



Dance

Coming Through the Skin

Danger and Beauty in Image and Flesh

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December 7, 1999



"I wonder what Peter Stuyvesant would have thought of it," said a newcomer to Downtown dance, struck by the incongruity between RoseAnne Spradlin's concert and historic St. Mark's Church. The church's shell encloses a space for spirituality to take wing. The skins of Spradlin's dancers cover inchoate desires that rock their entire beings. It's hard to know exactly what they crave—sex, peace of mind, attention, understanding—but their need for it is unswerving and terrible.

To see Justine Lynch dance *Desire* is to see a woman out to devour the world. Every move is so large that she can't fully control it, but she never gives in, never relaxes her lurching precision. When she drops to the floor, it is to cross the room like a rolling pin in the hands of a mad baker. She thrusts and swings her legs into big, splatty steps that twist her clothing—a white hospital gown over panties.

In *Theory of Mind*, Paige Martin begins standing on one leg, heaving. To music by James Lo that sounds like the contents of her stomach (or her nightmares), she spins to the floor; over and over she balances in a skewed and tilted arabesque, falls to her hands, gets up, turns, balances, falls. She pulls imaginary threads out of herself or into herself. Her desperate attempts to master improbable tasks have an almost histrionic quality, as if she hoped we might scream, "Stop!"

The new *Empathy* feels unnecessarily long, and if the subject (in part) is death, a dizzying video voyage through a graveyard by way of interlude doesn't do it justice; whizzing over green grass and past headstones undercuts the work's often stunning force. Pity Trisha Bauman, Walter Dundervill, and Tasha Taylor, who wear translucent rubber tunics tied bunchily behind them. When Bauman grabs her garment at the hem and lashes it around, the sound is fully as punitive as Diamanda Galas's recorded snarls and screeches. These people seem constantly to be trying things they don't know how to do, or finding themselves in baffling situations with no clear outlet for their sexual turmoil. Taylor hoists a leg and presses her foot against Dundervill's forehead. Bauman lies facedown athwart Dundervill's lap; he stares at her butt. Dundervill walks Taylor on her hands, her tunic inverted to encase her head and bare her breasts. There's a lot of inept mounting behavior, but no violence; the three respect one another's needs, even as they get hotter and moister and more frayed.

Spradlin takes risks. Her choreography and the demeanor of her wonderful performers suggest a troubling discrepancy between inner sensations and the outside world. Shudder though I may, I *feel* the performers' dislocations and can't wrench my eyes away.