

Barbara Mettler: Interview II
Interviewer: June [Warner], ca. 1979.

Barbara Mettler: The question is, how am I teaching? How are they practicing? How are they studying? Well, I think the attention on improvisation, rather than on the substance of what I'm teaching is probably related to the emphasis on technique. The technological, the technical is confused with the meaning of something and I am very much concerned with meaning. And what is the meaning of what I'm teaching? I'm teaching dance of course, but my goodness, there are many, many different kinds of dancing and many concepts of what dance is. In fact it is quite an interesting thing to try to say what the best word, the best terminology of what we really should call our dance. It could be called free dance. It could be called natural dance. It could be called basic dance. It could be called pure dance, and that of course is the word for it, and you can go around publicizing pure dance. Pure dance in the sense that it is underived, unapplied, underived from any other art or anything, unapplied to any other kind of activity, and unmixed, undiluted I would say, so that many people are using it more and more.

It's very interesting, students will come to me and say to me, this is the first time I've ever experienced pure dance. One of my students who's really nice, she's going to be a member of the small company I'm having this winter, she says "I've studied everywhere." She says "I've studied with this group, and all the names in New York and all," she says "This is the first I've ever danced!" And I believe this is pure dance. If you like to dance, this is it. If you like to perform, well, there are lots of things you can perform, lots of different kinds of dancing you can perform, you can perform free dance. If as I said you like to entertain, well that's your thing. So I'm not even talking about the difference between art dance, educational dance, therapeutic dance, recreational dance, I'm just talking about pure dance, independent dance.

So this is what I long for. You see, I ask students to write a paper at the end of three intensive weeks, five hours a day five days a week. And I say, "Just tell me what you've been studying. Don't tell me how much you love it or how it's transformed your life, I know that. Don't tell me what a good teacher I am, I know that. Tell me what you're studying." And I can't get it from them. I can't even get it from the ones who've been here for years, but after many years, yes! This all what we're saying relates to your thing of how hard you had to work, and I answer that I say this is an enormous field which is wholly untouched. Why is it untouched? Because even scientists aren't sufficiently interested in the kinesthetic sense. And the artists don't even know it exists. And apparently the

therapists - I don't believe Rolf talks about the kinesthetic sense, well maybe it isn't a question of movement, maybe it's a question of manipulating the body.

Now this business with the body, I can't help but want to get in to that. Now look, we're really talking about what am I teaching, and I am talking about the theoretical clarification of what I am teaching. There's never been any doubt of mine of what I was teaching. Putting it in to the right words, sometimes, is a difficulty. Oh dear, what was that thought I had? My students, as you say, I learn by watching my students, by working my students hard, by working you hard, by working all my students hard. And it comes back to me, when a student comes up to me and says, "You're teaching pure dance," and it was the first time I'd ever really thought of it. And so I got something there. One of my students in the last class said, "The kinesthetic sense. That's the whole thing isn't it?" It comes back to me. And I realize why I ought to be teaching in a nutshell. Somewhere we are at that black bottom where nobody else seems to be. That the art of body movement is dependent on, exists as an expression, a kinesthetic experience. Nobody cares! After 25 years of professional work, these things gradually come into focus for me. And I am so longing to have them right here. And I'm fortunate there are lots of people who know about this studio now and that know about my work. It isn't that utter confusion that it once was. People came to me thinking they were going to get gymnastics and weight reduction and that sort of thing. Then, strangely enough, there were people who came for theatrical techniques. Then this wave of therapy only. "I hear you're the greatest dance therapist!"

You know, it's coming through a little more. They're coming for dance. They're coming for dance, and yet, as I say, three intensive weeks, five intensive weeks, two intensive summers, three intensive summers, maybe they begin to know what we're doing. Now this is the extent of the field that I am probably leaving and opening up. In other words, I say to my students who want a job, don't go out and try to get a job in the field. There isn't any field. Go out and try to create a field so that you can get a job, so that you can work in. Now when I say I've even fought with people in contact improvisation. Criticize me because I don't follow the rules they've set up in the last five years. I've been improvising for 45! In a richer, more meaningful way. Freedom, freedom, freedom is the crux of the whole thing! I made them repeat it, too, I was speaking to my students yesterday. You are either free or you are not free to be what God intended you to be and to do what you feel is the thing, is the right thing for you to do! And -

(Tape cuts off)

Now, I was speaking to the students, and I will repeat, about this concept of freedom. It does seem as if a little bit of freedom isn't what we are after, we are after total freedom and this involves everything including your freedom from independence and approval of others, and I did not go into this as far as freedom is concerned. You see, we found that many dancers have a certain amount of freedom and then you know that they are not free to follow their inner light, their inner feelings, because they're afraid the audience won't like it. And then sometimes they're obviously doing things simply because the audience will like it. So I define our ultimate freedom as freedom from spectator approval. And I don't see that anywhere. I don't see it in any student that comes to me, not any. Every student who walks through these doors thinks of dance as having to appeal to the spectator. Now we get into that, but it's hard and it takes time and some give it up more easily than others.

I had a very interesting talk with a student yesterday who was obviously – she's got so much dance energy and it's coming out in the most outlandish ways that have nothing to do with kinesthetic experience. And I've been trying to figure out what's wrong, is it too much tension? What is it? She's a very intelligent little thing and she's out of college and I talked to her and it came out that she's also interested in visual design and did a lot of painting and drawing and she figured out for herself that she was always, but ALWAYS picturing in her mind what it looked like before she did it! Now what she does are very interesting things, but it has nothing to do with kinesthetic experience. I watch her and I get no feeling in my muscles, none. She does interesting things, and of course it's disastrous as she's working in a group because you will see, as the groups work, you will see a kinesthetic feeling moving them. She said, "I think this needs repeating." I said, now you must simply lie on the floor and relax and wait. Wait until your body – here's where the body comes in – needs to move. And then move on with it. And go on in that way. And she was puzzled, she said, "I always have a picture of what it should be," she said. What's it supposed to look like? Well that's not the point. You should be asking me what it's supposed to feel like! You see the kinesthetic sense is the inner sense.

Now she was not stupid. In fact she was a smarty, very intelligent, but almost the peak of someone not being able to move as a dancer without having an idea ahead of time what it was going to look like. Now what does that have to look like with the art of body movement which is rooted in the kinesthetic sense? Now we won't use the word art, I've been saying far back that people are coming more and more for dance. The word "art" is from outer space. Is from outer space. There isn't one in a hundred of my students that has any basis for understanding for what I mean by art. And I could talk myself

blue in the face and they still don't understand. And I could spell it out, that art is the making of some – is creating of some form, of some objective material, that satisfies your inner need for integrated expression of some inner life.

Well, this is the world in which we live. And I've often said about my studio, they've heard me say over and over again. Here I am, I know a lot about – I go out of my studio maybe once a week to get groceries during an intensive period like this. But what am I, living in an ivory tower? Every sociological, social culture is the word, washes over this studio, and washes over sometimes so fast that I can't keep up with it. I am very anxious either to have you or somebody or me, I think it should be me, write the atmosphere of the summer schools as they have changed over the fifteen or sixteen years they have changed. Unbelievable. Coming and my having to fight to liberate, fight to free them. And gradually, without my realizing it, one day I was the establishment because I said "Now we're all going to make this kind of movement, make it any way you want it." "We don't want to make that kind of movement, we want to do our own thing. Don't tell us what to do." This hit me so hard I said, "I'm not giving another summer school. I – this isn't for me." After I said that was a very interesting educational experience. I said, "You don't want to do this? I'm finished with you, go ahead, do your own thing, I'm out." And we had a program all filled up and all sorts of things that we were invited to, I was ready to call off the press and everything. Well they messed around one morning and did their own thing and that sort of thing and then they came back and said we're ready to work now. And it was a good thing.

The next years began gradually, as I've said the therapy coming in and this tremendous difficulty, look at the polarity here! With theatrical techniques – tell me exactly what to do and I'll lift my leg in such and such a form, to the atmosphere now, let's go over there, she lets us be free, we do anything we want to do, any time we want to. It's all about free and being completely baffled by discipline. On the other hand, the wave is not coming up in to the disciplines. That last couple of years, that feeling that they are longing to follow someone who knows where he's going with a firm hand and be told, not this, not that, they are longing for it. And it's so pronounced now you can almost see it, you can almost sense that these are working hard and they are accepting the differences. For some of them it's strange, it's new, and they don't know quite what to make of it. But they hear it, and it makes sense. And, oh if I could, these atmospheres, do you remember me telling you about those years when the fight against the establishment was so strong, well I think I don't need to go in to that, but it was utterly unleashed in Boston! The waves washing through the studio, people felt it economically too.

JW: In relation to this, the discipline of dance, I was going to say that it was ... you were stressing what freedom is, the formless, we just do our own thing, meaning we just move around, and the other, the theatrical discipline which says you must do it exactly this way. Now when I've been asked by someone in relation to my own teaching, what do you teach? What is creative movement, what is creative dance? I'll say, I really don't want to talk about it, I'd like you to start in with the group in the little place that we had to work, our kind of studio. But since you've asked and you're not going to be here for that, I say I'm working with very definite material for convenience divided into the areas of force, time, and space. These are very definitely worked out. In each of those areas, for instance within force, we start with the experience. The experience of tension and relaxation. We move from that to the experience of activity and passivity, the relation of one person to another, alternating activity and passivity, and work with that in groups with that force freely flowing and I'm describing something to you that can only be experienced. In time we work with the polarities, we want to experience the rhythm of the dance that wants to be brought in, or with the duration of time, whether the rhythm lasts a long time or a short time, with the regularity of the expressed movement, of the movement impulse, whether it's a very regularly felt impulse or whether it's irregularly felt or slow or fast. In space you'll work with beginning movements and spatial qualities of smallness and largeness and curved and straightened and so forth in these carefully built up movement experiences. Now this is a very brief description of the kind of thing we do.

Now regardless of how I've expressed that, I've just encapsulated a little – this kind of experience which you are now able to give through using terminology like that, which is your teaching material, and which we later want to get into how it's changed in the past years, what I've missed in these past few years, how you've developed from what I would have received as teaching material. You didn't, back in the days in New York City when you opened your studio as you described it, you didn't have people walk in and say to them, I'm going to work with you in the areas of force, time, and space. I'm going to be concerned about rhythm as the basic stuff of movement. I'm going to be working with the qualities of your release of the movement, the qualities in the timing of them, and so forth. How did that come about? Where did that come from, that carefully formulated material that would release their creativity so that within that discipline the person could be as free as he or she liked?

BM: I was doing a lot of experimenting in the New Hampshire summer school. And just thinking of some of those early years in Sanbornton,

I remember those – we had an 8 week summer school. Eight weeks. And I was experimenting, and I was writing. I wrote "The Art of Body Movement", that article, about that time. I think I even wrote that article for the visual arts for the journal of aesthetics. I wrote a lot.

JW: Yes you did, I remember that article.

BM: I was thinking and I was analyzing. In other words, once in a while, perhaps my thinking and analyzing would get ahead of the experience. A little while back I said everything came up out of the experience. The experience would take me up to a certain point and I would say, I know there's something beyond that. And I'd get that somehow into my notes even though I hadn't experienced it. This actually happened with my black book materials of dance. The last chapter, there's nothing in the last chapter because I really hadn't gotten into thinking in or working in dramatic elements. And I say to my students now that last chapter is really worthless. And the interesting thing is there's dramatic material all through the book which really should have been collected, you might almost say, in the dramatic chapter instead of me desperately trying to get together some material on drama.

So it's almost impossible for me to relive and see exactly how especially the force, time and space elements came. I knew somehow that they were there and that we had to find our way through them. So I'd try one and say I knew strong and weak, strong and weak, that was obviously some kind of movement that had to do with forceful and forceless. That was obvious. And then time, duration, pulse, and all that sort of thing. And then I think, we've only got one in force and we've got two in time, there must be another in force. So I do a lot of thinking that way and a lot of experimenting and ever ripening. And my analysis now, I guess it's in the black book, I can't believe that I was that clear so long ago, but this concept that you move at all – that's a force problem. I mean, movement is a manifestation of force. So moving and not moving is the basic experience, and then the concept of a movement, an impulse, here we are, that's a problem of force. Then time problem, oh you'll love our time studies, we'll say now when does the movement occur? Now. So then – what is happening? This is happening. Where is it occurring? Now. Where is it going? Here. So yes, this is theory, this is theoretical, creative thinking – (tape cuts off) We were rarely, rarely ahead of the working of things and got the course right in the studio, these things being hinted at –

(tape cuts off)

JW: Barbara, on this earlier theme of freedom from spectator approval, I want to go back to the young woman who always seemed to be looking at herself from the outside instead of moving from within. Now when you had her lie down on the floor and asked her just to completely let go and let the movement start to flow from within, she said to you, "What should it look like?" I remember when there were very few studios for dance or ballet or whatever studio existed, there would be mirrors all over the studio. You absolutely forbade that and asked us to start from within and let the movement come from there. It reminded me a little, this whole search today that people are engaged in, one form of it takes the inner exploration. It has to do with dreams and dream analysis, there are so many groups who want to come to the self, the interior self. Another of course is the analytical process in which the self wants to meet the self comes to terms with that. And the mystic is the self that goes inward and through the dark night of the soul, oceanic regression, emerges in union with the self with a capital S or God, as the religious mystics would say. And this then brought me to remember that my impression of what we were doing in dance was to take this inward journey, to go inward, but to completely free ourselves of the self, especially of ego, and simply clear the channel so that the dance which wanted to come about could be born. In one way I could almost think of it as a dancer dancing with a dancer, improvising with a movement which was about to come about, but it was something more like that, this interior journey.

BM: I am not psychologically enough oriented to be able to really feel or to understand with myself the way a work which speaks of getting in touch with one's self, and I can't meet you directly, but it does... probably what I have to say would relate directly to it. I felt, well, I'd like to repeat what I think may have been lost on the earlier tape, that I always very naturally felt joy in beat patterns, time patterns, rhythmic patters, expressed as I bounced over the sidewalk cracks as a child or as I heard the machines beating along in some kind of a pattern. And as I believe I said one of mother's helpers teaching me to scrub my fingernails with pleasure because she let me say, "Scrub scrub scrub, scrub scrub scrub." And these time patterns which I believe we really can call rhythmic patterns because they have to do with force and time and space, to some extent, indirectly. Come into the feeling that these were all about us, they were everywhere, and that I was tuning it, kind of opening myself to them.

And then as I matured more, even before I had any desire to know of God, the feeling that I was an instrument in the service of forces, rhythmic forces, that are all around us, and probably an instinctive feeling of joy in that, and wanting to be a good instrument, and realizing that one needed to open oneself. So that

this being – to me this is being one with the forces that are working within you and without you. It is a uniting, perhaps, of the inner force with the outer force and, of course, that would imply not only physical which is there, in other words we're always working with the inner force of gravity as well as the inner, muscular force in dance. But also the rhythmic forces of nature that are there in everything. And the rhythmic forces in our body, which are there. And then of course the spiritual force with which I was unconcerned at that time working with us.

So the concept of instrument, now, with me as a God-centered person, is completely and totally meaningful. I feel that when I'm having troubles the prayer to be a good instrument has every possible meaning for me. It seems to me though that there are other elements in dance that need to be talked about that are directly related with what you're saying. It has to do, of course with whether you are looking from the outside at yourself or whether you are looking from yourself out. And the dance as we approach it does develop and require a total integration so you are both looking in and out at the same time. So you are both giving out and taking in. So that you are aware of every aspect of your movement, the inner and the outer, and the relationship to everything. So that this whole concept of total integrity in the movement experience kind of cuts through this problem of looking in or out.

And the only thing is a problem of the dancer's development in case he comes with a concept that dance is a visual art and is to be seen. Which of course we reject entirely. It's not true, it's not a visual art, it's a motor art. You can see it, you can hear it, and you can touch it, but it's not – it is primarily a motor and a movement experience. So I often find myself, in teaching, that the dancer is outside of himself really visually looking in rather than trying through the inner experience to express which means to get out – in other words, the inner life coming through the outer form in perfect unity – kind of breaks down all these distinctions. But so does this work break down all sorts of intentions. In other words, it develops integrity within the person, that means the unity of the various aspects of the individual. And of course the integrity of the individual in the group and his relationship to all his environment.

So I feel very strongly that although our way of work in dance offers all these things doesn't mean that everyone takes them. Doesn't mean you can achieve this with everyone. That's why I, with all humility, step aside and say psychologists are working on the same problem in different ways, but let them not ignore the tremendous power of this to integrate I would say an ordinary person where there are extremely difficult psychological problems that of course another different force has to work. But I think all of my

students who are just simple people come here and they feel this. They feel this integrating. I think I haven't quite learned, as you see I'm a little lazy now, I've got so much in my mind and in my hands that I'm not studying very much what other people do. But the psychological concept - (tape cuts off)

[End of Side One]

BM: I think I have to apologize for being a little – it isn't exactly defensive, protective, you might say, of the work. Because we have a great many coming here from a kind of, probably a, possibly inadequate approaches. So trained to analyze what they are doing. To look in – to look into themselves, what am I doing? What am I doing? That the simple, free, natural, let's do something, let's get it out! Sometimes I have a very hard time in getting them back to that if at all because they have found some satisfaction, probably, in the looking and in the analyzing. And in the utilitarian this is good for me so that what I think is more basic – not better, but more basic – let's do it because it feels good! Let's do it because it feels good. So I'm a little, probably almost consciously out of touch with the person looking at himself and putting himself on the outside and looking in because every effort of my studio life is to help people become one with themselves. And as I say, I am unacquainted with and don't know how the psychologist does it, but it is different from the way we do it here.

J: Yes, and it brought me back to something I remember from the past and I wonder if I can say it in the way I think you – I heard you say it or something like it. It is the art in which the artist or creator, an instrument or material, and expression or creation are all together at the same time at the same place. And I believe I remember saying this, the one art in which this integrating experience takes place.

BM: I think we can easily see that. Let's take music. The voice. It's part of your body, but it is a voice. And the voice creates the sound. The voice is here, the sound is out here somewhere, but more easily understood is the piano. The piano is the instrument. The material is the sound. The content is within the person that's using the instrument to create the sound. Three elements! Content, or experience, whatever you want to call it, the feeling, and the instrument, and the sound. Now these are all one in the dance. You can't have movement in dance without the person feeling the movement. You can't have movement in dance without the body as an instrument so they're inseparable. Now you can have the piano without sound. But you can't – let me see, am I fumbling, there is an absolutely rational point here! That – I think I really used it mostly only for instrument material, you see the material for dance is movement and the instrument is the body. The material of the piano is sound and the instrument is the piano, or sound and the instrument is the voice. Now I think I probably get a little over my head when I talk about the person – no, not really, the inner life of the person creating movement forms by means of the instrument of the body. The

person, the inner life of the person, creating sound, musical forms, by means of the instrument of the piano. All three different things!

JW: Yes, that's the point I wanted to get out.

BM: Mmm-hmm. Of course you know how disturbed I am, how confused is the instrument and the material.

JW: Yes, that's what I had in mind, do you want to say any more about that?

BM: Well, it's a concept that is getting harder and harder to come back and to clarify. Harder and harder. Because when there was no interest in the body it maybe was easier. Because we almost had to put the attention on the body. We did have to say, why should I move? Because your body wants to move. Because your body needs it. Get with your body! Now everybody is so awakened – well not everybody, but you know what I mean – to the body, the body, the body, that it's very difficult to say wait a minute, we're really not interested in the body! We're interested in the movement of the body.

JW: Mm-hmm, yes this is really what I wanted to hear.

BM: And it is really quite difficult – again, I get these papers back, and I am delighted when people say you've made me at home in my body but what it comes down to, I as you say even reject the term body language. I reject that. You don't alter your body to express feelings. You alter the movement of your body to express feelings. You can do anything in movement, anything. But as I've said, it's the plastic surgeon that alters the body, the dancer alters the movement. And this is getting so far away from it. So much therapy now is geared towards accepting the body and working with the body and it gets harder and harder. Because the artist does not reshape the body. The artist reshapes the movement of the body.

One tries and tries and tries to make clear and it's even harder with my own students. I have to talk until I'm blue in the face and then about three years later they'll come back and say, I think I see what you mean. And I don't know how to do it any better. In some ways, I've often said, June, and I'll say it today, I'm not really a teacher. I'll say it today, I'm not really a teacher. I really think at heart I'm an artist. And then the question is why haven't I just gone out and done my artwork and not done so much teaching? Because the whole meaning of dance to me is that everybody should do it. And I've never, except for when I was very young and used to dance around the Wigman school, I've never felt that I wanted to dance for people as much as with people. It's just so endearing. But it is the art of the dance that I am interested in. And teaching, I've learned to

teach because of this great desire and this great love. I want this person to dance, I'm going to teach it. And they learn how. Of course I love it, I love my students, I love people, I love my dancing, but that still is different from being a real born teacher.

And now as my work begins to get clearer and clearer I wish I was just starting out because then I would dance on the inside of my groups instead of having to be on the outside. I keep hoping year after year I will be able to do some dancing on the inside. Of course if I wanted to do that and nothing else than I could, but then all of the everythings weighing me down I can do almost none. I kind of hoped to do a little more this winter. I think it's good for my groups if I could get on the inside. We had a lovely experience yesterday, I wish it had gotten taped, or two days ago. I was giving them this study of - oh, it was a new group, and some of them had had a lot of work and others had had less and I thought they ought to be tested in that capacity. So we had this huge circle, 45 people around, and I took some of my more experienced workers and I said, "You test this one. And you test this one for passivity." I could see how each one did. And then they all interrupted for a long time and there was one left over who I thought should have the experience of testing. And I said - Everyone had been tested, everyone had been tested and everyone except this one had had a chance to test. And she looked around, and she didn't see anyone so she came over to me. Decided to test me. And it was so lovely because they just adored it! Because I am on the outside. I sit on the outside and I tell them what to do and I just sit there and they do it.

And I wish - I can let you know, my path has been so inevitable. I was consumed for the passion and the joy of this thing. And then the desire to have everybody to do it! And then having to work like the dickens to find ways of getting them to do it, and then becoming fascinated by the therapeutic and the educational and the recreational aspects of it. Never for a minute interested in showing it except to enlist people's confidence that they could do it. Never! Until the last few years. In the last few years I have come to the need to show it. Because I'm doing all I can to teach it. I'm doing - I've done all I could to demonstrate it. And I want to show - I just want to show the video! But it's kind of painful. We get 300 people out here, many who've never been performing, and they get on the grass in the evening, maybe we get 45 people, and they improvise and maybe for about 45 minutes or an hour the people that are there, "I just thought I'd see if I could do it!" ... So that you see our showing is far away from "You sit out there and look at me and I'll entertain you!"

JW: "And I'll show you what I can do and you can't!" (Laughter)
Barbara, this brings me to a theme, I know I'm jumping about a good

deal, and I'm bringing up material that I'm searching out some relations to in other fields. There's all the material in the world available in your books and I want to ask questions on that and go back to it. But just at this moment, because we are on the theme of activity and passivity, and also on the group and how much they enjoyed it, and everything, I wanted to bring up the word *community*. Community is one of those large words today. If everyone is searching for the interior self or inward journey, psychologically or whatever, it seems that everyone is concerned about community. And what is community? There are the young people who have gone off into directions which include having houses together, with combined elements of having regard for a way of living that is very simplified, it seems to me it has some very positive aspects, I think that I think it has some very negative aspects and a loose sense of sexuality or feeling that freedom includes total shapelessness in relation to one another, moving from one moment to the next and so forth.

Now, having been in that community for 17 years or so and heard the discussion at the last community. There was a weekly meeting. The community spirit was searched for, making decisions together and so forth. I feel that it's very difficult, people often feel that they have a community when they are being manipulated or influenced by one person who says, "In the name of community I'm going to tell you what to do, or in the name of democracy I'm going to tell you how to vote," and so forth. Now it seems to me that in that whole area of activity and passivity, then leading to letting the movement flow to where the movement developed, and the persons or person in charge of the group being in the place where the movement was cresting so to speak or wanting to be born. In a way these people became active and you could say were leading the movement to some extent, but it was really letting the movement come through them. And then that would flow away from them and I remember the point that was strongly made is it's just as important to be passive as it is to be active. Will to be moved is just as much fun as it is to be moved. And it isn't just that one person is a born leader and should lead all the time but rather that the movement flows and you come in to the leadership role in which you're instrumental to the movement or you pass out of that and you follow the movement where the movement wants to go.

Now, in working with creative movement in a community which wanted to be a community, I found — and I hope this was very enlightening to some of the people who thought that they had theories about when they were in my class that they experienced this. And they had theories about communities and leadership roles and so forth. And I think that if we want to speak about democracy, you mentioned that earlier, and the development of a human being as the kind of person who can live in a democracy, I think this is valuable. I know that

you are not awfully keen on saying that "my approach to dance" "my dance" – well, you're keen about it, saying take it away and use it for therapy, take it away and use it for psychology, but don't get it all mixed up. Don't bring or force about a union, saying this is therapeutic dance, and I believe you want to say this is community dance. But you see the point I'm trying to make. I think it has a value for community, it has a value for democracy, because of what happens to the person who is the dancer. Then it doesn't have to be applied theoretically but the person who is dancing becomes a different person in the community or in the democracy. That's what I want to say, and at this point I want to relate that to the Union Symposium.

BM: Oh, I think this is extremely important. We have it right down the line. It's not a teaching of a technique whereby community learns how to work together, that's what I'm talking about. It is an ingredient which can make a person a better member of a community.

Now we have this all the time in our applications. We have just a comparable situation. We have our teachers – I gave many teacher training courses for the University of Arizona, we have teachers coming here to get material to teach. In other words, the technique of teaching creative dance to their school children. Which – I can't do it. I just can't do it. And I knew I couldn't do it, but I wanted them there for their own sake; I wanted them to become better teachers! Some of course did and some didn't, but there were many teachers there. I would have sometimes an English teacher, and I would say, what are you here for? She said, it's making me a better teacher. Now I'm going to teach creative dance to my English students. And here what you're talking about is the same thing.

You're not going to give these experiences, so they come here and have their activity/passivity experiences. Now they can go out and they can set up a better community. You know, there's got to be better community members. Now it is – it's always been true, June, it's always been true, that at this studio, that we are thinking of particularly the activity/passivity. Of course that's what we should really talk about. I find it just about the most basic poles of movement expression are activity and passivity.

Now I wonder if you had been with me – if the material of mine that you have in your hands – has ever been eloquently taught, it's taken me a lifetime to clarify this. And my books sometimes they sort of mix them all up. Tension and relaxation is our first or is our most interior physical experience of activity and passivity. If you relax, gravity takes over. So you are fully passive. Now the minute you tense you can resist gravity, you can resist gravity, you can

resist anything. So just to talk about the gains for community, okay. Learn to relax. And learn to be tense. Alright.

Now you've got a lot of people roaming around, some of them very gentle and delicate and others very forceful. Okay, let's experience tension/relaxation as a condition of the instrument, condition of the muscles and nerves. Let's experience the creation of these two different kinds of movements. Make very forceful movement. Just make a forceful movement! Express the feeling of forcefulness! Now express the feeling of forcelessness. What's the difference between that and relaxation? Well it's all the difference in the world. Relaxation is a condition of muscles and nerves, I sense the relaxation, I sense the relaxation of the human body. Forceful and forceless is a body of movement which can be shared with the airplanes and the bulldozers and the fish and everything else, so the dancer needs to make a distinction between these and needs to give experience in all of them.

Now what's activity and passivity? That's a relationship between moving bodies. In other words, one body or more is the moving force, and one body or more is being moved. So it's strictly a relationship of moved forces, it's strictly a dance problem. Because if you really were being moved, you'd lie on the floor and I'd have to get a crane to lift you up. So it's not that you really are being moved, it's that you are expressing the feeling of being moved. This is true right down the line. Tension and relaxation, lie down on the floor. Show the feeling of relaxation. Make yourself tense. Feel the tension. The word Feeling is everything here. Make forceful moves! Make forceful moves! Feel the quality of forcefulness! Make forceless movements. Feel the quality of forcelessness. Now the polarity is the thing that could use a little bit - now if you're forceless, well there's not much difference between forceless and relaxation. It's only on a more advanced level that you say, well, make a very forceful movement, now make that movement with a little less force, make it with less force, make it with no force, make it with no force at all, you'd probably be very relaxed when you do it. But what we're really interested in is activity and passivity and I think it's difficult to develop this theory. And that's the reason I'm stressing these other two areas because they all help. The area of tense and relaxation and the area of the force of the body. Now here we are because in the first place, in activity and passivity, do you know any of my baby studies in activity and passivity? I'll show you, stand up, turn it off.

(Break in tape)

BM: I'm going to show you some of my baby studies in this area. We're really talking about three areas. We're talking about the

instrumental problem of tension and relaxation, we're talking about the abstract quality of movement, force and forceful, we're talking about the relationship of one human body to another. And they're all completely related because as I said relaxation is your first experience of forcelessness and passivity. Gravity is doing it all for you. Now I used to build these all together, it doesn't do any harm. But the teacher should know the difference. Because if you've got little tiny, tiny babies, suppose you've got five year olds, six year olds, maybe, you don't have to mix all those things up. Although – do you know my children's – I'm not sure, I'll have to check my files on that – Alright, well, it's true, little children, we work a great deal in relaxation. We have them lie on the floor and we test them and I lift their arms and they just love it when they test each other and they love that too. And I usually have some relaxation before their first activity and passivity study which is this.

I take one of them by the hand. And I say, now I'm going to lead and you're going to follow. And if you're going to be a good follower, release. There you go, I just lead you all around the room, forward and backward, and so forth, and that's it. Now you're going to do the same. That was the primary study in activity and passivity. A study which could be done – I often do it with a group, I often have little children sitting on the floor, then I say, "Now I can lead you around without touching you. Let me lead you around." (Silence) Now, any baby could do that. And they adore it. Then they do it to someone else. Then the last one leads the teacher around. And that is simply wonderful.

Now that has nothing to do with force or forceless, it has to do with primarily with activity and passivity with a little undercurrent of relaxation. All I say is, if you're going to be a good follower, you've got to be loose. That's all I say. So that this is natural. Now then with my adults I do have – well I do it with adults too. Same thing with regular adults. Then we have the next study and I'm afraid this is not in my book. The next thing with adults. Now I'm going to test you. There are two kinds of tests. One is for relaxation. Now if I'm testing you for relaxation I'm doing this, and I'm doing this and this and this and all sorts of things. But, oh, even better I'm lying on the floor and lifting up a leg and I don't really do that very much. But I do, with the adults, test for passivity. And I say now I'm going to – you know what passivity means, it means you do nothing unless the other one moves you to do it! And I also have to say you aren't just a big weight, otherwise you'd be lying on the floor and you'd have to wait for somebody to lift you up. You sense, you're trying to sense. Now I'm going to test you for passivity. I can do lots of things, I can move you around the room of course if I want to. I can do all sorts of things, I can make you go down the stairs, I can make you go down on the floor. This is

a test of passivity. This is a dance problem. You're not really passive. You're expressing passivity. And then of course we're on our way, now we do that without touching. But it still isn't - uh! Uh! Well that's what we want. It's easy. Come along, come along, come along, come along. That's easy. Where does the forcefulness come in? Well that comes in one day. Because you're expressing the fact that you are being moved, now I've got to express the fact that I am the mover. This doesn't do it, this doesn't do it. This doesn't express it. This just indicates what you're supposed to do. So I got to - if this is a matter of craftsmanship, I've got to be able to express the fact that I'm an irresistible moving force! Now you've got all the elements together. You've got tension, you've got relaxation, we've got forceful, we've got forceless, we've got activity and passivity, those are three different things.

JW: Oh I see.

BM: Did you always know that? Is that new at all?

JW: I think, yes, I think that the nuances - it's certainly new in clarification and in emphasis.

BM: Well here we are. The reason we are going into it is that you're so right in saying that in all our studies the most socially significant is the activity and the passivity. Because in any group action, in any group movement, in which a community is, you have to be skilled in both. You have to be skilled in passivity, just letting the group movement move you if that's what's being done. If this mode is appearing get with it, let it happen.

On the other hand, if you are needed as a leader at any time, you may not want to lead but you must. And it is so terribly important that our progression of course there from one leader to alternating leaders to leading in a prescribed progression and of course leading just when the situation calls for it. Now this is quite a skill in dance. And I wouldn't say it's quite a skill in dance and therefore quite a skill in community, because the two things are entirely separate. And yet increasing your skill in dance increases your whole capability to feel and to sense and to know. And I see it we go from moving to feeling to knowing. We go from body to emotions to mind. So the dancer has to grow in every way.

Now here you've got someone who has grown in these ways, of course he's going to see the application to the community. I wonder if I ever used to talk to you about the things that I felt so strongly that I learned about how to move in many ways in life, this was this had to do with what to do in the studio. Sometimes I'd be having a hard time with someone, I'd take one out. This is just a

group dance. This is just a couple dance. And the important thing that I would say, and I think this is worth stating, the important thing I say when they are dancing, I say you must express yourself freely in movement, but you must do it in relationship to the other person's free expression.

J: Mmm, that's terribly important.

(End of tape)

Hampshire College Archives

MG7: Barbara Mettler Archive, Carton #22, Tape 12