

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Dance is an expression of the social, political, moral, economic and artistic climate of its time; it is not merely a mirror, for it must in some sense offer a critical view, a perspective and a comment on contemporary concerns. A discussion of dance cannot avoid a discussion of culture in general. But whereas general interest in classical music, jazz, literature, and painting is waning in view of rock video and television, dance in contrast is inherently linked to these popular media forms. Significant, for example, is the fact that the world's most popular female vocalist, Madonna, is a former student of Alvin Ailey and whose music, artistic criteria aside for the moment, is highly danceable. Herein lies its greatest strength and shortcoming: Can Dance still entertain without becoming outmoded and vulgar, maintaining its tradition and vitality as well as critical perspective? My answer is a resounding yes. As an American living in France for two and a half years I have had the opportunity to come to terms with the contribution I believe American culture has made: the celebration of life through dance and music in its popular culture. Behind the show business one can discern the anthropological characteristics of the ritual. My dance is an explanation of ritual's relation to traditional dance--that being ballet--and contemporary movement today. Dance is gesture and rhythm in space, and movement can never be separated from the dancer in the same way rhythm is the human pulse, the beat of the human heart. Dance is the most immediate of the arts, both physically speaking as well as culturally. Dance is therefore the most contemporary art.

The main link between the crisis in contemporary thought and dance is the inability to distinguish today between a work that has "value" and one that does not. My definition of a work of value in dance is one that carries forward the modern dance tradition as well as makes an original and creative statement. Most new European dance is innovation merely for the sake of being new and based upon an intellectual idea whose novelty fails to justify its fecundity for dance. In dance today, pedestrian, everyday, superficial movement has become indistinguishable from dance that has been molded, worked through, lived with, rehearsed, discovered, and raised to another level of experience. Contemporary dance is often without rigor in Europe; the mark of success is the choreographer's ability to appeal to people's sense of what a postmodern ethos might be. The problem is that no one knows how to define postmodern "values."

Culture and dance are not merely epiphenomena in a Marxian sense, but must say something else about the life and times in which we live and not only be a reflection of the times. Contemporary dance must not simply be a return to a romantic moment in the past when life had "values." Dance must encourage people to believe that they themselves are capable of making the distinction between good and bad. Dance must foster the belief that human beings can realize themselves and realize an autonomous world. Dance is the ultimate expression of freedom. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the philosopher/dancer/king distinguished between true and false; but human beings were given this decision by autocrats. Dancers, like philosophers and revolutionaries, must rethink the possibilities of freedom. Dance must foster the capacity to develop values, but should not impose them as a rigid set of regulations. It is not enough for dance to provide a criterion; rather, it must inculcate the desire and the capacity for generating these values.

The role of the imaginary is all-important in contemporary dance. Indeed, it is primordial because the imaginary speaks of the needs, desires, and preoccupations of the culture at large. My daily work is to make that more dominant than my technique or my habitual way of moving. This is what makes me, as a modern dancer, distinct from a ballet dancer or a Baroque dancer.