre-espessivi, è il contraltare di un rifiuto dell’interpretazione che le sue parole chiariscono e che plasma l’arte figurativa (dal neodada alla pop art), come la musica concreta e la letteratura (a partire dal *nouveau roman* di Alain Robbe-Grillet) o il nuovo teatro degli *happening* e degli *event*. Nel 1964, quest’approccio artistico trova un’eco nella riflessione di Susan Sontag che, nel saggio *Against Interpretation*, propone di

⁶ Forti, Simone, *Manuel en mouvement*, cit., s.p. Il testo è riportato in inglese nell’originale. Oltre al testo di Forti, tuttora inedito in Italia, una breve descrizione delle “costruzioni” qui menzionate e in parte discusse all’interno dell’intervista, si trova in Banes, Sally, *Tersicore in scarpe da tennis*, cit., pp. 50-54.

eliminare la gerarchia tra contenuto e forma e invoca una trasparenza nell'osservazione critica, per cui l'opera diviene oggetto di analisi, e non di giudizio⁷.

Contro il “mito della profondità”, il primo passo per la danza è quello di spogliare il gesto dall'intenzione, per recuperarne la sensazione⁸, sul modello di Halprin e di Merce Cunningham; il secondo comporta l'ideazione di strutture compositive indipendenti dalla narrazione. Così, Simone Forti può, per esempio, abbozzare su carta un disegno delle *Five Constructions*, senza curarsi di stabilire un legame tra i diversi frammenti, basandosi su azioni funzionali e su strutture ludiche. Queste ultime ritorneranno anche nella maturità come strumento didattico.

Una serie di relazioni fruttuose si stabiliscono o si consolidano, in altri termini, in questo periodo, così come si pongono le basi per una nuova estetica della danza, ma non solo. Usando Forti come epicentro della nostra riflessione, notiamo che nella continuità tra la riscoperta delle potenzialità del corpo con Halprin e la liberazione dei sensi promossa dalla controcultura durante l'intero decennio (e particolarmente esperita dall'artista a seguito della partecipazione al concerto di Woodstock del 1969), va inserita una piega nell'accezione deleuziana del termine: non proprio, dunque, una rottura, bensì un'increspatura che trattiene il piano dell'esperienza vissuta in California e vi sovrappone la formalizzazione strutturale newyorchese. Negli anni Sessanta e dagli anni Settanta in poi, Forti non smetterà di spiegare e dispiegare questa duplicità in un rapporto fluido tra improvvisazione e composizione estemporanea.

Infine, una considerazione metodologica può essere letteralmente estrapolata dall'intervista, interrogando il racconto biografico, ben oltre la narrazione degli eventi. Quando Forti descrive i movimenti estetici che l'hanno influenzata o anche solo affascinata non parla mai dei temi e dei contenuti,

⁷Sontag, Susan, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, New York, Farrar Strauss & Giroux, 1964 (trad. it. *Contro l'interpretazione*, Milano, Mondadori, 1998). A livello filosofico, la critica all'antropocentrismo che questo discorso comporta corrisponde alla caduta del soggetto, che negli anni Sessanta segnerà il passaggio dalla filosofia esistenzialista di Sartre alle posizioni strutturaliste legate al pensiero di Jacques Lacan e di Claude Lévi-Strauss. (Cfr. in merito, Jameson, Fredric, *Periodizing the 60s*, in Sayres, Sohny – Stephanson, Anders - Aronowitz, Stanley - Jameson, Fredric, *The 60s Without Apology*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 178-209).

⁸ Per un approfondimento di questo passaggio nel confronto con la generazione della *modern dance* e rispetto al contesto coevo, rinvio al mio *Judson Dance Theater. Danza e controcultura nell'America degli anni Sessanta*, Macerata, Ephemeria, 2010.

bensi delle qualità cinestesiche delle opere conosciute, tanto che si tratti di danza o di pittura (particolarmente, con riferimento al gruppo giapponese Gutai e agli *happening* di Whitman). Guarda, cioè, con il corpo e con l'attenzione di chi, attraverso le sensazioni di movimento, è intento a ricercare dentro di sé, e nelle proprie azioni, le impressioni visive derivanti dall'osservazione (e ciò tanto in relazione all'arte, quanto a qualsiasi altro referente culturale o naturale, come, per Forti, la "danza" degli animali). Questa sua considerazione è illuminante ed estremamente problematica da accogliere per uno studioso; è una sfida perché, se la danza è evanescente, diversi sono gli strumenti che ne favoriscono la ricostruzione rispetto alle intenzioni autoriali, ai processi creativi e di trasmissione e alle forme (video, documenti iconografici, notazione, dichiarazioni scritte o riportate, testimonianze e riscontri critici). Provare a ritrovare la sensazione del gesto, la *motion* stessa, è però pressoché impossibile, tanto più che essa è legata a fattori percettivi che si modificano in relazione all'ambiente, al periodo storico, agli stessi avanzamenti scientifici e tecnologici. La percezione dello spazio e della durata di altre epoche non può, per esempio, che essere immaginata o evocata. Eppure, le parole di Forti sembrano suggerire di restare all'erta e di non bloccare l'interpretazione e la ricostruzione della danza alla forma e ai contenuti, che, nel suo caso, disattenderebbero la qualità e il senso delle ricerche condotte. Al di là delle intenzioni, le domande sul metodo restano comunque irrisolte e vanno, naturalmente, cercate nell'esperienza scientifica. Nella trasversalità rispetto ad altre espressioni artistiche coeve intravediamo, però, una strada in cui sembra opportuno muoversi con intuito, attraversando e andando oltre le forme recuperabili dalle fonti dirette che la danza ci ha consegnato.

Rossella Mazzaglia, dicembre 2015