

Andre Interview August 8, 1988

Martha Graham was same age as Barbara. Eric Hawkins 10 years younger.

Was Eric that deeply involved in the teaching? "We all selectively take what aspect of it interests us. He had worked with Sweigard before, had read Todd extensively. Of course he did not go into Barbara's work as extensively as Joanne and I did, but I would not want to say just how deeply he went into it. But he did grasp the essential principles."

"His changing was an evolution that went through many, many stages." Before Martha he was involved in ballet. "When he first found out about the Todd technique, that was one of the major influences that had him restructure, definitely. And he got that from many sources, from reading Todd, working with Sweigard and from working with Barbara Clark. It was not a simple, one little thing. It is a complex series of events. In his own body he somehow got the essence of the work because he wouldn't be what he is if he didn't. And he would not have continued to improve. Because what I have noticed about Eric over the years is that he got better as he got older. Which leads me to believe that he just kept getting deeper and deeper insights."

"It is not a question of whether he took Barbara's work or didn't take it. He in his own way got the essence of the work. That is what I see in his body. Having known him from years and years and having worked with him from time to time."

Andre doesn't feel that it is ethical for him to tell people that Eric worked with him (Andre) although Eric has told a few people himself. Andre says that he could be certainly mentioned as a person who worked with Barbara, and whose ideas to a certain extent were shaped by Barbara or influenced.

"I had met Eric down in Atlanta Georgia where I was touring with the Border Theater (sp?) and we had a dark night and Eric was in Atlanta performing with Martha Graham. We went to see the Martha Graham Dance company and I saw him dance Cave of the Heart a classic Graham piece. He was dancing with Martha and it was such a magnificent experience. I had never seen Modern dance, that I went back stage after the performance and had to meet him. And met him and said I want to study with you when the company finishes its tour. I'm coming to New York. And he said sure look me up at Martha's because he was still in the company; then and married to her at that time. So we finished our tour at the end of the year and I went to the Graham studio but by that time Eric had left. They had broken up. I assumed that because he came from the Graham studio that that was where all of this great dancing came from and so I enrolled at the Graham studio and studied there for a couple of years. Finally I began to see that the Graham technique was not what I really wanted. It was a little violent for my taste so then I did go to Eric's

studio and I started studying with him. And after some lessons with him I began to see that there was something in the movement that his people did that I thought was wonderful but I didn't know how to get it into my own movement. And so I told him one night after class, we were just chatting because he was very friendly to me and would help me alot, would let me use his library, he had an immense library of wonderful books and he would talk about them and suggest certain readings. And I told him that there was something that he was doing in movement and his good students were doing that eluded me, I didn't know how to get it. And so I asked him if there was anything that I could do to learn that. So then he mentioned Barbara. He said 'you must go to her and she will show you what you need to know.' So I did just that I called her and made an appointment. At the time she was living over the Art Student's League. So I had my first lesson and I still remember that very well, So I came out to catch the bus that would take me home and stood in front of Carnegie Hall waiting for the bus and my first impression was it was very strange work, because I had been a chemical engineering student but later actually took my degree, majoring in chemistry and minored in mathematics. But it was such a strange way to think. I had been in the university level of studying what is obvious rather than Todd's world. She gave me a table lesson and a little bit of either sitting or standing or something. Whatever it was I thought it very strange and I don't think I would have gone back had it not been for Eric because I thought to myself because here is Eric advising me to go and Eric is a very fine dancer and a very intelligent person and he must know something that I don't know and so let me keep on going until I find out what that is and that is why I hung on. And then of course as I began to take more lessons, I began to get a perception and a reaction from the images that I could percieve and then of course I really began to like it more and more."

This was in late 1950 or early 1951. He was studying acting and his goal was to study dance to help his acting, his movement and postural patterns.

Graduated in 1944, worked in Radio then toured with the Barter theatre in 1948 and toured with them for a year into 1949 and in summer of 1949 I came to New York. So I was studying in New York for a year or so before I met Barbara. Tony was Andre's acting teacher. He had quite a bit of kyphosis and Barbara helped him with that.

Technique for Movement studio "Was a very loose organization. It wasn't a formal sort of thing. My memory on that is not too complete but my vague memory is that as we began to get all of these talented people together, there was Ethel Brodsky involved in that. Barbara was always looking for ways to further the work, she was like a mother hen in terms of the work it was her progeny. That was the way the work was to her it was like her child and she was always seeking ways to further it. And she wanted to get an organization together to further the work and so

we used to get together and we would have meetings and we rented a place that we used as a studio. Joanne used it for dance and Barbara used it for teaching and I used it for teaching and that to my knowledge of how it came about it. By then Barbara had taught me some of the tablework and I was doing some of the table teaching, that's right. There was no class instruction at the time."

Joanne was teaching dance with the influence of the work - that's right. "I was in many of those classes with Joanne. I remember that perhaps Joanne was frustrated or perhaps felt held back. I do remember something of that. In those days teachers were quite authoritarian that was the style. And when you knew Barbara that had changed. But in those days Barbara was very authoritarian and ran a tight ship and so we didn't dare deviate from what she said because we didn't know, she was the person who knew. So I can very well see that Joanne could have been frustrated by having these restrictions placed upon her."

The table lessons were specifically outlined by Barbara. Centering the ribs going down the spinous processes all were specific techniques that she taught him. When asked if there was a particular order for the table lessons he said - "Lengthening the spine was probably one of the early lessons and then getting into centering the ribs and so on."

"Barbara did not like to be touched herself, but she did not like to be touched. I think that I was one of the few people that ever gave her lessons using tactile aid. Todd was one. In fact she told me once that the reason that she asked me to be a teacher my touch was the closest to Todd's that she had experienced. I think probably myself in addition to Todd and Miss Colwell probably some of the other teachers when she started at the Boston studio were the only people to give her tactile aid. She did not like to be touched. And so I could see that before she left for Illinois to work with you and John, I could see that coming. She was using less and less tactile aid and more and more relying on just the thought, the image. We have to say that part of that decision not to use tactile aid was the result of her own personal preference and her somewhat neurotic concern about being touched."

I express concern that because she was not using touch when I knew her that I may not have experienced her best teaching.

"Don't make any snap judgements on that because it might be that she was doing her fullest because the older I get and the more experience I have in the work the more I am beginning to see the power of the image." I comment that this preoccupation with working with just the image is what I think was unique about her approach. If you have the patience to really look at her images and work with them you can practically do the whole lesson non verbally, without touch, without words just through the picture.

"Absolutely, it took me a long time to get to the point where I could really do that and really understand the power of the technique of the image however you conjure it up either from the pictures or somehow you are able to do that in your own imagination. Whatever. Her preoccupation with not being touched might have been a blessing in disguise you know. You know Todd was good about that too. In her book The Thinking Body those concepts she gives are so powerful. So I think that certainly Barbara in developing that aspect of the work was probably the best of all the teachers, in the use of sheer imagery. The whole story of what she did is in her pictures I think. They alone will tell the story. Just as you could do a lesson with just pictures and no words you could probably make a book of Barbara Clark with just the pictures."

I conclude that as she progressed into the writing that she let go of the table lessons more and more and more. He agrees.

The Table lessons are what she had learned from Todd and the others in Boston. John Hawkes emphasized to me that Barbara's real gift was the pictures and when Todd showed pictures they were so complicated that it was very difficult to discern what the image was. Barbara was trying to make the picture so clear that it was the image itself.

"Another element in there was that her images were quite sensitive, that is to say that alot of Sweigard's images have an element of of either stiff mechanics (farm machinery). Barbara tried to develop imagery that was subtle and peaceful, things that would not be antagonistic to an individual. She was quite sensitive to imagery what would not upset the body processes or upset one's thinking."

"She told me once that When she was assisting that Sweigard taught the lessons but Barbara came up with the imagery for most of the lessons and that the students loved her imagery and even Dr. Sweigard did."

"Once when Barbara and I visited Sweigard we were working on the concept of the psoas as a bridge. And Sweigard she said 'brilliant' she really liked it."

"It is true that Sweigard thought of Barbara as something of a country bumpkin and that she herself had all of the scientific knowledge but she tended to be somewhat that way about anyone that didn't have a doctoral degree. That attitude she imbued into her students. Only they have the scientific valid truth about the work and anyone else is just a bumpkin fooling around with it. They don't want to admit that anyone else could have any validity."

I say that Barbara's way of teaching is an example of how one really effectively interact with someone in order to truly help them to learn something. Which is different than giving them

information. She was an example of how accept a student, to provide an environment in which they can feel completely secure to accept themselves and then to work with the crumbs of knowledge that they can accept slowly into their way of life.

Andre' agrees totally and wants me to put that in.

"As I through the years of being in a center here in New York of a lot of different aspects of the Human potential movement are taking place, workshops of the various disciplines, I have investigated alot of them just to keep myself abreast and almost invariably I will find out about something that is supposed to be very current and new and so on. And all of a sudden I will realize, Barbara knew this way back and taught it. Brought it out in a simple very direct and accessible way. I think to myself how did she know all of this where did she learn all of this? Because she did know these things. Whether it was just her innate wisdom or what - she knew."

I say that it surprised me that he considered her an authoritarian because although "she was judgmental but not about a person she was working with. She always surrounded her students with complete acceptance I felt."

"It might have been on our part because we were very young and we didn't know and we did not want to displease her so it might have been alot of that on our part. But I do know that she wanted things done a certain way and we wouldn't teach it another way. We would follow her direction. Other wise she would get very unhappy. What she said that was what was done. When she would observe our teaching if we did something that she thought was not right she would let us know very quickly."

Andre' was teaching the work only. Joanne was trying to incorporate the work into dance.

"Barbara was trying to further the work in whatever way that she could, she was a pragmatist. She was using the dance as a vehicle for the work. It wasn't that she wanted to revolutionize dance, her major objective was to promote the work and the objectives of the work. And she used dance to do that because dancers were the group that were most receptive to the work, that would apply themselves to it more than any other one group of people that she knew."

"Joanne's major interest was dance, she was a dancer and she wanted to be a good one and she was and she wanted to use the work to further dance. Barbara wanted to use the dance to further the work."

"Barbara had a limited amount of experience with dance itself and so if she would see something that wasn't exactly centered, a movement it would disturb her. And she would tell Joanne and Joanne would feel that she was being restricted in terms of her expression of the dance. What I feel is that there are some things that you would do in the dance that would seemingly violate some of the principles that are involved in our work but maybe not really. You see the more I work with dance and movement and life in general, I see that being excentered is not necessarily bad because centeredness is not a static condition or a fixed condition. We are always centering and excentering, going from one to the other and dance is just that. Maybe Barbara would pick up something of the excentering part of the dance movement and get disturbed by it whereas I don't think she should have been because the dancer must excenter in order to get back to center. You can't just stay centered otherwise you have no movement. Folk dancers never excenter because it is very simple movement and they are always totally centered and it is a very good training form of dance for people. Dance as it has evolved in the western world tends to take more chances to be more excentered. That is a philosophical question as to whether that is good or bad, ballet has maybe accentuated a little too much of the excentering. It isn't too good for the dancer and maybe for the art form I don't know that is a philosophical question that I don't think appropriate for our book."

Andre' was concerned that Sherman price might exploit Barbara. He thought that he wanted Barbara to put up the money for the film. Andre' was afraid that Barbara would put up her meager savings and he would do I don't know what with it.

"There was alot of emotional debris that got into that relationship between Barbara and Joanne." Agrees that Barbara did hold herself back to some extent. But - "Don't forget Todd had been prosecuted for practicing medicine without a licence back in the early 50's. Barbara was understandably concerned about that and concerned about having that sort of thing happen to her and to the work. So I think that certainly was one of the factors in her holding back. It might just been trying to preserve herself, self-protective to keep from being destroyed by the medical profession.

"And also I think Barbara did not want to do anything to sensationalize the work. I think she wanted protection from sensationalism. What Joanne said is true, this did hold it back to a certain extent. Barbara would on occasion tell me 'we're jus not going to be able to meet the demand that we are going to get as the work gets more popular'. It is very strange that she wanted to promote it and then if she was not able to fulfill all the requests for lessons that people wanted she would get a little panicky. She somehow felt that she had to say yes when someone wanted a lesson. And she didn't want to teach more than a certain number of lessons because she was getting older and didn't want to tire herself out, destroy her own health. So I

can remember as interest in the work began to pick up she would say 'we are not going to be able to meet the demand for it, we had better not to any more publicity, or take it easy or train more teachers.' So that always was a concern and yes there was a duality there of wanting to further the work and in a way kind of holding it back. She wanted to contain it within a certain framework of her own control so that it wouldn't get out of hand. Maybe that was due to some sort of desire to control the situation."

I suggest that it might have also been that she wanted to free herself so that she would continue to be able to creatively develop the ideas. Very complex series of reasons.

"Barbara for a number of years talked to me about Miss Colwell and her studio in Boston. So what I always assumed that Colwell kept the Boston Studio going until she herself died."

He asks me if Barbara ever mentioned Lila Clark another teacher of Todd's work in New York. He tried to get together with her but didn't work out. She may still be living.

State of New York versus Miss Todd, state doing the prosecution at the instigation of the medical society. Medical society has no enforcement powers itself. "The resolution of the suit was, she was never jailed or anything like that, but she was warned never to practice medicine without a license again, which means never to teach her work again. You see Todd did manipulations and they considered that practicing medicine without a license. So she was forbade to do that. And that is when she went to California. She came back shortly and died. She was living with Sweigard and died here in New York." Andre says that when he was assisting Fritz Popkin that Fritz said that she lived with them toward the end of her life.

"Barbara came from an era when women were repressed from doing things and she probably felt that men could further the work more because they had that role in society.