

Dance/Agency/History: Randy Martin's Marxian Ethnography

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The question of this special issue is Randy Martin and dance studies. Why is this a question? It is a question because Randy had a powerful influence on dance studies and because his work could also be considered in certain ways as peripheral to the field.¹ This is perhaps because he wrote on so many other topics, including Marx, academic labor, derivative finance, etc. But how can a scholar be considered both central and peripheral to a discipline? I want to propose here that one must return to the question of movement itself in relation to dance, meaning, and the social that preoccupied Randy throughout his career. Interconnections between dance, meaning, and the social were treated in Randy's writing and public speaking with great sophistication and style. Anyone who heard him lecture or even converse can attest to this fact: There was almost a style of Randy Martin, one that was attractive and inimitable if also at times difficult and elusive. I propose here a close reading of certain of his early texts in order to track the commerce in his work between dance, meaning, and the social in his thought. Ultimately, my argument is that Randy returned repeatedly to the effect of dance on the audience and that this dance–audience relationship—expressed in certain important early essays as an ethnographic encounter—held the key to his thinking on dance in and as sociality. In a certain sense, the quasi-hypnotic effect Randy Martin had on us as a writer and speaker was itself the microcosm of this effect of movement on the spectator he was at pains to describe and theorize. This was, I believe, the great performative strategy of his presence in its written and spoken modes.

This article examines Randy Martin's initial formulation of the project of dance studies in several essays on ethnography and representation he wrote and published between 1992 and 1998 in the wake of his first book, *Performance as Political Act* (Martin 1992, 1995, 1998).² What I offer here is a close reading of these essays. Moreover, this article also addresses the role of Marxian conceptual thinking in Randy Martin's larger project.³ Yet, we must immediately nuance this to stress that Martin was not a believer in fixed concepts, but advocated instead for a rereading of Marx as a way of thinking in and of movement. "Naming," he wrote of Marx's fate, "fixes an identity that otherwise will not rest" (Martin 2002, xx).⁴ That neither dance nor Marx would rest in stillness forged a bond between Marx's thinking and dance. Moreover, experiencing dance both as a dancer (which Martin was) and as a spectator allowed him to develop a protocol for reading Marx and writing about Marx. For Marx, as Martin liked to point out, "every historically developed social form is

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in fluid movement” (2002, xxi). I would venture to say that this was one manifestation of the model for dance studies of my generation, which works across critical reading and the experience of dancing and watching dancing. I would also venture to say that the intersection of Marx and dance was perhaps the most original among the many original insights of Randy Martin, and one that proved extremely generative for his work. I also want to suggest here that it might be equally generative for future generations of dance scholars. But it does come with certain theoretical problems that I hope to explore in what follows.

What does all this have to do with ethnography? Well, clearly it had to do with gazing upon the other. Martin’s early essays focused on the potential of dance studies in relation to the critique of anthropology as colonialist; the Marxian strain of the thinking in them was consequently somewhat implicit. “Anthropology,” wrote James Clifford, “no longer speaks with automatic authority for others defined as unable to speak for themselves (‘primitive,’ ‘pre-literate,’ ‘without history’)” (Clifford and Marcus 1986, 10). To look for a colonizing situation within the West, Martin seemed to be saying, one has only to look to dance. The “illiterate” dancer practicing a nonverbal art was a domain of exoticism. In this way, Martin put into question every manner of account of dancing, and such iconoclasm was very much on the agenda of dance studies in the early 1990s. Martin’s early articles also contained a sort of auto-ethnography as Martin positioned himself as an informant interweaving his own performance experience with the analysis. It was the 1990s and Martin had been a postmodern dancer of the post-Judson moment in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁵ But more was at stake here than the status of the dancer. For Martin, the critique of anthropology was relevant to the aesthetic dimension of dance itself as an “object” of study. Martin drew upon the self-reflective turn in ethnography as a way to rethink how the exchange that occurs in dance engages the audience. Indeed, the audience was to become a major player in his proposed methodology for dance studies.

This audience was to be understood as a co-player—a participant—in the dance work; although highly contingent and unstable, the audience was fully historical in its presence. “The body’s sensation, its feeling, its touch,” he wrote in *Performance as Political Act*, “are with history” (Martin 1990, 7). One could say that if the dancer introduced agency into the performer-spectator relation and in a sense also theory inasmuch as the dancer embodied an idea as a proposal, the audience introduced history in its ability to act on this idea or at least to mobilize a critical presence around it.⁶ Martin’s proposal for dance studies extended from writing in its failed attempt to represent the “other”—even if this other was a postmodern dancer—to the limits of dance itself as a representation: Where the audience began, there dance as representation stopped. For this reason, it was difficult to describe (e.g., represent) the dance event, and this difficulty of description was presented as a corollary to the “crisis of representation” experienced by ethnography. Thus, for Martin, as far as dance was concerned, there was no object of study properly speaking, and self-critical trends in ethnography only confirmed the intersubjective nature of the encounter between dance and audience that was itself constitutive of dance’s political potential. Dance in its relation to the audience promotes “imagining political possibilities” that critical theory itself has difficulty in achieving (Martin 2002, xv).

The ethnographer and the “other” s/he studied were functions Martin called upon to think through the relation of the audience to the dancer. But dance and audience were not assigned consistent roles: each was double cast as both itself and the other. It was, in Clifford’s terms, “a world of generalized ethnography.”⁷ That is, audience and dancer functions were permeable, and this affected the economy of their separate if linked pursuits; there was to be no clear distinction between the dancer’s so-called productive labor and the audience’s so-called passive reception. Self-understanding grows out of observing some other.⁸ Martin drew upon the anthropological terminology of participant observation to note that observation was always already participation and the reverse. In *Grundrisse* (1973) Marx had posited an analogous permeability between production and consumption that I shall develop in what follows.⁹

In his introduction to *Writing Culture* Clifford contextualized the challenges ethnography faced as symptomatic of the ongoing critique of representation itself: “The critique of colonialism in the postwar period . . . has been reinforced by an important process of theorizing about the limitations of representation itself” (Clifford and Marcus 1986, 10). These formations—poststructuralism, feminist theory, neo-Marxism—were instrumental, as we know, to the emergence of dance studies in the 1980s and 1990s (see Desmond 1997; Morris 1996). By turning to the self-critical dimension of ethnography, Martin posited the body itself as colonized by (most) dance with one exception: postmodern dance, which had gone through a self-critical phase on the order of ethnography itself.¹⁰ Janet Wolff made a similar claim around the same time on behalf of postmodern dance with respect to the possibility of a critical attitude toward gender. “The dance can only be subversive when it questions and exposes the construction of the body in culture. . . . Postmodern dance has begun to achieve this, and thus to use the body for the first time in a truly political way” (Wolff 1990, 137).¹¹ Self-criticality opens the way to politics. For Martin, postmodern dance interrogated the apparatus of representation (he would later call it historical kinesthemes) such that the audience became mobilized as a critical presence: audience members became self-critical ethnographers factoring themselves and their historical embeddedness into the interpretation of what they see. This, at least, was the methodological strategy Martin foresaw: “I would want to encourage the development of self-critical ethnography toward a strategy responsive to the demands of dance analysis presented here that would reaffirm and relocate the exotic within ethnographic representation, precisely that of the unstable audience” (Martin 1995, 112). Hence, Martin envisaged the exotic status assigned dance as appropriate on condition it be transferred to the audience. By casting the audience as inherently unstable, Martin was underlining its uncertainty with respect to its own interpretative role. The audience is in “a common predicament of looking for the dance as they view it” (Martin 1995, 107). Here the notion of dance as product or commodity is put into question. This “predicament”—also called a trying-out for “the assertion of its capacity for evaluation” (Martin 1995, 108)—casts the audience in a decidedly performative, or more precisely, pre-performative, role. In its very efforts to perform as audience, the audience auditions to be itself—to become the social ensemble that “understands” and uses that which has no objectified status as product by setting its ideas into circulation. Its ideas are “what dancing assembles as a capacity for movement” (Martin 1998, 4). Hence, and Martin stated this quite clearly in *Critical Moves*: “. . . dance emerges through the mobilization of participation in relation to a choreographic idea” (1998, 4). The otherness upon which the audience casts its gaze is its own socialist otherness. It was this intentional blurring of the categories of production and reception in the relation of dance to its audience that Martin gleaned from the crisis in ethnography and went on the redeploy in the field of dance analysis. He turned to ethnographic analysis for the needs of dance studies in order to conceptualize the terms of analysis as a relation between these two unstable subject positions. This was, in other terms, the initial formulation of mobilization: “Here, production is what dancing assembles as a capacity for movement, and the product is not the aesthetic effect of the dance but the materialized identity accomplished through the performativity of movement” (1998, 4).

This transposing of categories fit well with Martin’s implicit recourse throughout his work to Marxian categories that themselves demonstrated a comparable flexibility in their application. Indeed, it was the very encounter between dance and audience that was seen here to lay claim to difference: “Difference, hitherto relegated to some exotic other elsewhere, now lies within the account of the object as destabilized and destabilizing” (Martin 1995, 112). As Martin also said, “The ethnography of this strategy consists in writing that fully displays the disruptive potential of that which it represents in analysis” (112). With disruption and instability on the side of both the “object” and the “analysis,” Martin was developing here, I would maintain, a theory of the relation between performance and audience as constitutive of historicity.¹² The historicity of dance came about through the abandonment of a colonial context for reading and its substitution by context, which the audience, in its ethnographic reading, “insinuates . . . in the midst of the object without it being absorbed by that object” (1995, 112).

This theory of historicity through context is, it seems to me, the first lynchpin of Martin's exploration of the relation of dance and politics, and thus it deserves more concerted attention than it has thus far received.¹³ Social relation cannot be aestheticized and is hence not a domain of representation *per se*. But the burden of the audience to "make sense" of dance is a question of exchange inasmuch as assigning a meaning is an act enabling dance to exist as "idea," and thus to occupy, if only temporarily, social space that is given over to mobilization. Dance, in other terms, becomes the domain not only of self-critical ethnography (instability of the object) but also of the operations of capital (exchange, etc.) understood not as the circulation of products but as the circulation of production(s). The mutation Martin was effecting in dance studies could be likened to that of the commodity with respect to exchange in Marx, who wrote: "A product posited as exchange value is in its essence no longer a simple thing: it is posited in a quality different from its natural quality; it is posited as a *relation*, more precisely as a relation in general, not to one commodity but to every commodity, to every possible product" (Marx 1973, 205). We are here in an area of value rather than of assignable meaning.¹⁴ It had become important to think about how dance could get beyond representation, but also about how thinking on dance could get to *relationality*. A focus on choreography and technique in and of themselves could be an obstacle in the attempt to see the interaction of dance with its audience as constitutive of the social and political potential of dance.¹⁵ Martin saw the Marxian categories of production, exchange, distribution, and consumption as mobile categories. He did not stop to analyze the dancer as at once producer and product or the dancing body as subject, instrument, and product all at once. Rather, he saw all these categories as "mobilized," set in motion in the sense of being relational and hence beyond representational fixity or representation properly speaking.

The Limits of Representation

Martin delineates what he means by the limits of representation in "Agency and History: The Demands of Dance Ethnography" (1995) and "Dance Ethnography and the Limits of Representation" (1992). The limit could also be called a boundary to unequivocal legibility, a failure of representation that is proper to postmodern dance.¹⁶ Martin understands the relation between dance and audience as no longer to be governed by such representations of reality that might be ascribed in the dance field to classical ballet in which the beauty and harmony of the body presuppose a mimetic potential suitable to the telling of a story.¹⁷

In "Agency and History" (1995), Martin describes an experimental dance piece in which he performed—and hence for which he uses himself as an informant in a sort of auto-ethnography. His description is purposely as much one of the audience as it is one of the dance. For the experimental dance scene, the failure of representation is elaborated in a description of the interior of Judson Church itself, which is in no way a "theater," and a description of the odd spatial proximities of dance and audience in Judson as well as of the aesthetic of the performance itself (the choreographer is unnamed) in which the body is not a privileged signifier. It is precisely a lack of traditional boundaries from an architectural perspective that occasion representation's failure in contemporary dance: But "the boundaries have been redrawn so persistently as to inflict a partial meltdown of that familiar Da Vincian figure in its orb. . . . Like figures *momentarily released from the stillness of representation*, we [the dancers] pour through the openings [of the ripped canvas]" (Martin 1995, 106). This is related to what he later cited in the work of Bill T. Jones as "the capacity to make the movement of life excessive in a manner that spills out beyond its frame" (Martin 2004, 58). Here we can see that representation does not limit itself to the representation of reality, but signifies instead the interaction of body, space, and audience that constitutes a classical aesthetic. Invoking Da Vinci's design of the proportions of Vitruvian man, Martin implies that classical representation with its focus on the body as an aesthetic object governed by the appreciation of proportions—whether those of the site of display or of the body displayed within it—has been supplanted by an engagement with the dancer-audience relation itself as a social relation or as a

laboratory of relationality. It is relationality *per se* that is beyond representation. At the same time, dance has the capacity to manifest the movement of bodies beyond representation as inherently social, that is, as the experience of society as a coming together of bodies concretized as the very gathering of dancers and audience to occasion instances of performance. Mobilization is setting things and people into relational movement both by virtue of what they do and what they see each other doing. In other terms, Martin is deeply engaged with aesthetics, however contradictory that may sound. He gave to the idea of a politically alert aesthetics the name: *social kinesthetic*: “The capacity to move an idea in a particular direction through the acquired prowess of bodies in action, is what is meant by social kinesthetic” (Martin 2004, 48).

Martin extended the notion of representation to the various media that would fix dance in time, explaining how reviews, video documentation, dance reconstruction, and even dance theory fail to sustain the memory of the event so as to preserve the unique moment of social relation that transpired within it. This is because the relations established by the live performance are “highly particularized”: “the participation of audience refuses to be subsumed by the representation of performance” (Martin 1992, 323). Highly particularized is a synonym of historicized. Neither the performance nor the audience is permeable to representation in that they fluctuate over time: both are “untranslatable objects” (Martin 1992, 321). But the benefit they derive from this uncertain status is a full awareness of their own historical dimension that relationality unfolds: to be cognizant of one’s “position” within history is to acknowledge that position as beyond representation. The fact that dance is “disruptive” of traditional protocols of representation of the body in dance is in this way matched by the audience, which, for its part, is “unstable.” Martin wrote that “The audience has no identity as audience prior to and apart from the performative agency that has occasioned it” (1998, 38). Performance gives the audience its historical awareness as such. The audience is unstable because its existence is contingent upon the agency of the performance; reciprocally, the agency of performance cannot express itself as such without the critical presence of the audience. Here again, we are in a realm of pure relationality.

Martin’s description of the performance takes the conditions of production and the presence of the audience as their own sort of social entity into account more than do most first-person experiential accounts. For example, the entire process leading up to the performance in which he participated at Judson Church in New York City is encapsulated in one sentence as a topos of concert dance: “Without presumption or repetition, four of us assume places in the darkness that we take as the illusory origins of something that culminates but did not actually start here” (Martin 1995, 105). Martin makes reference to the “genealogy of the unity” (107) of the performers before an audience “that is only constituted by that particular instance of the dance” (107). The condition of possibility of live performance as residing with the audience more than with the performers is a way to transfer agency to where we least expect to find it. In this way, from the start, Martin establishes performers and audience as two unities or collectivities with distinct yet highly contingent histories whose separate trajectories converge at the dance concert (the culmination of two processes: rehearsal and going to the theater) only to diverge or collapse as effective unities in the immediate aftermath of the event. Elsewhere, he called them ensembles. There are “two moments,” Martin explains, “of any ensemble: the production of voice, idea, or agency and the movement or the capacity to gather that generates historical time, or history” (1998, 44). Yet, this collapse does not spell failure, but only the failure of representation. It is actually the beginning of something entrusted to the spectators in that they arrive at it through their critical apprehension as well as through their nascent historical self-awareness.

The political, in consequence, escapes representation and hence also capture. In this sense, one could relate it to Paolo Virno’s definition of labor power, one that Virno derives from Marx: “Labor-power incarnates (literally) a fundamental category of philosophical thought: specifically, the potential, the *dynamis*. And, potential ... signifies that which is *not* current, that which is *not* present” (Virno 2004, 82). One could substitute for these words “not current” and “not

present”: not representable. Labor power also describes quite well the invisibility of politics in the scene of dance that Martin gestures toward. In this very contingency of the encounter there is something potentially historical, which is another way of saying that there is something potentially political, albeit a politics that would remain invisible were it not for this ethnographic approach to the dance concert. “Ethnographic writing identifies politics where there was thought to be none” (Martin 1992, 323). It would seem that this social basis for the encounter becomes mirrored in all the conventions of performance that subsist from the old structures, such as the curtain call, which is as much as to say: “I suppose you were hoping to get some sort of meaning out of that. Well did you?” (Martin 1995, 106). The burden of interpretation falls to the audience, which, in its very instability, is “a social body” (Martin 1992, 336). Why is it conceived as a social body? Is it because it deliberates as one entity? Perhaps. But I think the stronger meaning is that the audience participation in interpretation, while invisible, constitutes in itself a labor. And this labor too, like the labor of dance, escapes representation: “The traces of participation, the work an audience does to create a sense of the object as it is presented to them, are nowhere to be found in the standard means of representation and documentation and as such, absent from the ways history is conventionally conceived” (Martin 1995, 110). This would confirm that Martin viewed the audience’s work as labor at the level of performance itself:

The audience, when taken as an object of representation, is best understood as a means of participation. Participation, in my usage, assumes the internal perspective of the performance event. As event, *audience-as-participation cannot see or observe itself from without* but is labor that, through its association and expenditure, enables the event to occur. (Martin 1998, 38, my emphasis)

Reception is made up of the “traces of participation” understood as work masquerading as passive consumption of the image. “The full appreciation of the place of reception, of the unstable audience, has the potential to extend an understanding of the political” (Martin 1992, 322). What Martin is saying, it seems to me, is that dance is the occasion to revisit the Marxian categories of production, exchange, distribution, and consumption as varieties of labor. Martin weights labor in the direction of the audience, and in this connection it is also striking that he refrains from analyzing the dancer as producer in relation to Marxian categories of means of production, instrument of production, and product.

In the final analysis, what is at stake here is dance studies itself as a kind of writing that should not aspire to representation and that should be sensitive to these modalities. This is where self-critical ethnography enters the picture as a writing practice in which participation and observation cannot be neatly distinguished from one another. “Ethnography,” specifies Martin, “is an appropriate method for appreciating the disruptive presence that divides representation and its object” (Martin 1992, 322). This is because

... the ethnographic field is neither the undifferentiated space of the Other visited by the ethnographer nor the seamless space of representation in which an ethnographer writes. It is, rather, like dance performance, a relation of forces joined in tension yet fundamentally unlike one another. (1992, 323)

In terms of the ethnographic nature of Martin’s approach to the dance performance, participant observation comes into play. As participant (dancer), Martin observes the audience and reflects on its function, its challenges, and its destiny. And he also considers the audience to be participants rather than merely observers. But the audience’s participation is the labor of interpretation that is not reproducible. In sum, “the audience represents a mobilized critical presence such as that implicit in radical notions of ‘history’” (1992, 322). Put otherwise, “The Other, grounded in practical terms as the mobilized presence of the unstable audience, provides momentary context to the agency of the object itself” (323). As the dancer’s action is virtual, it is only the audience reception

that provides that action with context and, hence, historicizes it. Let me underline here that the notion of context and singularity comes to inform what Martin means by history, which should not be confused with the representation of the past: historiography.

Choreographic representation thus encounters its limits but also its ultimate possibilities with/in the audience: without the audience the live performance could not exist. In this sense, the audience should be understood not only as the limit in the sense of destination, but also as what unhinges the danced representation from its representational status: the audience constitutes the very condition of possibility of live performance as well as its ground and grounding understood as the place into which the energy of performance sinks and from where it disperses into the collective life of the social body. Performance disappears *into* the audience. But reception dissimulates its own retention of the event. The paradox is that the audience endows performance with historicity, but it does so at the price of its own immobilization as a collectivity of spectators assembled not to act, but to observe.¹⁸ In a very dynamic sense, the audience negotiates the meaning of what the theatrical beyond representation might incite us to do or think, which is to say, what impact it might have in the social dynamic underlying future action. It barely needs saying that Martin was not interested in a reflection theory of performance, but rather in the idea of performance as a potentially volatile encounter that could unleash social energies in the short or the long term. Here we confront a contradiction. The energies that can be unleashed by performance cannot be captured in or by theatrical representation as such; action is contingent upon theatrical production once it is distributed to reception and consumed as such through critical labor. The Marxian coordinates are all activated here; yet, they hinge on volatility.

Having said this, one must immediately recognize a corollary point in these writings: The limits of representation also refer to the contemporaneous self-critique of ethnography according to which the role of ethnographer/observer was called into question as an adequate means of representing the Other. In ethnography, representation was acknowledging the limits to its own representational procedures. Here, the idea of the limits of representation gains a negative connotation: “There is more to ethnography, it would seem,” Martin writes in *Socialist Ensembles*, “than combining two perspectives different from one another, participation and observation” (1994, 8). This is to say “participation and observation [are] contradictory activities that cannot be sustained in the face of one another” (1994, 9). Hence, a self-reflective ethnography is not the answer to a fully mobilized dance theoretical project of writing.

In the final chapter of *Critical Moves*—“For Dance Studies”—Martin sketched his vision of dance studies as “this middle ground, this terrain of mediations” (1998, 183). The way Martin played with participation and observation, turning their meanings inside out in the context of danced performance, making the reception of performance the labor constituting it, establishing the “idea” as the dancer’s product being consumed and in this way potentially socially constituted—all this brings us back to his engagements with Marxism. In *Grundrisse* (1973), the notebooks written in preparation for the *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx also turned his fundamental concepts of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption inside out, experimenting with these categories as mutually self-defining in order to wrest from them their full (I dare say performative) meaning. In the concluding section of this article I show how the opening sections of *Grundrisse* are helpful in grasping the Marxian terms of Martin’s innovative treatment of participant-observation in the context of dance studies as a project.

For a Materialist Dance Studies

A reevaluation of Marx in terms of performance theory suffuses Randy Martin’s scholarly output. Dance materializes labor such that the idea of materialism itself becomes transformed by diverting the study of social process to the field of dance as a labor of production of socialism as a being

together. Randy was a man of the left, and his concern was with the community of the left, its possibility of sustained existence. He did call this socialism, thus avoiding communism and trying not to think socialism as state socialism.¹⁹ Having come of age in the 1970s his dancing career coincided with the rise of neoliberalism throughout the world. Hence, the trajectory toward the summation of his research in *Knowledge, LTD*. seems already to have been foreshadowed and thus can be linked to the emphasis he put on the term socialism as a keyword. Into the community of the left he brought dance as the labor of “imagining political possibilities” (Martin 2002, xv). Throughout his career, he asked himself what kind of production dance was in the context of civil society. Marx saw all human endeavors in terms of production just as Martin saw all human endeavors in terms of movement and the production of movement. Here, it is worthwhile to highlight Martin’s claim that the politics of dance are, for a variety of reasons, fundamentally invisible. From a Marxian perspective, this means that the way dance participates in production, distribution, circulation, exchange, and consumption is generally disavowed. However, once we begin to think seriously about what dance produces, what the terms of its distribution, circulation, and exchange are in specific contexts and how its reception amounts to consumption (the fulfillment of needs), then we are engaged in a Marxian-oriented dance studies. Nevertheless, the Marxian emphasis on production itself did represent a stumbling block, and the evolution of Randy’s thought shows us how he tried to move around it.

Marx sets forth the most fluid conception of these relationships in his *Grundrisse*.²⁰ The classical theory is present in these terms: “The person objectifies himself in production, the thing subjectifies itself in [the person’s] consumption” (Marx 1973, 89). The question arises how the dancer objectifies herself in her “product.” We must bear in mind, however, that the danced product is the least concrete of objects—an “idea” (as Randy stipulated)—and that the audience consumption of the idea as an ensemble enables the mobilization of the latter’s critical consciousness. Hence, what I have called elsewhere the performative economy (Franko 2002) is cast by Martin in terms of agency and knowledge. That production and consumption can be recast as agency and knowledge (critical consciousness) seems almost to be accounted for by Marx in the *Grundrisse* when he wrote:

Production, then, is also immediately consumption, consumption is also immediately production. Each is immediately its opposite. But at the same time a mediating movement takes place between the two. Production mediates consumption; it creates the latter’s material; without it, consumption would lack an object. But, consumption also mediates production in that it alone creates for the products the subject for whom they are products. (1973, 91)

In the above passage, the continuity between production and consumption is termed both immediate (a fact that blurs the distinction between them, the effect of which is to sublimate the object itself as object) and a mediation. Mediation is the very term Martin used for his vision of what dance studies methodology could become: “this terrain of mediations” (1998, 183). By transposing the tense standoff between dancer and audience that transmuted the terms of participation and observation into Marxian terms, we can begin to see more clearly how dance may be conceived of as a product consumed by the social body. For to put dance in those terms allows for the mediations to take center stage in any methodological procedure.

Similarly, the way Martin distributes participation across dance and spectating echoes Marx’s awareness that “Distribution is itself a product of production” (1973, 950). That is, as Marx explains, “the specific kind of participation in production determines the specific forms of distribution, i.e., the pattern of participation in distribution” (950). As we have seen, Martin envisages participation in the labor of performance as “distributed” across the functions of dancer and spectator. The sense of the term participation in Marxian analysis comes in this way to impact the same term used in anthropology because it introduces the consideration that a distribution of labor is

necessary to an evaluation of what gets produced in performance or, more precisely, of how the performative economy does its “work” (Franko 2002).

In fact, Martin’s whole manner of conceptualizing the audience as agentive but also unstable in his early essays here under discussion is consummately Marxian. Marx continues: “Production produces consumption in a double way, because a product becomes a real product only by being consumed” (1973, 91). This seems to suggest that a product does not exist *qua* product prior to its consumption. The problem with this idea is that it elides the reality of the market where we can see products as if suspended in time and space (see Franko 2002, 35). If we take this as an ontological consideration rather than as a reflection on the pragmatics of the economy, it does require further reflection. A dance becomes a product only in the moment it is experienced. Most strikingly relevant for dance studies is Marx’s next sentence: “The product is production not as objectified activity, but rather only as object for the active subject” (1973, 91). This statement of Marx works against the grain of classical Marxian theory and leads us to think of dance not as work but as labor. If we do this, then we can see how the dancer’s labor becomes transformed into, and in some sense cocreated by, the audience’s work of interpretive spectating. It seems to me that what we can find in the *Grundrisse* is a tendency to deobjectify the product, to make it more performative in the sense that the very condition of possibility for objectification resides in its consumption, which in dance comes to mean: in performance. In Martin’s final book, *Knowledge, LTD.* (2015) the derivative is understood as “production inside circulation” (2015, 52).²¹ Martin’s rewriting of Marx’s terms was an attempt to wrest a more supple apprehension of product, object, distribution, and consumption adequate to dance. Dance itself, in other terms, is the practice that provides the methodological orientation for a conjunctural rereading of Marx in the present (Martin 2002, xv). Because Marx believed that “every historically developed social form [is] as in fluid movement” (Marx 1973, 20), Martin showed us that Marx’s lesson is that we must write “from the perspective of fluidity” (Martin 2002, xxi). Whether this is ultimately convincing or not demands further discussion. The fact remains that in classical Marxian theory when the worker’s subjectivity is objectified in the product, the subjectivity becomes separated from her physicality (which causes alienation) to only become embodied as the consumer’s subjectivity upon consumption. Is it sufficient to compress the temporality of this “exchange” such that there is no longer a frozen moment of objectification that would make of the dance as product an object we do not recognize as the danced phenomenon? In general, the phenomenological orientation of dance studies would doubtlessly resist this orientation. Nevertheless, one can find some support for it in the rhetoric of the *Grundrisse*, as I have tried to point out. But as with the term *socialism* itself, the point remains contentious. I addressed this in *The Work of Dance* by saying: “Dance exchanges what it does not produce and produces what it does not exchange” (Franko 2002, 167).

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that in these early essays of the 1990s Randy Martin was working with a complex theoretical model of spectatorship at the dawn of dance studies. It was only in a subsequent essay (Martin 2004) that he pulled together the threads of these reflections to assert a quite explicit relation between dance and socialism, a relation he discussed as experiencing parallel crises of eclipse. “In the face of an all-consuming market rationality, a movement [the danced movement] that has no other purpose than to allow people to gather to reflect on what they can be together is perhaps the supreme figure of an ongoing desire for socialism” (2004, 62). This statement has the value of showing how he conceived of the relation between dance, socialism, and mobilization. Although he wrote on topics other than dance, the fact remains that dance remained for him *the* critical method. “To privilege dance analytically, as a critical method, invites thought from within its own conditions of movement, from the means through which bodies are assembled” (Martin 2015, 144). It was in this sense that Randy was both inside and outside the field of dance studies, and it is also why he remains central to us as dance theorists.

Notes

1. See the Editors' Note to this issue. I hesitate between talking of Randy or Randy Martin. Although this article is not a personal tribute, I must acknowledge how much Randy's perceptions influenced me throughout my life as a scholar, and I write this in appreciation of his work, which I only now begin to consider as a quasi-totality and attempt to comment on as such. In some of the issues raised here we were in dialogue. For a more personal reflection on Randy and dance studies see Mark Franko, "The Kinetics of Dance Theory and the Social Movement of Desire" (2015b).
2. All quotations from the 1992 article are taken from *Meaning in Motion* (Desmond 1997, 321–43). The second essay is an expansion of the first, which was then further reworked and expanded as "Dancing the Dialectic of Agency and History," and published in *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (1998).
3. Martin gave explicit attention to the relevance of Marxian theory today shortly thereafter in his book *On Your Marx* (2002).
4. Martin also wrote: "The case must always be made for reading Marx precisely because the value of his work comes to us neither already guaranteed nor already surpassed. Its meaning must be produced. . . . One way of keeping marxism alive and lively is for it constantly to be reread, retaught, and relearned." (Martin 2002, 3).
5. The auto-ethnographic impulse in his work was also evident in his first book, *Performance as Political Act* (1990) as well as in parts of *Critical Moves* (1998).
6. Martin's most succinct definition of these terms occurs in the Introduction to *Critical Moves* where he links "the relation of agency" to the "execution of the [choreographic] idea" and history to "the mobilization of critical presence" (1998, 16). Hence performance and spectatorship explicitly bring agency and history into relation.
7. "People interpret others, and themselves, in a bewildering diversity of idioms" (Clifford 1988, 22).
8. As Martin wrote in a later essay: "As a means of reflection, both performance and theory operate to produce certain self-understandings, or concepts of identity based upon a situation of seeing some other" (2004, 47).
9. The *Grundrisse* were notebooks Marx wrote between 1857 and 1858 in preparation for *Capital*. See Kemple (1995).
10. In his last book, *Knowledge, LTD.* (2015), Martin sketched a theory of historical kinesthemes from the classical to the modern to the postmodern. If the classical kinestheme was based on verticality and sovereignty, and the modern kinestheme was based on depth and individuality, the postmodern kinestheme was a critique of both verticality and depth: "The postmodern represented a shift from centered to de-centered movement sensibilities" (Martin 2015, 171).
11. For further discussion of Janet Wolff's reflection on dance and dance theory, see Franko (2015a).
12. In *Critical Moves* (1998, 44) Martin attributes the notion of historicity to Alain Touraine (1988).
13. It certainly relates to Martin's theory of overreading.
14. See the article by Susan Leigh Foster in this issue.
15. Although it needs to be said that Martin gave a great deal of attention to the phenomenon of technique in relation to dance and labor, which would demand a separate study.
16. It was only later that he saw postmodern dance as a political relation of the United States to the Third World (Martin 2000). In discussing Yvonne Rainer's well-known description of neutral doing as a technique for the performance of *Trio A*, Martin wrote:

Although no reference is made to nature per se, the absence of any cultural reference suggests that the focus on these bodily movements serves as a platform for the universalization of a particular practice. This reflexive but un-self-reflective generalization of the conditions for making bodies work is consistent with the apotheosis of

In his later writing, Martin would focus on Trisha Brown as the globalized form postmodern dance had taken albeit in this connection it was decentered.

17. This is not Martin's claim as such, but he does not develop his critique in a historico-aesthetic dimension. He returns, however, to the notion of a historical trivium in his discussion of the kinesthemes of dance history: "The triptych of classical, modern and postmodern ways of knowing would be more properly rendered as a trivium" (2012, 71). By trivium, he refers to the verticality of classicism, the depth of modernism, and the de-centered kineasthetic of postmodernism. I have attempted to rethink Martin's trivium as sovereignty, the I–Thou relation, and the impersonal, respectively, and to argue that despite its historically grounding, each kinestheme can be articulated in the present; that, indeed, the very presence of kinesthemes is a phenomenon of articulation itself (Franko 2017, 172).

18. The mechanisms of assembly of the audience under capitalism and socialism were of great interest to Martin, but we shall leave this aside for the moment.

19. He acknowledged the influence of Michael E. Brown in this respect, with whom he coauthored an article, "Rethinking the Crisis of Socialism" (Brown and Martin 1991).

20. See note 7 above.

21. "Derivatives articulate what is made in motion, how production is inside circulation, and, as such, how to notice the value of our work in the midst of volatility" (Martin 2015, 52). See also page 5 of that essay where circulation is understood as "the future actionable in the present" prior to any positioning of value as such (understood as production).

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