

Editor's Note: States of the Body

Nobody as yet has learned from experience what the body can and cannot do, without being determined by mind, solely from the laws of nature insofar as it is considered as corporeal.

—Spinoza, *Ethics*

It seems appropriate to preface this issue of *Dance Research Journal* with a look back at Spinoza's famous dictum: "Nobody as yet has learned from experience what a body can and cannot do." (Spinoza 1677/2002, 280).¹ I thank Barbara Browning for her evocation of Gilles Deleuze's transformation of that statement into a question, "What can a body do?" (Deleuze 1988, 90; see p. 82 in this issue).² The question highlights the body's potential for unpredictable physical invention or the production of new and unforeseen affect. Both understandings of Spinoza/Deleuze are pertinent to the diversity of research published here. Contributors to this issue are analyzing dance or dance-related practices that resist traditional and confining representations of subjectivity and the human, which we might refer to generally as "representation." Each essay turns on what we could call "states of the body" in tension with representation. The essays also deploy a range of critical strategies that frequently situate the study of dance or dance-related practices intellectually with respect to scientific and philosophical discourses.

Gabriele Brandstetter's "Dancing the Animal to Open the Human: For a New Poetics of Locomotion" sets the tone by questioning the presuppositions, limits, and norms of anthropomorphism and representation in choreography from the Ballets Russes to recent postmodern dance. Brandstetter shifts the emphasis away from mimesis and mimicry in danced animal identity to the modes of locomotion that dance in particular is suited to display. Drawing on the interrogation of boundaries assumed to exist between the animal and the human in the work of the contemporary Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, Brandstetter shows us that such familiar choreographic representations of animal figures in Western dance raise questions about the category of the human. She expands the boundaries of subjectivity in canonical Western choreography.

Isabelle Ginot examines the epistemological status of the discourse of somatics. "From Shusterman's Somaesthetics to a Radical Epistemology of Somatics" asks what rhetorical strategies somatics has used—going back to Alexander, Feldenkrais, and others—to legitimate itself as a form of knowledge that can compete with scientific proof. Ginot's discourse analysis uncovers normative assumptions about meliorative movement that have passed from the founders' discourse to a recent philosophical intervention. She reacts to Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics with proposals for a radical epistemology

of somatics. She performs a crucial deconstruction of somatic ideologies and argues for progressive and culturally aware somatic practice.

Henrietta Bannerman's essay, "Martha Graham's House of the Pelvic Truth: The Figuration of Sexual Identities and Female Empowerment," reveals that the mimesis of sexual identity in Graham's oeuvre is ambiguous. Even though Graham's choreography of the late 1940s to early 1950s is generally considered to rely, in Carrie Noland's terms, "on pathos embedded in plot, or energy framed as categorical emotion," Bannerman shows that Graham's dancing troubled preconceived notions of feminine identity as an enactment of gendered subjectivity. Paradoxically, it is in the very emphasis on female sexuality that Bannerman perceives emerging from Graham's technique that gendered identity becomes arbitrary and open to unexpected variation.

The Cunningham dancer's expressivity is analyzed by Carrie Noland in "The Human Situation on Stage: Merce Cunningham, Theodor Adorno, and the Category of Expression" in terms of what the "human situation on stage," David Vaughan's phrase, means. There are connections to be made here with Brandstetter's essay, although Noland does not invoke Agamben but rather Theodor Adorno as a philosopher whose thought parallels Cunningham's choreographic practice. Noland contrasts expression as a form of theatrical representation of the emotions—rejected by Cunningham and Adorno alike—with the operative notion of a proto-subjective state that draws upon proprioception, locomotion, and other problem-solving tasks in time and space to engender expressive motion. Noland reconceptualizes the category of expression outside the confines of the unified subject and sees it mirrored in choreographic and philosophical discourses that were unknown to one another.

There are interesting connections between Noland's analysis of Cunningham and the work of William Forsythe as discussed by Sabine Hushka. "Media-Bodies: Choreography as Intermedial Thinking Through in the Work of William Forsythe" is the first extended critical treatment in German or English of William Forsythe's recent performance installations. Hushka treats the "intermediality" of these works not as an exclusively body-technology interface but rather as a metaphoric process in which choreography and movement transliterate propriocepted perception, memory, dance-technical knowledge, narrative fragments, and theatrical modes of address. As with Brandstetter's essay, the potentials and limits of danced mimesis are open to question. A poetic structure emerges in which the body "translates," as it were, from one "language" to another.³ While placing the body (choreography and movement) at the heart of Forsythe's techno-performative installation practice, Hushka is also mindful to stress that Forsythe's performance installation work is an art of intellection more than an art of representation.⁴

In "Dialogues" we step back from *states of the body to the state of the body* by taking the meta view of the cross-disciplinary basis for the unsettling of subjectivity in its relation to embodiment. Gwendolyn Alker introduces an interdisciplinary roundtable bringing together Randy Martin, Barbara Browning, and Awam Amkpa as they each reflect on how embodiment informs their research concerns. In her introduction, Alker suggests the body is a broad category that can bridge dance studies and performance studies, and

that, as such, *body studies* is a field of inquiry without a disciplinary location. The discussants address the terms within which the body presents itself as an object of study in the contemporary world. Martin stresses the decolonization of nature and the unconscious; Browning speaks to what makes a body culturally “proper” in the most complex sense of that term—one’s own, as in the proper name, but also socially acceptable—and to the importance of the notion of bodily technique first articulated by French anthropologist Marcel Mauss. Amkpa uses the idea of a textuality of the body to posit a fragmented archive productive of mythologies and signifiers, all of which create active and unpredictable presences in the postcolonial moment on the African continent.

It is a pleasure to include in this issue works translated from French and German as they expand the scope of our discussion of dance. I wish to thank Allegra Barlow, Leslie Allison, Iain W. M. Taylor, and Claire Canavan for their invaluable assistance in the translating and transcribing of texts for this issue. I also wish to thank Rebekah Kowal for her work as book review editor as she reaches the end of her term, and to welcome Gay Morris as the new book review editor.

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Notes

1. In Spinoza, as well as in Deleuze, this corporeal potential is inseparable from mind and affect.

2. Deleuze paraphrases the above passage in Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 256. And, as Browning specifies, he devotes chapter 14 of *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*—“What Can a Body Do?”—to an analysis of the passage from *Ethics* (1992, 217–34).

3. William Forsythe himself has likened his work to translation and/or transliteration in an interview with Toni Morrison on the occasion of the New York premiere of *You Made Me a Monster* (Baryshnikov Arts Center, New York City, March 8, 2007).

4. Catherine Soussloff’s definition of “intellection” is helpful here: “By intellection I mean artistic production as an intellectual process that results in a creative solution or presentation whereby viewers or audiences are provoked to think, re-think, or research new areas of knowledge” (Soussloff 2009).

Works Cited

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