

## Moving Critically

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The late dance studies scholar Randy Martin spent much of his career showing how different kinds of bodily mobilizations helped “condense” and make “palpable” what otherwise remains obscure or mysterious about social mobilizations. For Martin, movement (broadly defined) was a method for “generating concepts that are available to theoretical appropriation,” including critiques of different “forms of politics” (1998: 14–15). It is just such a method, I would argue, that is on display in this issue of *Performance Matters*, which brims with movement: in the way contributors range across topics, temporalities, and locations; in the dance of ideas they bring to their respective analyses and the corresponding shifts of perspective those ideas incite; and, not least, in the material and social forces that both give rise to and flow from the different kinetic performances examined in the pages that follow.

The first of those performances concerns the movement of light. In an “illuminating” article that attempts to put performance studies’ recent dialogues with new materialist criticism in further conversation with cultural geographers’ discussions of “affective atmospheres,” Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy examine the role of light—both as a specific actant within a performance and the larger medium through which we apprehend that performance—in the production and reception of atmospheric experiences at large-scale public events across time. Noting that 2015 was designated the “International Year of Light and Light-Based Technologies” by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the authors ask “how light as both an immaterial and material phenomenon makes (visible) material relationships. How does it direct human movement and work in tandem with other environmental factors to shape the appearance and experience of the surrounding world?” To answer these questions, Schweitzer and Zerdy focus on two temporally (and socially) disjunctive immersive public performances: Albert Speer’s orchestration of the Nazi rallies in Nuremberg, Germany in the 1930s; and *nacionale vita activa*’s 2012 performance installation, *Speed of Light*, in Edinburgh, Scotland. Setting Speer’s floodlit and vertical Cathedral of Light in Nuremberg aslant the collective and “horizontalizing” LEDs worn on the bodies of participants in *Speed of Light*, the authors argue that the very different atmospheres generated by both events nevertheless helped to materialize in each case what they term a “refracted nation,” that is, a felt condition of ephemeral unity “produced by and through public assemblies of humans, objects, technologies, environmental forces, and ideologies.”

In her reassessment of the career of Helen Levitt, Alison Dean advances a theory about the double invisibility of this important modernist photographer and filmmaker. That is, if Levitt’s whiteness and her gender allowed her to trip lightly and unobtrusively, like a nimble and silent dancer, through the crowded streets of New York City taking her iconic photographs of mostly Black and immigrant residents through the trick viewfinder of her camera, then her deliberate absenting of herself from the critical conversation surrounding her work, according to Dean, is a structural politics that enables Levitt to opt out of a dominant discourse of documentary photography that continues to categorize her work as derivative and in need of institutional validation and explication. In outlining her argument, Dean supplements an analysis ably supported by visual culture methods with additional critical frameworks derived from performance studies, including Peggy Phelan’s foundational critique of the representational politics of visibility and visibility in *Unmarked* (1993). As importantly, Dean applies the lessons of critical dance studies to an unpacking of the gendered and

raced relationships between ambulatory embodiment and the machinic in both Levitt's photographs and her films.

Gwyneth Shanks's essay is also concerned with the politics and aesthetics of walking in New York City, only in her case she shifts the focus from sidewalk to sky by offering a nuanced and performatively materialist reconsideration of Philippe Petit's daring high-wire walk between the twin towers of the then newly built World Trade Centre (WTC) in August 1974. As with Dean's probing of the critical fungibility of invisibility in relation to Levitt's work, Shanks deploys the term "groundlessness" as a heuristic through which to read not just the actual staging of Petit's feat (and the rescaled figure/ground relationships between performer and spectators that resulted from pedestrians and car drivers stopping in their tracks to look up), but also the economic and urban history of 1970s New York against which the event took place. To this end, Shanks links the physical precarity of Petit's performance to the economic precarity of many of his spectators ill-served by a Lower Manhattan revitalization plan tied to the WTC that had backtracked on its commitment to develop low- and middle-income housing in the adjacent Battery Park landfill. As a Barthesian *punctum* that, in Shanks's words, "defined the visual composition of Lower Manhattan during this period," this tract of land also serves as a fulcrum between Shanks's initial analysis of Petit's performance and its remediation in Robert Zemeckis's 2015 film *The Walk*. A close reading of the landfill's CGI appearance in *The Walk* allows Shanks to reflect not just on the current redevelopment of Ground Zero post-9/11 and post-Occupy, but also on her own experience of "zero ground" in the course of researching the recent nostalgia surrounding Petit's stunt.

The Occupy Movement is exemplary of the performative theory of assembly that Judith Butler has recently proposed as a template for local grassroots organizing that is also attentive to how we are obligated to others globally, a "politics of the street" that is both here and there, real and virtual (Butler 2015). In her article Kimberley McLeod considers the digital kinetic relays of such embodied relations in the context of the Idle No More movement, which since 2012 has been promoting Indigenous sovereignty and recognition in Canada and across the Americas. While Idle No More has organized many in-person, real-time protests, including a succession of public round dances that function as re-territorializing and durational flash mobs, McLeod notes that the movement mostly promotes its cause on social media through the hashtag #idlenomore. In adapting the bodily mobilizations that come with Indigenous ways of knowing for a digital platform, McLeod argues that #idlenomore has helped to mobilize politically a new generation of Indigenous activists and their allies despite the impediment of geographical separation. At the same time, McLeod balances her discussion of the role new media has played in disseminating information and fostering participatory politics around Indigenous sovereignty with a careful consideration of "who gets access and whose voices get amplified in various online spaces." And she does so in relation to a close reading of Algonquin playwright Yvette Nolan's *The Unplugging*, a dystopic retelling of a traditional Athabaskan story that questions what and how knowledge should be shared in a post-technological age, and that in the online controversy that erupted around the casting of a recent Factory Theatre production of the play questions how ideas circulate on and information is potentially coopted via the Internet.

This issue of *Performance Matters* also features a special Forum section showcasing current research in dance studies in Canada. Curated and edited by Seika Boye, T. Nikki Cesare Schotzko, Heather Fitzsimmons-Frey, and Evadne Kelly, the work collected here represents a selection of the papers presented at "The Other 'D': Locating 'D'ance in Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies in Canada," a symposium organized by the Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies at the

University of Toronto in January 2016, as well as at a follow-up roundtable at the Canadian Association for Theatre Research (CATR) conference in Calgary in May. The papers in this section showcase both established and emerging dance studies scholars and practitioners, including: Allana Lindgren and Susan Manning, who bookend the Forum with takes on the future of dance research in Canada and the history of its academic institutionalization in the United States, respectively; Henry Daniel, Kelly, and MJ Thompson, who offer “trans-,” “inter-,” and “post-” disciplinary interventions on the “place” of dance within the Canadian university; Megan Andrews on the history of dance writing and publishing in Canada; Gdalit Neuman on how early Israeli folk dance helped to corporealize the muscular “New Jew” image of the *Sabra* promulgated by Max Nordau; and Stefanie Miller on the affectively insurrectionary bodily states induced by Indigenous choreographer Lara Kramer’s *Native Girl Syndrome*. Boye and Emma Doran round out this section with some reflections on the impetus for and the aftermath of “The Other ‘D’” symposium and the CATR roundtable. I am happy to report that *Performance Matters* will be helping to prolong that aftermath by publishing an additional issue of the journal every two years that will be devoted to dance studies in Canada. Look for the first of these to appear in 2018.

Finally, movement—be it ideational, geographical, or physical—underscores the three reviews that conclude this issue. Kelsey Laine Jacobson tracks the feedback loop of theatre and reality in her assessment of Marvin Carlson’s new book, *Shattering Hamlet’s Mirror*. Melissa Poll considers Jane Koustas’s analysis of the reception of Robert Lepage in Toronto. And Peta Tait reviews Louis Patrick Leroux and Charles Batson’s new edited collection about the cultural export of circus from Quebec.

## References

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- Martin, Randy. 1998. *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Phelan, Peggy. 1993. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge.