
Book review

Danse et santé : du corps intime au corps social

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This collection examines the intrinsic and complex relationship between health and dance. Meant primarily for balletomanes, including dancers, choreographers, coaches, researchers, physicians and journalists, among others, it includes rigorous academic analysis, presented in a detailed and informed way, as well as comments and descriptions of personal impressions, experiences and perceptions.

Danse et santé is divided into six parts, each made up of related articles in which the writers examine their perspective on health and dance. Giving a voice to these various contributors—all are involved with the world of dance—reinforces one of the central ideas of this work. Indeed, many of the texts suggest taking an approach whereby the dancers work with their colleagues to take charge of their own health and safety in the workplace. Others suggest that, although self-knowledge and kinesthesia go hand-in-hand with the aesthetic and artistic quest central to performance and creativity, listening to others and teamwork both play a major role in dancers' safety. Yet others point to the importance of government, unions and society in providing a framework for health, safety and injury prevention for performing artists.

The first part of *Danse et santé* describes the experiences of dancers and choreographers who strive constantly to balance artistic vision, aesthetic awareness and the limitations of their own or others' bodies. It also questions, in very clear terms, each and everyone's role, as well as that of the system, especially with regard to preventing injury. In the first chapter, Sylvie Fortin et al. address the issue of gender, referring to specific challenges in the areas of competitiveness, the creative process, training and even expectations.

The second part of the book describes the strategies used to inform the different actors of the opportunities to participate in the creative process, as well as the forms of power associated with each strategy. Pamela Newell and Sylvie Fortin detail the specific relationship between the choreographer and performer. The role of the performer in the creative process is part of a continuum between a traditional approach, in which the dancer's role is limited to reproducing movements, and a so-called decentralized role aimed at active and even spontaneous participation in the creation of the work. Linked to this continuum is the control the choreographer exercises over his or her work and that of the performer over

his or her own body. The fourth and fifth chapters relate experiences in action research and in somatic education, and how students become increasingly aware of their bodies and question those automatically accepted assertions that determine issues of power over their own health.

The third part of *Danse et santé* provides an international perspective on injury prevention strategies in the dance world, beginning with a study on the diploma courses for dance teachers in France. Jill Green examines the concepts of health and well-being and related practices in America, including the medicalization of health and the benefits of (and issues connected with) alternative approaches such as somatic education that could become the dominant approach in the quest for an ideal. Blanka Rip et al. conclude this section by examining passion and the possible effects of obsessive passion on health and balance in a dancer. When passion is harmonious, it allows for flexibility and control; when it is obsessive, it affects everything, including health and injuries.

The fourth part of this book provides an interpretation of the professional dance milieu, examining the variety of structural

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factors that determine the health and safety of dancers in their work. Élise Ledoux et al. look at the organizational issue of business in dance, while Roger Hobden examines injury prevention during training.

The fifth part is the most unexpected. The eleventh chapter comprises works of fiction by four of the contributors who, based on personal accounts gathered through study and observation, re-create the dancer's world in poetry, a play, a diary and a narrative. The two other chapters in this section address the direct relationship between dance and illness. Christine Hanrahan and Nathalie Buisson, two dancers who have cancer, explain to Sylvie Fortin how dance helps them through their illness. Conversely, Aurore Després describes observing a dancer perform for hospital patients, thus giving them a gift of her art.

The sixth and final part gives various examples of the representation of illness and physical suffering through dance, often, but not exclusively, as a cathartic or auto-therapeutic process. The reflection on the physical form that begins in this contribution by Tamar Tembeck continues in the following chapter with a choreographic analysis of the definition and perception of the perfect body and of the expectations for achieving that ideal.

Overall, the contributors convincingly persuade us of the need for greater awareness of and control over the issues related to dancers' health and safety. An underlying theme is the matter of gender and the issues specific to female and male dancers, highlighted in particular by the rate of participation in the various workshops and studies (where there is a preponderance of women), as well as individual first-hand accounts. With a view to changing the sociocultural practices that have long prevented dancers from controlling their own bodies and their own health, the contributors advocate change among the dancers themselves, in their training and in society, to include stricter standards, healthier practices, revised expectations and new ways of thinking.