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Book Reviews

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Simone Forti: Thinking with The Body

edited by Sabine Breitwieser for the Museum der Moderne (Salzburg). 2015. Munich: Hirmer Verlag. 304 pp., 538 illustrations, biography, bibliography, 24 × 28 cm. $55 hardcover.
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Now that researchers in dance and performance are interrogating the current development of dance in museums, a new subject, related to exhibitions, offers itself for study: the exhibition catalog. What might a catalog of a dance exhibition be like? Is there something specific to an exhibition of choreographic art that would lead to the reinvention of the nature of even the catalog of this exhibition? Readers opening *Simone Forti: Thinking with the Body*, the catalog of the exhibition of the same name, which ran from July 18–November 9, 2014, at the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg, will find a very traditional structure. Thus, there is a first section containing six essays, or texts, written by art scholars (Meredith Morse, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Fred Dewey) and by artists closely associated with Simone Forti, with whom she made her debut as a dancer and as a choreographer in San Francisco and later in New York (Robert Morris, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer). This section contains two conversations, one between Liz Kotz and Tashi Wada on sound in Simone Forti's work, and the other, which comes first (pp. 16–33), between Simone Forti and the curator and director of the Museum der Moderne, Sabine Breitwieser. It should be said at once that this initial conversation is particularly valuable: it reveals in detail aspects of Simone Forti's biography and of the cultural, social, and political context of her family, in relation to the direction the artist herself was able to take.

The second part, entitled "Works and Texts by the Artist," is divided into six sections, in the interests of organizing the work thematically. "*Dance Constructions* and Related Works" brings together material relating to what is probably the best-known, and most discussed part of Forti's work: her *Dance Constructions*, created in 1961 and still being performed and shown today. A performance of them at the Geffen Contemporary at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles led to a DVD, published by Artpix in 2009.

The catalog certainly gives pride of place to this part of the work, in terms of the number of pages devoted to it (79–129) and of the line taken by several of the essays in the first section of the catalog. It is perhaps, says Robert Morris, the part that is "most influential in changing the premises for dance" (48). One might regret the fact that other much less well-known aspects of Forti's work are presented more indirectly (thus, to quote Morris again, "the later work the *Logomotions* and *News Animations* [. . .]—is far more subtle. Here, language, memory, and history meet in a kind of controlled and constrained movement that wrings pathos from the understated" (48). Nonetheless, the fact that the catalog includes these other aspects of the work is a clear pointer to the wealth of possibilities it continues to demonstrate. Ultimately it is an invitation to scholars to take other sources appearing here as the starting point for further research.

Grouped under the slightly odd title "'Personal' Works" are various works, some pictorial, some performative, mainly created in the second half of the 1960s (127–157). It is up to the reader to perceive the connection between them. First, without any accompanying comment, there are pencil drawings, pastels, and watercolors—sometimes done on pages torn out of a spiral notebook, which depict landscapes, family portraits, daffodils. The work on color contrasts is striking, as is the construction of the connection between figure and ground—a topic Simone Forti discussed at great length in her book *Handbook in Motion* (1974). Photographs of the performance *Cloths* (1967), revived in 2004, enable one to make the connection between this pictorial work and performance, in terms of the interest in frame and color: thus, crouching behind one of three frames of different sizes, each performer flips over four or five lengths of colored material, changing the color of the "picture." The performer also sings two or three songs, which are superimposed on a tape of songs sung by friends. This element of sound in the piece leads on to the following pages, which describe

performances in which sound is of central importance [in particular *Face Tunes* (1967) or *Molino* (1978)]. *Ink on paper* (1971), or the photographs in *Fallers* (1968), which evoke ideas of falling, or of floating bodies, are in themselves more comparable to the falling away of the ground that Simone Forti shows elsewhere in her writings. This was the time of La Monte Young's *Dream Houses*, of experimentation with LSD, of her visit to Woodstock in 1969, and of interest in the suspension of vigilance in the sleeping state, which many American artists of the 1960s described. It is indeed the connection of subject and ground which is disturbed by swelling, abandonment (154), symbiosis with the landscape, vibration in the ground that swallows up the figure, and the disappearance of separations. Everything becomes an undulation, like the line tracing a torso rising out of the water (*Floating Drawing* 1971, 152).

The next section, entitled "*Animal Movement Works*" (158–197) brings together photographs of performances inspired by studies of animals—some of them very little known, done during her stay in Rome from 1968 to 1969, others much more recent—numerous drawings in pencil or ink done at the Rome zoo (caged grizzlies, sea lions, elephants, ostriches), photograms taken from videos, instructions for performances, poems about animals, show bills, and pages from her diary containing a mixture of text and drawing done after a public reading by John Cage of *Empty Words* (*Great Thanks Thoreau Drawings, Empty Words*, 1981). Lastly there is something much rarer: prints of photographs of cats taken by Simone Forti in Rome in 1968; these apparently could be part of a slide show in an exhibition space [*Largo Argentina (*aka *Rome Cats), Sounding*, The Box, Los Angeles, 2012, exhibition view, p. 162]. This section can be filled out by reading Julia Bryan-Wilson's absolutely fascinating essay, "Animate Matters: Simone Forti in Rome." In it she analyzes Forti's work from the point of view of the relation between art and animals, in the context of Fabio Sargentini's Galleria L'Attico.

The diverse nature of the material brought together in this section indicates what "exhibiting dance" can mean: it is more to do with exhibiting, on the one hand, what remains of past dance, and on the other, preparatory material. It acquaints us with the work involved in dance in its various stages, by means of the traces it can leave behind. In the end the reader of the catalog discovers what could be likened to reproduced choreographic archives. One may also find, however, elements whose status as works of art may be questionable: should one consider these cat photos as fully-fledged art works, or this big pencil drawing entitled *I Stand Where a Bear Stood Recently Clawing This Tree* (2009, p. 175)? The catalog probably provides an answer via the photographs in the actual context of the exhibition. In the first case one has in the end to understand that the cats are part of an installation (and that the photographs alone therefore do not constitute the work). In the second case, the way in which the roughly 2×1 m length of paper is displayed alone on the white wall of the gallery suggests its autonomy. It is notable that, in recent years, a number of dance exhibitions have seemed to elevate to the status of a work of art things that were merely archives or dance memorabilia, carefully pinning up, or framing under glass (in other words, verticalizing like a picture) documents (work letters, preparatory sketches, etc.), which obviously had a different status from that of an artwork. It is as if archives had suddenly become the object of a kind of reverence comparable to the fetishism surrounding ballerinas' shoes, costumes, fans, or scraps of material in museums of dance (in the Museo Nacional de la Danza in Havana, for example). Instead, the archives displayed here will be a call to scholars for a form of genetic editing. Another reason for making the archives public is that their esthetic dimension is often remarkable. In the particular case of Simone Forti the catalog (and the exhibition) underline the diversity of the media the artist has been able to make full use of: painting, drawing, sound, performance, poetry. And Fred Dewey's essay "Embodying the World," which deals mainly with Forti's text work (he was the editor of *Oh Tongue*, 2003), offers a way of thinking about the different levels of the work, and the complex status these layers can have:

> At first, Forti treated the texts from the pre-performance writing sessions merely as preparation, discarding them afterward. In time, however, alert to the

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> poetic discoveries they facilitated, she began to keep them, as well as to make transcripts of the spoken component of the performances. It was this constellation of texts, materials, and transcripts that caught my interest. [. . .] To me, this was text work in and of itself, and not mere performance document, preparation, or artifact. (75–76)

It would certainly be possible, and stimulating, if not to expand, then at least to compare this analysis of the written material with the other material included in the catalog. Thus the sketches are not merely preparatory: some of the sketchbooks that are included depict performances that were created in the 1960s but drawn in the years following 2010 (88–89). They thus point to a process that continues via drawing, as successive repeats of the performances take place. Drawing thus not merely precedes the realization of a dance, but goes along with it and prolongs it after the event, until a future performance, perhaps by different artists.

The next section, which is entitled "Illuminations" (198–221), includes photographs of performances with that title, created in collaboration with the musician Charlemagne Palestine in the 1970s; however, it mainly contains ink, charcoal, or graphite sketches on paper (sometimes colored) depicting multiple variations on the circle as line of travel, and explorations of geometry or number.

"Further Works" (222–258) includes, without comment, the score of a song and a number of drawings, but mostly it consists of photographs or contact sheets of performances in the 1970s and 1980s in the United States, Austria, Italy, and Japan. The musician Peter Van Riper appears on the posters as a collaborator.

The last section, "Anatomy Maps and News Animations" (258–275), brings together, without any obvious link between them, photographs of performances of *News Animations*—improvisations based on the news, which Forti started making in 1983 (the year when her father—a great reader of newspapers—passed away), and a cartographic work which I had not seen before. It consists of maps of continents in black and white on a scale of 1:16,000,000, to which Forti adds drawings of skeletons—skulls, feet, a spine—in a sort of transplant that is out of proportion to the scale. The spine becomes like a mountain chain. The bones of the feet seem to extend the lines of the land. While this work connects Forti to contemporary cartographic art and also to the historical links that exist between the invention of anatomical charts and cartography, it seems to me that this series, which dates from 1984, should also be analyzed in terms of the link that Forti constantly makes, both in her dance and in her poetry—with the land and the environment. The scale on which she does this sets aside the accounts she normally gives of her detailed observation of nature: what is involved here is world history and human responsibility for the future of the world. In this, of course, there is a possible connection with *News Animations*, which puts into narrative and movement an account of what is going on in the world.

A number of paths are thus opened up by the publication of this catalog, both by the texts in the first part (which are also lavishly illustrated) and by the second part. The traditional structure of this catalog contrasts with Forti's previous books, in which the relation of the text to the drawings and the archive (particularly in the notebooks that are included) is less direct. Forti tries out, in her books as in her improvisations, modes of composition that leave room for things to appear or break off unexpectedly, and for sudden associations of ideas. In this catalog, though, the relation of book to performance takes much more varied forms because of the diverse nature of the material that is brought together. Indisputably it is this that makes the catalog so rich and complex, and which raises a number of questions regarding the status of the material. Furthermore, although at first sight the catalog seems to offer reproductions of the works in the exhibition, sometimes accompanied by a short text by Forti, a careful reader will notice that the reproductions do not exactly match the two hundred or so works on display in Salzburg. The "List of Works in the Exhibition," added as an appendix (292–300), does indeed give a precise idea of the contents of the exhibition, and enables one to detect the gap between the exhibition and the catalog, with its 538 illustrations. Thus, in the catalog, except for the presence of photograms, no sign will be found either of the daily performances which took place in the gallery (performed by students

of Salzburg Academy of Dance), or of the various videos that were projected. Instead one will find a number of photographs of some particular work that was performed at various different times. The catalog seems in fact to complete the exhibition, or to be a complementary addition to it. The appendices also contain "the first comprehensive list of exhibitions, performances and biography of Simone Forti" (11). Without claiming to be a catalogue raisonné, *Simone Forti: Thinking with the Body* is highly enlightening. Thus one can see how important a resource it is for scholars—a new point of departure for reconsidering Forti's oeuvre as a whole.

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Dancing to Learn: The Brain's Cognition, Emotion, and Movement

by Judith Lynne Hanna. 2015. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 205 pp., appendices, references, index. $27.55 paperback.
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Philosopher Jaana Parviainen argues that, "The dancer wrestles with sensations and images of movement, its meaning, quality, shapes, and textures, struggling to capture some half-grasped or intuitive complexity of visual-kinetic form" (2002, 13). Dance knowledge, in philosophical terms, foregrounds procedural, versus discursive, knowledge; that is, of what it is like to know *how* to dance, versus knowing something *about* dance. Dance scholar Anna Pakes distinguishes this difference by using Gilbert Ryle's (1963) oft-cited example of riding a bicycle: "Knowing how to ride a bicycle is clearly different from a theoretical knowledge of how the bicycle works [. . .] Factual and theoretical knowledge of the latter kind is not going to help the aspiring cyclist learn to ride—that can only be achieved through practice" (Pakes 2009, 11). Knowing how to dance "essentially concerns the body's awareness" (Parviainen 2002, 13). Dance knowledge of this type "means becoming bodily sensitive in the respect of the kinaesthetic sense and one's own motility" and "the ability to find proper movements through bodily negotiation" (Parviainen 2002, 20). This is not to make the claim that dance is *only* a bodily way of knowing, and negate discursive knowledge only accessible through language, or to claim dance as some authentic "physical, transient, non-classifiable" type of knowledge (Klein 2007, 29). Rather, it is to argue that dance knowledge has a *relationship* with language, but also has its own discursive forms, such as intersubjective communication via the body (Klein 2007; Parviainen 2002).

It is important to continue to proclaim the significance of bodily dance knowledge. As dance scholar Gabriele Klein points out, knowledge is fundamental to the establishment of social, political, cultural, and economic relations and, as new forms of knowledge gain social significance, "new forms and distributions of power develop and become established within state and society" (2007, 26). The argument for dance as a valuable form of knowing needs to be continually declared, to politicians, academic officials, and the public, in the face of economically based ideologies that put pressure on dance for not producing a concrete, measurable commodity.[1] As Parviainen notes, a great deal of work still remains to be done in the nature of dance knowledge and our means of attaining and communicating it (2002, 23).

Judith Lynne Hanna's *Dancing to Learn: The Brain's Cognition, Emotion, and Movement* aspires to contribute to this domain. The book aims to cover the cognitive aspects of learning to dance and to "[reshape] our understanding of dance based on profound shifts in knowledge about the brain" (x). Dance is defined as a form of "exercise plus," because "dance adds cognition—thinking processes—and emotion to the physical" (xi). The goal, Hanna states, is "to illuminate and demystify dancers' inner processes of learning, creating, performing—building their complex cognitive, emotional, and movement skills needed to hone and execute the dancer's craft" (xxii).