

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Lisa Kraus

Posts from Paris: A Decade's Difference

by Lisa Kraus

Ten years back I spent six weeks teaching a slippery, exuberant dance—*Glacial Decoy* by Trisha Brown—to dancers of the Paris Opera Ballet. The following year I returned to coach them again. The beginning of my committed dance writing traces back to that experience. It was so full of firsts that my desire to communicate about it overrode any hesitation.*

Now I'm back in Paris, from September 29 to November 1. The thINKingDANCE Editorial team decided that TD could try hosting a blog on what happens this time, or a series of posts anyway. I came with a little camera. And a sixty year old body.

Unchanged is the beauty of the Opera building. Here are some views from inside.







The Opera has a large gift shop now, not just a little hole in the wall. It's in a side area of the main floor so that you are really IN the building, tucked behind the main staircase. It's full of interesting books, CD's, DVD's, some running on a continuous loop. That's where I got to watch quite a bit of the recent Frederick Wiseman documentary, *La Danse*, which gave me a glimpse of dancers I'd worked with nine years prior. They looked great!

There's also a fancy restaurant at the back with wavy glass doors where there had been largely unused space.



And through the hallways outside the theater now are photographs of stars (étoiles) of the past and present and costumes in cases.



Here's one from Trisha Brown's *O Zlozony/O Composite* (2004) by Elizabeth Cannon.



What else is different? People I knew and loved to watch have retired or are about to retire. The Director of the Ballet, Brigitte Lefevre, steps down at the end of this month after 19 years at its helm. This will be the final production which she oversees and I anticipate some big to-do around the time of our premiere. Brigitte is an eloquent spokesperson for dance and dancers. In the Wiseman documentary, she likened her dancers to both racehorse and jockey. She also underscored how vital presenting contemporary work is.

Trisha herself is the biggest change—the fact that she has retired from choreographing and working with the company. This shifts the nucleus of the enterprise from *her*, a magnetizing and brilliant flesh-and-blood force, to her choreography. As with other artists whose work lives on, the attendant issues of how best to provide suitable presentations of her work and thinking is an ongoing koan.

Is it different to be in the studio with the dancers? I am still acquainting them, as before, with a friendlier relationship to gravity, to falling and to a tricky balance of precision and letting go. They are still energetic, interested, quick to learn, but gradual in integrating the deeper information. Being in the studio with them is still a joy.



A few changes in Paris: People are eating on the streets, walking along, that is. There are Starbucks, crammed with young people. The one nearest the Opera is in some 18th century gentleman's dwelling, all ornate plaster and gilded surfaces. And, surprisingly, it's extremely stuffy and hot with no AC or ventilation and people at their laptops and conversing in packed-together groups.

Stores have gotten more opulent and over-the-top. Galeries Lafayette Gourmet puts any Dean & DeLuca, or whatever you want to name, to shame. The Lindt store, all chocolate--the size of a Trader Joe's. Insane. AND a woman prostrate, begging, with folks trying on very costly shoes a step or two away.

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*You can read my accounts from 2003 and 2004 on the weblog [Decoy Among the Swans](#). Blog style, they appear in reverse chronological order, so you can choose to begin at the end or at the beginning.

All photos by Lisa Kraus.

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