

Editor's Note

There are various links between individual articles in this issue, wherein the politics of performance in some way or another is brought to the fore. The first two individual essays by Gerald Siegmund and Christina Thurner, which were submitted together, further trouble the meaning of the often taken for granted understanding of the term “contemporary” in relation to “dance,” a question which SanSan Kwan considered largely in connection with American dance in the December issue of this journal in 2017, “When Is Contemporary Dance?” The third and fifth articles by Ketu Katrak and Imani Kai Johnson, respectively, situate the politics of performance in relation to or in conjunction with space and place and race, via their individual analysis of the site-specific choreography of Jay Pather and the oral history of hip hop battling in the South Bronx in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s. The politics of performance is also invoked in the fourth article by Hannah Yohalem, who argues that contact improvisation’s shift from the primacy of the visual in performance to sensate experience can be seen to be influenced by and hold much in common with anarchistic forms of “mutual assistance,” which may seem like a contradiction in terms.

The first article, “Doing the Contemporary: Pina Bausch as a Conceptual Artist,” by Gerald Siegmund, asks if and in what ways, might Pina Bausch’s work be seen as “contemporary.” Siegmund draws principally on Peter Osborne’s philosophy of contemporary art and his definition of “contemporary” to pull out the “conceptual concerns” in Bausch’s works, which Siegmund article explores. Through a discussion of the “temporal relations” in her work, followed by an analysis of Bausch’s medial approach that includes *Die Klage der Kaiserin* (*The Complaint of the Empress*), Siegmund argues that her approach sufficiently corresponds with Osborne’s definition of contemporary art. “Pina Bausch” for Siegmund, may be seen as a “concept” which, he suggests, is where her “contemporaneity” may be found.

The main title of the second article, “How to Re-View Things with Words: Dance Criticism as Translation—Pina Bausch,” is a play on the title of the ordinary language philosopher, J. L. Austin’s much-cited book, *How to Do Things with Words* ([1962] 1971). Here, Christina Thurner analyzes the contradictory manner in which dance critics often refer to Bausch’s later productions in particular as being “absolutely contemporary” while at the same time, (re)viewing them as “important dance heritage.” Thurner draws on Frédéric Pouillaude’s construct of “contemporaneity,” which he describes as a “structure of temporality” (2007, 127). Tracing reviews of Bausch’s pieces over time, Thurner notes that her aesthetic practice has historically posed challenges for dance critics. This is the case particularly in German-speaking areas, where it is generally taken for granted that the function of word-based dance criticism is to translate “dance into language” and thereby “describe, analyze, and judge.” Thus, one of the main questions that Thurner explores in this paper centers on “what do reviewers do when they put things into words?” When I asked Gerald Siegmund why he and Thurner wanted to submit these two articles on Bausch and contemporary/contemporaneity together, Siegmund responded that: “In a way, she maps out the fault-lines of what is and isn’t considered to be contemporary—which may be why it is interesting to probe into her work if one wants to define contemporary” (e-mail to Helen Thomas May 5, 2018).

In, “Jay Pather: Re-Imagining Site-Specific Cartographies of Belonging,” Ketu Katrak situates her analysis of Pather’s approach to choreography and curation of site-specific works in general and his *Cityscapes* in particular, within the context of his background as a South African of Indian and Tamil descent growing up during apartheid, through which his acknowledged interest in the relationships between space, place, and racial discrimination is an integral aspect of his critical creative practice. Katrak shows how Pather’s site-specific works “use space to inspire social change” by facilitating access to spaces that are still not available or welcoming to black or colored South Africans even after the abolition of apartheid. Pather’s concerns with space, for Katrak, resonate with those expressed in Henri Lefebvre’s analysis of the production of (social) space.

Hannah Yohalem’s article, “Displacing Vision: Contact Improvisation, Anarchy, and Empathy,” takes us back to contact improvisation in the 1970s and early 1980s to reassess the communication modes that were employed by practitioners such as Steve Paxton, the founder of contact improvisation, and his students at Oberlin College such as Nancy Stark Smith, that had been borne out of the improvisational contexts of the Grand Union. Yohalem builds on phenomenological interpretations of contact improvisation that “describe the dynamic between improvisers in purely intersubjective perceptual terms.” She focuses on an article by Paxton published in 1972 in which she notes that he invoked “the anarchist political values of mutual aid and individual freedom in the body.” As such, she posits that the form emerged not from a concern to decentralize freedom from choice or authority, as is often suggested, but rather, from the anarchistic notion that “group behavior supports individual development.”

The final article, “Battling in the Bronx: Social Choreography and Outlaw Culture Among Early Hip Hop Streetdancers in New York City” by Imani Kai Johnson, is based on her oral history analysis of b-boys (Aby and Kwikstep), a b-girl (Baby Love), and two poppers (Cartoon and Wiggles), and what the author refers to as the “social choreography” that was crucial to negotiate the streets of the South Bronx in the 1970s and the 1980s. Oral history methods were necessary for this project, given the time period in question, when video recording was expensive and beyond the reach of many. At the same time, the oral history approach is underpinned by a sense that the voices of participants should be heard in their own terms, which is precisely what the author is at pains to ensure here. Johnson’s analysis focuses on the “four core principles” of battling as set out by b-boy Trac2, whose amalgamated stories form the first indented text of the article. She compares and contrasts Trac2’s principles of “survivalism, strategizing, nomadism, and illusionism” with “life lessons of growing up in the Bronx,” which gestures toward what she sees as the “impact of ‘outlaw culture’ within hip hop” on the one hand and “the counterdominant sensibilities” on the other.

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Works Cited

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- Pouillaude, Frédéric. 2007. “Scène and Contemporaneity.” Translated by Noémie Solomon. *Drama Review* 51 (2): 124–35.
- Siegmund, Gerald. 2018. E-mail to Helen Thomas. May 5.