The Original – 'Again'
Historical and Contemporary Strategies for Writing and Re/Constructing Dance

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Abstract   Writing and dance have been positioned by scholars in a contraposed play throughout the chronological period from the Renaissance to today: dancing begins when writing stops. Scholars have accused dance of ephemerality and have attempted to salvage it through notation. In postmodern and contemporary dance, some choreographers challenge traditional assumptions about the primacy and stability of text and documentation. They 'write' with dance in both conceptual and alphabetic ways, some exploring the dimension of race. This study tests theories by Mark Franko and André Lepecki through analysis of dance reenactment strategies and interventions by choreographers Trisha Brown and Christopher-Rasheem McMillan.

Keywords   Dance. Performance. Re-enactment. Geometric dance. Postmodern dance. Contemporary dance. Ephemerality. Copy. Original. Score. Reconstruction. Race.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 The Alphabet in Postmodern Dance. – 3 A History of Writing with Dance. – 4 Femininity and Ephemerality. – 5 Documentation and Reenactment. – 6 Theorizing Historicity and Documentation Through Intermedia Repetition. – 7 Conclusion.

1   Introduction

In the twentieth century, dance preservation efforts and emerging technologies inspired waves of reconstruction and reenactment[1] that raise further questions about historicity, originality, and temporality. The question about whether dance can be accurately documented through inscription tools, such as notation, video, or even motion-capture, centers on the problem of dance as presence and, respectively, as absence, an eighteenth-century question, according to André Lepecki's interpretation of Jean-Georges Noverre (b. 1727-d. 1810).[2] Reenactment scholarship is popular in performance theory as well, yet dance's relationship to presence places it uniquely in this debate because of its feminized[3] materiality and history. In discourse, dance has been shunned as fleeting, unstable, unrepeat-

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[1]   The term 'reenactment', however, was neither present in the 1970s, nor in Mark Franko's first edition of *Dance as Text* (1993). In the new edition (2015), the term only appears in the Preface.

[2]   Lepecki 2012, 125-7.

[3]   Lepecki 2012, 135-8.

Figure 1 Christopher-Rasheem McMillan in *Black Lōkəs* (2017)

able, and less giving to efforts of inscription. The ephemeral, or feminized, materiality is one theoretical way to look at presence, through the absence of presence. The site-specific dancing body, however, produces presence through its affective labor. This kind of presence may, in turn, be different than the presence theorized in historical discourse.

In the 1950s, the chance-inspired Cagean score incited a less pejorative relationship with dance. John Cage stated that "no amount of dance notation will catch the life of a single step".[4] Cage, who also used methods of *I-Ching* divination, worked to free the artwork from intention and aesthetic preferences. His nondeterministic scores served to generate a performance, not to document it. From the experimentation of the 1960s and 1970s in both dance and linguistic theory emerged works that questioned the primacy and stability of text and the relationship between original and reconstruc-

tion.[5] Dance critics Mark Franko (b. 1946) and André Lepecki (b. 1965) theorize that successful reenactment of dance requires more than an accurate re-play of the movements in the original performance.[6] What is often missing in Franko and Lepecki's theoretical accounts, discussed here, however, is the corporeal aspect[7] of reenactment, a somatic and affective specificity.

A larger question is when and how it is right to try to preserve dance at all. Notation attempts have reinforced unproductive hierarchies and the misunderstanding of materialities. Artists and audiences demand the preservation of dance, but is their desire and, more so, its methods a misunderstanding of the nature of dance? What mediums are best suited for dance preservation? If writing, film, photography and sculpture are partial solutions, to what extent does the body itself have a capacity to record and transmit? This self-reflexive method

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4   Cage, Kostelanetz 1993, 84.

5   The term Franko uses in the original 1993 edition of *Dance as Text*. In the revised 2015 edition, the term 'reenactment' also appears.

6   Franko 2015; Lepecki 2012.

7   In his Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Dance and Reenactment*, Franko does acknowledge the role of the body as an archive and as an instrument of knowledge production in reenactment (Franko 2017, 10).

of documentation is explored by Trisha Brown and Christopher McMillan in their choreography. Yet, this avenue has been continually missed by critics and artists who envision a disembodied intellectual dance practice.

The chronology of text-to-dance was subverted by postmodern dance, whose artists' more direct relationship to corporeality[8] disrupted traditional literary views on dance's signification and epistemology. Historically construed as polarized concepts, dance and writing unite not only in their performance of actual or semiotic absence. Postmodern choreographer Trisha Brown's view of the body itself as an archive allowed writing to be subsumed into the corporeal through postmodern dance practices. Others have also followed in her trail.

2 The Alphabet in Postmodern Dance

In 2017, the choreographer and academic Christopher-Rasheem McMillan created the installation-performance *Black Lōkəs* [figs 1, 3-6], in which he commemorated Black people who lost their lives due to police violence. He says: "It's […] also about making them alive again, through my black body in a cube".[9]

Using a spatial system, McMillan 'spelled out' the names of the people by pointing to invisible letters with his body. McMillan's project is actually a re-activation of Trisha Brown's 1975 score of *Locus* [fig. 2]. The 'locus' is a group of points in Brown's original and in the re-activation; McMillan, however, spells the word differently, perhaps to underline the specific context of police brutality and contrast it to Brown's matter-of-fact score text. Brown's system of spelling-in-motion had twenty-six points on a cube that stand for the letters of the alphabet while the twenty-seventh point in the center of the cube represents the spaces between words.

Imaginative conceptual communication models like Brown's make use of both corporeal and alphabetic language. Are such methods, however, linguistic-centered dance? And if they are linguistic-centered, by extension, do they also invoke a masculine perspective? Shannon Jackson (b. 1967) discusses the associations of language and literature as "literature's redefined story about itself as a masculine, hard science".[10] While dichotomies of masculinized theory and feminized embodiment are counterproductive, they, nevertheless, have shaped discourse on dance and performance and its relation to writing and theory.

Created one year after Sol LeWitt's (b. 1928-d. 2007) *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* (1974), Brown's *Locus* portrayed a spatial relationship of the body to its conceptual enclosure, which resembles Leonardo da Vinci's *The Vitruvian Man*.[11] Brown's original, *Locus*, also justified the dictionary definition of its title by relying on a set of points, united by a principle. Brown's movements, however, did not correspond directly to each letter but included

> discrepancies between graphic and kinesthetic [which] opened a productive gap because Brown chose not to create a fabric of transitions.[12]

By refusing to simplify correspondences in her own project, Trisha Brown resisted the codification of movement.[13] She also resisted its proscenium forward-facing presentation, which was subverted by the imaginary cube with no privileged side.

McMillan acknowledges that the experience of black subjects was not on the mind of postmodern dancers like Trisha Brown. Yet, as a black choreographer in 2019, he sees "blackness" in the "relaxedness of the form" in Brown's casual use of everyday movements without transitions.[14] Yet, what does McMillan mean by "blackness", related to movement, and how does he situate this category historically? He identifies an energy, similar to "swagger" in Brown's task-based dancing:

> Maybe that's because postmodern dance is always performing itself, but the thing about swagger is that if you try and have it, you don't.[15]

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8   I define 'corporeality' as materiality, physicalness, embodiment, focus on the body as a site of performance or discourse.

9   McMillan, Sakamoto 2019, 215.

10   Jackson 2004, 51.

11   Rosenberg 2017, 163.

12   Rosenberg 2017, 163.

13   Rosenberg 2017, 181.

14   McMillan, Sakamoto 2019, 208.

15   McMillan, Sakamoto 2019, 208.

Figure 2 Mona Sulzman, Elizabeth Garren, Trisha Brown, and Judith Ragir performing *Locus* (1975) at BAM in 1976. Photo by Nathaniel Tileston. © The Estate of Nathaniel Tileston

According to McMillan, Brown was not trying to achieve this effect and, thus, she achieved it, despite her belonging to the postmodern dance era. The similarity McMillan sees is in the approach. He says: "There is blackness [in early postmodern dance], but it's unacknowledged and quiet".[16] Marianne Goldberg describes Brown's presence as "relaxed" as well:

> [Brown] shed the stylized use of her muscles and the tensile alertness though the spine and skin. Focusing instead on subtleties of elegant, relaxed alignment of her spine and limbs, she moved with ease and a spatial clarity that stemmed from innovative inner imagery.[17]

Brown innovated dance posture and stage presence by replacing tension with confident comfort, which was still captivating. Brown's choreography also transformed spatiality. In *Locus*, the cube around each dancer was imaginary, unknown to the audience unless the viewers were presented with the score. The cube had special significance to Brown because she frequently performed her early work in the 'white cube' space of art galleries. According to Goldberg, "Brown reinvent[ed] the body as a field of equal places, with varying centers".[18] At most, Brown stood on a square, marked on the floor, but no more.

McMillan, on the other hand, chose a cube skeleton, inside which he danced.

16 McMillan, Sakamoto 2019, 206.

17 Goldberg 2002, 30.

18 Goldberg 2002, 29-45.

Figure 3 Christopher-Rasheem McMillan and the cube for his performance-installation *Black Lōkəs* (2017) at Art Building West, University of Iowa. Photograph by M.SM

A black body in a box means it can't be anything other than a cage. Whether it's imagined or not.[19]

A queer, Black choreographer, McMillan finds his body 'displaced' in many of the contexts he exists in. His racial identity redefines the meaning of a project from early postmodern dance, led by "white women in spandex", a group with which he paradoxically identifies.[20] Yet, Brown's most memorable clothing staple was loose pants tied with a drawstring and not the spandex leotard McMillan likely references. If "white women in spandex", however humorous, conflates a tradition of ballet and the legacy of postmodern choreographers, the expression might be problematic. Still, the spandex leotard might be less popular in black American culture and, thus, a symbol of the influence of whiteness, and McMillan is right to suggest that Yvonne Rainer (b. 1934) and Trisha Brown innovated without giving a significant weight to racial dynamics. What attracts McMillan to this lineage of female white American choreographers is that they experimented, considering "just bodies in space".[21]

McMillan's contemporary re-imagining of *Locus* ties in a tradition of dance and text discourse, which is steeped in absence and disappearance, with the literal disappearing of black bodies today. McMillan says he is "pointing to black peo-

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19 McMillan, Sakamoto 2019, 215.

20 McMillan, Sakamoto 2019, 205.

21 McMillan, Sakamoto 2019, 205.

Figure 4 Christopher-Rasheem McMillan in *Black Lōkəs* (2017) at Art Building West, University of Iowa. Photograph by M.SM

narrative, the physical vocabulary black bodies inhabit in the United States. Abraham's work *Pavement* (2013), for example, uses the gesture of raised hands, along with choreography, set to the baroque music of Johann Sebastian Bach (b. 1685-d. 1750). An amalgamation of traditions empowers the work of both McMillan and Abraham.

McMillan centrally posits that race can be used as a "lens through which to enact dance reconstructions".[23] He worked with two of Brown's dancers, Diane Madden and Shelley Senter, when learning the movement. McMillan also acknowledges a "static in the transmission" because he "was not in the room" in 1975 with Brown and her company.[24] As an element of reenactment, this static is a necessary voice in the conversation with the present moment. McMillan himself views the black body in Brown's piece as "something other", yet reminds that "[b]lack bodies were always in there… and now… made visible".[25] Through the deliberate staging of perceived otherness, McMillan is illuminating a new possibility for expression. Moreover, the new score's text is not cold autobiography, but the code for cultural and societal grief. Even though McMillan is performing Brown's choreography, as carefully transmitted by Madden and Shelley, the solemn charge of the score must have entered his affective labor as performer.

McMillan's reactivation of Brown's score is also inspired by the physicality of her choreography. He is

> resurrecting both early white post-modern dancers and murdered black bodies. The names of people killed by police violence are never mentioned by name, they're only present through [McMillan's] bodily enactment of them, making them physical.[26]

The audience cannot see the text side by side with the dancing. Instead, both Brown and McMillan embody 'writing' in three-dimensional space. By approaching the work with originality and by being aware of the context of audience reception today, McMillan is creating what Mark Franko calls 'construction'. He is also activating the original score 'again' in André Lepecki's terms because he converses directly with Brown's score, not with

ple in space, using whiteness to make blackness visible".[22]

He has chosen a white cube frame for *Black Lōkəs* and a white female postmodern choreographer's method of sequencing movements through alphabetic text. Despite her pronouncement against subjective narrative, Brown did use autobiographical statements for the text of *Locus*. She stuck to the dry facts, however. Similarly, McMillan would include facts about the killings in his text, including the number of shots fired. McMillan is not alone in his exploration of the black body in public space. Choreographer Kyle Abraham (b. 1977) also documents, though more through

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22 McMillan, Sakamoto 2019, 207.

23 McMillan 2018.

24 McMillan 2018.

25 McMillan 2018.

26 McMillan, Sakamoto 2019, 207.

one of the many performances of *Locus* by Brown's company.

Why is it so important to study methods of reenactment? Reenactment exposes dance's long and strained relationship to writing, which includes ephemerality and arrest, semiotic principles and embodiment, disappearance and physicality, the original and the supposed copy. Susanne Franco, writing about Laban notation, points out that looking for authenticity in recreation of historical work is paradoxical because "the very act of re-

trieval produces a new work".[27] Moreover, in his Introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*, Mark Franko distinguishes between reconstruction and reenactment as different projects, the latter tending to be more contemporary. In short, reconstruction is concerned with a "dance museum", figuring out the movement from notation or other historical sources, while reenactment interprets and situates the work in the present.[28]

3 A History of Writing with Dance

Besides being a structure that holds power, 'writing' in dance is also a performance. If writing were not performance, it would be documentation. Franko notes that the condition for the return of writing's appearance is actually its disappearance.[29] On one hand, the discourse of the twentieth and twenty-first century usually assigned the disappearance of presence, which is 'absence', as a quality of dance and live performance. On the other hand, the concepts of dance's appearance and disappearance trace back to the Renaissance court and geometric dance.

The alphabetic patterns of geometric dance were contained in the still moments when dancers held poses that could be 'read' while the transitions between poses, or the movement itself, were chaos and "patternless flux".[30] The arrangement of dancers in patterns marked a two-dimensional space. The "dissolves", on the other hand, created "depth and volume", returning a three-dimensional aspect to the dance.[31] The interchange of the two registers continually restructured the space. It switched each regime from presence to absence in a tension, which is both textual and dramatic. Franko observes two

> textual models: one founded on the hieroglyph, the other on the labyrinth; one is an obedience, the other an escape; one a discursivity, the other a madness.[32]

The principles associated with the writing mode were orderly and legible. Movement seemed to be interpreted as confusion but also as subversion. The lack of transitions between the order and its dispersion raises the question of whether a true connection lies between the two modes or whether they simply facilitate one another.

Inscribing involves the live movement while inscription is the stationary mark. It is both the tool of inscription and the mark, however temporary. Franko argues that ideology manages only a "partial colonization of the space".[33] It needs the movement but cannot subsume it within itself. Textuality, according to Franko, encompasses both modes: stationary text and chaotic, three-dimensional escape from text. Domenico da Piacenza (b. 1390-d. 1470) called these two aspects *posa* and *fantasmata*. *Posa*, or 'the pose', was the beginning and ending of each movement while *fantasmata* was "the repeated invasion of the *posa* by movement".[34]

Geometrical dance can be summed up as writing with bound flow. The paradox, however, is that in moments when the writing was clear, there was no movement. The act of inscription and its legible product remained separate, so separate that, according to Franko, Antonio Cornazzano (b. 1430-d. 1484) described them as "death and resuscitation" or "life and death".[35] If writing can be seen as a kind of 'death' in this view, its power may be total, but also stagnant. It is important to note that

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27 Franco 2017, 149.
28 Franko 2017, 1-14.
29 Franko 2015, 25.
30 Franko 2015, 25.
31 Franko 2015, 25.
32 Franko 2015, 25.
33 Franko 2015, 26.
34 Franko 2015, 27.
35 Franko 2015, 28.

this is not writing as movement, but writing accomplished through the stilling of motion into inward contemplation.

Historically, it might be problematic to insist on connections between Renaissance or Baroque dance and the 1960s avant-garde. However, a shared point of view can be seen in the fact that, in both postmodern and geometric dance,[36] emotion (or, in Baroque terms, 'the passions') was de-emphasized.[37] The individual performer functioned in a group arrangement, serving the symbolism of the monarch. Both performer and configurations became subsumed in "a simulacrum of language".[38] It was not quite language but a more hermetic replacement for it, one that continually dissolves and needs to be reinterpreted. Franko argues that the dancers, members of the court themselves, in "conceptual limbo" between two states, were involved in an act of theory:

neither imitating lifelike actions, nor abstract[ing] their own human presence as formal bodies in space.[39]

It would be a stretch to call this kind of dance non-representational since it does form shapes, which resemble letters that, in turn, stand for specific meaning, recognizable at least to the privileged. However, Franko is making the point that "textual status" is at stake in the alternating game of geometrical dance.[40] A conceptualization, far beyond mimesis, was necessary for this kind of dancing act. Theory is essential for choreography in the critical work of Franko. In his discussion of dance reconstruction, he considers theory indispensable for recreating a dance's uniqueness and re-activation of audience response. "Dance theory is […] constitutive of choreography itself", Franko writes.[41] Theory is not a post-script or addition to the dancing; it is part of it.

4 Femininity and Ephemerality

Another important facet of reenactment concerns dance history's relationship with femininity and ephemerality, concepts which become entangled and continually subdued to remediation through writing. Ephemerality, however, should not always be seen in negative light as it transforms into a strength in contemporary restaging efforts. Cristina Baldacci has noted that what is missing or lost about a work "becomes a prophecy and a condition of [the artefact's] rebirth".[42] In his essay "Inscribing Dance", André Lepecki centers dance and writing discourse around ephemerality and the loss of presence. He also claims that, in discourse, writing, dancing, and femininity are tightly linked in a seemingly inseparable web of significations.[43] Lepecki attempts to detangle early sources of this semantic triad by appealing to choreographer Noverre's "perception of dance as an art of self-erasure".[44]

Noverre's complaint, according to Lepecki, was that dances of the past are lost because their choreography and reception are all but fleeting, a state of unreliability, associated with femininity.

Dancing becomes convicted of various forms of instability, many of which are also associated with femininity. "Dance's unfortunate ephemerality can be overcome by writing",[45] Lepecki sums up Thoinot Arbeau (b. 1520-d. 1595), a cleric and historian who wrote about social dance. Writing, historically associated with the logos and masculinity, has stood for the kind of stability that ephemerality supposedly does not possess. Lepecki says the conundrum of archiving dance is resolved through writing, which "cures dance's somewhat embarrassing predicament of always losing itself".[46] Arbeau's view on writing, as interpreted by Lepecki, "casts dance as unruly, light-headed, slippery – the negative attri-

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36   It must be acknowledged that geometric court dance does not easily sum up all dance practices from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries.

37   Franko 2015, 29.

38   Franko 2015, 30.

39   Franko 2015, 29-30.

40   Franko 2015, 30.

41   Franko 2015, 30.

42   Baldacci 2019, 66.

43   Lepecki 2004, 124.

44   Lepecki 2004, 125.

45   Lepecki 2004, 125.

46   Lepecki 2004, 126.

butes femininity is accused of".[47] Writing and dancing kept being pushed into, respectively, masculine and feminine loci through associations at least since the Renaissance. This polarization of the attributes of these entangled forms positioned them in a quagmire of familiar gender-informed power relations.

According to Lepecki, Noverre considers writing as a "mournful performance", never convinced of its ability to capture dance.[48] Beauchamps-Feuillet notation of the seventeenth century attempted to accomplish a similar goal: to inscribe and compose dance without the need for bodies moving in space. Pierre Beauchamps (b. 1631-d. 1705) was the dancing master to Louis XIV of France, or the Sun King (b. 1638-d. 1715). A choreographer did not describe the king unless it was in celestial terms, for which ordinary dancing bodies were technically not necessary. Beauchamps-Feuillet notation could be used to create the dance, much like a score would in the twentieth century. Within this tradition, the tale goes that seventeenth century choreographers were required by the Royal Academy to write their examination dances before they ever got a chance to perform the movement.[49] Unlike Noverre's view, this method assumes that anything important that takes place in a dance can be contained in writing, a method challenged in postmodern explorations of corporeality.

Appealing to performance thinkers throughout history (from Jean-Philippe Rameau to Peggy Phelan), Lepecki theorizes about dance's impossible predicament in general: "how movement and words can be placed under arrest".[50] The stability dance has looked for in writing is also questionable because of writing's own inadequacy to provide stable signification. Lepecki's crucial point is that presence itself became inextricably bound to mourning ever since the eighteenth century. He brings Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) into the debate when he concludes:

> Mourning is the psychic state resulting from the difficulty in acknowledging how presence has slipped or will slip into absence no matter how much effort, love, anger, cathexis we invest and project onto the loved object, or idea.[51]

To make presence last was the new important psychic struggle of modernity. Its grief was more palpable in eighteenth century discourse on preserving or writing dance.

Coming to terms with and relishing in dance's impermanence could have been one path out of mourning, one that, however, did not take place in Western dance discourse before postmodern dance. The remedy, instead, was more fervent inscription and preservation of dance into history. Lepecki sums up his vision of the role of the dance theorist thus:

> dance vanishes […] therefore, the dance scholar, theorist, critic, must work against dance's materiality by fixating the dance.[52]

If we returned, entirely metaphorically, to the tropes of geometrical dance, we could map the roles of the critic and of the fleeting dance into the *posa* and *fantasmata*, respectively. Stung by the chaos and unreliability of dance, the critic froze movement into the distillation of the pose. The critic, writing, and the document all processed dance into a framework of culturally acceptable virtues (reliability, repeatability, inscribability), in order to enter the register of history.

5 Documentation and Reenactment

Assuming the possibility of recording dance through documentation, even its accurate reconstruction might not yield the same result for a different audience, at a different time in history. In her essay "Writing Dancing: The Viewer as Choreographer in Contemporary Dance", Susan Foster draws attention to postmodern dance practices in the 1970s and the ways they have shaped audience roles. Through use of techniques like improvisation and metacommentary, the American collaborative group Grand Union positioned the audience to "watch both the story and the making

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47 Lepecki 2004, 126.
48 Lepecki 2004, 126.
49 Lepecki 2004, 126.
50 Lepecki 2004, 129.
51 Lepecki 2004, 129.
52 Lepecki 2004, 130.

Figure 5 Christopher-Rasheem McMillan in *Black Lōkəs* (2017) at Art Building West, University of Iowa. Photograph by M.SM

of the story".[53] The audience as witness, participator, even co-writer was the norm in postmodern dance. However, is it possible that this audience participation was part of the dance not only for the postmodern dance, but for works centuries before?

Though not made explicitly, this seems to be Franko's point in *Dance as Text*. Disappointed with reconstruction works that attempt to replicate a dance as "retrievable text",[54] Franko argues for a theoretical approach that doesn't merely aim to copy the original but delve further to analyze it. An easily reproducible, always present dance, perfect each time, like a marionette or automaton was theorized for the last few centuries but is an unrealistic and, in the end, a lifeless project. Extreme cultural anxiety about the repetitiveness of reenactments should also be questioned. Baldac-

ci has echoed Antonin Artaud to call reenactment "an interpretative gesture that never produces a true repetition".[55] Franko's view is that unsuccessful reconstruction does not acknowledge "the uniqueness of the original as a quality of the performance".[56] He is not interested in making copies, but new originals of historical works.

Audiences might long to be in touch with another point in time, in reenactments of historical dance, but it is the reenactor's work to communicate the uniqueness and the innovative qualities of the dance. Franko appeals to Umberto Eco's idea that every age has its own postmodern moment.[57] For a stimulating viewing experience, contemporary audiences should be given an innovation that reaches their threshold. This approach might have inspired McMillan's own original approach to Trisha Brown's *Locus* in *Black Lōkəs*.

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53 Foster 1986, 223.
54 Franko 2015, 12.
55 Baldacci 2019, 60.
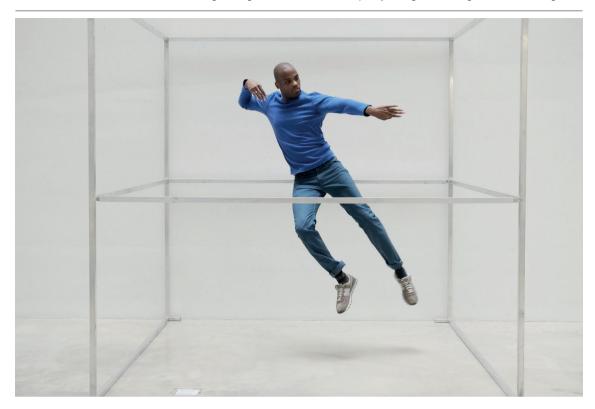56 Franko 2015, 11.
57 Franko 2015, 133.

Figure 6 Christopher-Rasheem McMillan in *Black Lōkas* (2017) at Art Building West, University of Iowa. Photograph by M.SM

Franko suggests that successful construction recreates audience reception through use of theory, focusing on the work's most salient points.[58] This view offers a more holistic understanding of the work's theoretical framework that stretches beyond its visual and technical repetition.[59] This can be done by thoroughly consulting any available historical documents referring to the work. In fact, these vital underpinnings might not be visible in the *re*construction. Perhaps, in a well-theorized and reception-conscious *con*struction, the theoretical might be more visible.

Dance history's concern with text is not only about text's re-translation into dance, but also a concern about repeatability of the absent. Repeatability and reenactment are not the same quest, however. Reenactment, in Franko's terms, could be either construction or reconstruction. Attempts to theorize a repeatable dance or performance aim to stabilize its disappearing materiality. Re-

construction, similarly, tries to remedy absence through an inscription of dance into a repeatable text. Absence is both highly valued, because it increases demand, and has been fought against in theoretical and reconstruction efforts. Reconstruction, the practice Franko disagrees with (as opposed to 'construction', which does not aim for repeatability), acts in relation to dance as writing dance, attempting to arrest it, to correct dance's supposedly flawed nature.

While for Noverre, in Lepecki's interpretation, writing acted as the remedy for dance, for Franko, the remedy pathway is theory. He not only sees dance as, essentially, theory, but requires this aspect of it engaged for every successful reenactment. Dance is more complex than the return of presence, whose repeatability is already questionable, and requires a theoretical skeleton to hold up.[60] To activate cultural critique, the reenactor must be aware not only of the historical context of

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58 Franko 2015, 133.

59 Franko 2015, 135.

60 Franko 2015, 150-1.

the original dance but also of contemporary contexts and of how these contexts might be analogous. Such juxtapositions are necessary for the inclusion of the audience as co-writer and the completion of the artwork through audience response. As a reenactor, McMillan, for example, is aware of the specific twenty-first century associations with the 'box' when he steps into it. Adding socio-political commentary to Brown's choreography, he is honoring the spirit of rebellion of the original work, even if the site of that rebellion is different.

In the end, the quality of a reenactment depends heavily on the historical perspective or critical lens through which it is viewed. If the dance was the unreliable presence in the eighteenth century (Lepecki's reading of Noverre), in the twentieth, a reversal of roles between writing and live event has occurred, at least in performance. André Lepecki believes that a successful performance reenactment would be a re-energizing of the original score (like McMillan's), rather than a faithful repetition of the live event. This position is similar to Franko's enthusiasm for the actualization of the theoretical aspects of a dance, not simply its accurate steps. While Franko calls a poor remaking "reconstruction" and a successful one "construction", Lepecki uses different terms when discussing the work of artists like Allan Kaprow. "Redoing", a visually accurate but uninspired repetition of the live work is what disappoints Lepecki. Instead, he recommends a necessary revisit of the written score, an activation of the generative idea.

Which comes first: the writing or the dance, the score or the performance? Lepecki asks: "What is being quoted by what"?[61] Derrida would say that quotation marks watch over the word and their removal causes what Lepecki calls "the unleashing of spirit".[62] This problem of primacy and framing within the context of the primary is also brought up by postmodern choreographer Trisha Brown in her questioning of what comes first: dance or documentation?

6 Theorizing Historicity and Documentation Through Intermedia Repetition

In her 1960s work, Trisha Brown participated in a gesture of intermedia theorizing through dance, commenting on competing media and the question of accuracy in passing down choreography. Intermedia is defined by Dick Higgins in a 1967 publication as an "art that falls conceptually between established or traditional media".[63] In the work of Trisha Brown, live performance and video documentation tugged dance between equally problematic ephemerality and memorialization. Stressing temporal gaps in *Homemade*, attrition of movement taught from person to person in *Roof Piece*, and insisting on specific approaches to revivals, Trisha Brown performed her belief in the historicity of a work. Unsuccessful reenactments can be anti-historical, as Franko and Lepecki have discussed, if crucial effects and sources of the performance are not activated. Brown's true rebellion was the illumination that the body is an archive in itself, storing movement and memory together, being a site of unfolding kinesthetic discovery, not an instrument for the expression of the dancing subject's emotion.

Trisha Brown was an innovator who developed the experiments of 1960s postmodern dance into a long career as a choreographer with a dance company. Wendy Perron calls her

> a multifaceted artist: inventor, detective, conductor, and the one who unleashed rivers of movement within a brainy structure.[64]

Brown was famous for her work defying gravity during an era when humankind was trying to set foot on the moon. Her defamiliarization work with gravity included performers walking down a vertical wall or gallery columns, making each step a conscious effort.

In her performance of *Homemade*, however, Brown was grounded on stage, while it was a projector's image that flew around the theater. The anti-gravity feat was performed by technology in an intermedia collaboration.

In harmony with the Cagean notion that anything can be used as a score, Brown used visual clues from a plain wall for that purpose, exploring the idea of what could be treated as 'writing'. In *Homemade*, she did the same with memory: "distill[ing] a series of meaningful memories, preferably those

61 Lepecki 2012, 156.

62 Lepecki 2012, 156.

63 Higgins 1967.

64 Perron 2017, 187.

Figure 7 Trisha Brown. Photo by Lois Greenfield

that impact on identity".[65] Treating the body as an "archival repository from which kinesthetic-cognitive material can be retrieved",[66] Brown engaged in an act of "writing with the body",[67] Hélène Cixous' expression for a somatic mode of communication, empowering women. In fact, Brown wrote with the body 'doubly' in *Homemade*. Once, with her movement, and twice, with the projector strapped to her back, which 'wrote' its path along the theater walls every time Brown moved.

Originally started in 1965 and performed without the projector, Trisha Brown's *Homemade* used a plethora of minimized gestures and actions. Its unpretentious title was accurate for the plainness of the choreography. The lack of explicit concern for the technical execution of the performance recalled Sol LeWitt's 1967 statement about the essence of conceptual art:

Planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes art.[68]

Brown not only minimized movement to take away from emotional intensity, which was the frowned-up-on in the 1960s. She was reaching to engage her own and the audience's memory. The audience had to struggle to make out what the minimal movement resembled and how to relate to it personally, a teasing game of recognition.[69] Memory is traditionally the performer's struggle: learning and memorizing movement and lines, in order to deliver them clearly and expressively for the audience. Trisha Brown turned this model upside-down, turning down the volume of the performer and thus encouraging the spectator to turn the volume up. According to Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "*Homemade* explores memory as a spectatorial problem".[70] Brown continued to probe this question in the second iteration of the work by involving the mnemonic capacity of technology.

In 1966, in BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, Trisha Brown performed *Homemade* with a camera strapped to her back **[fig. 8]**. The audience met the effects of the contraption with laughter, as can be heard in Robert Whitman's filming of the piece, documented by Mark Robinson. When Brown was facing the audience, the reel on her back projected on the wall behind her a recording of Brown doing a similar piece. However, when she bent over

65   Rosenberg 2017, 40.
66   Rosenberg 2017, 40-1.
67   Cixous et al. 1976, 880.
68   LeWitt 1967, 79.
69   Lambert-Beatty 2008, 53.
70   Lambert-Beatty 2008, 53.

or turned to face the wings, the projection was not visible. This scenario brought attention to the limitations of the proscenium stage as a hierarchical space where the performers typically faced forward, in order to be seen. In fact, Brown worked on numerous occasions in the white box space of the gallery, a more equitable environment for facing and projecting in different directions.

The projected documentation subverted the question whether the 'original' choreography of the piece was the live version or the filmed version. Yet, they were not quite the same. Sometimes the movements were similar and sometimes not. At times, the camera framed Brown's entire body while, at others, it was only her hands or feet that were visible. These framing choices reminded that the camera has to choose a perspective while in the live theater the performer is seen from myriad viewpoints, corresponding to seats in the audience. A glint of camera projection could be seen in passing as Brown turned her back on the audience and the projector happened to alight the observers and the camera documenting the event.

Projecting onto the audience broke the fourth wall and fashioned the opera visitors into improvised screens, part of the medium of the video performance. Similar to the rotation of a disco ball, the projector sent the image in unpredictable directions. Thus, parts of the recording would never be seen by that particular audience, on that particular night. This effect raised the question of the ephemerality of the documentation itself. Yet, Brown's film, which hopped around, was not stationary, stable documentation. It was documentation active in the performance.

The location of the performance itself occupied both the formal stage and was dispersed throughout the hallways, wings, seats, and ceiling of the theater. The closing night of *Homemade* featured a second performer with a screen, "a [viewer] surrogate…trying literally to capture the moving image".[71] The video ran through surfaces, unsuitable for its ideal visibility, raising the question of whether it was at all the impossible-to-catch video that the audience should be looking at. In this set up, the elusive video documentation gained an ephemerality, customarily attributed to the live dance.

On the other hand, the projector had gravity and materiality, changing the movements of the performer. The projector and the dancer's body became fused in an intermedia prosthetic situation, playing with the idea of projecting one's vocals or performance out to the back rows.[72]

Performer and projector moved together even though they were 'facing' different directions. The body's voice was amplified through the projector, which was both a 'loudspeaker' for movement and a burdensome memory bank. "Film does our remembering for us", concludes Carrie Lambert-Beatty, about the piece.[73] She further claims that the projector's magnification of the image on the theater surfaces allowed the audience a clearer view of the live dancer's minimal movements otherwise not easily seen.[74] The chaotically jumping projection, however, betrayed that promise, and the audience did miss out on much of the choreography in the film.

Comical with its nonchalance and surprises, *Homemade* was also a serious, culturally and discursively engaged work that theorized the issue of originality and repetition. For Rebecca Schneider, what is most fascinating about art, grounded in time, is its "fold: the double, the second", what she also calls "the warp and draw of one time in another time".[75] In *Homemade*, Brown explores this fold in a very literal and material way, showcasing both time instances parallelly. Susan Rosenberg believes that *Homemade* interrogates "performance art theory's separation of live performance from its documentation".[76] Brown's piece also spoke to Robert Rauschenberg's (b. 1925-d. 2008) 1957 duo of paintings, *Factum I* and *II*. The almost-identical collage paintings used printed reproductions, fabric, and oil paint, intermedially combining easily reproducible newspaper clippings with clearly visible brushstrokes. While the paint-drips and brushstrokes on each canvas were different, the near-perfect identity of the overall composition undermined the primacy of a single original. In Brown's work, however, the live performer and the flitting video image were separated by an obvious temporal gap. They may be seen as two parallel universes, in which a similar idea has developed differently. Yet, unlike the video, which could be potentially replayed, the live work was disappearing in front of the audience's eyes.

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71 Lambert-Beatty 2008, 55.

72 Lambert-Beatty 2008, 53-5.

73 Lambert-Beatty 2008, 53.

74 Lambert-Beatty 2008, 53.

75 Schneider 2011, 5.

76 Rosenberg 2017, 45.

Rosenberg argues that Brown's work differs from Rauschenberg's because "the singular and original dancer mediates between *Homemade*'s two reproductions".[77] Both canvases continued to exist without Rauschenberg's body; however, Brown's juxtaposition was dependent upon her embodied presence.

The transmission of embodied experience has been taught in person but also through notation and documentation. Rosenberg distinguishes these two clusters in dance thought and acknowledges Brown's position, which avoids their polarization. For Brown, notation and dance are not separate, and she acknowledges the "time-bound historicity of each performance".[78] Neither notation and documentation, nor the embodied dance occupy a timeless space. Notation has a history and a moment of interpretation. Video documentation captures one unique angle, preserving a particular aspect, and is later viewed in specific circumstances. The juxtaposition of video and live performance, such as in *Homemade*, makes time difference visible: "the temporal gap…implies the work *always* having a history".[79] It might not be possible to trace that entire history through experiencing the performance, however, the works of Trisha Brown steered clear of assuming timelessness or suggesting timeless repeatability. The reenactment of a time-sensitive work, unless acknowledged, risks compromising its specific relationship to history.

In one such gesture of acknowledgement, Brown's voice was featured in a rehearsal video introducing the *PastFORWARD* program (2001) at BAM, a revival of 1960s and 1970s dance from *Judson Dance Theater* participants, including Simone Forti and David Gordon. Brown's voice was guiding Mikhail Baryshnikov's (b. 1948) reenactment of *Homemade* where he has strapped a heavy, vintage camera to his back **[figs 9-10]**. The presence of the voice was a gesture that clarified that the work was acknowledged as a reenactment. Brown's voice said:

> Physicalize a memory… You know there's that purity of the first time you try something… It's almost the same… But more from your experience.[80]

On one hand, the original projector-free piece's movement was generated from memory and, on the other, the projector performance's memory was physicalized through the revival. Each of these acts involved interpretation, acknowledged by the mention of "purity", only available with the first experience. Thus, the voice referenced both the choreography and its attempted repetition. Brown is aware of the "impossibility of any truly authentic revival", but she also acknowledges the entanglement of original and subsequent attempts.[81] This impossibility does not mean that the repetition should never be attempted, but that the

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[77] Rosenberg 2017, 48.
[78] Rosenberg 2017, 44.
[79] Rosenberg 2017, 44.
[80] Atlas 2001, disc 1.
[81] Rosenberg 2017, 49.

Figure 11 Trisha Brown's *Roof Piece, NYC, 1973*. Photo by Peter Moore. Peter Moore Photography Archive, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries. © Northwestern University

murky question of originality peeks behind every re-staging. Sometimes reenactment can exhaust spontaneity or dilute discovery.

The mini-retrospective of revivals[82] was named *PASTForward* (2001). What did Brown's voiceover really suggest by "[b]ut more from your experience"?[83] She was not saying that the only "purity" is to be found in her own performance, the first time 'she' presented it. Brown encouraged Baryshnikov's own experience and memory to activate the score.[84] This is a case of reenactment in the line of Lepecki's 'again'. Brown encouraged Baryshnikov to work from her idea, or the score, not from her original performance and create a work for his specific instance in time. The title of the program, *PASTForward*, was a pun on the expression 'fast forward', a reference to skipping through video material. The 'past' instead of 'fast' signified a com-

mitment to exploring temporal relationships, in the case of *Homemade*, relationships created by the existence of video documentation. The past was partially skipped, to protect its historicity. A new living account of physically-archived memory was generated by the score and Baryshnikov's activation of it.

Brown was, at times, reluctant to allow her work to be reconstructed; on several occasions she outright refused it, including *Judson Now*, Danspace Project's revival program. Repeating a work could "result in a seriality that produces empty simulacra and multiples" that do not do justice to the powerful effects of the original work, or, worse, reduce the repetition to a fetishization.[85] This is the danger of repeating without interpreting. In Baryshnikov's program, Brown also included her latest work to counterbalance a view of her choreography, skewed by past work and "nostalgic reminis-

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82   The term 'revivals' is used by the 2001 BAM performance program.

83   Atlas 2001, disc 1.

84   Rosenberg 2017, 49.

85   Baldacci 2019, 67.

cence".[86] Brown's choices reveal her awareness of choreography's historical context and her caution in the face of inaccurate mythologization of a performance.

The problematic nature of a work's recreation was an issue that Brown also explored in *Roof Piece* (1971), performed on multiple rooftops in New York's SoHo, extending ten city blocks from Wooster Street, where Brown lived, to Robert Rauschenberg's Lafayette Street work space [fig. 11]. Using a network of contacts in the neighborhood, Brown positioned dancers on rooftops, a situation reminiscent of the Beatles' unannounced concert two years earlier. The dancers were supposed to copy a semaphore movement sequence they had never seen before in a chain, resembling a game of 'telephone'. Positioned far away from each other, the performers altered the movement little by little until the final 'message' arrived quite different from the original. This work commented on the movement message's deterioration – a critique of choreography's timeworn model of person-to-person transmission.[87]

Brown questioned the belief that a work taught from one person to another retains its original state. Rosenberg notes that if movement is communicated in this way infinitely, the movement would disappear.[88] This project exemplified Brown's understanding that choreography should not blindly rely on movement imposed from outside by mimesis. The continual recreation of works by an artist long gone or their company through the copying of movement would be even more problematic, causing attrition and diminishing innovation. In *Roof Piece*, Brown questioned the historical accuracy of such legacies. In this spirit, choreographer Merce Cunningham (b. 1919-d. 2009), for example, folded his own company purposefully. As his wish dictated, the company disbanded in 2011, two years after his death.

7 Conclusion

Mark Franko's point that dance equals theory is made in the context of the proto-conceptual geometric dance and in dance reenactment as 'construction', which participates in well thought-out contemporary cultural critique. Theorizing, critique and conceptual practice are important to postmodern dance. Postmodern dance also develops contemporaneously with influential 1960s conceptual art. In "Sentences on Conceptual Art", Sol LeWitt states:

> Ideas can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical.[89]

Ideas may be art, they may help generate dance, but they are not quite *dance*, unless we speak of a figurative dance of ideas or of the kind of 'thinking' Trisha Brown says her 'body' can do. The site-specific, performer-specific physicality of dance and its presence through affective and somatically-engaged labor matters. This labor and its corporeality are not 'theory', unless Franko believes the body can theorize.

Theory, nevertheless, can be very useful for the balancing of power relationships between different art forms and modes of expression. Post-structuralist theory, for example, has destabilized the very rigid ideas about textual presence that accused dance of its faulty materiality, the ephemeral. Dance only became ephemeral when it was measured against text during preservation and composition attempts that excluded the body. Post-structuralism redeemed absence from its air of tragedy and frailty. Despite the significant power restoration that dance has experienced in the twentieth century, it is important to ask the question whether the 'presence and absence' angle in dance scholarship will stay relevant for a long time. The integration of dance and writing through both somatic and semiotic practices might provoke the need for the transformation of theoretical lenses and a renewed understanding of performance and textual materialities.

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86 Rosenberg 2017, 52.
87 Rosenberg 2017, 103.
88 Rosenberg 2017, 105.
89 LeWitt 1969, 12.

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