

# animated

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making  
dance  
matter

## **In search of a phantom**

Bharatha Natyam as  
connective tissue

## **Dwelling space**

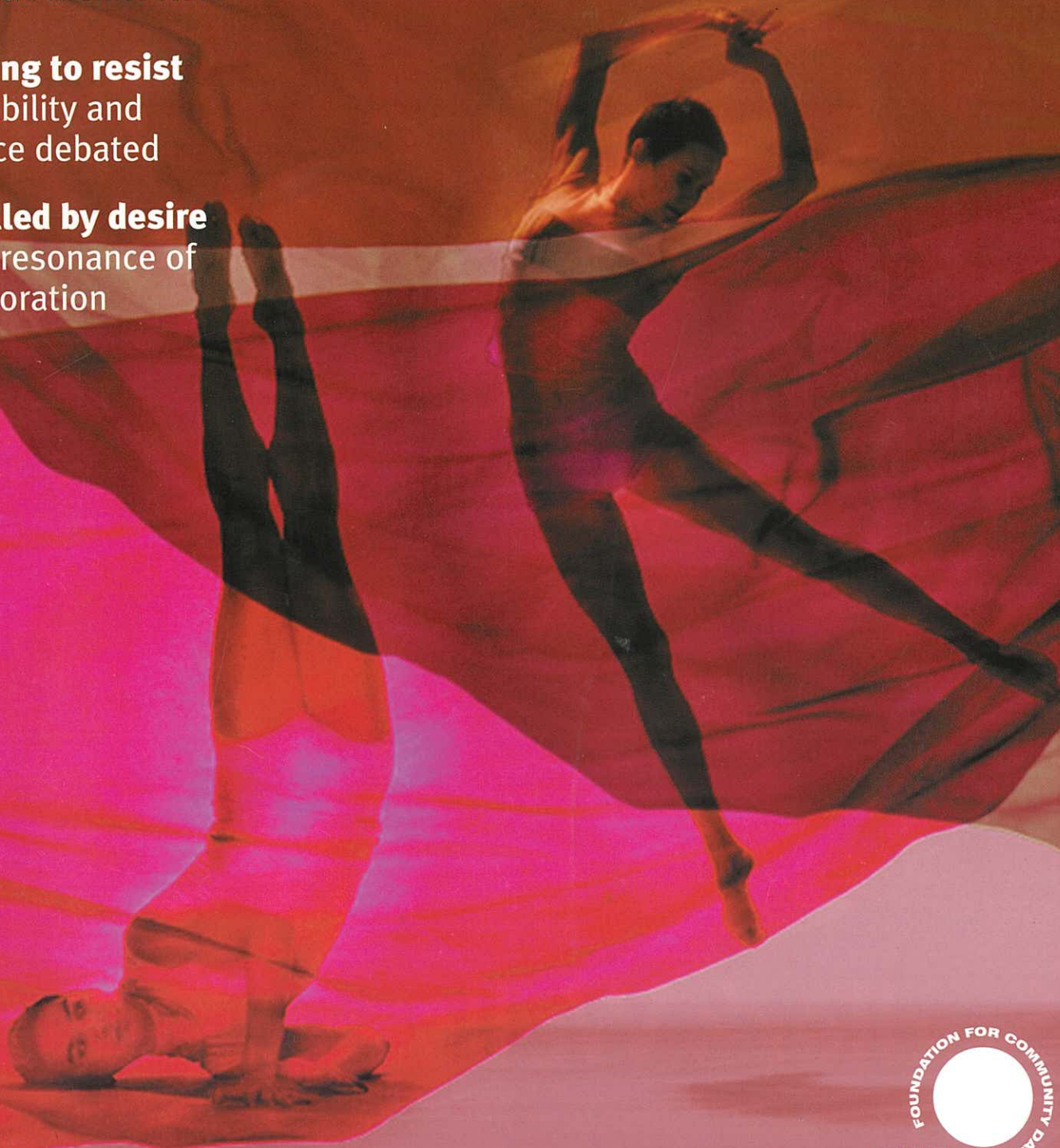
Kinetic architecture

## **Daring to resist**

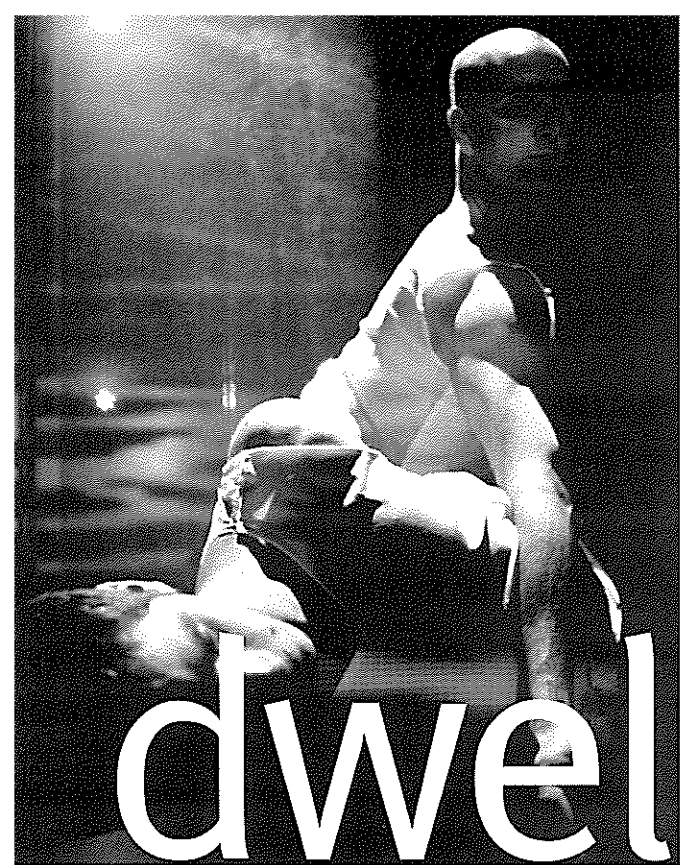
Disability and  
dance debated

## **Fuelled by desire**

The resonance of  
exploration

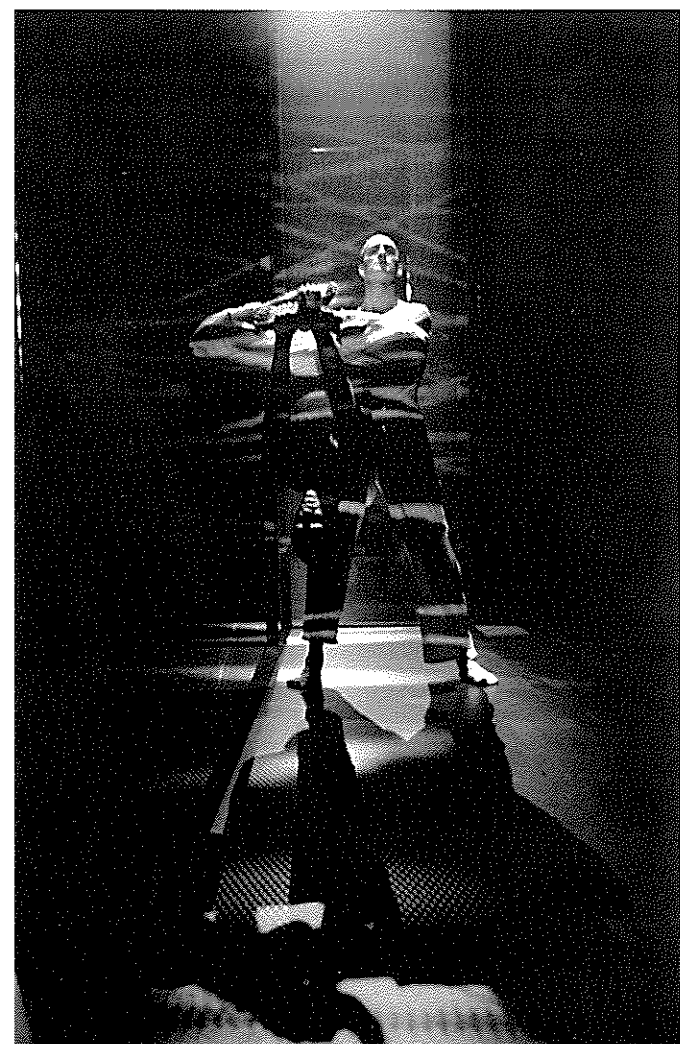


FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY DANCE  
MAKING  
DANCE MATTER



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# dwelling space



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THE ARCHITECT, LE CORBUSIER COINED THE phrase, 'the house is a machine for living in' to describe his vision of habitation in the machine age; 'man' and machine accommodating each other in a harmonious flow of urban design.<sup>1</sup> His rational housing projects demonstrated utopian socialist sympathies, and his ambitions for modern engineering and materials in the construction of the mass-produced house, the House Machine.

In appropriating this terminology, I am suggesting the pliability of contemporary dance to wider questions of space beyond its disciplinary frontier in the theatre. In particular, I am thinking of the subtle connections between corporeal identity and spaces of habitation at the level of construction.

In her classic work, *The Thinking Body*, Mabel E Todd described the structural integration of the body in terms of the properties of the built environment: 'The articulation of the spine works like the structural mechanics of a bridge, bone is comparable to steel for its tensile integrity, balancing forces can be understood in terms of axes, counterweights, and compression.'<sup>2</sup> These descriptions suggest the currency of metaphors of construction in relating

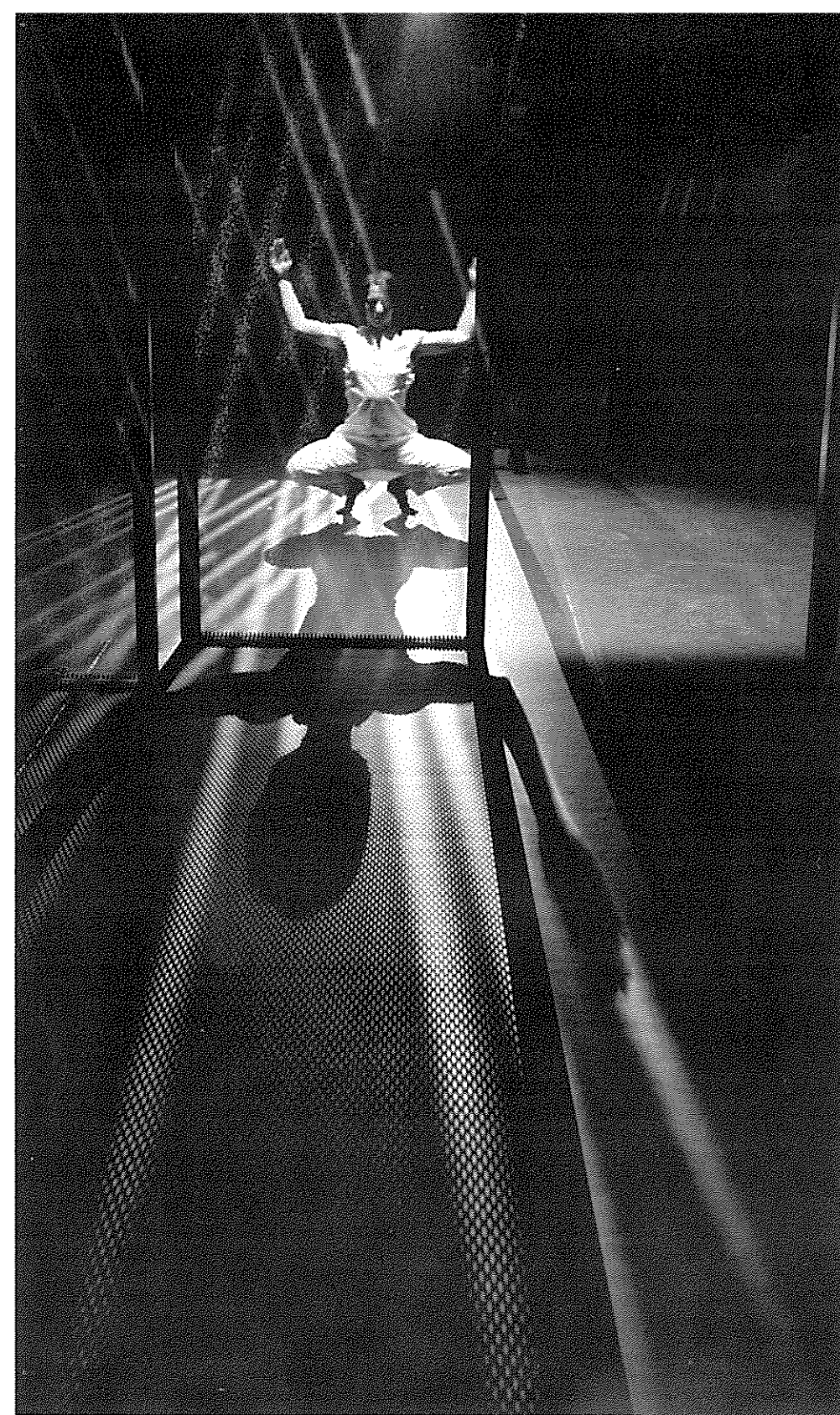
Skin, once the boundary of the self, no longer signifies closure. Space, once the container for the body enfolds, amplifying it into kinetic architecture as technology extends the physical environment, perception and memory. What happens when architecture is not where you expect to find it? **Carol Brown** contemplates the language and placement of architecture, which informs both the process and presentation of *Machine for Living*, a collaboration between herself and visual artist, Esther Rolinson.

to the body in the machine age.

Todd wrote her book in the 1930s when modernist construction was literally on the rise. Despite its datedness, her body mechanics continue to circulate as a source for movement research in contemporary dance. The construction of the body determines its corporeal identity. Whilst at times I can think of my body as machine, I can also consider it as home and as stage. For the body in action is never one thing, singular and stable but exists in flux with the activities we pursue, the spaces we inhabit, the relationships we encounter. As Todd states, in living, 'the whole body carries its meaning and tells its own story, standing, sitting, walking, awake or asleep. It pulls all the life up into the face of the philosopher, and sends it all down into the legs of the dancer'.<sup>3</sup>

I am interested in the permeability of spaces and the plenitude of embodiment. To this end, I am seeking to create choreographies which position the body as both dwelling place and machine, inside and outside, public spectacle and private ritual in here and out there, a crossing point for images of modernity and the contemplation of futures unforeseen.

I speak from the metropolitan



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context of London, and from the third floor of a South London tower block whose concrete severity would be difficult to imagine without the contributions of Le Corbusier to 20th Century urban design. Whilst we recognise that the project of modernism is inherently flawed, we continue to live in the buildings it inspired; to move through the vertical cities it spawned; and to allow our gazes to be led along its flat lines. The enduring presence of modernism provides a framework for our thinking

about the future. For these are the spaces we move through, the rooms we inhabit, the floors and walls which bind us into urban territories.

Given this context, references to Le Corbusier within *Machine for Living* are important, not as a celebration of heroic modernism, but as an acknowledgement of the very real spaces we move through. According to Le Corbusier, 'man is a geometrical animal'.<sup>4</sup> In making the work, I was interested in exploring just how geometric our constructions could be.

As choreographer, I sought to uncover and unwind our continuing attachments to the modernist line and linear perspective. Movement improvisations explored the formal properties of lines - straight and warped; intersecting and crossing; at right angles; cut up; multiplied; and dissolved. As evolved forms - inter-relating lines, levers, fulcrums and cantilevers, as well as the folding of imagined planar geometries - formed the materials of the choreography.

Underlying this interrogation of linear perspective in dance is a recognition of current shifts in perceptions of space, enabled through the increasing digitisation and mediatization of our daily lives. For, in this historical moment of accelerated knowledge and information systems, perceptions of space and materiality are rapidly evolving. New modalities of space are emerging through developments in telecommunications networks, information technologies and complex digital infrastructures. These are currently interpenetrating contemporary culture, eroding prior constructs of linear perspective and Euclidean geometries and creating new technologies of perception. They are challenging the assumptions we have inherited, including our idea of home, space and stage.

As those of you who choreograph will know, there is a key moment when you are literally projecting the dance onto the stage, into the theatre. We customise ourselves for the built environment of the theatre, measuring out the dimensions of the space and making the dance fit into these. The proscenium arch theatre, as a framed space organised around a vanishing point, creates an illusion of depth, a site for the experience of both the spectacular and the intimate. This experience depends upon me taking up a position on 'stage' and you taking up a position, in the body of the theatre, its 'house'. This model of space has been 'home' for my creations and traditionally has contained our relations and styles of exchange. Lines of influence are drawn according to an ancient model. Whilst I wonder about this dancer with the theatre inside her, I am questioning the boundary of her dancing.

The architect, Daniel Libeskind in his book, *The Space of Encounter* describes how our notion of the classical stage, 'is really not fitting to contemporary reality being swallowed by space'.<sup>5</sup> The grand narrative of introjection and projection, so characteristic of modernism no longer holds firm.