

# THE PERSISTENCE OF DANCE

Choreography as Concept and  
Material in Contemporary Art



Erin Brannigan

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in Contemporary Art*

**Erin Brannigan**

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*To Sunny and Billy Westbury*



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## PART I

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### State of the Art

The introductory section of *The Persistence of Dance: Choreography as Concept and Material in Contemporary Art* begins by defining its field of study. This work is distinct from contemporary dance presented on the stage that has its lineage in theater and classical ballet and is, rather, contemporary choreography where the central preoccupations and conditions correspond to those driving the broader contemporary arts: *dance as a contemporary art medium*. Such work has been exposed as both a crucial catalyst for innovation within broader aesthetic developments, and a distinct permutation of art categories such as the post-conceptual. This goes beyond superficial associations of dance and choreography with strategies such as the experience economy and participatory aesthetics that have been employed in the service of a reinvention of the museum. *The Persistence of Dance* addresses the question of what dance histories, practices, and knowledges bring to contemporary art in its broadest sense in the first decade of the new millennium. Chapter 1 introduces the project of the book. Key artists, theorists, terms, and methodologies are introduced, and the chapter ends with a survey of the book's chapters. The introductory case study, *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer* (2011) by American choreographer Sarah Michelson, exemplifies the work under discussion: a self-reflexive, durational choreography with telescopic range and disciplinary rigor. Chapter 2 outlines the methodology of attending to the poetics or the *work of the work* of dance where the case studies exemplify methods of *experimental composition*. Foundational dance principles and key choreographic concepts that draw on a dance lineage focused on the materiality of the body and its biological parameters are described: *the mind-body, singularity/collectivity, presence/participation, process, practice, composition* and *performance*. These add new analytical tools to the rich

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history of formal analysis within art theory, and through their inclusion within an intermedial context we can rediscover them in a new light. The analysis and definition of these terms are drawn from multiple sources on choreography across the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries and scaffold the discussion of case studies across the book, articulating with the material elements of dance unpacked in Part IV: *breath, weight, tone, movement, force/energy/effort, rhythm, and space-time*.

# Chapter 1

## Unassertive Persistence

### *Dance beyond Theater*

#### 1.1 Introduction

*The Persistence of Dance: Choreography as Concept and Material in Contemporary Art* seeks to understand a new field of creative work that has garnered attention from our major art institutions, changed the way that dance circulates in cultural economies, and become an exemplar of post-disciplinary art.<sup>1</sup> This work is distinct from contemporary dance presented on the stage that has its lineage in theater and classical ballet, and is, rather, choreographic works where the central preoccupations and conditions correspond to those driving the broader contemporary arts: *dance as contemporary art medium*.<sup>2</sup> It is also distinguished from performance art, which is understood as an expansion of visual arts practitioners into theater and has been defined as a “genre of the visual arts”; the dance-based works under discussion here would be more accurately aligned with a different lineage—choreographers such as Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Trisha Brown who forged unprecedented intermedial modes of dance.<sup>3</sup> Such work, currently exemplified in case studies by artists such as Sarah Michelson, Maria Hassabi, and Latai Taumoepeau, is neither subsumed into the logic of the visual arts from outside nor an invention from within, but figures within an inclusive understanding of contemporary art. Recent research has revealed the crucial role such work has played within broader aesthetic developments in the arts since the mid-twentieth century, and its position in the contemporary situation as a distinct permutation of art categories such as the post-conceptual and post-disciplinary. This history, and its trajectories into the present and future, have nothing to do with the superficial associations of dance and choreography with museum strategies of renewal such as *the experience economy* and *participatory aesthetics* that have railroaded more robust analysis of this important field.<sup>4</sup>

Among what some have described as a domination of dance and choreography within the recent performative turn in the museal sector, definitions, specificities, and careful framing have often been lacking.<sup>5</sup> Various iterations of *dance in the gallery* have included adaptations of stage-based works for the new context, works made for proscenium theaters located in multi-arts centers (such as the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis and the Centre Pompidou, Paris), new works responding to exhibitions and permanent collections, and public programs engaging visitors in the practice of dancing. This project seeks to refine definitions of this broader field by following artists' self-determination and intentions. As *Artforum* editor David Velasco notes, there is a "dissonance between those who aspire to the museum or think inside its terms and those for whom it's simply another horizontal 'space' to work in."<sup>6</sup> In order to overcome broad generalizations and associated misrepresentations, *The Persistence of Dance* turns to key works and exhibitions amongst the broader performative turn, and relies on the commentary of the artists themselves, to unpack the specificities of this still emerging field. While the aforementioned activities have their own benefits and challenges, the focus will be on choreographic works that, to reiterate, share the preoccupations driving the field of contemporary art; they are presented as a part of that field, both inside and outside the major arts institutions.

Situating the current field in dialogue with preceding periods of intense dance-visual arts exchange is crucial to the mapping ambitions of *The Persistence of Dance*. A recent wave of literature has revised the narratives of the mid-century period through a focus on individual dance artists, such as the work of Carrie Lambert-Beatty on Yvonne Rainer, Meredith Morse on Forti, and Susan Rosenberg on Brown.<sup>7</sup> This revision of the historical backstory to the current situation has been important in making sense of the new choreographic work—how it can be defined, characterized, contextualized, and analyzed in terms of its specific lineage back to the work of John Cage, Halprin, and Neo-Dada. In the following I refer to the *second-wave dance avant-garde*, which was centered in post-Merce Cunningham New York from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, and the *third-wave dance avant-garde* beginning in Europe in the early 1990s and continuing until the present in local occurrences. The deeply intermedial condition of dance since its emergence at the turn of the twentieth century, post-classical ballet, is beyond the scope of this work, but that historical backstory informs a resistance to arguing for innovation where there is often, in fact, a return.<sup>8</sup> A central premise of this book and its compan-

ion, *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s-1970s* (2022), on the earlier, second-wave avant-garde—that the interdisciplinary depends upon the disciplinary—acknowledges a delicate balance in the field between the corporeally focused findings of disciplinary leaders, and the special condition of dance as *always already intermedial*.<sup>9</sup> *The Persistence of Dance* thus insists on a disciplinary identity for the art form historically, in response to the more recent expansion of *choreography* as a practice, object, metaphor, and concept.<sup>10</sup> From Forti's seminal work in Yoko Ono's loft in the early 1960s, to Michelson's disciplinary incursion in the Whitney Museum of American Art in the 2010s, the case studies here exemplify a sharpening of the medium-specificity of dance in the intermedial field of the contemporary arts where all arts are (apparently) equal, and discipline comes in the form of a rigorous, critical survey of the state of play. So while the approach in this book acknowledges that notions of post-discipline, a-discipline, indetermined, and generic art are all relevant to the field under discussion due to the significant role of dance in the intermedial revolution of 1960s North American experimentation, I ultimately plump for *post-dance* as a category within which to discuss the future of the still emerging field of *dance as a contemporary art medium* to retain hard-won and highly specific disciplinary knowledges and practices.

## 1.2 Intermedial Methods for Intermedial Practices

If Western dance in its interdisciplinary formulation was confronted mid-twentieth century by Forti et al., it re-emerged in the twenty-first century within a complex set of relations between, first, intensified and widespread experimental and intermedial/post-medium creative practices; second, a crisis in disciplinary terminology; and third, the visual arts' turn to performance more generally, and dance specifically. These are the key developments that broadly frame the project of this book. The following thus centers its critical work on creative practices within the associated network of institutions, discourses, and traditions with which such developments interface: dance training, dance studies, dance studios/centers, museums of art, galleries, art theory, art criticism, historiographies, canons, contracts, literacies, ethics, writing, sculpture, theater, archives, capitalist economies, and curatorial practices. So transmedial practice and the accompanying inter- and intra-disciplinary scholarship have, as Australian art theorist Terry Smith declares, paved the way toward what I hope

approximates “a genuinely contemporary art-historical” position that can hold all that is of relevance to the work of the work.<sup>11</sup>

Curated exhibitions have set the terms for much of the recent framing of the dance-visual arts story, which is taking time to emerge in the critical and academic literature of artist-theorists, critics, and scholars. The post-2007 work of curators such as Sabine Breitwieser, Corinne Diserens, Eva Schmidt, Catherine Wood, Stephanie Rosenthal, Helen Molesworth, Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle, Ana Janevski, Thomas J. Lax, Martha Joseph, and in Australia, Hannah Mathews, Lisa Havilah with Emma Saunders and Susan Gibb, and Zoe Theodore, is of interest to this project. Their exhibitions have brought to light the work of artists both historical and contemporary between, across, and among choreography and contemporary art. However, with its own rich history of analysis and practice, dance literacy within the visual arts context has been exposed as a blind spot. This has had repercussions regarding contemporary art historiographies, but also curatorial practices, associated presentation opportunities, and access to/for audiences, and is symptomatic of the power imbalance between the visual and performing arts. As Smith writes, contemporary art is “a trendsetting force within international high culture” and certainly trumps contemporary dance in terms of visibility, influence, and scales of economy.<sup>12</sup> And as Tate Modern Director of Programme Catherine Wood points out, this suggests we pause and consider what dance has to gain in this new order.<sup>13</sup> The pressing question of the inclusion of dance in art collections and archives is driving points of tension between museum and choreographic processes that are underscored by issues of power and authority.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere I have described within the character of dance “an unassertiveness that is constitutional and productive, rather than negative, [which] allows the discipline to advance into territories that are undefined and thus still under-negotiation, in a persistent and tenacious way.”<sup>15</sup> With dance becoming “the newest desirable art object,” *agency* and *intention* become central and need to be balanced with the openness of the form.<sup>16</sup>

Institutional critique has always accompanied the development of dance as a contemporary art; the form has historically dealt with complexities around the fixity of the art object, documentation, commodification, and subjectivity, and has demonstrated a resistance to institutional spaces. Upon entering the museum or gallery, dance is forcing institutional change not only at the level of internal procedures for collection, conservation, and archiving, but the very architectural context of the museum as

well as its ethical practices of care and stewardship. However, the important recent work within museum studies on the impact of performance and choreographic practices on curatorial, public programs, infrastructure, and conservation work is peripheral to what follows.<sup>17</sup>

*The Persistence of Dance* centers the question of what kind of dance is appearing in galleries and museums across the turn of the twentieth century and why. This can only be understood in relation to both the discipline-specific and shared histories, practices, and knowledges across dance and the contemporary arts, which are revealed by attending to the *work of the work*. Such an approach is anchored by the material-conceptual bind that has framed developments since the 1960s. New understandings result from a turn to medium-specific dance elements such as *breath, weight, tone, movement (qualities), force/energy, rhythm, and space-time*, which supplement and sometimes replace visual arts elements such as line, figure, surface, volume, color, etc. Dance elements, compositional practices, and choreographic concepts offer much to the rich and historical field of formal analysis within art theory and update the toolkits available to match contemporary practices. In the eleven case studies in this book, dance tests its disciplinary terms through intermedial exchange, and the approach taken in what follows—which Smith might describe as part of the “historical materialist critique” of art—perhaps argues for some commonalities or “consistent dimensions” across these works at the very moment that contemporary art is often defined as “periodless,” “posthistorical,” and “anachronic.”<sup>18</sup> Such a move is dependent on the genealogies established across this book which follow those set out in *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s-1970s*.

An imperative for dance to reclaim its own language, which has appeared since the turn of the twenty-first century within both practice and commentary, follows a prior movement across the 1990s to shed dance of *dance* at the very moment it entered into a newly intense dialogue with the other arts. This reclaiming supports the disciplinary work in my approach and extends to general artistic principles such as labor, process, context, presence, concept, material, authorship, and subject, which also feature in dance and choreography. In the following case studies, such terms are *fleshed out* through an *incorporation* of how they persist in these new choreographic manifestations. Through such a method, aesthetic strategies and features that were developed in the second-wave dance avant-garde such as an interest in presence, an anti-representational mode, an emphasis on process over product, a critique of visuality and movement, and self-

reflexivity, can be identified in the more recent work of artists such as Michelson, Meg Stuart, Boris Charmatz, Hassabi, Shelley Lasica, Agatha Gothe-Snape, Adam Linder, Taumoepeau, and Xavier Le Roy to argue for a continuity between the earlier period and the current third-wave dance avant-garde.<sup>19</sup> Other artists who belong to this configuration would include Latifa Laâbissi, María La Ribot, Alexandra Pirici, Trajal Harrell, Nadia Lauro, Senga Nengudi, Melati Suryodarmo, Jennifer Lacey, Ralph Lemon, Sara Wookey, Tino Sehgal, Pablo Bronstein, and François Chaignaud and Cecilia Bengolea, and a new generation including Yve Laris Cohen, Miriam Kongstad, Malik Nashad Sharpe, Ligia Lewis, Andros Zins-Browne, Isabel Lewis, Jimmy Robert, Mel O'Callaghan, Gerard & Kelly, Daina Ashbee, Eisa Jocson, Paul Maheke, Alex Baczyński-Jenkins, Jahra Wasasala, Tamara Cubas, River Lin, and Isaac Chong Wai. I begin with Michelson in Part I to draw out the key themes of this book and bring us closer to understanding the topography of this still emerging field of practice.

A focus on *the practice of producing works of art*, that is, *composition*, differentiates my approach from an interest in the archival impulse of the museal turn to performance, a separate and rich field of investigation that appears here only in the notion of the body-archive as a material, processual, and resistant feature of the discipline.<sup>20</sup> Choosing this method of analysis has also led to a general (but not total) exclusion of philosophy and critical theory. This has constituted a discipline in itself and a way of working that is out of step with current popular methodologies.<sup>21</sup> We have recently seen the most significant philosophical turn in dance studies since the work around Michel Foucault and the subjected body of the (ballet) dancer in the late 1980s to early 2000s.<sup>22</sup> Monographs on the state of the art released in the last decade make substantial use of continental philosophy—particularly the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari—including books by Jenn Joy, Petra Sabisch, André Lepecki, Bojana Cvejić, Ramsay Burt, and Derek McCormack.<sup>23</sup> This body of work in many ways constitutes a Deleuzian turn in dance studies. In counterpoint to this excellent work, in the following chapters I do not bring a toolkit of methodological apparatuses to my encounter with interdisciplinary creative practice (in dance studies typically philosophical lenses such as phenomenology or post-structuralism, but also anthropology, sociology, or musicology), but frameworks and concepts drawn from theories of composition, and utilizing specific terms for particular works that undertake singular compositional experiments.

### 1.3 Revision and Specificity: *Choreography as a Contemporary Art Medium*

Part of the task here is to reassess the use of terminologies such as *avant-garde*, *intermedial*, *conceptual*, *material*, as well as *choreography*, *dance*, and *dancing*, in light of claims made by, and on behalf of, a group of European choreographers working since the early 1990s. Geographic, economic, and cultural specificities are exposed as major players in the public profile of this group referred to as “conceptual,” a cohort of artists also closely associated with the engagement between dance and the art museum. An expansion of the field of dance as a contemporary art medium beyond this group contributes to decentralizing the critical debates that shape not only historiographies, but the kind of work being made. Paradigms from art history such as modern, post-modern, Minimalism, and conceptualism, which have often been applied to contemporary dance in misleading ways, are confronted by putting dance analysis into dialogue with art theory to arrive at a more representative account of the current state of affairs. Overall, the (relatively) new and international field of choreography as a contemporary art medium is considered in light of the ongoing contributions dance-based knowledges make to progressive art practices, including non-object-based or dematerialized art, and post-conceptual, post-disciplinary, and participatory practices. This lens incorporates the “prehistory of contemporary within modern art,” a project that dance has been largely excluded from but to which it can offer rich models of contemporaneity such as “the ontology of the present . . . what it is to be in time.”<sup>24</sup>

Finally, the dance-gallery interface is a stubbornly white space. African-American choreographer Ralph Lemon is an important and high-profile spokesperson on this; he quips (good-humoredly) that Michelson’s work “is the whitest” work he’s seen.<sup>25</sup> He also describes the layers of minoring at play here when he notes that being a dancer in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) atrium (as opposed to its main galleries), was “about being in that body politic and that kind of ghetto” and “less about being black and more about being a dance person.”<sup>26</sup> Systemic racism within the relatively minor form of contemporary dance is writ large once you reach a sub-genre within it such as dance as a contemporary art medium where the endemic white privilege of “high” art weighs in. In Australia, important work by First Nations artists such as Latai Taumoepeau (Tongan-Australian), Vicki

Van Hout (Indigenous Australian), and Brian Fuata (Samoan-Australian) is emerging as some of the strongest in the field. And, internationally, artists have diversified from the narrow racial and socio-cultural profile of the North American second-wave to include Vera Mantero (Portuguese), María La Ribot (Spanish/Swiss), Maria Hassabi (Cypriot), Trajal Harrell (African-American), and Miguel Gutierrez (Colombian-American) who are highly visible and subject to rigorous critical attention. The latter's "Does Abstraction Belong to White People?" is a powerful statement on "the politics of race in contemporary dance," and joins work by Lemon that confronts the tensions between a predominantly conceptual, analytical field of contemporary dance, and the realities of race, community, politics, and culture that increasingly partner with the same.<sup>27</sup> African-American scholar Thomas F. DeFrantz has also been increasingly active as both a commentator and curator specifically regarding the racial inequities in the field of dance as a contemporary art medium.<sup>28</sup>

In *Choreography, Visual Arts and Experimental Composition 1950s-1970s*, the historical background for the current work across dance and the gallery required attention to an influential group of artists made up of white, middle-class, educated, English-speaking Americans and Europeans. Their influence was ensured by privileges such as their democratic society, access to relevant and sometimes powerful cultural resources and organizations, international and national mobility, and the benefits of philanthropic traditions and government arts subsidies that supported national cultural priorities. Other artists highly relevant to the discussion of the field's emergence, including Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica living and working in Brazil, and Cuban-American Ana Mendieta, have been written into this narrative by theorists such as Lepecki, and in curatorial work by Rosenthal and others. The important but unrealized project of Adriano Pedrosa, Julia Bryan-Wilson, and Olivia Ardui, *Histórias da Dança / Histories of Dance* (2020), at Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand in Brazil, expands the historical field globally and the catalogue and anthology are manuals for future revisions.<sup>29</sup> Important essays by Lepecki and DeFrantz cogently set out the terms for a curatorial way forward that acknowledges the legacy of "neoliberal imperial colonialism" inherent to current systems of curatorial care, inclusivity, and institutional framing, and seeks a different apparatus that might encourage deeper change through attention to "sensation," "microecologies," and other "radical or antinormative potentialities."<sup>30</sup>

One contribution this book makes to decentralizing the current field

is the introduction of important case studies from the South Oceanic, including the work of Taumoepeau alongside other Australian artists of settler descent—Lasica, Linder, and Gothe-Snape. Writing from the geographical (if not socio-economic) periphery in Australia throws fresh light on the legacies of North American art as they continue to inform and shape local activities, while recognizing local knowledges and practices that have previously been excluded from our art historiographies. I work in Sydney, Australia on the land of the Gadigal and Bidjigal people of the Eora Nation. This locates my position as an Australian of Irish and Danish political exile, convict, and settler descent working within the Western tradition of contemporary art and dance, with awareness of the much deeper cultural traditions that bind music, dance, painting, sculpture, and site in the art of our Indigenous people. I pay my respects to elders past and present and extend those respects to all First Nations readers. I anticipate a growth in self-determined trajectories and opportunities for local First Nations choreographers engaging with choreographic and visual arts disciplines, processes and contexts already begun by artists such as Amrita Hepi, Van Hout, Tammi Gissell, Daniel Riley, and Dalisa Pigram. “Always Was, Always Will Be, Aboriginal Land.”

#### 1.4 Scoping the Field: Across Theory and Practice

As noted previously, Michelson, as a UK-born, New York-based choreographer, is a key case study in this project and an analysis of her work, *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer* (2012) follows as Case Study 1. Her works made for the gallery help map out some of the key arguments in this book. The central position of the conceptual here aligns with the broader shift in progressive art toward the conceptual and post-conceptual since the mid-twentieth century. The following notes the continuity between the emergence of this tendency in relation to Minimalism and Neo-Dada and current dance-gallery work in order to insist on a role for dance as a contemporary art medium within this development. So rather than see the recent museal turn to dance as a new migration or intermedial experiment, we can understand how it is the most recent expression of an historical exchange. Links such as those between Brown and Michelson are integral for understanding the recent work at the interface between dance and the visual arts, and this book bridges those two periods of experimentation in dance: the second-wave dance avant-garde and the third-wave dance

avant-garde that began in Europe in the early 1990s and is still underway. Chapter 4 directly addresses continuities and innovations between the recent and earlier, mid-century period, building on the work of Cvejić, Lepecki, and Rudi Laermans who also address the legacy of conceptual art vis-à-vis the third-wave dance avant-garde. Avant-garde is understood here, following art theorist Peter Bürger, as a critique of the autonomy of art through a narrowing of the art-life divide, thus constituting an attack on established and stable (autonomous) forms of art.<sup>31</sup> *The Persistence of Dance* also recognizes the complicity between originality and repetition in avant-garde art in step with art theorist Rosalind Krauss's understanding of the term. The North American art theorist writes that "the actual practice of vanguard art tends to reveal that 'originality' is a working assumption that itself emerges from a ground of repetition and recurrence."<sup>32</sup>

The two periods under discussion both feature the use of the term "conceptual," and have examples of the intermedial practices operating between dance and visual art cultures that I refer to as dance as a contemporary art medium. Both set such activity against a lineage of dance that is committed to theatrical presentations and codified dance languages. They reference, repeat, and diverge from that lineage which has existed since the early twentieth century and which has been identified (often using the language of visual arts) as modern, minimalist, post-modern, dance theater, contemporary, conceptual and post-dance. Dance as a contemporary art medium parses dance cultures, knowledges, and practices with the cultures, knowledges, and practices circulating in the broader contemporary arts in a history of exchange that can be personal and specific, or generic and random, and is part of the move toward what Krauss refers to as "post-medium."<sup>33</sup>

Using terms in dance theory and history that artists do not use confidently in their own historical situation is problematic, and attempts by dance artists to engage directly and critically with -isms formulated in the visual arts can set the terms for their place in history, as we shall see in the case of "conceptual dance" in Chapter 4. However, given the proximity of artists and ideas across disciplinary divides since the 1950s (at least), it is not surprising that dance engages wholeheartedly and critically with such terms. One of the conclusions drawn in this book is the asynchronous complicity of dance in the formulation of notions of *the conceptual* in art practices, and the significant distinctions the art form evidences in its manifestation of the same.<sup>34</sup> Dance as a contemporary art medium is a part of the broader contemporary dance activity that has played a major

role in shaping a uniquely disciplinary take on conceptuality which, I will argue, features (1) a specific take on the role of its materials therein; and (2) the uniquely covert, unstable, and multiplicitous nature of the operations and condition of its concepts. Building this argument, then, requires attention to the material of dance in its grammatical and social condition as a discipline among other disciplines in Chapters 2 and 7.

Case studies are drawn from a field of choreographic work within the third-wave dance avant-garde that has taken a leading role in an inter- or transmedial field for contemporary art as we move further into the twenty-first century. In many of the cases that follow, the work does in fact manifest as dancers dancing in a gallery or art museum space. This “pointy end” of the broader intermedial situation brings some of the central issues into high relief, particularly those relating to the political and economic tensions that haunt the dance-gallery liaison and which provide a backdrop to my focus on the approach to experimental intermedial composition in each case study. Lepecki and Mark Franko ask, “what are the conditions of labour of the dancer and choreographer in the framework of museum performance?” and refer to Bruce Nauman’s score directive to “hire a dancer,” which describes curator Mathieu Copeland’s approach discussed in Case Study 3.<sup>35</sup> Their line of questioning has been repeated recently by Catherine Damman, in relation to *Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done*:

The issue was never whether dance belongs in the museum or gallery, but rather what we do with dance—and how we treat dancers—once it’s there . . . Modest demands might look something like this: Pay attention to dancers, to dancing itself, and to the specificities of dance history and forms.<sup>36</sup>

Following Damman on the specificities within the field, it is in the work of individual artists and artist-led exhibitions where we find the most progressive formulations of the dance-visual arts dialogue emerging from communities of practice and criticality. Such work is at the center of what follows, and their specificity necessarily reveals the actual conditions for the artists, both practical and aesthetic, and how these two facets inform each other. Supporting information is gleaned from interviews, reviews, and profiles, but also artists’ contributions to panels and seminars that accompany exhibitions, discourse that is unevenly transposed into texts that are accessible and enduring.

The eleven case studies demonstrate how dance and choreography are in dialogue with both the art *context* (galleries, museums, and their apparatuses) and contemporary art *practices*, and are participating in a new exchange that repeats the conditions of Neo-Dada where the dance artists were largely in control of their engagement with the visual arts, defying the dancer-as-dupe narrative that recurs in the discourse on the field.<sup>37</sup> In fact we have seen a significant shift away from the hire-a-dancer model that was at the center of disciplinary tensions in the early 2000s, particularly in North America, toward a commission-a-dance-artist model in the case of the new generation of artists listed above. Case studies include much-cited male French conceptual artists such as Charmatz but move beyond the same to decentralize the field from a politically and geographically limited inheritance as noted, expanding the idea of a third-wave avant-garde to include important forerunners such as Stuart (USA/Germany), and artists outside the American-European axis, mapping a more diverse international field. Added to the key case studies of Michelson (UK/USA) and Hassabi (Cyprus/USA), are those of Australian artists Taumoepeau (Australian/Tonga), Lasica (Australia), Linder (Australia/Germany/USA), and Gothe-Snape (Australia). Each brings to the foreground specific elements such as repetition, duration, sensation, attention, physical virtuosity, improvisation, presence, and subjectivity. Other artists discussed include Le Roy (France), Sehgal (UK), Chrysa Parkinson (Belgium), William Forsythe (Germany/USA), and Philipp Gehmacher (Austria).<sup>38</sup> I have attempted to include artists working on modest *and* highly visible projects, representing a diversity of cultural and economic contexts, but also varied disciplinary profiles in relation to their engagement with dance and choreography. For example, Gothe-Snape identifies primarily as a visual artist but has trained broadly across body-based practices.

I have also interviewed many and recall Alain Badiou's observation on the vagaries of writing on living artists: "if they contradict you completely it's a weakness."<sup>39</sup> While I take full responsibility for this text and its arguments, there are elements of collaboration that have emerged from this process and I am very grateful for the generosity of those artists who agreed to share their perspectives with me (Lasica and her collaborators, Linder, Hassabi, Taumoepeau, and Gothe-Snape). Such collaborations have sometimes helped address the issue of "availability" from Smith's list of challenges for any commentator on contemporary work, an issue particularly pertinent due to the "local prejudice of contemporary dance," in the words of Fabián Barba.<sup>40</sup> While I have primarily limited my examples to

works and exhibitions I have encountered in person, there are some historically significant cases that needed addressing for which I depend on interviews, video footage, photographs, and secondary sources.

Alongside innovations in practice, the writing of historians, theorists, and the artists themselves seeks to reinstate dance as a participant in, and generator of, the micro- and macro-ecologies that shaped contemporary art practice in the twentieth century and continue to shape it in the twenty-first. David Velasco and his team's impetus in publishing the MoMA *Modern Dance* series of publications is the latest iteration in a larger project to bring dance out from the shadows of the modern art monolith and articulate its singularity in relation to the same, but also to decenter historical narratives by viewing them from a new position.<sup>41</sup> From American art and film critic Annette Michelson to Lambert-Beatty, Anna Chave to Velasco, champions needed to emerge on the "other side" to realize this shift in perspective, but they have been slow coming. The work of British art theorist and philosopher Peter Osborne, alongside the writings of artist-theorists Henry Flynt and Sol LeWitt on which he draws, and Robert Pincus-Witten, provide a theoretical framework for connecting the second- and third-wave dance avant-garde that supports the importance of dance's contributions to our post-conceptual present. Osborne also models a close reading of the work of artist-theorists that forms the backbone of the method employed here and to which I shall return. Other visual arts scholars who provide relevant perspectives on the current condition of contemporary art include Hal Foster, Lucy Lippard, Robert Pincus-Witten, Alexander Alberro, Zöe Sutherland, and Claire Bishop. Theorists working within dance and performance studies who have turned their attention to the field under discussion include Noémie Solomon, Thomas F. DeFrantz, Bojana Cvejić, Catherine Damman, Isabelle Ginot, Jeroen Peeters, Ramsay Burt, Petra Sabisch, Rudi Laermans, André Lepecki, Mark Franko, and Alessandra Nicifero. Others, such as Marcella Lista, Kirsten Maar, Pamela Bianchi, and Josefine Wikström, have brought dance knowledges into their work in art theory and curation. This list includes some of the most recent thinking around the dance-gallery activity that is rapidly shifting, changing course, and evolving. To swim in the *current* is always an experiment, and my particular improvisation is heavy with citations and call-outs in order to map an emergent field of practice *and* discourse for respondents to come.

To briefly summarize the shape of *The Persistence of Dance*, the work of the dance and visual arts theorists, historians, and critics mentioned

above provide a complex field of discursive lenses that support my critical engagement with specific works, artists, and exhibitions within the field of dance as a contemporary art medium. This approach coalesces in Part II with the story of the emerging field as it has been presented via curatorial frameworks. Gallery and museum practices have played a major role in identifying key artists, setting the terms for how the field interfaces with its public, and creating the historical narratives within which such work is understood. Individual artist studies also appear in Part II, and include the important and pioneering work of Stuart, whose early gallery-based work has been largely overlooked and has been followed by her recent return to visual arts contexts. Part III attends to the male French conceptual artists who have come to represent the established dance avant-garde—Le Roy and Charmatz—to understand: (1) the emergence of the critical categories of *conceptual dance* and *choreography as concept* and associated redefinitions of key terms *dance* and *choreography*; (2) the continuities with the previous generation of iconoclasts and any new innovations; and (3) any bearing this has on the field of creative work I define as dance as a contemporary art medium, in order to finesse our definitions of the types of work that have appeared in galleries and museums. A close consideration of Charmatz's *Musée de la danse* (2009–2018) and *Manger* (2014) is helpful, particularly when put into dialogue with the more recent work of Adam Linder and the other case studies in Parts IV and V: Shelley Lasica, Maria Hassabi, and Agatha Gothe-Snape. Exploring the usefulness of the categories *conceptual* and *post-conceptual* in Parts III to V continues work begun in *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s–1970s* on the function of visual art categories and labels within dance studies, and helps clarify the historical, cultural, aesthetic, analytical, philosophical, and practical grounds on which the two art forms currently meet.

In Parts IV and V, artists working with choreography among the international contemporary art milieu are discussed not so much in relation to their “art historical inheritances,” or through the performance studies lens that has dominated much discussion of the field, as pointed out by Wikström, but by considering their invention of new authorial modalities, working methodologies, and material manifestations that underscore the inheritance that dance as an art form has delivered to the contemporary arts at large.<sup>42</sup> The book concludes with the persistence of dance within the current post-context with a definition of *post-dance*. The “post” of “dance” can be understood with the help of Osborne who is describing the “post” of “conceptual” and “structuralism”:

. . . postconceptual art stands to conceptual art not as postmodern art was thought to stand to modern art, but rather as poststructuralism may be taken to stand to structuralism: namely, as its philosophical comprehension and the elaboration of its consequences.<sup>43</sup>

So, post-dance can be seen as an elaboration of the consequences of the project of contemporary dance as it played out in the twentieth century, the period in which it was also born. It allows us to imagine a specific field of creative practice engaged in the ongoing re-invention of dance and choreography in the twenty-first century both in terms of re-location (within the contemporary arts broadly rather than theater) and re-turn (to practices that it itself contributed uncredited knowledges to), as well as one that aspires to a general condition that is post-colonial, post-heteronormative, post-ableist, and post-neuronormative. The final case study, Latai Taumoepeau, orients us toward the future of the dance-gallery relationship, demonstrating the decolonizing, decentering, and indigenizing strategies that are reshaping the contemporary art world.

One last comment on the structure of the book. The five parts are divided into chapters and case studies to avoid hierarchical relations between theory and practice in the units of the book. The reader will find some of both in all sections as they have informed each other in developing the arguments that follow. While there is a narrative flow and sequential construction of my case for a distinct set of artists working between and across the cultures of dance and contemporary art, the challenges of a deeply intermedial project are accounted for in this design as readers with specialized knowledge in one field or another can choose their own journey between sections, rehearsing aspects of either art theory or dance analysis, exhibition chronologies, and choreographic histories. I expect the reader can choreograph their own dance among the various assemblages that constitute this work.

## Case Study 1

# Sarah Michelson—Choreography as Concept, Dancing as Material

Choreographer Sarah Michelson, an artist-in-residence at the Whitney Biennial 2012, won the Bucksbaum Award for best work for *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer* (2012). For the first time a choreographic piece had taken the main prize in a visual arts exhibition for emerging American artists that has established the careers of many major names since becoming an annual event in 1932. This indicator of our post-medium condition spotlighted an artist who states emphatically that she is “A CHOREOGRAPHER” and who has both tested dance critics’ measures for the art form *and* asserted a commitment to the discipline.<sup>1</sup> Michelson’s residency seemed to be a turning point in the history of The Whitney, occurring at a time when the institution secured dedicated spaces for performance in a new building that opened three years later in 2015. The “multi-use space for film, video and the performing arts” joined Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall as a performance-ready space in a major art institution, this time within The Whitney complex in the heart of New York.<sup>2</sup> However, in 2014 Michelson told her friend, *Time Out* critic Gia Kourlas, that she was ready “to go back” to her “home,” the theater.<sup>3</sup> What was it about *Devotion Study #1*, an explicitly theatrical work, that pulled focus at the very moment the interest in dance from the visual arts world was at an all-time high?

*Devotion Study #1* brilliantly and conscientiously brings the encounter between the discipline of dance and the visual arts institution into high relief, a strategy shared by many of the case studies that follow.<sup>4</sup> Distanced from the European focus on non-dance at this time, Michelson’s work appeared at the height of the curatorial interest in dance and cut through with boldly disciplinary preoccupations couched in conceptual terms. The disciplinary work included turning The Whitney gallery space into a theater space, drawing attention to its floor as Michelson’s primary



Sarah Michelson, *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer*, February 26, 2012 at 2012 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photograph © Paula Court.

surface, stressing the limited temporal duration of the work through repetition, highlighting the agency of the dancers whose labor was foregrounded, referencing the American modern dance heritage that belongs to New York, and citing the reductive strategies through which dance and the visual arts moved into such close proximity in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> David Velasco notes that while Michelson had presented her choreography in the museum before this work, this is “the first to be sited in a museum gallery, to be not just proximate to the corridors of visual art but *of them*.”<sup>6</sup> The focus on dancing in the museum or gallery as contemporary art—not part of public programs or relegated to archival work—is the subject of this book as we observe choreography moving into museum collections, including the museum’s struggle to formulate an ethical framework for their dealings with dance and dancers.<sup>7</sup> As I trace developments from the mid-twentieth century to the recent field of work at the interface between dance and the gallery, we find the conceptual and material intricately bound to each other, quite often *through the conversion of material realities into conceptual propositions*.

Michelson was drawn to the vast fourth-floor gallery space of The Whitney (rather than the second floor where Whitney “legacy” works have taken place), which she set with minimal staging elements designed by herself with others: simple costumes, floor graphics, a neon sculpture of Michelson by Charlotte Cullinan, text by Richard Maxwell read live by Michelson and Biennial curator Jay Sanders who were seated in the audience, sound, and lighting. The choreography consisted of five dancers entering the 5000-foot-square space one at a time, walking backwards in a variation of a triplet (a Merce Cunningham travelling step in three-quarter time, one flat step, two on a rise), arms raised horizontally, in time with a metronome beating at 152 beats per minute. Moments of stillness gave the dancers some reprieve as they stood, stationary, for a pause that Michelson stretched to ten minutes, a much-needed rest but one which extended the parameters of inactivity-as-agency to an almost untenable degree. The dance repeated one movement—walking—which continued for one hour and 20 minutes for Nicole Mannarino who was the first and last dancer to appear in the space.

Michelson describes it as “an exhibition of the dancer’s devotion to dance.”<sup>8</sup> She elaborates: “we spend our lives and our beings and our money, hours and hours in the studio . . . this form, this interest, and it’s our lives . . . this is what I have done with my life, this is it.”<sup>9</sup> The large neon image of Michelson mentioned above looked down on the dancers from one of the walls. Esteemed dance critic Deborah Jowitt describes how “the dancing becomes increasingly amazing” due to the dancers’ commitment to their task.<sup>10</sup> Michelson states:

The rehearsal process was definitely a labor of love. Especially between me and [dancers] Eleanor [Hullihan] and Nicole Mannarino . . . it was about the task, and how the dancers kept trying to apply themselves to the task . . . I started thinking about the American dancer in *Devotion* (2011). I started understanding it as a kind of clarity, like Modernism with a capital M.<sup>11</sup>

The figure of “the American dancer” is evoked in *Devotion Study #1*, in tune with the earlier *Devotion* presented at The Kitchen and the Walker Art Center, in which Michelson employed what Velasco describes as a “mythopoetic” mode.<sup>12</sup>

That figure also played an important role in the mid-twentieth-century Neo-Dada configuration dominated by John Cage, Cunningham, and Robert Rauschenberg outlined in *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental*

*Composition 1950s-1970s*, and in the ensuing historical shift toward conceptual art that is discussed in Chapter 6.<sup>13</sup> Cunningham, Michelson's teacher in the early 1990s, had passed away two years prior to the premiere of *Devotion Study #1*. She told curator Philip Bither that she found herself explaining who he was to one of her young dancers, Non Griffiths.<sup>14</sup> The discipline and labor that Rauschenberg so admired in Cunningham's company was part of a longer tradition of rigor, both physical and conceptual, that contemporary dance brought to the renovation of classical ballet. Focused work with the materiality of the body remained central to the experiments of the second-wave dance avant-garde that embraced the pedestrian, utilitarian, and aleatory, experiments which are referred to in the account of dance elements in Chapter 7. The proximity of medium/material and experimental composition in the work of the mid-twentieth-century dance artists was linked to other key concerns such as process, improvisation, and performance. Michelson presses this history through the commitment of her dancers to the task at hand, underlining the disciplinary through a kind of "dignity," in Velasco's words, that equates to a kind of advocacy.<sup>15</sup>

Michelson's comparison of her American dancer with Modernism underlines the reference to the historical figure in her work, a critically distant view presenting us with *the dancer as an idea*. The dancers' physical duress that is much commented on in reviews, presents dance as a *discipline* in the sense of Foucault's systematic subjection of the individual to an external code.<sup>16</sup> This subjection becomes "impossible to dodge," in André Lepecki's words.<sup>17</sup> But the terser demonstration of consensual subjection through the exposition of labor by the sweat-drenched dancer is converted, as Lepecki points out, to devotion through the work's title.<sup>18</sup> This confers agency back to the dancer who demonstrates unreasonable, irrational but dedicated behavior underscoring both the strength and mystery of disciplinary work. Michelson thus presents us with dance in its disciplinary condition, drawing momentum from its proximity to contemporary art to re-stage the question, "what is a dance?"<sup>19</sup> The result is summarized by her colleague Ralph Lemon: the work "changes contemporary dance as I know it."<sup>20</sup>

In *Devotion Study #1* this revival of an older disciplinary formation for the choreographer-dancer relationship was addressed with sardonic wit in the god-like neon presence of Michelson above the action. Michelson's use of portraiture (of herself and her dancers) mobilized a visual art trope to glibly raise the profile of her collaborators to "stars," and she made a

pin-up of Mannarino whose image, “hippie-angelic in her electric-blue jumpsuit,” has come to stand for the prize-winning work.<sup>21</sup> Presenting the work as part of the Whitney Biennial 2012, the importance of the choreographer-dancer relationship across the history of contemporary dance was spotlighted in the novel context of the art museum with its different conditions regarding agency and authorship. When the media of the artwork are living, complex subjects, how does the institution navigate their status? Where some of the exhibitions cited in *The Persistence of Dance* model a dancer-for-hire paradigm, Michelson’s relationship with her dancers is informed by their specificity and singularity. She states, “the shows themselves aren’t just about dance steps . . . they’re about the people who are doing them and where.”<sup>22</sup> Kourlas goes so far as to say that in Michelson’s prior work with Mike Iveson, Parker Lutz, and Greg Zuccolo (2002-2005), the audience were privy to “a private world,” where the dancers’ “presence defined the works more than the choreography did.”<sup>23</sup>

Minimal differences became dramatic shifts in this austere work (Jowitz registers surprise when they bend forward at some point), but the visual arts audiences started drifting away after about eight minutes.<sup>24</sup> In a 2010 interview with Lemon, Michelson describes how her work is “really directed toward a certain kind of dance lover, someone who’s watching—really watching, and watching in context, and watching completely.”<sup>25</sup>

Loads and loads of people walked out, which I started to find quite energizing . . . In a weird way, dance audiences are incredible and dance is really fucking hard to watch. We’re dedicated to this rigor of watching as well as making it new. It is an entire rigor that we have. Not that an art audience couldn’t have that, but we just have the practice of it. That felt rewarding and clarifying in a strange way.<sup>26</sup>

The contract between dancer and audience regarding labor is undertheorized in dance studies. While dance spectatorship has been understood kinaesthetically, the commitment of dance audiences has a temporality and perceptual depth that requires cultivation and immersion which works in tandem with affective forces. *How to Look at Dance* is a guidebook for the general public that is yet to be written, and the communities of criticality in localized dance oeuvres are currently where such training occurs. Velasco notes of *Devotion Study #1*, “the devoted audience meets the devoted dancer,” not only in terms of attention and rigor, but also regarding intra-disciplinary references (to Cunningham and Tharp in particular).<sup>27</sup>

Michelson's interest in the context of a given work is clear in both her choreographic output, and in her discussions of her practice in which she refers to it repeatedly. Velasco notes her intra-textual inclusion of "institutional agents and supports" in her work, with curators, programmers, and directors featured in person or through portraiture as scenography. This sits alongside a wily colonization of institutional architectures. It all adds up to a telescopic vision including "the site, the network, the milieu," triggered by the task of creation itself.<sup>28</sup> But it begins with the physical realities of the space. Her preoccupation with the floor of the gallery saw her map the original blueprint of The Whitney onto an installed sprung floor as a surface for the work. In her following choreography in the same space—4 (2014)—she and curator Sanders painted 220 squares of flooring in the same colors as the existing tiles (an inappropriate dance surface), noting that the floor in that work is "maybe the most important thing about that dance."<sup>29</sup> Attention to the floor of the gallery space underlines the re-orientation of the visual paradigm from the vertical walls to the horizontal plane of the floor in the dance-gallery encounter. New perspectives on the material forms of the art institution through the introduction of dancing bodies into its spaces was combined here with a critique of art as commodity, testing the limits of materiality, objectification, and accumulative value with the factory-line approach to the floor panel paintings and the fact that Michelson's choreographies do not form a repertoire of works to be repeated. Her works have, at most, two consecutive seasons, and each work departs significantly from the former in style and form, responding to specific contexts, with degrees of self-quotation self-consciously nodding toward an ongoing body of work.<sup>30</sup>

In relation to *Devotion Study #1*, Michelson's telescopic grasp of context was applied to the task set for her "of making contemporary the legacy of performance in the Whitney."<sup>31</sup> Reviewing the work, Jowitt notes that the first time she saw dancing at The Whitney "it was in 1971 and Trisha Brown's dancers were walking on two walls of one of the huge galleries."<sup>32</sup> Brown was performing for the first time in The Whitney and the work was *Walking on the Wall* (1971), part of her cycle called *Equipment Pieces*. As part of *Another fearless dance concert*, Brown's choreography was the art in the space curated by herself, in the same way *Devotion Study #1* and 4 were. Susan Rosenberg notes that Brown "located dance on every available wall space: the floor, three adjacent walls, and the ceiling."<sup>33</sup> Michelson contemporized the legacy of performance at The Whitney by bringing explicit disciplinary business from dance such as the dancer's labor (as

devotion), authorial signature (ironically), and singularity and specificity (“these dancers, this work”) into the art institution as concepts refined through reflexivity. However, Brown had led the way regarding dance-fundamentals-as-concept (gravity), a critique of presentation surfaces in the gallery, and spatio-temporal iteration (the “study,” the cycle) in her earlier work. The pioneering work of Brown is the historical precondition for Michelson’s intermedial encounter in *The Whitney*. Such continuities and departures between the second- and third-wave dance avant-garde are discussed in Part III, specifically in relation to their ongoing dialogue with the visual arts. But first, setting out the knowledges and tools of dance up front in Chapter 2 establishes some disciplinary foundations that have been put into dialogue with other fields of art (specifically sculpture) since the emergence of contemporary dance as a discrete art form, and understands those knowledges and tools specifically in light of this interface.

## Chapter 2

### Intermedial Methodologies

#### *Dance Composition and the Work of the Work*

##### 2.1. Introduction

Practical negotiations between artistic media are an opportunity for dance, as a relatively unassertive art form, to sharpen its own terms through active, dialogic deployment. In 1987, Australian choreographer Shelley Lasica, who was already working in gallery contexts at the time, wrote an article pre-empting the position taken in this book and its companion on the disciplinary versus the interdisciplinary. She critiques the operations of historiography (in this instance Sally Banes's accounts of American "post-modern" dance), raising many issues that it would take years for others to arrive at. This includes her take on the complexity of the backstory for the emerging field of dance as a contemporary art which she traces to Anna Halprin. Her comments on the way forward for critical work within the field of dance studies are prophetic and worth repeating at length:

. . . there are two ways to go: to align dance with other art forms such the visual arts, to beg that it be seen and given the same critical space and import; or to allow dance to find its own language and sources—to see it for what it is and not in terms of 'the other.' It is finally unacceptable to impose the discourse of one activity onto another and hope that it fits somehow; to do so is to underline dance's supposed inferiority as a medium. But perhaps it is not a matter of an either/or situation . . . what is proposed is a discussion of modernism and postmodernism *in relation to* dance, not simply a discussion of modern and post-modern dance.<sup>1</sup>

In an associated footnote, Lasica also warns against dance studies hiding behind “great thinkers” as a distraction from “discussing the work itself.”<sup>2</sup> What follows continues a critical project that grounds itself in the “language and sources” of contemporary dance and the specificities of particular works, while acknowledging the aesthetic conditions of Modernism and its post- (in particular the legacies of conceptual work) as the ground that dance shares with the other arts, thus bringing disciplinary tools to intermedial discourses.

Central to this work is the premise that contemporary dance is a form of *experimental composition*.<sup>3</sup> Such creative work is produced through, performed with, and requires analysis engaging in an “experimental attitude,” defined by Australian theorist Stephen Muecke as “keeping things alive in their place.”<sup>4</sup> Such experiments involve being context-aware, sensitive to participatory networks, self-reflective, speculative, inventive, and affirmative. This prioritizes the local conditions of the work of art regarding its disciplinary origins, performance context, and moment of execution, down to the detail of corporeal specificity and the manipulation of identifiable elements of the composition such as tone, texture, and weight. In this way I hope to stay true to the “signature of the thing,” to use Muecke’s phrase, to remain within its orbit or influence.<sup>5</sup>

So this book aims to engage with the poetics of each case study, where poetics refers to “the resources that the practice itself has chosen,” and for this reason draws on a dance lineage focused on the materiality of the body, its biological parameters, mind-body operations, and the resulting elements specific to the art form of dance.<sup>6</sup> The radical developments in dance in the twentieth century catalyzed a (generalized) disciplinary shift in the mid-century from spectacle to experience, from projected body-image to sensation, which took the disciplinary explorations of the art form to a new level. The history of dance composition (which is covered in detail so well elsewhere), forms the backdrop for a survey of dance principles (this chapter) and dance elements (Chapter 7) which draws on dance and choreographic analysis, including European body cultures, American modernists, African-American dance scholars, and French movement analysis.<sup>7</sup> That history is as radical as it is brief—stepping into the deconstructive tendencies of the modernist/post-modernist project almost from the art form’s inception at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> This genealogy stretches back to the nineteenth century in the work of Frenchmen François Delsarte and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, through the work of

modernists such as Doris Humphrey and Rudolf von Laban, across the mid-twentieth-century lineage of Margaret H'Doubler, Halprin, and Simone Forti, and the emergence of Western somatic practices through the work of Mabel Elsworth Todd and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen et al., to the late twentieth-century wave of French movement analysis in the work of Laurence Louppe and kinesiologist and movement researcher Hubert Godard, and the concurrent revisions of the African-American scholars. *The Persistence of Dance* thus contributes to a new chapter in dance composition studies spearheaded by figures within French, Belgian and American dance theory, which engages intensively with practice through collaboration with artist-experts.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.2 Poetics as Method

Louppe's concept of the "poetics of contemporary dance" provides a method that is committed to artist-led knowledges and processes and allows for rigorous attention to the characteristic elements, terms of production, and modes of circulation particular to a given artwork:

A poetics seeks to define and uncover in a work of art what touches us, animates our sensibility, and resonates in our imagination. Thus, poetics is the ensemble of creative conducts that give birth, meaning and sensuous existence to a work. . . . It does not only tell us what a work of art does to us, it teaches us how it is made.<sup>10</sup>

As this quote describes, poetics is focused on the internal operations (practices), sensuous form (products), and spectatorial affects (sensations) of a work of art, understanding the latter through the former. The work is not autonomous of the affects it engages, but is constituted through them; as Louppe states, "every work of art is a dialogue."<sup>11</sup> In addition, poetics is not an analytical method that takes up "a critical position outside the making of dance."<sup>12</sup> For this reason it does not focus on interpretation and decoding meaning (although these things are not excluded), but rather "the implicit prerequisites out of which the realm of appearances opens up."<sup>13</sup> This attention to *the work of the work* as it exists in its encounter with the world sits squarely with Louppe's aim to assert the discipline of dance within its twentieth-century milieu.<sup>14</sup>

Loupe sets out the parameters of her task in *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*:

Only a considerable corporeal and philosophical labour to renew theoretical tools will allow us to advance towards the unknown along a path that contemporary dance has been down so many times before: to set free the luminous modes of practice (more than of representation) . . . without ever allowing a limit to be set.<sup>15</sup>

Questions of method, history, practice, knowledge, and potential/limitation frame her project and set out the terms for what follows here. Repetition, revision, return: these apparently oppositional forces to freedom and advancement are the very ground that opens practice to the contemporary, that heterogeneous collusion of what is present. Australian dance scholar Sally Gardner corroborates the need to further develop tools for articulating and disseminating dance practices and knowledges:

If there is a dearth of shared, experiential, embodied reference points for sharing dance research, there is also no ready-to-hand, widely accepted professional or disciplinary dance discourse. Verbalising about dance is by definition interdisciplinary.<sup>16</sup>

Here Gardner underlines the deeply interdisciplinary history of dance composition studies. Health reform at the turn of the twentieth century provided the context for focused attention on our bodies and the knowledges and aesthetic possibilities held there. The field of somatics developed as an “alternative science,” challenging the establishment with anecdotally based accounts of mind-body research that were, ultimately, run out of town (in the case of Todd at least).<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, choreographic tools were developed, formalized, and disseminated in classrooms and publications. The knowledges accumulating from these areas of research formed the basis of the developing field of contemporary dance, which also drew on philosophy (e.g., John Dewey, Friedrich Nietzsche), science (biology, anatomy), music (composition and performance), and technology (photography, electric light, cinema). The terminology describing this new art form borrowed from all of these fields, but Gardner is also pointing to the special relationship between dancing and language, in and of itself, which constitutes a translation from one medium to another.

### 2.3 Writing Dancing

If dance is—relative to the other arts—undisciplined, unregulated, and unassertive, one danger is that the achievements of dance may be obfuscated when a lack of regulation combines with a resistance to translation into the language of institutionalized knowledge. But this translation is not without its challenges. Choreographer Mette Ingvarstsen, who developed platforms for sharing choreographic tools and methods, puts it simply: “verbal articulation and discursive practice is not the most evident mode of expression in relation to dance as an art form that is primarily physical, corporeal, and non-verbal.”<sup>18</sup> Louppe describes how contemporary dance engages body zones “which have not yet mastered a discourse . . . (the chest, the thorax, back and shoulders),” looking back to Vaslav Nijinsky’s reformulation of the geography of the body to open up movement possibilities, and citing other historical examples of object-like heads and unsupportive feet.<sup>19</sup> Working in a field engaging heavily with the operations of *sensation*, which is bound to perception and the operations of the body, the conversion to language as a linear grammatical system can be reductive, approximate, and even misleading. So, I proceed with an acceptance of the limitations of the medium through which we all work, whether it is choreography or writing.

Theorists who lay out some dance elements, and who will be referenced throughout the book, include Humphrey, Susan Melrose, André Lepecki, Gardner, Bojana Cvejić, and Bojana Kunst. Humphrey’s theory of dance composition is built upon the foundations of design, dynamics, rhythm, and motivation, a focus that owes much to her interest in architecture and visuality, and the use of musical models for organizing movement.<sup>20</sup> Melrose’s recent article on the creative process in dance takes the late Rosemary Butcher’s choreographies as her subject. She speaks of dance as being “outside of language” and troubles concepts of authorship, collaboration, reiteration, and work with characteristics such as multiplicity, singularity, and rhythmicity.<sup>21</sup> In her contribution to the *Post-Dance* publication of 2017, Kunst focuses on “the doing of dance” and its time, space, movement, physicality, energy, rhythm, power, exchange, context, weight, and materiality.<sup>22</sup> Lepecki’s contribution to the *Move. Choreographing You* catalogue cites “corporeality, movement, and ephemerality” as elements “that had been deemed constitutive (and exclusive to) dance as an art form.”<sup>23</sup> And, in her essay, “Notes on Choreography,” Gardner focuses on

movement, kinaesthetics, process, intersubjectivity, and a resistance to language.<sup>24</sup> All of these themes, as well as other important writing that seeks to account for the parameters of the still emerging form, are present in the chapters and case studies that follow.

Among the dancer-theorists cited in this book, a key figure is Jonathan Burrows whose book *A Choreographer's Handbook* exemplifies a poetic and rigorous approach to compositional discourse for dance. Burrows and his creative partner, Matteo Fargion, are presented in the *Motion Bank* project (an online digital repository of choreographers' scores), alongside Deborah Hay, Bebe Miller, Thomas Hauert, and William Forsythe.<sup>25</sup> Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker's work with Cvejić on her book series has been important in uncovering the choreographic practice of a leading artist in the field. The Sarma website, facilitated by Belgian dramaturg, performer, and theorist, Myriam van Imschoot, hosts an important cluster of writers including Mette Ingvartsen, Chrysa Parkinson, Daniel Linehan, Eleanor Bauer, and many others. And in the United States, Jennifer Lacey, Tere O'Connor, Jennifer Monson, and Ralph Lemon represent some of the voices found in the *Movement Research* journal coming out of New York. Australian dance artists writing about their practice include Lasica, Rhiannon Newton, Lizzie Thomson, Vicki Van Hout, Matthew Day, and Rebecca Hilton. The writing of dance artists has been the greatest pleasure to read throughout the process of writing this book, and much more could be done to honor this specific genre of artist-writing that so rigorously brings the thinking-doing body to light.

## 2.4 The Limit Features of Dance's Social Condition (Part 1)

Regarding intermedial work, as Dorothea von Hantelmann states, "when you mix something, it's good to know your ingredients. That's one lesson to be learnt from the avant-gardes: conventions are quite powerful."<sup>26</sup> In Chapter 7, dance elements are described as we head into case studies that exemplify the persistence of dance as a discipline in this intermedial work: *breath, weight, tone, movement (qualities), force/energy/effort, rhythm, and space-time*. These terms are directly related to the physiological operations of the body and constitute a set of discipline-specific variables for dance. Other foundational principles frame and support these terms and the more global concerns of choreography as an art form are discussed in

this chapter: *the mind-body, singularity/collectivity, presence/participation, process, practice, composition, and performance.*

The conservatism that haunts any project interested in disciplinary formations provides a challenge: to account for the *limit-features* of an art form that constitute its *social condition* and identity, while concurrently describing the radical testing of those limits within experimental practice. A focus on elements that have constituted the *grammatical parameters* of dance must necessarily take into account the role of the same as points for resistance, subversion, critique, revision and dismissal.<sup>27</sup> Hence a return to the body and movement in what follows, elements of the art form that have provided the richest fields of limitation and transgression in recent work. Through such a revision, I can offer a set of elements for dance in its post-disciplinary, intermedial condition, bringing us closer to an account of their influence among key moments in the expanded field of contemporary art.

I must also acknowledge that there can be no question of constructing a comprehensive account of such materials. As Louppe points out, Laban's four factors—and any account of fundamentals—are “only a step in the search for ‘choreographic materials’ that are more global and also more disseminated so as to escape fixed frames of adjudication.”<sup>28</sup> There is no attempt here, for instance, to account for choreographic strategies, or “ideas” in Forsythe's terms; that “class of ideas” that can be contained in the term “choreography” and which describe “a possible course of action” (e.g., fragmentation, repetition, interruption, etc.).<sup>29</sup> The focus here is firmly on dancing as the material of choreographic experiments. So I proceed with an understanding that this is a relational and contingent exercise. Cultural, biographical, and social experiences and understandings of these terms cannot be elided in attending to specific case studies.<sup>30</sup> Readers familiar with the dance studies heritage may see the inclusion of this focus as a retrograde step, recalling regulatory prescriptions that fuelled the radical rejection of dance and its trappings in the 1990s. However, in the intermedial context of this project, an account of the tools and strategies discovered and developed within dance is intended to redress an imbalance in visual arts texts that reveal an ignorance of such histories. Curator Yvane Chapuis writes, “the fine arts have, for almost two hundred years, produced a reflexive discourse that dance knows little about.”<sup>31</sup> The opposite is actually the case: very little visual arts criticism references or includes dance theory and analysis. Underlining a tradition of disciplinary

clarity in the field of dance in this study of deeply intermedial practices aims to even up the balance between the two critical fields to match developments in practice.

### Mind-Body

Some attention to the first and most significant of the foundational principles, the *mind-body*, will open onto others. This key concept is the source of many of the other foundations of dance: *presence* and *awareness* as the conditions for feeding receptivity and sensitivity; *process* as the mode for an expansion of the pre- and post-cognitive; *imagination* as the field of exploration and instigation; and a shuttling between *subject* and *collective* or context involving a decentering of a controlling consciousness to be open to other proximate forces and subjectivities. This follows Laurence Louppe and other artists and theorists writing about dance practice and composition who find the mind-body processes that drive movement invention and performance to be at the heart of the art form. As a corollary, for Louppe the central characteristic of contemporary dance is the explicit rejection of the mind-body divide.<sup>32</sup> Mind-body dualism is an invention of modern philosophy, a field that has struggled ever since to overcome that divide.<sup>33</sup> In his essay, “Can Thought Go On Without A Body?,” written in the late 1980s, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard states:

The body might be considered the hardware of the complex technical device that is human thought. If this body is not properly functioning, the ever so complex operations, the meta-regulations to the third or fourth power, the controlled deregulations of which you philosophers are so fond, are impossible.<sup>34</sup>

So even here, as Lyotard is attempting to redress the prioritizing of the mind in philosophy, the body is still in service of thought and the operations of philosophy that depend on the same. The notion that the body may operate in a system of knowledge acquisition or experience that doesn't culminate in language-based operations has only recently found adequate articulation in theories relating to affect with their provenance in the writings of Baruch Spinoza. As Gilles Deleuze states:

The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which

it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life.<sup>35</sup>

Dance-based tools such as kinaesthetic awareness, muscle memory, and body consciousness have named and thus helped mobilize and refine precognitive bodily processes and experiences *through practice*—which is the only way to know and understand how they operate. Dance artist and theorist Nalina Wait's definition of the sensorium and proprioception are at the heart of *kinaesthesia*, and *here she* describes the material or medium at work:

Sensorium is a biological term for the network of somaesthetic receptors and processing centres for the sensory modalities that cover the skin, skeletal muscles, bones, joints, fascia, epithelia (tissue that lines the surface of the body, alimentary canal, and other hollow organs), cardiovascular system, and internal organs. The sensorium includes proprioception, temperature, nociception (pain), haptic perception (touch), exteroception (the perception of the outside world), and interoception (the perception of internal organs and sensations). The sensorium collects and sends information about what the body is doing and feeling to the central nervous system which processes this information and then directs the physiological systems (muscular, endocrine, circulatory, respiratory, and digestive) to respond in the way that best supports the continuation of life (homeostasis)<sup>36</sup>

Processes and associated practices that attend to, and develop, kinaesthetic awareness support the suspension of the good-bad paradigm of mimetically focused dance methods so that the work of movement exploration can begin.

Kinaesthetically aware processes are resistant to the scopic and are grounded instead in *sensations*, *intensities*, and the *imagination*; they exemplify practices “where the body-subject goes looking for itself.”<sup>37</sup> Swedish choreographer Jefta van Dinther refers to this complex, unstable work in the realm of senses and experience as the work of “devotion,” recalling Sarah Michelson, *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer* (2012), Case Study 1, which also links devotion and dancing. He evokes the contemporaneous experience of the viewer:

There is a devotion to our own bodily experience, i.e. creating a sensorial body, not set in time nor space, and a trust that through this experience

an audience can have an experience. We as performers work on ourselves, affect ourselves, do and undo ourselves. We use our bodies to do that, explicitly and actively . . .<sup>38</sup>

Loupe's notion, that dance is "the experimental/experiential scene of being," resonates with van Dintner's description here of the labor of the dancer being on and through themselves as medium (mind-body), doing and undoing subjectivities through physical work, and recalling descriptions earlier regarding the shift from spectacle to sensation in mid-twentieth-century dance.<sup>39</sup>

It also becomes apparent how mind-body work with corporeal sensations and intensities calls for a shift in the field of *perception* from being dominated by vision to becoming decentered, plurisensorial, responsive, mobile, and virtuosic. As choreographer Anne Collod puts it, "dance is an experience of the importance of the phenomena of perception."<sup>40</sup> However, this model of perception is unchained from patterns of recognition and seeking the familiar, and is closer to *attention* as an open, dispersed, and non-assertive form of information-gathering mobilized by/mobilizing affect and sensation.<sup>41</sup> In 2011, I described this model of information-gathering in dance as "somatic intelligence" via Australian theorists Jane Goodall and William McClure. Working in this way, the dancer can circumvent the dangers of speechlessness associated with affect and sensation by channelling incoming stimuli into a corporeal loop so that what is experienced through the body stays with corporeal modes of expression, movement, and exchange.<sup>42</sup> Other theorists have described this as "thinking through the body."<sup>43</sup>

I would, however, like to reconsider the use of terms such as *thought*, *information*, and *intelligence* to ask: what is the appropriate verb for the process through which dancing comes into being? If it's not "thinking through dance," what is it? What is it to stay in the zone of sensation, expanding and thickening the experiential field before recognition, using methods such as interruption, repetition, exhaustion, or constant variation? And how can we name this? What is the verb for this "embodied decision-making" characterized by a decentralized multiplicity within each movement and between each moment that is corporeal/somatic, but also fed by "mental, imaginative, memory-based and responsive processes"?<sup>44</sup> This action that is self-reflexive, relational, expanded, and durational? Is this a very specific type of poetic thought that is characterized by a commitment to the multiplicities of the decentered corporeal field, suspending the

shift away from experience and toward cognition? Is it, as Australian dance artist Rhiannon Newton suggests in her choreographic work, more aptly described as “doing dancing”?<sup>45</sup> Dance artist Chrysa Parkinson says, “if you think of the material of performance as perception, or as relationship (as Deborah [Hay] would say), then some form of ‘doing it’ to understand it makes sense.”<sup>46</sup> Dancing, then, exists in the doing, and understanding it is therefore contingent upon the doing and can’t exist without it. As Newton says, a focus on doing “takes attention away from pre-emptive or reflective cognition.” *Doing dancing*.<sup>47</sup>

### Singularity/Collectivity

The focus on mind-body processes not only takes us to the origins of movement invention; it is also the source of a singularity that has been considered a characteristic of contemporary dance. As Godard states, “it’s always a matter of a unique dancer in relation to a unique spectator.”<sup>48</sup> In recent definitions of dance and choreography, a traditional understanding of singularity has been set against a new emphasis on collectivity (to which I shall return). According to the dance-as-singularity thesis, every individual negotiates the world via a specific gestural orientation or “corporeal signature” shaped by tangible cultural influences, invisible forces, and degrees of unconscious physiological work.<sup>49</sup> Melrose describes this “named, potentially singular, skilled dancer” as a product of the dancer’s “bodywork as well as her ways of being in the world.”<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere, I have described this as the dancer’s idiolect: “the gestural parameters, performative domain, or corporeal specificity” of the dancer.<sup>51</sup> Dance emerges from, and reflexively plays with, this notion of singularity. If the medium of dance (the dancer in this instance) is specific, complex, and unrepeatable in its unique condition regarding physiology, training, disposition, spatio-temporal context, and presence within an encounter, it is also “knowing” of such conditions in its self-reflexivity.

At the center of Louppe’s understanding of the project of contemporary dance is the assertion that “action is the consciousness of a subject in the world.”<sup>52</sup> Her book features choreographers from the late twentieth century whose research propelled them toward “heterogeneous and profoundly individual vision[s].”<sup>53</sup> Some dance theorists identify an attempt in more recent dance work to disconnect notions of particularity or individuality from the dancer in order to debunk “the figure of artist as unique and original source of the new [sic],” in line with the critique of the subject in the

post-structuralist project.<sup>54</sup> One could add into the mix here Yvonne Rainer's counter-argument in 1976 on the impossibility of a "neutral" body.<sup>55</sup> This came from an artist whose early experiments with the object-subject bind of dance (and those of her peers) were a development of Merce Cunningham's experiments with the same through his repression of traditional forms of expression in the dancer. Kunst describes the concept of "autonomy" as "one of the basic aesthetic utopias of early contemporary dance" that "seems today to be in ruins, together with its emancipatory effects and self-rotating exclusiveness."<sup>56</sup> However, in a 2003 article, Burrows and his one-time collaborator Jan Ritsema describe "the feeling that we are composed by our life in which we perceive and experiment and are perceived and experimented on by other internal and external parts," linking this to Spinoza's "celebration of individuality."<sup>57</sup> So questions of the subjection and/or empowerment of the subject in and through dance persist.

The broader critique of the subject within philosophical discourse impacted dance studies most significantly in the application of Michel Foucault's theories of the subjected body to various critical projects. Foucault's work described the impossibility of the body-subject escaping subjection to sociocultural conditioning, and this theory was applied to various codified dance forms whose centrality within dance pedagogy was being challenged.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, *all* dancing bodies were equally condemned through the application of Foucault's subjected body discourse, with slivers of hope coming to light recently through attention to Foucault's 1966 radio interview, "Utopian Body," in which proprioception figures as an exit from subjection.<sup>59</sup>

An alternative discourse on the dancing subject is Kunst's definition of *autonomy*. In her revision of the term, autonomy in dance "is not a static essentialist concept" bound to "originality," but "an artificial process where links of representation and necessity to the modern subject can be disclosed."<sup>60</sup>

[For philosophers, dance's] autonomous streak reveals a different (perhaps imaginary and artificial) *history* . . . a history of evasiveness and instability, where representation is inefficient due to a freedom lurking in stitches and cracks; a place where the body is allowed to glitter without form, freely generating a playful tension between its presence and disappearance. It is not a history of representation any longer, of taking the place of the Other—it is an artificial, playful process of performing, where different potentialities of embodiments are disclosed.<sup>61</sup>

This resonates with van Dintner's "devotion" of the dancer to working on the unstable material of their own dancing body, and with the description of dance earlier as emerging from, and reflexively playing with, a specific physical world—embracing its inherent "instability" and constant modification, tiny discrepancies (in "stitches and cracks"), ephemerality ("glitter without form"), and the materiality and fragility of its "presence." In such a scenario, individuality is put into play with many other forces and options. For instance, Burrows and Ritsema comment on "the pleasure of recognising individuality as a product of all possible possibilities."<sup>62</sup> This network of *specificities, possibilities, and limitations* produces the autonomy and singularity of the dance.

The apparent opposite of singularity is "collectivity," and here I quote American choreographer Jennifer Lacey on the collective imperative in dance/choreography as a practice:

Dance is about people spending time together, thinking by behaving, and modify [*sic*] their thoughts by modifying their behavior: it is potentially a very powerful work.<sup>63</sup>

The collective dimension of choreography returns us to questions of the art form's disposition as unassertive, open, and inclusive, and thus, its particular facility for intermedial experiments. It could be persuasively argued that theater and film are infinitely more collective than dance as an art as dance is often developed through solo practice. But the special condition of dance as social, relational, and medial is set out in scholar-artist Noémie Solomon's notion of *en-dehors* as "a constitutive technology of the choreographic discipline that shapes the dancing body and its conditions of visibility"; an "ontological and ethical impulse" outwards, upon which the very condition of singularity depends on the establishment of difference.<sup>64</sup>

In a 2008 interview with Christophe Wavelet, French choreographers Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy agree that the main difference between dance and the visual arts—specifically in training and creative process—is that the visual arts promotes the singularity of the artist, while "choreographies suppose a certain communion: of bodies, of movements, of their capacities, and their way of offering all of these a visibility."<sup>65</sup> Le Roy went so far as to base a teaching method on this; "the aim is to start afresh from the fact that all choreography in general presupposes a collective experience. It's no doubt the specificity that is characteristic of this field of art."<sup>66</sup> How-

ever, comments from Bel on his process suggest that his emergence as an “auteur” depended upon a very singular experience. When asked how he tried out his choreographic ideas, he answers, “in isolation. Alone.”<sup>67</sup> On his work *Jérôme Bel* (1995) he states:

as I had, first of all, worked out everything alone, I was able to show [the performers] the actions necessary . . . As the propositions were very specific, there wasn’t much to discuss. The aim was to be concise and efficient.<sup>68</sup>

For Bel, collectivity moves away from the very traditional model of the choreographer-dancer relationship described here when he turns to his understanding of “the audience function” as the site of the work’s “resolution.” He states, “what interests me isn’t the performance, it’s what it articulates, what it addresses to all those who come that night to see/ receive it: the audience,” as “ephemeral community.”<sup>69</sup> So the collective impulse of dance includes not only the choreographers and dancers, but also the audience, the component of the *mise-en-scène* of performance that Frédéric Pouillaude so nicely links to the very term *contemporary*. He describes contemporaneity as “a neutral simultaneity, a contingent coexistence . . . all that belongs to a particular time.”<sup>70</sup> This definition can be applied to “the contemporaneity of performers and onlookers,” but also to the performance itself, which “conserves the heterogeneity of the spectacular elements without hierarchizing them.”<sup>71</sup> It also chimes with art theorist Terry Smith’s notion that “contemporaneity is the fundamental condition of our times,” and that “being with” (con) “time” (tempus) is what makes contemporary art contemporary in ways that are distinct from the modern and post-modern.<sup>72</sup> If this is the case, it explains the currency of choreography as a model for an “ontology of the present” suited to such a condition.<sup>73</sup>

A *non-hierarchical community* describes the aspiration of some of the most radical dance experiments of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including collaborative creative teams exemplified in the Cage-Cunningham-Rauschenberg legacy. Contemporary choreographer Trajal Harrell has evoked the Judson community as exemplary regarding models of an ethical-social context for art and art-making, citing “rapport” as key to his practice:

I think in dance, unlike any other field, the support from those with whom you compete for support is . . . critical. How many of us could have any

kind of work without the professional support of our colleagues? The same colleagues we compete with for money, gigs, re-cognition, etc. . . . I think the precarious economics of dance requires a kind of mutual collegiality that isn't necessary in, say, the visual arts where there is more potential for economic freedom.<sup>74</sup>

The “audience of artists” that Catherine Craft has written about in relation to the mid-century North American art scene operates in an even more intense way in the close communities of artists working in independent contemporary dance, where discussions about the lack of life-work division frame broader ramifications regarding modes of process, practice, and production.<sup>75</sup>

### Presence/Participation<sup>76</sup>

When asked what is essential to dance, Jonathan Burrows answered, “presence”:

For in this immaterial and impermanent of art forms in an increasingly disposable global art market, no structure, score, improvisation, material, image, movement or idea can ever matter enough to argue. In this we begin and end with the image of a human being walking onstage to endure, resist or confront an audience, whose discomfort reveals something to us about our own uncertainty and bloody-mindedness in the world.<sup>77</sup>

Burrows is arguing that what is essential to the art form is not so much the content of a dance (method, resources, concepts), which rate little in generic art economies, but the time-space of a confrontation or co-presence and what that encounter does to its participants: the affects and effects of presence. Perhaps this is what Mary Wigman meant in 1963 when she described how, in her work as a choreographer, she “toiled and worked on the human being, with the human being, and for the human being.”<sup>78</sup>

To consider the presence of the dancing body is to turn wholeheartedly to the subject-object issue as it relates to dance. As Sally Gardner and many others have pointed out, “body-subjects are both the agents and the objects of their own actions and are continually transformed by them . . . bodies exist only insofar as these emerge in the dynamic particularity from the flux and organizing forces of social actions, movements and

vitalities.”<sup>79</sup> These subject-objects are the *processing centers* within specific situations, with agency, responsiveness, and adaptability, characteristics that set them apart from other gallery-based phenomena. Carolyn Brown describes her memories of dancing with the Merce Cunningham Company in 1953:

I remember almost nothing. The essence of performing is its ‘newness’—no mind, no memory. Just that brief time when one has a chance to be whole, when seemingly disconnected threads of one’s being are woven and intertwined into the complete present. No other. No past. No future. No mind as an entity distinct from the body.<sup>80</sup>

Present tense and presence are interwoven here and recall the autonomy of dance; according to Kunst, “autonomy is not about the *exclusiveness* of the moment, but about *different possibilities of presence and being in the present*.”<sup>81</sup>

A playfulness with the “different possibilities of presence and being in the present” exemplifies the autonomy of dance, pointing to an agency that interferes with repressive models of subjection or a simple collapsing of the subject and object. As a verb formation, the notion of *doing* dancing introduced earlier cleaves some space between the dancing as an outcome and the doing as a process. “Being with dance,” as Newton terms it, puts the subject into a *relation* with dancing, a virtual distance that interferes with the direct inspiration or intuition cited by artists such as Isadora Duncan. This space could be characterized by what Newton describes as “an increasingly specific logic between the dancer, the environment and the accumulating dance,” which is not necessarily cognitive, but is experimental and contingent.<sup>82</sup> In such a situation—exemplified in the historic and contemporary dance avant-garde—the role of a dance foundation such as presence is not denied, but expanded, tested, and revised. As Kunst says:

This moment of presence has nothing to do with authenticity, originality, with geography or territory, but with an always artificial construction of autonomy—which itself is nothing more than a *masquerade*, an artificial tactic of presence and being present at the same time, a strategy that potentially discloses a different moment.<sup>83</sup>

Some strategies that have been identified among this general critique of presence include stasis, replication, documentation, duration, and dis-

appearance. On the latter, Lepecki writes, “what could this daring thing be in dance, since invisibility, imperceptibility, and modesty all go against the consistent privileging of ‘presence’ in Western theatrical dance? This privileging of presence seems to be predicated on a ‘powerful narcissistic capacity’.”<sup>84</sup> So the critique of presence in dance is linked to questions of authorship, and the question of where the dance begins and ends in terms of subjectivity.

In Burrows’s account, presence depends upon a witness—the audience. The participatory potential of dance in terms of spectatorship is linked to its profile as a collective method, as described above, and is one of its most appealing aspects in the museum context which has been traditionally yoked to artifacts, material archives, and objects.<sup>85</sup> In the approach to spectatorship within dance studies, social dance has a special place regarding participatory practices. In a theater dance context, various theories have attempted to account for the phenomena of experiencing movement when *watching* dance in a co-present situation. *Kinaesthetic empathy* has been in circulation for some time and an early version was introduced in 1946 by dance critic John Martin who wrote of “the inherent contagion of bodily movement, which makes the onlooker feel sympathetically in his own musculature the exertions he sees in somebody else’s musculature.”<sup>86</sup> Mary M. Smyth took a more scientific approach to the subject in 1984, concluding that “if there is kinesthetic communication such that we experience a sense of movement when we do not move, then this must be mediated via the other senses and we need to ask how this can be done.”<sup>87</sup> The discovery of mirror neurons, “synaptic connections in the cortex that fire both when one sees an action and when one does that action,” offered one scientific explanation for the phenomena.<sup>88</sup> However, the plurisensoriality hinted at by Smyth (and mentioned in the discussion of the mind-body) is addressed at length in the work of Godard.

In Godard’s discussion with interviewer Suely Rolnik, titled “Blindsight,” he draws on his important work in dance and movement research and analysis to describe sensorial aspects of the art encounter as participatory, non-vision-centric experiences.<sup>89</sup> His focus here is on the work of visual artist Lygia Clark in order to describe a new type of visual art work in the mid-twentieth century that was calling for (or responding to) alternative modes of perception. He fleshes out the spectatorial dimension of the plurisensorial work described earlier in relation to the mind-body of the dancer, bringing the two together. Drawing on his knowledge of kinesiology, biomechanics, and physical rehabilitation, Godard explains

subjective vision—as opposed to objective vision—as “subcortical,” where “the person blends into the context. There is no longer a subject and an object, but a participation in a general context.”<sup>90</sup> This vision is not related to time, gravity, history of the subject, or interpretation, but is “more of the order of ‘geographic’ vision” informed as the subject moves in space-time.<sup>91</sup> He refers to this type of vision as “blindsight” and describes not being able to see the chair directly in front of you but still being able to negotiate around it *indirectly*.<sup>92</sup> This begins to sound less like vision and more like a network of sensorial exchanges shaping our experience of being and moving in the physical world. He refers to this as “intersensorial plasticity” or “plurisensoriality.”<sup>93</sup>

Godard goes on to discuss movement development in contemporary dance in relation to this nexus between perception and movement production: if one’s perception is expanded through engaging blindsight or plurisensoriality, then one’s experience of space and movement potential is expanded and with this, the possible “movement of thought.”<sup>94</sup>

For a dancer, [plurisensoriality] is fundamental; dancers must be able to reproduce a movement they have seen, match it with a musical sound, and modulate their motor function accordingly . . . the work carried out in contemporary dance aims to do away with this compartmentalization [of the senses] which is caused by the catastrophe of language, by history.<sup>95</sup>

He applies this to the dance practice of contact improvisation which he posits as being beyond vision: “to try to be face-to-face with the other as weight, as contour, as colour, as a gesture, and to be in the urgency of these primal things—a kind of incredible vigilance . . . it is a peripheral, panoramic sight . . . which is the blindspot.”<sup>96</sup> Godard thus outlines a model of participation in the art event that is informed by dance practice and clinical knowledge, and which offers an alternative to the static, ocular-centric regime of the direct gaze of the visual art spectator that has been critiqued by new art practices and their commentators such as Claire Bishop, Susan Best, Amelia Jones, and Lucy Lippard.<sup>97</sup> These sophisticated ways of thinking about collectivity, presence and participation drawn from dance studies constitute a rich alternative to the reductive discourse and practices associated with the participatory or social turn driving the experience economy in museums and galleries in which dance has been expected to play a part.

Process<sup>98</sup>

Process in a dance context is usually associated with composition or choreography as opposed to training or performance, a stage of development that is invisibilized, that is, absorbed into a final, stable outcome.<sup>99</sup> As Parkinson notes, “most processes are finished once the piece is constructed.”<sup>100</sup> In fact, choreography has been used as an analogy or concept to think through many processes resulting in both stable and unstable outcomes, including curation, as well as beyond the arts, say, in the emergence of social formations and political manoeuvres, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.<sup>101</sup> For Bojana Cvejić, “choreography stresses the design of procedures that regulate a process . . . This resonates with choreographers’ and performance-makers’ current theoretical, self-reflective obsession with working methods, procedures, formats, and performance scores.”<sup>102</sup> The shift toward method over matter in dance, as in the other arts, began in earnest in the mid-twentieth-century milieu. Throughout this period, choreographic process was thoroughly worked over, reinvented, and radicalized through aleatory processes, game structures, rules and limitations, and improvisation. The legacy of this has had far-reaching effects. Parkinson notes that “contemporary dance is very good at creating original procedures. We are brilliant at finding rules and limitations to specify what we do. We are always making things up.”<sup>103</sup> During the earlier period and up to the present, process as the condition of being ongoing, incomplete, and unstable has also been applied to other aspects of dance.

The strong affiliation that the choreographic arts have with process underlines the comparative material conditions of dance. Choreography is not reducible to a single performance, while painting, for instance, can be the equivalent of a static, commodified, singular object. Process is endemic to the form and is something in which it excels. Improvised performance in any media has claims to a special exhibition of process, collapsing composition and performance, but also often blurring with methods of training or practice. Beyond this special case, evidence of process is available in many forms across the arts (amended manuscripts, brush strokes, evidence of technical virtuosity), but these things are most often subordinate to a final, authoritative rendering or version. For dance, there is a role for process in all facets of the medium:

- the ongoing process of technical and creative aptitude that requires attention to a physical *practice*;

- the labour of *composition* which can require singular or collective effort over time and may remain open to change, that is, remain in process within performance; and
- the process of *performance* which can alter any stable or authoritative choreography through context.

### Practice

In tune with the poetic method's emphasis on process and continuity of practice, many dance artists see performances as windows to an expanded situation that encompasses past, present, and future, and a gamut of activities and degrees of perceptibility. European-based Parkinson has written beautifully about dance practice, something she engages in and mentors others through. Asked to define practice she responds:

I started with the idea that there's something I do that is not training, process, or product, and that this thing is what underlies the decisions I make about training, process, and product. And I wanted to call that thing my practice . . . Then I thought maybe I could say the underlying, over-arching thing I do is 'giving and getting attention.' Then, more recently, I thought maybe my practice is just performance . . . The most important thing to me about identifying my practice is noticing it change, letting it change . . . Once a practice is static, it's no longer functional. It becomes a marketable object, a product. Practices have to remain volatile, unstable enough to change.<sup>104</sup>

So practice is both the ground for, and the totality of, the work of the dancer-choreographer. It resists stabilization through naming, being a process that is continually changing and developing, and may have a special manifestation in and through performance—both on and off stage.<sup>105</sup> Here I distinguish practice from both choreographic process *and* performance as product, as a distinct field. In this way it could be linked to training and technique; “habitual or regular activity” in Parkinson's account.<sup>106</sup> However, I do follow Parkinson in acknowledging the co-dependence of the three fields of process in most dance artists' working life as a part of their dance practice.

## Composition

For Louppe, Alain Badiou (via Nietzsche), and others, choreography is a process of restriction and restraint, a setting of limits upon the always already expressive body. This could be applied to both predetermined and spontaneous choreographic composition. Louppe describes dance as “an art of subtraction which offers, said Laban, *a restricted gamut of authorized motifs*.”<sup>107</sup> Badiou notes, “this is perhaps Nietzsche’s most important insight: Beyond [sic] exhibition of movements or the quickness of their external designs, dance is what testifies to the force of restraint at the heart of these movements.”<sup>108</sup> Choice-making—as a form of restraint—is at the heart of dance composition; a simple but important point given that any movement whatever describes the broad field of contemporary dance practices. Choice-making as a process can be determined by any number of methods (e.g., random structures, sensory stimulation, chance systems, formulas, biographical information), and as noted, in most works of art this phase ends once the work is completed.

Many choreographers include choice-making options within their work—versions of structured improvisations using some of the mechanisms mentioned above, or entirely improvised works that represent one end of the spectrum regarding process as practice, also mentioned above. However, dancer Steve Paxton argues for a continuation of choice-making by the dancer in the act of dancing, no matter how fixed the choreographic framework. Paxton comments on his experience performing Simone Forti’s *Slant Board* (1961):

Simone told us (the initial cast) that she worked hard to have an idea and wanted to see those thoughts without other people’s ideas mixing in . . . But upon the slant board or in the fountain of people, I noticed I was constantly making choices. There was no time to get out of my thought to explore hers . . . soon we were involved in making choice after choice after choice, each choice amplified by the sense of will which accompanied it.<sup>109</sup>

Paxton refers to a proximity between his own thought processes and the act of dancing (i.e., *doing* dancing) that squeezes out external choreographic directives under the command of a subjective “will.” If action is intention, an internalization of the imperative may involve degrees of decentering choreographic commands.<sup>110</sup> Dancer and academic Megan Nicely echoes this sentiment: “dances—or more specifically their cho-

reographic directives—can . . . be considered less as stable entities than propositions for rewriting through movement.”<sup>111</sup> Which leads us to . . .

### Performance

The context and event of performance alter the nature of a choreographic work; dancing is affected by the space-time in which it appears with degrees of consciousness about this. So, in comparison to other works of art, dance and performance have the unique capacity to adapt to their environment. They can be in an evolving dialogue with their context, enabling the processual development that embeds the situation in the work. Paxton’s description of performing *Slant Board* is one example of the performer’s role in keeping the process of choreography alive.

In 2013, Parkinson and colleagues curated *The Dancer as Agent* conference that aimed “to shed light on performing dance artists['] approaches and the impact of experiential authorship on artistic production and research.”<sup>112</sup> Questions of agency, authorship, and power underlay the discussions and uncovered the interdependency of practice, composition, and performance. Parkinson writes, “we create a lot of procedures. Often these procedures are transferred to other contexts . . . Who owns a procedure? How do you stop a procedure from moving? Would you even want to?”<sup>113</sup> The recent interest in the dancer as agent is surprisingly overdue and reveals the body archive as an unstable and uncontainable locus of shared knowledges and methods. Alongside an unrepeatable combination of experiences, habits, and capacities that constitute the idiosyncrasy of a particular dancer are patterns of creative behavior, indoctrinating technologies, and shared means of emancipating the body from the same. The medium of the dancer is in constant process; a center of indeterminacy and the source of a characteristic *instability* in the art form that has an impact on any attempts to stabilize the concepts that drive the work, as we will see in Chapter 6.

Many of our foundational elements are drawn together in this discussion of process. The durational aspects of process are essential to the presence/participation it involves, its status as an event or encounter that is experienced both collectively and as a unique, corporeal experience. The strong affiliations of dance with process sharpen its profile as unstable, contingent, experimental/experiential, multiplicitous, and changeable, even in its most conservative form as tourable repertoire. Burrows has often reiterated his understanding of dance as fundamentally unstable.

Here he refers to the relationship between his accounts of his practice in written articles and the practice itself, over time:

When we repeat our own history like this, we are trying to make sense of the past and also to hold the future steady. We do this although we know there is no sense to be made, and no steadiness to be borrowed, but we are overwhelmed by possibilities and this repetition is sometimes all we have to guide ourselves by.<sup>114</sup>

Key terms in Burrows's choreographic discourse are repetition and anticipation, which underline and play with "problems" of stability in dance.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This work on foundational dance principles, and attention to the histories and labour of dance analysis, is essential to articulating how dance as a contemporary art medium has, on the one hand, contributed concepts and practices to the increasingly generic or non-medium specific field of contemporary art, and on the other, instituted its own disciplinary actualization of conceptual work with the materials that constitute it. Experiments with composition have allowed the art form to explore the sensations, intensities, and imagination of the mind-body as medium to produce choreographies that are self-reflexive, relational, expanded, and durational. Such creative work has offered much to the toolkit of the arts from which it borrows as much as gives. The special role of process that has been described at length and across all stages of the work of choreography—practice, composition, and performance—explains how the art form is able to suspend the materials and concepts within a given work in a state of "evasiveness," "instability," and "potentiality," to recall Kunst's terms, so that the qualities of its primary medium—the body—can persist in all of its complexities. This chapter also clarifies the focus of the present book on composition and aesthetics over questions of the dance archive in relation to museal imperatives and the politics of institutional processes and best practices. These are both very worthy topics that have been attended to elsewhere, and with the completion of further work around the latter we will no doubt see dance artists who choose to work within the horizon of contemporary art expanding aesthetic potentials ad infinitum.



## PART II

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### Dance and the Museum

Having set out some of the disciplinary characteristics that help distinguish the particularly choreographic concerns shaping recent contemporary art, in this section a survey of specific exhibitions and curatorial approaches describes the current contexts in which such contemporary work is being presented and what this reveals about the new field. It also clarifies the diversity of creative practices umbrellaed within the field, which is complicated due not only to the convergence of two artistic disciplines (practices, knowledges, economies, cultures, heritages, communities), but associated desires, intentions, agendas, remits, policies, and ambitions that are as influential on the field if less transparent. The section begins with a case study from the 1990s, *This Is the Show and the Show Is Many Things / Extra Muros* (1994), curated by Bart De Baere and which featured the work of American choreographer Meg Stuart. Stuart's proto-conceptual work and the collaboration's processual nature re-introduced dance to the contemporary art museum as a significant force following the innovations of the mid-century avant-garde. Chapter 3 overviews the programming of curators such as Corinne Diserens, Catherine Wood, Stephanie Rosenthal, Helen Molesworth, and many others since 2007, which has brought to light the work of artists both historical and contemporary between, across, and among choreography and contemporary art. Selected exhibition Case Studies 2 to 5, presented in Belgium, Switzerland, France, Sydney, and Melbourne (*This Is the Show and the Show Is Many Things / Extra Muros* [1994], *A Choreographed Exhibition* [2007], *Ghost Telephone* [2016], and *To Do / To Make* [2018]), respectively reveal the format as the primary context within which current artistic developments in this field have been made public. Operating within a post-disciplinary context, these exhibitions model diverse approaches to the curatorial-choreographic relationship, ranging

from institutional prescriptions to localized, community-based initiatives. What they reveal collectively, and with degrees of self-awareness, are the many and varied aesthetic and practical points of confluence, exchange, and tension that describe the dance-gallery relationship. Through attention to the practices of exhibition-making, the stakes for dance become clear at the level of composition, physical conditions, cultural processes, discursive privileges, desire, and related issues of power and agency.

## Case Study 2

### Meg Stuart and Bart De Baere— Choreography and/as Collaboration<sup>1</sup>

American choreographer Meg Stuart's development of her practice as an expanded field of dance within the particularly intermedial scene in Belgium (which produced Les Ballets C de la B and the early experiments of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Jan Fabre, and Wim Vandekeybus), provided the right kind of dancing for what is now considered a seminal exhibition engaging with "relational aesthetics": *This Is the Show and the Show Is Many Things / Extra Muros* at the Museum of Contemporary Art (now S.M.A.K.), Ghent, curated by Bart De Baere.<sup>2</sup> Nineteen ninety-four was also the year in which Stuart set up her company, Damaged Goods, and themes developed there are in nascent form here, as we will see: "absence, exposure and privateness" and "notions of presentation."<sup>3</sup> Rudi Laermans comments on the impact Stuart had in Flanders and Belgium, noting that her first two works, *Disfigure Study* (1991) and *No Longer Readymade* (1993), marked "a decisive turn" in "the twofold trend towards [the] intellectualization of contemporary dance, its increasing position during the 1990s as a medium for both critical cultural reflection and artistic self-reflection," addressing "the body's dominant culturalization" and "the prevailing definitions of the medium of dance." Laermans goes on to credit Stuart with ushering in the field of "so-called conceptual dance."<sup>4</sup>

Stuart writes that De Baere "asked the company to make a performance intervention" in a context "determined by the visual artists."<sup>5</sup> This work is a distinct (and overlooked) precursor of the current field of practice, specifically examples of choreographic works for the gallery that are devised to negotiate existing or surrounding artworks such as Case Study 4, Adrian Heathfield's *Ghost Telephone* (2016). It could be considered an early post-conceptual project which is in line with De Baere's own retrospective framing of the event, and this might explain why Stuart has only

a tentative association with conceptual dance as it has been recently theorized, advancing ahead of the core field of artists. De Baere's exhibition was conceived as "a museum without walls . . . finding a different space for contemporary art," using all of the spaces in the building (including the basement) just prior to the museum's contemporary collection being given its own space.<sup>6</sup> Rather than control the terms of the artists' and performers' engagement with the institution as we see in other curatorial approaches in this part of *The Persistence of Dance*, De Baere set up a framework within which the artists were free to respond as they saw fit. Given the project's strategies such as working processually in the gallery, exhibiting unfinished works, and being reflexive about the relationships between works, this was the ideal situation for dance to reappear in the contemporary art museum since the innovations of the mid-century avant-garde.

Stuart's contribution, which had no title beyond the exhibition name, consisted of "eighteen actions" both improvised and set and performed by thirty-three participants including "dancers, non-dancers, actors and artists" in all parts of the museum building. She notes that this was her first opportunity to work outside a theater and in a gallery, and was fascinated "to see how each spectator, no longer captive in a theater, determined his own timing and sequence of the performance as he was visiting the exhibition."<sup>7</sup> The work was thus all encompassing and everywhere:

As the visitor walked through the museum he simultaneously walked through (and into) the performance. It is his pace—not the choreographers [sic]—that determined the perimeters of each action. Each room in the exhibition—each corner, each corridor—was a viable stage.<sup>8</sup>

For Stuart, "the dance can be seen as physical notes on the exhibition," a corporeal commentary, with some actions integrating elements from other artworks presented, some occupying the spaces of the other art, and some being unnoticeable beside the rest of the work.<sup>9</sup> In the video documentation we see snippets of some of these strategies of *incorporation*, *replacement*, and *integration*. Performers occupy the same space as large objects such as stones and inflatable clear balls, presenting as just another inert object. Elsewhere a figure lies on the ground, mummified by packing tape, trying on objecthood. An elbow protrudes in isolation through a hole in a wooden wall, a defamiliarized joint finding a place among another work. Performers approximate other visitors, peering out of windows and doors as people pass by, or performing moments of intimacy such as kissing or

whispering in busy thoroughfares. Dance in its unassertive, improvisatory, inclusive, collective, physical, and processual condition provides the gestures of commentary, response, and connection that negotiate between art objects, artists, and visitors.

As noted, certain types of dance have been more present in the gallery than others, and Stuart's oeuvre does not have consistent examples of museum presentations. However, there are points of rigorous contact to the visual arts in her early works, particularly in her creative development research where she often engaged visual artists as collaborating designers, and more recently has returned to working in galleries and museums. As dramaturg on *No Longer Readymade* (1993), which had a theater presentation, André Lepecki notes that much attention was given to Marcel Duchamp's ideas about art.<sup>10</sup> This was followed by Stuart's "first large-scale explicit collaboration with a visual artist," German installation artist Via Lewandowsky, on *Swallow My Yellow Smile* (1994), commissioned by Deutsche Oper Berlin.<sup>11</sup> Stuart notes that the following *Insert Skin* series (1996-1998) "attempts to make a direct physical connection between the two mediums," commissioning visual artworks from collaborators and putting art as "costume" ("image" or "prop") into dialogue with a "physical body."<sup>12</sup> In *Crash Landing* (1996-1999), a huge and inclusive project over five editions involving eighty artists from various disciplines, including many of the key players in conceptual dance (Xavier Le Roy, Jérôme Bel, Boris Charmatz, María La Ribot, Vera Mantero, and others), installation artist Lawrence Malstaf "transferred processes" to dance and turned Stuart into an object, "becoming plastic."<sup>13</sup> More recently, as mentioned, Stuart has returned to the museum. *knots and then* (2019) was created for, and collected by, the Archiv der Avantgarden (AdA) in Dresden, and was an improvisation amongst their collection aimed at "revising, reimagining, untying, undoing, and living through the archive."<sup>14</sup> *rune* (2021) was created for the Berlin *Sculpture Festival* with dancer Sigal Zouk and musician Klaus Janek. The performers use their shared history and other materials to improvise in response to the exhibition: "she questions what a sculpture made of dance and sound could look like."<sup>15</sup> *confirm humanity* (2022) is "a solo choreography for two dancers" performed by Stuart and Varinia Canto Vila that expresses the contingency of our humanity through the capacities of the contemporary body and was part of the *Lifes* exhibition at Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.<sup>16</sup> This exhibition seemed to allow its participants unprecedented freedom to contribute and collaborate in the spirit of *This Is the Show and the Show Is Many Things / Extra Muros*, with

a focus on interdisciplinary work, agency, bodies and spaces, and sensory experience.

Significantly for the context of this book, in Stuart's early work there is also an interest in the visual arts at a compositional level. This includes an approach to the body as material rather than subjecthood, an interest in stasis and contemplation regarding spectatorship, and an emphasis on image-making for meaning production. Physical presence has also been a persistent concern. Stuart describes how

visual artists gave me the courage to question my modes of expression and gave me the power to take distance from the languages of Limon, Cunningham and Release. They somehow gave me a license to not dance at all and made me understand that things could be translated . . . spending time in galleries with visual art I learned that another sort of time was required for an image or intention to resonate . . . I wanted to offer that time on stage too.<sup>17</sup>

Another Stuart scholar, Jeroen Peeters, notes that Stuart's interest in image-making was always in dialogue with the "sensory and organic workings" of the body.<sup>18</sup> He sees an interest in the mind-body in Stuart's work, described in Chapter 2 as the first dance principle, as the site of subjective processing and becoming that draws on "signals, energy, concepts, images, identities and archetypes," but producing external effects that often lead to the drama of extreme actions and physical conditions.<sup>19</sup> Peeters isolates the body's negotiation of these internal and external aspects of dance as a pronounced point of tension in Stuart's work, and links this to disciplinary formulations:

It would undoubtedly be possible to write the history of modern and contemporary dance as a negotiation between the visual logic of an ideal image of the body, and the organic logic of a body that moves on the basis of proprioception or a heightened internal sensorial awareness. It would be naïve to assume a strict opposition between an image-based and a physical body, but by considering their tensile relations the body can emerge as a discursive site.<sup>20</sup>

In Chapter 1, I described this shift from spectacle to experience, from projected body-image to sensation in the mid-twentieth century as dance discovered somatics and rejected codified forms of movement. We shall

see a similar interest in the body as discursive site in the work of Stuart's colleague, Charmatz, who challenges the system from within major choreographic institutions, and also Bel and Le Roy who began their experiments with a return to the proscenium theater as performance site (discussed in Part IV). These artists also share a tendency toward minimalism where the tensions between visual logic/registration and corporeal sensation/experience can play out in a clear field.

Stuart's interest in drama is strong and she has been at the cutting edge of dance theater since she began making work. However, her seminal work regarding the emergent third-wave dance avant-garde, which was in contact with the gallery and visual artists, dealt with important issues such as duration, co-habitation, presence, perception, and repetition, all of which would endure in this field. *This Is the Show and the Show Is Many Things*, an example of dancing in a gallery space which co-inhabits with other artists' work, was a precedent for works by Charmatz, such as *20 Dancers for the XX Century* (2013-2017) discussed in Part IV, and as mentioned, Heathfield's *Ghost Telephone*, underscoring such continuities and Stuart's status as an innovator.

## Chapter 3

# The Museum and Dance Since the 1990s

### 3.1 Introduction

In 2013 an exhibition came to my town—*13 Rooms* curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Klaus Biesenbach.<sup>1</sup> It was described by the curators as an exhibition of “living sculptures” featuring “protagonists” who were mostly trained dancers, and the local dance community voiced its discomfort at the hire-a-dancer economy of this star-curator-led project.<sup>2</sup> During the course of the exhibition, a cast of around 100 performers realized works by artists such as Marina Abramović (*Luminosity*, 1997) and Joan Jonas (*Mirror Check*, 1970). The performers were treated as exchangeable “bodies for hire,” overlooking any singularities, and were barely credited for their work. This local case chimed with existing international debates around the presence of dance, and the knowledges developed and refined in the discipline, in museum contexts.<sup>3</sup> In the second decade of the twenty-first century, what seemed to be needed in such contexts was an assertion of dance knowledges and a new visibility for the legacies that had produced them.

Attention to historical precedents of dance as a contemporary art began in the early 2000s with exhibitions such as *Yvonne Rainer: Radical Juxtapositions 1961–2002*, curated by Sid Sachs in 2002; *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*, curated by Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle in 2012; and other surveys and presentations of the work of Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Simone Forti.<sup>4</sup> In 2018–2019, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York presented its first stand-alone dance exhibition of scale, *Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done*, appropriately celebrating the legacy of the downtown dance scene of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>5</sup> This felt like a turning point; the institution was honoring dance as an art form on par with the other disciplines represented in our major art museums. But now that dance was in, was this really where it belonged? The primarily white artists represented

there suddenly appeared so obvious and comfortable in the linear histories of fine art canons.<sup>6</sup> Was dance abandoning its counter-cultural kudos that had kept things a bit murky in the shadows? Now there seemed to be no turning back; resistance on the part of dance seemed pointless given the evidence on display, in this exhibition and elsewhere, of the key involvement of dance artists in the major aesthetic shifts of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> It became clear that if this fact were to be adequately acknowledged it had to happen in the museum, the institutional heart of contemporary art, using the powerful tools of documentation, acquisition, and archive that were at their disposal.

The historical relationship between dance and the visual arts at an institutional level might find its analogy in the Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium space in MoMA as described by *Artforum* editor David Velasco:

Unclaimed, unprotected, the Atrium is allowed to be ‘other’ things to ‘other’ people, a space for those who are adjacent to the visual arts canon articulated in the Museum’s galleries but for whom that canon never really worked.<sup>8</sup>

The monolithic specter of the Western canon of modern art has been a reference point for the artists and theorists of dance as the corporeal art developed concurrently across the twentieth century, but the two have never quite lined up, aesthetically, chronologically, or politically. As French dance theorist Isabelle Ginot notes, “we cannot be certain that the observations inspired by the contemporary art scene can simply be transferred to the contemporary dance scene.”<sup>9</sup> Debates around the appropriateness of terms such as *modern*, *contemporary*, and *post-modern* to specific moments in the history of dance after the revolutions at the turn of the twentieth century are ongoing.<sup>10</sup> The latest contribution is Velasco’s pitch to subsume the art form into the termino-logic of MoMA so that modern dance includes everything from George Balanchine to Sarah Michelson; in Velasco’s words, “thinking the modern larger.”<sup>11</sup> Bringing dance out of the shadows and into the protection of the canon poses a threat to the “unclaimable,” resistant, unstable, and incorporeal realities of historic practices that don’t read clearly in their new context. An advocatorial impulse, a desire to claim ground for dance among the scene of contemporary art since the 1950s, runs the risk of diminishing the otherness that has been of so much value to this singularly *undisciplined discipline*.<sup>12</sup>

This chapter confronts the points of connection and divergence between dance and the visual arts as they are being mapped within museums and galleries, including the special role of *process* in relation to dance practices. Attention to exhibitions and curation is in line with current art criticism and theory that recognizes the rise of such practices since the 1990s as, in some cases, usurping the functions of both the artist and the art critic as chronicled by French artist Daniel Buren and other art commentators.<sup>13</sup> The contributions of dance to new developments in the contemporary arts are outlined, alongside the programming of curators such as Corinne Diserens, Catherine Wood, Stephanie Rosenthal, Helen Molesworth, and many others since 2007, which has brought to light the work of artists both historical and contemporary between, across, and among choreography and contemporary art.

### 3.2 The Resistance of Dance

While this book engages with aesthetic labels from the visual arts canon, it also notes the ultimate shortcomings of those terms and the principles they are in dialogue with when it comes to fully accounting for the practices and knowledges of dance as it has developed as a contemporary art form (i.e., not classical or traditional). This opens a space in which to *move* by acknowledging that the canon, in Velasco's words, "never really worked" for dance. Beyond the always present interface with the visual arts was a multiplicity of influences, realities, and traditions that kept dance "unclaimed" and "unprotected": biology, physical labor, floor surfaces, degrees of visibility, mismatched monikers, community, bodily lineages, touring, poverty, experimental music, somatics, and real estate, to name just a few. The break with institutionalized dance at the turn of the twentieth century through the development of new and unprecedented dance practices was so absolute that a new history began that is primarily gleaned through corporeal inheritances, uncertain memories, inexact reviews, and shameless imitators. As choreographer Jonathan Burrows puts it, "we enjoy this place of privileged deviancy that pulls people in, and has nothing to do with history but is about defiant and intelligent becoming."<sup>14</sup>

The resistance or alternative status of dance in comparison to the relatively stable canons of the visual arts is connected to its deep dialogue,

since the turn of the twentieth century, with *context*, a key element of the art form associated with *process*. Escaping from the bourgeois theater at the end of the nineteenth century into burlesque venues, domestic spaces, schools, outdoor settings, and cinema screens, and then in the mid-twentieth century to community halls, studios, churches, galleries, rooftops, parks, gymnasiums, and loft spaces, contemporary dance was embodying Buren's critique of the process-to-product model of art regarding its habitats (studio to gallery) well before the visual arts did.<sup>15</sup> In his 1971 essay "The Function of the Studio," Buren argues for the artist's studio as the correct home of an art work, and that once removed from there the work-of-art's function changes as other desires, juxtapositions, economies, and architectures are introduced by the "foreign" situations in which it finds itself.<sup>16</sup> In the case of dance, issues regarding a gap between the work and its situation are circumvented, to a large extent, by it being realized with each iteration in situ (for example, in the work of Maria Hassabi), or bringing the audience to its place of work (the studio and university hall performances of the mid-century choreographers). Furthermore, the serious blurring of art-life divisions in the dance sector contrasts, to a large degree, with an emphasis on professionalism, studio-based solitude, and art-as-commodity traditions in the visual arts, particularly at the beginning of this story in the 1950s when such notions were gaining real momentum. The undisciplined, open, social, and intersubjective qualities of dance have, in fact, been points of desire for visual artists since Robert Rauschenberg's associations with the New York dance avant-garde in the 1960s.

Beyond an historical aversion to institutional spaces, dance as an apparently ephemeral art form has also confronted challenges such as the persistence of the art object, adequate means of documentation, financial return on costly layout, audience accessibility, and a resistance to translation into language through its practices and performance iterations. This brought dance to issues such as the dematerialization of art, the nature of creative labor and the archive, (post-internet) art criticism, experience as economy, and participatory aesthetics early on, issues that are now center stage for our museums and galleries. In this sense, the interest in dance and choreography at our major art organizations now outstrips the interest in performance art, as theorists have recently affirmed.<sup>17</sup> At New York's MoMA and London's Tate Modern, two of the world's most high-profile modern art museums, dance content has been favored in perfor-

mance programming as part of either public programs or exhibitions.<sup>18</sup> The performative turn has also given rise to the *performance curator*, a new role pioneered by curators such as Wood and one that has been much discussed in both performance and visual arts discourses.<sup>19</sup>

With dance having a perceived advantage in key areas of interest to the gallery, agency and intention become paramount as major histories come into dialogue with apparently minor ones. This quote from Jérôme Bel around 2010 describes a directive *coming from* the galleries:

. . . for several years now I've failed to find a solution to the London Tate Modern's demand for an exhibition of dance . . . I never managed to find an adequate connection between the museum framework and dance . . . we must try and solve this problem: dance is starting to be recognized as art. In the end it's as if you had to enter the museum to be legitimized! As a result, pressure to exhibit is growing.<sup>20</sup>

The attraction of relatively well-resourced, architecturally impressive, internationally recognized art institutions needs to be weighed up, as Bel notes, with the fact that they may curate the form in alignment with their own “framework” and beyond the artists' chosen trajectories. Seasoned gallery invitee, choreographer, and filmmaker Yvonne Rainer is less starry-eyed about the attention:

I used to think that the museum surround ensures that aesthetic illusion, by refocusing the spectator's gaze, packs the most powerful punch. But in this age of chronically frustrated desires do we want to see more than a painting of a sleeping gypsy? Do you want to see more than the body of a sleeping dancer? Do you want to touch her? Do you want to test her, feel her? Who upstages whom? Does the institution's survival depend on accommodating such an appetite? Must it now provide sensation at the expense of reflection? Spectacle at the expense of ideas? Voyeurism at the expense of contemplation? Should we call this phenomenon a new form of ‘co-optation’ of or by the artist? Must the dancer or performance artist cooperate, collude, or resist?<sup>21</sup>

We shall see how Bel's and Rainer's skeptical attitudes are repeated by artists such as Xavier Le Roy, Jennifer Lacey, and Michelson, as a crucial part of how these artists engage with the gallery as a context for their work.

### 3.3 Curation since the 2000s: Revision, Appropriation, and Potential

New curatorial approaches to integrating dance into exhibition programming began around the same time as the historical work just described and have contributed to defining the contemporary field and projecting future possibilities. Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen presented *Dancing, Seeing* (February 18–May 28, 2007) curated by Eva Schmidt, an important precedent in presenting dance artists alongside visual artists within the body of the exhibition.<sup>22</sup> Diserens, whose exhibition *Peripheral Vision and Collective Body* (2008) at Museion, Bolzano in South Tyrol, Italy was another early venture into this terrain, described a “*désir désespéré du musée pour la danse*” that informs a self-awareness in her curation.<sup>23</sup> Further, Wood’s appointment as the first Senior Curator, International Art (Performance) at Tate Modern led to some considered and powerful programming in new and appropriate spaces. Wood explained to Bishop how “the museum’s interest in programming dance emerged organically from working with younger artists who were appropriating dance, or were interested in choreographing social relations.”<sup>24</sup> A similar pattern has emerged at MoMA and other major museums with the appointment of staff specific to the field of dance and performance. But perhaps the most progressive programming is happening at smaller organizations such as Block Universe festival and Performance Exchange platform in London; Something Great Collection in Berlin; and *If I Can’t Dance, I don’t want to be part of your revolution* in Amsterdam, where emerging artists are being showcased, the roster of artists is diversifying to under-represented and highly innovative new artists, and revised commissioning and presenting models are very much under construction at the time of writing.<sup>25</sup>

The Australian context provides an interesting counterpoint to the international centers of Europe and America in what follows, demonstrating the reach of the intermedial revolution. Melbourne-based artist Shelley Lasica has been working at the interface between dance and the visual arts since the 1980s and has influenced a new generation of artists who have chosen the gallery as one, if not their primary, venue. Smaller galleries such as Gertrude Contemporary and West Space in Melbourne, and Firstdraft and Artspace in Sydney, have been presenting choreographic works since the 1990s.<sup>26</sup> An early exhibition project at Campbelltown Arts Centre in Sydney in 2009 curated by Emma Saunders and Lisa Havilah, *What I Think About When I Think About Dancing*, experimented with plac-

ing choreography front and center in a gallery space far enough from Sydney's center, and adaptable enough (grey enough), to accommodate the risk.<sup>27</sup> The curatorial projects of Hannah Mathews in Melbourne, such as *Framed Movements* (2014), which presented Maria Hassabi's *INTERMISSION* (Case Study 9), have also had an influence on the local scene.<sup>28</sup> For the 2016 Biennale of Sydney, under the curatorial leadership of Stephanie Rosenthal who had curated *Move. Choreographing You* for the Hayward Gallery in London (October 13, 2010–January 9, 2011), there was an unprecedented focus on performance. This included numerous choreographers: Boris Charmatz, William Forsythe, Adam Linder, Mette Edvardsen, Brooke Stamp (working with Gothe-Snape), and artists in Adrian Heathfield's *Ghost Telephone* program (Case Study 4). Charmatz delivered the Biennale keynote, and other public program events focused on choreography.<sup>29</sup> Around the same time, a choreographic prize—the first of its kind in Australia—was established by a local philanthropist and was open to artists with a reputation outside the discipline but with a “choreographic idea,” and one visual artist—Shaun Gladwell—was supported through the scheme in its inaugural year.<sup>30</sup>

Given this brief survey, it seems important to reconsider claims that the high visibility of dance and choreography in our major arts institutions was, and is, primarily driven by a widely criticized opportunism that links dance and performance to a reinvention of the gallery/museum.<sup>31</sup> In this scenario, dance artists are “dupes” who are only in responsive mode, willing to provide the museum what it needs at its own cost. I return to this debate in Chapter 5, but Wood's observation of an artist-led shift that curators were following *toward* dance and choreography allows for the possibility of changes that were happening at the level of practice and in the independent sector of the contemporary arts, where relatively risk-free conditions were providing the opportunity for intermedial experiments that were then filtering their way upwards and into the major institutions. I also highlight Wood's reservations, which are in line with those of Bojana Cvejić, Benjamin Buchloh, and Hal Foster. Wood notes that “Foster links the institutional embrace of ‘experimental performance and dance’ to contemporary art's pervasive state of indeterminacy and provisionality.” She adds:

... these artistic strategies are now celebrated blindly for their own sake . . . performance, which sets its own formats and positions, has become the central arena for this larger state of play.<sup>32</sup>

The post-categorical condition of art, *historically incorporating dance and performance*, is linked to the current general commodification of the arts by Cvejić and others who warn of the colonizing power of the visual arts which may subsume the creative practice and production of performance (and other ephemeral arts practices) into its economy.<sup>33</sup> In 2015 Wood was explicit about what she saw appearing in galleries:

a return of highly determined, practiced, and composed art, typically by way of other disciplines, whether in the form of curators inviting practitioners of theater, dance, or music to perform in museums or galleries, or artists borrowing these disciplines wholesale as ready-made formats. This prompts us to ask new questions about contemporary art's limits and its needs, its rapacious consumption of other disciplinary specificities.<sup>34</sup>

As I argue in Chapter 5, this view of the dance-gallery relation overlooks the contributions of dance to the invention of post-disciplinarity and the historical fact of its embeddedness in the story of contemporary art in its broadest definition.<sup>35</sup> *Dance cannot be colonized if it had a role in the formation of the current state of the arts*, or if its artists currently self-identify as belonging to that world. However, this is not to say that more cannot be done to ensure that dance, dancers, and choreographers are well cared for as they navigate a new position inside the museum. I defer on this point to Rainer:

What can (or should) the museum offer dance in the way of value, movement, time, materiality, permanence?

Value: A living wage (or more, in accordance with art world economic norms), prestige, validation

Movement: Lots of it

Time: Ephemerality

Materiality: Documentation, default décor (dancing with the collection), sprung flooring, dressing rooms, comfortable seating for spectators

Permanence: Archival documentation, residencies for choreographers<sup>36</sup>

Finally, both dance and visual art have ventured far from their siloed definitions (noting that disciplinary siloing is something specific to the white history of contemporary art, something I return to in Case Study

11). It is true to say that inequities in power and visibility have real effects on artworks and their artists; however, the expansion of choreography as a field *in practice* is a given; dance was *always already intermedial*. Developments in dancescreen, dance technology, site-specific dance, dance theater, and many other intermedial practices vouch for this beyond the group of experimental dance practitioners that one might categorize as presenting dance as a contemporary art form. However, the current expansion of choreography *as a concept*, discussed in Chapter 5, is tightly yoked to the terms and conditions of the broader contemporary arts which, in our most influential historiographies, is dominated by the aesthetic, cultural, and political economies of the visual arts. Charmatz has claimed, “I have a feeling that it is at once wide-ranging and precise that the physical and conceptual tools dance has developed in recent years can permanently modify art in a broad sense.”<sup>37</sup> This project observes dance and choreography closely as it is practiced in new venues and systems, such as Case Study 3, Mathieu Copeland’s *A Choreographed Exhibition* (2007), to map the conditions that the art form both instigates and finds itself subjected to. In this way, I hope to bring to light the ongoing contributions of dance to the most progressive modifications within the arts that Charmatz is referring to.

### 3.4 Exhibiting Dance, Now and Then: Exclusions and Specificities

Having set out some disciplinary tools in Chapter 2 that will help us distinguish the particularly choreographic concerns found in some recent contemporary art and beginning with the collaboration between curator Bart De Baere and choreographer Meg Stuart in the early 1990s, in Part II I describe specific exhibitions and curatorial contexts in which such contemporary work is presented. The examples reveal much about the new field, building on case studies such as *13 Rooms* (2013) and *Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done* (2018/2019), which were discussed (respectively) in relation to issues such as the precarity of dancer agency and knowledges in curator-led surveys, and an historical approach that has “legitimized” (and institutionalized) dance by establishing certain genealogies and cross-disciplinary exchanges on visual arts territory and within its terms. I also reveal the diversity of practices (artistic, curatorial, institutional) within a field that is complicated due not only to the convergence of two artistic disciplines with their own knowledges, econo-

mies, cultures, heritages, and communities, but associated desires, intentions, agendas, remits, policies, and ambitions that are as influential if less transparent. This section of the book also marks a move away from historically oriented exhibitions such as *13 Rooms*, *Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done*, and *Move. Choreographing You* (2011), with a turn to the ways in which current work is being programmed.<sup>38</sup>

Selected exhibitions presented in Belgium, Switzerland, France, Sydney, and Melbourne between 1994 and 2021 reinforce this mode of presentation as the primary site where current artistic developments in the field have been made public. Velasco sums up the frenzy of dance gallery activity that was peaking internationally in 2012, placing it within the context of the symbolic death of modern dance in the person of Merce Cunningham, and the passing of 50 years since the heyday of “post-modern” dance in the form of Judson Dance Theater. His account is comprehensive, and I quote him at length:

. . . the backdrop of the fiftieth anniversary of that magic fiasco—that ‘parade of formal explorations,’ as Paxton has put it—called Judson. And all this was in the wake of a still too quiet but resounding event in the dance landscape—the recent folding of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, the historic sine qua non for Cunningham technique, whose dissolution marked the symbolic burial of ‘modern’ dance. And all this was part of a more coherent integration of something called ‘dance’ into the body of something called ‘the museum’: Sarah Michelson and Michael Clark at the Whitney Museum of American Art for the Whitney Biennial; Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Boris Charmatz, and Nina Beier at the new Tanks at Tate Modern in London; Xavier Le Roy at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona; Paxton, Bel, Michelson, Faustin Linyekula, Dean Moss, and Deborah Hay at MoMA for ‘Some sweet day.’ Each venue offered a different model for how to do dance, and ‘Some sweet day’ in particular—with its galvanic weekly conversations and eschatological title—took as its very subject a rethinking of how choreographers and dancers and art institutions and publics might (and do) commit to one another. Of how they might (and do) comprehend ‘dance.’ And each artist in his or her own way worked against these overdetermined spaces and categories, reconsidering the logic of the museum and producing new hybrid audiences as they went.<sup>39</sup>

Velasco’s identification in the early 2010s of “a more coherent integration of something called ‘dance’ into the body of something called ‘the

museum,’” and the artists and institutions he calls out, indicates the high profile of this seismic shift and the kinds of power relationships involved. Integrating dance into “the body” of the museum or gallery suggests a one-way flow, and as noted, there has been much speculation about the desires, intentions, and policies that have fueled this interest on the part of the institution. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, and with the passing of Katherine Dunham (1909–2006), Cunningham (1919–2009), Pina Bausch (1940–2009), and later, Brown (1936–2017), curators at major visual arts institutions began to shape new accounts of dance histories and program choreography in their spaces. At The Whitney and MoMA in New York, Tate Modern and the Barbican in London, the Louvre in Paris, and Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona, curators were crafting historiographies and mapping lineages linking the mid-century dance avant-garde to the present activity in the field. However, as Velasco also suggests, the resistant, undisciplined nature of dance, described earlier as being at risk of diminishing its otherness when it appears in such institutions, often made the *context* of the museum or gallery central to its aesthetic project, “reconsidering the logic of the museum” as it passed through it.

### 3.5 Conclusion

In comparison to the mid-twentieth century, where exhibitions and exchanges between the visual and performing arts were almost exclusively driven by artists outside the physical and administrative parameters of major art institutions, since the 1990s curators within those institutions have played an integral role in determining the conditions within which choreography is presented as a contemporary art medium.<sup>40</sup> As noted previously, this is in step with a general rise in the responsibilities and power of curators, with Buren going so far as stating in 2003 that “today, it is possible to imagine that we are not far-off from having a large-scale international exhibition directed by a great organizer-author who proposes the first exhibition without any artists at all!”<sup>41</sup> With this shift in situation, galleries and museums have taken on the responsibility of drawing attention to, and framing, the contributions dance continues to make to broader aesthetic developments. Such framings have taken the form of public programs, commissioning physical interventions in and responses to museum spaces, retrospectives of specific artists, and remounts of historical choreographic works. Such activities may have little to do with the

work that artists are undertaking in practice, or they may align beautifully with the preoccupations of the artists themselves. The framing of developments in the field by major institutions through their curatorial and programming activities may have led to a certain antagonistic or combative mood in critical writings about dance and the visual arts. Such a tone is not representative of artists' practices that enjoy higher degrees of self-determination and agency, or balanced curator-artist collaboration, as seen in the examples in this book. In an effort to indicate the full range of presentational opportunities in the field, and the important definitional work they do, the following exhibition case studies model diverse approaches to the curatorial-artistic relationship, ranging from institutional prescriptions to localized, community-based initiatives.

What they reveal collectively, and with degrees of self-awareness, are the many and varied aesthetic and practical points of confluence, exchange, and tension that describe the dance-gallery relationship. Through attention to the practices of exhibition-making, the stakes for dance become clear at the level of creative practice, physical conditions, cultural processes, discursive privileges, desire, and related issues of power and agency. *This Is the Show and the Show Is Many Things / Extra Muros* (1994), curated by De Baere at the Museum of Contemporary Art (now S.M.A.K.), Ghent, was an experimental exhibition that invited a choreographed intervention/response from Stuart. *A Choreographed Exhibition* (2007), curated by UK-based curator Mathieu Copeland for galleries in Switzerland and France, was an extreme experiment where a curator set the conceptual framework, compositional terms, presentation structure, and contributors for their curatorial vision. *Ghost Telephone* (2016), curated by Adrian Heathfield, was a collaboration with four artists on a chain of performances within a Biennale framework at the AGNSW in Sydney. And finally, *To Do/To Make* (2018), curated by choreographer Shelley Lasica and curator-theorist Zoe Theodore in Melbourne, modelled an artist-led, local, embedded, and democratic approach that recalls the radical experiments in programming in the downtown New York art scene in the 1960s.

As noted, much of the second-wave dance avant-garde work was initially presented by artist-curators programming peers (and often including themselves). Male artists such as La Monte Young, Allan Kaprow, Robert Whitman, Claes Oldenburg, and Red Grooms were operating as artist-curators in downtown New York galleries and studios such as Yoko Ono's 112 Chambers Street Loft (1960-1961) where Forti's first works were shown on the East Coast; Hansa Gallery (1952-1959); Tan-

ager Gallery (1952-1962); City Gallery (1958-1959); Delancey Street Museum (1959-1960); Reuben Gallery (1959-1961); and the Judson Memorial Church Gallery (1969-1961). Dance historian Sally Banes notes that “it was in these galleries and through these networks that so many performances were given.”<sup>42</sup> This period was followed by innovative programming at major museums such as The Whitney, the Walker Art Center, and the Guggenheim where curators located choreographic works within the galleries’ main programming. This fed into a processual turn in groundbreaking exhibitions across the late 1960s and early 1970s such as Harald Szeemann’s *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* at Kunsthalle Bern (1970) and Marcia Tucker’s *Anti-illusion, Procedures/Materials* (1969) at The Whitney, and Fabio Sargentini’s curation at Galleria L’Attico in Rome, which all pioneered transdisciplinary curation. The new focus is summed up by John Brockman who produced *Intermedia ’68*, a program of work that echoed *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering* produced by Robert Rauschenberg in 1966, and which toured a college circuit in the United States: “these people traffic in experience, not objects . . . who wants objects? . . . What’s interesting is process—seeing, feeling, sensation, and environment.”<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere I argue that these major exhibitions, and many more, failed to include relevant dance artists and thus excluded key works from specific lineages.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the recent curatorial attention to mid-century dance artists such as Forti, Brown, and Rainer is corrective and/or revisionist. Then, as now, a paradigm shift from objects to experience in the field of contemporary art coincides with an increased engagement with corporeally-oriented creative practices. As art historian Pamela Bianchi notes, “the new material . . . is nothing more than the body in movement, intended both as the spectatorship body and as an authorial body;” however, curatorial and broader institutional work has been slow to develop the right kinds of support for this shift, as the case studies reveal.<sup>45</sup>

One of the aims of this book is to define specific fields of work at the interface between dance and visual art, and through the following exhibition examples one can begin to understand the different kinds of practices and creative works that have featured in museum and gallery spaces, often without adequate articulation of specificities. Among these exhibitions we find choreographic scores to be enacted by a hired dancer, choreographic responses by carefully selected dance artists to collections, exhibitions or biennale contexts, and choreographies presented as discrete works of art in gallery spaces. The works themselves, following the Stuart and Michelson

case studies, set out some of the key aesthetic, conceptual, and material preoccupations of the field, including its genealogies and histories. This selective survey thus sets the scene for the case studies in Parts III, IV, and V where the work of singular artists demonstrates the rich potential of artist-led experiments in which the instigators have taken a full and rigorous account of the terrain into which they venture.

### Case Study 3

## Curation as Choreography—Copeland’s *Choreographing Exhibitions* (2007)

In 2007, Mathieu Copeland curated *A Choreographed Exhibition* for the Kunst Halle in St. Gallen, Switzerland, and the Centre d’Art Contemporain de la Ferme du Buisson, France:

. . . an exhibition only composed of movements. For over a month and a half, three dancers from the Tanzkompanie Theater St. Gallen are present in the kunsthalle during the opening hours to perform in space the choreography of movements, patterns and choreographed gestures, following the scores and instructions as provided by the invited artists, dancers, and choreographers.<sup>1</sup>

Artists contributing scores and instructions included Roman Ondák (visual artist), Jennifer Lacey (choreographer), Jonah Bokaer (visual artist and choreographer), Philipp Egli (choreographer), Karl Holmqvist (visual artist and poet), Michael Parsons (composer), and Fia Backström (visual artist) together with Michael Portnoy. Pablo Leon de la Barra gives an account of specific works within the exhibition:

Roman Ondák communicates an attitude of disdain in his piece ‘Insiders,’ requesting the dancers to wear their clothes inside-out and to ignore their surrounding reality. Michael Parsons re-actualises his seminal ‘Walking Piece’ from 1968 [sic], and through a new score instructs the three dancers on how to walk in the space of the Kunsthalle, thus generating an open piece of visual music. Karl Holmqvist creates a polyphony of voices in asking the dancers to read different lyrics from various songs whilst performing cleaning gestures.<sup>2</sup>

This exhibition replaced the art object with the dancing body in a project that employed simple transference as its strategy; as one of the dancers, Carole Perdereau, stated, “the exhibition exhibits us.”<sup>3</sup> Through this simple comparison, the approach laid bare the conditions of both visual arts and dance regarding such things as objecthood, subjectivity, work practice, space, time, rhythm, movement, and spectatorial processes. While such a reduced approach to dance in the gallery has occurred before and since (nothing was in the space but the dancing bodies), Copeland’s attention to critical discourse surrounding the project, including his curatorial statements, suggests a radicality by framing *A Choreographed Exhibition* as a clear convergence of concept, material, and action in line with Hal Foster’s schema for the preoccupations of the experimental arts since the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> This exhibition also demonstrated the reasons why the visual arts in its institutional formations (in comparison to individual artists) was so interested in dance and choreography at this historical moment, where the points of confluence, productive tension, and difference lay regarding the relationship with dance as an art form, and how choreographers, dancers, and their collaborators were finding their own way in this cultural and aesthetic space.

In Copeland’s account, the exhibition realized a critical proposition:

... if, classically, the curator curates the exhibition, the artists create the art, the question becomes one of the status of those who ‘embody’ the pieces. Subjects that, despite appearing as objectified, object to being an object . . . the relation to the spectators is thus fundamentally shaken, as they no longer evolve around objects, but twist around subjects and become carried with these conflicting movements . . . In a space where nothing is present but movement, in a gallery left empty and devoid of any ‘props,’ only the opening hours and the duration of the exhibition determine the rhythm. Movements produce a critical experience of the ephemeral, affirming a critical counter-attitude to a world saturated with objects. A choreographed exhibition will only exist for the time needed for its overall realization.<sup>5</sup>

For Copeland, scored improvised movement as art content in a gallery space is a political and critical choice: a commentary on the culture of the art object and the behaviors that surround their exhibition, and this is made clear in his curatorial statements quoted here. In the tradition of Yves Klein’s *The Void* exhibition (1958), and variations on the locked gallery from conceptual artists such as Graciela Carnevale (*Confinement*

*Action* [1968]), Copeland is critiquing visual arts culture, in this case through an intermedial experiment involving the transference of the discipline of dance into a new context.<sup>6</sup> In doing so he combines the conceptual gesture with a material practice through choreographic means; but what does such a project mean for dance culture? Issues he raises in this quote around the subject-object bind, a kinaesthetic empathy with the dancing subject, an experience of time as a product of movement, and the transitory nature of that movement, have been well worked over in dance studies, as we saw in Chapter 2. His emphasis on the ephemeral nature of dance is particularly regressive, recalling philosophy's essentializing of this characteristic, and manifests in his catalogue as a series of images of empty galleries displaying traces of bodies as marks upon walls, with no images of the dancers themselves.

The catalogue for *A Choreographed Exhibition*, edited by Copeland and Julie Pellegrin, features essays by and interviews with artists, commentators, and theorists such as Myriam Van Imschoot, André Lepecki, Barbara Formis, and Boris Charmatz. The inclusion of these dance-related theorists and makers indicates a concerted and rigorous engagement by Copeland with dance theory—particularly around scoring.<sup>7</sup> Movement scoring is a specifically choreographic practice developed alongside the visual arts during the mid-century period to become a transdisciplinary strategy, and this medial exchange has had a degree of critical attention.<sup>8</sup> Copeland's curation references this history, with movement scores commissioned from choreographers, poets, composers, and visual artists, some of whom, such as Michael Parsons, were involved in the mid-century intermedial milieu. However, Copeland's approach raises the specter of the traditional dancer-choreographer relationship, the hire-a-dancer mindset addressed in the associated literature by one of the choreographers involved, Lacey.<sup>9</sup> Lacey takes Copeland to task on his use of dancers from a repertory company from the Tanzkompanie Theater in the St. Gallen iteration of the exhibition “as the neutral material of the thing. This is such an old idea in dance, that of course still exists, but it is extraordinarily dated.”<sup>10</sup> There is some account in her interview with Copeland of how she approached a score for the dancers based on duration, the transitions between the total of eight artists' scores, and the fact that they would be performing to no-one or each other for large chunks of time. Lacey brings a dance artist's perspective to bear on the performers' experience and the composition of the whole for both them and their audiences; she says, “for me the specifics of the group were important, their process, not mine.”<sup>11</sup> Attention to

the real conditions for the artists and spectators in the time-space of the exhibition was perhaps secondary to the execution of the conceptual proposition for Copeland, and gestures toward issues of care and ethics that more recent dance-gallery projects are trying to address.<sup>12</sup>

In relation to the question of power at the heart of Lacey's critique, Copeland attempts to define "exhibition" as "choreography":

A proposition for a definition: Exhibition . . . noun—a material, textual, textual, visceral, visual . . . choreographed polyphony.<sup>13</sup>

. . . my entire curatorial approach is based on the idea of choreographing an exhibition. For example, I increasingly think of my exhibition catalogues as scores.<sup>14</sup>

In these definitions, choreography is equated with the exhibited result of curating and organizing materials, bodies, space, temporal frameworks, and potential for subjective feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and memories that constitute the phenomenon of the gallery exhibition. Copeland takes the role of choreographer here in the formula of an outdated mode of choreography as a process of control and constraint across a multiplicity of physical and intangible variables.

Copeland's experiment is clearly linked to the curator-author phenomenon that has an associated field of discourse within curatorial studies.<sup>15</sup> The curator becomes the artist and commissions experts to realize their concept, and the result is a decentering of the work of the artist to be replaced by the work of the curator. An extreme case might interfere with the commissioned artist's own desires about what they want to do and how their work is framed. Regarding *A Choreographed Exhibition* where the medium consists of dance artists translating scores by other artists in situ, the question of agency sits on a knife edge between subjection and empowerment; between layers of contextual limitations and control on the one hand, and the authority of presence and processual investment on the other.

Another group of dance artists, Toni Pape, Noémie Solomon, and Alanna Thain, who have written about performing in a Tino Sehgal piece, note the "somewhat pervasive phenomenon across the art field that draws performance within the museal space [which] often reiterates a distinction or hierarchy between theater and visual arts rather than enabling new, heterogeneous encounters between the forms."<sup>16</sup> The benefits for

the artists involved in Copeland's project—both score-makers and dance-makers—regarding new discoveries or encounters is hard to ascertain, but the response of the dancers in the French season, LeClubdes5 (Mickaël Phelippeau, Virginie Thomas, Carole Perdereau, Maeva Cunci), are recorded in the catalogue and elsewhere. Unlike the St. Gallen dancers, this group are artist-choreographers with a pre-existing collective practice. They describe the project as “a collective work” with “an artistic director and eight artists/authors,” and within this imposed framework they found agency through a self-reflexive approach to co-habitation, interpretation, experimentation, and a shared imaginative:

Three days a week for a month and a half, six hours a day, the collective Le Clubdes5 [sic] occupied the exhibition spaces in the Centre d'art to interpret these works. That's when things became interesting. The collective was called upon as a 'group of interpreters.' The question of the 'common' was therefore shifting towards a 'being together.' We represented both a work force and an artistic entity in its full right. We seemed to have achieved our challenge to exist at the same time as an 'interpreters' collective,' 'projects initiators,' 'places for experimentation,' 'permanent laboratory,' 'self-school,' [and] 'imagination to be shared.'<sup>17</sup>

While the project was a step in Copeland's journey as a curator, the dancers involved could find agency by adapting the conditions of the work to their own practice.<sup>18</sup> The gallery became, as Inés Moreno puts it, “a rehearsal room, a production site for new movements, an exhibition space, and a rest area,” and the “time of the exhibition would be the time of practice.”<sup>19</sup> In this case we can add *adaptation* to comparison and transference as key strategies for this exhibition to account for the dancers' perspective.

This was also Lacey's approach to her scoring task; she was interested “to use my tropes within the tropes of the ‘exhibition’,” so she focused on the moments of transition between each of the seven other scores to honor the durational nature of the work for the dancers and help them “stay engaged and really active in delivering the work.” She goes on, regarding the challenges of gallery time:

The question of duration was also glaringly obvious to me. It was a crazy thing for the dancers to go in, to work constantly with all these different notions of performance and with the possibility of being exposed to maybe nobody all day long . . . I felt strongly that the human level had to be considered: interest, fatigue, hunger, boredom, etc.<sup>20</sup>

It will become clear across the case studies in this book that dance artists and visual artist-collaborators commissioned directly by galleries or museums, or seeking out such contexts, have similarly dealt with adaptation, comparison, and transformation at the interface between disciplinary conventions. They have also moved, via transformation, toward what Agatha Gothe-Snape describes as an “a-disciplinary” condition opening onto “a field of action,” unrestrained by binaries, within which they can match their ideas to the appropriate material.<sup>21</sup> Among all of this is always the question of care when working with a medium that brings all of the complications of the human condition, and artistic agency is key regarding modelling best ethical practices.

## Case Study 4

### Activating Dancer Agency in the Gallery— Adrian Heathfield’s *Ghost Telephone* (2016)

Nine years after *A Choreographed Exhibition*, performance theorist, maker, and curator Adrian Heathfield put artists’ practice front and center in a series of events at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) as part of Stephanie Rosenthal’s 20th Biennale of Sydney. Three choreographers were part of Heathfield’s *Ghost Telephone*—American Chrysa Parkinson (based in Europe), Canadian Benoît Lachambre, and Austrian Philipp Gehmacher—artists who have all been associated with conceptual dance and who were presenting their work in Sydney for the first time.<sup>1</sup> Described as “a one-month-long daily chain performance comprised of new interlinked works,” which were all subsumed under Heathfield’s title, *Ghost Telephone*, the solo artists were asked to respond to the gallery’s exhibited works.<sup>2</sup> Heathfield’s proposition was that each would spend time “in residence” with their chosen artwork/s, “attuning to its resonances and mutating its immaterial affects” through their performances.<sup>3</sup> He describes the work as a

serial improvisation made in the vibrant space of relations between people, spirits and things. It mines the art institution as a site, using its environment and its works as the impetus for original performances that morph over time and make a new kind of unending performance work.<sup>4</sup>

In this sense, this performance work within the Biennale exhibition at AGNSW did seem to be an “amplification” of the museum, to use theorist Theron Schmidt’s term in describing the work, having some affinity with Meg Stuart’s response to Bart De Baere’s provocation in *This Is the Show and the Show Is Many Things / Extra Muros* (1994), which I described as a corporeal commentary.<sup>5</sup>

While some of the solo artists' attention may have been elsewhere—imagined characters conjured collectively (Parkinson), other art work (Gehmacher who was dancing with Melbourne-based artist Daniel von Sturmer's installation *Material from Another Medium (Sequence 2)* [2001], and Lachambre who was dancing with installations by Colombian artist Doris Salcedo)—“the work of the work” manifested as dancing in the gallery.<sup>6</sup> While I spent time with all of these works, two sessions with Gehmacher provided some insight into his approach to investigating “where the material of an artwork ends and the context begins,” and “what kind of material is his 41 year old body and how can it move in relation to other kinds of matter?”<sup>7</sup> Gehmacher engaged with von Sturmer's installation, which consisted of three digital videos projected onto screens (two clunky monitors and a free-standing screen), and a gap in the gallery wall that revealed the storage room behind. The videos showed objects in action (balloons filling with water, scrunched-up paper expanding, a ball of Blu Tack dropping and sticking), which appeared in the on-screen space like art objects in alternative sites, choreographed as a series. In Daniel Palmer's words, von Sturmer's work is “site-specific,” deconstructing and multiplying the white cube in which the work appears.<sup>8</sup> Gehmacher responds to the title and intention of the work by adding the medium of his presence (awkward, hesitant, melancholy, direct), words, and choreographic choices to the existing collection of materials. He talks sporadically when I am present, translating crumpled plastic on the screen into fire blazing inside a “fireplace,” and the shadow under a monitor into an “apron.” He covers the projectors, blackening out the image, and stacks the empty chairs in the space (for viewers of the performance) into a tower, like Constantin Brancusi's *Endless Column* (1918) (there's “too much blank space” in the room he says). He also performs an homage to Bruce Nauman's *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square* (1968), putting his work into direct dialogue with the twentieth-century lineage of dance-gallery relations through his interventions.<sup>9</sup>

Von Sturmer's *Material from Another Medium (Sequence 2)* is part of philanthropist John Kaldor's family collection and during the exhibition it was located in the (then new) John Kaldor Family Gallery. Gehmacher muses on the Kaldor family—ex-partners, favorite children. He returns to the family theme often; he remembers me when I return to the work—he says that I remind him of an aunt in Vienna. He refers reflexively to dance and its place in the gallery as not being ephemeral or immaterial: “in the future museum dancers will be there to stroke and touch,” and, “I'm



Philipp Gehmacher with *Material from Another Medium* (Daniel von Sturmer, 2001). Part of *Ghost Telephone*, a month-long chain performance curated by Adrian Heathfield for the 20th Biennale of Sydney, 15 March—15 April 2016. This project was made possible with generous assistance from The Keir Foundation. Courtesy of the artist. Photograph: Zan Wimberley

a Biennale artist now. But none of my people care.” This critique of the institutional misstep between dance and visual art continues; he advises, tongue-in-cheek, that if we have sons, they should be dancers and “save the world, save the gallery.” The artist telescopes us out of a work to consider its place in the museum as institution, in the chronology of inter-medial developments therein, and art history more generally in a way that resonates with the post-conceptual tendencies I discuss in Chapter 8.

Gehmacher’s dancing in the museum mobilizes the art form as a medium of adaptation, process, intervention, translation, accumulation, and connection. Dance elements become concepts in new work that speaks back to its context and viewers. Heathfield’s and Gehmacher’s choices demonstrate how far things had come, since Copeland in 2007 and Obrist and Biesenbach in 2011, to arrive at a curatorial model that supports the artist’s active engagement with the art context, where their knowledges, virtuosity, and agency take center stage and open onto processual,

improvisational, and embedded responses. However, this is also a situation determined by Heathfield's curatorial proposition, which included the tag-team structure of *Ghost Telephone* with the artists overlapping into one another's residencies to establish some continuity across their work. Heathfield's framework was also in response to Rosenthal's naming of the gallery as "The Embassy of Spirits" within the broader context of the Biennale; she states, "the artists exhibited here investigate what religion and spirituality may mean for us today."<sup>10</sup> Gehmacher's contribution occurred within layers of curatorial concepts, and so his authorship and agency is shared with Rosenthal, Heathfield, and the other artists.

Gehmacher would return to Australia in 2017 to perform at Griffith University Art Museum his own critically acclaimed work, *my shapes, your words, their grey* (2013), a work in which "bodies, gestures, text, images and objects all dance together."<sup>11</sup> Critic Helmut Ploebst's review of this work when it premiered at Tanzquartier Wien with an associated exhibition at Grauraum describes how Gehmacher "dances enigmatically between exhibition and performance," having abandoned the traditional choreographic formats in his broader practice, working across video, installation, and lecture modes.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, Gehmacher embodies the a-disciplinary artist who brings dance elements such as improvisation, mind-body rigor, contextuality, and process into dialogue and collaboration with other art forms, arts workers, and art infrastructures. Dance as contemporary art manifests here as a negotiation with many moving parts, and my take-away image of Gehmacher in the last minutes of his last three-hour performance, streaking wildly through the gallery rooms with abandon and agency, brought home the radical potential of the dancer-as-medium as a force of change and transformation within the art museum.

## Case Study 5

### Artist-Led Events—Shelley Lasica and Zoe Theodore, *To Do/To Make*

Choreographer and theorist Bojana Cvejić clearly articulates a political issue that many have noted regarding the appearance of dance and performance in galleries and museums since the turn of the twenty-first century:

The current second performance turn in visual art consists of accommodating and adapting already existing works of dance and performance for the purpose of enhancing audience participation. This is part of a larger condition of total aestheticization of consumer-capitalist life, where art is a potent instrument.<sup>1</sup>

Like many of the debates in 1990s dance studies that engaged Michel Foucault's subjected body to discuss the impossibility of a self-determined dancer, such arguments run the risk of positing the dance artist as dupe, manipulated by the institution and powerless within its systems.<sup>2</sup> Rather than desperate artists clambering for the reputational heft that major museums and galleries can bestow, the artists discussed in this book have deliberately and knowingly chosen the particular frames, contexts, associations, and collaborators they work with, and within, as most relevant to their practice. Cvejić herself sees a possible exit point from the power dynamic she articulates in the form of the "transindividual":

. . . it's interesting to think about the transindividual, how those relational, interactive, reciprocal moments might actually work against these dead ends as a different kind of resistance, to individualism and capitalism alike. Maybe that's wishful thinking.<sup>3</sup>

While Cvejić perhaps applied this to her experiments at Tate Modern in her program of events, *Spatial Confessions (On the question of instituting the public)* (2014), one could think about the transindividual paired with artist self-determination in other examples of artist-curated, dance-based events as a possible escape from the “dead ends” of inequitable power configurations linked to commodity culture.<sup>4</sup>

Adrian Heathfield’s and Bart De Baere’s collaborative processes as curators maintain the traditional distinction between roles: there are curators and there are artists. However, there are also opportunities in major museums where artists are engaged as curators and the results are often significant (even though they generally repeat the white, male domination observed in art history more broadly). Carte blanche programs, such as Tino Sehgal’s exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in 2016 is one example, as is Ralph Lemon’s curatorial project at MoMA, *Some Sweet Day*.<sup>5</sup> Other examples include artist retrospectives such as Xavier Le Roy’s *Retrospective by Xavier Le Roy* and Boris Charmatz’s *Musée de la danse*, discussed in Part III. However, artist-led initiatives outside the major museums, and in the spirit of the Neo-Dada performance scene in New York circa 1960, offer a unique model where artist agency brings deep and nuanced knowledge of practice and creative process alongside its associated discursive field to actively shape and define the context within which the work occurs. In doing so, such work also defines a field of practice.

In the models rediscovered with the historiographic recuperation of the mid-twentieth-century engagement between dance and the gallery outlined in Chapter 3, we find dance immersed in artist-led events in New York beyond the major galleries, an historical phenomenon familiar within art history and closely tied to an associated performative turn exemplified in groups such as Fluxus. However, the Judson Dance Theater and Surplus Dance concerts pioneered an even newer kind of curatorial collaboration where *all of the artists involved self-curated collectively* in a model that was as challenging as any true democracy.<sup>6</sup> Sally Banes describes the professional context in which such an approach could flourish, with experimental dance acting as a “metacommunity of sorts where the different communities revolving around single arts disciplines coalesced.”<sup>7</sup> This philosophy of inclusivity and equality is a reflection of the creative processes shaping the choreographic work of the host community. Banes notes how a Judson piece, such as Yvonne Rainer’s *Shall We Run* (1963), involved a group of people behaving as a cohesive and non-hierarchical practice, “herding” or following the leader in running patterns, and producing an image of “a

serious, even heroic, egalitarian collective.”<sup>8</sup> Later, the Grand Union collective, a continuation of Rainer’s project *Continuous Project—Altered Daily* (1969–1970), would radically critique the role of authority inside a choreographic performance.<sup>9</sup> An improvisation group of stellar artists who each had their own individual body of work, Grand Union modelled a truly democratic structure for co-authored work. In Wendy Perron’s excellent book on the group, she explains how “Rainer’s ultimate decision to pull back from leading the group was not only a moral imperative but also a feminist moment . . . Rainer had demonstrated a kind of sisterly solidarity.”<sup>10</sup> That the dance collectives had a strong female contingent, as opposed to the contemporaneous male-dominated artist-curators in the visual arts collectives described in Chapter 3, is worth underscoring in this discussion about power and agency.

Egalitarian approaches to presentation models for contemporary dance outside theater circuits persist in smaller collectives internationally.<sup>11</sup> Such activity would fit within Terry Smith’s third current of contemporary art (after globalization and decolonization); an art of “modest” scale, “specific,” and “lower and more lateral” in the international scheme of things.<sup>12</sup> Owing to their localized and unauthorized nature, artist-led spaces, showings, exhibitions, and events are open to the charge of vanity projects; there is no external authority such as state art funders (often peer-assessed) who bestow legitimacy on such phenomena. For this reason, they can also be the place where true innovation occurs beyond the reach of economic or politico-cultural remits that may restrict experimentation. Examples of artist-run dance initiatives internationally include Jacuzzi in Amsterdam and Chez Bushwick in New York (both supported by arts foundations); ReadyMade Works in Sydney (partly government-funded); and Insister Space in Stockholm.<sup>13</sup> The latter is resourced purely through memberships and is

an artist driven organisation, platform and network for freelance artists within the field of dance and choreography. We work collectively and continuously to question the conditions and methods of artistic work . . . We wish to reshape the neoliberal structures in the dance-field—instead of promoting individual artists, we create supportive structures where our members can work with their own interests but in solidarity with each other . . . All our activities promote constant re-questioning of artistic production and methods; we replace competition with support, and individualism with solidarity.<sup>14</sup>

The key terms here—independence, collectivity, process/methods, practice-based, and artist solidarity—are characteristics that have been defining the dance avant-garde since the birth of contemporary dance at the turn of the twentieth century.

Another independent artist-run presentation program with a focus on choreography and its dialogue with visual arts is *To Do/To Make*, Shelley Lasica and Zoe Theodore's series of co-curated events.<sup>15</sup> Among Case Studies 2 to 5, the specificity of *To Do/To Make* is in its independent, co-operative practice established outside existing opportunities (including the ongoing program at the host venue Neon Parc), to support a simple, sustainable, and focused program that is grounded in a community of practice and discourse.<sup>16</sup> With two editions in 2018 and plans ongoing, this presentation platform was conceived by and for Melbourne artists working between dance and the visual arts, and provides an independent context where they can control the conditions within which their work is seen. Unsupported by government subsidies, with in-kind space from Geoff Newton of Neon Parc and artists being paid from ticket sales, this salon-type program of existing works attempts to de-hierarchicalize the artist-organizer relationship. Lasica and Theodore manage this through what they describe as “hands off curation”:

The artists were encouraged to do what they want, present the work for as long as they want, engage as many performers as they want and address the audience as they want, however, we always asked them to present a work that we had seen in the past and that we felt would benefit from re-development or re-presentation.<sup>17</sup>

In this sense, the program is shaped by following the artists' existing practices and communities, identifying what they describe as “leakages” across and between works by artists who share mentors, teachers, cast members, and histories.

*To Do/To Make* is thus dependent upon an artistic community that recognizes shared practices, lineages, and preoccupations. Theodore describes a clear and consistent orientation in the presented works that reach beyond the logic of the proscenium theater and toward the gallery, but she also describes a challenge to the latter as the performances are “not suited to normal exhibition conditions.” Lasica and Theodore also outline shared concerns across the works such as an acute awareness of context (space, history, community, performance), an interest in testing the subject/object



Shelley Lasica, *Behaviour Part 7* (2018), 215 Albion Street, Brunswick, Melbourne, 8 September 2018, *To Do / To Make*, curated by Shelley Lasica and Zoe Theodore in association with Neon Parc. Performers: Sarah Aiken, Ellen Davies, LJ Connolly-Hiatt, Luke Fryer, Timothy Harvey, Alice Heyward, Benjamin Hurley, Rebecca Jensen, Leah Landau, Shelley Lasica, Claire Leske, Jo Lloyd, Daniel Newell, Megan Payne, Bronwyn Ritchie, Harrison Ritchie-Jones, Ivey Wawn, Jo White. Photographer: Jacqui Shelton.

relation often through corporeal engagement with other materials, specific “modes of moving” that blur the distinction between the everyday and the virtuosic, and “stasis” and “exhaustion.” The artists involved often work with propositions that can be repeated to produce variable outcomes, and this results in “a mode of address” that draws the audience into something “conceptual, specific, yet porous and open-ended.” The performance tone is “perhaps casual,” but “not cool,” and certainly does not exclude the manic or emotional, “speculative or haphazard.” But most importantly, as the name suggests, there is a focus on “the doing” of the work as key to its conditions: “making themselves at the moment,” “making to remember,” and “continually practising dancing and performing.” This often involves collective decision-making, and the majority of the works are for more than one dancer, if not an ensemble. Here is the transindividual as a mode

of operation at the level of practice, choreographic composition, and curatorial philosophy, recalling Jennifer Lacey's description of the collective quality of dance cited in Chapter 2: "Dance is about people spending time together, thinking by behaving, and modify [*sic*] their thoughts by modifying their behavior: it is potentially a very powerful work."<sup>18</sup> And Jérôme Bel and Le Roy on the same:

choreographies suppose a certain communion: of bodies, of movements, of their capacities, and their way of offering all of these a visibility.<sup>19</sup>

There is a proximity here to Terry Smith's *contemporaneity* as the primary feature of current contemporary arts, and connected to this is the event model of exhibitions.<sup>20</sup> In a conversation between Smith and art historian and theorist Boris Groys, the model of the "installation exhibition" as "event" is discussed as the new *Gesamtkunstwerk*—a total work of art that extends beyond the theater or opera model to potentially encompass anything necessary to the whole, and subsuming the parts to a totalizing vision.<sup>21</sup> Groys talks about this being "subjective" in comparison to more linear, narrative, or survey-type exhibitions, which, in a choreographic model where the elements are themselves subjects, begs the question of whose subjectivity is in play. This is where a community of practice makes particular sense, acknowledging the agency of the various parts of the whole rather than subjection to a singular, externally imposed vision.

Part of the impetus for Lasica and Theodore to curate *To Do/To Make* was a lack of adequate presentation opportunities in Australia for artists working in this way, primarily due to programming limitations at local major arts organizations and shrinking resources under conservative governments. Another factor was the emerging nature of new work that moves across and between the practices, strategies, and aesthetics of dance and those of other contemporary art media. Reciprocity and resistance operate as two sides of one coin as artists map pathways beyond cultural gatekeepers, a map that extends upon traditions that are foundational to contemporary dance, contemporary art, and dance as a contemporary art form. Lasica's solo exhibition, *WHEN I AM NOT THERE*, presented at Monash University Museum of Art in 2022 and the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2023, continues Lasica's interest in alternative models of authorship. Curated by Hannah Mathews in its premiere MUMA iteration, and described as a "performance-exhibition," Lasica and her dancers occupied the gallery for the opening hours from 10 am to 5 pm and performed con-

sistently among materials from Lasica's decades of performances which included costumes, set design pieces, scripts, and video material. This work is the subject of research by Theodore who acted as Creative Producer for the exhibition, and the insights of her work will bring to light new models of best practice for choreographic-based exhibitions and exhibited works.

This circles us back to French artist Daniel Buren's critique of the rise of the art curator as artist, which he launched in 1972 and updated in 2003, and his important observation in the latter article that it is common practice for artists to take curatorial, editorial, or programming roles in music, opera, theater, publishing, and cinema but not visual art.<sup>22</sup> While performing arts programmers or producers are the equivalent of arts curators, which has resulted in the new moniker *performance curator* as mentioned in Chapter 3, there does seem to be very different histories, kudos, and cultures attached to the two roles. In the case of the emergent, transmedial field of dance as a contemporary art medium, leadership is fragile. Attention to the legacy of experimental dance as the traditional home of highly socialized art practices and collective authorship could bring more lateral models of leadership to presentation and programming in this new field.

## PART III

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# Between the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

This section of the book bridges two periods of experimentation in dance: *the second-wave dance avant-garde*, from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, and *the third-wave dance avant-garde*, which began in Europe in the early 1990s and is still underway. Understanding the radical and influential nature of the choreographic work that was in dialogue with the broader field of contemporary art during the mid-century avant-garde established in the companion book to *The Persistence of Dance, Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s-1970s* (2022), the most recent or third wave of experimental dance demonstrates an outward orientation that is even more pronounced, and has affiliations with the visual arts that have a new visibility. The focus of Chapter 4 is dance studies discourses since the 1990s regarding so-called *conceptual dance*. Conceptual dance (as well as non-dance, post-contemporary dance, and think-dance) has been used to describe a certain field of European contemporary dance, and as a term is as contentious as *contemporary dance*. This chapter considers the literature on this field of practice in so far as it throws light on the continuity of the dance-visual arts exchange; the field of conceptual dance has been closely (but certainly not exclusively) associated with the museal turn in dance. What do we mean by conceptual work in relation to dance? Which broadly influential strategies pioneered by dance artists in the mid-twentieth century apply to this more recent activity, and what are the new ways in which dance is in dialogue with contemporary arts practices? Following on from the case studies in Parts I and II, this section also seeks to challenge some assumptions about choreographic work at the interface between dance and visual art, and so, includes a discussion of Boris Charmatz (Case Study

6) as a paradigm of French conceptual dance. Charmatz has contributed substantially to the discourse on the dance-gallery field through his creative provocations as much as his manifestos and other writing projects. Chapter 5 looks at discourses and practices associated with *choreography as a concept*. This phrase has been used to describe the art form's increasingly extra-disciplinary adventures, and involves dance being split more emphatically into *dancing* as movement, technique, and singularity, and *choreography* unhinged from a specific dancing body and deployed by any number of possible elements (a collective of bodies, objects, score, etcetera). I discuss the intra-disciplinary provenance of the term, which produced binaries that cannot account for the diverse approaches appearing in the field, and I challenge associated narratives that have undermined the role of dancing and dancers. Such an approach contributes to other recent literature on dancer agency and labor, helps even up gender discrepancies in the current discourse, and addresses an over-investment of critical attention on narrow geo-cultural regions and cohorts.

## Chapter 4

# Between the Second- and Third-Wave Dance Avant-Garde

### 4.1 Introduction

Attention to specific choreographic projects that have been realized in galleries and museums, or are in dialogue with the visual arts but located elsewhere, requires a shift from curatorial and institutional contexts to the work of the work. The discourses surrounding artists working with dance as a contemporary art medium have primarily focused on the impact of new venues on the space-time programming of dance, cultural misunderstandings between arts institutions and dance artists, the condition of a choreographic work as a work of art (connected to the dance archive), and a consuming interest in the social function that has been associated with dance and choreography. Oddly, there has been little attention to distinguishing how the post-medium framework within which such work operates has changed creative practices, methodologies, and outcomes at a compositional level. In the following, I turn to developments in both dance studies and dance as creative practice over the past twenty years that were central to Chapter 2, where I put recent dance criticism into dialogue with the history of dance analysis to revise some key disciplinary principles. This involves the legacy of the North American second-wave dance avant-garde that has had such a significant impact on developments in contemporary dance internationally to place the more recent innovations within their historical-artistic context. Key theorists such as Bojana Cvejić, André Lepecki, Rudi Laermans, Jeroen Peeters, and Isabelle Ginot have contributed to mapping out a field that has survived a crisis in its foundational terms in the last three decades, offering renewed approaches to dance theory and compositional analysis. This allows us to consider which broadly influential strategies pioneered by dance artists in the mid-

twentieth century apply to the most recent dance avant-garde, and the new ways in which dance is informing arts practices and outcomes within the contemporary field at large.

Writing in 1944, John Cage summarizes the two remaining, unchallenged principles of the first wave of experimental dance stretching from Isadora Duncan to Martha Graham as, first, disciplinary dependence on the other arts, and second, an orthodoxy of the singular personality:

The strength that comes from firmly established arts practices is not present in the modern dance today. Insecure, not having any clear direction, the modern dancer is willing to compromise and to accept influences from other more rooted art matters . . . the strength the modern dance once had was not impersonal but was intimately connected with and ultimately dependent on . . . the originators.<sup>1</sup>

The creative labor of the second wave of experimental dance through the 1960s and 1970s addressed this legacy via strategies of media-focused reduction and differentiation that established discipline specificities, and a programmatic critique of the cult of the author-artist through the employment of aleatory methods, performer neutrality, and collective authoring, among other things. However, the artists involved achieved these through an exchange with contemporaneous fields of creative practice, most intensively with the visual arts.<sup>2</sup>

Accepting the radical and influential nature of the choreographic work that was in dialogue with the broader field of contemporary art in North America during the mid-century avant-garde, the most recent or third wave of experimental dance reveals an even more pronounced orientation beyond its disciplinary borders, including expanded affiliations with the visual arts. French dance theorist Isabelle Ginot notes in 2003 that “a study of the history and aesthetics of the two periods and movements [second and third wave] in order to understand the effects of this proximity still remains to be undertaken.”<sup>3</sup> This chapter examines some of the claims made for the recent wave of experimental dance in light of the revised accounts of the mid-century scene undertaken over the past 15 years in order to track continuities in the dialogue between dance and the broader contemporary arts. The following thus attempts to grasp the nuances of the new disciplinary-interdisciplinary field that both repeats, and is differentiated from, the American post-modernists and has been labelled *conceptual*. This work contributes to the task of clarifying what

is understood as conceptual work in contemporary dance since the 1960s, whether and how it is connected to the canonical category of conceptual art, and what, if anything, this has to do with the work I am describing as dance as a contemporary art medium. This requires close attention to key works. Having mapped some of the key concerns for the field in broad strokes through a discussion of recent curatorial work across dance and the gallery in Part II, here I pick up on specific compositional practices and choreographic choices in the work of Boris Charmatz, Xavier Le Roy, and others associated with the conceptual moniker. This shifts the focus in Part III more firmly to the work of artists in the field.

#### 4.2 Conceptual Dance and the Third-Wave Dance Avant-Garde

Since the early 1990s, disciplinary discussions regarding progressive work in dance and choreography have been yoked to an intense focus on so-called *conceptual dance*. Conceptual dance (as well as non-dance, post-contemporary dance, and think-dance) has been used to describe a certain field of Western European contemporary dance, and as a term is as contentious as *contemporary dance*.<sup>4</sup> UK choreographer Jonathan Burrows writes:

And we've invented the term 'post choreographic field,' and we're all camped out there under the stars while we work out what it means, which is tricky.<sup>5</sup>

Burrows describes the inadequacy of the “conceptual” of “conceptual dance,” which was a “thinking mess and only afterwards became history.”<sup>6</sup> While the term “conceptual” emerged in visual art, according to Peter Osborne, “as both a critical-curatorial category and a form of practical artistic self-understanding,” it has never been taken up so broadly or confidently in dance studies, dance as creative practice, or programming.<sup>7</sup> This is in line with the awkward adoption of visual arts terms for other periods in dance such as post-modernism and Minimalism.<sup>8</sup>

European theorist and artist Bojana Cvejić has taken a leading role in discussions of conceptual dance. In her 2015 book, *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance*, Cvejić associates “conceptual” with a derogatory attitude to the work of choreographer Xavier Le Roy and some of his colleagues in light of their resistance to “the foundational characteristics of dance as a his-

torical art discipline.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Cvejić has done much to establish the term in current literature through her book’s title, her use of the term in other articles, and her earlier comparison in 2005 of conceptual art and conceptual dance in dialogue with Le Roy.<sup>10</sup> Cvejić concludes that the term “conceptual dance” is symptomatic rather than descriptive, and “designates no movement, poetics, style or genre.”<sup>11</sup> However, Cvejić and other writers (Ramsay Burt, Petra Sabisch, Lepecki, Peeters, and Laermans) have outlined in some detail the characteristics of the work of the artists associated with the term.<sup>12</sup> The primarily European artists are listed by Cvejić as Le Roy, Burrows and Jan Ritsema, Charmatz, Eszter Salamon, Mette Ingvarstsen and Jefta van Dinther (Cvejić’s case studies), as well as Jérôme Bel, Christine de Smedt, Alice Chauchat, Mette Edvardsen, Vera Mantero, Juan Dominguez, María La Ribot, Antonia Baehr, and Thomas Plischke.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of surrounding debates, the designation has stuck and is in circulation, and the fact that a specific group of artists have been consistently associated with the term suggests that there is common ground to be found among them.

Part III considers the literature on this field of practice in so far as it bears on the continuity of the dance-visual arts exchange and mobilizes this discourse in an analysis of French choreographer and dancer Boris Charmatz who has been creating work since the early 1990s. The field of conceptual dance has been closely (but certainly not exclusively) associated with the museal turn in dance. In fact, Lepecki argues that the critical work both within and surrounding such choreographies is behind the impact of the discipline on the “contemporary aesthetic imagination” resulting in “a choreographically renewed visual arts.”<sup>14</sup> Jean-Marc Adolphe, a key commentator on this field of work writing in 2004, defines the tendency as “the emergence in recent years in Europe of ‘new choreographic forms,’ sometimes close to the visual arts or performance.”<sup>15</sup> Many of the artists mentioned above cross over into gallery programming, appearing at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) (New York), Tate Modern (London), Hayward Gallery (London), Centre Pompidou (Paris), Museum der Moderne Salzburg, and Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney), among many others.

Debates around the conceptual as it relates to dance, and the associated art historical and pan-disciplinary binary that sets concepts against materials, throw light on a much broader field of experimental practices than that outlined above, from Meg Stuart in the early 1990s (Case Study 2), through to both Sarah Michelson (Case Study 1) and Adam Linder

(Case Study 7) working in the 2010s and beyond. Conceptual dance in a broader sense, encompassing its pre and post conditions, thus provides a critical framework for a discussion of the contemporaneous, intermedial situation which might better be described as *post-dance*, as I argue in Chapter 8. Such an approach loosens discussions of a third-wave dance avant-garde from a specific network of (mostly male, French) artists, and clarifies any links between choreographic works appearing in the gallery and the legacies of conceptual art and its precedents. So, in Part III, the literature on conceptual dance allows us to first identify links from the mid-century avant-garde to current experimental dance, tracing continuities from Neo-Dada across the two periods; second to track the persistence of strong links between dance and contemporary visual arts across the same; and third to consider the recent intensification of issues arising from the conceptual-material bind with the repeated movement across disciplinary borders between dance and the visual arts (in Chapter 5).

Historically, conceptual work belongs to philosophy, not art. In order to attend to this aspect of recent choreography, theorists have turned to philosophy in a shift that could be described as the most significant philosophical turn in dance studies since the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> This has involved an intense engagement with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi, in step with—and closely aligned to—the performance-philosophy work within performance studies.<sup>17</sup> As an example, Cvejić refers to “a commitment to philosophy” in her discussion of Le Roy, Charmatz et al. with a focus on “practices of thought” that contribute to the philosophical project more broadly, and declares her intention to “account for them conceptually by a philosophical method.”<sup>18</sup> She focuses on their “analytic propositions” (which she sees as a continuity with conceptual art), and “problems” as an act of thought in such work.<sup>19</sup> This suggests an orientation toward ideas and away from the materiality of dance in her approach, but this, as we shall see in Chapter 6, is not the complete story regarding Cvejić and her peers.

The relationship with philosophy extends to the dance artists themselves who can certainly articulate their ideas and practices in sophisticated ways that continue the tradition of the artist-theorist emerging in the mid-century avant-garde.<sup>20</sup> Like composer Henry Flynt who studied philosophy and refers to the field in his seminal discussion of concept art in the early 1960s, certain of the dance artists associated with conceptual dance directly reference philosophers’ work. A key commentator here is Swedish artist-theorist Mårten Spångberg who notes in 2002 that “the

interest for [sic] language and its conditions in relation to the moving body” in conceptual dance drew on philosophers such as Michel Foucault to undertake a “diagnosis” of the discourses shaping the dancing body.<sup>21</sup> Bel discusses reading Roland Barthes, Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu, and works such as his first one, *Nom donné par l’auteur* (1994), directly address such philosophy.<sup>22</sup> Cvejić notes that Le Roy, in turn, “draws . . . on the thinking of philosophers such as (among others) Gilles Deleuze, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, and Jacques Rancière.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite such relationships with philosophical work, Cvejić notes that, in practice, conceptual dance is less text-based than conceptual art. It is true that the use of text *in* the work of dance artists is limited in comparison to conceptual art in which, as Lucy Lippard states, it “offered a bridge between the verbal and the visual.”<sup>24</sup> However, it is as pronounced as it was during the second wave, one historical exemplar being Trisha Brown’s *Accumulation with Talking plus Watermotor* (1979) in which Brown interweaves two of her dances, *Accumulation* (1971) and *Watermotor* (1978), with two spoken narratives, one about the dance’s origins and the other a personal anecdote. Le Roy and Bel have lecture-based performances, *Product of Circumstances* (1999) and *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* (2005), respectively, which use language as commentary on the action, and Bel also uses text on t-shirts and song lyrics as narrative components of his works (*Shirtologie* [1997] and *The Show Must Go On* [2001]). But this is different to the use of language in conceptual art as “iterative structure and representational medium,” in Liz Kotz’s words.<sup>25</sup> An example here would be Tony Conrad’s tautological word score, *This Piece Is Its Name*, “in which the substance of the piece is ‘This Piece Is Its Name,’” so that the work is fully realized in its word form.<sup>26</sup>

Not all artists described as conceptual share a commitment to theory and philosophy, nor do they all turn to language as material within their work. American conceptual artist Sol LeWitt took a different tack (perhaps distancing himself from earlier concept artists such as Flynt) and his approach resonates with some of the dance work recognized here as approaching the conceptual. He is clear that “this kind of art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories . . . Conceptual art doesn’t really have much to do with mathematics, philosophy, or any other mental disciplines . . . The philosophy of the work is implicit in the work and is not an illustration of any system of philosophy.”<sup>27</sup> LeWitt’s formula of a conceptual art that is bound to its material form, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, epitomizes the poetic work described by Jeremy

Prynne and Laurence Louppe where experimental composition is found to engage deeply with “the resources that the practice itself has chosen,” the medium, and its parameters (in Prynne’s terms, its *language*).<sup>28</sup> As demonstrated in Michelson’s art in Case Study 1, the recent work continues and deepens the dialogue with the visual arts begun in earnest in the 1960s, and leverages this “sociability” to extend its internal disciplinary critique, also begun in that period. In Part III, a poetic method engaging with the dance elements set out in Chapter 2 argues for *materials as ideas* or *dance elements as concepts* (paradigms suggested by LeWitt) in conceptual dance, establishing the recent avant-garde as working at, rather than beyond, its disciplinary limits.<sup>29</sup>

### 4.3 Continuity between Recent Experimental Dance and the Post-War Neo-Avant-Garde or Neo-Dada

Lepecki’s much-cited 2004 article, “Concept and Presence: The Contemporary European Dance Scene,” focuses on the group of dance artists considered conceptual (but to which he does not apply the moniker despite his article’s title) in relation to the first- and second-wave avant-garde. He notes, “rather than rehearsing a modernist rupture with the past, contemporary European choreography sees the past as a common ground, as the surface it is inevitably destined to wander on.”<sup>30</sup> Lepecki thus argues that the third wave consciously occupies the same critical terrain as its predecessors of the 1960s and 1970s, noting in particular their continued dialogue with minimal and conceptual tendencies. Two years later he makes a concession regarding the term “conceptual dance”:

I do think, however, that ‘conceptual dance’ at least allows for historically locating this movement within a genealogy of twentieth-century performance and visual arts, by referring to the conceptual art movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s . . . ‘Conceptual dance’ at least prevents claiming absolute historical originality to this movement, something I believe its participants would agree with, given their open dialogue with the history of performance art and postmodern dance.<sup>31</sup>

A year earlier, Ginot took a different position that, by her own account, has been ignored until recently, providing a critique of the discourse surrounding conceptual dance.<sup>32</sup> She systematically questions claims made

by, and on behalf of, artists such as Le Roy and Bel regarding their radical reworking of traditional notions of originality, authorship, and authenticity, suggesting that moderating such assertions would better acknowledge historical precedents.<sup>33</sup> Keeping Lepecki and Ginot's positions in mind, the following seeks to identify continuities between the second- and third-wave artists while acknowledging the important innovative ground struck by the latter.

Lepecki's outline of the characteristics associated with the conceptual dance artists has become authoritative and what follows underscores how conceptual dance first emerged as a critique of theater dance—that is, dance appearing in proscenium theater venues or their equivalent. He lists an anti-representational mode, anti-virtuosity, simplified performance scenarios, “a deep dialogue with visual arts and with performance art,” a critique of visuality and movement, an explicit engagement with theory, and a preoccupation with presence.<sup>34</sup> Also in 2004, Adolphe and Gérard Mayen list slow temporalities and attention to “the less visible part of the movement” alongside non-predetermined corporealities “as a place of construction, experimentation, and inscription of being-in-the-world” as key characteristics of the work.<sup>35</sup> In 2007 Pouillaude adds anti-narration, anti-expression, and anti-compositionalism.<sup>36</sup> Self-reflexivity regarding the terms of production and process is also a recurring theme.<sup>37</sup> And almost ten years later, Cvejić adds some more nuanced points that emphasize the critique of theater: the dissolution of the dramatic apparatus that synthesizes making, performing, and attending under the domain of a unifying concept, with anchoring concepts instead being specific to each facet of a performance event; the foregrounding of time as the unifying element in performance; and “impurity” regarding mediality.<sup>38</sup> Other characteristics added by Cvejić include the very Cagean elements of undermining both recognition of the staged object along with a stable spectatorial position, and a critique of the identity of the author.<sup>39</sup> One element that is constant but rarely underlined (with the exception of Lepecki's extended consideration of stasis in this work), is a general tendency toward reduction that approaches a kind of minimalism often linked to the recurrence of solo work in this field.<sup>40</sup>

The radical testing of disciplinary parameters that is often claimed for this generation of experimental dance artists is clear when they are mapped back against the dance principles of Chapter 2. This work is clearly *post-disciplinary*, being dependent upon the form's defining characteristics to do its self-reflexive work, and thus we see *the persistence of*

a thing called dance at the point of its disappearance. However, in the work of the mid-twentieth-century dance avant-garde there are many of these same characteristics, including a strong engagement with the contemporaneous experimental arts and the widespread rejection of expression, narrative, and representation more generally.<sup>41</sup> The critique of virtuosity and visuality landed firmly in the work of Simone Forti, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer, with various uses of ambulatory movement, and an associated rejection of spectacle taken to an extreme in Forti's *Platforms* (1961) where the performers were hidden from view inside human-sized boxes. Brown spearheaded the interest in modes of presence within dance with works such as *Homemade* (1966) in which she wore a projector playing a film of her dancing the same dance *while dancing*, working the space between liveness and the recorded image. Her *Inside* (1966)—in which the audience sat on the four sides of the performance space while Brown “moved along the edge . . . on the kneecaps of the audience . . . looking at the audience”—reconsidered performer attitudes and proximity and their effect on presence and spectatorship. The same can be said of Rainer's *Trio A* (1966), which has been much written about regarding the effacement of the performer's gaze to deny their objectification by the viewer.<sup>42</sup> Experiments with extremes of pace and scale challenged the centrality of movement and visibility and highlighted the temporal dimensions of dance. Paxton explored stillness in his work well before his practice called *The Small Dance, The Stand* (1977) (e.g., *Transit* [1962] and *Flat* [1964]), so established an important precedent to the current interest in the same. And Brown's *Roof and Fire Piece* (1973), transmitted by single dancers across rooftops in New York, was impossible to perceive as one composition, exemplifying a critique of an ideal spectatorial position.

Forti, Brown, Rainer, and their colleagues such as Deborah Hay developed pared back staging that was easily transferable or adaptable to all kinds of venues, including the gallery, which in turn refocused attention on dancing as the material of the work. A challenge to anthropocentrism came in the form of the “non-human movement” of Forti's object-based works such as *See-Saw* (1960) and *Slant Board* (1961). Intermediality, established as a new standard in that New York milieu and chronicled in the writing of Jill Johnston et al., found a particular home within the parameters of dance, and this inclusive characteristic of the art form continues to appeal to the visual arts. To disagree with Pouillaude's mention of anti-compositionalism, the interest in composition turned then, as it has more recently, to an exposition of process, method, and means, so that cho-

reographic mechanisms were visible and indeed highlighted in the work of Brown, Rainer, and Paxton, and, more recently in that of Burrows, Bel, and Charmatz. In both avant-gardes, this involved a critique of the framing of the work (regarding technique, venue, institution, economy, etc.) and the term *dispositif* has been introduced to encompass all these aspects of composition.<sup>43</sup> This new approach to composition was yoked to questions of authorship and saw the development of movement scores that are now ubiquitous. To quote LeWitt, “to work with a plan that is preset is one way of avoiding subjectivity.”<sup>44</sup>

#### 4.4 Conclusion

Given the historical precedents for many of the stated features of the more recent avant-garde, what then are the unique innovations of this more recent group of artists? And how do these innovations cross over, once again, with the progressive work being done in the visual arts? As I note in *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s-1970s*, choreographic practices of the American mid-century were influencing developments in contemporary art such as the democratization of materials and authorship, the dematerialization of the art object, institutional critique, processual and distributive/iterative art, and intersubjectivity, all of which would contribute significantly to our current post-conceptual condition. Which of these tendencies apply to the most recent dance avant-garde, and what are the new ways in which dance is informing contemporary arts practices and outcomes? Some attention to the work of Charmatz will help answer some of these questions and clarify our understanding of genealogies related to the field.

In many of the cases that follow, as with those already described, the work of dance as a contemporary art medium does in fact manifest as dancers dancing in a gallery or art museum space. This “pointy end” of the broader intermedial situation brings some of the central issues—particularly those relating to the political and economic tensions that haunt the dance-gallery liaison—into high relief. Lepecki and Franko ask, “what are the conditions of labour of the dancer and choreographer in the framework of museum performance?” and refer to Bruce Nauman’s score directive to “hire a dancer,” which describes Mathieu Copeland’s approach in Case Study 3.<sup>45</sup> Their line of questioning has been repeated recently by Catherine Damman in relation to *Judson Dance Theater: The Work is Never Done*:

The issue was never whether dance belongs in the museum or gallery, but rather what we do with dance—and how we treat dancers—once it's there . . . Modest demands might look something like this: Pay attention to dancers, to dancing itself, and to the specificities of dance history and forms.<sup>46</sup>

Rather than artists performing another version of the dancer for hire, the following examples of Charmatz, Linder, Shelley Lasica, Maria Hassabi, and Latai Taumoepeau, like Michelson, show how certain choreographic work is in dialogue with both established art contexts and contemporary art practices. Such artists are participating in a new exchange that repeats the conditions of Neo-Dada where the dance artists were largely in control of their engagement with the visual arts. Each work brings specific choreographic elements to the foreground such as process, practice, participation, visibility, time, presence, and singularity. In doing so within the art gallery or museum, they re-imagine the contemporary arts with dance, dancing, and choreography working *and* unworking institutional codes. The other side of this tendency has seen contemporary visual artists employing dance-based approaches and strategies in much the same way as Rauschenberg and Nauman; the choreographic work of Agatha Gothe-Snape sits within this field and actively acknowledges this legacy.<sup>47</sup> Across all the case studies there are examples of adaptation, transference, comparison, incorporation, replacement, and integration, but the movement beyond binary models and toward a-disciplinarity is clear as dance knowledges become one material among many for the artists, whether they define themselves as choreographers, or not.

## Case Study 6

# Boris Charmatz—Institutional Critique and Contemporary Dance Histories<sup>1</sup>

Much has been written about French choreographer Boris Charmatz. The following focuses on his contribution to the formation of what has been called “conceptual dance,” particularly the specific manifestation of the conceptual-material relation in his work presented in museums and galleries. Having trained in classical ballet and taken part in the European encounter with the American second-wave legacy in the 1980s and 1990s, Charmatz’s commitment to the physical practice of dancing has been approached choreographically through highly conceptual structures unique to each work, including the dance-museum-as-concept.<sup>2</sup> Several aspects of his work are important for the critical thrust of this book. First is his desire to expand choreographic works into intermedial experiments exemplified in a project such as *Ouvrée (artistes en alpage)* (2000), which brought together multigenerational artists from various disciplines in an open-form workshop.<sup>3</sup> Second, his dance advocacy manifests in a desire to expose “the minor, the anonymous, the collective, and the intensive” aspects of the discipline, in Noémie Solomon’s words, which aligns with the advocacy agenda of *The Persistence of Dance*.<sup>4</sup> Third, Charmatz was one of “Les Signataires du 20 Août,” which will be discussed in Chapter 5, and the influential political position of that group propelled much of the European conceptual dance activity.<sup>5</sup> And last, his work for the gallery evidences some continuities with, and significant departures from, the second-wave dance avant-garde.

All of this appears to have led him and his producer and collaborator Angèle Le Grand to the notion of *Musée de la danse* (2009–2018), an overarching concept that oriented his entire practice toward a comparison between disciplines that such a speculation necessarily provokes. This involved curators, producers, choreographers, dancers, and the public in

an experimental re-orientation of the status quo vis-à-vis the arts, a project that his peer Jérôme Bel sums up as expanding the definition of dance “to its maximum so we can find it, identify it everywhere.”<sup>6</sup> *Musée de la danse* is thus perhaps the ultimate concept of dance in relation to this book project: “a conceptual dream that has taken shape with everyone’s gestures” (in Charmatz’s words) to redress an historiographic exclusion.<sup>7</sup> But if redressive action is on the agenda, there are several strategies currently in play and we will see how Charmatz’s institutional approach, which he describes as a Trojan-like invasion, differs from artists such as choreographer Adam Lindner who choose the museum as site and context for their work at the outset.<sup>8</sup> Insisting on such differentiations and specificities helps clarify the nuanced approaches at the dance-visual arts interface.

In a discussion on “Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp,” Benjamin Buchloh identifies “the transition from self-reflexivity to tautology to contextuality as three stages of conceptual development,” with the latter reflecting on “institutions, framework, distribution.”<sup>9</sup> While one can see all three tendencies across second- and third-wave avant-garde dance, context played a special role in the second-wave, which was at the forefront of institutional critique, epitomized in Trisha Brown’s rejection of the main dance stages in New York and occupation of urban spaces in the first decades of her practice. As Henry Sayre states, “it is important to recognize, in Brown’s removal of her dance to a lake in Minneapolis or to a rooftop in Manhattan, a rejection of the system which would *contain* it in order to *sell* it.”<sup>10</sup> The revision of disciplinary elements in the second wave was yoked to the spaces in which it was developed and presented, beginning perhaps with Anna Halprin’s move outdoors to her dance deck in California and the streets of San Francisco, and continuing in New York with the diversification of performance sites mentioned earlier, which included parks, building exteriors, warehouse spaces, university gymnasiums, galleries, museums, and roller-skating rinks. This was the result of rejections from traditional festivals and venues and the presentation circuits they represented, but it meant that twentieth-century dance took the lead in a rigorous reinvention of art contexts, so that in this way it was more institutionally resistant than the rest of Neo-Dada, which maintained functional relationships with traditional institutional structures.<sup>11</sup>

Charmatz’s work is interesting in dialogue with this aspect of the mid-century avant-garde. His *Musée de la danse* is a take-over:

If one wishes the choreographic tradition to pursue the new technological trends and truly embrace the trans-media space of the contemporary world, then it seems to me that under the designation of Museum the artists will be able to have fun and create freely . . . We are at a time in history where a museum can be alive and inhabited as much as a theatre, can include a virtual space, and offer contact with dance that can be at the same time practical, esthetic and spectacular . . . where a museum in no way excludes precarious movements, nor nomadic, ephemeral, instantaneous ones . . . where a museum can modify BOTH preconceived ideas about museums AND one's ideas about dance.<sup>12</sup>

A broad dissatisfaction with the model of national choreographic centers in France became, for Charmatz, a critique of the institutional framework he inherited as the new director of Centre Chorégraphique National de Rennes et de Bretagne in 2009 and saw him look elsewhere for other models to claim.<sup>13</sup> His proposition was not a museum that we would recognize at the time; he describes a fun, liberated, open, technologically equipped haven for transmedial activity. But he hit upon what museums hoped to become (encompassing the processual, dematerialized, and inter-subjective characteristics mentioned in Chapter 4), and Charmatz, rather than waiting for an invitation and weighing up his options à la Bel, proactively proposed what it was that he desired, and it (more or less) became so.<sup>14</sup> Charmatz understands that dance requires—or initiates—an entirely new model of the museum, and this is what he approaches in this project through a disciplinary stand-off at the threshold between the studio (rather than the theater) and the gallery.

*Musée de la danse* is a speculative framework that is not limited to the Centre Chorégraphique National de Rennes et de Bretagne but can find a home anywhere and can house any number of activities. In 2015, Charmatz and Catherine Wood presented *If Tate Modern was Musée de la danse?* at Tate Modern, London, a landmark exhibition in terms of scale and the use of streaming technologies to negotiate disciplinary differences.<sup>15</sup> The project was described as “a large-scale, two-day dance event . . . a variety of dance invitations, choreographies, exhibitions and free spaces,” and included performances of Charmatz’s early choreographic duet *À bras-le-corps* (1993), solos from *Levée des conflits* (2010), a community-led performance of *Roman Photo* (2009), and *manger* (2014), to which I will return.<sup>16</sup> Posing the question in its title, the project proposed a new hybrid entity, “the tatemusée-moderndeladanse.”<sup>17</sup> UK choreographer Jonathan Burrows responded:

I went to Boris Charmatz' *Musée de la Danse* at Tate Modern and I thought 'These are my people,' and I thought 'I don't care where they do this but a gallery is as good as any other place so long as they keep on doing it,' and it made me wonder what it was they were doing and whether it was old or new, and it seemed to defy exact placement and I thought maybe that is what we're doing, to somehow keep occupying these spaces that can't be easily identified but live in the body and can be activated anywhere, and as much as we worry that we should be more popular, nevertheless we enjoy this place of privileged deviancy that pulls people in, and has nothing to do with history but is about defiant and intelligent becoming.<sup>18</sup>

Burrows sums up the complicated ambiguities in Charmatz's project: the ever nimble, resourceful choreographer stumbling upon millions of new audience members; the relatively obscure (or minored) historical precedents in dance that dissolve in the novelty and marketability of Charmatz's vision; the mobility of the body archive at the center of his vision that can make a home anywhere and resists "exact placement"; and the flirtation with the possibility of losing the subversive, seditious elements of dance that have kept it relevant yet slightly apart from its disciplinary peers. Charmatz himself is aware of his concept as a provocation: "it's a proposition—not a reality."<sup>19</sup>

Alessandra Nicifero has flagged the importance of Charmatz's curatorial project in providing "more equality over the negotiations and aesthetic decisions involved in performing dance in museums . . . To have a dialogue without accommodating dance practices to the desires of the institutional discourse."<sup>20</sup> He is no unwitting tool of the museum, flattered by its attentions, but has rather located the museum within his own suite of research projects that began with *Association EDNA* and continues in his role at *Tanztheater Wuppertal* since 2022, which was established by German choreographer Pina Bausch. Mark Franko's essay, "Museum Artifact Act," celebrates Charmatz's idea that dance offers the museum what it itself does not have: dance creates its own museum in each instant in dancing bodies, thus constituting an "emancipatory procedure" when relocated to the museum. He writes, "the wealth of museum collections is productive of extreme poverty whereas the poverty of dance is productive of extreme wealth."<sup>21</sup> This echoes Burrows above on how dance can "keep occupying these spaces that can't be easily identified but live in the body and can be activated anywhere." This optimistic tone is a celebration of the qualities of dance that have been the envy of the visual arts since Rob-

ert Rauschenberg put on his skates, and points to an inherent resistance on the part of contemporary dance to the operations of capitalism.

One choreographic work that has been included in iterations of *Musée de la danse* at major museums of art, including Tate Modern, is *20 Dancers for the XX Century* (2013–2017) and this piece is perhaps emblematic of Charmatz's concept.<sup>22</sup> For this work, Charmatz commissioned 20 dancer-choreographers to perform, as solo artists, excerpts from their body archive; choreographies of their own or others, or dance techniques they were trained in. *The New York Times* critic Brian Seibert describes an encounter with Richard Move, a dance-impersonator, who performed as Martha Graham in the work at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York:

For a while, he wandered like any other visitor, looking at the art. But Mr. Move also was the art. The Graham choreography he performed was an exhibit, yet so was he: a dancer as a living archive of dance . . . This was art that explained itself, or tried to . . . They gave minilectures, answered questions, suggested connections . . .<sup>23</sup>

Charmatz aims to raise the visibility of dance in its material form within gatekeeper institutions, arguing through practice and discourse for the historical significance of a medium that is so easily invisibilized.<sup>24</sup> By placing historical works embodied by current practitioners as “exhibits” beside other esteemed art works, Charmatz emphasizes (perhaps didactically) both the instability and persistence of the art object in dance in order to

foster teaching and dissemination by way of a panorama of twentieth-century dance. Performers with diverse backgrounds and from different generations take over the hallways, rooms, and stairways of institutions of learning, appropriating and exhibiting some of the landmark solos of the twentieth century. As they stroll around, the audience may come across these strange visitors in motion dispersed around the building: they might discover a Merce Cunningham solo or a dance by Isadora Duncan, allowing everyone to build, each in his own way, a living, non-linear archive of dance in which they may forget themselves, pause, wander from echo to echo, from gesture to gesture . . .<sup>25</sup>

The work aims to demonstrate equivalence between paintings, sculptures, video works, and dances, while never forgetting “there’s an ‘imma-



François Chaignaud performing as part of *20 Dancers for the XX Century*. Direction by Boris Charmatz, Tate Modern, 15 May 2015. Artist Copyright: Tate©. Photo: Tate.

terial' part of the collection [of *Musée de la danse*]" that will always resist the museum's conditions, most obviously through the one-off status of the performances (organized for each iteration), and their exclusion from acquisitions and, thus, collections.<sup>26</sup>

Other points of resistance and differentiation between the dancers and their context in *20 Dancers for the XX Century* are in evidence in the qualities of the specific performances recorded at Tate Modern: the effects of gravity that engage the floor rather than the wall (Ko Murobushi performing Tatsumi Hijikata, Samuel Lefeuvre performing Alain Platel); an attention to the perception-action interface within the body (Chrysa Parkinson performing Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker); physical presence as both process and product (Julie Cunningham and Antonia Franceschi performing technique); and the effacement of a divide between art and life through the conflation of the artist-subject and the art-object (Frank Willens performing Charlie Chaplin in a performance-lecture). Curator Helen Molesworth would add the following dance characteristics in comparison with the other arts: "an acculturation with duration, a high regard

for non-narrativity, and sensations of bodily empathy.”<sup>27</sup> These were also on display in Murobushi’s crawl along the floor in a drawn out Butoh temporality, uncontextualized (un-narrativized) physical states such as Lefeuivre’s disconcertingly tortured and awkward behaviors, and Parkinson’s delicate feeling-forms emerging in, and transforming the energy of, her crowded gallery room. Placing choreographies side by side in this way also allows for the kind of networked spectatorial experiences produced by the museum but rarely available to dance audiences: non-linear, personalized maps that make sense of history through the detail of “gestures” and “echoes” (to use Charmatz’s terms) across and between works in and through performance in real time-space.

Owing to the clarity of *Musée de la danse*’s aims, intentions, and methods, this speculative provocation became a touchstone in the discourse surrounding dance and the gallery. In a special issue of *Dance Research Journal*, *Dance in the Museum*, Charmatz is the subject of three articles, the author of one, and is also interviewed.<sup>28</sup> While Charmatz’s politics are about decentering power and valorizing the role of the dancer (often over the choreographer), he has found himself auteur of what Ana Janevski describes as “an artist’s project” in the most high-profile new venues for dance.<sup>29</sup> His many invitations from museums and galleries (e.g., Biennale of Sydney [2016], Tate Modern [2015], MoMA [2013]) to present his conceptually acute, but also singular take on the dance-visual arts relationship, have stimulated much critical debate.<sup>30</sup>

There is certainly some truth that his projects accommodate the new museum strategies such as the experience economy and participatory aesthetics that have been engaged in the service of its own reinvention, occupying a place of “slippage between dance as a fine art practice and the spectacle that it can become,” to use choreographer Sara Wookey’s phrase.<sup>31</sup> Linder notes:

Boris’s work was waged on this idea that dance’s value is in its presence, in its community, with its public. It is this immaterial form, [however], all the personnel of the material is alive and kicking and therefore, if it engaged with the audience it would breach and overcome the kind of glib detachment that objects in the space can’t offer.<sup>32</sup>

While it may be true that Charmatz, Le Roy, and Bel mobilize a participatory aesthetic in the gallery which may be open to the criticisms associated with the same, it is also true that Charmatz has demonstrated

a long-term commitment to participation as an aesthetic strategy and philosophy. His project *Terrain* (2019—after leaving the Bretagne choreographic centre) creates events such as *Dance Ground for Zurich* (2019) which brings this philosophy to a decisive point in an outdoor, inclusive, 18-day festival of dance.<sup>33</sup>

A more generative point of critique might be *Musée de la danse* as a stand-off; so what if dance claims the museum as its own? In terms of programming, the dance take-over model can be seen as a temporary, novel, and alien occupation that is focused on the museum as a venue for cultural experience and pedagogy, in comparison to, for example, the artist-led model of *To Do/To Make* curated by Zoe Theodore and Shelley Lasica (Case Study 5) that provides an alternative to both the theater and the museum. Charmatz's take-over, or "experimental invasion," is also different to the thread of practice we are following from the mid-twentieth century, downtown New York milieu to recent work that is equally at home in the gallery and the dance studio.<sup>34</sup> Like Le Roy's *Retrospective by Xavier Le Roy* (discussed in Chapter 5), Charmatz's *20 Dancers for the XX Century* and the concept of *Musée de la danse* are many things, but they do not fulfill the working definition of a field of *dance as contemporary art*. The latter work is distinct from contemporary dance presented on the stage that has its lineage in theater and ballet; however, this is exactly the kind of dance culture that Charmatz introduced to the gallery in *20 Dancers for the XX Century*, which featured the work of Merce Cunningham, Ted Shawn, Bausch, and Bel, performed as it would be on stage. In this sense, Charmatz's *Musée de la danse* does not emerge from a deep engagement with contemporary art practices and knowledges, despite Charmatz's studies in art history, or build on the legacy of dance-gallery pioneers such as Forti and Brown. It is distinct from the approach of artists such as Sarah Michelson, Lasica, Maria Hassabi, and other case studies in this book who have considered the contemporary art context as a part of their practice across their choreographic careers. Charmatz emerged from training in classical ballet and discovered contemporary dance through seeing works locally, studying at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Lyon, working with Régine Chopinot and Odile Duboc, and meeting the important French dance researcher, Hubert Godard.<sup>35</sup> He became part of a wave of new choreographers in France and Europe who were focused on an alternative to a conservative model of dance that was local and has been ill-defined (as discussed in Chapter 5) but was potent for his generation. From a distance, intermediality in this context appears reactionary rather than emerging

from an organic community of practice, or indeed, from intermedial aesthetic lineages. Charmatz's position as advocate produces work stabilized by dance in its grammatical, cultural, and political conditions (no matter how critical it is of the same) and distinguishes it from an a-disciplinary or post-disciplinary position.

Charmatz's interest in the dancer (a role he has never abandoned himself, creating a solo—*Somnole*—for himself in 2021), and what Burrows interprets as his commitment to the “privileged deviancy” of dance as a discipline, became clearer to me when I encountered his contribution to the 2016 Biennale of Sydney. It also helps clarify where his choreographies, which have been mostly conceived for stage and are one part of his multifaceted outputs, fall within the dance-visual art field. Charmatz presented *manger* (2014) at Carriageworks in Sydney, an old railway yard with vast performance spaces and an industrial aesthetic. Originally devised for the stage, it was adapted here to “an embodied installation and a durational performance, a living exhibition and a dance,” where the dancers, sound score, and paper-as-prop were the sole materials of the work.<sup>36</sup> His dancers were scattered on the concrete floor around the space but worked mostly in isolation, performing highly wrought solos in parallel, contained in space and full of a dark energy that reached extremes of pitch and tone. The themes of the work—the literal translation of the title is “to eat” but the broader theme is the mouth and orality—were manifested almost solely through the physical performance. Jeroen Peeters observes that Charmatz, Stuart, and Benoît Lachambre, who have all worked together (as noted in Part II), share an interest in “the body as filter,” as noted in Case Study 2. For Peeters, this refers to the body as an active center for processing perceptions, sensations, and thoughts within a given context and converting these into meaning through action:

These bodies, permeable as filters, are inextricably linked to the context in which they operate. In principle susceptible, these bodies are discursive sites where accepted meanings are outlawed, and where visual hierarchies and conventions are re-mediated.<sup>37</sup>

Peeters sees the discursive nature of such dance as a tension between the body as experienced, and the body as an object within a visual economy. Such economies or “heirarchies” are “remediated” through the agency, instability, and sensitivity (like a film plate or “filter”) of the dancing body. Peeters describes these bodies as “heterogeneous,” as empty of



Boris Charmatz *manger*, 2014. Choreography: Boris Charmatz. Performance, 60 mins (19 March 2016) presented at Carriageworks for the 20th Biennale of Sydney. Courtesy the artist. Photograph: Zan Wimberley

preconditioning as they can be, and “susceptible” to the influences that surround them, including predetermined movement scores.<sup>38</sup> The importance of context as it pertains to the condition of the dancer working at the perception-action nexus recurs in the case studies in this book and will be a focus in my discussion of the Lasica and Hassabi case studies.

The question of context also returns us to the heart of the material aspect of dance through which Charmatz realizes his (corporeally based) concepts in *manger*. This choreographic strategy is in line with his commitment to the body as medium across all of his works and his privileging of “dancing” over “choreography,” something that sets him apart from some of his conceptual dance peers. His colleague Dimitri Chamblas describes how Charmatz works through the conceptual aspects of a new piece, “then he faces them off with the material nature of the dancing body.”<sup>39</sup> An associated aim of *manger* was that the dance should “linger” in the bodies of the audience.<sup>40</sup> I observed the spectators negotiating their proximity to the physical states of the dancers and their relationship to the perceived action, their own behavior and responsibility,

and the affective force of it all. Observing as an audience member, and watching a primarily visual arts audience negotiate this work, the power of subjectivity-as-art-medium had never been so apparent to me. The technique, virtuosity, powerful scores engaging with imagination and physical states, temporal structures of duration that helped us all go deep, and self-conscious associations with trance dance and ritual, produced an overwhelmed and reverential state in so many around me. Charmatz was using the most powerful means of the discipline to expose the audience to his themes knowing that physical presence, proximity, force, labor, energy, and rhythm are both disarming and contagious.<sup>41</sup> A work about the functions of the body, expressed through the body in motion in an installation context, closed the space between content and media, meaning and form, object and subject, using all of the tools of theater-based dance rebirthed in a new context with new audiences in novel proximity to the action. The sophistication of this intention, which would have challenged visual arts audiences to reconsider what they think contemporary art can do and be, is in contrast to the rather didactic approach taken in Charmatz's larger *Musée de la danse* project.

*manger* is not a particularly radical work for contemporary dance, but when Charmatz places it in and among visual arts audiences, it is another "take-over." When Wood describes how Charmatz works with "the staging of attention" and "holding our gaze" to draw us toward something "potentially ungraspable and too particular to be repeated," she is describing the condition of contemporary dance as infamously "hard to see."<sup>42</sup> Charmatz has clearly mastered the choreographic structure of parallel solos that appear in his other works; in such work individuals are in full flight, improvising around scores and owning their material in a radical way that forcefully engages audience attention.<sup>43</sup> From his earliest work, *À bras-le-corps* (1993), which was performed with the audience in a tight frame around Charmatz in a very physical duet with Chamblas, Charmatz understood that the power of dance is in the dancers' bodies, and that *doing dancing* is the most powerful tool of the discipline.<sup>44</sup> This plays out even in his discursive workshop forms such as *expo zéro* (2009) where devices and tools are banned and "participants manifest their work solely through encounters with each other."<sup>45</sup> Concepts in his work are always arrived at via the body.

Charmatz's position in debates surrounding *dance as a contemporary art form* is interesting. He is committed to dance as a discipline and works with the medium in challenging formations, often involving

intermediality-as-experiment, and engages the institutional critique native to the art form, perhaps more aggressively than the second-wave artists. He also brings a conceptual approach to dance history, performance contexts, and disciplinary infrastructure in tune with others who are labelled “conceptual dance artists” and significantly departing from the second wave in his focus on these. All of this has made him a leading innovator in the third-wave dance avant-garde. He has studied visual art, collaborated with visual artists and major arts organizations, and represents the most public face of the choreographic turn in contemporary art.<sup>46</sup> Yet his choreographic works have a theater logic and make most sense in dialogue with the contemporary dance canons that he plunders, so reverentially, across his oeuvre, and this is a striking difference from the gallery works of Brown, Forti, and Deborah Hay that were operating far from a theater logic and deep in dialogue with their visual art peers. So, does Charmatz’s entire body of work represent a Trojan Horse, a trick that knocks at the door of the art museum and blatantly overruns it, on its own terms, only to pack up and go home, continuing along its own journey? Is that dancer who rides the edge between experience and exposition, feeling and form, and who carries their own history with them wherever they go, always going to choose another home? Will dance always be alien to the art museum? A new generation of artists are taking a different tack, working the interstices within the institution in a less combative and spectacular way, and looking more comfortable among other works of contemporary art. The next case study, Adam Linder, is part of a new generation of artists who identify as choreographers yet move easily between the art museum or gallery, theater, and other contexts, creating work specifically for each.<sup>47</sup> Linder refers to peers such as Isabel Lewis, Yve Laris Cohen, Andros Zins-Browne, and Ligia Lewis. Others who could be added to this generation of dance artists in Australia include Angela Goh, Amrita Hepi, Jo Lloyd, Lizzie Thomson, Brian Fuata, Deanne Butterworth, Brooke Stamp, Matthew Day, and Alice Heyward, and I list their international peers in Chapter 1. But first I will turn my attention to the rise of conceptual and post-conceptual work across all fields of art to better understand a central (but not sole) aspect of the conditions within which such work is operating.

## Chapter 5

# Choreography as Concept and Post-disciplinarity

### 5.1 Introduction

Art theorist Hal Foster summarizes the importance of the work done by Robert Rauschenberg in the mid-1950s that anticipated the preoccupations of contemporary art over the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first: “conceptual gesture, material process, and performative action.”<sup>1</sup> A clustering of new and advanced art around *concepts*, *materials*, and *performance* emerged from the intermedial mid-century avant-garde that was engaging, as Rauschenberg did, with dance as a model and strategy. In some recent choreography the legacy of this period is clear in tendencies toward *choreography as a concept*, or choreographic ideas and objects that are independent of the dancing body. This has involved a renewed commitment to an expanded set of materials for dance that involves human participants in a non-hierarchical field of diverse elements. As a result of these recent extra-disciplinary adventures, dance has been split more emphatically into *dancing* as movement, technique, and singularity, and *choreography* as “a possible course of action” (to quote William Forsythe’s influential “Choreographic Objects” essay), unhinged from a specific dancing body and deployed by any number of possible elements (a collective of bodies, objects, score, etcetera).<sup>2</sup> This prompted Forsythe to ask, “are we perhaps at the point in the evolution of choreography where a distinction between the establishment of its ideas and its traditional forms of enactment must be made?”<sup>3</sup>

This chapter considers the provenance and scope of the division between dancing and choreography in theory and practice over the past three decades, and the association of choreography as a concept with the movement of dance into galleries and museums. The aim is to build on the

work in Chapter 4 toward understanding the way that conceptual work in dance has been understood. This will demonstrate the specific and asynchronous use of the term in relation to the visual arts while acknowledging shared principles that reflect overlapping histories. This chapter thus continues the dialogue in *The Persistence of Dance* with the history of contemporary art despite some critique from dance theorists regarding the relevance of the same. In 2006, German dance and performance scholar Gerald Siegmund dismissed the usefulness of considering new developments in dance in relation to the history of (Western) art, as did others.<sup>4</sup> Such a position suggests that dance is irrelevant to developments in the arts more generally and denies its intermedial dimensions and exchanges historically. The choreography-dancing divide that emerged in the 1990s is contextualized in what follows as an iteration of the conceptual-material dialectic that has been so central to the arts post-World War II, as well as being a specifically *intra-disciplinary* process that dance as a discipline was undergoing. The following uncovers narratives that, on the one hand, promote choreography as a transdisciplinary model of composition or organization liberated from outdated paradigms of dance and with unique qualities and potential, but on the other hand, disempower the role of dancing and dancers and reinstate old binaries that are unhelpful in understanding the true scope of new practices emerging at the dance-gallery interface. The question of how relevant *choreography as a concept* is to the field of choreography as a contemporary art medium is also addressed. Finally, in attempting to unpack this recent history, a reconsideration of the scope of the third-wave dance avant-garde allows for new accounts that even up gender inequities in the existing discourse and help correct an overinvestment of critical attention in narrow geocultural regions and cohorts.

## 5.2 Dancing versus Choreography

In 2007, Performa Biennial in New York presented a series called *Dance After Choreography* which featured works by European choreographers Xavier Le Roy, Jérôme Bel, and Mårten Spångberg, key players in the conceptual dance debates. The distinction between *dance* and *choreography* made explicit in this title (and the implicit reference to a post-choreographic or post-discipline condition) appeared during a period when definitions and terminologies were dominating certain dance studies discourses and media commentary.<sup>5</sup> American dance theorists André Lepecki

and Mark Franko differentiate dancing and choreography in relation to Le Roy's gallery-based work, *Retrospective by Xavier Le Roy* (2012), as follows:

*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).<sup>6</sup>

Le Roy was invited by curator and director Laurence Rassel to develop his *Retrospective* for the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona. His aim was to use the archive of his solos (1994–2009) to produce an exhibition, and the result was a new take on the visual arts format of the retrospective—a performative archive that responded to both the intense interest in archiving dance that had emerged over the turn of the twenty-first century, and the choreographic turn in museums and galleries.<sup>7</sup> I saw this exhibition remounted in November 2014 at MoMA PS1, Queens, New York City, and understand the distinction Lepecki and Franko are making as, on the one hand, the procedural apparatus of the exhibition as *choreography*, and on the other, the individual and specific iterations by the dancers through their *dancing*. A major part of the exhibition (which also included an audio-visual archive and separate installation) was a rotating cast of six dance artists performing multiple tasks as soloists within a dramaturgy that was triggered by someone entering the space. One of those tasks was to recount how their biography entwined with the work of Le Roy and thus, their participation in the exhibition, and another, was to perform excerpts from his solos. Much has been written about *Retrospective*, including an anthology edited by Bojana Cvejić that discusses its significance regarding, for example, “the history and medium of the exhibition,” and “the dramaturgy of the spectatorial position.”<sup>8</sup> In terms of Lepecki and Franko’s alignment of *Retrospective* with specific definitions of *choreography* and *dancing*, and in my experience of the work, the dramaturgical system could be equated with an expanded and stable choreography that was authored by Le Roy, while the cast members’ performances constituted less stable, subjective, and idiosyncratic instances of dancing. *Retrospective by Xavier Le Roy* was accompanied by a conference, *Expanded Choreography. Situations, Movements, Objects . . .*, which was organized by Spångberg and marked a high point in the theoretical work associated with conceptual dance.<sup>9</sup> The description of the conference notes:

Choreography is today emancipating itself from dance, engaging in a vibrant process of articulation . . . Simultaneously, we have seen a number of exhibitions in which choreography is often placed in a tension between movement, situation and objects. Choreography needs to redefine itself in order to include artists and others who use choreographic strategies without necessarily relating them to dance . . . Choreography is not a priori performative, nor is it bound to expression and reiteration of subjectivity; it is becoming an expanded practice, a practice that is political in and of itself.<sup>10</sup>

In Lepecki and Franko's observations, this conference description, and Le Roy's work, the division into dancing on the one hand as singular, present, and unstable, and choreography on the other as a repeatable, ahistorical, stable structure, can be linked to the historical division between dancer and choreographer that has been rejected by many contemporary practitioners. The historical model is associated with restrictions and prescriptions authored by a choreographer who remains external to the performance of the choreography by the dancers, the latter needing to be stabilized through a (Foucauldian) subjection to the choreography, technique, or body practice.<sup>11</sup> What has occurred since the mid-twentieth-century dance avant-garde has been, in fact, a breakdown of the distinction between dancing and choreography (commented on in Sarah Michelson's work, Case Study 1), with most dance practices involving degrees of choreographic work through an understanding of the spontaneous composition of improvisation, and choreographies often dependent upon dancer collaboration, agency, and authorship.<sup>12</sup>

*Choreography*, as opposed to *dance*, has become the preferred categorical term for experimental dance practitioners associated with the recent avant-garde that has been of such interest to the visual arts. Lepecki and Ric Allsopp link choreography to "conceptual and post-conceptual performance," stating that

choreography is a field of contemporary arts practice that provides not only vectors for new forms of trans-disciplinary arts research but also a locus for questioning the orthodoxies of contemporary art work and practice. Through this work choreography can now be seen to invoke, recuperate and incorporate other forms of cultural practice.<sup>13</sup>

Here is choreography both in exchange with its peer art forms as a facilitator of intermediality and innovation, but also stewarding the arts

toward its beyond. Le Roy is emphatic about the subsidiary role of dancing in relation to choreography's broader applications:

How do we extend our understanding of 'movement'? How do we produce movements? What structure or organization produces what movement? These questions are pertinent to different fields, but they also cover dance. This is why I prefer to talk about choreography rather than dance.<sup>14</sup>

Choreography allows Lepecki, Allsopp, and Le Roy to consider movement as non-dance-specific, as a strategy or process that can move across, and connect with, various disciplines and phenomena. Such definitions of choreography also have a provocative, almost antagonistic dimension that has resulted in some defensive responses. Katja Praznik, who perhaps coined the phrase "post-contemporary dance" in 2004, asks, "what do these authors [Bel, Le Roy, Tino Sehgal] offer as an alternative to dance and choreography, and why do they not want to dance anymore?"<sup>15</sup> Le Roy's colleague Bel certainly distanced himself from dancing, referring to how, in his early oeuvre-defining work, "there was no question of rehearsals, of dance classes or training sessions."<sup>16</sup> Later, Bel describes the conservatively trained dancer-subjects of his pieces, *Cédric Andrieux* and *Véronique Doisneau*, as "work horses" and how his job was "to introduce doubt, questioning, and subjectivity" into their position as dancers.<sup>17</sup> Bel's critique of a broad diversity of training regimes from ballet to Merce Cunningham represented by these artists (and to which he himself has submitted), is partnered with his abandonment of the studio, a move he aligns with Marcel Duchamp's rejection of the craft of painting: "in the same way that he claimed not to be 'hooked on turpentine,' there was no way I was going to be a 'lactic acid addict'."<sup>18</sup> This is an example of the generalized opposition set out in certain dance practice and theory between choreography aligned with the broader contemporary arts and their related discursive fields on the one hand, and a more hermetic understanding of dance that values the choreographer-dancer relationship and standardized forms of technique above all else on the other. However, as we will see, the latter are poorly defined in such literature.

### 5.3 Choreography as Concept

In 2013, Cvejić arrived at the conclusion that the "concept" of conceptual dance was "Dance as Choreography, which contradicted or showed that

choreography was used as a closed concept of Dance.”<sup>19</sup> So the liberation of choreography at a conceptual level and a fierce opposition to mainstream practices were the central tenets of the tendency. This echoes conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth who stated in 1969: “the ‘purest’ definition of conceptual art would be that it is an inquiry into the foundations of the concept ‘art.’”<sup>20</sup> Possibly owing to its still emergent status in discourse, accounts of choreography as a concept lack both a clear vision of what it opposes and a succinct definition of the term. It is described as being “open” in opposition to more traditional understandings of choreography that Cvejić aligns with “the still Modernist established practices of the choreographers who emerged in the 80s and who are desperately clutching to the idea of Dance as the invention of body.”<sup>21</sup> Dance critics committed to the older generation of artists are the target; Cvejić describes “essentialist resistances” in such criticism to the new work being due to the writers’ commitment to a “prevailing regime of representation in theater dance, a regime characterized by an emphasis on bodily movement, identification of the human body, and the theater’s act of communication determining the reception of the audience.”<sup>22</sup> There is little concrete detail regarding who or what represents the “prevailing regime,” but Cvejić here focuses on corporeal movement, anthropocentrism, and pre-determined affects as characteristics of mainstream practices. Broadly speaking, expression, subjectivity, and craft/virtuosity seem to be the key aspects of the conservative model to be addressed through strategies such as objectivity, a voiding of content including fundamental elements such as movement, and a de-skilling of the dancer.<sup>23</sup>

Cvejić locates an “open-ended” attitude to choreography associated with conceptual dance within the currency of an “indeterminacy of art” as defined by art theorist Stewart Martin.<sup>24</sup> This term is applied where all divisions between disciplines of art, and art and non-art, are broken down, thus going further than the contingent post-disciplinary label. This post-categorical condition of art is linked to the general commodification of the arts by Cvejić (via Martin), and can result in the colonizing power of the visual arts subsuming the creative practice and production of performance (and other ephemeral arts practices) into its economy.<sup>25</sup> As we saw in Chapter 1, other commentators such as Tate Modern Director of Programme Catherine Wood and art theorist Hal Foster warn of contemporary art’s “rapacious consumption of other disciplinary specificities.”<sup>26</sup> And as noted here by Cvejić, conceptual and post-conceptual models of choreography seem to offer paradigms readily subsumed into this logic. The narrative of dance as an unwitting tool of the visual arts set out in such

discourses needs to be re-written with an understanding of the complicity of dance in the conditions from which post-disciplinary art emerged, a complicity that has been argued for by myself and others elsewhere.<sup>27</sup> And the notion that the choreography in this field is completely unanchored from discipline is not sustainable when we look more closely at the work of artists such as Adam Linder, Shelley Lasica, Agatha Gothe-Snape, Latai Taumoepeau, and Maria Hassabi in the following chapters.

While sensitivity possibly prevents Cvejić from naming the artists or critics associated with the conservatism that her case studies oppose, the historical context of the emergence of conceptual dance artists helps us to read between the lines.<sup>28</sup> Suspicions regarding the value of traditional training techniques in dance and the emergence of choreography as a concept must be seen against the backdrop of the condition of contemporary dance in France in the 1990s. The history of the institutionalization of dance in France in the 1980s, and an important letter of protest in 1998, “Les Signataires du 20 Août,” catalyzed a reactionary movement that went to the aesthetic extremes articulated here and elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> Ginot describes the conservatism at the heart of a legitimizing process that the art form went through in France in the 1980s which saw the establishment of national choreographic centers, prescriptive terms for evaluating new choreography, and opaque funding assessments. This resulted in what Ginot describes as a “stifling uniformity” in choreographic production in that decade.<sup>30</sup> The 1990s saw a widespread backlash “that started by a revaluing of the status of the dancer and developed into a global criticism of the system, through a return to values of performance, collective [sic], rejection of virtuosity, etc.”<sup>31</sup> Alessandra Nicifero describes the ensuing dissolution of the company structure in France (and Frédéric Pouillaude the resulting freedom for dancers) which “seems to have had a domino effect in weakening other dance constitutive elements, such as authorship, composition, the essence of dance as medium and the nature of dance as spectacle, as previously understood in modern times.”<sup>32</sup>

Added to this political situation is an aesthetic one noted by Cvejić: Europe’s disconnection from the developments in American mid-century avant-garde dance during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>33</sup> Céline Roux concurs that the shift in Europe in the 1990s was brought about by a delayed connection with American “post-modern” dance and the notion—associated with the work of Simone Forti, Brown, Yvonne Rainer et al.—“that the field of visual arts was a rich territory for art choreography.”<sup>34</sup> American theorists acknowledge “the great migration . . . the dance diaspora” that saw the

European importation of American innovations, but the chronology and details of this are hard to discern.<sup>35</sup> Was the new European dance primarily breaking with European dance theater? Were they less familiar with the American second-wave avant-garde, hence the claiming of innovation described in Chapter 4? Or did the geographic distance allow for fresh innovations where the persistence of a monolithic sense of dance history stifled American artists? In any case, this specific geopolitical history of contemporary dance has been obscured within international dance studies and related fields by a generalized crisis of the discipline. In the process, links between mid-century American dance, European dance of the 1990s, and a clear-eyed account of connections to the recent and international dance-visual arts nexus have also been obscured. Choreography as concept, which thus emerged from a specific intra-disciplinary situation and history where dance was uncoupling itself from existing institutional paradigms and realities, has since been catalyzed by various aspirations regarding the social, political, and aesthetic potential of choreography in its most expanded applications.

Such aspirations played out in a 2022 event at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, *Choreographic Devices*.<sup>36</sup> The symposium appears to follow artist and theorist Edgar Schmitz's project with Mårten Spångberg *CHOREOGRAPHIC* (2016-) and its use of choreography as a concept, or rather "model," to frame discussions on "embodied and spatial practices in order to question social, political, legal and technological realities."<sup>37</sup> Participants included curators; theorists across art, philosophy, and history; and artists with diverse cultural backgrounds working in writing, dance, performance, sculpture, film, opera, and sound. Themes included ecologies, environments, and animals; queer creative practices; space and social relations; migration; feminism; post-colonialism; legal studies; indigenous studies; ethics; and activism. Like curator Mathieu Copeland's action as choreographer of *A Choreographed Exhibition* (2007, Case Study 3), commanding a structure to be performed by hired dancers, or even Le Roy's *Retrospective* (2012), such work is distinct from dance as a contemporary art medium if the latter is a model of choreography as an art form engaging with the central preoccupations and conditions driving the broader contemporary arts. In these three cases, choreography is either a theoretical apparatus for a suite of broader concerns, a model for curation, or a structure to reinvent the visual arts retrospective. These are all examples of conceptual work busy with extra-disciplinary concerns often related to the social or relational, and distanced (to varying degrees) from the material of

dance and dancing. This, then, is also different to *conceptual dance*, which is concerned with dance histories and materialities and which I will now revise before we move into Part IV of the book.

## 5.4 Conclusion

Le Roy, Bel, and Charmatz are male French dance artists who were the focus of theoretical discourses and institutional practices between dance and the visual arts in the first two decades of the 2000s. As Claire Bishop pointed out in 2014, “only *certain* lineages of dance are embraced by museums and the art world in general: a conceptually oriented practice that refuses narrative, character, and expression.”<sup>38</sup> While this flattens the nuances in the work of these important artists (Catherine Wood notes how Charmatz works “between ideas and experiences,” “between anarchy and control”), their broadly conceptual approach that has centered ideas and provocations and contained physical dancing in various ways has suited contemporary art museums.<sup>39</sup> Such suitability recalls, for me, Le Roy’s and Scarlet Yu’s durational exhibition *Temporary Title* (2015) performed at Carriageworks in Sydney in a grey space—not a gallery or a theater but a space approximating a studio—and involving more than a dozen naked dancers loaded with technical skill, crawling, lying prostrate, or on their backs with their legs in the air swaying together, and talking one-on-one to the spectators who lined the walls of the vast space of the old train workshop.<sup>40</sup> The dancers were objectified to a large extent in a simple and transparent compositional structure, approaching the sculptural in its overall affect, and largely voiding “narrative, character, and expression.” The result was neutral to the extent that it could be re-set in other like spaces. One could conclude that the substantial investment in the work of Le Roy and his peers within dance studies is symptomatic of broader economic, aesthetic, cultural, and social circumstances. Between 2006 and 2017 eight books and numerous articles on contemporary dance focused on the work of this field of European artists, a large percentage of a small pool of dance studies literature.<sup>41</sup> The gender profiles of the most highly visible dance artists working in this field should also be noted. Alongside Le Roy, Bel, and Charmatz was another male-identifying artist, Sehgal, who was trained and worked as a dancer before becoming a visual artist.<sup>42</sup> Another continuity between the second- and third-wave dance avant-garde could then be the slow emergence of the work of female artists: Forti, Brown, and

Rainer in the mid-century generation and, more recently, La Ribot, Eszter Salamon, Mette Ingvarsen, Alice Chauchat, Mette Edvardsen, Jennifer Lacey, and Vera Mantero among others.<sup>43</sup>

One of the aims of *The Persistence of Dance* is to define dance as a contemporary art medium not in opposition to an undefined, conservative model of dance, but rather toward a holistic notion of experimental, intermedial contemporary dance that is not limited to a small pool of male artists. In this way one can liberate the notion of a third wave of dance experimentation from geographical, gendered, and aesthetic overdeterminations indicated in Ginot's question in 2002, "is there anything else happening?"<sup>44</sup> This will allow us to consider the broader reach of the dance-visual arts exchange in the early twenty-first century. In light of these aims, there are three things that we can take from the discourse surrounding the conceptual dance artists discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 that will help identify correspondences and exchanges with the visual arts. First, Cvejić sees recent experimental dance as completing the work begun by Judson Dance Theater, and through interrogating this claim, the conceptualists evidence the ongoing influence of the Neo-Dada or neo-avant-garde post-war period. Second, the conceptual focus of the work is revealed as being deeply material, as suggested by Foster's comments above on the direction progressive art would take after Neo-Dada. Finally, arguments for the radical testing of disciplinary parameters by this group (inadvertently) evidence the continuities that sustain disciplinary limits in the face of their extinction, that is, the persistence of a thing called dance at the point of its disappearance. These are three frameworks carried into Parts IV and V toward a model of *post-dance* that acknowledges the historical precedents, disciplinary contributions, and unprecedented condition of dance in the first decades of the twenty-first century.



## PART IV

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### Concept and Material

Part IV begins with Case Study 7, Adam Linder, who exemplifies a return to the material business of dancing in his *Services* series (2013-2019), which is assertive of the discipline in many ways: of the labor of the dancer, of the right to place the work beside and as equal to other art forms, of the rights of the performer, of the financial value of dance as an art form, and of the ultimate resistance of the work to visual arts markets. What he and others have devised is a form of *dance as a contemporary art medium* and the materiality of dance in the figure of the dancer is crucial here. Chapter 6 seeks to unpack what *conceptual* meant when it emerged from the inter-medial historical period in art between the early 1960s and early 1970s, and how this can be mapped against its use in both recent experimental dance described in Chapter 4 and in the contemporaneous second-wave dance avant-garde. It also examines the usefulness of these discourses in understanding current choreographic practices that interface with the visual arts. The literature on conceptual dance covered in Parts III and IV allows us to consider how the conceptual-material bind in the broader contemporary arts is playing out alongside the repeated movement across, and gradual dissolution of, disciplinary borders. Chapter 6 also contributes to an interest in the specifically choreographic approach to *conceptual-material* practices and debates that emerged in the mid-century period and continue today. This includes dance's contribution to the critique of the material objectivity of art, disciplinary purity, ocularcentrism, and the transcendental status of art. In addressing such things, the work of dance and performance scholars Rudi Laermans and Bojana Cvejić are brought into dialogue with artist-theorists such as Sol LeWitt, Henry Flynt, and Joseph Kosuth, and also art theorists Hal Foster, Peter Osborne, Zöe Sutherland, Alexander Alberro, Lucy Lippard, and Claire Bishop. In

order to support a discursive balance between the two critical fields that can match developments in practice in this study of deeply intermedial practices, Chapter 7 underlines a tradition of disciplinary clarity in the field of dance. This chapter, continuing the work of Chapter 2, fleshes out a toolkit of methodological apparatuses, frameworks, and concepts drawn from dance analysis and theories of choreographic composition to arrive at specific terms for specific works that undertake singular compositional experiments. Putting these tools to work, in Case Studies 8 and 9, Shelley Lasica and Maria Hassabi reveal that in the most progressive choreographic work interfacing with the visual arts, the materiality of dance is most often bound to the conceptual as the mechanism through which it is realized. LeWitt has a formulation for this: the paradox of converting the material of the work into an idea—*material as idea*. The recent dance avant-garde thus works the space between attention to disciplinary fundamentals and a critique of institutionalized limits in subtle, unique, yet powerful ways that have helped reinstitute materiality, physicality, sensuality, and co-habitation into the very heart of our major art institutions at a time when such things were and are desired.

## Case Study 7

### Adam Linder—Dance as a Contemporary Art Medium

Adam Linder is an Australian choreographer based in Los Angeles and Berlin whose early works appeared in the 2010s.<sup>1</sup> He presented his first work in a gallery in 2012, *Ma ma ma materials* at Silberkuppe Gallery, Berlin, five years after Boris Charmatz instituted *Musée de la danse*. In his work, there is little sense of restrictions regarding established notions of what dance can and cannot be, and there is a new capacity to range beyond the Western contemporary dance skill base to include virtuosic popular culture styles and blatantly mimetic gestures. Linder has worked with Meg Stuart and Scottish choreographer Michael Clark among others and brings multiple technical skills to work with his highly trained dancers. In counterpoint to Charmatz's ambitious project, Linder's *Choreographic Services* series (2013-2019) insinuated its way into the museum and gallery in a more modest way, tinkering with the conditions of the institution from inside and recalling the approach of Stuart and Bart De Baere in *This Is the Show and the Show Is Many Things / Extra Muros* (1994) (Case Study 2) and Adrian Heathfield and collaborators in *Ghost Telephone* (2016) (Case Study 4). The works under discussion here do not present a spectacle that, in Linder's words, "wraps" the audience into its logic or energy to persuade, win over, or claim ground (which could perhaps all be applied to Charmatz's *manger* [2014] as it was described in Case Study 6).<sup>2</sup> A piece like *Choreographic Service No. 2: Some Proximity* (2014) functions alongside other works in the gallery as a cohabitant rather than a comparison, recalling Benjamin Buchloh on the importance of contextuality in the most recent conceptual work.<sup>3</sup> In comparison to Charmatz and the conceptual dance tradition of which he is a part, Linder shares some features such as compositional reduction and clarity and an aesthetic strategy to work the concept *through* the material, but apart from the difference in

scale and approach just noted, there are other departures: a new emphasis on virtuosity, skill, and dancing over choreography that can be distinguished from Charmatz's focus on the same; a folding of discourse more directly into the work; and politics that are less disciplinarily antagonistic and more culturally expansive. Linder states, "I'm much more interested in how performing bodies are institutionalized. If it is institutional critique, it's located in the transaction of bodies."<sup>4</sup>

Linder's *Choreographic Services* series is specifically made for museums and galleries and consists of *Choreographic: Service No. 1: Some Cleaning* (2013), *Choreographic Service No. 2: Some Proximity* (2014), *Choreographic Service No. 3: Some Riding* (2015), *Choreographic Service No. 4: Some Strands of Support* (2016), *Choreographic Service No. 5: Dare to Keep Kids Off Naturalism* (2017), and *Footnote Service: Some Trade* (2018).<sup>5</sup> These works, Linder acknowledges, "have a very clear conceptual framework," which he believes explains their popularity with galleries and museums, with invitations to present these works from the National Gallery of Victoria (Melbourne), Kunsthalle Basel (Basel), the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) (London), the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) (Los Angeles), and Serralves Museum (Porto).<sup>6</sup> They are easily reduced to their elements—a contractual text, freestyle solo dancing by an ensemble of two or more, a museum or gallery space—and the way in which they are put into dialogue which circles back, self-reflexively, to *the dancer dancing*, which is at the heart of the work.

*Choreographic Service No. 2: Some Proximity* features two dancers in matching uniforms (at the Museum of Contemporary Art [MCA] in Sydney in 2016 they were Linder and Justin Kennedy) who take turns reading excerpts from the critical responses to the festival/exhibition/collection (from Holly Childs in Sydney; in other editions UK art critic Jonathan P. Watts), which are posted on the walls around them. At the same time, they dance around the gallery space using a glide form of footwork that is a part of B-boy movement vocabulary.<sup>7</sup> Choreographic staging is peripheral, as in Charmatz's work, with a focus on the individual dancer's agency and investment; one of Linder's aims is to "keep the subjects the primary material."<sup>8</sup> There is nothing immaterial here; the working dancer is front and center. Linder describes how "the fulfillment of these very skilled actions . . . really detailed and virtuosic" are "the crux of my service position . . . and that is why it is being offered as a commodity on the market."<sup>9</sup> So, if Linder's work is conceptual, it is through both the legal work framing the performances and the foregrounding of movement vocabularies in each work, and how the two speak to each other.



*Some Proximity*, Adam Linder, 2014. *Choreographic Service*, 2 dancers and a critic. Pictured: Justin F. Kennedy, Adam Linder at MCA Sydney, 2016.

The *Services* do not present choreography as a concept that is busy with redefinitions of the discipline, but dancing that is in dialogue with its new context. If Linder's central theme is the value of dancing as a skill, he is responding to the new conditions the art form confronts as it moves into much tighter dialogue with visual art and its various apparatuses—venues, legalities, economics, working conditions, ethics.<sup>10</sup> Rather than an invasion that temporarily turns the institutional machinations toward the logic of the dancer and the dance studio, Linder confronts the economic conditions that exist in the museum and finds a way to work within the same. The most obvious condition is the “hire” transaction that applies to dance as opposed to the “purchase” logic of the visual arts:

When choreography circulates in the visual art field, it needs an economic form that distances itself from that of objects, because it cannot be an object in a typical material sense . . . The idea for the services came from witnessing performance and particularly dance being wheeled out as supposedly ‘immaterial’ alternatives to an interest in objects—I found this quite patronising.<sup>11</sup>

Linder found equity in a transparent, contractual arrangement that became a part of the works, and which stresses the materiality of the dancer and their conditions, moving the performances “away from eventhood” and distinguishing them from objecthood.<sup>12</sup> As with Maria Hassabi’s work (Case Study 9), the mechanism of the contract (between choreographer and institution, choreographer and dancer) is both implicitly and explicitly realized through materials that do not diverge from their purpose: “we’re going to commit to what we’re proposing to offer and that kind of agreement is more important than the whim of the moment [or to] serve the audience at any given time.”<sup>13</sup> The contract details the terms of the engagement: how long they are engaged for, the hours they will perform, how much they are paid. But it also mentions less quantifiable things, such as this line in the original contract for *Some Proximity*: “Adam Linder, Justin F. Kennedy and Jonathan P. Watts—will invest subjectivity into fulfilling the service’s function.”<sup>14</sup> The displayed document thus plays with the logic of the genre of the contract.

I like the contract being very interpretive: it’s very playful. When a normal contract would maybe just stay fixed on technical details, I over-explain in a descriptive manner what the service will purvey. That is a tension in the work in that it starts off with this kind of rational logic, a carving out of parameters. But then—overtly in *No.5*, almost purposefully contradicting the previous services—it moves towards fiction and expressivity.<sup>15</sup>

The creative elements of the contract hint at the “delightfully pathetic” attempt of such legal documents to contain “a live experience of dance and of being with dancing bodies.” However, he insists on the ethical bond of fulfilling the contract, “like the pride of a small business,” as his interviewer artist Uri Aran suggests.<sup>16</sup> The document is binding, but Linder writes in some room to move.

Attention to the financial and legal aspects of the dance-gallery encounter introduces language into Linder’s work in a very explicit way, and this is an important part of how the work connects with its audience. As room notes, the contract displayed on the gallery wall completes the work, contextualizing the performances and becoming a remainder when the dancers are absent.<sup>17</sup> Charmatz, as an example of the prior generation of conceptual dance artists, tends to discuss his work in plain language in a manifesto mode, sometimes veering toward the oblique or poetic, but he does not generally quote philosophy or other external disciplines.

The use of the spoken word in *20 Dancers for the XX Century*, like Le Roy's *Retrospective by Xavier Le Roy*, takes the form of explanatory mini-lectures by each artist as described in Case Study 6, and there are didactic performance-lectures in Le Roy's and Bel's choreographic oeuvres as mentioned earlier (*Product of Circumstances* [1999] and *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* [2005], respectively). Linder uses discourse differently in his work, folding the language of law, criticality, or creative writing into the materials of the composition so that text-based knowledges are in dialogue with, and always balanced against, dancing:

I have been busy with language, I have been busy with idea/concept-based operations, but I've always met it with as much of a focus on what the body is doing in a very juicy, extra-linguistic kind of way.<sup>18</sup>

He sees this balance as an assertion of dance as a discipline, and distinguishes his approach from "some recent practices of dance that have been so focused on an extension toward the fields of philosophy, critical theory and science, perhaps rather than delving further into what the specifics of a virtuosic physical practice in dance might open up today."<sup>19</sup> Language is not a *substitute* for the home medium as it is in some conceptual art (both choreographic and visual), but a companion, annotation, or a compositional template for dancing.

Linder reflects that *Some Proximity* and *Some Riding* were "a lot about trying to grapple with how all the facets of information, knowledge, text production, were such big currency in cultural production."<sup>20</sup> In *Some Riding*, Linder gestured toward retaining control over the discursive ephemera around the work by putting commissioned writing by critics such as Catherine Damman *inside* the work and making it a function of the choreographic whole; grammar in its spoken form thus became a choreographic model. Linder used a movement vocabulary consisting of "a popping physicality stretched out, elongated with a kind of adagio-like temperament . . . there's this holding in the body that is being punctuated by these popping contractions," creating a "dynamic grammar in the body" that matches the rhythm of the memorized text being spoken by the dancers.<sup>21</sup> Linder explains how this "popping adagio" abstracts the semiotically loaded language of popping as it operates in Hip Hop scenarios, and "parses" it with the text so "they could like ride each other" in order to "make these languages look back at each other."<sup>22</sup> Jeppe Ugelvig, who saw the work at ICA in London, describes Linder chanting "I'm riding, I'm riding, I'm riding. . .

Catherine Damman,” as he moves around the space, and how dancer Frances Chiaverini, responding to a text by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, “hypnotically enacts a form of associative critical text in bullet-point form while synchronizing her utterances with a distinctive popping of her limbs.”<sup>23</sup> Here Linder is interested in the cultural power of language in contrast with the language of the body and dancing, and parsing the two is a “way of softening those edges.”<sup>24</sup> As Watts notes of his contributions as writer in *Some Proximity*, the dancing “animates my words, colliding the supposedly rational or the critical with the expressive, the undecipherable embodied.”<sup>25</sup>

Aran’s analogy of Linder’s set-up in *Choreographic Services* as a small-business model is in line with the modest tone of the work, but Linder is careful to maintain that “I don’t think this craft is submissive or subordinat[ed]” in this economy.<sup>26</sup> The *Choreographic Services* are designed to underscore the limited power of the art institution and the evasive and self-sufficient nature of dance within the transaction:

What’s interesting about choreography is that you can experience it as a viewer or keep company with it, but you’re never able to possess it. So the ‘Services’ model allows for this choreography to be compensated, though it doesn’t defy its true nature—its ephemerality.<sup>27</sup>

The *Services* series is assertive in many ways: of the labor of the dancer, of the right to place the work beside and as equal to other art, of the rights of the performer, of the financial value of dance as an art form, and of the ultimate resistance of the work to visual arts markets. The popular narrative mentioned earlier that describes dance as an unwitting tool of the visual arts is turned on its head as Linder takes control of the terms of his work’s appearance in a new context. In this way he goes beyond Charmatz in setting the terms of engagement.<sup>28</sup>

One important aspect of Linder’s work is a rejection of the generalized opposition described earlier between, on the one hand, dance practices aligned with the broader contemporary arts, and on the other, a more hermetic understanding of dance that values technical virtuosity and choreographic craft. The repression of technique became a point of differentiation for the French conceptualists regarding the European contemporary dance landscape in which they found themselves in the early 1990s, a scene Bojana Cvejić describes as “hermetic” and “conventional.”<sup>29</sup> Linder notes the impact of such work:

I do not believe that I have witnessed many positions thinking conceptually about critical formats in dance while remaining indebted to technical virtuosity, seductive theatricality, and colour.<sup>30</sup>

Linder manages a delicate balance of aesthetic strategies that sit easily within contemporary art contexts *and* feature recognizable technical virtuosity. There is no “closed concept of dance” here (to recall Cvejič’s words), but an opening out toward the popular—an inclusion of *all* the dancing—as well as other physical modalities such as cleaning.<sup>31</sup> (Linder refers to his “wryly devotional relation to mimesis.”<sup>32</sup>) Linder describes the division set out in the literature on conceptual dance:

What is the nucleus of the value? Is that within the form speaking for itself or is it within the form deployed as a device for the concept? . . . [in conceptual dance] the form is there to support the argument versus ‘oh, we’re going to find the criticality in the nature of this specific form and delve into its qualities and what it’s doing socially, politically, contextually.’<sup>33</sup>

Linder plumps for the latter, and the conceptual work that is carried in the title of the *Choreographic Services* and the associated legal texts are frames for attending to the dancers’ skills and their ability to deliver the content and meaning of the work through its own “grammar” and “language,” to use Linder’s own terminology.<sup>34</sup> Linder thus centers his creative question within discipline-based priorities (what kind of dancer? what kind of movement? what can dance offer in this context? what are the conditions? what is the discourse?) and works back from there to the administrative and bureaucratic formulations that would speak for the discipline. So, Linder’s work could never be categorized as non-dance, and neither is his work theatrical in the traditional sense. What he has devised is a form of *dance as a contemporary art medium* and the materiality of dance in the figure of the dancer is crucial here.

Like Charmatz, Linder honors the work of not only the dancer but specific dancers, in his case Brooke Stamp, Justin Kennedy, Stephen Thompson, Leah Katz, and Frances Chiaverini, which is something both Charmatz and Linder share with the American mid-century artists working around Judson.<sup>35</sup> Linder employs a consistent group of highly trained dance artists, offering them some job security and a large degree of autonomy within the work, and they contribute substantially to the choreographic whole. He notes that dance and dancing as a creative practice “is with people, com-

munity practice, it's transferring, it's really what I call orally-physical histories."<sup>36</sup> Charmatz's interest in the social and relational aspects of dance as they apply to *dancers and their audiences* (an interest shared with Le Roy and Bel) manifests in his specifically expressive, charged and "deskilled" movement, seemingly driven by imperative and instinct and engaging viewers through a contagious affective charge. Linder, on the other hand, consciously opposes an approach he describes as "stripping away virtuosity to tap this authentic experience of a social relation," and challenges the over-used notion of democracy that often accompanies this sentiment when it is applied to contemporary dance.<sup>37</sup> He chooses dancers who can follow his lead regarding "ornament" and "virtuosity" in their dancing.<sup>38</sup>

The craft of dance has got to do with discipline, virtuosity has got to do with having discipline and then letting it fly and discipline has got to do with a practice of engaging with a thing, focusing on it, meditating on it, and throwing yourself into the fire of it.<sup>39</sup>

Choreographic staging and the control that this enforces in the traditional dancer-choreographer relation is replaced with a focus on movement vocabularies that Linder draws from multiple sources (but which do not constitute a stable, signature style), their relationship to movement scores, and the rationale for their use regarding a broader agenda to represent the contemporary situation through form. Each *Choreographic Service* had a different movement language: "in all the services there was a real specificity of what is being danced."<sup>40</sup> Taking *Some Proximity* as an example, Linder was "looking for a fluid marriage, a *proximity*, between the critical faculties of an art writer who is observing a context and performed movement."<sup>41</sup> As described earlier, two dancers took turns reading excerpts from critical responses displayed on the wall and danced around the gallery space using a "glide" form of footwork. As with *Some Riding*, Linder used this specific form as a way to put the dancers' physicality into dialogue with both the spoken word/text and the gallery visitors who surrounded them:

if we look at a regular walk . . . there is a fluidity but you have a lot of the body that is held and rigid, facilitating the primary movement of the legs. But if you glide it's kind of a heightened walk . . . in terms of corporeal information, muscle memory, this is the reverse of walking. You have to plough your way over the knee into the toe cushion which gives you enough time to

slide the back foot out on the heel to create that glide so . . . it's much more labour intensive. You cannot glide without activating every part of your body. Even though it's in the feet, it is managed by a fluidity in the pelvis which has to be managed by a very fluid spine. So, I was interested in this amplified walk . . . I called it a future walk.<sup>42</sup>

The dancers differentiate their movements from the ambulatory behaviors of the gallery visitors through gliding, a key method of freestyling that Linder links to his anchoring principle of “flow.”<sup>43</sup> Freestyling is different to improvisation which might have a very open field of possibilities, being structured by specific movement styles and in this case, scores, and his dancers' command of their complex performance situation:

Freestyling is about shaping the moment and how you bring in every aspect of the instant, whether that be in your history, your future desires, your technique . . . Wrap in where people are standing, how many people are in the room, how long they've been watching, what they've been doing, what is the atmosphere of the room, into the magic that they're creating in that freestyle composition and maybe the viewer becomes part of that equation [but] I don't have to address the viewer. I've been looking for more covert ways for the affect to come across.<sup>44</sup>

Linder links the flow of the glide to the very nature of the dancers' intervention in the gallery space that “rides” the various influences on their choices in the moment, but which also negotiates a dialogue with the new conditions through its own language that is presented as an alternative to the legalese of the written contract displayed in the space.

In contrast to Michelson and Hassabi, in Linder's work (like Lasica's), there is a socialized, collaborative authorship that both critiques the models of ownership in the art museum and actively mimics the conditions of the visitors who are choreographing their own pathways through the exhibitions, *covertly* wrapping them into the work. This more subtle inclusion of the spectators through movement vocabulary is networked among other aesthetic choices that build a world akin to the contemporary condition. Linder has described performing in Michael Clark's work and his holistic approach: “dancing in his performances felt like a formal translation of the wider social and aesthetic world he inhabits.”<sup>45</sup> Returning to Linder's critique of the way democracy has figured in dance studies literature with its emphasis on the everyday and participation, Linder argues that

a truly democratic choreography for the early twenty-first century would be inclusive of social dance forms that are part of the African-American influence dominating popular culture internationally. This would include aesthetic consequences of the technologies that circulate such forms. In the use of a street style like gliding, Linder makes an analogy with the 1960s social dance form of the Twist and how both are physical reflections of their time.<sup>46</sup>

In summary, Linder's consciousness of the legacy of conceptual dance in its European formulation as he has moved into the gallery context has been considered here through a comparison with a particular artist: Boris Charmatz. In Charmatz's work I noted a departure from some of the conceptual art standards in his use of expression, subjectivity, and virtuosity, in addition to features such as an institutional critique that are in line with the conceptual field. Linder's work, on the other hand, can be explicitly representational in mimicking many everyday activities. It is virtuosic in its display of technical vocabularies and lacks the critique of visuality and movement so central to André Lepecki's formulation of conceptual dance described in Chapter 4, with Linder's work being low-key spectacle on both counts. In these ways it departs from the tropes of conceptual dance. However, in occupying the gallery as site it does adopt the following characteristics aligned with conceptual dance: simplified performance scenarios (the works mainly consist of dancers in uniforms/outfits that distinguish them from the crowd dancing among the art and visitors in gallery spaces); temporal manipulations of movement and the compositional whole (the popping adagio of *Some Riding* incorporates the rhythmic trace of orality and matching gallery opening hours makes the work durational); it is clearly in "a deep dialogue with visual arts"; it shares a preoccupation with presence; and it problematizes the figure of the author through both emphasis (the visible contracts) and obsfucation (appearing alongside and equal to his dancers who have agency and autonomy, again, like Charmatz). Linder's commitment to the materiality of dancing within his highly conceptual work leads us into a discussion of concept and material as they are understood across visual art and dance studies in Chapters 6 and 7, and further case studies that exemplify dance as a contemporary art medium.

## Chapter 6

# The Conceptual–Material Bind in Dance and Visual Art

### 6.1 Introduction

What many see as differentiating the broader field of the recent third-wave dance avant-garde from the mid-twentieth century second-wave is the prominence of the term *concept* and its use by both artists and commentators, even when they refuse the label *conceptual*.<sup>1</sup> Belgian dance theorist Rudi Laermans quotes Bojana Cvejić: “from the 1990s on, concepts are being thematized and discussed for every choreographic work of the new practices.”<sup>2</sup> However, mid-century artists were not averse to using the term. British dance theorist Ramsay Burt recounts Simone Forti’s use of “conceptual” to describe her 1961 works, and she managed to successfully combine dance elements with ideas, concepts, and propositions in works such as *Huddle* (1961), which resembles a rugby scrum involving five to seven people in which “one person on the outside of the huddle climbs up the mass and comes down.”<sup>3</sup> Forti scholar Meredith Morse argues that in Forti’s work, the physical aspects of embodiment are also treated as “atemporal abstraction, as a concept and proposition,” perhaps in this case approaching the concept of the group body as sculpture.<sup>4</sup> In 1968, Jill Johnston talked about Yvonne Rainer in relation to the “expanding choreographic concept,” pre-empting attention to choreography as concept in recent scholarship discussed in Chapter 5.<sup>5</sup> Rainer links her generation’s interest in concepts directly to John Cage: “what is John Cage’s gift to some of us who make art? This: the relaying of conceptual precedents for methods of nonhierarchical, indeterminate organization which can be used with a critical intelligence.”<sup>6</sup> However, the conceptual work of that period was more focused on analysis and discourse around the work and the use of dance materials as concepts, rather than producing choreographies where

concepts were the primary content presented to audiences. Rainer's *Trio A* (1966) could be described as an exposition of tone as concept, and Trisha Brown's *Walking on the Wall* (1971) a similar presentation of gravity. In this way, the strong links with the material of the body resisted the extremes of conceptualism seen in the visual arts during the same period.

The increase in the number of artist-theorists in the mid-twentieth-century milieu, and their implicit and explicit critique of the distant and silent artist-genius, led to the exposure of the artists' creative means and methods to their public (which continues today) and fuelled a newly analytical approach to composition. Curator and theorist RoseLee Goldberg has described the emphasis on discourse within the Soho community in the 1960s and 1970s, and Brown is clear on the specifically analytic approach in Judith and Robert Dunn's famous composition workshops held in Merce Cunningham's studios that fuelled the mid-century dance revolution:<sup>7</sup>

One of Bob's most important contributions was the method of analysis of the work shown. After presenting a dance, each choreographer was asked, 'How did you make that dance?' . . . and the discussion that followed applied non-evaluative criticism to the movement itself and the choreographic structure as well as investigating the disparity between the two simultaneous experiences, what the artist was making and what the artist saw.<sup>8</sup>

This kind of analysis of choreographic composition began with Anna Halprin. Forti describes the "show and tell" approach taken in Halprin's workshops where she would ask, "what was interesting about this?"<sup>9</sup> Dancers and choreographers were finding a language for their practice beyond the terms of forerunners such as Rudolf von Laban and Doris Humphrey through the collusion of ideas and concepts with compositional practice.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the parameters of the art form were redrawn.

Performance and sound artist Laurie Anderson links an analytic approach to composition during this period in North America to an increasing tendency to include the process stage alongside or even within the final work, sometimes even moving toward a de-emphasis of the final stage of production. This often involved the use of language. Quoting herself from 1974 discussing the exchange between post-conceptual artist Gordon Matta-Clark and Trisha Brown, Anderson says:

Talking is a way to figure out what you are doing. It's not just that it was the work itself. I was very convinced that Gordon [Matta-Clark]'s thing

was language . . . without the talk, the background, the thing that was left was really blank. It could be considered sculpture . . . but it wasn't really the thing that I thought it was about . . . I remember seeing Trisha's works and thinking, 'What I love about it is that she's talking and describing this thing that she's doing' . . . The stuff we actually made was not the point at all. The way Gordon talked about things was a hundred times better than how it looked.<sup>11</sup>

A good example of this is Brown's work *Yellowbelly* (1969), an improvised solo in which she "asked the audience to yell 'yellowbelly,' which means 'coward' in Aberdeen, Washington," and when they stopped yelling, she stopped dancing.<sup>12</sup> This set the audience up as both critic and *raison d'être* for the performance, exposing the awkward side of the audience-performer contract as well as the compositional machinery of the work to heighten the audience's complicity. The links between conceptually oriented dance work and a role for language in both development and performance continues, as was the case for Adam Linder in a piece like *Some Riding* (2015) in Case Study 7, and the imbedding of process itself (not documentation or commentary) in the product-oriented spaces of the gallery has been a major contribution of choreography to innovating the museum.

Marcella Lista, Chief Curator at the National Museum of Modern Art—Centre Pompidou, underlines continuities between the mid-century and current avant-garde in dance regarding conceptual work, referring to the earlier period as taking a "conceptual approach to dance, which critics described as 'non-dance' or 'anti-dance'."<sup>13</sup> She summarizes:

Dancers metabolized the general orientation of the arts towards performance, while rearticulating performative materials through a conceptual elaboration in which the interest in structure takes priority over vocabulary. This choreographic research opened up a field of reflection that, by shifting dance towards the notion of activity, irrigated conceptual and process-based practices. The tension between subject and object, time and space, and image and language, which occupied the Judson laboratory, were the focus for many artists in the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies.<sup>14</sup>

Lista thus indicates the important role dance took in the aesthetic advances of the earlier period that changed the course of the contemporary arts. These artists and curators are describing a conceptual turn in mid-century experimental dance. Laermans is emphatic: "The Judson Dance