

Choreographic Transformations: Creative Documentation in Dance

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I. Introduction

“Dance,” writes choreographer Yvonne Rainer, “is hard to see.” (Rainer 35) “[It] must either be made less fancy, or the fact of that intrinsic difficulty must be emphasized to the point that it becomes almost impossible to see.” (Rainer 35) Writing in the 1960s, Rainer casts her vision for the genre’s future in terms of legibility. Critical of choreography’s historic reliance on virtuosic movement, Rainer claims dance should be simplified through movement forms derived from everyday gestures, moving the form towards a radical invisibility. Rainer frames her argument with a thorough reexamination of choreographic technique, and suggests that “actions and movements” in performance make “a less spectacular demand on the body” making “skill [...] hard to locate.” (Rainer 33)

In 1966, Rainer premiered what many now consider her most enduring and well-known work: *Trio A*, the result of her investigations referenced above. First performed as a trio embedded within a larger evening of dance, the choreography’s seemingly technical simplicity and phraseless structure make dance both “less fancy” and “impossible to see.” In *Trio A*, task-based actions are performed continuously, and phrasing mechanisms like preparation and release are eliminated. Though the skill required to execute these task-based motions may be nearly invisible in Rainer’s choreography, the “exact amount of energy it takes to execute [them]” becomes the “visual[] index” of the choreography. (Bryan-Wilson, “Practicing *Trio A*” 62) Writing about *Trio A*, Rainer states her interest “in finding solutions primarily in the area of moving oneself [...] into pure and not-so-pure thing-moving,” the “thing” being the body’s appendages. (Rainer 33) The choreographic actions gain a

materiality, like a brush of paint on a canvas, which, when combined with other brushstrokes, becomes the painting. Functioning similarly within the choreography, these individual muscle movements, when performed together, coalesce to create the work as a whole. In *Trio A*, a performer executes rather than dances movement tasks, “submerging” the performer’s personality to remove “the artifice of performance.” (Rainer 32) The dancer is “not oneself,” but rather a “neutral ‘doer.’” (Rainer 33) Subjective identity is replaced with “a-personal, subjectless matter [to] liberate a dancer’s moves into a field of nonhierarchical, horizontal interactions.” (Lepecki 77) The “matter,” Rainer’s de-skilled movement language, eliminates the dancer’s subjectivity through the neutrality of the choreographic materials.

In 1978, Rainer, along with producer Sally Banes and cinematographer Robert Alexander, filmed *Trio A* as a solo, recording the dance in a single take with a one-camera shot. On film, the performance appears as though recorded live in a single take, with Rainer shot from the audience perspective, seen from a distance and in full view. Immediately following the filmed performance, a new section begins titled “details.” Here short movement passages and isolated gestures in the hands and feet are shot in close-up and edited in quick succession. The reprisal of these gestures “enforce[s] the discreteness of a movement...[to] make it more objectlike.” (Rainer 35) These succinct sections clarify the simplicity of movement language in the individual appendages. With Rainer’s full body largely hidden, the disembodied shots become studies, removed from the choreography as a whole, illuminating the unfussy quality of individual gestures. They reveal the architecture and technical mechanism of the choreography, as if to provide instruction or a choreographic blueprint for the recreation or study of the dance.

For Rainer, filming *Trio A* provided a means of articulating her choreographic ideas and an opportunity to enhance the accessibility of the choreography. The diptych structure of the film—the dance and the details—yields more than just reproduction; it captures the performance and elucidates its structure, archiving the dance, while affirming the material quality of its gestures. The transition from performance to film enhances the framework for viewing the choreography, and provides an original structure for documenting dance, simultaneously creating a document and an artwork that enlivens the choreography and alters its temporal register. The ephemeral materials of memory and muscle movement are secured within the structure of the document.

The film, then, serves a dual purpose. It is a visual analysis of Rainer's theoretical dance writings, a document of reproduction and a study of construction, a possibility Rainer seized upon in the translation from performance to film. Through close up and sectional repetition, the film invites viewers to consider individual gestures isolation and how they relate to the structure of the work as a whole, offering a tangible articulation of Rainer's remarks about clarity and invisibility in dance. As a piece of dance, *Trio A* demonstrates Rainer's critical examination and exploration of choreographic practice, while the film provides a logical and legible enhancement of the choreography through the structural formalism gained from the transfer of one medium to another.

Similar to Rainer's transposition of dance to film, artists and choreographers employ film and photography, notation and writing, even sculpture and drawing to organize, distill, and historicize their work, often collaborating with other artists to enhance the transfer between mediums. The most successful examples harness dance's corporeal presence, fleeting temporality, and historical fragility within the reproduction and recreation,

transforming the dance into a new form that captures the transient materiality inherent in the choreography. In this text, I will examine specific examples of film, visual artwork, and choreography that enact this transformation enhance the presentation and reception of dance to artists, audiences, and institutions.

II. Dancing Presence

Dance, as an action, exists in a singular, present moment, most often viewed by a live audience. A performer realizes an action—a movement or gesture—and the audience receives it, storing it to memory. This collection of images, the ephemeral archival record of the performance internalized by the audience, requires an attentive presence to ensure that the dance continues beyond its live iteration. In his book *Matter and Memory*, philosopher Henri Bergson examines the relationship between observation and perception. For Bergson, the object “is an aggregate of ‘images,’” which provide, when viewed, a concept of an object “placed halfway between the ‘thing’ and the ‘representation.’” (Bergson 97) In our perception, matter, be it a lamp on a table or a performance in a theater, is received by the brain as a series of images that are separate from the physical entity, but perceived as “real” by viewing them. These images are memorized, stored in the brain, and recalled later as mental images of representation. Within the ephemeral condition of dance, the perceived representational images become, over time, the record of the performance and a historical archive. When watching dance, the presence of the performer—live, charged—and co-presence of the audience watching the action —filled with memory and anticipation—defines the relationship between performer and observer.

Scholar Diane Taylor describes performance as “a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis.” (Taylor xvi) This “way of knowing” is an embodied practice between the performer and the viewer. The traces of performance, the muscular memory embedded within the performer and the transmission of images inscribed in the mind of the viewer

through the conversion of observation to memory, must be retained by the viewer in order for the dance to live beyond the present. They become the embodied record of performance.

This negotiation of time and memory, gesture and presence, physical movement and viewed experience establishes the relationship between performer the audience through the conversion of live action into embodied knowledge. Dance, then, relies on memory to sustain itself following the initial performance, but dancers forget choreography and viewers may not remember a dance they have seen. The production of dance produces only the memory of its performance, no object remains after its creation. Within the dance field, the ephemeral nature of the medium has been considered disadvantageous. As early as 1760, choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre lamented “the subordinate position of theatrical dance within the arts, brought about by dance’s specific materiality.” (Lepecki, “Inscribing Dance” 125). While there are legendary dancers and choreographers that receive hallowed mention in historic documents, dance as an art form has rarely held pride of place among artistic genres because of its lack of material object. Its absence of materiality, an item left to history, places the medium at a disadvantage, leading to centuries of discussion about the nature of the form and its lack of object, and therefore, commodity status. Because of its inability to be commodified, dance was considered a lower form of artistic expression. Scholars point to its inherent lack of posterity and the creation of commodifiable objects in its realization; in short, dance disappears. Critic Marcia Siegel argues that “[dance] doesn’t stay around long enough to become respectable or respected. Its ephemerality is mistaken for triviality.” (Lepecki, “Inscribing Dance” 130)

The ephemeral nature of dance, given its transience and temporal instability, relies on the fragility of memory for its continued existence. The embodied presence of performance,

the swirl of collected images of past performance, is recalled when watching dance. The flicker of images pulled from the past, creates an ever evolving “presence” of performance within the viewer, the performer, and the situation itself. This, of course, threatens to relegate performance to historical obsolescence if the memories of the privileged witnesses are the singular means of historicization. Diane Taylor acknowledges that “people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there,’ being a part of the transmission,” but argues that the historical progression of this embodied knowledge, particularly related to dance “change[s] over time, even though generations of dancers (and even individual dancers) swear they are always the same.” (Taylor 20) Memory evolves and changes over time. Social and political developments and personal histories reframe our memories; they are reshaped, reimagined, and altered by any number of external forces. These forces can alter our perception and recollection of live performance. The memory, like the medium, is unstable, unmoored and mutable. How, then, can performance push beyond the bounds of its ephemerality to become embodied within the context of history? It would seem that some representation of the performance through direct or creative documentation must exist in order to satisfy the burden of history and counter performance’s ephemeral condition.

Film, video, written description, and notational systems can harness dance within a fixed time and space allowing performers and audiences the chance to remember, revisit, and reframe their own memories of a particular performance. Documentation provides a structure to harness performance and insure that the future of its perception and recreation adheres as closely as possible to the original. Simultaneously, the document exists as a means of proof and a reference for those not present at the performance. Documentation works to stop the

erosion and disappearance of performance, and serves as a tool to allow for its continued existence.

Describing the necessity for documentation, scholar Rebecca Schneider relates our need for a captured presence to society's need for a product or remnant. She writes, "our performative relations to documents and to documents' ritual status as performatives within a culture privileges object remains. We are reading, then, the document as performative act, and as site of performance." (Schneider 105) For Schneider, the document can be performative, or, at the very least, portray the act of performing. The document, according to Schneider, captures some sense of possibility. It captures an element of the performative within its fixed state.

However, documentation also interrupts the embodied knowledge gained within the live transaction of performer and dancer. The fixed state of the document arguably arrests the embodied practice, the "way of knowing," that enhances the charged relationship of liveness between audience and performer. Critics of documentation cite this as a reason against the need for a fixed form, arguing that the reproduction of performance can no longer be considered performance. Documentation is marked by our conscious necessity to understand the past's historical relevance in order to appease the burden of the advancing future, but it also marks a particular performance as the specific record of the original. The documented performance replaces all other versions as the sole means of historicization. Though extending the temporal register of performance, it also halts its potential development and the possibility of reinterpretation. Scholar Peggy Phelan claims that performance's lack of material product is essential to its existence. In her influential book *Unmarked*, Phelan writes that performance "cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the

circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.” (Phelan 146) Here, performance is defined by its ephemerality, and any attempt to transfer its ephemeral nature to a fixed form reduces it to a poor copy of the original form. For Phelan, performance’s parameters and limits, namely its live presence and ephemerality, define the relationship between the performing artist and the live audience, and, for her, can never be accurately captured through documentation. A photograph, recording, or written description transfers performance into a medium defined by new parameters, altering the established relationship between artist and audience, creating an antagonistic triangulation between the document, the live performance, and the viewer. The photographic document may capture a moment of implicit forward motion, but it is caught in frozen stillness, lacking the lively transaction between performer and audience. The video recording, the document most closely related to the viewers’ eye, is criticized for failing to capture the present charge of live performance. For Phelan, “performance’s only life is in the present” and “becomes itself through disappearance.” (Phelan 146) The translation and reproduction of performance from temporal instability into a medium of longevity, alters the fragile and fleeting condition agreed upon by the performer and the audience, dissolving the delicate communion of liveness and presence. The object, whose permanence makes it vulnerable to commodification, would replace the more valorized byproduct of performance: memory.

To document dance, then, is to move its ephemeral remains to a more formal and fixed representation, replacing memory with a more concrete medium like film or photography. It provides a means of capturing and historicizing the work, providing greater visibility and conservation of the fugitive form. A photograph from a performance, for

example, seizes a single moment that can later be used to recall the visual images stored in the memory of the audience. It elongates the collective memory of a performance, providing a single frame of reference for an action that has been catalogued in the mind. It also continually recalibrates the memory, reminding the viewer of what they actually saw, assisting in steadying the mental images that may have been misremembered or altered over time. For those not present at the performance, it provides a compact slice of information, offering a sliver of the performative moment that can help the viewer extrapolate an idea of the live experience. The photograph becomes the marker and remainder of the work, an apparatus of memory both for the seen and the unseen, capturing an instance of the present projected into the future. The document is a “spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present.” (Phelan 146)

Though liveness and presence are essential aspects within performance, the critical arguments against documentation are predicated on the assumption that liveness is its most defining element. Neither the possibility of an artist retaining some element of liveness within the translation, nor the transformational possibilities that could accompany the transfer of dance to film or visual art are discussed. Can work be created that recreates or preserves the instability and ephemerality of live performance within the frame of an object or a documentary form? Is there a way to harness Bergson’s concept of matter halfway between the object and its representation, or in the case of performance, its live iteration and its documentation?

Within a document time is bifurcated. It is a place where “memory imports the past into the present, contracts into a single intuition many moments of duration.” (Bergson 146) Documentary technologies require the viewer to “reformulate [their] understanding of

‘presence,’ site, ... the ephemeral, and embodiment.” (Taylor 5). Considering this new state of presence within the document requires an examination of presence in the context of live performance. Henri Bergson investigates the definition of presence, linking the moment to both the immediate past and the intruding future, obscuring the definition to include an expanded temporal register. For Bergson, proximate memory and the immediacy of a projected future combine to define the present.

The essence of time is that it goes by; time already gone by is the past, and we call the present the instant in which it goes by. But there can be no question here of a mathematical instant. No doubt there is an ideal present—a pure conception, the indivisible limit which separates past from future. But the real, concrete, live present—that of which I speak when I speak of my present perception—that present necessarily occupies a duration. (Bergson 127)

The present forces us to recall the past while anticipating what follows, denying a single moment to be defined as the present in the swirl of anticipation and recollection. Bergson’s argument allows for the present to fluctuate and shift, expanding it beyond seconds and minutes to encompass a larger unit of time. When considering the present in performance, this enlarged temporal framework opens up the possibility that performance, by definition, exists within the span of memory and history. That is to say, the presence of performance must challenge the instantaneous conversion of action to memory and recognize its problematic future invisibility. Presence and the present moment coincide with memory and anticipation to place our understanding within the instant of the past and the future, obfuscating the definition of the present in live performance. Can presence then, be marked in that moment? Bergson explores the ideas of our recollections further.

Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act *sui generis* by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first, in the past in general, then, in a certain region of the past—a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera. But our recollection still remains virtual: we simply prepare ourselves to

receive it by adopting the appropriate attitude. Little by little it comes into view like a condensing cloud; from the virtual state it passes into the actual; and as its outlines become more distant and its surface takes on color, it tends to imitate perception. But it remains attached to the past by its deepest roots, and if, when once realized, it did not retain something of its original virtuality, if, being a present state, it were not something that stands out distinct from the present, we should never know it for our memory. (Bergson 124)

For Bergson, memory works as a readjustment of time from the past to a “region of the past” that allows our recollections to be organized as an embodiment of presence.

Through this adjustment, the kernel of memory stored in the mind becomes clearer, moving from a hazy recollection into a more focused image of the present, allowing its virtual form to be seen as something approaching actual presence. When considering the documentation of performance, is it possible for an artist to create a work that exists in the landscape of the past and the present? Can the document transform the live performance into a fixed medium that works in conjunction with our imagined reality to reinforce the actuality of live presence? Or unfix our understanding of permanence within a fixed document? This transformation would provide a startling juxtaposition between our imaged perception of performance and its realization within the document, reaffirming its live origins, while affixing the performance in time.

In her feature film *The Future*, performance artist and filmmaker Miranda July inserts a short, but curiously crucial moment of choreography into the narrative. In the film, Sophie, portrayed by July, yearns for artistic celebrity, and dance is her medium of choice. Sophie sets out to create a series of dances, which she will broadcast over the Internet. After numerous failed attempts, often comical, she gives up, creatively blocked and wracked with anxiety. Her failures induce a downward spiral, that eventually lead her to the house of a much older man, with whom she is having an affair. While at his home, Sophie finds herself

alone in a bedroom. A large, yellow t-shirt is crumpled on the bedroom floor. Tentatively, she approaches the shirt, grips it timidly with her toes, and pulls it towards her. Gaining confidence, she grabs the shirt, pushes her legs through its armholes, and stretches the garment over her head, enveloping her upper body in the bright yellow cotton. Now cocooned, Sophie dances, her movements eerie, but assured. In this empty room, Sophie creates what she so yearned for earlier in the film: a dance. Born from confusion, personal loss, and an aching emptiness, Sophie finally fulfills her dream of creation, but artistic renown will have to wait; there was no audience to witness the performance, and the dance evaporates, existing only in her memory.

In 2007, Miranda July performed her play “Things We Don’t Understand and Are Definitely Not Going to Talk About” at The Kitchen in New York City. After many drafts and re-writes, the play became the basis for her feature film *The Future*. The t-shirt choreography, first created live on stage, is restaged for the film. At The Kitchen, the dance would not seem out of place at a live venue known for experimental performance, but on film, a naturalistic medium that rarely includes spontaneous moments of choreography, the dance becomes a strange and oddly affecting narrative disruption. The cinema audience witnesses an intensely private, provocative moment, and though projected onto a film screen, the charge of “liveness” feels palpable, as if the film is complicit in allowing the audience to see this private melancholy moment. Even after repeated viewings, the scene retains its pull of presence, capturing some essence of what was created at The Kitchen, and committed to something beyond the ephemeral life of that moment. The choreography gains a potent power in its translation from stage to screen.

For July, the transfer of the choreography from the stage to film was a necessary narrative choice, and provided a reflexive link between the filmed version and its live iteration. In the previously discussed film of *Trio A*, Yvonne Rainer clarifies the objectives of her choreography through the transfer of performance to film. In both examples, film operates as more than a means of representation: it provides a transformational possibility for the artists to reexamine and reframe the choreography as it exists in live performance, enhancing and extending its representation beyond archival necessity. Clearly, documentation does not replace the live event, but it can become a tool to capture performance, clarify the artist's intention, and shape its historic impact.

For July and Rainer, conservation is not the primary focus of their documentation. The realization of performance on film stems from the need to elaborate an idea about performance that reaches beyond its archival reproduction, which does not replace the live performance. As Julia Bryan-Wilson notes in an essay about *Trio A*, Rainer "finds [the film of *Trio A*] inaccurate and was constantly striving to correct [it]." (Bryan-Wilson, "Practicing *Trio A*" 69) Similarly, July's dance was not included in *The Future* as a definitive documentary record of her performance, but rather, exists within the translation of her work from a stage production to a film. July's artistic output, which includes stage work, film, novels, sculpture, and other various practices, can be defined by Rosalind Krauss's term "post-medium." (Krauss 55) This term, when applied to choreography, can help define the various ways that choreographers and artists translate, arrange, and transform dance into other artistic practices and mediums. In this thesis, I examine works by choreographers and artists working within dance practices who seize the transformational potential of choreographic documentation. In each example, the artistic outcome is not intended primarily

as a means of confirming a performance's historical relevance, but rather, explores how the conversion of live performance can be captured and transformed through this transfer.

Through case studies, I will examine how these different forms (film, visual art, choreography) reframe time structures and visibility within dance. In film, dance's visibility is heightened and time is lengthened. In visual art practice, choreographers and artists examine the production of dance. The visibility of the actual dance is diminished in exchange for a closer inspection of its creation (the writing of dance). In examples of choreography, I examine how choreographers use body traces (muscle memory) to allow for the evolution of specific dances and practices.

III. Choreographing Light: Dance and Film

Translating live dance to film provides choreographers and filmmakers an opportunity to rearticulate, re-site, and reframe a performance. When creating dance for the stage, choreographers must often shape their choreography in relation to the fixed location and single visual plane of the audience. With film, the choreographer can explore shifting visual registers, panoramic viewpoints, and unconventional locations that might be impossible in live performance, providing new organizing structures for reproducing and viewing dance. Scholar Erin Brannigan, in her book *Dancefilm*, writes “as a film subject, dance has a tendency toward unrestrained, hyperbolic motility and unexplained stasis, which challenges film’s tendency to order, restrain, frame, and cut.” (Brannigan, “Dancefilm” 126) This tension between the mediums allows choreographers and filmmakers to investigate varied and creative forms of visibility, accessibility, and presence within the choreography and in its translation to film.

Film, as a medium, is a global entity that has influenced our visual language and cultural understanding of the world. As Gene Youngblood claims in his seminal book *Expanded Cinema*, film has become “the nervous system of mankind.” (Youngblood 41) Given the ubiquity and increasing global dominance of film, its social and aesthetic impact infiltrates and permeates nearly every artistic medium, including choreography. Brannigan cites film’s influence on dance “as a generation of choreographers draw on their familiarity with film culture” and indicate “an increasing openness” to combine dance “with the language of film, referencing it as a cultural, structural, and aesthetic influence and a key reference point.” (Brannigan, “Dancefilm” 5)

As choreographers and filmmakers translate dance from the stage to the screen, dance moves into newly imagined realms that explore and exploit the relationship between live dance and its cinematic representation. Choreography can be restaged and reproduced in new or unusual locations dictated by the choreographer, rather than imposed by the need for a live audience; the ephemeral limitations of live dance are reorganized through the extended temporal record of film; and the flexibility and relative ease of screening film opens up the possibility of dance reaching cinemas, galleries, and museums with greater frequency, providing opportunities for films to reach a broader audience beyond the live theatrical setting. If, as Chantal Pontbriand states, contemporary dance offers a “critique of the theatrical site as institution,” filmed reproductions of dance provide a similar critique, as well as a dynamic reappraisal of its essential live qualities. (Pontbriand 289)

Despite film’s expansion of site, temporality, and accessibility in dance, critics, skeptical of film’s dominating influence, are suspicious of the “rigid, rectangular window [that] too often robs dance of dynamic nuance, spatial relevance, and the sweating, exultant immanence of the living dancer,” but their arguments, privileging the live over the mediatized, are placed firmly within traditional notions of dance as a live art form. (Nagrin 33) Does dance, when placed on the proscenium stage, not exist within a similar “rigid, rectangular window?” Both supporters and critics have debated the infiltration of media and performance extensively. In his book *Liveness*, Philip Auslander discusses the impact of film and television on live performance and explores the ramifications of combining the two genres. For Auslander, critics arguing against the infringement of media technology are anxious about the corruption of the art form through commercialization. Peggy Phelan specifically addresses the problem, stating, “Performance’s independence from mass

reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength.” (Phelan 149). Auslander, citing increasing prevalence of media and technology in our daily lives, explains that “live performance now often incorporates mediatization,” and the “live event itself is a product of media technologies.” (Auslander 24) For Auslander, the mediatization of live performance has already happened. The confluence of live performance and mediatization runs parallel to our own increasing interaction and dependence on media and technology in nearly all facets of life. Many scholars and theorists welcome the convergence of film and performance, citing an enhancement of its political and creative potential. For José Muñoz the “reification of [live] performance” leads to the “ossification of performance’s potential to enact social critique.” (Muñoz 190) Reproduction of the live event through mediatization can enhance the visibility of performance and allow it to penetrate deeper into the cultural and political sphere. Theorists André Bazin and Gilles Deleuze argue that film can become a transformative medium within dance and provide “the genesis of figures that create new experiential and perceptual conditions for the actualization of a sense of presence.” (Brannigan, “Dancefilm” 11)

As choreographers continue to engage and experiment with cinematic representation, film and media can provide an experience of contemporary dance uniquely suited to address and critique the increasing mediatization of our lives. Through an examination of works by artists Ralph Lemon, Anne Theresa de Keersmaeker, and Dara Friedman, the combinatory possibilities of live performance and film are explored as expanded frames of dance, individualized by the aesthetic interests of each artist. They reinterpret the meaning of a theatrical site, alter the temporal framework of performance, and investigate the meaning of live presence within a filmed reproduction. These filmed performances do not accentuate the

commercial potential of their mediatization, but rather, act as a catalyst for further artistic interventions, transforming the medium of film into a genre of choreographic inquiry and experimentation.

Choreographer Ralph Lemon incorporates film poetically and effectively into his live productions, utilizing recorded documentation from previous research workshops and performances, highlighting motifs and themes that appear throughout his choreographic oeuvre. In Lemon's 2010 performance *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* documentary footage collected during research trips, rehearsal workshops, and previous performances is incorporated into the live theatrical production. Lemon, seated onstage at a small table, narrates, providing context and commentary while the filmed footage plays on screen. For Lemon, film provides a way to "re-perform" his work, which would be too expensive or too cumbersome to remount, and continue his choreographic explorations and investigations further, regardless of an audience's familiarity with his previous performances.

During *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* Lemon screens a filmed recreation of the final dance of his previous performance, *Come Home Charley Patton* (2004). On screen, five performers gesticulate wildly, while Lemon, from the stage, describes the dance's gestation and its impact on his own choreographic process, which he describes as a "search for compositional formlessness" and "a no-dance that was, in fact, a dance." (Lemon n. pag.) This section marks the end of Lemon's nine year *Geography Trilogy*, and this particular dance, representing a kind of "ecstasy" for Lemon, marks the last moments of that accumulated performance research, which, years later, continues in the performance of *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* From the

screen on stage, the audience watches the ecstatic ending of *Charley Patton* dissolve into a shot of a dance studio with the same performers, now dressed in rehearsal clothes, dancing similarly wild movements. Again, Lemon narrates the film as he invites the audience to watch his continuing investigations of this dance with no form or style. While footage from the rehearsal plays on screen, Lemon imagines a twenty-minute version of the dance, well beyond the three minutes in *Charley Patton*, and nearly beyond the capabilities of his expert performers. To create a different set of rehearsal parameters and experiences, he asks them to perform drunk and stoned, and Lemon incorporates this rehearsal footage into his live performance. The movements seem looser, somehow more expressive, and Lemon says he imagines a children's version of the dance, and though it never materializes on screen, a viewer can imagine exactly what that might look like.

After the *Charley Patton* tour ended and he began working on new material, Lemon wanted to revisit the final moments of his trilogy. He unravels his investigative process on screen, incorporating his research into the live performance. This explication of choreographic development becomes legible to an audience through his use of film, which provides a visual account of the performance and the subsequent rehearsals. Film, then, provides the bridge between the last and the next performance. Lemon's continuing movement studies, visible on the screen, illuminate his creative process for the audience, many of whom may not be familiar with his previous work, elucidating his choreographic research and ongoing examinations of history and culture. In Lemon's work, the structure of time is fluid and mystifying. The past and future constantly collide as the artist weaves a carefully plotted Bergsonian present, destabilizing time and history through his integration of film in live performance. Choreography and research that spanned a decade collapse into

minutes of archival footage shown on screen. This deft manipulation of time allows Lemon to enhance and expand the temporal framework of his practice.

Lemon also uses film's previously noted sense of order and restraint to create what I call "observational" materials. For Lemon, film provides a document for his investigations of the performing body. The combination of screened footage with his deadpan narrative delivery accentuates the systematic investigation of his choreographic practice, despite his desire for formlessness. The restraining, orderly effect of film changes the choreography's relationship to the audience through its transposition to film. The emotional and visual charge of the material is not diminished, but rather crystalized in its translation, particularly when paired with Lemon's explication of the material.

Philip Auslander states, "By being recorded and becoming mediatized, performance becomes an accumulable value." (Auslander 26) In the case of Ralph Lemon, the value of mediatization is not commercial; it is historical. The recording allows the production of simultaneous histories, which, in a way, "perform" time, reviving old material to produce new work. Lemon is a careful observer and a cunning documentarian. The video is an both an extension of the performance and the performance itself. In Lemon's work, arguments about the primacy of the live event or its representation are moot, as he cunningly weaves reproduction into the fabric of the live production. In *How Can You Stay in the House All Day and Not Go Anywhere?* performer Okwui Okpokwasili sobs and wails in an intensely emotional extended solo. During one performance, Okpokwasili, unable to control the enormity of her emotion after exiting, continues to cry backstage, out of view of the audience. Unbeknownst to Okpokwasili, Lemon filmed this charged, private moment, and would later incorporate that footage into another performance, *Scaffold Room* (2014). The

footage captures a moment beyond the live performance, unseen and unrehearsed, that Lemon uses as source material in a subsequent work. The temporal slippage, the excavation and presentation of private material, and the referential choreographic process would be impossible without film and media. In Lemon's current practice, performances are built upon the foundation of the preceding structure, which, over time, emerges as an epic choreographic process beautifully realized for and with an audience.

While Ralph Lemon uses films of dances within his live performances, choreographers often create dance films independent of their live iterations. The creation of these films is a duet of sorts between a choreographer and a filmmaker. The new work becomes a reimagining of the choreography, one that may emphasize different elements or engender new artistic impulses for the choreographer that vary wildly from the original live production. Dancer and scholar Philipa Rothfield explores the differences between live choreography and its documentation, citing the variations of participation and observation between the two genres. "The video tends to invite observation rather than participation, whereas performance allows for feeling, proximity, and corporeal relationship." (Rothfield 62) This implies that the flattening plane of film consistently removes the participatory and corporeal experience of viewing performance and becomes a more clinic method of observation. However, filmmakers and choreographers often successfully redefine the relationship between the performer and observer within their translations of dance to film, as in the case of Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker and Thierry de Mey.

In 1982, choreographer Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker premiered *Fase*, an evening of four dances set to music by minimalist composer Steve Reich. In each of the four Reich compositions *Piano Phase* (1967), *Violin Phase* (1967), *Come Out* (1966), and *Clapping*

Music (1972), a short, highly rhythmic musical or spoken phrase is the basis of the compositional structure. The phrase is played in unison, then gradually moves out of sync through slow, continual shifts in rhythm and line, creating a phase effect. The music evolves through subtle shifts and repetitions, rather than traditional harmonic progression. In her dances, De Keersmaecker adopts a similar compositional technique in the movement language, mirroring Reich's musical system. In the score for *Piano Phase*, two pianists perform a single measure of propulsive eighth notes for approximately twenty minutes. They begin in unison, and after the phrase repeats about a dozen times, the second pianist shifts the rhythmic fragment by an eighth note, while the first pianist continues to play the original phrase. This process repeats, shifting one eighth note at a time, until they reach the opening pattern in unison. In De Keersmaecker's choreographic translation, two dancers perform a unison spinning pattern, then gradually move out of sync through minute adjustments of speed, mimicking the synchronal shifts in Reich's composition.

In 2002, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Rosas, de Keersmaecker's dance company, she invited filmmaker and composer Thierry de Mey to film the four dances of *Fase*, moving them from the proscenium stage to highly dramatic settings around Belgium—a factory in Antwerp scheduled for renovation, an empty floor in Coca-Cola's new office building in Anderlecht, the Tervuren forest, and Rosas large rehearsal space in Brussels. The dances are reinvented and the drama of their movements heightened.

For *Violin Phase*, de Keersmaecker and de Mey stage the dance in a forest clearing in Tervuren, Belgium—an unusual location for minimalist choreography—with de Keersmaecker performing the solo role. In the original proscenium staging, a solo dancer performs on a simple black stage, lit by spotlight. The crisp, focused movement and minimal

staging work in tandem to create a *mise-en-scene* of simplicity and focused intensity, in order to allow the audience a clear view to see and hear the connection between the dance and music. By replacing the black box with a verdant Belgian forest, the film transforms the movement from minimalist intensity to joyful ritualism.

In the film, De Keersmaecker performs on a raised platform whose presence provides a destabilizing contrast to the lush surrounding. The stage flat is covered with a thin layer of white sand and a circle is inscribed around its perimeter. In the opening minutes of the dance, the choreographer moves along the entire circumference of the circle, her feet tracing the circular path, creating patterns that reveal the precision of her steps. Though film the captures this specific performance by De Keersmaecker, the sand, ever changing and rearranging, reflects the ephemeral nature of the dance, marking the impossibility of completely capturing the ephemeral motions of the dancer.

For *Violin Phase*, de Keersmaecker, following Reich's compositional technique, derives the structure of her work through a short movement phrase. She begins with a twist of the torso, hands by her side, and allows the arms to follow the torso, wrapping around the body with one arm in front and one in back. This opening gesture subtly references the opening seconds of Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*. As previously discussed, Rainer's choreographic gestures are created and combined with no developmental phrasing or sense of climax; the movements build an "aesthetic of continual, uninflected motion." (Brannigan, "Dancefilm" 132). Performing in silence, Rainer derived gestures from everyday movements like the tapping of the foot or the turn of the head, and combined them with antithetical arm and leg movements, each gesture seamlessly following the next, progressing as if without preparation or development. De Keersmaecker, building upon this perpetual movement

method, constructs a similar structure of simple gestures that show neither preparation nor development, but unlike Rainer, the gestures are born from their relationship to the musical composition, their non-development emerging from relentless repetition.

In Reich's score, written for four violinists or violin and tape, the opening phrase is repeated two to four times and is then joined by a second violin, then a third, and finally a fourth. Each musician enters, playing a variation of the opening phrase, either displaced by several eighth notes, or following the contour of its rhythmic structure. As the phrase expands and transforms, gaining rhythmic complexity, additional variations are layered on top of each other. De Keersmaeker's opening twisting gesture is, like Reich's violin phrase, the repeated movement that is varied and amended over the course of the dance. The choreography is not developed through the building of phrases, but is constructed through repetition with subtle shifts in footwork and precise changes in velocity and direction. De Keersmaeker develops her movement phrases in a similar evolutionary process. A leg kick and small hop are added, moving a bit of sand with each gesture; very brief moments of stillness are incorporated, introducing a slow building dynamism to the twisting gesture. She begins moving inside the radius of the circle, slicing through and disrupting the pristine center of the stage.

In the film, director Thierry de Mey's camera work adds to the drama of the dance. Moving between tight close ups, mid-shots, and aerial footage, the camera offers varying views of the performance. The editing and jump cuts, which become more rapid as the music and choreography become more complex, add to the urgency of the dance. When analyzing the relationship between the dance and the camera, it is important to consider the initial staging of *Violin Phase*. Though compelling to watch, the proscenium setting of the dance,

provides a static viewpoint for the audience, the shifting momentum of directional changes and the inclusion of larger gestures like the foot kick become major stage events. However, in the film, de Mey follows individual movements carefully, lingering on the feet, arms, and face, capturing minute and subtle shifts—even De Keersmaeker’s smile—within the choreographic texture that would be nearly invisible from the proscenium stage. The camera, then, allows the viewer a closer proximity and examination of the work’s choreographic structure.

The film’s scenic location, a flat, seemingly cut directly from the proscenium stage, transported to a clearing in the woods, and installed about six feet off of the ground in the middle of a forest, seems an odd choice for de Keersmaeker’s performance. But this dislocation from stage to nature, from black box to open space, transforms the choreography from a scrupulous minimalist study in a theatrical space to a ritualistic performance surrounded by the natural world. It breathes a new and different life into the piece and heightens the relationship of the dance to the attentive viewer. The determined focus of de Keersmaeker’s dancing, urgent and driving, juxtaposed with the stillness of the natural setting, offers stark contrast. On the proscenium stage, the audience views de Keersmaeker’s dancing from a distance, watching the work from a single viewpoint; the film shifts those perspectives, varying the viewing perspective with alternating camera angles that accentuate the specificity of the movement and the small variations of the repeated gestures. The dizzying editing, repeatedly shifting focus and visual continuity, accentuates the rhythmic aspect of the work.

The compelling elements of de Mey’s direction are, in fact, these frames and cuts. The ability to look closely at the movement derives from the ability of film to capture subtle

gestures and isolate specific movements of the body, which bring renewed attention to details that might be lost in a single camera wide shot. Naomi Bragin, discussing the possibilities of film editing, explains that it “literally ruptures visual continuity, both imposing a fragmented visual experience onto the viewer and undermining a stable narrative or linear unfolding of time.” (Bragin 106) In the live performance of *Violin Phase*, the combination of music and choreography unspools as a single band of time, continuing a similar trajectory for the twenty-minute duration of the choreography. The film, however, complicates this linearity through cinematic techniques, complicating the viewer’s relationship to movement and directing the eye to look closely at specific gestures. The camera guides the eye, and, by emphasizing and reframing movement, the dance, in fact, becomes a variation of itself, not by choreographic changes, but by visually narrating a new way to look at the performance, obfuscating the notion that a live performance is the ideal performance.

Film’s ability to provide new ways of seeing and watching can also heighten the visibility of performance that might normally be relegated to a space of near invisibility, like a niche nightclub or a darkened theater. In her film *Dancer*, artist Dara Friedman stages dancers performing in public spaces throughout Miami, Florida. Performing on sidewalks, public parks, street corners, and roofs of buildings, the dancers perform a wide array of movement styles rooted in Miami’s diverse cultural sphere: “ballet and modern, hip-hop and break dancing, tap and tango, capoeira and yoga (and some that defy categorization). (Ellegood n. pag.)

Using a tracking shot, Friedman films the performers as they stroll and dance along the sidewalk or perform in city parks, crafting a cinematic representation of continuous energy and movement, like the dances themselves. Curator Anne Ellegood explains the

dancing in Friedman's film "as deeply human behavior, in which exhibitionism and vulnerability seem to merge in a state of symbiosis that suggests that one could not exist without the other." (Ellegood n. pag.) The formal quality of the dances emerge out of everyday activities like walking or running, but incorporate gestures of contemporary and popular dance styles most often seen on stage and in clubs. The film's initial images depict professional contemporary and modern dancers; the virtuosity and technical rigor of their movements reveal years of training in traditional concert dance. But as the film progresses and new dancers appear, these professionalized movement forms are replaced by vernacular styles like voguing and capoeira, genres rarely seen on concert dance stages. Here, Friedman democratizes dance, pulling concert and club dance out of their customary performance settings and into the public sphere, heightening its visibility through this very public intervention. She captures the virtuosity and physicality of each dancer and pushes against an acknowledgment of formal choreographic hierarchy, equating the rigor of canonized dance forms with vernacular movement styles.

The dancers display a confident indifference to expected behaviors in the public sphere, embodying a freedom of movement and spirit that counters the notion that their performances are in any way abnormal or unusual for the locations. This disregard for "proper" behavior within public space establishes a quality of subversiveness to the gestures. The dancers perform as if intentionally unaware that their movements could in any way cause disruption or danger, either to themselves or to others. They just dance. This confidence in performance pushes against what José Muñoz labels the "burden of liveness" for minority subjects. (Muñoz 182) For Muñoz, the burden is the "cultural imperative within the majoritarian sphere that denies subalterns access to larger channels of representation, while

calling the minoritarian subject to the state, performing her or his alterity as a consumable local spectacle.” (Muñoz 182) The hip-hop performer brings his dance out of the club and into the daylight, performing against its marginalization and segregated erasure, forcing a visibility within public space. It reaffirms that dance belongs to the public, all kinds of publics, and prompts an evocative reminder that contemporary dance styles, portrayed in countless popular music videos, originates in the cultural sphere of minority subjects.

Friedman’s film also captures the cultural specificity of dance within various geographic sectors embedded within the city’s cultural heritage, relocating them to highly visible public spaces. As scholar Naomi Bragin remarks “space is not a blank slate onto which performance is momentarily inscribed but a container of local histories and collective memories.” (Bragin 104) Filmed in black and white, Friedman’s film bares a formal and aesthetic relationship to documentary photography in its depiction of the street, but instigates a radical reimagining of everyday life through the exuberant movements of the dancers. It is these images of dancing, the juxtaposition of joyous movement within a public space, that provokes a political reading of Friedman’s work and its relationship to race, place, and representation. As André Lepecki describes, it is this relationship that creates the political.

The political is not a given to the subject, it is not even a given of the human species. Rather, it is a social and personal force and a promise that must be built with others, must be set into relation, and must be dared, collectively, into existence. Once in existence, it has to be learned, sustained, and experimented with. Again and again. Lest it disappear from the world. (Lepecki, “Choreopolice” 22)

The politics of choreography are not necessarily visible during its presentation, but Friedman, harnessing the personal and social forces of dance, prompts this visibility in our shared spaces of collective engagement, the street.

Erin Brannigan, discussing the potential of dance on film, claims “the rendering process goes beyond reproduction, bringing the choreographic elements into a new state or condition; the film/filmmaker enters into an intense dialogue with the subject matter so that the point where the dance begins and ends becomes redundant, the film itself becomes dance-like.” (Brannigan, “Dancefilm” 127) In each of these examples, the filmed reproduction expands the possibility of choreography to exist beyond its live potential, becoming a new and experiential form defined by its relationship to dance, the camera, and the audience.

IV. Dancing “Object”: Choreography and Visual Art

When creating dance for the stage, Merce Cunningham would often invite visual artists to create scenic designs to accompany his choreography, collaborating with prominent artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol. In fact, many of the 20th century’s most celebrated visual artists designed stage sets, props, and costumes for renowned dance companies and choreographers. Pablo Picasso designed sets for the Ballets Russes, Isamu Naguchi created sculptures for the Martha Graham Dance Company, and Donald Judd and Rauschenberg both produced costumes and scenery for Trisha Brown dances. Often, these artists would inform and enhance the choreographic process through their scenic designs. Similarly, dance inspired the creation of visual art works, as well. Degas’s dancers, famously captured waiting backstage and in resting positions, illustrated the lives of ballet dancer’s in fin-de-siècle France. Joseph Cornell, a noted balletomane, created a number of his signature boxes in homage to prominent ballerinas, crafting an abstraction of dance through the poetic, myth-like aura of the dancing étoiles.

As the relationship between choreography and visual art continues into the 21st century, a burgeoning interest in the creation of work that illustrates the creation and practice of making dance has developed in contemporary art practices. In Philippe Parreno’s Cunningham-inspired sculpture *How Can We Know the Dancer From the Dance?* (2012), Xavier Le Roy’s *Retrospective* exhibition (2012), and Sharon Lockhart’s explorations of choreographer and dancer Noa Eshkol, the artists examine the process of generating and “writing” dance in order to amplify the visibility of labor and embodiment within the

choreographic construction. As Franz Anton Cramer notes, “Movement is [...] always a form of production,” and in each of these examples, the artists obscure the product of dance in order to reveal the labor and embodied practice of its production. (Manchev, Le Roy, Cramer 127)

In his sculpture *How Can We Know the Dancer from the Dance?*, a white, circular floor is situated in the middle of a gallery. The floor reverberates with the sounds of footsteps moving swiftly and deftly across the surface, while a large white wall, shaped to the contour of the floor’s curve, moves slowly around its perimeter. The ambular sounds emanating from the speakers were recorded at the rehearsal studio of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. Parreno placed microphones on the studio floor and recorded the Cunningham dancers rehearsing excerpts of five Cunningham dances: *Roaratorio* (1983), *Suite for Five* (1956), *XOVER* (2007), *RainForest* (1968), and *Duets* (1980). In the sculpture, the speakers are placed underneath the white plinth, invisible to the viewer, and broadcast the sounds Parreno recorded during rehearsals. In the gallery, the reverberations evoke weight and motion, as if live dancers were performing on the white plinth. Through these aural remnants, the Cunningham Company reemerges as a spectral apparition, fixed in time, captured and held in a ghostly, uncanny form.

Encountering the sculpture, the viewer hears the footfalls and metered steps and, in a synesthetic response, imagines a performance. The work harnesses Henri Bergson’s conception of presence; the past and future colliding with the present. The steps of the dancers, performed by the final Company members to be trained by Cunningham before his death, are held sonically in the present, and “perform” in the future, after the closure of the Company. Parreno recorded the dancers while the Company had already begun its final

world tour. The work memorializes both the choreographer and his dancers, subtly reviving the now disbanded Company, however spectral in nature. Parreno's work captures the essence of dance, of Cunningham, and of memory, which shifts and fades over time, allowing the audience to create their own Cunningham experience. Parreno, responding to the synesthetic response created by the sculpture, states, "The nature of the object becomes an 'other' nature: it has produced something that is alive. [...] It is projected into the future, but it is still a little bit in the past." (Béghin n. pag.)

The sculpture, displayed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art's exhibition *Dancing Around the Bride* (2012), was surrounded by the objects of Marcel Duchamp, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg and choreographic and musical remnants created by Cunningham and John Cage. Parreno designed the exhibition's *mise-en-scene*, inserting his conceptual framework inside of the exhibition. Like the exhibition, Parreno's sculpture anticipates absence, acknowledging choreography's ephemeral properties and bodily dependence. The recording does not exist as a score for the Cunningham dances, but rather operates as an embodiment of memory and history that is activated in the mind of the passing viewer. Though Cunningham's work will be performed in the future, the technique and clarity of his technique will degrade and change over time. Parreno, capturing a presence of performance through absence, displays the dances with the implicit acknowledgement that their original live orientation will, as time passes, only exist as conjecture. For Parreno, "art is filled with things that aren't so much objects but quasi-objects." (Jeffries n. pag.) The sculpture, capturing a singular moment of performance, operates as an aural hologram, framing the dances in relationship to their disappearance. Parreno describes the creative potential of the

sculptural object through the absence of the body as a new form of knowledge production.

He states:

I think it would have been awful to see poor videos in black and white of Cunningham's choreographies. We needed to invent forms to understand how, at a certain point, he asked his dancers to move from one position to another in a random way, without any relationship to the music. This fact becomes the object of an experience: we hear dance steps, a musical excerpt, and the thing works. You understand without having read any text. (Béghin n. pag.)

The bodily absence portrayed in Parreno's sculpture is replaced by an embodied presence in Xavier Le Roy's *Retrospective* exhibition. Commissioned by the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, the exhibition was first presented in Barcelona in 2012, then traveled to several other venues including MoMA PS1 in 2014, where I first encountered the work.

As I entered the strikingly white gallery space, several dancers, dressed in everyday clothes, were engaged in conversations with gallery visitors. Though unable to hear the details of their conversations, I noticed small, direct interactions between the performers and small groups of visitors. The conversations seemed personal and funny, as laughter punctured the relative calm of the brightly lit gallery space. From a far corner of the room, I heard a short, shrill buzz. I walked further into the gallery, unable to place the source of the noise, and a woman approached. Looking directly at me, she performed a series of movements, swift and angular, with brisk arm motions and a twisting movement in one leg. After several minutes, she stopped and introduced herself as Eleanor Bauer. She explained that I had just seen an excerpt from Xavier Le Roy's *Self-Unfinished*, a solo dance first performed in Germany in 1999. Bauer then discussed her first public dance performance. As a child, she attended jazz, tap, and ballet classes, and her first performance was part of a class recital: a group dance choreographed to Michael Jackson's *Beat It*. She recently relearned the choreography by watching a video recording of the recital and would now perform it for me.

After taking a few steps back, she began singing the Jackson hit and performed a solo version of the dance. Afterwards, she thanked me for watching, made the buzzing noise I had heard earlier, and moved in the direction of another visitor.

Looking around the gallery, I noticed similar conversations between performers and gallery visitors occurring throughout the space. A dancer would approach a member of the audience, perform a brief excerpt of Le Roy's choreography, and then describe some element of their personal dance history. As I wandered through the space and heard snippets of conversations, I realized I was not only encountering excerpts of Le Roy's work, but I was also discovering snippets of history about these dancers, mostly stories about their early training. I even had a brief encounter with a woman who performed a routine she learned while studying rhythmic gymnastics in high school. Looking around, I began to see other presentation modes of dance in the gallery. I watched one of the performers strike an awkward pose and remain there for several minutes, while another waved his arms frenetically, as though conducting an orchestra.

While observing the dancers, I understood that Le Roy's *Retrospective* contains two retrospective collections: his choreographic output since 1994, exhibited in fragments, and the personal dance histories of each performer. The dancers perform excerpts from Le Roy's oeuvre as well as fragments of from their earlier dance training. Within the conception and format of the exhibition, Le Roy examines his own choreographic output as well as the labor and training involved in the creation of dance. When describing the work, the choreographer outlines his expanded definition of retrospective as "a mode of production rather than aiming to show the development of an artist's work over a period of time," and he "seeks to recast the material from the solo choreographies in situations with live actions where the

apparatuses of the theater, performance, and the museum exhibition intersect.” (Rawls n. pag.) For Le Roy, the retrospective is a practice, an exploration of the choreographic process through the labor of both the choreographer and the performers.

The short excerpts of Le Roy’s choreography, excised from larger evening length productions, are removed from their original theatrical context and placed within the display structure of an exhibition. The excerpts, originally performed by Le Roy, are now executed by other dancers within the gallery space, operating as a kind of prelude for their interactions with visitors. The viewer, who can attend without prior knowledge of Le Roy’s work, sees movement divorced of its content, and likely devises an interpretation similar to an encounter with a sculpture. This separation of movement from content points towards Yvonne Rainer’s notion of the object-like gestures in *Trio A* discussed earlier. As Le Roy states “the basis of this project is a question about objects. And how performing in an exhibition space that is made to display objects will involve a question of how much, as a performer, I transform myself into an object and the agency implied in that.” (Rawls n. pag.) The rules of engagement, defined by Le Roy, allow a certain autonomy for the performers, who control the timing, placement, and content of their interactions. The performers, when first approaching a visitor, must always begin with an excerpt from Le Roy’s choreography, but the subsequent interactions focus specifically on the dancer as individual laborer, whose stories and history provide an illustration of the effort and practice of their dance education. They inhabit the space as object to be viewed and scrutinized by the audience, but their direct interactions with visitors humanize the experience through personal interaction.

This duality of roles, as performer and object, has been an essential tenet of Le Roy’s choreographic practice. He considers “the representation of the body [as] something different

from the envelope of the body: it might be a time and a space where there is *traffic*. It would thus be the traffic in time and space that we call the body, and this traffic results in the body passing through various representations.” (Manchev, Le Roy, Cramer 118) In the context of *Retrospective*, Le Roy’s re-examination of the object-based exhibition—its rules of display and engagement, or its “traffic”—has redefined the body’s parameters, of both the performer and the viewer, as it relates to a gallery that now displays dance. The performers and Le Roy’s choreography are transformed into an “object” on display, requiring the viewer to re-frame their relationship to the animate object (the performer) within the gallery, a space traditionally devised to display works of visual art. As Franz Anton Cramer describes, this rearticulation of the gallery experience is “a matter of choreographic experiences and artistic practices each finding their expression around a new form of questioning, a new apparatus.” (Manchev, Le Roy, Cramer 121) This new apparatus, Le Roy’s retrospective exhibition, acts as both a performance space and a traditional art gallery, altering the established parameters of performer, viewer, and site within the context of a performance and an exhibition.

After leaving the white gallery, I walked down a short corridor and encountered a second space: a black room, sparsely lit, with dark walls and carpeting. Entering this second gallery, the plunging darkness made it difficult to determine the dimensions of the space or what was inside. Along one wall stood a number of figures, but I was unable to make out what they were doing. After a few moments, I saw movement, and a figure stepped out, walking back towards the gallery I just left. I realized then that I was watching members of the audience, who were gazing intently at the other side of the room. I waited for my eyes to adjust and then turned to look inside. I observed the outlines of several new figures, slouched motionless in corners and along the gallery walls. The figures, seemingly human, were

completely covered in black clothing. As I approached one, I was unable to confirm if this body slumped along the wall was a person, a mannequin, or a sculpture. I scrutinized the figure and thought I saw a flick of the wrist and a small kick of the foot, but I was never sure if I saw, or only imagined, the movements. The longer I gazed the more lifelike the figure seemed, and as my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I was still unable to determine if the figure was human or not. If it was human, the stillness was impressive, and if it was a mannequin, I continued to see movement.

Later I learned that the darkened space contained Le Roy's installation *Untitled* (2012). The figures were indeed mannequins slumped along the gallery walls. In the darkened gallery, or "black box," these figures, either sculptural or human, created a mysterious charge through their present stillness. Bojan Cvejić, writing about the installation, states:

The power of the spectacle was redirected from the stage to the audience. In so doing, *Untitled* clearly marked the dissipation of the object of performance as something that is gazed at by spectators. Rather, the performance was governed by the audience, that is to say, by their reactions to what they could and could not perceive. In *Untitled* the act of not-seeing was just as significant as the action that was occurring on stage. (Cvejić 190)

Immobile objects inhabited the "black box," typically a site for experimental performance. After witnessing the vitality of live performance in the "white cube" gallery, it was reasonable for audiences to expect a similar presentation by the performers in the next space, but in the second gallery, "the only real movement is produced by the spectator, by virtue of their status as a living body, and the consciousness arising from their presence." (Lista 20)

With this juxtaposition of site, the white cube and the black box, both strongly associated with specific modes of display and presentation, Le Roy subverts our expectations through reversal. Here, the duality of the diptych, one utterly alive, the other, seemingly

lifeless, questions the expectation of performance within the space of the theater and the museum, inviting the viewer to reconsider established definitions of sculpture and performance as well as perceptions of the associated sites of presentation.

Similarly, Le Roy reconfigures the conception of time within visual art and performance practices in *Retrospective*. The exhibition “unfolds in three time axes: the duration of the visit composed by each visitor, the daily basis of hourly labor of the sixteen performers, and the time of the growth of a new composition during the length of the exhibition.” (Le Roy n. pag.) From the hourly interaction between performer and audience, the daily exercise of the performers, and the weeks of the exhibition’s presentation, Le Roy marks each phase as essential to the creation and meaning of the work. But Le Roy also hints at earlier phases of time prior to the opening of the exhibition. There is the time of creation and performance of Le Roy’s work from 1994-2010, the preparation, labor, and practice of the performers preparing for the exhibition, and even the numerous years of dance training which allowed them to become professional dancers, which they describe in their interactions with visitors. In *Retrospective*, this ever-expanding notion of time relates directly to the process of labor: the work required of the viewer, the performer, and the creator. This labor of production requires time. For Le Roy, time, rather than object, is deemed the collectible quantity within the exhibition of performance. If museum collections expand through the accession of objects, then, as Le Roy posits, time and memory are the collectible commodities of performance.

Le Roy’s consistent subversion of expectation is a hallmark of his approach to choreography. Describing this repeated process, Le Roy says, “I work always on similar questions in each production, but I try to change the format to blur the normative modes of

recognition, which create one understanding of oeuvre using exclusively the power of authorship and signature.” (von Hantelmann n. pag.) In *Retrospective*, Le Roy’s authorship seems subsumed within the production of the exhibition. The choreographer emphasizes the labor of engagement and the individual identity of each performer as a way to challenge the label of authorship. Though the concept of the exhibition (and a portion of the visible content) are exclusively designed and created by Le Roy, the performances by the dancers and the participation of the audience create the exhibition. Unlike a retrospective exhibition by a visual artist, authorship of *Retrospective* belongs collectively to the artist, the performers, and the audience.

In *Retrospective*, Le Roy examines performance through the exhibition form and the ways that dance are represented within that structure. As Diana Taylor notes “Representation, even with its verb *to represent*, conjures up notions of mimesis, of a break between the ‘real’ and its representations.” (Taylor 14) Le Roy repeatedly asks viewers to consider what is real and what is representational within his *Retrospective* exhibition. The dancers, objects, galleries, and the exhibition form itself all exist somewhere between the real and the representational, providing multiple possibilities for interpreting Le Roy’s work. Le Roy, it seems, is searching for a hybrid form of presentation that both is and is not an exhibition. Le Roy harnesses the presentation model of visual art exhibitions to derive new possibilities for the presentation of choreography, but he also derives new possibilities for the presentation and historicization of dance within an art historical frame. For visual artists interested in dance forms, like artist Sharon Lockhart, the exhibition provides a platform to investigate formal characteristics of choreography and to explore its relationship to visual art practices, as illustrated by Lockhart’s recent explorations of the work of choreographer Noa Eshkol.

Lockhart discovered the work of dancer and choreographer Noa Eshkol while visiting Israel in 2008. Lockhart never met Eshkol, who died in 2007, but she immersed herself in research, visiting Eshkol's archive, interviewing dancers who studied with the choreographer, and studying her movement notational system. Eshkol derived her movement language through a close study of the body, and developed her understanding that a limb's motion around its joint always operates within a sphere. This technique, clearly visible in Eshkol's movement practice, is centered in the arms and legs, while the body remains mostly upright. To document and illustrate her theory and movement practice, Eshkol began to experiment with drawings and symbols, transferring them into a variety of notational methods that highlight this circular movement. Many of her earliest drawings are abstract diagrams that mimic the movements of a body in space, but as her choreographic language developed, and the need for a more complex system became apparent, she, along with her student Avraham Wachman, devised a unique method of notation: Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation, first published in 1958. This "objective method for analyzing human movement" is based on "an analytic process that disassembles movement into its basic elements—body, space, and time," which is then converted to symbols representing movement patterns that are inscribed within a linear field resembling a musical score.

(Shoshani 97)

While studying Eshkol's archive, Lockhart became deeply interested in the relationship between the choreographer and her dancers, some of whom had studied and performed with the choreographer for forty years. For Lockhart, "The dancers [were] central to my conversation with Eshkol. They knew her; it's through their memory of her in part that I know her, too." (Eckmann 110) Lockhart's research resulted in an exhibition, organized and

designed by the artist, titled *Sharon Lockhart/Noa Eshkol*. The exhibition centers on Eshkol's choreography, which was "rarely performed in public," and features film and photography made by Lockhart as well as drawings, choreographic studies and research materials found in Eshkol's archive. (Eckmann 110) Lockhart states, "All of the components I contributed to the exhibition—the projections, the architectural elements, the photographs, the archive—were just framing devices for what I saw as my own historical precedents." (Eckmann 111)

Researching Eshkol, Lockhart found resonances with her own research interests:

"Minimalism, postmodern dance, and structuralist film," which she incorporated into the design of the exhibition. (Eckmann 111)

In Lockhart's *Five Dances and Nine Wall Carpets by Noa Eshkol* (2012), an integral component of the exhibition, five films are projected onto large freestanding structures built around the perimeter of the gallery space. In each film, dancers, dressed in simple black costumes, perform Eshkol's choreography in duos, trios, and quartets, accompanied by the persistent, steady beat of a metronome marking time. Lockhart's camera captures the muscular logic of the dances in a steady, fixed shot, and the resulting films are projected to human scale on the structures, honoring Eshkol's desire for "viewers always to remain conscious of their relationship to the performer." (Eckmann 112) When viewing the installation, visitors can focus on an individual projection or alternate their gaze among the five films. Because the dancers move at the same tempo, the individual films seem to exist as a choreographic whole, and the viewer, looking back and forth among the screens, can imagine the combined films as a larger group dance within the framework of the exhibition.

This expanded choreographic potential signals Lockhart's interpretation of Eshkol's practice. Despite her thorough research, Lockhart realized that her "comprehension of what

Eshkol was doing [would not] be exactly what she herself thought of it.” (Eckmann 112) This allowed Lockhart a certain freedom when crafting her own work. In the film, Lockhart incorporates abstract tapestries designed by Eshkol and sewn by her dancers as accompanying set pieces for the dances. Though these two bodies of work—the tapestries and the choreography—were never shown together in Eshkol’s lifetime, Lockhart combines them on film, joining two of Eshkol’s artistic practices in a single frame. Similarly, the exhibition incorporates object-based studies of Eshkol’s movement research. Eshkol designed a series of spherical objects made of wire and mesh to illustrate in three-dimensions how the body moves in space. The orb is divided into a circular wire grid with mesh inserted within the divided sections to illustrate rotational movement in the arms and legs. The objects provide a legible, though abstracted, representation of the body as it moves through space. Lockhart photographed these circular objects taken from different vantage points for her series *Models of Orbits in the System of Reference, Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation System* (2011). These photographs, along with Lockhart’s films, Eshkol’s tapestries, and other archival materials are included in the exhibition display.

Reframing Eshkol’s work within Lockhart’s practice “creates something uncanny about the repetition. It is familiar but different.” (Eckmann 111) As Lockhart states, “the only way I will ever know [Eshkol]” is through “memory and imagination.” (Eckmann 110) Within the exhibition, Lockhart imagines and transforms Eshkol’s artistic oeuvre through the lens of her own contemporary artistic investigations, assessing, articulating, and subtly altering Eshkol’s choreographic legacy. As Sabine Eckmann describes, “Through the means of memory, the past materializes in the present as different, yet still joined to its origin.” (Eckmann 111)

Eckmann's description aptly describes the way Parreno, Le Roy, and Lockhart have harnessed choreography within their individual artistic practices and employ memory as a material to create and sculpt new works of art. Parreno's footsteps, Le Roy's dance fragments, and Lockhart's interviews with former Eshkol dancers capture the past and transform the material into a new present, making visible the physical process of creating dance.

V. Historical Embodiments

In 2008, scholar Julia Bryan-Wilson learned to dance Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*. Having never previously trained in dance, the process of learning the choreography proved frustrating and awkward, but after weeks of study, under the guidance of Rainer herself, she could perform the entire dance. The process of translating this dance that was so familiar in her mind (for years she had shown Rainer's film version in her classes) into her muscles proved revelatory. In her article "Practicing *Trio A*," Bryan-Wilson discusses her fascination with muscle memory and "capturing movement within your flesh so thoroughly that when you move, you can do so without much conscious thinking. The body can contain and store thought, history, and meaning." (Bryan-Wilson 70) Now, when she sees images from the dance, "somatic triggers remind [her] of exactly when in the sequence they were taken." (Bryan-Wilson 70) She can feel and remember the movement within her body in a way that was unavailable before she learned to dance the choreography. For dancers, their bodies contain a vast collection of muscle memories—techniques, phrases, complete dances—that reside within their bodies and shape the way they dance. When creating new choreography, dancers must wrestle with these movement memories, which, like Bryan-Wilson, are triggered by memory, movement, and image, and decide how visible they should be within their dances. Their bodies house an archive that can be mined for inspiration, making the past visible through present movement. The body archive of dancers locates choreography within a unique temporal framework, one that can reimagine the past through the productive futurity of new movement creation. For choreographers, this ability to draw on the past can inform and resolve their contemporary choreographic choices. As choreographer Luciana Achugar

explains in a recent interview, “what you do in your generation is you work out the problems of the generation before.” (Achugar n. pag.) As André Lepecki remarks, these investigations are not derived from “nostalgic” concerns, but rather a “will to archive” as referring to a capacity to identify in a past work still non-exhausted creative fields of ‘impalpable possibilities.’ (Lepecki, “The Body as Archive” 31)

Examining the strategies and techniques of this “will to archive,” contemporary choreographers Will Rawls, Beth Gill, Silas Riener, and Rashaun Mitchell investigate dance work’s of previous generations, and how the techniques and inventions of their predecessors can be rearticulated and restructured in order to derive new forms and meanings within the contemporary landscape of dance. Their investigations examine the myth and history of dance and expand upon the creative possibilities embedded within that history, mining them to articulate their own ideas about presence, movement forms, and choreographic transmission. Their research centers around the traces of dance, articulated not through exact citation or mimicry, but a deeply humble and thoughtful confrontation with history and their considered relationship within it.

In 2015, choreographer Will Rawls performed his solo *Personal Effect* at Westbeth Artists Community as part of Performa’s biannual performance festival. In the solo, Rawls investigates how movement and memory are embedded within the body, and how choreography can “be a destabilizing rather than confirming force for [him,] for [his] identity, [and his] agency.” (Noeth n. pag.) As the title suggests, Rawls distills gestural materials and memories—artistic lineage, childhood recollections, past performances—that have influenced, shaped, and formed his choreographic identity to create a combined assemblage of those gestural traces.

Rawls's performance includes subtle references to pioneering choreographers Merce Cunningham and Martha Graham, which are amplified by the history of Westbeth. The converted factory, which now includes live and work space for artists, has a storied artistic New York dance legacy. In 1970, the Merce Cunningham Dance Company moved into studios and offices at the complex, where they remained until the Company disbanded in 2012. The Martha Graham Dance Company now occupies those spaces. This heritage inhabits Rawls's performance, and places his choreography within the context of dance history.

The performance space at Westbeth, formerly a storage area for the building complex, feels raw and unfinished. In the site, the audience faces three large storage bays, which line the theater's back wall. Supporting columns obscure the stage in several areas and a number of slightly raised concrete plinths cover sections of the floor. When Rawls first appears, dressed in a hoodie, black jeans, and sneakers, he runs around the perimeter of the stage, negotiating the uneven terrain of the space as the columns repeatedly obscure his body. After several revolutions around the stage, his running pace slows to a jog and then to a walk. In these first seconds of performance, Rawls's everyday movements and clothing reference the appropriated gestures and costumes of the 1960's Judson Dance Theater, who adopted pedestrian movements and clothes for their performances to mark a specific break with perceived exhibitionist tendencies by choreographers like Martha Graham. The inclusion of the reference to Judson Dance Theater within the opening moments of Rawls's performance indicates the importance of historic influences both in contemporary dance and within Rawls's own choreographic identity.

Rawls stops walking and covers his head with the hood of the sweatshirt, pulling the strings tightly to cover his face. As he holds the strings taut, he once again circles the perimeter of the space, this time with exaggeratedly deliberate steps. The hoodie, previously referencing the work of Judson, now takes on a darker, more personal significance. In 2012, Trayvon Martin, a young African-American man living in Florida, was wearing a hoodie the night he was shot and killed. This deliberate visual reference personalizes Rawls's costume, now becoming a symbol of the choreographer's own identity as an African-American and an acknowledgment of a latent racism that has erupted, endangering young black men in America. As Rawls explains, "I'm both trying to say something and leave things unsaid. I'm working a lot with a hoodie sweatshirt in my solo *Personal Effects*. The hoodie has become a signifier of urbanity that intersects with radicalized representation, in a US context, but also other contexts. However, in the solo, the hoodie is also a material and is something whose meaning and function can be poetically mobilized and stretched through the choreography." (Noeth n. pag.)

The hoodie, an increasingly potent symbol of racism in America, is legible within the work as a symbol of black identity, but it gains further meaning as Rawls incorporates a gesture by choreographer Martha Graham from her iconic solo *Lamentation* (1930). In the performance, Graham wears a tube dress and maneuvers the material around her body, pushing and pulling the fabric with her arms, legs and head. Graham, describing the significance of the tube dress, says, "I wear a long tube of material to indicate the tragedy that obsesses the body, the ability to stretch inside your own skin, to witness and test the perimeters and boundaries of grief." (Graham 117) In *Personal Effect*, Rawls replaces Graham's tube dress with the hoodie to indicate the specific tragedy that encompasses and

engulfs his body, as more and more black men are killed. Like Graham, Rawls stretches the hoodie, pulling the strings tightly up and away from his body towards the ceiling in a gesture appropriated from *Lamentation* and adapted for the hoodie. Rawls ascribes specificity to Graham's universal grief through the lens of his individual identity and experience.

Like the hoodie, Rawls imbues movement with multiple meanings and references, culling images and gestures from various sources including his own choreographic research and past performances. In *Personal Effect*, Rawls performs a brief excerpt of a folk dance that lasts only a few seconds. Here, the choreography alludes to his earlier research of Balkan folk dances. Rawls traveled to the region several times to study native regional dance forms, and upon his return, produced *The Planet Eaters* (2013) at the Chocolate Factory in Long Island, a performance that links historic folk dance to his own choreographic practice. In *Personal Effect*, the brief appearance of folk dancing is immediately followed a second reference to *The Planet Eaters*, as Rawls sounds syllabic vocalizations in the upper register of the voice. These fast and unintelligible utterances gradually transform into somewhat more comprehensible words that are repeatedly punctuated by an emphatic and clearly audible "Sold!" before returning to incomprehensible syllables. This evolution of sound, from an abstracted vocal noise to the symbolically potent voice of the slave auctioneer, carries multiple meanings. Like the hoodie and references to Judson Dance Theater and Martha Graham, Rawls's solo becomes a "space of enactment" that exemplifies how "history is rupturing in the present moment." (Bryan-Wilson, "We Have a Future 87)

"Mercy me, things ain't what they used to be," Rawls sings. "There's nothing new under the sun except right now." His singing articulates the prevalent opinion, often cited by artists, that there are no new ideas to be made or created, current practices are just further

investigations of previously conceived material. But, by including the phrase “except right now,” Rawls claims that the unique combination of references and gestures from the past, specific to the moment of performance, creates the potential for new ideas to exist within the newly devised context of the present. While singing, Rawls substitutes “mercy me” for “Merce,” as if calling upon Cunningham for inspiration and guidance in this process. In *Personal Effect*, Rawls’s looks backward, examining how images, materials, and movements have inspired and shaped him as an individual and a choreographer. Through the crucible of dance, Rawls crafts and grafts personal meaning into the gestures, which he shares in the communal gathering of performance.

The deft weaving of historical and symbolic gestures and references collected by an individual performer and realized through performance alters and enhances the embodied history of dance within the practice of choreography. Similarly, choreographers, when creating new work, often look to historic material that resonates closely with their own practice. In 2014, choreographer Beth Gill presented *New Work for the Desert* at New York Live Arts. Her choreographic investigation centered on movement practices derived from the work of Trisha Brown, specifically her 1987 work *Newark (Niweweorce)*, which Gill saw in a 2013 revival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Struck by the exactitude of the choreography and her own curious response to Brown’s movement vocabulary, Gill wrote herself a note which she hung in her apartment: “What would my *Newark* look like?” (Goldman 21) Inspired by this open-ended question, Gill taught herself phrases from Brown’s dance, then repeated them, making slight alterations with each repetition, until Brown’s original movement became an abstracted form of the original, like a memory in the body. As Gill researched, studied, and began to craft her choreographic response, she began

to understand her nascent work as “a deeply felt and personal homage to Brown, crafted amidst a quickening sense of loss.” (Goldman 18) Trisha Brown choreographed her final dance works in 2013, and shortly afterward, due to declining health, retired to Texas. The sense of loss and reverence for Brown’s choreography is clearly visible in Gill’s work, but it is distilled and personalized through the lens of memory and Gill’s own choreographic investigations.

In a clearly articulated article about the creation of *New Work for the Desert*, dancer and scholar Danielle Goldman proposes a question central to Gill’s research: “How do you respond to a work from a quarter century ago that embodies so much of what you desire and love about dance, and make your own work that lives up to its standards while also speaking to a contemporary field about dance?” (Goldman 21) Watching Gill’s work is like watching a memory of *Newark*; they both share striking similarities in pacing, mood, and design and contain nearly identical movement phrases, but Gill imbues her own choreographic language within textures and structures created by Brown, crafting a work that alludes to, but never mimics the original. Gill’s choreography contains a sculptural quality similar to movement language devised by Brown; both strive for a clear articulation of phrasing through deliberate gestural slowness. Gill, acknowledging the choreographic practices of Judson Church choreographers of the 1960s, where Trisha Brown was a participant, limits “overt virtuosity” and “seems less concerned with the surface effects of movement than with the actual experience of them.” (Lipton 173) Like Brown, Gill’s choreography maintains a measured, unhurried pace, and the dancers’ seemingly effortless execution closely resembles the tone and mood of *Newark*, maintaining a rigorous sense of technical control and evocative stillness.

For Gill, her response to *Newark* centered on three distinct elements: the pace and execution of Brown's gestures, her avid interest in the work's formal structures, and the gendered specificity of Brown's movement language.

While conducting research, Gill discovered that *Newark* was an intentional departure for Brown, who was aware that she often choreographed so that "one phrase fit all genders." (Burt 30) During rehearsals, Brown became interested in the "ponderous, furniture-like, geometric behavior of the inexorable, geometric men." (Burt 26) Watching dance, Brown felt that "some movement phrases looked undignified for the architecture of the male body," and wanted to explore phrases that were enhanced when performed by male dancers, but could also be accomplished—and look just as good—when danced by women. (Burt 30) Brown's choreography had long centered on investigations of the muscular structures of the body and how the training and formation of the body dictates movement, but with *Newark*, Brown began to explore how movements changed when performed by men. Central to *Newark* is a duet by two male dancers performing in unison standing side by side. The angular gestures and deliberate pacing, combined with moments of stillness, showcase Brown's investigations with gendered choreography. Gill, in *New Work for the Desert*, references this central duet, choreographing a series of duos for her dancers, which are variously performed by two women or a man and a woman. In each instance, the unison movements relate to and reference, rather than imitate, the choreography of Brown's male duet. Where Brown emphasized the muscularity of her choreography through its execution by male bodies, Gill highlights variations of movement through the juxtaposition of male and female dancers, focusing on subtle differences that arise when the dancers perform unison movements. As in *Newark*, the duets are punctuated by the arrival of other dancers, who interject short, staccato

phrases alongside the unison performers, breaking the placid character of the choreography with sharper, overtly physical gestures. However, Gill's brisk and frenetic movements differ in style from Brown's additions, which remain much closer to the overall character of the duet phrases. By contrast, Gill's interjections provide new choreographic material that, again, highlights the unique technical facility of each dancer, offering contrast through individuality rather than gender.

Like her approach to movement, Gill's scenic design provokes comparison to *Newark* with its striking use of color, but the effect seems conjured from memory, evocative of the scenic design of Brown's dance but distilled through the landscape of the desert. In *Newark*, artist Donald Judd created "five proscenium-sized drop curtains, each a different strong color" which, when dropped onto the stage, changed the length and depth of the performance area and inserted a bold, dynamic field of color into the performance. (Burt 26) Gill uses color to accompany her dance, but it is created with light rather than drop curtains. Inspired by the Arizona desert, Gill and lighting designer Thomas Dunn capture the hues of the Southwestern sky, projecting evocative washes of colored light onto a white scrim hung from the back of the stage. The colors, softer than Judd's strong hues, resemble something closer to natural light. Perhaps economics prevented Gill from utilizing drop curtains, but the effect, more subdued than in *Newark*, creates a subtler contrast to the dance than Judd's bold palette.

Gill, realizing that "one's impressions of a dance are never identical to the dance itself," created a work imbued with memories and impressions that were formed while watching and studying *Newark*, rather than direct citation of Brown's choreography.

(Goldman 24) The charge of history and Brown's choreographic legacy inspired Gill to

create a work that embraces Brown's movement language and honors its historical importance, but exists in tandem with Gill's own choreographic creation.

Beth Gill never performed with the Trisha Brown Dance Company, but she was able to incorporate the movement, mood, and memory of Brown's choreography within her own work. She could craft her own version of *Newark* perhaps because of her distance from Brown's practice. Could Gill have created *New Work for the Desert* if she had been a member of Brown's company? Would her proximity to Brown's legacy inhibit or enhance her choreographic choices? These questions, posed here as conjecture, were central to Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener who, after the closure of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, began to create their own original works of choreography.

Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener began creating original works of choreography in 2009, while they were both were still dancing with the Cunningham Company. Mitchell joined in 2004, while Riener joined in 2007, and both performed with the Company until it disbanded in 2011. Before its closure, the Company completed a two-year world tour, restaging and performing a number of important works from the Cunningham repertoire. For Riener and his fellow dancers, the chance to repeatedly rehearse, perform, and watch the repertoire deepened their relationship to Cunningham's choreography. The work "merited other viewings because of its complexity and because of its deep foundation in physical rigor. [The dancers] watched all the time. And it did something; it was a way of transferring the dances as files that now reside in [their] viewership history." (Riener, "Interview" n. pag.) The physical repetition and continuous observation embedded Cunningham's technique into their bodies, and in Riener's opinion, made them better dancers. He states, "the technique allows for facility, and it makes you stronger. It makes you able to do things, but it's a shared

language about clarity, specificity, space, and time that is really useful when you're making dances." (Riener, "Interview" n. pag.)

This shared experience with Cunningham informs the physical language of Mitchell and Riener's choreographic collaborations, which they often create together. When they first began to create choreography, Riener and Mitchell examined and questioned the meaning of Cunningham's legacy within their own movement vocabulary. Both were aware that their muscular structure and technical facility were developed to perform the difficult and complex movements devised by Cunningham, and which they could now harness and deploy in their own choreography. For Riener, the technique exists, in a broad sense, as "a kind of loose-knit philosophy around the use of time (rhythm), and shapes in the body, and the attentiveness and articulation and specificity of each gesture. (Riener, "Email" n. pag.) Within their own choreographic practice, Mitchell and Riener continue Cunningham's exploration of clarity and articulation, grafting it onto their own developing choreographic investigations, while they explore thematic and technical ideas that move beyond Cunningham's interests.

In the opening minutes of *Nox* (2010), an early dance by Rashaun Mitchell, Riener runs frantically across the stage in a single, frenzied motion. His gestural wildness is underscored by a graceful physicality derived from years of Cunningham training. Throughout the piece, Riener continually erupts into wild, emotive gestures, but the phrases are clearly articulated, like a frenzied form of Cunningham technique, imbued with rage, confusion, and anger. Emotional content is rarely present in Cunningham's dances, and when creating *Nox*, Mitchell felt compelled to add intensely expressive and personal gestures to his work as a way to distance himself from the shadow of Cunningham.

Mitchell created *Nox* at the invitation of the poet Anne Carson, who asked him to create a dance in response to her poetry. In 2010, Carson published a book length poem about her brother, who had recently died. She knew very little about him, and he becomes a shadow-like figure who haunts her text, provoking deeply provocative questions about the nature and responsibility of siblings. Inspired by the text, Mitchell began to craft movement that evoked the internal anguish and turmoil of Carson's brother, and set those movements on Riener. As Mitchell, describes, "It's inevitable that when you have any kind of text that has a character in it, and you have a person onstage, you place that onto that person. I tried not to shy away from it. I said, "You're the brother." (Kourlas n. pag.) Riener's intense movements and elaborate, outsized gestures embody the brother's emotional turmoil, and Mitchell's choreography hints at narrative, once again breaking away from Cunningham's nearly abstract constructions.

Nox was created while Mitchell and Riener were still performing with the Cunningham Company, and Mitchell's desire to integrate specific emotional content into his own work stemmed from his "frustrations with doing Cunningham for so long—feeling frustrated by the way the movement was so bound." (Kourlas n. pag.) Mitchell, using gestural language evocative of Cunningham, attaches narrative and character to movement as one way to expose and explore choreographic questions that Cunningham either rejected or chose to leave unexamined. Men partnering with other men is conspicuously absent in Cunningham's choreography, and in *Nox*, Mitchell crafts a number of shared phrases between Riener and himself, a pairing that never occurred in any of Cunningham's dances. For Mitchell, the limits of partnership within the Cunningham Company, and the consistent classical framing of the female dancer supported by the male partner was often frustrating.

He states, “There were never any male/male duets that weren't antagonistic or competitive. I wanted to experience being lifted and moved through space by someone else.” (Mitchell n. pag.)

Nox is among the most narrative works Mitchell and Riener have created, and in subsequent choreography, they have moved away from overtly expressive gesture and embraced a more abstract examination of the body. In Riener's *Way In* (2013), created after the closure of Cunningham Company, Mitchell and Riener, performing alongside former *New York Times* dance critic Claudia La Rocco, grapple with the uncertainty and anxiety of finding their way as choreographers while grappling with the legacy of Cunningham. In *Interface* (2013), Mitchell engages with choreographic representations of the face, incorporating set and improvised choreography within the dance, again a notable departure from Cunningham's work. As Claudia La Rocco states, “It could be very easy as former Cunningham dancers to coast on [their] legacy and create Cunningham-Lite work,” but “they decided to channel the physical and intellectual rigor of Cunningham but reshape it in their own image.” (Schaefer n. pag.)

As Riener and Mitchell's careers continue to evolve beyond the Cunningham Company, the influence of the choreographer is still present, though it has diminished. Riener and Mitchell both regularly perform in the work of other choreographers and this engagement with new techniques has clarified their relationship to Cunningham. Riener elaborates:

I'm performing with Tere [O'Connor], Kota Yamazaki, and Wally [Cardona]. Rashuan performs with Deborah [Hay] and Moriah Evans. All of [this] gets put into a box of information that you shake up. And different things come out each time, and I just feel that the more time we are away from Cunningham, the more that gets added, the more it becomes a fluid system drawing upon that material. It was also something that felt so overt about the two of us wanting to make work together. Not dealing with

[Cunningham], either going against it or towards it; it was more about making what we want to make. [Our choreography] is going to have stuff to do with this because we're steeped in this heritage and tradition. It's going to be there, and we are going to have opinions about it. (Riener, "Interview" n. pag.)

Riener and Mitchell consistently perform in each other's choreography, and the distinctive differences in appearance, performance style, and execution of movement shape and inform the creative process. On stage, Riener is full of feral energy, his thick mane of brown hair trailing as he moves around the stage, while Mitchell's movements seem visibly quieter, his mind wrapped inside the construction of each gesture. When dancing with the Cunningham Company, this individuality was contained within the shared technical language of the Company, but Cunningham did allow his dancers to infuse movement phrases with a unique individual identity. Cunningham would create a movement phrase, but he left room for dancers to make their own choices about its execution, allowing subtle differences in execution and style to become visible within his choreography. For Riener, "those kind of places where the cracks allow some light and air in and where people make some choices, allow [Cunningham's] work to be unpredictable." (Riener, "Interview" n. pag.) For Riener and Mitchell, that millisecond spark of unpredictability within Cunningham's practice inspired them to create their own works of choreography, and those small moments of choice are now stretched to encompass full evenings of dance. Cunningham's technique still resides in their practice, but it no longer encompasses their work, but rather exists inside of it

In Mitchell and Riener's most recent work *HORIZON EVENTS* (2016), performed in a gallery at MoMA PS1, dancer Cory Kresge performs an opening solo evocative of Cunningham's movement vocabulary: the spine's relationship to the body through line and extension, a clear articulation of movement gestures, and quick, fleeting directional changes. As a former member of the Cunningham Dance Company, Kresge's movements invite

comparison to Cunningham's language, but are implemented as a textural addition to Riener and Mitchell's choreography. Entering the space, Kresge walks to the center of the gallery, pauses, then looks around the room. The motion of her head is centered in the neck, while her body remains in its forward facing position. She takes several steps backwards, then quickly sweeps her left foot back, entering a lunge position while her torso moves forward, parallel to the ground. She holds this pose for several seconds, then returns upright and continues walking in a circular motion around the room. She repeats this process, walking forward, then, without pause, launches into a series of swift, angular movements, holding the final position for several seconds before she continues walking. These abrupt gestures conjure the memory of Cunningham dance, but they dissolve quickly as the phrase evolves. This use of Cunningham technique as a texture within the work illustrates a new phase of Riener and Mitchell's relationship to the movement. The technique now "exists as a structural ghost in the work" to be deployed when it feels necessary within the conception of the piece. (Riener, "Interview" n. pag.) As they create new and original choreography, Mitchell and Riener continue to look back at work Cunningham's work, consistently interrogating and questioning their relationship with and engagement to the choreographer's legacy through the lens of their own creative evolution. As they create new works of choreography, they pay homage to Cunningham's work through repeated reference, historicizing and changing the deployment his choreographic language within their own practice.

For each of the choreographers—Rawls, Gill, Riener, and Mitchell—the arc of dance history provides fertile material for the creation of new work. By looking backwards and performing gestures and movements developed by pioneering figures in dance, they add to and alter contemporary history for themselves and for their peers, imbuing new relevance and

fresh meaning to the past, while pushing the collective history of choreography further into the future.

VI. Dance and the Museum

A woman lying on her back slowly maneuvers down a set of stairs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Her movements are steady and deliberate but glacial in pace as she moves from one step to the next. Her left foot slides towards the wall; this normally quick gesture takes her several seconds to execute. Her motion stops and the woman lies still on the stairs. A visitor approaches, a cloud of concern spreading across her face as she looks down at the motionless body, who neither reacts nor acknowledges her approach. The visitor continues to stare as she makes her way up the steps, gazing intently at the sprawling figure, who now slowly begins to move her arm towards a descending step, as if falling in slow motion. The visitor seems relieved and quickens her pace as she makes her way to the landing at the top of the stairs. From there, she sees another woman, dressed in the same denim blue of the performer on the stairs, sitting on the arm of a couch, executing movements at a similarly slow pace. Intently, the visitor walks towards her, witnessing the gradual movement of the woman's leg just as it touches the floor. The visitor smiles slightly, then heads towards the gallery entrance.

In Maria Hassabi's *PLASTIC* (2015), presented at MoMA in 2016, dancers inhabit the museum's atrium and stairs, as visitors observe and navigate around their slowly moving bodies. Hassabi's durational choreography, performed daily for several hours over six weeks, was presented as a live installation in the museum, and visitors could wander in and out of the performance spaces. Some passed quickly, barely glancing at the performers, while others paused and watched for several minutes, often grabbing their smart phones to take

pictures of the statuesque performers. Still others gazed intently, lingering in the shared spaces, taking in the images of the dancers' deliberate gestures.

This pictorial quality is integral to Hassabi's artistic practice. In her choreography, Hassabi investigates "the relationship of a body to images," "juxtapos[ing] movement with prolonged stillness, giving [the viewer] time to consider them as pictures flooded with multiple references." (Lax n. pag.) During the performance, her dancers often pause between movements, integrating an embodied sculptural presence in the choreography. This imagistic quality, slow movement coupled with statuesque poses, illuminates a correlation between performance and object specific to Hassabi's museum presentation. Though Hassabi's choreography provokes intentional comparison to sculptural display, this same "pictorialization" frequently occurs when performance is presented in "spaces usually reserved for visual art [...and] is set among aestheticized objects and images;" it acquires "the virtual sensibility of a picture rendered in space." (Griffin n. pag.) The intervention of performance within an exhibition space complicates the audience's relationship to the expected image and object of a museum through an embodied presence. As Tim Griffin observes, "To *perform* within the context of contemporary art is to embrace a contradiction—between object and image, and between singular and circulated event. (Griffing n. pag.)

In *PLASTIC*, Hassabi highlights this contradiction through perceptible alterations to the performance/exhibition space at the museum. For her performance, the customary white walls of MoMA's atrium were painted gray, and several couches, normally placed near the exhibition galleries, were installed within the space, doubling as visitor seating and performance props for the dancers. Through these adjustments, the site Hassabi's performance exists as an exhibition space, but is disrupting through the display of performing

bodies, creating a space that resembles a gallery for the display of objects, but is utilized as a “theatrical” setting. This destabilizing architectural intervention invites the viewer to consider Hassabi’s live installation within the context of museum display and to approach the experience within the framework of an exhibition of visual art. Entering this hybrid space, the viewer encounters Hassabi’s durational choreography, intended not to be seen as a whole, but rather, to be viewed like an exhibition, allowing the viewer to invest as much or as little time as she chooses. Hassabi’s disruption of expectations continues on the stairs, destabilizing its expected function of through the deployment of performance. The stairs, a pedestrian architectural feature joining one floor to the next, at MoMA lead to the exhibition galleries, but for Hassabi, “stairs are a place of transition.” (“Maria Hassabi” n. pag.) Hassabi, curious “how a transitional space becomes a place of pause,” disrupts this intermediary site through performance, as her dancers slowly and evocatively “fall[] forward” along the steps, which are shared with visitors as they make their way up and down. (“Maria Hassabi” n. pag.)

Hassabi’s choreographic exhibition at MoMA highlights a burgeoning interest in dance and performance within museums and galleries. Over the past decade, performance and visual art curators have adopted a dynamic, fluctuating position regarding the relationship between the performing arts and the museum. Many have incorporated dance within exhibitions of visual art, including the Museum of Modern Art’s *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*, the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*, and the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston’s *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933-1957*. In each exhibition, dance is defined as a genre of historical importance essential to the context

and meaning of the exhibition, confirming the value of dance and performance within an art historical narrative. Similarly, museum presentations by renowned choreographers such as Merce Cunningham, Jérôme Bel, Ralph Lemon, Trajal Harrell, Simone Forti, and Boris Charmatz expand the presence of performing artists within the museum context, providing valuable museological research and scholarship within the field of contemporary art as it relates to formal and aesthetic concerns of contemporary performance practices.

Curators and artists experiment with and expand exhibition models developed for the presentation of visual art in the museum when presenting contemporary performance. To take MoMA as an example, curators, often working closely with choreographers, have organized several exhibitions about or relating to contemporary choreography. To accompany the previously mentioned *On Line* exhibition, which investigated the relationship between drawing and movement, MoMA curators programmed a series of performances by renowned choreographers Xavier Le Roy, Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker, Trisha Brown, Ralph Lemon, and others to “move[] drawing into three dimensions. (“On Line” n. pag.) In 2012, Ralph Lemon and performance curator Jenny Schlenzka organized *some sweet day*, a month long performance series centered around dance’s relationship to the blues. In 2013, the museum presented *Musée de la danse: Three Collective Gestures*, a series of dance works by the French choreographer Boris Charmatz. The presentation of dance at MoMA evolved from a series of performances organized to accompany a visual art exhibition, in the case of *On Line*, to a curatorial platform independent of the visual art work on view, but still closely aligned with curatorial strategies of exhibitions. *Some sweet day* bore a striking resemblance to a group exhibition of visual art, with the presentation of work by Boris Charmatz mirrored the solo artist exhibition.

Though the thematic organization of performances mirrored curatorial approaches within the visual art exhibition practices, the individual performances themselves remained traditional theatrical presentations. The majority of performances took place in the museum's atrium, a cavernous central gallery with sightlines on many different floors of the museum. Performances were scheduled on specific dates and times over the course of each month long series, and visitors would sit or stand near a stage platform installed in the large gallery, which, in this context, operated as a proscenium stage for dance presentations. One notable exception was Charmatz's *20 Dancers for the XX Century*. For this work, the choreographer abandoned the theatrical setting of the atrium, choosing instead to place dancers, performing a variety of iconic dances from the 20th century, in various interstitial spaces and exhibition galleries throughout the museum. By moving dance from the atrium into the galleries, Charmatz instigates curatorial and presentation strategies similar to the exhibition and display of visual art objects, placing choreography directly alongside images and objects to provide a new contextual framework between object and performance. For Charmatz, the placement of performance within an exhibition of visual art located the choreography within the direct frame of the art historical narrative, which was intentional, given the project's historical scope. The dancers' proximity to canonical objects in MoMA's collection highlighted a historical connection between movement and visual art practices.

For Hassabi's *PLASTIC*, dance returns to MoMA's atrium, but incorporates her choreography, unencumbered by art objects on view, within the exhibition context. Hassabi eschews the atrium's typical theatrical apparatus through alterations in temporality, presentation, and display to produce an installation of choreography that functions as an exhibition, utilizing the dancers as both performer and embodied object. As curator Thomas

Lax describes, “the work can be seen from multiple vantage points and inverts the typical relationship between performer and viewer so that it is the dancer who appears static and the onlooker who moves.” (Lax n. pag.) By subverting the traditional relationship and display of performance within the museum, Hassabi harnesses the framework of the exhibition to illuminate the imagistic and sculptural quality of her choreography, and therefore, locates her performance within the context of history through its relationship to the exhibition.

Through artistic interventions like these, new connections between dance, visual art, audience, and performer are made, interrupting expected encounters between art and audience within the space of the museum. In a museum, visitors can likely anticipate the nature and display strategy of the objects. A painting is likely hung on the wall, a sculpture is most often placed on the floor, and a video installation is usually presented in a darkened room. Now, encountering performance within the context of an exhibition—still relatively atypical for museums—visitors must negotiate their relationship to a body, who exists within the same referential plane as an art object, but is, of course, an embodied performer, with a mind, a consciousness, and a subjectivity that complicates the viewer’s expected encounter with art in the museum.

In Hassabi’s performance installation, a visitor is confronted with a series of questions as she approaches the performers. Should she acknowledge and participate in the gesture? Should she stop and look? Can she ignore the performance and maneuver herself as far as possible from the situation? If a museum visitor encounters a sculpture, the choice to look or not to look does not necessitate questions of personal address, given the object’s inanimate nature. But a live body, even one focused on the labor of performance, requires a negotiation of an object and an interaction with a performer. In *PLASTIC*, the rules of

engagement for the audience have altered drastically, and the viewer must frame their encounter with performance through the lens of both an exhibition and performance. Hassabi's *PLASTIC*, along with Xavier Le Roy's *Retrospective*, ignite a crucial reimaging of dance and performance within the museum and illustrates how performance can enliven and disrupt an exhibition space. Throughout this thesis, I have examined how dance as a medium is transformed when reframed and rearticulated through the lens of film, visual art practices, and new choreography. But what transformation occurs when dance and performance are presented within an exhibition context?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a museum as “a building or institution in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are preserved and exhibited.” (“OED Online” n. pag.) Through objects, museums embody history. Art objects acquired by museums are normally assured posterity through careful conservation, historical scholarship, and repeated display. If an art object from the 19th century is acquired by a museum, that same object will be displayed in the gallery today. Contemporary scholarship or the framework of an exhibition may alter the meaning and context of the object, but the physical entity will always be the same.

But the recent interest and inclusion of performance within museums works against the rigidity of object-based exhibition practices within the museum. The temporal nature and ephemeral status of performance obscures the relationship of the museum to the object in its embrace of this seemingly un-collectible genre. Of course, the earlier rise of conceptual practices within the visual arts, which often lacked a collectible object, already complicated the notion of the singular artwork, which could be changed, altered, or even remade when displayed in the gallery, but those practices were still often centered on the production of an

object for display. For Catherine Wood, curator of performance at Tate Modern, performance in the gallery is “the mirage-like end-point of radical non-object art,” citing artist Tino Seghal’s experiments with performance and embodied practices. (Brannigan, “Dance and the Gallery 14)

When crafting exhibitions of art objects, curators create an informed pathway which traces an argument or historical narrative related to the objects on view. In the museum, “visitors’ experiences are realized via their physical movement through an exhibitionary space” which creates “a place for ‘organized walking’ in which an intended message is communicated in the form of a (more or less) directed itinerary.” (Bennett 6) Most curators draft exhibition floor plans that craft clearly delineated paths to direct both the narrative of the exhibition as well as the audience’s movement within the gallery. The collection of objects creates a physical manifestation of the curator’s theoretical or historical argument that is clarified through the objects’ considered placement, often arranged in thematic or chronological groupings, along this set path. The presence of the audience, in most instances, does not change the prescribed pathway created by the curator or alter the meaning and context of the objects on view.

The incorporation of dance and performance within the galleries intentionally disrupts this carefully plotted path, injecting presence and liveness into the exhibition. For the visitor, the performing body signals a return to the contemporary moment through the embodied performance of the dancer, even if historical work is performed. At the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, a recently recovered film of Merce Cunningham performing his solo *Changeling* (1957) was screened in the galleries as part of the exhibition *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933-1957*. On screen, the film, discovered in the vault

of a German television studio, exhumes a Cunningham dance thought lost for decades. As the film plays in the gallery, Cunningham's performance, full of ferocity and grace, fills the gallery and looms over the art objects installed in the space. Complementing the projected choreography, Silas Riener, a former dancer in the now-disbanded Merce Cunningham Dance Company, revives the work in live recreation, bringing the filmed record of Cunningham's performance from an archival document into a live presence. During the exhibition, Riener performed *Changeling* on a dance floor installed in the gallery space several times over the course of the exhibition. Visitors could view the black and white Cunningham film on screen, then, minutes later watch Riener perform the choreography live, costumed in a recreation of Robert Rauschenberg's shockingly red costume. Riener coaxes the dance from historical documentation into what Phelan would term a "manically charged present." (Phelan 148) The fluctuation of documentation and live performance, providing an essential conversation between the past and the present, evokes the fluidity of history and the essentialness of documentation coupled with live performance within the exhibition. For visitors, the historic presence of Merce Cunningham at Black Mountain College was physically realized through Riener's live performance.

Riener brings a wealth of references to his performance notably his connection to Cunningham and his Company, as well as his continued research and exploration of Cunningham technique as both performer and teacher. But, there are also distinguishing characteristics specific to Riener that project our contemporary moment onto Cunningham's choreography. Riener performs *Changeling* as an out gay man who shares his personal and professional life with Rashaun Mitchell. Cunningham, whose romantic relationship with composer John Cage is well documented, either could not or would not explore his own

homosexuality within his choreography. In live performance, Riener, then, represents both the legacy of Cunningham dance as well as an evolving social history regarding homosexuality, which allows Riener to perform as man who can publically acknowledge his sexual preference. On film, time stops, freezing Cunningham within the framework of history; the live presence of Riener's performance moves the temporal register of the choreography from a mid-20th century document into the present, adding new dimensions and new meanings to Cunningham's work.

As scholar Mark Franko notes in an essay about museum performance, "movement brings life to the collection, restores life to the objects that have been severed from their physical and cultural locations." (Franko 252) Performance enlivens the objects, providing new subjectivities with which to view and analyze the art works, like Cunningham and Riener's performance of *Changeling*. The past returns through the present, and the intrusion of dance and performance moves the museum from the temporal frame of history into the contemporary moment, momentarily erasing the distance between the eras. Franko, citing Foucault, elaborates on this temporal shift:

If the museum is, historically at least, [...] a rational and scientific project that documents and explains material and visual culture, the presence of danced performance in its galleries points to the intrusion of the oral into the sphere of visual and material culture. This could also be viewed from the perspective of time. The museum, in Foucault's term, is 'a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place' whereas dance 'spends' time, 'takes' time, in a way that simulates the presence of being. (Franko 253)

Dance's "presence of being," well illustrated in Hassabi's *PLASTIC* and Xavier Le Roy's *Retrospective* exhibition, enlivens the gallery and "simulates the presence of being," providing possible models for future iterations of dance in the museum. As Le Roy's project

travelled to museums around the world, he became curious if his exhibition concept could be used as a template for other choreographers.

If I think about the possibility of extending this into a form that would not use my works as a frame or as material, I think that's the question—Can the choreographic structure developed to exhibit these live materials become generic or, is it specific to my work? Can that choreographic structure be used as a frame for other kinds of material and subjects? How will that work? What would that do? (Rawls n. pag.)

In Le Roy's *Retrospective*, the transposition of dance from the confines of a stage presentation to a gallery space produces a newly established correlation between movement practices and the art object. In the theatrical context, the choreographer and audience are dependent on a co-presence within an established temporal relationship and shared space, but in the gallery context, this relationship changes. The performers, operating within the function of an art object, enact their labor independent of the audience. The experience mimics the relationships established by an art object placed in a gallery. The temporality of the performance no longer functions in relation to the shared presence of audience and performer, but like an art object, takes place regardless of the co-presence of audience and performer, offering a chance to re-envision dance practices and reframe them within a gallery space. The placement of dance within the frame of the museum informs the institutional parameters and visual reception of the performance. As choreographers grapple with presentation and production in the museum and gallery space, they must re-consider the presentation of the theatrical structure, the presentation of dance within a fixed space at a specific time. The museum structure allows for an expanded notion of time, and a re-envisioning of performance's parameters different from those created in a theatrical presentation. For Le Roy, this includes a consideration of the creation of dance, its means of production, and how dance is "written" for the performer and the audience. In the theatrical

setting, this creative process often takes place before the audience enters the theater. Within a gallery context, this “writing” can take place with and for the audience, making visible the process of creation.

Within the museum, particularly collecting institutions, conversations surrounding the exhibition and presentation of dance have evolved to discussions about the acquisition of dance for permanent collections. Though objects relating to dance and choreography, including scores, instructions, and performance props, are often present in museum collections, the acquisition of choreography, the dance itself, is still a relatively nascent concept. In an essay about the increasing frequency of performance presentations in museums, Erin Brannigan cites the difficulty of collecting dance if the object remains the focal point of museum collections. The “object in dance constitutes a movement toward the conditions of object-based creative production and presentation” more closely associated with the collection and presentation of art in the museum, but “the dancing body and its resources as a creative producer, participant, and body-archive are what the museum desires” making the art form both “desirable and resistant” to the museum. (Brannigan, “Dance and the Gallery” 17) By presenting dance in a museum context, does the institution have an obligation, by way of its definition, to preserve dance? And if so, what does it preserve? Dance, with its attendant ephemerality, cannot be preserved within the same collecting framework as an object. As museums and related institutions present, research, and study dance with greater frequency, the desire to acquire dance for museum collections has generated unique methods of collecting and preserving the form. To cite two recent examples, the Walker Art Center commissioned and ultimately acquired Ralph Lemon’s *Scaffold Room* performance in 2014. In this highly unusual acquisition, Lemon, “his

collaborators, and the institution are developing a score that involves thirty or forty moments of the performance. When completed, it will constitute a kind of creative capture of [the] real-time experience.” (Bither, Lemon, Michelson 40) In a similar, though more traditional acquisition process, MoMA has been working to acquire choreographer Simone Forti’s 1961 work *Huddle* into its collection. In both instances, the choreographers worked closely with curators at the museum to set the terms of the acquisition. For Lemon, the acquisition exists almost as a memory, a non-object of ephemerality that reinforces the nearly impossible task of collecting a time-based work. At MoMA, Forti, working closely with performance curator Ana Janevski, filmed several hours of rehearsal footage in which she taught dancers how to perform the work; the footage will be used as primary documentation for dancers who perform the work for future presentations of *Huddle* at MoMA. In each example, the collection of an ephemeral art form like dance yields wildly varying approaches. Lemon was not interested in *Scaffold Room* becoming “another thing that can be stored in some warehouse as an archive.” (Bither, Lemon, Michelson 40) Working with Walker curators, Lemon proposed a “porous” model of acquisition; Walker curator Philip Bither elaborates, “The Walker doesn’t own *Scaffold Room*. No one needs to come to us for the rights or pay us in order to do their own version of *Scaffold Room*. But hopefully, if another city does it, they will create their own set of materials that will be their score—or their acquisition—for their community. (Bither, Lemon, Michelson 41) At MoMA, the acquisition of Forti’s *Huddle* focuses more specifically on the accession of detailed instructions that will be used to recreate the performance in the future. Within their variations, these two methods of acquisition point towards a developing conversation among museum curators focused on the inclusion of dance within the history of the individual institution and within the history of art.

As museums continue to build and expand performance programs, curators and artists will become savvier in the construction of exhibitions and performance presentations, providing content and context for audiences to understand, in greater detail, how choreography and performance relates within an institution primarily charged with the presentation of visual art. Many critics already see this audience development. Bojana Cvejić, writing about *Retrospective*, finds “that people are less intimidated than you might expect when a familiar apparatus, such as an exhibition, is dismantled. This encourages the construction of new apparatuses.” (Cvejić, “Giving Time Without Losing It” 21) This continued search for new ways of presenting and exhibiting performance provides choreographers an opportunity to reimagine and transform their choreography within a new site and context. However, Claire Bishop, critical of the spectacle of performance within museums, cautions that dance must be presented within the carefully considered context of history.

Live dance seems to exist in a different time zone to that of history: it is usually deployed by the museums as a presentist spectacle—a way to enliven its mausoleal atmosphere and play into the demands of an experience economy. Resolving the temporalities of these conflicting demands—i.e., finding a way to present dance as part of a historical dialogue with visual art, not just entertainment—is one of the main challenges the museum now faces. (Bishop, “The Perils and Possibilities of Dance” 72)

Hassabi and Le Roy’s museum presentations, as well as gallery performances that inform and enliven the history and meaning of an exhibition, push against Bishop’s criticism and lead the way for an expanded conception of the exhibition, which deftly weaves dance into the museum.

VII. Conclusion

After attending *Retrospective* in Spain, scholar Claire Bishop discussed the work with Le Roy and discovered that he devised his strategies for presentation through the examination of the exhibition form.

Le Roy explained to me that he had observed three types of temporalities in the gallery space: the loop (the circular temporality of the continuous video projection), the sculpture (a more or less static entity, present continually in the space), and the line (more akin to cinema or storytelling, in which a narrative is presented from start to finish). (Bishop, “I Don’t Want No Retrospective” 94)

For Le Roy, these three modes—the loop, the sculpture, and the line—allowed him to rearticulate and reframe choreographic strategies in order to transform them for exhibition within the museum. From these various mediums, Le Roy could alter his engagement with time, audience, and presentation in a way that suited the transfer of dance from the stage to the gallery. Similarly, these same classifications can be broadly applied to the various artists discussed in this thesis, who, like Le Roy, adapt and transform choreography through creative forms of documentation and historicization. Like Le Roy’s use of the loop, film provides continual access and visibility to choreography, preserving and historicizing dance as seen in the work of Ralph Lemon, Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker, and Dara Friedman. Sculpture, expanded here to include a variety of visual art practices, as depicted in the work of Philippe Parreno, Le Roy, and Sharon Lockhart, provide new opportunities to frame and present choreography through the lens of object, memory, and visibility. And the line, which Le Roy defines as narrative, can be applied to the linear development of choreography through history, which, in the work of Will Rawls, Beth Gill, Silas Riener, and Rashaun Mitchell, incorporates gesture and movement from previous generations of choreographers to

preserve, expand, and import contemporary meaning to the legacy and history of choreography.

In each example, the artist chooses how the choreography evolves and is transformed, allowing their own ideas, opinions, and anxieties to shape the historicization and preservation of an ephemeral form. Ralph Lemon, in a recent conversation with curator Philip Bither and choreographer Sarah Michelson, addresses the value of ephemerality and its relationship to history within choreographic practice. The inherent instability of choreography, its ability to disappear, provides artists with a variety of choices when considering its preservation, spurring unique and creative forms of documentary production. For Lemon, the artist is the principle arbiter for documenting dance, stating, “What does the *artist* want? [...] I suspect that’s kind of the benefit of dealing with the ephemeral stuff. You get to choose—imagine—how it’s held or not.” (Bither, Lemon, Michelson 48) For choreographers, to “imagine” is to create new potentials and possibilities of form, allowing history, accessibility, and future visibility to reside within their own artistic process. For some choreographers, that potential form is disappearance. Remarking on the creation of form within choreography, Sarah Michelson, says, “I feel really afraid of the distillation of the moment into form. I feel really afraid of it.” (Bither, Lemon, Michelson 26) Michelson continually disrupts the translation of choreography into form by tightly controlling the documentation and discussion that surrounds her dance works. She feels that the choreography’s translation and transformation into form pushes too far beyond what is, for her, essential to its creation, and potentially damaging to her creative process. She chooses instead memory as her nearly exclusive means of historicization.

For Lemon and Michelson, the choice of how dance is “held” is given to the artist, but as dance is presented and collected by museums and galleries, this privilege is complicated by the needs and infrastructure of those institutions. When asked about the purchase and preservation of dance within museums, Michelson states, “You’re talking about the museum, and ownership, and the canon, and art history, and about performance being taken into art history on art history’s terms.” (Bither, Lemon, Michelson 25) This criticism of the museum, the adoption of performance and dance within the parameters of visual art is something choreographers must examine, grapple with, and push against. At institutions that present dance alongside visual art and collecting institutions that have turned their focus toward the acquisition of dance, the genre must be historicized by the museum through the lens of art and performance history, allowing dance to be understood on its own terms. As previously discussed, the Museum of Modern Art and the Walker Art Center work closely with choreographers when presenting and collecting dance work, and though critical questions about the inclusion of choreography within the museum should be asked, the relationships that evolve among choreographers, curators, and the institution will hopefully pave the way for a deeper knowledge and understanding of how dance should exist and endure within the museum.

Given the ephemerality of performance, the possibilities for its future prompt a series of questions. How does the very material of dance, with its limited documentary possibilities, reach between generations? What is lost by the exchange, what is gained? Can there be some sort of tethering from one generation to the next? Many of these questions have been addressed in this thesis. The fixed nature of documentation allows a performance to exist in the past, present, and future, noteworthy for its contribution to performance history and the

increased accessibility of dance. While a performance may only have one live iteration, documentation extends the life of that performance, allowing the work to live simultaneously in the memory of the past and the captured presence of the future. Though the ephemeral nature of performance often prevents the complete documentation of the live experience; creative documentation in film, visual artworks, and other choreographies should exist for future generations. For artist Sharon Hayes, “part of the futurity of performance is about it living in other generations and a compliment to [succeeding] generations.” (Hayes n. pag.) Performance, then, is generationally generative. The live moment and its subsequent documentation presents a “condition of generation” that is both “bound and unbound to [past and future] generations.” (Hayes n. pag.) The performance exists in the present but is also recalled by future generations via writing, photography, notation, and other documentary processes. The ephemeral nature of performance exists in an inherent futurity that whose form must be continually readdressed; it must be understood to recapitulate the lived experience of the artist and the audience, provoking a limited, but essential future for its history. For many, “the document is less than the event,” which is recorded to “prove [the event] took place.” (Lepecki, “Crossing the Line” n. pag.) But, that document, illustrated by each artist previously discussed, can “hold the moment that has materialized in the present” and extend it reach into the future. (Hayes n. pag.)

Some are, by nature, poetic representations of performance, while others simply capture the moment of performance for future study and research. In each, documentation marks a distinctive objective: the preservation of the elusive moment of live presence, existing within a varied set of parameters, that allows performance to continue. Of course, as Julia Bryan-Wilson asks “How is each iteration both a fresh interpretation of an archival act

and a reenactment—or reactivation—of a repertoire?” (Bryan-Wilson, “Practicing *Trio A* 58) Dance, with its characteristic ephemerality and embodied presence, is a medium that “might be continually in process.” (Bryan-Wilson, “Practicing *Trio A* 66) Perhaps choreography, with its temporal and historical instability along with its continuous development and progression, provide artists and choreographers a unique opportunity to translate and transform the genre in this “post-medium” era. From its capture on film, to its inscription within visual art practices, to its transmission from one generation to the next, dance remains alive, both in memory and in the body, through reappearance, provoking and igniting its presence through visibility.

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