

Editor's Note: Dance in the Museum

Over the past five years, we have been witnessing an ever-growing presence of dance performances and choreographic works “exhibited” in major museums across the globe. A quick survey would have to include the exhibition *MOVE: Choreographing You*, at the Hayward Gallery, London (2010; Dusseldorf 2011; Seoul 2012); the exhibition *Danser sa Vie*, at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2011); the exhibition *Dance/Draw* (2011) at the ICA Boston; and the exhibition *Dancing Around the Bride*, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (2013). All of these exhibitions, despite their curatorial singularities and divergent approaches, have explored the deep relations and concurrent developments (to use the expression of Yvonne Rainer¹) between dance and the visual arts since World War II (the big exception being *Danser sa Vie*, which covered the entire twentieth century). However, other approaches indicate that the current interest in dance and its relationships with the development of the visual arts and of performance art are not just a matter of rewriting history and finding parallel lines of development among the arts. Were we to follow that logic, we could see dance's intrusion into visual culture as parallel to the earlier acceptance of photography, film, and video as arts within the narrow confines of the fine art canon.

Indeed, when the exhibitions *LINE* (2010) and *Inventing Abstraction* (2013), both at MoMA, included as objects of display both live and documented choreographies, what appears to be at stake, curatorially speaking, is to consider how dance's presence in the museum reconfigures *the very nature of the visual in the visual arts*. Symptoms of this reconfiguration reached their apex in the last Whitney Biennial (2012) and the last Documenta 13 (2013). In the former, the top prize went for the first time in the biennial history to a choreographer, Sarah Michelson, with her piece commissioned for the biennial titled *Devotion: The American Dancer*. While in the latter, the presentation of two works where dance is central became indeed iconic of the whole, monumental exhibition: Tino Seghal's *This Variation*, where, in a large, pitch-black space, the audience is invited to dance in the dark as long as they want to; and Jérôme Bel's *Disabled Theater*, where the French choreographer (for whom Seghal danced before starting his own artistic work), having accepted the invitation of the Switzerland-based Theater Hora, choreographed a work for Documenta where actors with cognitive impairments dance their hearts out. Finally, it should be noted that Seghal won the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennial 2013, with a piece that can only be described as an extended, long-duration choreography. In this, as in many other cases, dance attempts to rewrite performance as exhibition: what could it mean to exhibit movement rather than to dance it?

Some choreographies venture responses to this question. That these works took place under the auspices of visual arts curatorial projects and spaces indicates how dance at this juncture in history has become all but inescapable for the visual arts. What is dance doing for the museum if not intensifying its drive to accumulate time and extend the boundaries of the visible to ever-widening domains? Is the museum out to accumulate time-based art? Or is it exploiting the uses of time proper to dance in the interest of a different sort of accumulation? What is the museum doing to dance if not simply providing it with venues and audiences hitherto unfamiliar with this art? Where do dance and the museum fruitfully communicate?²

If dance is a force that indeed allows the visual arts to re-imagine the image—as Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica wrote in 1965, just as he was moving away from painting and sculpture and into a deeply participatory mode of working—one question that must be asked is: what does dance have to gain, or what positive changes may come to dance, once it starts to move in museums? Or, as correlated questions, what are the (art) historical, social, economic, discursive, and even political forces at play that predispose dance to appear so predominantly in museums today; and, do dance and choreography exploit these conditions to reimagine their modes of making work and existing in the larger art sphere?

Concomitant to the obvious potential inherent in such questions is a corresponding series of cautionary questions: what are the conditions of labor of the dancer and choreographer in the framework of museum performance? Is dance work being acquired by the museum, and if so, how is it to be preserved for re-performance? Such questions have recently animated a Movement Research blog on this subject.³

These questions are particularly charged once one remembers that it has been some 30 years since Douglas Crimp (1995) offered his extraordinary analysis of the museum as institution in unstoppable (self-)ruination throughout the twentieth century. Could we follow Crimp's critique and understand the *resurrection* of museums in recent times (financially, curatorially, and institutionally reinvented as globalized corporations flush with cash, visitors, and ever more highly valued objects) as intimately linked to the *animation* dance brings to museums? What role might dance be fulfilling "in the museum's ruins" (Crimp 1995), as it operates through its crevices, cracks, and usually dormant spaces, to offer a spectacle of the living, and to bring live performance back to these ruins, after the strong institutional critique the museum had suffered throughout the late 1960s and the 1970s? Does dance serve what Tony Bennett (1995) has called the museum's "exhibitionary complex"?⁴ It may very well be that in our post-Fordist era of affective or virtuosic labor, the dancer becomes the figure through which a new formation of capital's relationship to both bodies and ephemerality becomes apparent—and thus her presence is required in and desired by this new volatility of capital's relation to the aesthetic commodity. It is here that the art object becomes implicated in the phenomenon of immaterial labor, and that dance becomes the figure par excellence of immaterial labor itself. But, then, what kind of institutional critique becomes possible under these circumstances—on the ruins of the museum's ruins, which is now the moving body collected and acquired?

The absolute versatility in techniques and readiness to perform that the contemporary dancer is trained in makes her a privileged worker for all sorts of exhibitions. As is well known, since Marina Abramovic's famous retrospective at MoMA *The Artist Is Present* (2011), or Tino Segah's *Kiss* at the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum in New York City (2011), dancers are the most usable and expendable bodies available for work whenever "performance" needs to be activated. This understanding of the dancer as generic/hyper-virtuosic worker for visual arts performance labor was clearly expressed as early as 1968 by Bruce Nauman, when, in several of his instruction pieces (such as in two of his "Untitled" works of 1969), he begins his more or less complex, more or less long-duration scores with the apparently neutral line "hire a dancer." Nauman's matter-of-fact statement, which is the very condition of possibility for a work to take place, to exist in the gallery or museum, speaks volumes about the many problems at stake in our current conjuncture as well.

A thorough analysis of the political/economic unconscious underlying this resurgence of dancing bodies as spectacles for the museum visitors in its relation to neoliberal capitalism is yet to be fully articulated in dance studies. However, one of the most interesting critiques of this logic took shape, paradoxically perhaps, as a curatorial and choreographic project developed by Pierre Bal-Blanc under the title *La Monnaie Vivante (The Living Currency)*, presented at Tate Modern (2008), the Sixth Berlin Biennale (2010), and the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (2010). It is crucial to know that Bal-Blanc was one of the original "dancers for hire" that animated Félix Gonzales-Torres's iconic work *Untitled (Go-Go Dancer Platform)* of 1991. As Bal-Blanc stated a few times, it was his experience of being an "art work" for hire in someone else's work that made him start considering the politics and economies of corporeal presence and dancing in the

context of museums. *The Living Currency* project erupts from this reflection, and the project involved a series of visual artists working with performance (such as Tania Bruguera) but also choreographers of different generations and styles (such as Meg Stuart or Simone Forti).

Projects such as *The Living Currency* clearly show that there is much more than just “neoliberal opportunism” when museums program dance in the museum’s ruins—or when museums hire dancers as disposable and cheap, yet highly skilled, workers for live performance. The fact is that it seems to be impossible at this point to imagine a history of “visual” art after World War II without considering dance and choreography. This, of course, offers tremendous possibilities for dance to reimagine itself as well—to reimagine itself away from its longtime privileged apparatuses (the proscenium stage, the darkened theater, the evening-length program, the company) and thus launch a whole new project for choreography’s and for dancing’s imaginations. At the same time, we should point out that there is significant discussion in these pages of the uncomfortable fit between dance and the white cube, as well as of the issue of collecting and acquiring in relation to dance as an art form that can suffer both gains and losses through its association with the museal world. Of course, the theatrical set-up of danced performance has been radically interrogated by choreographers since the 1960s. The mutation from the black box to the white cube may be overrated in purely formal terms; the mutation is more disturbingly made evident in the conditions of spectatorship, the phenomenon of audience distraction, and the production values the museum can or cannot, is or is not willing to provide, along with the labor conditions of the dancer and the deeper motives of the museum itself become producer. A number of contributions to this issue abandon the live-static binary of dance and the museum to turn to analysis of the tensions between performance and exhibition as precise formats of duration and participation.

In this vein, two projects stand out quite powerfully. One, initiated by an invitation from Laurence Rassel, chief curator at Fundacion Tapiès in Barcelona, is the exhibition *Retrospective*, on the work of French choreographer Xavier LeRoy. This remarkable exhibition, conceived and choreographed meticulously by LeRoy himself, re-articulates the whole choreographic protocol, since here, it is clearly the dancer who emerges as archival agent of Le Roy’s body of work—and yet, an archive understood as a dynamic system of formations and transformations of statements, much as Foucault (1972) defined it.⁵ Performed in Barcelona, Spain (2012); Salvador, Brazil (2013); Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2013); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2014); and MoMA-PS1, *Retrospective* reworks an understanding of choreography in the sense that each and every one of its instantiations is deeply singular (its dancing) while the whole structure remains rigorously in place (its choreography). *Retrospective* points to another key aspect of dance’s presence in the museal world: its own status as virtual museum, to which the work of Boris Charmatz testifies as well. Dance becomes museal when it highlights and accumulates evidence of its relation to the historical past: to the past of art, as well as to its own past. Hence, beyond the phenomenon of the site specific through which dance might emancipate itself from the stage, there is the specificity of the museum as more than just another site, but as a properly archival site that should also be taken into consideration. As an archival site, the museum inspires dance to emulate the artifactual quality of the archive while also transforming it—and itself—into a new version of the act. It is this unstable shifting between settings and set-ups that a number of the articles in this issue explore.

The other project, which is discussed at length in the opening section of this issue, is Boris Charmatz’s *Dancing Museum*. A deeper discussion of the latter, along with an interview with Boris Charmatz, opens up this issue. What must be retained from these two projects is how both projects divert both the institutional function of the museum and the institutional function of choreography away from their previously immovable positions and redefine both through the act of dancing. Both projects interrogate what a museum’s function and relation to dancing bodies is, and in doing so, re-imagine for dance a different dimension of its own being in the world.

Of course, there have been predecessors. At the turn of the century, many modern dancers, from Isadora Duncan to Ruth St. Denis and Mata Hari, performed in museums, as Gabriele Brandstetter has described:

The museum was transformed into a theater and the theater turned into a museum that housed the rhetorics of gestural expression as a space in which the expressive forms adopted from the artworks of antiquity were physically brought up to date and simultaneously inventoried. (2015, 70)

More recently, we might think of the strong relationship that the Whitney Museum had with Trisha Brown in the 1970s; the Moderna Museet in Stockholm with Robert Morris in the 1960s; The Historiska Museet in Stockholm with Donya Feuer in 1963; and the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro with Hélio Oiticica (despite the fact that, in his case, dance was blocked from entering the museum since Oiticica was bringing in samba with all its implications in terms of skin color and class the dancers represented). One could also add the dance photography exhibition organized by Lincoln Kirstein in the late 1940s at MoMA and the performances of Simone Forti in the MoMA garden in the 1970s. However, it seems that the scale, prevalence, and consistency in presenting dance currently at MoMA in New York, for instance, or MAR in Rio de Janeiro, or Tate Modern in London, and in several other museums across the planet, suggest that something else is taking place right now—a situation that we hope this issue’s contributions will help clarify.

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Notes

1. “What is perhaps unprecedented in the short history of the modern dance is the close correspondence between concurrent developments in dance and the plastic arts” (Rainer 1968, 269).
2. For another attempt to sketch these questions, see Franko (2014).
3. <http://www.movementresearch.org/criticalcorrespondence/blog/?p=8048>.
4. “Not, then, a history of confinement but one of the opening up of objects to more public contexts of inspection and visibility: this is the direction of movement embodied in the formation of the exhibitionary complex.” (Bennett 1995, 73).
5. “By this term [archive] I do not mean the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity; nor do I mean the institutions, which, in a given society, make it possible to record and preserve those discourses that one wishes to remember and keep in circulation.” Rather the archive, is “the general system of formation and *transformation of statements*” (Foucault 1972, 130, emphasis added).

Works Cited

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