

“This story gets long and convoluted...”

— MIRIAM ADAMS

Artist: Amelia Ehrhardt
Curators: Nomadic Curatorial Collective
Erin McCurdy, Victoria Mohr-Blakeney, Cara Spooner
Catalogue Concept: Nomadic Curatorial Collective
Catalogue Editor: Victoria Mohr-Blakeney
Catalogue Designer: Marta Ryczko
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In the summer of 2014, we commissioned dance artist Amelia Ehrhardt to create a new work in response to archival documents from 15 Dance Laboratorium, Toronto's first dance artist-run centre, a nexus for experimentation in dance, which ran from 1974-1980.

Ehrhardt's work responds to these archival documents from Dance Collection Danse as a whole, but takes note of a proposal called Studio Place which 15 Dance Lab founders, Miriam and Lawrence Adams, pitched to the city in 1976 in the hopes of founding a large-scale, multi-purpose centre for dance in Toronto.

Studio Place didn't happen.

Many other things did.

No Context or Studio Place or Decentralize or We Actually Maybe Right Now Have Everything We Need comprises a live performance and an accompanying catalogue.

-Nomadic Curatorial Collective

Context for *No Context*

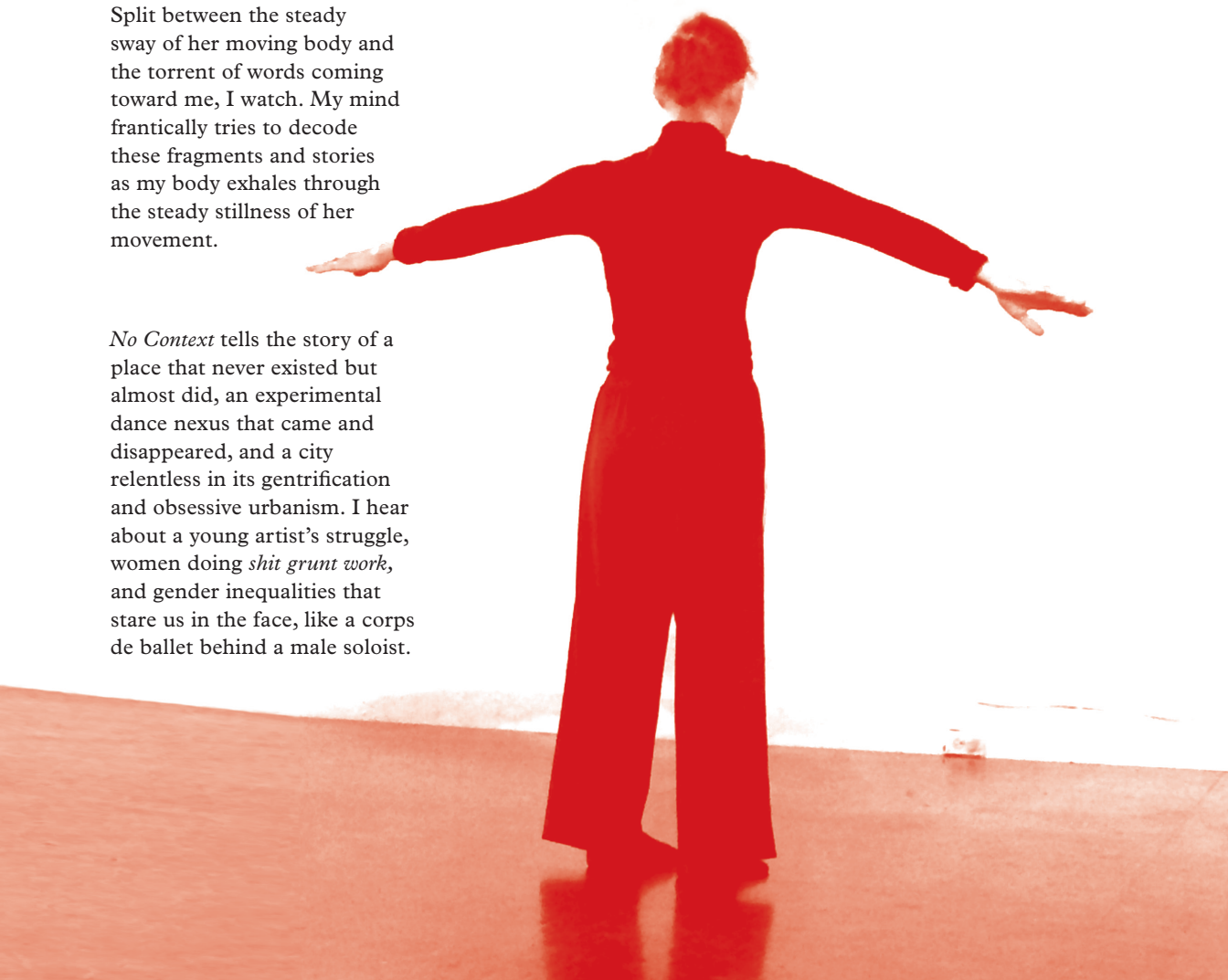
By Victoria Mohr-Blakeney

She almost never stops moving.

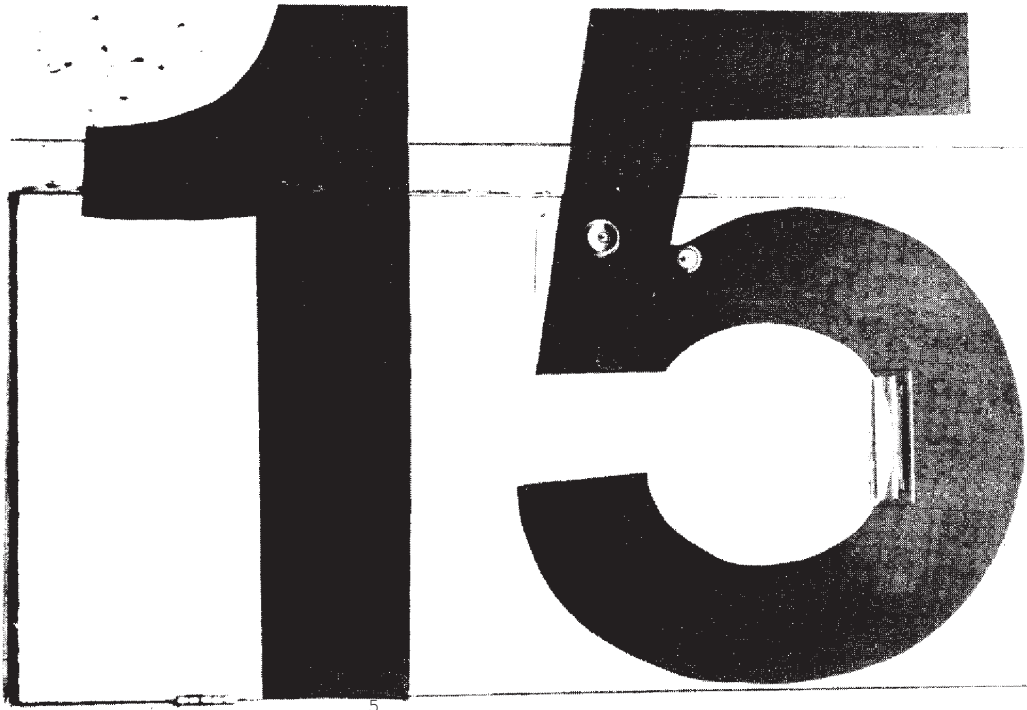
Watching Amelia Ehrhardt's *No Context* or *Studio Place* or *Decentralize* or *We Actually Maybe Right Now Have Everything We Need* is like following words across a page as her body tirelessly enacts a series of unending tasks. Twist, pull, reach, place, never repeating, always slightly different, her gentle yet calculated gestures are constant, hypnotic.

Split between the steady sway of her moving body and the torrent of words coming toward me, I watch. My mind frantically tries to decode these fragments and stories as my body exhales through the steady stillness of her movement.

No Context tells the story of a place that never existed but almost did, an experimental dance nexus that came and disappeared, and a city relentless in its gentrification and obsessive urbanism. I hear about a young artist's struggle, women doing *shit grunt work*, and gender inequalities that stare us in the face, like a corps de ballet behind a male soloist.



15 Dance Laboratorium Leaflet, 1974, Lawrence and Miriam Adams Portfolio, Dance Collection Danse



"We found a spot here on Britain St. and we moved the 15 Dancers concept over to Britain and George Street. We built a little theatre in there. It had been a factory that baked enamel onto washing machines. When we took over that space, there was nothing in there, it was an open and empty space. And we painted it black. And we found some theatre seating from the old Imperial Theatre; we went up into the balcony where there were old wood and iron theatre seats upholstered in red velvet, and we chiseled them out of the concrete floor."

— MIRIAM ADAMS

Four decades have passed since 15 Dance Lab first opened its doors, and as I watch Ehrhardt move and hear her words, I am taunted with the question—

where are we now?

And who speaks for whom around here?

Ehrhardt's *No Context* is a cry of frustration, a manifesto, and a wistful glance backward all rolled into one.

And yet she keeps moving.

Relentless, she leans, sinks, rolls and lifts. She bends and turns. Folds and unfolds. Collapses and stiffens. Again and again and again. I listen to the story that unfolds with her body. She is moving static. Unfiltered sound.



February 12, 1976

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter is in enthusiastic support of Fifteen Dance Laboratory.

This organization plays a very important role in the Toronto Dance community, creating an atmosphere of encouragement and support for creative people who are beginning to develop as choreographers.

This is the one theatre that exists exclusively for the encouragement of experimentation. It creates a balance with the large institutions that guard the valuable work from the past.

Indeed, so much money is devoted to preservation and restoration in the dance field that unless the artists who work today receive some portion of that money there will be nothing from 1976 to preserve!

I encourage you to consider that the wise society allows the artist to make his statement whatever it may be. He is a product of that society and a very vital barometer of its health.

Financial support to an organization such as Fifteen Dance Laboratory is indeed money well spent.

Yours most sincerely,

David Earle,
Artistic Co-Director:

DE: jk

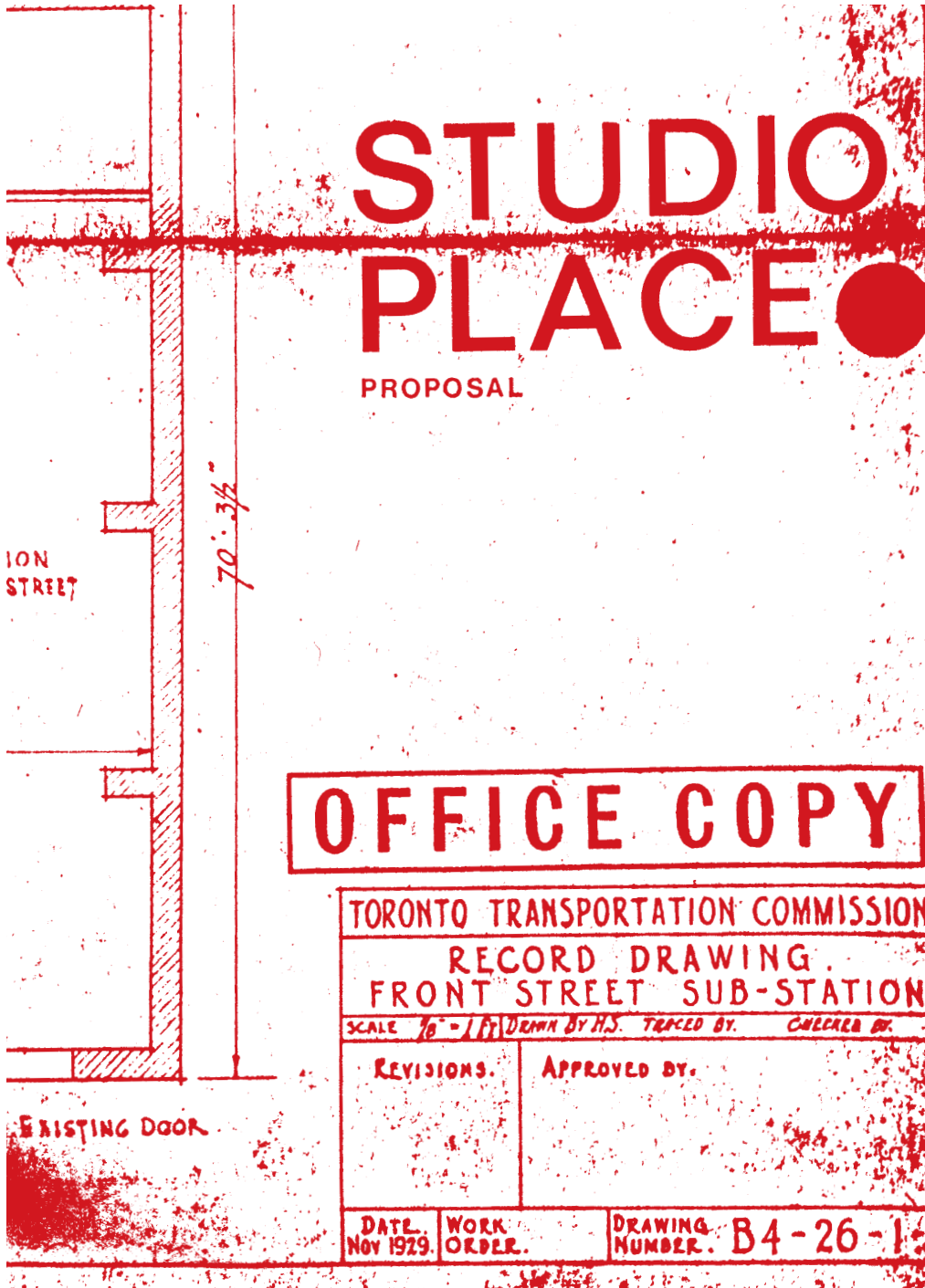
957 Broadview Avenue, Toronto M4M 2B5
Artistic Directors: Peter Randi, Lawrence and Miriam Adams

I learn about the utopic impracticalities of Studio Place. A proposed dance centre, whose most striking feature is that it never happened. Lawrence and Miriam Adams, co-founders of 15 Dance Lab, lost the bid to Toronto's Young Place Theatre.

Studio Place. A vision that exists now only as an 8 page typed document, hugged in a laminate folder in a cardboard box. The trace of an idea that never lived. Archives are complicated things. They house our pasts. They are idiosyncratic and incomplete. They are simultaneously precious and mundane. They are irrelevant until they are essential, always waiting to fulfill the desperate, spontaneous needs of the present. Out of the mountains of archival documents professionally stored at Dance Collection Danse, the majority of 15 Dance Lab's ephemera sits in three uncategorized cardboard boxes.



Studio Place Proposal Cover Page, 1976, Lawrence and Miriam Adams Portfolio, Dance Collection Danse



**"If you want to dance, you have to
create your own environment and
make something happen."**

— MIRIAM ADAMS

As I watch Ehrhardt's body in constant motion, her pace lulls me. I have eased my breath into the cadence of her elbows and knees, the words of her wrists and neck.

I think about how here, in Toronto, we are in a constant state of forgetting. Experience is always ephemeral. We trick ourselves into believing that we can preserve, contain, keep, but we are in a constant state of losing. Moments, time, memories. Always paying the price for newness.

STUDIO PLACE NOTES

There has been much talk over the last few years about creating a dance facility in Toronto in order to bring some unity and cohesion to the dance scene. There has always been a lot of dance activity in Toronto but there has never been a focus and a facility to accomodate the special needs of dance.

Thus, when an advertisement appeared in the Globe and Mail requesting proposals for the use of an old T.T.C. building, with which we were familiar, in downtown Toronto, we decided to present a proposal. The deadline was two weeks away. However, unperturbed by the short time allotted, we moved ahead.

We barged into the offices of Ron Thom, Architect, and found Alastair Grant who became instantly enthusiastic about using the building as a very flexible facility to include office space, two 30 x 50 studios, mobile seating, portable floor and a movable lighting grid to accomodate a proscenium, arena, thrust or in the round situation. He kindly offered to produce some drawings to include within the proposal.

It has to be kept in mind that the building is situated within the site plan of the St. Lawrence housing development which is a large, very well planned low rise housing project to be built over the next five years in downtown Toronto. It seemed important that any use of the building should relate to the immediate community of people.

An important factor considered within the proposal was that it not only have performance activities, but also educational and community programmes. Also pointed out was the need for organic growth, simplicity, careful use of money and materials and avoidance of duplication of already existing performance facilities. In other words ----- a new environment. We proposed that Studio Place be a neutral space (not the home of any one particular group) with its own administration and available to individuals, groups and companies.

In the short time available, some dance people were approached for support and input.

The proposal was duly delivered on March 1/76, then the real fun began inside City Hall. It's a long story, but the upshot of it is:

- 1) There were only two proposals submitted - a) Young People's Theatre, a fixed proscenium facility - b) Studio Place, a flexible, multi-use environment.
- 2) Young People's Theatre had the advantage of time in that they had been pursuing the building for two years.

But time is not a straight line.
A spiral more like. Because
there are moments, such as
these, when we loop back so
close that we feel like we can
reach out and grasp the past.
From across the street, we peer,
we squint, we wait.

Forty years have passed.

But it is only a gesture. Worse.
An idea. We cannot go back.
The temptation to re-create is
misleading. If I were to walk
up to the old door to 15,
what would I find?

Decades of accumulation, a
stockpile, a storage locker of
material memories.

“Can we take a look?”
McCurdy and Spooner and
I asked on a reconnaissance
mission to retrace the old
15 Dance Lab. The landlord
shook her head. It was too full
of her husband’s things to even
open the door.

It looks like we are all hanging
on to the past.
What is remembered and what
is forgotten and the faintly
drawn line between the two.

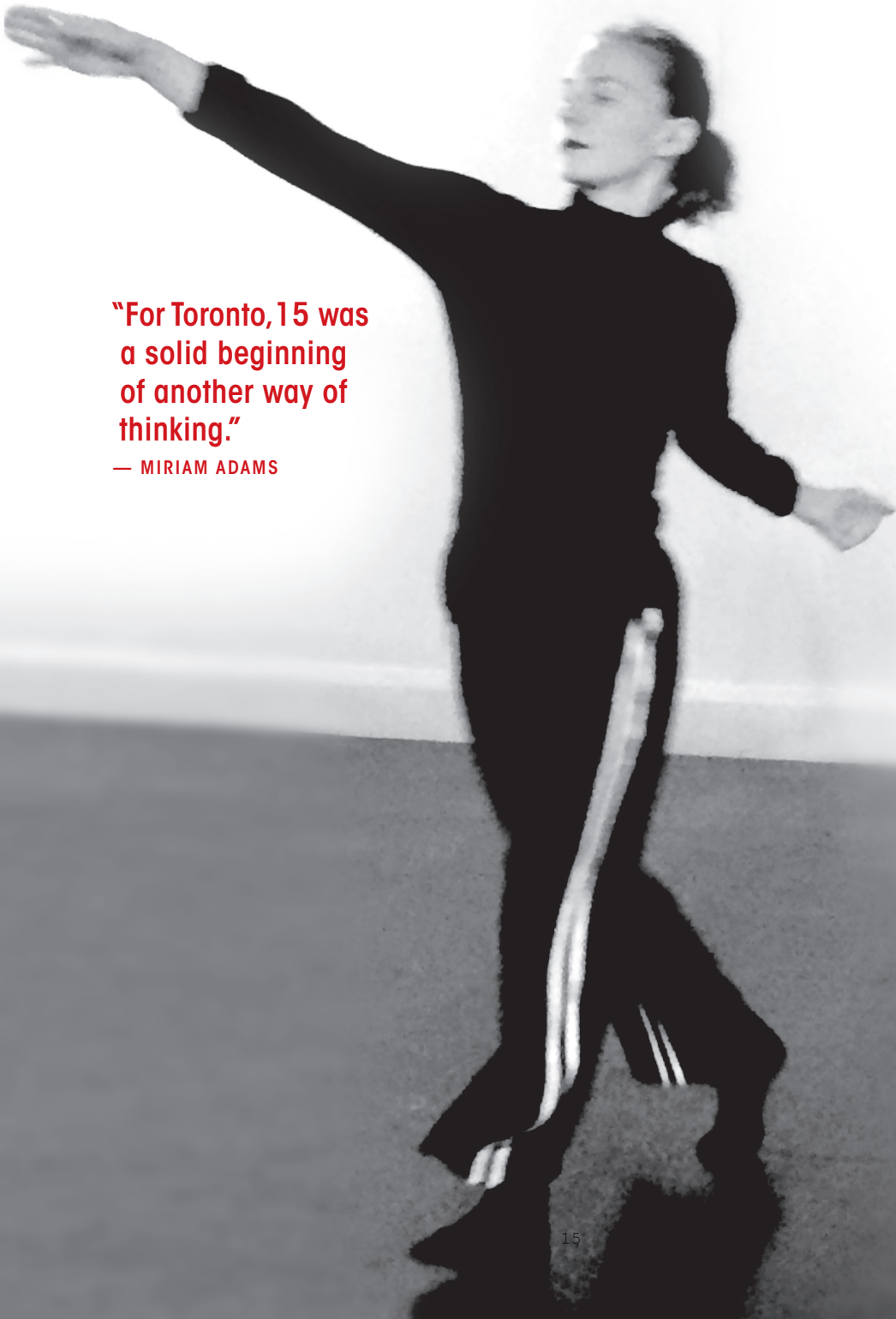
Photograph of Stanley, Lawrence Adams, Miriam Adams, Mr. Dog, and Jackie Malden Outside 15 Dance Laboratory, 1975, Lawrence and Miriam Adams Portfolio, Dance Collection Danse



Excerpts from an Interview with Amelia Ehrhardt

It's a funny legacy, postmodern dance in Toronto, because it is unquestionably there but has an invisible history. My good friend Niomi Cherney talks about wanting to teach a history of experimental dance in Canada as a Forgotten History—this whole realm of work that was quite well-documented and subsequently archived, and yet somehow doesn't really get taught. In school, I learned about the history of the term Dance Artist, and a bit about how Lawrence and Miriam Adams had left the Ballet, that they had done this thing called 15, but not so much about the actual work that came out of it. So I feel like one delight about this project has been revisiting this legacy and re-learning it via the actual ephemera it produced. I've of course been very influenced by postmodernism in dance, Judson Dance Theatre, the turn to pedestrian movement and all of that, so it is nice to look more closely at what was happening here, in this field.

-Amelia Ehrhardt



“For Toronto, 15 was a solid beginning of another way of thinking.”

— MIRIAM ADAMS

15 Dance Laboratorium has 41 seats --- has had
since it was built, some 3 years ago.

Big new plans.

Much discussion.

Throwing ideas around.

Shit in the fan.

WE WILL ENLARGE.

Tear down walls.

Put in 60 more seats.

More money.

More people.

The Big small-time.

More discussion. - . - . this time with dancers

It was decided.

NOT.

15, as it is, has a unique atmosphere. Intimate is
the word, --- , (but grossly overused).
This theatre is unlike any other. The pieces created
inside its walls are unlike any others. It demands that
the choreographer re-think dance. It's 360 degrees - so
your ass is as good as, or better than, your face. The
audience sits a few feet away. They can touch and smell
the performers.

No.

We did build a video studio, but the theatre will remain
the size it is. Grossly intimate.

It seems to me that in the Toronto dance community today, in comparison to what was happening here 40 years ago, some challenges persist—we still have this struggle with large-scale organizations eating funding and smaller ones struggling to begin. But, you know, I have to say that I think steps are being taken towards this. The Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts have just announced big (controversial!) measures on this issue and maybe it will make a difference. On the good side of things, I feel that there is less animosity between large organizations and individual artists. Maybe the playing field is being levelled (ha), maybe there's just more respect for different forms within the form, but...this seems like a relief to me.

I feel like there's a big problem with making space for work that is non-majority. This is a problem that I feel like has been going on for a while. A difficulty in contemporary dance is that it is a huge field and invariably there are segments of the field that are, I don't know, less popular. And I think it's important in art not to discredit work that is less popular. Oh my god, it is so important in art not to discredit things that are less popular. We are so (excellently) concerned with representing a very diverse range of cultural work in this country, but I think a problem with this is that it can lead to trusting one—majority?—opinion on what kind of work that is. And this turns into tokenism in any form of dance. There is a value here that work should be accessible and appeal to a lot of people, but I'm not sure I think it is the responsibility of artists to make sure their work draws a crowd. Ask me again in ten years and I should have some more perspective.

-Amelia Ehrhardt

But just as I drift into the speculative futures of the past, Ehrhardt pulls me back into the present with the liveness of her own struggle. A female artist trying to make work and live in this city. And I wonder—who failed whom? Did the present fail the past, or vice versa?

Still Ehrhardt dances. Her motion is careful yet irreverent, a sort of sloppy precision that seems impossible to get to the bottom of, or to clutch with the fastidiousness of language.

Still she makes work in Toronto. Still she moves. Until of course eventually she, like everything else, including 15 Dance Lab—stops.

But until then Ehrhardt moves in the face of stillness. A moving landscape, my words forever searching before, beside, and beyond her, trying to calculate, to conclude, to catch a glimpse. To keep. To hold.

Or is this all about letting go?

As I write, *No Context* is still evolving, shifting, and coming into being. In many ways this is a blessing in disguise because it makes it impossible to write Ehrhardt down, to pin her between my wrist, thumb and index finger, to compulsively proofread her again and again. *No Context* is alive. This writing is by necessity incomplete, a fragment, a sketch, a frantic yet measured gesture towards liveness.

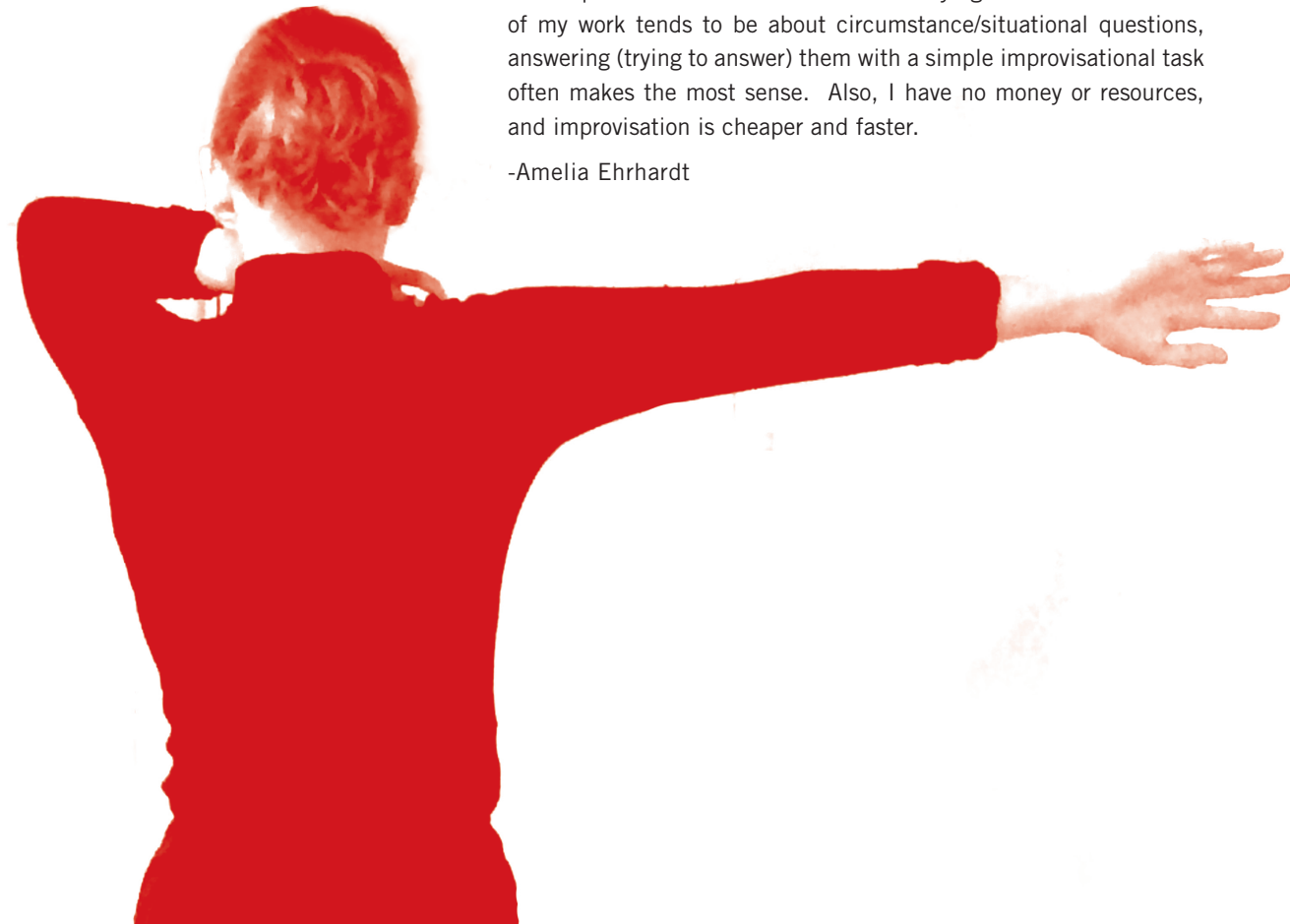
**“We ran it until 1980, so six years.
And some of the work was god-awful
and some of it was fantastic.”**

— MIRIAM ADAMS

I’ve been describing my approach to working for a while now as psychedelic minimalism. At what point is minimalism almost disorienting, almost hard to see? It’s less about extreme clarity and more about so little that it’s invisible, or so much that it’s all the same thing. It’s like fighting to find layers to peel back and being left with something devoid of content. Or maybe it’s like listening to twenty people speak at the same time. It’s important to me that my work is unclear.

I tend towards improvising in everything, but lately this has started to feel like a crutch, and I am trying to challenge myself to do more set choreography—this is what I’ve been doing with this other work of mine, *Traditional Dance*—but improvisation often feels like a much quicker route towards what I am trying to do. Because a lot of my work tends to be about circumstance/situational questions, answering (trying to answer) them with a simple improvisational task often makes the most sense. Also, I have no money or resources, and improvisation is cheaper and faster.

-Amelia Ehrhardt



I almost always work with text and dance, but in this work it's a different format. I feel like this has usually functioned more or less as: text asks a question, dance answers. When I describe it this way I am incredibly embarrassed but I realized that's what I've done. In this work I am dancing alongside a long-form written thing being read aloud. It sort of feels like my dancing is the soundtrack to this writing. I've never not delivered my own text before. I am a huge control freak, so asking someone else to do it is a challenge but also a way of actually trying to dissolve that aspect of my voice in this work. Like: I am extremely wordy and maybe if I farm that task out to someone else I can appear as someone who is quiet and considered. Maybe it's really manipulative!

-Amelia Ehrhardt

"Conjectures" by Douglas Ord, *Spill*, June 1976, Lawrence and Miriam Adams Portfolio, Dance Collection Danse

CONJECTURES

Douglas Ord

The writer's hand moves across the surface of the page tracing in ink its little arabesques and convolutions of fantasy. For the writer there could be little more frustrating than to propel an empty pen across his paper. There must be a record of his scratchings, for from the movement of his hand alone, there is to be derived nothing.

agree () disagree ()

The dancer's hand draws a long arc through empty air. The movement of the hand, in its relation to movements of other parts of the dancer's body, is everything. When physical movement is complete, the dancer's work is complete. For the viewer there remain only faint memory traces of an action whose purpose was fulfilled in the course of its execution.

agree () disagree ()

The writer's body rests immobile and ignored while his mind's energy follows a direct course to his hand, and thence through the tip of his pen, onto the surface of his paper. Occasionally he senses an ache in his back, or a cramp in a leg that has, inexplicably, become twisted around a table leg. Then he momentarily ceases the movement of his hand, rises, stretches the offending portion of his anatomy, and settles back again onto his seat, ready to resume his interrupted exchange with the mind of a reader who, in all likelihood will pursue the same attitude of benign neglect toward his body all the time his eyes are travelling across the surface of a page.

agree () disagree ()

The dancer's body is alert and poised. All activities of his mind that do not contribute to the development of the pattern he has mapped out for his body are irrelevant and must be purged, or at least ignored for the length of time he is present before other people as a dancer.

agree () disagree ()

cont'd

I think a lot about the role of women in dance in Toronto 40 years ago and today. It looks like in the 70's in Toronto there were actually more women in positions of creative power in dance (and performance in general) here, whereas now there are so few women at the creative head of institutions and organizations.

Quick stats: the Dance Transition Resource Centre reported in 2005 that 71% of professional dancers in Canada were female, yet at the time of the report, 66% of the organization's member companies were under male artistic directorship. Dance Theatre Workshop in the States has a good one: "In 2000, of the 18 modern dance choreographers who received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, 13 were men"—The men received a total of two hundred thousand dollars with a typical grant of 10 grand, and the women received a total of 45 grand with a typical grant of five thousand dollars.

(Statistics can be misleading and manipulative but still so powerful. Yvonne Rainer says something good about this in *MURDER and murder* but I can't remember what).

And then Toronto - well, we barely have positions of creative power in dance here anymore (not many Artistic Directors left eh), but I would argue that they are still male-dominated (certainly the, you know, paid ones).

Ugh. In general, on lots of levels, I am sick of the way that we deal with gender in this form and think a big conversation about it needs to happen. There is a serious glass ceiling. We continue to promote the idea that because it is harder for young boys to get involved in dance as kids, because of social norms, they are disadvantaged in the professional context. This is baloney. In professional dance, men are typically more valued (paid higher), and work more often than women because there are fewer of them. However in professional sport, for example, women are typically less valued and work less often, because there are fewer of them. Women represent the vast majority of this field and represent a minority of Artistic Directors, presented choreographers, and generally, female independent dancers have fewer contracts than their male counterparts. We still live and work in a world in which men can be loud, opinionated, disagree a lot, and do things their own way, and women have to fight to do this or pay for it, or have this be one of their "personality quirks."

-Amelia Ehrhardt

List of Choreographers at 15 Dance Laboratorium, Lawrence and Miriam Adams Portfolio, Dance Collection Danse

Choreographers at 15 Dance Laboratorium	
Kyra Lober	Sallie Lyons
Mimi Beck	Melodie Bengner
Louise Garfield	Maxine Heppner
Judy JarvisX	Slade Lander
Ingrid Remkins	Margaret Atkinson
Jennifer Mascall	Anita Shack
Joan Phillips	Susan Cash
Paula RossX	Savanah Walling
Carolyn Shaffer	Leslie Manning
Janice Hladki	Martha Lovell
Johanna Householder	Patricia White
Elizabeth Chitty	Ernst Eder
Margie GillisX	Carol Eder
Steve Paxton	Anna BlewchampX
Nancy Stark Smith	Paul Dwyer
Mitchell Rose	Ricardo Abreut
Marie ChouinardX	Terrill Maguire
Cynthia Mantel	Susan McNaughton
Barbara Zacconi	Jean-Pierre PerreaultX
Lawrence Adams	Judy Marcuse
Margaret Dragu	Jo Leslie
Miriam Adams	Andrew Harwood
Susan Aaron	Alice Frost
Jill Bellos	Sarah Shelton Mann
Irene Grainger	Martha Bell
John Faichney	Susan Daniels
Lily Eng	Simmie Airst
Peter Dudar	Joann Anderson
Charlotte Hildebrand	Menaka Thakkar
Nancy Scheiber	Kathryn Brown
Bettle Liotta	Douglas Hambourg
Roberta Mohler	Cornelius Fischer-Credo
Brenda Neilson	Rina Singha
Nikki Cole	Linda Moncur
Patrick O'Hara	Alan Risdill
Muna Tseng	Paula Ravitz
Joe Starr	Stephanie?
Alice Rosenberg	Grant Stitt
Holly Small	Joe Bietola
Gordon Dowton	Barbara Stowe
Kay Purdy	Christopher HouseX
Kilina Cremona	John Miller
Grindl Kuchirka	Robyn Simpson
Bryan Hayes	Peter BonehamX
Belina Weitzel	Sylvie St. Laurent
Dena DavidaX	Gabby Miceli
Theresa Kowall	Alexandra Langham
Luba Dobal	Lu Levine
Keith Urban	



My process really started in the archives at Dance Collection Danse and has remained oddly text-based. My initial archive-dig sessions at DCD were so rich, and I got so excited and had so many responses to what I was looking at but my reactions were all very text-based. I felt I had a lot to say about what I was looking at but that most of it was in words, and for a while going into performance felt disingenuous. I tend to work beginning to end (come up with a title first, and create work from start to finish) and it has certainly been the same for this. One day, while at Dance Collection Danse, I suddenly went sort of, aha, and opened my shitty computer and started writing. I've been working on that same document since. Because the bulk of the work of this work has been creating the text to be read alongside it, the act of writing has felt very choreographic. Sitting on my couch banging out words has been how I've shaped the movement: although it is improvised, I feel like the phrasing and shaping of how I'm flopping around is very much in response to the speed, tenor, and cadence of the text. But, I am trying very hard not to um, you know, be literal with my movement. It's actually quite difficult!

It's been nice to work on something where I get to openly have a really direct dialogue with dance history. My work is always like this and I have always, always been a huge dance history nerd, and there are so few living representations of historical dance work that are not ballet or other culturally specific historical forms. Creating this has been a nice way of feeling like I can, in some way, activate historical work, although I am not personally performing or even directly citing any of the work performed at 15. Maybe someday I'll really regret having had all my opinions printed in a risograph catalogue.

— Amelia Ehrhardt

NO CONTEXT: AN INCOMPLETE RECOLLECTION BY NOMADIC CURATORIAL COLLECTIVE

Victoria Mohr-Blakeney (VMB): When did we decide to commission a contemporary artist - as opposed to an original artist - from 15 Dance Lab? Does anyone remember?

[laughter]

VMB: We really sort of rolled around the idea of what it would mean to approach an original member of 15, or someone who was creating at that time, to ask them to recreate work, to really get us into this complex challenge of how do you re-visit the archive in that way? And how do you re-mount and how do you re-enact? And I think we realized that we were less interested in the authenticity of an original and revisiting an original, and more interested in what a dialogue with the present would look like.

This is 1976. All of us should be learning survival techniques. Gas is very expensive. People with university degrees cannot find jobs. It is too late for most people to consider buying a home. Do we not have to rethink our priorities and act in the most sympathetic and sensible manner?

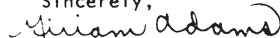
Art must exist within the society. It has existed throughout the centuries. But because we live in Canada in the 70's we have to deal with new problems in the arts. Those problems are being dictated by money. I often question the very existence of arts councils. Most of us rely on them so heavily that we become confused as to our motives for working in the arts. Huge organizations feed the parasites of the arts, as you yourself said. Where would the agents, administrators, managers, etc., etc. be without these organizations? And --- WHERE ARE THE ARTISTS?

But we have come this far in Canada. It is too late to turn back. We have created the monsters and now we are obliged to feed them.
Or are we?

I have many questions, few answers and one suggestion which follows. Could we please consider the artists themselves before we consider the institutions and organizations which are, at this point in time dictating the direction of Canadian dance. Can we think first about the INDIVIDUALS who can possibly make the greatest contribution to the art of dance in the future.

Our resources must be divided more equitably so that the individual student, potential artist and artist can choose the most suitable environment in which he or she can best live, learn and create.

Sincerely,


Miriam Adams

Excerpt by Miriam Adams, Spill, October 1976, Lawrence and Miriam Adams Portfolio, Dance Collection Danse

"I think it [15 Dance Lab] was well received by everybody. Even those who hated it loved to hate it. It gave them something to talk about and debate."

— MIRIAM ADAMS

Cara Spooner (CS): To really tether it to now. And to look at the context in which artists are now creating work and how that is the same or different. What has changed, what hasn't?

VMB: Not to say that we might not look at re-mounting past work with artists in the future.

Erin McCurdy (EM): No, no, no. But I think a key idea that emerged through writing grant applications, is that we're curating a new work in dialogue with the past and that has informed a lot of what we've done since making that shift. It's not revisiting the past but it's actually sitting in the current context—or dancing in the current context—and trying to engage with a local history that's already passed. So it's more about how do you have a conversation? How do you have a conversation with the archive and not fetishize objects, or the truth, or the singular identity of what happened, but how do you treat it as a part of a conversation, or a dance partner?

CS: It's also the materiality of the photographs and the documents and the letters. These are things. These are not the dances themselves, these are ephemera. They're all the extras that surround the thing. So how do you engage? And this is the task that we approached Amelia with – to go into the archive at Dance Collection Danse and look at what's there and see what sparks her interest.

[...]

VMB: I'll always remember that moment of watching Amelia's piece for the first time, because we had no idea what we were about to see. And it was really moving, and we all teared up, and laughed and–

CS:–She just hits the nail right on the head.

[...]

CS: The first time we went to the archive, we took that walk with Miriam, and walked over to the original site of 15 Dance Lab. And the woman who owns the house came out–

EM:–Her old Dutch landlord.

CS: Yes! And she hugged Miriam, and they hadn't seen each other in years, and it felt like this sign that we were onto something that there was something here, and it was a really incredible moment.

VMB: That's right, because we were originally thinking that we could potentially find the old site of 15 and house Amelia's performance there...

[...]

SPILL p. 2



Spill is a bi-monthly newspaper published by the 15 Dance Lab. In order that SPILL become a national paper, we encourage contributions from across Canada. The main focus is dance but we are happy to accept material dealing with the visual arts, poetry, video. Unfortunately, we are unable to pay contributors at this time. Our only source of income is through advertising and subscriptions.

The purpose for SPILL's existence is to provide an outlet for people in the arts who require an extension to their work.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the contributors themselves. The editorial staff merely adds a comma here and there and reserves the right to shorten articles when a limited space situation exists.



EM: We're still in the middle of it...

CS: We're still figuring out...

VMC: Wait - so this is an incomplete recollection? That goes very nicely with what we're trying to highlight here.

EM: Especially since we can't really remember what happened last June and July, when we first started working on this project.

VMC: It's shocking how little we remember.

EM: Because things change and you go with them, and then this path you were on just erodes, and you can't even recall what it was in the first place.

VMC: And that's where all of a sudden Derrida—not to bring him into this—starts to make sense.

CS: Don't bring Derrida into this!

[laughter]

VMC: This idea of the archive co-determining the event. After this, the catalogue will become our memories, in so many ways.

[...]

EM: Our catalogue is going to determine how we remember the history of this project. It influences how the public sees our process, but also how we'll remember it. Using the analogy of the family photo album—the pictures in the album are the moments that you remember from your childhood.

CS: Because you've seen them so many times—

EM: So that you're actually remembering the picture not the memory. But we're creating this document now. This incomplete recollection—

VMB: Fragments really...

EM: I think a lot of what we did was about conversations. Conversations with each other. Conversations with Amelia. Conversations with people who lived through 15 Dance Lab. Conversations with other practitioners in the community with an interest in 15. And during all those conversations we took copious notes, and, you can kind of trace our process that way.

[...]

EM: The idea of contextualizing or not contextualizing was something that's come up a lot in thinking about the catalogue.

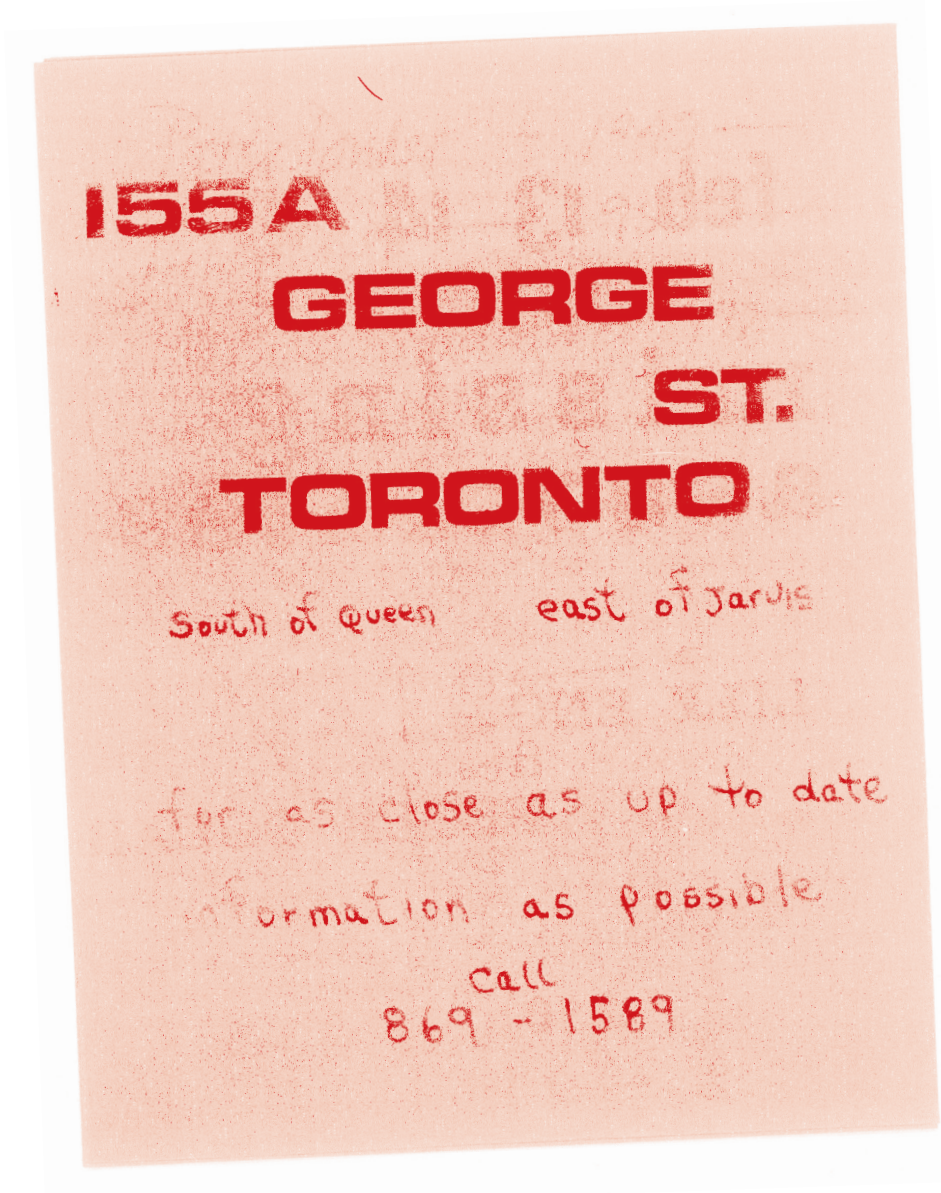
CS: Yes.

VMB: Mm hm.

EM: And setting out, we all agreed that part of our work as a collective, and part of what the role of the curator is, we believe, is to produce written work, or some sort of other material that surrounds artistic production and helps with its preservation and longevity—

CS: And we had talked about the temporal aspect of the catalogue being produced before the live event, being given out at the live event—so it primes the audience in a certain way, but then it exists afterwards. So how do we write to honour all that?

15 Dance Laboratory Launch Brochure Back Cover, Lawrence and Miriam Adams Portfolio, Dance Collection Danse



EM: Or how do we write in a performance-oriented way? How do we turn the book into a performance—can we even do that?

[...]

VMB: That's what I go back to in my mind. That moment of liveness. And yes, it is a crazy thing, liveness. Liveness in the face of all of these written documents that surround us in life. How do we re-visit it? How can a document take us back to liveness?

EM: Yes, while the document is the support to what is lived, the liveness is the thing that's real. But the document is the thing that's accepted as truth.

VMB: And complete. And that's the thing that's so interesting to me is that in reality the archives are incomplete. They're fragments and they're non-linear and they're non-narrative and they're all of these things. And anyone who has gone through any of those 15 Dance Lab boxes at Dance Collection Danse knows that.

CS: Which is amazing. Also, that new considerations and new connections come up by seeing things...

VMB: ...willy-nilly...

CS: ...as they emerge! You know there isn't an authority. There isn't a voice that says this is the way.

EM: And that's—

VMB:—and that's our challenge with the catalogue too, right? It's that we, as humans, love to put things into narratives, and to read in narratives, and the minute you have a front page and a back page, what happens between those pages for 99.9% of the population is a narrative.

Department of Dance



FACULTY OF FINE ARTS

4700 KEELE STREET, DOWNSVIEW, ONTARIO M3J 1P3

January 26, 1976

To Whom It May Concern:

I regard the events and activities at 15 Dance Laboratorium as of the utmost importance to our emerging dance community. It is devoted to the concept of open forum for any and all who have the courage to come up with a fresh idea. It has already stimulated dance creativity in Toronto to a significant level of energy and imagination.

I would go further to say that without 15 Dance Laboratorium, which I regard as a research unit, the process of bringing dance into closer alignment with the other arts will be much slowed down.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "Grant Strate".
Grant Strate
Chairman

GS:cm



**“You often don’t know what you’re
doing, you just know you’re doing it.”**

— MIRIAM ADAMS

CS: Well there’s a sequence also—you read page one before you read page 50—

VMB: —yes, exactly. It’s how we read. How can you destabilize a convention that is so ingrained and what does that look like? And can we achieve that in our catalogue? Can we destabilize that certain way of reading?

EM: Even thinking that maybe it was the blessing, dealing with un-catalogued boxes at Dance Collection Danse. That they weren’t framed for us...

VMB: That’s true.

EM: They’re just boxes filled with paper that has not yet been organized in the archive. Organized loosely in that they relate to 15 Dance Lab, but aside from that we were kind of free to wander through the pages.

VMB: That’s true!

EM: But with Miriam there to consult with us—someone who has a lived memory of what happened, and can tell you the story behind the documents, instead of the title of them. *Her* story behind the documents.

[...]

VMB: In a way the miracle is that it was archived, and that it was all kept. And that’s where we have Miriam to thank. Because—for one thing—without that we have no show.

[laughter]

15 DANCE LAB

We would like to invite you
to a Press Conference
to announce the closing
of 15 Dance Lab Studio Theatre
and to present future plans.

APRIL 23, 1980 at 4:30
155a George St., Toronto.

155a GEORGE STREET

TORONTO, M5A 2M8

(416) 869-1589

"I do not know anybody who would know of 15 now - except the folks who went through it; but I don't think any of the generations after it would know. No. They don't teach enough Canadian dance history in the schools; they teach dance history but most of it is European and American. How would they know about 15? So I'm not sure it has had any impact, except for the people who experienced it and became better because of it. I don't think so. I mean, that it's had any impact today. Maybe you can tell me."

— MIRIAM ADAMS

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*All writing by Amelia Ehrhardt taken from a written interview with Victoria Mohr-Blakeney, January 30-February 6, 2015

*All quotations from Miriam Adams taken from an interview with Victoria Mohr-Blakeney on January 23, 2015

*All photographs of Amelia Ehrhardt taken by Erin McCurdy