

# RELEASING DANCE

**SKINNER RELEASING TECHNIQUE** is an innovative approach to dance training developed by Joan Skinner in the early 1960s. In 1966-67, Joan's teaching at the University of Illinois spawned the growth of what was to become several forms of "release work." As these new techniques spread across the country, and since "release" has been a popular term in diverse approaches to dance training, there arose a need to attach her surname to the work she continued to develop, in order to preserve its identity and to give its unique emphases a recognizable name.

Briefly, Releasing (Skinner Releasing Technique or SRT) utilizes image-guided floorwork to ease tension and promote an effortless kind of moving, integrated with alignment of the whole self. Tactile exercises are used to give the imagery immediate kinesthetic effect; spontaneous movement is frequently evoked by imagery and movement studies. SRT smoothly integrates technical growth with creative process.

Through the 1970s, Releasing Technique was taught by Joan and The American Contemporary Dance Company (ACDC), primarily in Seattle, Washington. The work continues to be taught and practiced today, deeply influencing many contemporary movement artists around the country including Stephanie Skura, a New York-based choreographer/performer, who conducted, transcribed and rough-edited this interview.

In 1979, CQ published "Notes on the Skinner Releasing Technique," by Joan Skinner, Bridget Davis, Sally Metcalf, and Kris Wheeler [CQ Vol. V:1, Fall 79]. The article sets down in detail the philosophy, practice and pedagogy of SRT at that time. An application of Releasing to improvisational performance in collaboration with musicians appeared in Robert Davidson's article, "Transformations: Concerning Music and Dance in Releasing," [CQ Vol. X:1, Winter 85, Music and Sound Issue No. 1. A videotape entitled "Releasing Dance" was completed in January 1990 and is available through Joan. For more information on any of the above, contact Joan Skinner, 2202 NE 63rd St., Seattle, WA 98115; tel. (206) 525-1659.



## Interview with Joan Skinner

by Stephanie Skura

**STEPHANIE SKURA:** *When I first asked you if you had ever considered writing about your work, you said, "It's really hard for me to write because the work is more like poetry than science." To me that is an important point, and I thought you could talk about it a bit.*

**JOAN SKINNER:** One of the key things I want to find a way to explore is that the work does use imagery, but then a lot of work uses imagery, in different ways. In this work, the images seem to take a poetic form, and I call them "image clusters." I liken them to haiku, because they're brief and, hopefully, they send out some kind of

resonance or reverberation. What they represent is something underneath them, and for lack of a better term at this point, I have started to think of those things underneath as archetypes. I don't think these archetypes can be named or described in a narrative way. The Jungian archetypes are a different kind of archetype—they represent societal roles in our culture, and rituals that are handed down through a kind of racial unconscious. *These* archetypes that are underneath the Releasing images need some kind of poetic metaphor to represent them, to *pre*-sent them to one's experiencing. I know I've plunged into

the most difficult thing to talk about, actually.

*So it's not the image that's the archetype.*

No, the image is a poetic metaphor for the archetype. But maybe we should sidestep that for awhile. You asked me, why is this work more like poetry than science.

*Yes. There's a lot of movement- and body-work that's based on anatomical reality. You can explain why it works in terms of muscles and bones, and you can study it and have a certain exact goal. Whereas, you can't really say what's going to happen when you read a poem, or write a poem. My understanding is that your work functions on many different levels of your being, in ways that you couldn't possibly predict, but that it somehow energizes many different levels.*

And how do we explain these different levels? I think we'll just have to come at these things from many different directions, because, as you know, there is no linear route. To work with these images, the instructor has to guide the students into a state of being where they are receptive to the work. In the pedagogy there are many ways that one guides you to this, all of them having to do with letting-go. They could be likened to relaxation techniques, which I recently stumbled on. There is a system of autogenic training which takes you underneath levels of conscious control in a step-by-step system of relaxation. My "checklist"<sup>5</sup> techniques are similar to those systems of relaxation. But I have to explain to the students that this is just a first step, in order to be available to Releasing. Relaxation is not the same as Releasing. But that step has to take place before you're available to these images.

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<sup>5</sup>"Checklists," on a basic level, guide one with imagery to focus on different areas of the body in order to get in touch with states of tension there. Through various images of letting go of those tensions, one reaches a level of consciousness just underneath conscious control where growth and change can take place. More sophisticated checklist images guide one into deeper states of consciousness and deeper body/mind integration.

Not long ago I read about the different levels of consciousness. At the alpha level, just under the conscious state, there's internal calm and quiet; it's free of tensions and anxieties; it's alert to new stimuli; and it's the state most conducive to learning. The mind is concentrated and sensory perceptions are heightened. I was struck by this as being similar to the level that we take Releasing to, at least initially. With those first checklists we take students to a level underneath conscious control, where they are relaxed and focused and available to image work. So the image work, then, is not functioning in an analytical way at all.

There are so many possible reasons for why the work became poetic, and one of them is that my orientation has always been dance. And that's not going to be easy to talk about either, because what do I mean by dance? To me, everything is dance. Even on a cellular level, I see it all as dance. It seems to me that when you start tuning in to levels of experiencing with movement, it has a poetic aesthetic about it. Now that's not to say that the anatomical work isn't also concerned with dance. There are answers to this yet, Stephanie, as to why—

*As to why it's more like poetry—*

Um hm. The image works in an oblique way on the whole psycho-physical organism. It taps the imagination right away if it is a poetic image; the way it seems to function is very *in-direct*. When I think back on my early exploration—the three years that I worked alone with this before I attempted to teach it—I avoided anything analytical. I avoided it studiously, whether it was reading or whatever. Of course there weren't any books out yet, except for Mabel Todd's *The Thinking Body*, which was published in the '30s, but I don't think Lulu Sweigard's book was out yet. Something compelled me to avoid the analytical work while working with this. It seemed as if they were functioning in two different realms of knowing and of experiencing. I don't know if I can answer why I chose the poetic route, but it just seemed absolutely essential.

*One of the things that I've always been so thankful about in doing your*



Joan Skinner

*work is that I start having ideas, all kinds of ideas, and that to me is a great gift. The work taps into the flow of ideas, and that's true of almost no other dance training that I've experienced.*

It seems to tap into creative process, whatever that is. It's a process. One thing leads to another. It's coming out of the individual, not imposed on the individual. It seems to be self-perpetuating, once it's been initiated by whatever is coming from the work. That's what I mean by the oblique way these images are intended to function. I avoid the direct one-to-one muscular approach—not that it's invalid in any way, just that it gets in the way of going through *this* door to experiencing. When students who have had a lot of analytical work first start to study and sometimes ask an analytical question, I just say, "Later," or "Set that aside for now," in order to let go of that analytical thinking for now, and allow this other process to come into play.

*The images that you use almost never have to do with anatomical reality, and, frequently, when looked at in that context, are completely absurd.*

Um hm. Can you give me an example?

*Well, for instance, the image of hollowness—that your head is hollow, that your legs are hollow, everything is hollow—when we all have a pretty good idea of all the things that are in there.*

Yes, yes I know. But, there is also an emphasis on alignment. It isn't that we're off on cloud nine weaving our little tapestries of ideas and becoming creative. There's a thread through all the classwork, constantly bringing relationships into awareness—neuro-skeletal relationships. Does that seem so to you, from doing the work?

*Oh, I would say there's a lot of emphasis on alignment. And I also would say that your work is technique. It's a technique class as much as a ballet class is a technique class.*

That's its intention. But how do you get at alignment without going into specifics of bones and muscles and so on? We do it through "partner-graphics," specific partner studies, to some degree. And we do it through the images.

*You said something interesting last time we talked—that when you talk about alignment, you don't just mean the relationships between body parts, but alignment with the forces in the universe.*

Yes. There is evidence that we are energy systems within the larger energy system in the universe. I'm excited about this book on the new physics—*The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, by Gary Zukav. It says that most physicists know that their concern is to harmonize themselves with a larger entity than themselves. That's what a *physicist* said. Sounds like an eastern mystic. But they mean it in terms of energy fields, quantum leaps, multigravitational fields, the whole cosmic dance. I love that idea—that if you break it all down into systems of energy, that's exactly what we are: we're just one manifestation, or form, of the systems of energy in the universe.

I think of the human organism not as a mind-body complex, but as a psycho-physical system of energies. The whole psycho-physical organism is a network of energies, and it is the

microcosmic form of a larger system of energy. When we're dealing with alignment in these classes, we're dealing with multidirectional balancing—not holding the balance in any one part of the body, but relating to multigravitational fields. When this alignment is harmonious with the larger energy systems, it releases the individual. Distortions of alignment constrict the individual. These distortions are constrictive because they are warps of the energy patterns which flow through us and around us and out of us and into us. A Releasing alignment is not a fixed alignment; it's always in flux. Everything is relative to everything else. So I see it as harmonious or not harmonious. When it's harmonious, then something is unleashed, then power and energy are released, and that becomes Releasing dance.

*I think the work is a catalyst for many things. One of the effects that I've noticed is that I collect a lot of energy. I might be moving very little, or I might be dancing madly, but, afterwards, I'm energized rather than exhausted.*

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I've often said that excess tension, or tension that constricts the body in any way, actually constricts energy. It's bound, it's blocked. When that tension block is released, it releases energy. But I like to think of energy as not just inside the individual—me in my own little vacuum, that I have to manufacture this energy and then I have to store it and then I have to use it and then I have to replace it somehow—but as having all the channels open to the energy that is all around us.

*A lot of images you use are from nature, and yet they're different than those Composition I Class images where you imagine that you're walk-*

*ing on sand. I've been given, in those Composition classes, a very literal image or environment and then I am supposed to put myself in that environment, and that presumably makes me move in a certain way. Somehow it's never been a useful creative tool for me. Your images are the only ones that someone besides myself has suggested that I've ever been able to work with. They are from the natural world, but they don't seem silly to me—not like, oh, here I am now walking through some tall grass, so I have to lift up my knees. Your images are open-ended enough, or more profound.*

I think the key to the *Releasing* images is that they were found when I was working on another level of being and, when they're given to someone who has been taken to a state where they're receptive to this, then they are experienced on another level of being. Then it becomes another reality. It's not an imagined reality, but another kind of reality. And, if it's experienced vividly enough, it becomes your own. You experience it as no one else does on a level underneath conscious decision-making or control.

As to why the images are from nature—you can hear the word "water" in different contexts, and experience it in different ways because of these contexts. Nature for me is just another form of these energy systems. When I look at something in nature, whether it's a tree, or a wild heron, or water flowing in a stream, I experience it as a form of energy. It's always beautiful to anyone, I think, who goes into nature and sees it. Everyone experiences this as a kind of beauty; it's universal. People hunger to go into nature, to be part of it.

I see primal forms, and experience primal energy in nature—when water

changes as it flows, or clouds change. And because it's beautiful, it becomes an aesthetic experience. So, somehow, that's where the poetic aspect comes in. Forms we see in nature seem very organic and indigenous to where they occur, and what causes them to move seems very organic, even alive. There is a harmony about that and a primal energy in it. And we are a part of that. I don't know if that answers the question as to why—

*Oh yes, it does. Somehow, going into the natural environment is the closest that we can get, in our ordinary states of being, to experiencing raw energy and its powers.*

And to experience something larger than the self. When you merge

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with an image, you are aligning yourself with it, and with whatever form of energy is underneath the image. That's how I started off with this archetype idea. The archetype underneath the image is what we align ourselves with, and the image is a catalyst for that.

*Do you think that we as a society got a little sidetracked into thinking of beauty in a way that's more influenced by man-made structures of order?*

Oh, I think that a lot of things that human beings have created are expressions of their cultural life as they are experiencing it. And if they're not experiencing their lives as part of nature, then they're experiencing something else, and that's what they express. They express *it's* energy, whether it's an urban energy, or mechanistic energy, or the kind of power that comes from the new technology, nuclear energy. The sheer mass of it and the sheer power of it is awesome, and yet the human being has created it. I think that our civilization has, for the most part, lost touch with the more primal relationships that the human being has with the forces of nature.

*But the new physics is getting back to it.*

Yes, because it's getting down to the subatomic level. At that level, there are no distinctions between matter and energy. And there are no particles—just tendencies. I find that so exciting. I can even conceive of the human being finding a way to be in harmony with this technology. But I think our civilization is showing grim signs of malaise, from the lack of understanding of our technology and our abuse of it—our abuse of our energy resources, our destroying of the land, cutting down forests that affect our atmosphere, the whole rhythm of balance of forces in nature. Everyone's talking about it now. What are we going to do to correct it?

*You must feel affirmed when you read about the new physics, that you've been on the right track.*

I just feel a tremendous excitement, because it does bring the various disciplines together—science, art, religion, philosophy—to where we can perhaps find a common language to communicate with.

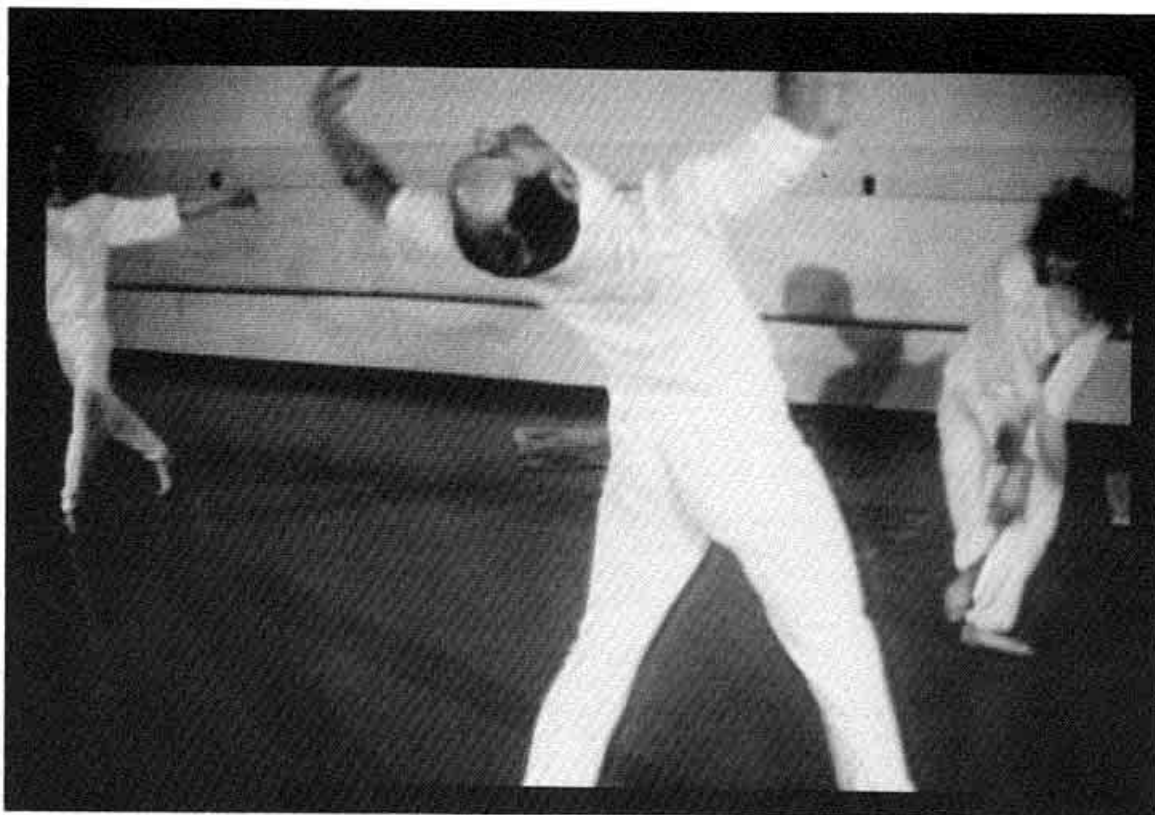
*I thought it would be interesting if you talked about how you got started on this path, because you came from the modern dance world and now you're doing something so different.*

There are so many things that influence the course of your life. My first dance experience as a very young child was in 'interpretive dancing'. My teacher, Cora Belle Hunter, had studied with Mabel Ellsworth Todd at Columbia Teachers College in graduate school, so her teaching was influenced by the use of imagery, and skeletal awareness, and awareness of alignment. Because she was teaching very young children, she didn't give us very sophisticated images, but I remember one, which was "smoke coming out of the top of your head."

After going to Bennington College, I aspired to dance in New York with whatever was the going dance work—which at that time was Graham, Humphrey-Weidman and Holm. I went to the Graham studio to train to dance that way, completely forgetting about my early childhood experience.

After I left Martha Graham and I was dancing with Merce Cunningham—taking my ballet class in the morning, my Cunningham class in the afternoon, rehearsing in the evening, and going to my part-time jobs—something prompted me to set up a ballet *barre* in my little apartment, with a mirror on either wall, and try to answer some questions about what I was attempting to accomplish in the technique classes. I kept a notebook and would ask myself questions such as, "How can you 'pull up' your abdominals and hold onto them while you are dancing, and also breathe the way I think nature intended you should be able to breathe?" And I started to experiment with this. "How can you get the lift, the suspension, that every dance teacher teaches, and still allow the breathing to deepen and expand?" I'd give myself a *barre* working with these principles, not having to stay with the normal pace of a class. So I think that early work with Cora Belle Hunter planted the seeds that caused me to question methods of training that didn't seem organic to the way the body itself can function.

Then the inevitable happened, an injury, a ruptured disc. It happened during a four-month bus tour of one-night stands, during performance, in mid-air. And from then on it was the usual search for healing. It would heal for awhile if I rested, but if I went back to class it would begin to break down again. I was very discouraged, wondering if I ever would be able to sustain dancing again for any length of time. Then a musician friend told me about the Alexander Technique. In those days, it was not known except among a few professional people. There were only three Alexander teachers in this country. So I went to see an Alexander teacher. She didn't want to take me on because she didn't think dancers were open enough to other ways of working. But I persuaded her to try me. It made it possible for me to dance, and I thought it was marvelous.



Mark Lynd, Robert Davidson, and Theresa Moriarty in the videotape, "Releasing Dance," by Joan Skinner.

Then I moved to the Midwest, and I was still performing and teaching and choreographing. I just don't know what prompted me to start to work alone one day, but it felt so good, so right, as if—AT LAST. What I was really starting to do was to apply the Alexander principles to a ballet *barre*. Then it would just break down from that to where, if I couldn't stand on one leg without tightening somewhere that I didn't feel I should have to, I would just wobble around on one leg and fall and then I would get back on that leg and wobble around some more. So the *barre* deteriorated into standing on one leg for long periods of time, experimenting with balancing. What I was searching for was multidirectional balancing. I worked in that totally open-ended way for three years.

I didn't have any idea how I was going to teach this, but I knew that I couldn't go back into a traditional class and teach without some application of what I had learned. Then, at the University of Illinois, I started to introduce some of these ideas, and to search for images, because that was the only way I could communicate this kind of

kinesthetic data—what I had discovered in my own body in the three years of work. I couldn't just point to a muscle and say, "Let go of that one and grip this one." Somehow it had to be oblique.

*What images were you working with in those days?*

The initial images I gave were just tools for getting at the Alexander principles. For the suspension of the head I gave a "marionette headstring"—that's an old one that everybody uses. But it had a profound effect on the students, because they started to improvise with it. So they weren't just standing there academically thinking about being suspended in the head, or giving themselves a direction up and forward, as you do in the Alexander work; but they were given an image that took on a dynamic state for them because they were moving with it, dancing with it. This was in the context of a traditional technique class. I'd have them go across the floor with their headstring, and then I'd have them break out of the process across the floor and just go with the headstring, and it became

all-absorbing to them.

That encouraged me to go on and give them other images to get at other principles. In order to do that, I felt it was necessary for them to let go of their programmed training, of that fixed body, in order to experience anything different or new. So we would go to the floor, and I would give them an image to help them let go of that pulled-up look, that fixed physical state. Then I would give them an image for some kind of change—for more flexibility in the hip, or a change in the back of the neck. I saw how profoundly they responded to that, so I suggested they experiment with it and let the image move them. That broke down the class structure altogether. From then on some people would stay on the floor, and I'd look at them in astonishment, but they weren't going to leave that image. They weren't ready. Others would be up dancing, vigorously, just the way they do now. And that became the way the work evolved.

*Compared to most dance classes, the structure of your class seems like total anarchy. But really, the individuals have a lot of responsibility*

to decide what they feel like doing at any moment. That's a radical change.

It seems like anarchy, but a Releasing class has evolved to where the sequence of the images and the level of experiencing them are carefully planned by the instructor to be an organic whole. When I first began to teach Releasing, some of the students and faculty weren't ready to just abandon a traditional class. This matter of individual responsibility is always a tricky one, because there are different levels in the work. There's the introductory level where you get a lot of guidance. But then there's also open-ended time, and that's where individuals develop, with practice, some sense of whether what they're working with is really taking them somewhere, whether it's opening doors for them.

This raises all sorts of thorny questions about our past conditioning and the work ethic. Are we just copping out? Are we lying there because we're lazy or tired? There's so much to learn from just lying there. I have journals from students over the years about that very thing, about how they experience a class day after day after day. They'll come into class one day and just lie on the

day, to carry over into the work. Something is changing and growing in the whole psycho-physical organism. It's a different kind of learning process than the traditional technique class, where you practice something that is given to you by rote. You see it and imitate it and you repeat it until your body responds to it.

*The dance world has so much in common with the Protestant work ethic—that you learn by doing, and you have to keep doing and you have to keep sweating and you have to keep moving, and that's the only way you get anywhere. Mystics have known for a long time that by doing nothing you achieve great things.*

Yes, yes.

*I gather that for your work two things are important: One, that you keep improvising with the images; and two, that you do nothing.*

Nothing, yes, and let it resonate. That used to be one of the most difficult things. Now people come to study Releasing and have had other experiences. There's been a whole explosion of meditation practices, and of "body therapies." That's not my favorite term, because it leaves out

Skeletal spaces  
become an inner landscape  
of crystal clear pools — — —  
now and then — — — sunlight  
casts radiance  
into the pools  
they shimmer for a moment  
then become still  
and clear — — — once more

floor, thinking they're exhausted. The next minute they're charged with energy and they're up and dancing. Or they might come into class and find themselves spinning right away, not knowing why they're spinning. The work is in process. Something has been planted that is ongoing in them. And it doesn't just end with the end of class. It goes into their lives, into their sleep, into their half-sleep. And that affects how they come back to class the next

the whole mind/imagination/psyche.

Poetry.

Poetry, it leaves that out. I don't see how you can separate them. The whole psycho-physical organism and the imagination are all just one network.

*One thing that disturbed me when I was studying dance was that nobody was talking or teaching*

The whole self transforms  
into a configuration of  
serpentine spines  
serpentine energy  
releases its power  
no warning

"Totality" images from SRT.

*about what's going on inside you. I remember going to take a yoga class and feeling so relieved that there was some recognition of your internal state, because they told you after doing a position to just lie down and feel the effects of it. Then there was training about the mind, some kind of meditative practice. There was an acknowledgement of the relation of mind and body. In dance classes, we were just using our minds to work on our bodies.*

And it's considered self-indulgent to think about your psyche. That belongs in the creative end of things, over here, after you've reached advanced levels of technique. Then you can become creative and be a choreographer. But I think you cannot separate the whole thing from the beginning. Or if you do, then you're compartmentalizing and cutting off the flow, the blood supply, the whole system.

*I wanted to ask you about the "totalities." You talked about watching students, in the advanced work, work with an image while lying still, and actually seeing physical changes happening.*

A "totality image" is an "image cluster." It immerses the individual in a state of being where there is disorientation and a total allowing of new experience to take place. The image may take them into movement or not. [See "totality images" on this page.]

Students have written about experiencing a totality without moving and with all kinds of things happening: they're falling, endlessly falling;

or they are disintegrating, everything coming apart and getting down to a cellular level. The totality can also take them into what we call deep states, where they think they don't even hear the image, but then they'll be up and dancing, and I know that they're dancing from that image. Then I'll write it on the board at the end of class, and they'll see it and say, "Oh yes." So they're hearing it on one level and experiencing it on another level.

There are many levels of totalities—it depends on the level in which you're absorbing the image, whether it overtakes you in a state of disorientation or another state. Now disorientation doesn't necessarily mean without focus. In the introductory stages I would give an image that would seem fairly safe and secure, and then gradually the individual doesn't mind being displaced, in fact even welcomes it, just as a child welcomes disorientation by spinning until he or she gets dizzy, or by rolling down a hillside. Oddly enough, even though the students are completely taken by the image, they *know* they're being taken by the image. They can write about it afterward or the next day in their journal. The totalities have different focuses. One image might be encouraging you to move; another

Skeletal spaces  
become an inner landscape  
of dark caves — — —  
the skull — — — becomes the moon  
as the moon rises  
moon dust  
falls  
into the caves

might take you into a very deep stillness, and that would be its purpose.

*I think it would be good to say something about the partner work, because it seems to be an important part of your teaching.*

The "partner-graphics" can be experienced on a very physical level in the early stages of study. You're experiencing some kind of physical

change by having your partner assist you with a letting-go of a certain area of the body (with a light touch or attention)—letting-go of tissues around the hip-joint, for example, so that the leg can experience some autonomy of movement.

Then these "graphics" progress to where they become energy exchanges on a much more refined level. One of the aims is to experience the realigning process in a multidimensional, multidirectional way. In some of the partner work, delicate fingers (sometimes fluttering, sometimes smooth, fast, or slow) trace continuous flows of 3-dimensional energy patterns, such as spheres or figure eights, along the surface of the body. These patterns or circuits of energy activate an aligning process within a releasing mode, rather than a fixing of the posture.

At the more advanced levels, the partner-graphics become partner dances, because the students are actually moving as they are receiving and giving these traveling tactile tracings. The channels of energy between the partners become very open and sensitized.

*When I teach, and am introducing people to your work, sometimes I explain the partner work by saying it is like homeopathic medicine: rather*

*than change your body chemistry, it's an element that stimulates your own body to go into the healing process. In the partner work, rather than manipulate your body, your partner does something very subtle so that the body moves along certain lines.*

Indeed. Oh, I used to fight having someone use the word "manipulation." You said that homeopathic

medicine stimulates the body to activate along certain lines, and that's a key in the Releasing work. The guidelines are set as to what you're stimulating the body to activate itself along—

*The lines of force, the energy paths—*

Yes.

*What's interesting is that you don't even have to actually touch the skin. You can just be very close to it and it has its effect.*

Yes. Also, the partner work is not to try to bring about the change, but to simply hint at it or suggest it. The whole psycho-physical organism brings about the change in an organic way as it is ready, in its own growth process. The change comes about through all the dimensions of the class, not just that partner study. Whereas you think of manipulation as actually changing something right then and there.

*You frequently refer to "autonomy"—autonomy of body parts. In class a few weeks ago, we were doing the "graphic" in which your partner flips your arm over your head, and a student said, "It's as if it were someone else's arm." And you said, "That's exactly right. It's as if it were someone else's arm, but you know very well that it's your own arm."*

You're getting out of the way of controlling it as you're accustomed to controlling it, so that you can experience other energies at work that propel the arm, so that it moves. It moves, and it ignites the space. I'm reminded of a book that had a strong impact on me years ago, *Zen in the Art of Archery* by Eugen Herrigel. There would be so much practicing, just being there in a state of readiness, but without shooting the



Video and stills shot by Terry Moyement

From the videotape, "Releasing Dance," by Joan Skinner with dancers Robert Davidson, Theresa Moriarty, and Mark Lynd.

arrow. Then one day after years of this agonizing practice, the master broke off the class after the student had finally shot and he said, "It shot." It shot. The student had to go through so much giving-up and letting-go in order to achieve a state of being in which *it* moves. *It* moves. I think that had a profound influence on some of my Releasing work. That, and other ideas in Zen that were introduced to me when I was dancing with Cunningham and John Cage was reading Suzuki.

*You haven't written that much about your work, and you tend in class not to talk very much about it. Is this intentional on your part—not to talk about the ideas and values behind it?*

The study of the Releasing work is experiential, not theoretical, although there is theory behind it. But you can't understand it by just studying the theory. You have to practice it and experience it. I notice that students with very little instruction

as to the whys and whats behind it will change as they come to class every day. I see them arriving at an understanding. The "graphics" give them one kind of understanding, the "checklists" of the letting-go process give them another kind of understanding. If they're available anyway, they begin to come in and work in a very open-ended way. One reason I have them keep journals is so they can have some sense of what is happening to them. They'll often write in their journals right after they've come out of the "totality image"; and then they'll look at it later and be amazed at what they've written. I think that also helps their understanding.

The other thing is that—and this is hard to talk about—the *process*, whatever that is, the process of discovery in the Releasing work is a web-like process. Once you have discovered that there is permission to move into this web and let it take you wherever it's going to take you, knowing that the instructor is there to guide but that it's still your own

journey, once this is self-propelling in the students, no one could tell them that they're not learning, that they're not growing, that they're not changing and experiencing something profound, something larger than the self. There's a knowledge there, and a security in knowing you're discovering something. When you sense that the teacher respects that, knows what is happening to you and gives you permission to go with that, it becomes a very strong self-sustaining process. ★