

Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s–1970s

Erin Brannigan



CHOREOGRAPHY, VISUAL ART AND EXPERIMENTAL COMPOSITION 1950S–1970S

This book traces the history of engagements between dance and the visual arts in the mid-twentieth century and provides a backdrop for the emerging field of contemporary, intermedial art practice.

Exploring the disciplinary identity of dance in dialogue with the visual arts, this book unpacks how compositional methods that were dance-based informed visual art contexts. The book provokes fresh consideration of the entangled relationship between, and historiographic significance of, visual arts and dance by exploring movements in history that dance has been traditionally mapped to (Neo-Avant Garde, Neo-Dada, Conceptual art, Postmodernism, and Performance Art) and the specific practices and innovations from key people in the field (like John Cage, Anna Halprin, and Robert Rauschenberg). This book also employs a series of historical and critical case studies which show how compositional approaches from dance—breath, weight, tone, energy—informed the emergence of the intermedial. Ultimately this book shows how dance and choreography have played an important role in shaping visual arts culture and enables the re-imagination of current art practices through the use of choreographic tools.

This unique and timely offering is important reading for those studying and researching in visual and fine arts, performance history and theory, dance practice and dance studies, as well as those working within the fields of dance and visual art.

Erin Brannigan is a dance and performance academic currently working at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia of Irish political exile, convict, and settler descent. Her research explores the condition of dance and choreography within the broader field of the contemporary arts.



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CONTENTS

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xi</i>
1 Between Dance and the Visual Arts	1
1 <i>Writing Dance into Art History</i>	6
2 <i>Naming and Claiming</i>	11
3 <i>Dance Composition and a Material Lineage</i>	15
4 <i>Scoping the Project</i>	19
2 John Cage, Anna Halprin, and Dance as Contemporary Art	33
1 <i>Neo-Dada Dance and Performance</i>	36
2 <i>Anna Halprin—Dance as Experience-Experiment</i>	39
3 <i>Cage and the Dance Neo-Avant-Garde</i>	48
4 <i>Cagean Aesthetics</i>	54
5 <i>Conclusion</i>	59
Interlude #1 Minimalism, Experience, and Experiment	76
3 Dance and Minimalism	86
1 <i>Minimalism and the Mid-century Artistic Milieu</i>	93
2 <i>Minimalist Strategies</i>	99
3 <i>Strategy No.8: Participation</i>	110
4 <i>Conclusion</i>	114

4	Dance and the Neo-Avant-Garde: 3 Case Studies	132
	1 <i>Simone Forti (Works 1960–1962)</i>	136
	2 <i>Yvonne Rainer (Works 1961–1965)</i>	142
	3 <i>Trisha Brown (Works 1962–1974)</i>	151
	4 <i>Conclusion</i>	157
	Interlude #2 Choreographers and Artists	170
	1 <i>Simone Forti and Dan Graham</i>	171
	2 <i>Yvonne Rainer and Richard Serra</i>	174
	3 <i>Trisha Brown and Gordon Matta-Clark</i>	177
5	Robert Rauschenberg: Choreographic Tools for the Visual Arts	185
	1 <i>Monochromes—Assemblages—Combines—Sets</i>	191
	2 <i>Rauschenberg and the Dance Community</i>	194
	3 <i>Rauschenberg's Choreographies</i>	200
	4 <i>Conclusion</i>	208
	Interlude #3 Exhibitions and Exclusions	220
	Conclusion	226
	<i>Index</i>	231

FIGURES

- 2.1 Photographer unknown, Anna Halprin and others in her work “Birds of America”, 1961. Courtesy Anna Halprin Digital Archive. Anna Halprin Papers, The Elyse Eng Dance Collection, Museum of Performance + Design 40
- 2.2 Photographer unknown, Anna Halprin in rehearsal for her piece “Esposizione”, ca 1963. Courtesy Anna Halprin Digital Archive. Anna Halprin Papers, The Elyse Eng Dance Collection, Museum of Performance + Design 42
- 2.3 Anna Halprin, Copy of dance score “Elements” from Halprin’s “Parades and Changes”, 1965. Scoring system for Stockholm. Courtesy Anna Halprin Digital Archive © Estate of Anna Halprin. Anna Halprin Papers, The Elyse Eng Dance Collection, Museum of Performance + Design 43
- A.1 Robert Rauschenberg or Cy Twombly. Untitled [portrait with four-panel White Painting, Black Mountain], ca. 1951 © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation/VAGA at ARS/Copyright Agency, 2021 77
- A.2 (a–c) 4”33”, 1952, by John Cage © 1993 by C. F. Peters Corporation. All rights reserved 79
- 3.1 (a, b) Flyer and program for “A Dance Concert by Deborah Hay”, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969. Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art © Deborah Hay 87
- 3.2 Robert McElroy, Simone Forti’s “See Saw”, 1960. Courtesy Research Library, Getty Research Institute © J. Paul Getty Trust 89
- 3.3 Peter Moore, Steve Paxton, “Satisfyin’ Lover,” March 22, 1968 © 2021 Barbara Moore / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York 106

x Figures

- 4.1 Peter Moore, Untitled (Simone Forti: “Huddle”), May 4, 1969 © 2021 Barbara Moore / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York 140
- 4.2 Peter Moore, Yvonne Rainer’s “Terrain,” April 28, 1963 © 2021 Barbara Moore / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York 146
- 4.3 Peter Moore, Yvonne Rainer’s “Parts of Some Sextets,” Two Evenings of Dances by Yvonne Rainer, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut], March 7, 1965 © 2021 Barbara Moore / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York 148
- 4.4 (a, b) Program for “Another Fearless Dance Concert” by Tricia Brown, 1971. Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art and Tricia Brown Dance Co. Performance photograph © Carol Goodden 156
- 5.1 Carolyn Brown, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Doris Stockhausen, David Tudor, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Steve Paxton, Michael von Biel, and Robert Rauschenberg during the Merce Cunningham Dance Company world tour. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg. Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Unattributed, 1964 190
- 5.2 Alex Hay and Steve Paxton in Rauschenberg’s “Map Room II,” Expanded Cinema Festival, Film-Makers’ Cinematheque, Forty-first Street Theater, 1965. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Peter Moore, 1965. © 2021 Barbara Moore / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY, Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York 199
- 5.3 Robert Rauschenberg in his piece “Pelican” (1963) during the First New York Theater Rally, former CBS studio, Broadway and Eighty-first Street. Photograph Collection. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York. Photo: Peter Moore © 2021 Barbara Moore / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York 201

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xii Acknowledgements

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1

BETWEEN DANCE AND THE VISUAL ARTS

Across the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, dance as an art form has been undergoing the most substantial changes since those catalyzed by the artists associated with Anna Halprin and Judson Dance Theater 50 years earlier. The current post-disciplinary situation that has irrevocably slackened the links between dance and its traditional proscenium home has instigated a flurry of creative, curatorial, and theoretical activity. Taken as a whole, this work reveals a compelling story: how particular dance practices have, for many decades, been a part of the contemporary arts in its most progressive manifestations. This, in turn, has put traditional understandings of the disciplines of *dance* and *choreography* into a state of productive crisis that is forcing a redefinition of both.¹ We see choreographic works today that belong to the gallery in the way that Trisha Brown's *Walking on the Wall* did in 1971.² For instance, *Artforum* editor David Velasco describes Sarah Michelson's *Devotion Study #1—The American Dancer* (2012) as “the first [of her work] to be sited in a museum gallery, to be not just proximate to the corridors of visual art but of them.”³

It is widely accepted that *dance as a contemporary art medium* has its provenance in the work of Halprin, Brown, and their peers during the historical period covered in this book, when the exchange between communities of creative practice in the downtown New York scene intensified and choreographers first chose the loft gallery or museum as the destination for their work. Writing in *Artforum* in 1974, art and film critic and theorist Annette Michelson looks back at the “new” dance activities that emerged from within that scene in the 1960s as the most “sustained” manifestation of the new direction in performance that was turning away from expressionism and towards “objectification.”⁴ Michelson spells out how choreographers such as Yvonne Rainer made this shift through exchange with artists working in other media in the downtown Manhattan scene, and how they would go on to lead the most progressive shifts towards process, dematerialization, and new models of engaged spectatorship. Current intermedial innovations that explicitly straddle choreography and the visual arts need

2 Between Dance and the Visual Arts

to be seen in light of this deeper historical context to understand their provenance and help define a new field that is still coming to light.⁵

So, at the heart of *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s–1970s* is a time and place that was post-high-modernist and pre-postmodernist and which provides some of the clearest and most influential examples of dance in its intermedial condition, the North-American neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s. This historical backstory to the current condition of the contemporary arts reveals an earlier period characterized by unprecedented disciplinary exchange in theatre dance, but importantly, also disciplinary assertion. New York performance critic Jill Johnston, whose chronicles of the period are definitive, describes this exchange:

Artists made dances. Dancers made music. Composers made poetry. Poets made events. People at large performed in all these things, including critics, wives and children. Dogs, chickens and turtles made it, too. One result of the notion that anyone could do it was an orgy of Intermedia.⁶

Within this “orgy” of activity, the personal and creative relationships between dancers and visual artists, and the crucial influence of Anna Halprin on the one hand and the experimental composition methods of John Cage on the other are the historical and aesthetic setting for what follows.⁷

The first-wave dance avant-garde that broke with classical ballet at the turn of the twentieth century is referred to peripherally throughout what follows but is beyond the scope of this project. Exchanges with the visual arts in the earlier period amounted to a parallelism where artists rarely took on a medium outside their own to realize works of art, despite aesthetic and formal exchange across disciplines.⁸ In what I will refer to as *the second-wave dance avant-garde* (centred in post-Cunningham New York, from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s) and *third-wave dance avant-garde* (beginning in Europe in the early 1990s), we see explicit cases of intermediality where various artists ‘try on’ media beyond the discipline they primarily trained in. Ways of working, disciplinary tools, and materials were transposed from one art form to another to produce works that sometimes defied categorization, and this was coupled with an increasing use of the generic term ‘artist’ to escape disciplinary determinations. Both experimental periods also featured intense discursive and practical exchanges between dancers and the visual artists in particular. Avant-garde is understood here, following Peter Bürger, as a critique of the autonomy of art through a narrowing of the art–life divide, thus constituting an attack on established, stable, and discrete forms of art.⁹

Not only did the dance artists of the second-wave avant-garde contribute compositional, ideological, and contextual innovations to the broader arts, they also successfully modelled the intermedial methods that have now become ubiquitous. This book magnifies passing, peripheral, and footnoted commentary on this important historical activity by art theorists such as Maurice Berger, Branden Joseph, and Julia Robinson that hint at a “minor-minor-history,” in Robinson’s words, deserving the full focus of rigorous historical and theoretical consideration.¹⁰ By confronting the visual arts paradigms that dance has traditionally been mapped *against* including Minimalism,

Neo-Avant Garde, Neo-Dada, Conceptual art, Postmodernism and Performance Art, the distinctive qualities of the discipline of dance are brought to light alongside their substantial contributions to future developments in the contemporary arts.¹¹ Those developments include performance art, non-object-based or dematerialized art, situational, post-Conceptual, post-disciplinary, and the participatory. The strong formalist tradition in the visual arts has not generally been in dialogue with the tools of dance analysis that address the materials and compositional strategies of the art form. So new historiographies set the stage for modelling new intermedial methodologies that can accommodate work that combines disciplinary knowledges. Bringing art and dance languages and methods into dialogue is thus a means to redress imbalances and assert disciplinary knowledges within the global contemporary art milieu.

Having said that, the configuration of the downtown New York art scene challenges the whole enterprise of history writing due to discrepancies in documentation practices, contradictory recollections, inter-personal relationships, corporeal archives, and the sheer density of activities. Given the body-to-body transmissions at the heart of choreographic practice, Rebecca Schneider's observations regarding networks of artistic influence seem particularly relevant here:

If an original is composed always already of citation, sometimes citing laterally or peripherally or multiply, how can I draw any discrete line, how can I legitimate any discrete family tree?¹²

To this should be added what Adrian Heathfield describes as the ubiquitous crisis of "historical narrations" and the resulting impact on curatorial practices in relation to this field in particular.¹³ Across this book, we will see the effect of the history-producing mechanisms that we do have (reviewing, commentary, public citations, exhibitions) on both 'major' and 'minor' accounts of the period. Amongst these accounts are relations, connections, influences, and collaborations that we can only begin to unpick where we can catch a thread. The unravelling of historiographies opens space for new narratives, but the danger is repeating patterns that close and ratify versions of the past as we have seen with the over-use of 'Judson' as a catch-all for the disparate, mid-century New York dance avant-garde. The aim here is to contribute to work that is teasing apart over-determined paradigms and stubborn generalizations regarding this period by highlighting some underground currents.

Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s–1970s understands dance as a fragile anomaly amongst the arts in its professional, pedagogical, and discursive formations. This work confronts the breadth and depth of the male-dominated field of art historical discourse and the luxury of its prolonged and seemingly unlimited critical speculations, perspectives, and counterpoints. In doing so, we might propose that Virginia Woolf's imagined and rhetorical figure of Shakespeare's sister was not an actor but a genius dancer born in the late nineteenth century, and that the art form Woolf desired that would emerge independent of the arts of man was not a new form of literature, but contemporary dance.¹⁴ That emergent art form, born amongst the women's rights movement, has fought a good fight against the History, Culture,

4 Between Dance and the Visual Arts

and Pedagogy of Woolf's Patriarchy. The miracle of its survival has evolved into a mature force with resistant practices that art institutions now desire (for better or worse). Given such a history, the position taken in what follows responds to a genuine and pressing question asked at a recent workshop in Sydney by one of our leading artists: Is there any reason to discuss disciplinary specificity anymore?¹⁵ For an art form that has only (relatively) recently gained legitimacy in theatres, cultural policy, and education, and which struggles at all levels of its existence for recognition and resources in my country Australia and elsewhere, disciplinary specificity attracts high stakes.¹⁶

So the political position taken in this book has been shaped by two issues: an advocacy for dance as an artistic discipline, and the place of female artists and theorists in accounts of the contemporary arts.¹⁷ The following highlights the work of Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Deborah Hay, and theorists Anna Chave, Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Susan Rosenberg, Meredith Morse, Annette Michelson, Liz Kotz, Susan Melrose, Jill Johnston, and Julia Robinson. This is, of course, not to the exclusion of male figures such as Cage and Rauschenberg (but who also represent a queering of art history). Bennahum and Robertson contextualize their focus on the three female artists in their exhibition (with co-curator Wendy Perron), *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955–1972*, as a contrast to “the story of Cage and Cunningham, which centres on New York City and has been told often and very well.”¹⁸ Any balanced account of this period in dance must, however, include all the key players, and this book attempts to map the exchange between mostly female dance artists and primarily male visual artists. Adequate attention to other key figures such as Steve Paxton and Alex Hay, Carolee Schneemann and Meredith Monk, was beyond the scope of this study, but the complex picture of this rich period will continue to emerge over time, no doubt taking issue with what is proposed here. As noted earlier, my strategy is to uncover the minor-minor history described by Robinson that has been buried in the actual (not metaphorical) footnotes of art history. While this period has been generously covered in both dance studies and visual art history, bringing the two fields into dialogue has only occurred recently and is rebalancing a discursive weighting between the disciplines.

This history, however, is a ‘white’ history, as are its historians. Slovenian dance and performance scholar Bojana Kunst and colleagues made the following important observations:

Dance as an art form has always been considered an art form of democratic societies ... Dance is an art form *par excellence* of the First World, the democratic and free world ... If there is a dance history, it is the history of some student of a great Western master, mostly Laban, Wigman, or Palucca.¹⁹

This study is bound to the work of artists and theorists from the Western democratic society of North America. Both the artists themselves, and the field of dance studies that has been built largely on the lineage that they represent, have been confronting this Western bias slowly (very slowly), but surely. Trisha Brown commenting on the mid-century New York dance activity in 2002 notes that “it was a phenomenal

period of experimentation—mostly by educated white people, hubris along the history chain.”²⁰ Important work is being done to shift the cultural paradigms within which contemporary dance has been, and will be, historicized. African-American scholars such as Brenda Dixon-Gottschild and Tommy de Frantz, and anthologies from Routledge, Duke University Press, and Palgrave MacMillan have begun to turn the ship around, and the Eastern European perspective of Janez Janša et al. has been stated clearly.²¹ Regarding choreographies at the interface with the visual arts, dance theorist André Lepecki’s work on Helio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Maria José Arjona, Trajal Harrell, Ralph Lemon, and La Ribot indicates the way forward. Lepecki is following a more inclusive approach to programming since the turn of the twenty-first century that is beginning to address racial prejudices and attempting to decolonize contemporary dance. In the third-wave dance avant-garde, we see an expansion of the field of artists beyond “educated white people” to truly represent the most innovative work in the field. Artists such as Lemon, Vera Mantero, La Ribot, Maria Hassabi, Harrell, and Miguel Gutierrez are highly visible and subject to rigorous critical attention. The way forward towards a more inclusive and diverse future for dance and the gallery is already here.

For this historical project, the aim is a more nuanced understanding of the practices that shaped the development of a contemporary art field that is inclusive of the new generation described here. How have we arrived at a situation where choreographic work is commissioned for gallery spaces and collected by major art institutions? While specialized knowledges, practices, and compositional methods can be attributed to dance, an unassertiveness that is constitutional and productive, rather than negative, allows the discipline to advance into territories that are undefined and thus still under-negotiation, in a persistent and tenacious way. The possibility that dance has had privileged and historically deeper access to a transmedial condition that was interrupted by the siphoning activities of the first half of the twentieth century is a speculation that informs what follows. That dance may lead the way beyond disciplines is another.

In addressing these issues, *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s–1970s* adds to important work begun by others across creative, curatorial, and theoretical work. Gallery-based retrospectives of key artists, survey exhibitions, catalogues, monographs, and anthologies draw on case studies from the mid-century, and artists have undertaken new activations of historic works from this period or created new works responding to the same. The dance-visual arts exchange is highlighted and interrogated in such work to varying degrees, and it is referred to across the book. To mention a few, in the 2017 exhibition *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York, 1955–1972*, co-curators Ninotchka Benna-hum, Wendy Perron, and Bruce Robertson demonstrate the exponential expansion of the influence of dance during this period, noting in their curatorial essay that “dance became a central metaphor for postwar American culture.” In Robertson’s essay on Rainer he notes, “my goal is to bring dance and sculpture ... back into balance with each other, as codependent, mutually co-formative, and productive.”²² *Assign and Arrange: Methodologies of Presentation in Art and Dance*, published in 2014, focuses on the period and milieu under discussion here with essays on key mid-century artists

alongside contemporary case studies.²³ Earlier, in 2011, Lepecki notes that “throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, we find with increased frequency examples of visual artists using compositional elements that had defined for two centuries the aesthetic regime of theatrical dance.”²⁴ The role of dance as a metaphor, influence, model of practice, innovator, and host for the other arts is the story being assembled in a new field of critical discourse and practice.

This book considers the work of Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, and dance artists Anna Halprin, Deborah Hay, Simone Forti, Trisha Brown, and Yvonne Rainer within a broader constellation of artist-colleagues to understand the kinds of aesthetic exchanges that were occurring across and between art forms. A critical approach counters the monolith of Minimalism with a capital M that has dominated discussions of the mid-century, second-wave dance avant-garde, and which persists in the contemporary development of the dance-gallery relationship. Discourses coming from the visual arts (Thierry De Duve, Stephanie Rosenthal, Joseph, and earlier Barbara Haskell) have largely framed American postmodern dance as a footnote to American Minimalist sculpture.²⁵ We will see how a Minimalist label inadequately represents the choreographic innovations undertaken, subjugates dance-based innovations and knowledges, and is unable to accommodate the full range of the methods and modalities employed by the associated artists. As a counterpoint, the sophisticated account of Neo-Dadaism recently articulated by Joseph and curator/scholar Catherine Craft, amongst others, provides a paradigm that owes much to contributions from dance yet has not been substantially explored in dance studies. German theatre historian Günter Berghaus’s claim that dance and performance were at the forefront of the emergence of Neo-Dada is a significant signpost.²⁶

Challenging established discourses to revise the historiography of this period thus involves de-centring Minimalism to make room for the dance-based concepts and practices that were so radically influential. This requires a recovery of the artists’ original commentary and a return to the associated key case studies. So, this project confronts and critiques the *isms* produced in visual arts theory through a return to artist-led knowledges and their working contexts. In this way, we can begin to understand the contributions of dance to the formulation of those *isms* and identify where such paradigms fall short in their application to choreographic practices. In the network of ideas and practices set out here, dance emerges as a central and influential force that facilitates the rigorous reconsideration of the role of the body within the aesthetic encounter as both object and subject, a shift that reverberates across contemporary arts practices up to the present. We may then understand how dance, as Lambert-Beatty argues, keeps bringing artistic developments back to our physical lives by inserting “the body in a social field increasingly constituted through the exchange of images.”²⁷

1 Writing Dance into Art History

Most accounts of the major aesthetic shifts during the period covered in this book neglect to include relevant activities in the field of choreography adequately, if at all.²⁸ This is a symptom of the disciplinary silo-ing in criticism and theory that struggles

to match the intermedial moves of the artists. The historiography of the emergence of non-object-oriented practices in contemporary art has played out with this blind spot maintained, neglecting the fact that this development was as much about dance as it was about art. The challenges that established art critics such as Michael Fried and Harold Rosenberg faced at the time, which forced them to seek out new performance or action-based paradigms to account for unprecedented practices, are one indicator of the movement of art into new disciplinary terrain.²⁹ Of course, more revealing are the artists themselves—their practices, writing, intentions, works, and networks—which are leveraged in what follows to revise accounts written by others. This book thus contributes to the project of uncovering the provenance of our most progressive, current, intermedial art practices by turning to the position of the artists themselves between or across disciplines. The three interweaving stories that emerge cover: (1) how visual and choreographic artists supported, lived and worked with each other; (2) how a resulting exchange produced work that both transgressed disciplinary boundaries and refined distinctions through the same process; and (3) how discourses—social, public and professional—both fuelled the developments and inadequately narrativized the emerging practices.

While no wide-ranging history of this period in art has been written from a dance studies perspective, this project brings such a lens into deep dialogue with several fields of discourse: art history and contemporary art theory, dance history and theory, and dance composition and analysis.³⁰ There is substantial attention to intra- and inter-discursive debates in what follows which is in line with the aim to redraw historiographical maps, and extensive bibliographic work to support and develop important work to come. However, at the heart of the book are choreographic works that are not fully recoverable—an absent presence. Excluded from the space-time event of the occurrence of the work, and with no enduring object to re-encounter, the project to recover this period of dance work has been challenging. An interest in practices, ideas and discourses produced within, and circulated through, networks of dance and visual artists confronts a relative scarcity and historical suppression of dance-based works, reviews, debates, and knowledges, particularly in comparison to the visual arts. This imbalance has clearly had a direct impact on how we have come to understand the period.

The public space of North American dance criticism established by John Martin, Mary Watkins, Louis Horst, and others in the 1940s and 1950s was in crisis during the period under discussion here due in part to Martin's censorship of new developments in the work of Merce Cunningham, and a general resistance to the work of the new generation of dancers outside of the Village Voice critics.³¹ The established methods of dance analysis and composition were tired: Horst, who taught dance composition to generations of dance students from the late-1920s to the mid-1960s, based his method on the musical model of theme and variation.³² And dance studies was still emerging as a legitimate field, dominated as it was by artist-theorists such as Horst and Doris Humphrey. The first scholarly books published on the new generation of dance by Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-modern Dance* (1977) and *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (1981), appear more than a decade after the work

which underlines the lack of contemporaneous theory of the dance of this period.³³ Dance reviewers in *The Village Voice* filled this gap to a certain extent, especially the writing of Jill Johnston, but also Allen Hughes at *The New York Times*. Many of the other critical accounts cited in what follows are authored by visual art critics whose attention is often drawn to the work of visual artists who shared performance bills with choreographers. These include Annette Michelson (whose work on Rainer for *Artforum* was groundbreaking), Barbara Rose, Richard Kostelanetz, and arts writers Rafael Squirra, Maricla Moyano, and Erica Abeel.

The aim here is then to test any historic or new critical tools through application, making the work of the work—including ephemera and the associated writing of reviewers and collaborators, but most particularly artists—central. Current erudite commentary from artists on their own practice has a precedent in the mid-century American avant-garde, as demonstrated in the writings of Cage, Rauschenberg, and Forti. Cage scholar and curator Julia Robinson underlines the importance of Cage's writing as a "crucial auxiliary of [his] compositional practice" and the "fuel" for his "great renown," noting that it came to occupy the place of his potential critics who wielded considerable power at the time.³⁴ Cage set a precedent that was followed by many of the artists discussed here. Through attention to such writing, privilege can be given to creatively acquired knowledges and concepts within the broader literature surrounding each artist's work. A case in point, Yvonne Rainer's output as a writer was an important enabler for her within this historical context, and it was through her publications that she came to be a spokesperson for the Judson Dance Theater. She was also the first of this group of dance artists to receive serious curatorial and critical attention by art institutions such as Ravens Row Gallery (London), Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery (Philadelphia), Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles), and Museum Ludwig (Cologne), illustrating how an artists' writing can aid the dissemination and longevity of work in this ephemeral form.³⁵ Commentary on choreography by her generation provided the groundwork for the twenty-first century where we find a new generation of artist-commentators representing a variety of approaches to writing about, with, and for dance.³⁶

Robinson is a scholar and curator working in areas very close to this project, specifically the importance of scoring as a transmedial practice across music, dance, and art during the mid-century period. In her review of Joseph's *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage*, in which he writes extensively on the nature of 'minor histories' in relation to Conrad, Robinson notes that the neglect of dance in both of Joseph's books on the period suggests

there is additional minor history (or perhaps it should be designated as minor-minor) that is neglected within Joseph's larger program. This extends to the rather 'light' treatment of Simone Forti, thus relinquishing another profound source for Minimalism.³⁷

While dance is peripheral to Joseph's project which continues the 'footnoting' effect described above, his treatment of Conrad and his music models the kind of minor

history that this dance-based project seeks to attend to through a similar process: in Robinson's words, "to remake an entire field, with the means of one's own discipline."³⁸ Beginning with dance knowledges, *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s–1970s* hopes to reconceive the expanded artistic milieu of the period from a disciplinary perspective, and an explicit gender focus reveals how the primarily female profile of the dance artists involved contributed to the historical minorizing effect. Links between this gender profile of the participating artists, the feminization of the art form that is dance, and the lack of focus given to dance contributions within the period will be noted throughout. It should be mentioned that while credit mostly falls to female theorists for extended and in-depth analysis of the dance artists important to the mid-century North-American scene, some male theorists have done much to champion both dance and the many female artists involved in its development as a contemporary art form. Henry Sayre has a chapter on dance in his book, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970*, and gives some attention to the work of Rainer, Brown, and Lucinda Childs and the importance of collaboration for the dance artists, also stating that "as a medium, dance already possessed most of the attributes that would give rise to performance art in the seventies."³⁹ However, a large part of the chapter on dance covers artists with home-disciplines in music and the visual arts.

A more significant case in point is Thomas Crow's *The Rise of the Sixties*, written in the mid-nineties, which explicitly acknowledges the influence of the Judson Dance artists on the broader mid-century New York art scene and its legacy. He bounces off Yves Klein's infamous *Anthropométries de l'Epoque Bleue* (1960), where naked female models were used as "brushes" for his International Klein Blue paint, to contextualize a contrasting force coming from the west coast to the east in the form of an under-recognized, female-led revolution. He notes, "its point of departure had been the one area of art practice where women had historically played a dominant role: modern dance."⁴⁰ Crow places Halprin's Dancer's Workshop Company in San Francisco, and her approach to art-making via improvisation, basic physiology, and everyday movements, at the source of this aesthetic force, and Forti at the helm of its West-East migration. He states that, together with Fluxus,

... they laid a great many of the coming possibilities in advanced art for the 1960s, and both did so in the name of committed egalitarianism in both art and in political life ... The values that were to lend a distinct character to much 1960s art-making—rejection of hierarchy in favor of serial repetition, equality of parts, anonymous surfaces, suspicion of self-aggrandizing emotion—first came together as ethical imperatives in the conduct of the Judson circle.⁴¹

Crow gives as an example the sculptures of Donald Judd that "transferred the aesthetic of task and function from Judson-style dance to the gallery."⁴² The policy of "inclusiveness" that, for Crow, explains the appearance of artists such as Rauschenberg and Robert Morris amongst the dancers, demonstrates why this particular milieu is so important to the model of "undisciplined" dance I am arguing for (and to which I shall

return).⁴³ I take up and extend Crow's understanding of the radical role of Halprin and Judson's female-led influence on "advanced art for the 1960s" in Chapters 2–4, where we find Forti at the centre of aesthetic changes popularly attributed to the intensely masculine scene of Minimalist sculpture.

Three female art historians have successfully bridged an institutionally driven discipline divide in recent accounts of the dialogue between those key mid-century female dance artists identified by Crow and their local art scene. Chapter 4 owes much to the work of these theorists, drawing together and building on the work done there. In 2008, Carrie Lambert-Beatty published the groundbreaking *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s*; this was followed by Meredith Morse's book on Simone Forti, *Soft is Fast* in 2016, and then Susan Rosenberg's *Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art*, in 2017.⁴⁴ These studies, incorporating original archival research, have revised historical accounts of the downtown New York scene between the late 1960s and mid-1970s by writing dance knowledges and discoveries back into the important aesthetic discoveries of the time. The delay in published monographs on these significant female artists evidences the gender and disciplinary inequities that have obfuscated the actual provenance of key experiments of the period. Collectively, they assert the art form amongst other key players such as new music and film alongside the significant impact of strategies for experimental composition emerging from John Cage and his interest in Marcel Duchamp.

Lambert-Beatty's book re-positions dance within this artistic milieu through the figure of Rainer. In her account, the art form worked alongside the Happenings of Allan Kaprow and the Minimalist sculptures of Robert Morris to deconstruct the performer/audience divide and insist on the contingency of all works of art. Lambert-Beatty is clear on her intention here: to write the Judson group's aesthetic project "into social histories of the period."⁴⁵ Lambert-Beatty spotlights Rainer's identification of the resistance of dance to perception "as an artistic problem," and the associated spectator-performer or subject-object complications, digging deep into a critique of occularcentric tendencies in dance as an art form.⁴⁶ What she does brilliantly is identify choreographic strategies that unsettle conventional habits of perception, thus highlighting *specifically* what dance contributed to the most progressive aesthetic concerns of this milieu. She cites how Rainer's work progressed the development of concepts of performance and spectatorship via the key dance fundamentals of presence, motility, and improvisation; "heterogeneity, stillness, slow motion;" "indeterminacy, and other techniques of spontaneity;" the use and abuse of the composition standard "repetition and variation;" and nonhierarchical or "paratactic" movement.⁴⁷ She goes so far as to suggest that Rainer is a "bridge between key episodes in post-war art," converting the spatial minimalism of visual arts into a temporal form.⁴⁸

The recuperation of Forti's work, and the intervention of this narrative into perceived genealogies of current tendencies in the post-disciplinary contemporary arts, finds a very worthy champion in Meredith Morse. Following Anna Chave's early revisions, Morse makes the connections to Halprin clear, along with Forti's proto-Minimalist status and pre-Conceptual significance.⁴⁹ Drawing on Richard Serra's direct account of the influence of dance on his work allows Morse to highlight the

choreographic elements of post-Minimal art such as corporeality, materiality, temporality, and spatiality, but also an attention to perception, sensibility, and presence.⁵⁰ Morse's work on the material turn in dance in the mid-century period, to which I shall return, is particularly important for the discussion of dance and Minimalism in Chapter 3. Susan Rosenberg's work on Trisha Brown demonstrates how aligned her work was with developments in the visual arts, noting her inclusion in groundbreaking exhibitions such as *Contemporanea* in Rome in 1974, and suggesting that her choreography be considered as visual art. Importantly, Rosenberg gives a clear account of the *exchange* between Brown and the visual artists with whom she was in contact. For every element she drew from her artist peers (seriality, neutrality, unitary forms, scores), she offered new ones to those artists she influenced such as Gordon Matta-Clark and Bruce Nauman (originality, autonomy, weight, process, and institutional critique). What is also highlighted in Rosenberg's work on Brown is the sharp co-dependence of disciplinary specificity and methodological expansion; of the second-wave avant-garde dance artists, no one was more committed to the activity of dancing than Brown.

2 Naming and Claiming

That we still require attention to the provenance, terms, and future of the discipline of dance is indicated in Steve Paxton's brilliant and concise history of North-American theatre dance in his catalogue essay for the exhibition *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue* (2002). He suggests that by the time we get to post-World War 2 and Merce Cunningham, who he describes as an "anti-particle" produced by modern dance, developments had been fast and extraordinary if one makes a disciplinary comparison. He writes, "I think by this point, Modern Dance was historically unprecedented. In only 50 years, dance thinking had been enormously expanded and confirmed."⁵¹ That dance as a contemporary, creative discipline is still being invented is as true today as it was in 2002 and 1962.

However, the first task here is to define the field of study—dance as contemporary art medium—within the broader expanse of *contemporary dance* as a cultural phenomenon. I turn to a definition by French dance theorist Laurence Louppe whose work has broadly influenced this project. Louppe defines contemporary dance as the art form of the twentieth century that was largely unrelated to the theatre dance that had preceded it and encompasses the various movements—modern, tanztheater, postmodern, physical theatre, etc.⁵² So the term is applied retrospectively by her to encompass the entire gamut of dance as an artistic practice across the twentieth century. Louppe argues, "for me, contemporary dance only exists from the moment that the idea of a 'non-transmitted' movement language first appeared at the beginning of the [twentieth] century."⁵³ She even shrugs off ballet as a precedent with liberating swagger, citing the imagined but not-yet-existent dances pined for in the nineteenth century by Émile Jacques-Dalcroze, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Richard Wagner as describing possibilities and pathing the way forward: "At the beginning there was no relation, no conflict: simply another place ... [Modern dance] did not grow out of dance but from

an absence of dance.”⁵⁴ So this understanding of a body of practice stretching from Duncan and Fuller to the present day, and constituting a unique field of dance distinct from classical ballet, will provide the definition for what follows.

Loupe’s definition of contemporary dance has a parallel in aesthetic philosopher Peter Osborne’s notion that the contemporary is whatever is critically engaged with its moment.⁵⁵ So progressive events such as the emergence of modern dance, expressionism, dance theatre, and so-called Conceptual dance can be seen as distinct and relevant to their historical milieu and share a rigorous engagement with the same. He writes, “each is constructed from the standpoint of the rupture of a particular historical event and each privileges a particular geopolitical terrain.”⁵⁶ These categories of theatre dance are distinct from classical or traditional forms in their embeddedness in their context and perhaps share this with innovations in social dance which contemporary dance references more and more often.⁵⁷ All these genealogies can thus be captured within an umbrella term that refers to work engaged with its own contemporaneity.

Another understanding of contemporary dance, described by Bojana Cvejić as coming after modern and postmodern dance, also correlates to Osborne’s understanding of the contemporary as it is understood in visual art today.⁵⁸ Emerging as a term post-Second World War to differentiate new art from Modernism, he says:

in the 1950s and 1960s, it still acted mainly as a qualification of (rather than a decisive immanent counter to) a more extended sense of the modern: the contemporary was the most recent modern, but a modern with a moderated, less ruptural futurity than that associated with the avant-garde ... it is only with the decisive discrediting of postmodernism as a coherent critical concept, at the end of the 1990s, that ‘contemporary’ began to emerge into the critical daylight from beneath its commonplace function as a label denoting what is current or up to date, by which time it had definitively separated itself out from the modern in arthistorical periodization, with the invention of a new subdisciplinary specialism: history of contemporary art.⁵⁹

If we consider *Contemporary Dance*, edited by Anne Livet in 1978 (which features an image of Rauschenberg’s choreographic work *Pelican* [1963] on the cover), we are perhaps seeing the earlier use of contemporary to distinguish new dance from modern dance, but certainly always in relation to the modernist tendencies of the group of artists she includes in this publication.⁶⁰

By the 1990s, the term contemporary dance was in broad circulation and had become distinct from modern dance. That experimental contemporary dance since the 1990s (or the third-wave dance avant-garde) may constitute the ruptural moment of post-Conceptual dance (or post-dance) becoming a part of the “history of contemporary art” is something to be taken up elsewhere. In terms of this project, mobilizing the term ‘contemporary’ as it is used by Loupe and Osborne allows one to re-shuffle or re-mix traditional labels for periods in dance history which have caused much debate and confusion. On the matter of terminology, UK choreographer Jonathan

Burrows has recently commented on the inadequacy of the term ‘postmodernism’ when applied to dance:

And it seems like [Sally Banes] and others called Judson post-modern partly because it came ‘after modern dance,’ and on the other hand the expression got caught up with the actual philosophical term which confused things for years, and afterwards anything vaguely pedestrian got called postmodern, and then to confuse things more we eventually started to read postmodernism and it was easy to think then that what we were doing had always been actually postmodern and maybe it was.⁶¹

Using terms in dance theory and history that artists do not use confidently in their own historical situation is problematic, as are attempts by artists to critically engage directly with *isms* formulated in the visual arts which can set the terms for their place in history, as we shall see in the case of Yvonne Rainer.

In using the phrase *dance as contemporary art medium*, I am indicating work both historical and current that is distinct from contemporary dance presented on the stage with its deeper lineage in theatre and ballet, being rather contemporary choreography where the central preoccupations and conditions correspond to those driving the broader contemporary arts. This is not to say that such work is subsumed into the logic of the visual arts, but that it operates in dialogue with other fields of contemporary art such as painting, sculpture and video art. This field of practice is thus placed it at the forefront of the post-disciplinary and has contributed dance-based knowledges to the emergence of performance art, non-object-based or dematerialized art, post-Conceptual, post-disciplinary and participatory, as previously noted. Most importantly, such work has always operated beyond superficial associations of dance and choreography with strategies such as the experience economy and participatory aesthetics.⁶²

Continuing to drill down into some key terms, performance theorist Susan Melrose has recently attempted an overview of the art form and directly addresses the question of *discipline* in relation to dance. She argues that dance

is a discipline-specific complex practice or complex system of practices, characterized by expert practices and mastery, whose histories are rich and complex; they are relatively stabilised in terms of the systems specific to the discipline, as well as repeatedly destabilized, from within. In short, ‘dance’ is a stabilized self-destabilizing system ... dance-makers select—explicitly or implicitly—a certain number of discipline-specific or related options with which they play.⁶³

What is immediately apparent is the very need for such claims in support of the discipline’s existence in 2018, something that would be considered redundant if it appeared in visual arts or music discourse. Second, her key terms “practice” and “instability” are key features of dance as we shall see when we apply a working set of dance