

## Danse: An Anthology

Edited by Noémie Solomon. 2014. Dijon: Les Presses du Reel. 325 pp., writer biographies. \$34.95 cloth. doi:10.1017/S014976771500011X

What has been missing for some time in Dance Studies is a reader in English that includes the important work of European (mainly French and Belgian) dance theorists. With backing from the French Cultural Attaché—and in the tradition of France’s local support and international export of contemporary dance—Noémie Solomon has edited an anthology that fills this gap through translations of key theorists such as Christophe Wavelet, Michel Bernard, Laurence Louppe, Isabelle Ginot, Myriam van Imschoot, and Isabelle Launay. (Hubert Godard and Frédéric Pouillaude are among those missing.) While some writings from these authors exist in English in Australia’s *Writings on Dance* journal, in Launay’s co-authored book with Boris Charmatz, van Imschoot’s SARMA Web site (<http://www.sarma.be>), and in André Lepecki’s *Planes of Composition* (2009), as brought together here, the group reveals a paradigm of “contemporary dance” across theory and practice that is philosophically tested and intensely engaged with the broader field of contemporary arts. This reflects the preoccupations of the dance artists who provide the case studies for the theorists—artists who also have a voice in the collection with contributions from Charmatz (France), Miguel Gutierrez (USA), Mårten Spångberg (Sweden), Jérôme Bel (France) and Ralph Lemon (USA).

Solomon’s editorial essay locates us firmly in a Western, predominantly male (regarding the artistic voices in the book), experimental domain where the “project of contemporary dance” (Louppe 2010, 22) has mainly been located. This will not be an anthology that represents the interface of theater dance with social dance forms, such as hip-hop and folk dance, nor where the classical idiom has been deconstructed and re-imagined, nor the tradition of theater dance that lives on in the work of Alain Platel and his extended artistic family, nor the rich field of improvisation fed by somatic practices. What is meant by “experimental dance” here is work that is closely aligned with continental philosophy, the

American postmodern tradition, and contemporary visual and performing arts—work that is often referred to as “conceptual dance.” While Solomon sets up this distinction in the editorial essay to a certain extent, there is the danger of extrapolating that it is the *only* experimental dance occurring internationally. The point that these artists have “met fierce resistance on the part of dance institutions” (10) may be historically accurate. However, the close attention that theorists currently pay to the same artists, along with their regular presentation at major venues and museums/galleries, suggests that they are now occupying a more central position within a different nexus of institutions that may or may not include some of the dance “old guard.” They were also well-represented in *DANSE: A French-American Festival of Performance and Ideas* (May 1–18, 2014), the New York festival associated with the book.

Having set out the parameters of the dance works under discussion, the path is cleared for a deeper inquiry within this defined range of practice that clearly contrasts with the classic, broad-ranging, inclusive anthologies such as *What Is Dance?* (Copeland and Cohen 1983) and *Routledge Dance Studies Reader* (Carter 2010). Theme-specific anthologies such as *Dancing Desires* (Desmond 2001), *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (Desmond 1997), and *Dance in the Field* (Buckland 1999) service research networks within dance studies engaging with gender studies, cultural studies, and ethnography, respectively. This quick survey highlights the scarcity of up-to-date dance anthologies and emphasizes the discipline-specific focus of the publication under discussion. That an inquiry into “the epistemological status” (12) of contemporary dance underpins much of the choreographic and theoretical work covered in the book points to the important disciplinary work that is still underway in our relatively young field. For this reason alone, this anthology contributes significantly to a timely reassessment of the condition of contemporary dance—an art form that, as Ralph Lemon states in Solomon’s introduction, “will always be on the outside” (20).

One of the issues for the discipline is slippage of dance into/as *performance*, which is here explained as designating “the experimental

practices taking place on the choreographic scene and at its limits” (19). Where, how, and why the disciplinary boundaries between dance and performance more broadly are articulated in the anthology plays out against an understanding of “a constitutive technology of the choreographic discipline” as being a “relation” or orientation to its “outside,” resulting in “an experimental praxis that is based upon propositions for differences, variations, and metamorphosis” (21). The disciplinary–interdisciplinary tension that shapes the current status of dance is thus set up for exploration.

The book is divided into three sections: (1) Times, Scores, Techniques; (2) Writing, Images, Affects; and (3) Spaces, Things, Worlds. The very first piece is an interview with Le Quatuor Albrecht Knust (1993–2002), a collective that is involved in research into historical dance scores and related remounts, again locating us within particular European genealogies from Laban, Humphrey, and Nijinsky through Kurt Jooss to Yvonne Rainer. The impossibility of a perfect reconstruction from notation is a limit point from which the group bounces to (1) treat the score as “a vector of experiences and spawning of possibilities,” (2) critique the choreographer as author and move toward the “ordeal” of equality, and (3) interrogate the notion of “interpretation” as central to the constitution of the dancing subject (28–30). In this sense, the group’s practice-based research is clearly a contribution toward freedom from “the ideological fantasy of the origin or original that animates conservative and legacy discourses on ‘reconstruction’ in dance,” (35) concurrently reintroducing “the dancer’s experience of movement” back into the discourse of dance history (37).

Loupe’s commentary on the collective’s work in this volume reinforces its significance, suggesting that the notational-turn in French dance has had repercussions in the broader contemporary arts: “Dance has become a model, in the sense that a choreographic score (more so than a traditional music score) sets a program of activities, or ‘scripts’ that in turn generate ‘scenes’ that multiply in time and space” (90). Accordingly, the power of the movement score lies in its capacity to “alter the modes of production” of the work of art by allowing for a slate of contingencies (the non-specified components, which might include time, space,

style, quality, the make-up of the performers, the influence of outside forces) to occur in each iteration of its deployment (90–1). This important contribution from dance to the arts more broadly is drawn out by Loupe mainly in relation to the visual arts, and points to the possible further development of this line of enquiry.

Van Imschoot’s (n.d.) important work on scoring and the dance archive supports her elaboration on the nature of the dance “score” (as opposed to notation) as not necessarily written and reproducible, so often unable to be copyrighted or distributed. Such scores are, rather, “heteronomous working tools, whose use is ad hoc, local, and mostly in tandem with verbally and physically communicated agreements” (48). She sets this definition against the backdrop of the debates between Rebecca Schneider and Peggy Phelan on the ontology of performance to define the score as both instruction (“the bones”) and action (“the flesh”) (89). Burrows gives an account of how the score is experienced by the viewer *and* performer, where a “grasping” at possible rules, interference from other experiences, and physical affects all collide in bodies on both sides of the footlights. This is body *as* score: “the body as an archive of trace elements, configuring and reconfiguring themselves on the border between the private and that which is communicated” (82). In his characteristically simple but pointed style, he discusses the shifts between structure and play, organization and sensation, intuition and self-monitoring, success and failure that shape his experience as a choreographer/dancer (83–4). This clearly demonstrates the flesh and bones of Van Imschoot’s thesis at the level of the dancing body.

It is very exciting to read Bernard, founder of the influential dance program at Paris 8 University, whose extensive publications have not been translated to date. He argues for the specific temporality of the act of dance as “qualitative, intensive and heterogeneous” (70), and thus resistant to judgment. He offers the notion of “sensorial scanning” as an alternative mode “to specify and designate a dance” (71). This involves an interweaving of the senses in both dancer and viewer, driven by “shifts in motor functions required by situational changes” (70), creating a condition that he describes as being outside linear progressive drives

characteristic of modernity. The resulting condition of dance—which he gives the four characteristics of “kinetic metamorphoses, temporal ruptures, gravitational variations, and auto-affective fantasies” (71)—is characterized by a kind of simultaneity of these complex corporeal functions. He is effectively calling for a new mode of enunciation for the dance scholar/writer, which might suggest that dance studies is, indeed, still being invented. The essay is an excerpt from his 2011 book, *Généalogie du jugement artistique*, and perhaps suffers from its extraction, hinting at possible new paradigms for dance analysis that remain tantalizingly out of reach for this reader.

The singularity that Bernard finds at the heart of dance is echoed in Bojana Kunst’s discussion of autonomy as “one of the basic aesthetic utopias of early modern dance” (61). Kunst’s brief survey of philosophers and commentators on this facet of dance—Nietzsche, Badiou, Valéry, Mallarmé, Pervots, Martin, Derrida—is a great lens for considering developments in the art form. Her article is available elsewhere, as is Erin Manning’s contribution, an extract from her monograph *Always More Than One: Individuation’s Dance* (2013). Other reproductions of texts accessible in English include Miguel Gutierrez’s “The Perfect Dance Critic,” Mårten Spångberg’s “A Dance That Is,” Boris Charmatz’s “Manifesto for a Dancing Museum,” and André Lepecki’s “9 Variations on Things and Performance.” So I will focus on articles that are translated and available here for the first time.

The last article in section one is a panel discussion between Xavier Le Roy, Boyan Manchev, and Franz Anton Cramer and focuses on the “conceptual” dance of Le Roy and Bel as “critical, courageous, uncompromising, intransigent, and radical” work (129), appearing at a time when they find dance center stage in the contemporary arts (the panel took place in 2004). They discuss contemporary dance as a challenge to the cultural coding of the body, the potential transformation of the body/subject in dance as an act of resistance to capitalism, and dance as “an autonomous sphere in which its techniques are invented” (117). Manchev says that contemporary dance is about the body “in relation to—the conditions of its functionality” (121–2), but this is surely Le Roy’s dance, not everyone’s. As with most transcribed panels, this one is slightly lacking in shape and depth.

The second section, “Writing, Images, Affects,” begins with Yvane Chapuis on the critical analysis of dance; however, she begins with a discussion of performance and dance and its interface with the gallery with little reference to actual artists. The point here is unclear until she states “... the visual arts territory does not constitute an asylum for artists known as choreographers. This is a fact that should cut short any tendency to believe that an undisciplined movement is currently being (re)enacted in the dance scene, a movement that consists in leaving the stage” (136). This territorial statement seems disconnected from her following points on the state of critical discourse in dance, which she complains is ignorant of visual arts history (138). To put such comments in context, this is an account of dance from an art curator and historian, and one written over a decade ago. That half the essays in the anthology pre-date 2007 does give rise to such problems regarding the currency of their debates.

However, the conversation between Bojana Cvejc and Le Roy from 2005 is historically significant regarding the source of, and issues surrounding, “conceptual dance” as a term and a sub-genre (listing Le Roy, Bel, Charmatz, and Mantero as key artists). It resonates with Rainer’s famous comparison between minimalism in dance and the visual arts written in the 1960s, taking a pros and cons approach to the application of the visual arts-based term “conceptual” to dance. In Cvejc’s account, based on self-reflexivity, the analytic propositions the works present, and a concern with spectatorship, we might say “yes” to the appropriateness of applying “conceptual” to this particular group of dance artists; in terms of a linguistic bias, affiliations with the project of Modernism and a resulting homogenous school, we might say “no.” Cvejc cleverly posits that the “concept” of conceptual dance is “Dance as Choreography, which contradicted or showed that choreography was used as a closed concept of Dance” (149). This points to the compositional emphasis of these artists and their expansion of definitions of the labor of choreography. What does seem dated is a generalized notion of the “closed concept of Dance” (153), which, again, suggests that there is only one field of innovation in dance over the past ten to twenty years.

Isabelle Ginot's following essay substantiates an apparent bias toward one area of dance above others when she states: "this article [focusing on conceptual dance] represents only a part and perhaps a marginal one at that, of the current [2003] choreographic scene. However . . . it constitutes a very visible part, one that might even be considered to overshadow the rest of the creative sphere" (159). For Ginot this "scene" is characterized by: (1) a conflation of aesthetic and critical thinking (with critics and philosophers often appearing within the works); (2) a critique of the condition of French dance from aesthetics through politics to economics (the history of its institutionalization and an important letter of protest "Les Signataires du 20 août" in 1997 are pivotal here); and (3) an interest in collective authorship that she links to their admiration of the American postmoderns (159–60). She is writing at a time when artists such as Gourfink, Bel, Huynh, Rizzo, Charmatz, and Buffard presented their work in alternative spaces, but we now see that they have been taken up by the major stages in Europe and beyond, and have leadership roles as directors of choreographic centers. Where does this leave such "rebels" today? There is already disillusion in Ginot's tone in 2003, and it is welcome in a book that unwaveringly promotes what Ginot describes as an exclusive milieu based on an "aesthetic consensus" (164).

Céline Roux elaborates on this integration into the mainstream of work that she claims undertakes "the unframing of the choreographic" through a collusion with "performative practices" (261). It is in her essay that the nexus between "conceptual" dance, contemporary performance practices, and the visual arts is most clearly laid out through her discussion of the work of Le Roy, Laâbissi, and Bel. I would rather follow Chantal Pontbriand's position as she discusses how "contemporary dance allows us to see beyond dance and the body," comparing the expansion of the term to the notion of "expanded cinema" in film history (285). She gives authorship back to the discipline, describing its contributions to the contemporary scene beyond itself as including presence/copresence, openness to its outside, improvisation, an exposition of process, a pursuit of the unknown capacities of the body, and a critique of authorship, as well as a celebration of singularity. Roux also writes of the roles that artists such as Charmatz, Gourfink, and

Huynh have taken in revising pedagogical models for dance toward a "resistance to the quest for an ideal body . . . realized through questioning the choreotypes [read stereotypes] and the fetish of technique" (261–5). (See also Laurent Goumarre on the critique of the ideal dancer [277] and Le Roy's work for Mathilde Monnier on pedagogy.) The details of such pedagogical programs would be of great interest to a sector that is generally struggling to find appropriate models for tertiary dance training internationally.

The e-mails between Bel and Charmatz are enlightening in their focus on dance history that is characteristic of this cohort of artists, and their shared interest in "how certain dance praxes can constitute the subject of the spectator" (242), returning to the body as archive proposed by Le Quatuor Albrecht Knust. Charmatz unpacks his idea of the "Dancing Museum," a proposition of an alternative to the National Choreographic Centres set up by the French government since 1980. His playful approach brings the terms "dance" and "museum" together against the background of what art curator Corinne Diserens describes as the *désir désespéré du musée pour la danse* that has resulted in a broad range of approaches to presenting dance within the gallery context and all of the archival issues that accompany this shift.<sup>1</sup> In opposition to the "perennial, lasting, static" qualities of the museum (236), dance is for Charmatz "alive," inclusive, accessible, non-copyright-able, and "permeable" (236–7). Mark Franko's essay, "Museum Artifact Act," supports the idea that dance offers the museum what it, itself, does not have—that dance creates its own museum in each instant, thus constituting an "emancipatory procedure" when relocated to the museum: "The wealth of museum collections is productive of extreme poverty whereas the poverty of dance is productive of extreme wealth" (254–5). This optimistic tone from Charmatz and Franko is a celebration of the qualities of dance that have been the envy of the visual arts since Robert Rauschenberg put on his skates. However, in their telling of this tale, I cannot help wondering what truly motivates the power play between the gallery and dance.

Accounts of particular artists such as Alexandra Baudelot's essay on Jennifer Lacey and Nadia Lauro, Isabelle Launay on Latifi Laâbissi, Julie Perrin on Emmanuelle Huynh,

and Jenn Joy on Maria Hassabi uncover important female choreographers through performance descriptions (particularly affecting in Launay and Jenn) that are lacking to a large degree elsewhere in the book. They trace genealogical threads and thematic concerns that are fundamental to dance, such as the presence of the dancer and interdisciplinary collaboration, and redress a superficial impression that the most innovative dance in France is coming from white, male artists.

Bernard's critique of critical discourse as "a violation of creative process" (73) is a constant hum below the surface in much of the writing in the anthology, and is already being countered as artists begin to theorize their own work. The writing in this book augments current discourses on dance available in English and provides models of critical analysis closely tied to choreographic processes and products, committed to the most contemporary and experimental approaches, and to the project of contemporary dance as a significant player among the arts. The typographical and grammatical mistakes—and some awkwardness in the translations—do not detract significantly from the major contributions of this anthology.

Erin Brannigan

University of New South Wales, Sydney

## Note

1. Email correspondence, August 27, 2013. Translation: a "desperate desire of the museum for dance."

## Works Cited

- Bernard, Michel. 2011. *Généalogie du jugement artistique*. Paris: Beauchesne.
- Buckland, Theresa Jill 1999. *Dance in the Field: Theory, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Carter, Alexandra Ed. 2010. *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Copeland, R. Roger, and Marshall Cohen, Eds. 1983. *What Is Dance?* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Desmond, Jane 1997. *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Desmond, J. 2001. *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexuality On and Off the Stage*. Madison, WI: University of Madison Wisconsin Press.
- Louppe, Laurence. 2010. *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*. Translated by Sally Gardner. Alton, UK: Dance Books.
- Manning, Erin. 2013. *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Van Imschoot, Myriam. N.d. "What's the Score? Publication on Scores and Notations in Dance." [http://sarma.be/oralsite/pages/What%27s\\_the\\_Score\\_Publication/](http://sarma.be/oralsite/pages/What%27s_the_Score_Publication/).
- Embodying Hebrew Culture: Aesthetics, Athletics, and Dance in the Jewish Community of Mandate Palestine**
- by Nina S. Spiegel. 2013. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. xii + 257 pp., 47 illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth, \$31.99 e-book.
- Seeing Israeli and Jewish Dance**
- edited by Judith Brin Ingber. 2011. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. xii + 458 pp., 182 illustrations, 2 tables, notes, glossary, bibliography, notes on contributors, index. \$34.95 cloth. doi:10.1017/S0149767715000121
- In Dani Rosenberg's 2008 film *Bet Avi (Homeland)*, two men's distinct ways of embodying Jewishness at a desert outpost during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War/Israeli War for Independence define the early-mid-twentieth century cultivated physical differences between Jews in the *Yishuv* (ancestral Land of Israel in Palestine) and in the Diaspora. One, the Commander, a Hebrew soldier, is shirtless, sun-kissed, and tough. The other, Lolek, a Holocaust escapee who stumbles upon this outpost while searching for his wife's family, is pale, physically and emotionally weak, and out of place in the desert in his button-down shirt and slacks. These men represent the ideologies associated with the divergent physiques of the effeminized Jewish European man versus the tough, masculine New Jew of Hebrew-Israeli creation. The camera's glimpse of the number tattooed on the Commander's arm shows that he, like