

Developing body awareness

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Watching a workshop is somewhat embarrassing. One tends to feel like an intruder. Watching Tess de Quincey and Stuart Lynch give a three-and-half hour workshop on Saturday, December 4th the Max Mueller Bhavan auditorium was, for me, no exception. However, the casualness of their approach and the relaxed ambience they invoked made the experience comfortable.

The duo, who presented their experimental Butoh-based work on December 5, offered an abridged version of the usual working day of Min Tanaka's dance company, Mai Juku, where they had worked for several years. The process of training is known as Body Weather and is meant to "provide the opportunity to sharpen our focus and awareness on our own and others' bodies."

The training is in three sections, covering a whole range of procedures, obviously gleaned from a large variety of sources — although de Quincey and Lynch did not mention origins, one could hazard a few guesses — as diverse as Vipassana and Zen practices, contact improvisation, aerobics, Grotowski and shiatsu. The cross-culturalism, diversity and general nature of their work place it neatly in the realm of post-modernist dance.

The duo were originally graphic artists and sculptors. The particular "eye" this background has given them was evident in their close observation of the partici-



Dancers Stuart Lynch and Tess de Quincey at the workshop

pants, when they would step back, having given instructions and observed their handiwork like artists at work. Sometimes they would express a response in a movement or gesture and for a moment the workshop would be transformed into a theatre of movement-dialogue. "We try to observe neutrally the different states of body and mind, our habits and boundaries, and to perceive and be

attuned to the constant state of change inside and outside," they say. "These changes are our dance."

In an interview with Lynch, the dancer stressed the importance of having a frame of reference in the Body Weather training. "But the problem with a workshop like this is that it is not connected to anything," he said. "What we do is train people to per-

form. Discovering the inner self is a massive undertaking which we are not qualified for. Our point of reference is the body in the context of the group."

In the workshop, there was an emphasis on just doing, not analysing, brought out in the simplicity and clarity of the directions given. In this, the Body Weather approach seems part of the worldwide trend to apply traditional forms of performance practice to Western frames of aesthetics and presentation.

The direct and practical aspects of traditional teaching seem to appeal to many western artists fed up with the complexity of analysis. Although an undeniable facet of post-modernism, one might question the application of certain practices evolved for and from specific purposes in the interests of a specific kind of theatre where the means (process) is the end. For example, when it is a case of "neutral" observation, it represents a certain point of view, which accepts the possibility of scientific objectivity. Such a view must be related to a referential frame of values and beliefs. How can the process have relevance without such a frame?

Stuart Lynch mentioned that the original work had developed in the living atmosphere of the countryside where daily labour was interwoven with artistic work, and the inter-relationship of movements of different activities was acknowledged. Perhaps the organicity of that situation and the framework and values it represents, would have made the work more coherent.