

(UN)COVERING GROUND: DANCE, SPACE AND MOBILITY

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ABSTRACT:

Ballet and modern dance teachers often exhort students to ‘travel across the floor’ and ‘cover ground’. These instructions invoke metaphors of travel and mobility that capture an array of common assumptions about dance, space and movement. This essay examines the spatial and mobility discourses that these instructions simultaneously build upon and produce while exploring the seductiveness of technique’s promise of mastering space through the moving body.

Threading auto-ethnography with critical theory and moving across different disciplinary fields and writing styles, I explore the ways in which these instructions leak outside the perimeter of the dance studio to feed into the narrative of a dancer’s extended physical, geographical and social mobility. Analysing the mobility and travel discourses of my dance training vis-à-vis poststructuralist theorizations of the subaltern power of the nomad and theories of space and place, I argue that this narrative becomes complicit in the construction of an idealized notion of artistic nomadism, which, in turn, aligns with current neoliberal logics organised around the production of mobile subjects.

Key Words:

Dance Training; Mobility; Space; Nomadism; Spatial Discourses; Auto-ethnography.

COVERING GROUND

Dancing – I was taught – meant extending my body beyond its limits and moving through space as much as I could. As I was often told in class, ‘I had to cover ground’, ‘travel across the floor’ and ‘pierce space’. Therefore, to learn how to dance I covered as much earth-ground as possible, travelling across dance studios and countries.

Eighteen, half naked, I was lying on a massage table being closely examined by a member of the faculty. With the English I had learned preparing just for this day, I had traveled from my small Italian hometown to London arriving at 17 Duke's Road right on time. The dancing part of the audition was over, and now the flesh of my body was being auditioned. I felt the cold hand of the inspector reaching for the flesh of my thigh. Grabbing it, she asked, ‘What is this?’ Since I had learned that dancers should be prepared to endure everything, I swallowed my humiliation and answered, ‘Fat’. I listened to her as she explained how ‘excessive’ weight hinders proper movement and causes injuries, went back to Italy and anxiously waited for an answer. It didn't occur to me then that taking up as much ground as possible – both literally and figuratively – was at the price of shrinking the space my own body occupied.

A year later I was skipping classes again. This time I was running away from the Graham-based classes at 17 Duke's Road to audition for what I thought was a more rigorous school where I could get the ‘necessary’ ballet-base that even modern choreographers wanted in their dancers. All winter long I had prepared for this moment, taking extra ballet classes and practicing pointe-work during weekends. Surrounded by younger and thinner girls escorted by their parents, I waited to enter the studio wearing the required, and unforgiving, transparent pink tights. After the ballet class, we were asked to take off our shoes for the modern part of the audition. Pink tights still on, the merciless nylon covering my shoeless feet made dancing across the wooden floor a slippery enterprise. I failed and returned home to plan my next move across dance techniques and countries. My body had not shrunk and yet it persevered in its mission to cover ground in order to dance.

My early contemporary ballet and modern dance training invoked, involved and insisted on mobility as a vital tenet to the successful development of a dancer. As I will illustrate in this essay, the refrain to ‘cover ground’ that characterized my training often extended beyond the kinetic proficiency of the dancing body to symbolically urge for transnational movements that would expand a dancer's artistic and social mobility. The emphasis on the empowering properties of mobility that were so integral to my dance

education in the late 1980s resonated with the social and philosophical theory of the time. With its promise of opportunities, change and freedom, mobility seduced not only a young dancer like me but philosophers and social theorists alike, who celebrated it as key to practices of transgression and resistance (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, Braidotti 1994). In recent years, however, scholars have increasingly scrutinized such celebrations of mobility, interrogating the value given to distance and exposing the gendered colonial ideologies perpetuated in presumptions about the pleasure and freedom of movement (Kaplan 1996, Cresswell 2006, Urry 2007, Uteng and Cresswell 2008). Correspondingly, more and more dancers have challenged contemporary dance's proclivity for constant motion by refusing to stage and perform movement in their choreographic works (Lepecki 2006).¹

After a few years of professional dance training, my interest in dance-as-mobility also waned. I started questioning the instruction of covering ground of my early training by exploring alternative approaches to movement in my studio practice and by investigating dance's relationship to space, place and travel in my choreographic work.² Twenty-five years later, I revisit the centrality of travel, movement and mobility of my early dance experience through this essay in order to uncover the ideological roots and political implications of the spatial and mobility discourses that my training simultaneously built upon and produced and expose the seductiveness of technique's promise of mastering space through the moving body.

¹ Discussing contemporary European choreographers commonly grouped under the umbrella of 'conceptual dance', André Lepecki (2006) reads the stillness in their works as a sign of the exhaustion of movement and an act of resistance to dance's dominant politics of time and space.

² I explored questions of mobility through a trilogy of video-dances, which became part of a solo performance titled *The Aging Daughter* (2001).

In what follows, I thread auto-ethnography with critical theory as a way to bring experience and discourse into writing. This approach is grounded on the self-reflexive methodologies first advanced by feminist ethnographers who incorporated their autobiographical reflections in their works as a tactic against a dominant genre of academic writing in male-centred social sciences and as a way to reveal how experience is an integral part of knowledge-making (Kondo 1990, 1997, Abu-Lughod 1991, Behar 1993). The weaving together of the cognitive and the experiential also draws on performative writing and corporeality studies and their effort to imbue writing with the corporeal (Savigliano 1995, 2003, Foster 1996).

The auto-ethnographic narrative in this essay loosely weaves together the teachings and experiences of diverse dance techniques – namely ballet, Graham and Cunningham – to focus on the spatial discourses and practices of mobility that these disciplines produced, rather than on the specificities of their techniques. In order to address the ways in which these discourses affected my sense of self and my body's relationship to space both in and out of the dance studio, I examine how 'technique' and its promise of mastering the body seduced me. I examine the contradictions of dance's narrative of mobility by pointing at the tension between the expanded spatio-cultural footprint of my dancing body and the expected diminishing of my own physical footprint. I proceed to show how the instruction to cover ground leaked outside the perimeter of the dance studio to feed into the narrative of a dancer's extended physical, geographical and social mobility. Rethinking the metaphors of travel of my initial dance experience vis-à-vis poststructuralist theorizations of the subaltern power of the nomad and theories of space and place, I argue that this narrative becomes complicit in the construction of an idealized notion of artistic nomadism, which, in turn,

aligns with current neoliberal logic organized around the production of mobile subjects (Gill 1996, Kaplan 1996, Tsing 2002, Cresswell 2006, Ong 2006, Uteng and Cresswell 2008).

DISCIPLINING MOBILITY

'You don't have to move your hips to do modern dance' was the critique I received during my audition at 17 Duke's Road. I had passed all the different phases of the audition, the written application with two pictures of me standing with a tendu à la seconde and in fourth arabesque (pink tights required), the dance classes and the physical exam, and now my moving hips were being judged as out of place. My hazardous reply to the criticism explained that my choreography reflected the jazz training I had received in the small town I lived in. But, as I found out, my dancing was not to be restricted by geographical confines. The audition board objected that there was a well-known Graham teacher in Rome, inferring that I could have received the 'proper' training even in Italy. The fact I lived 600 hundred kilometres away from Rome was not to be considered.

In my early experience dancing did not only mean extending the body beyond its limits, it also meant challenging physical and geographical spatial confines. In order to do so I had to continuously move. My training spatialised this on-going mobility both physically and metaphorically in contradictory ways. The most significant contradiction was the relationship of space to gender and the conventional modes through which gender is spatially produced. Exhorting me to expand the kinesphere of my self-conscious female teenage body, dance training enabled me to challenge conventional female modes of moving and living in space, which, as feminist theory has pointed out, are traditionally constructed in restrained and inhibited ways. If, on the one hand, dance disrupted the social conditioning of women's

constricted spatial-being-in-the world (Young 1980),³ on the other hand, it re-inscribed such confined space by controlling the physical size of my body. Urging me to expand my limbs and take as much space as possible and simultaneously shrink my flesh, dance trapped me in a fundamental spatial contradiction.

Dance disciplined my body into this spatial contradiction through a system of practices and discourses that operated according to a Foucauldian structure of disciplinary power. While the codes of technique were the technology through which dance classes organised discipline, the mirror – as the distinctive feature of the typical dance studio – was the panopticon-like apparatus through which individual self-control was enforced. Whether in reach or not of the teacher’s gaze, this all-seeing apparatus made mistakes and inadequacies visible to everyone in class, encouraging comparisons, critiques and, ultimately, a continuous process of self-monitoring, scrutiny and evaluation. Susan Leigh Foster provides a clear analysis of this process and its impact on dancers in her article ‘Dancing Bodies’ (1997). As she explains, the mirror by nurturing narcissism and, at the same time, battering self-esteem sets in action a perverse process of internal-external confrontations. In an effort to embody the values and choreographic codes of a dance technique dancers seek to master their bodies and, in so doing, develop a fractured bodily consciousness divided between ‘the perceived body – what the dancer feels from sensory information’, ‘the ideal body – derived from a collection of fantasized images’, and ‘the demonstrative body of the teacher showing correct and incorrect actions’ (Foster 1997 p.

³ In her landmark essay ‘Throwing Like a Girl’ (1980), Young articulates women’s embodiment in relation to their social positioning and argues that girls are taught not to take up space, not to use their whole bodies or not to believe they can accomplish physical tasks; this is an argument she later revisits in an effort to revalue aspects of women’s experiences (Young 2005).

237). When dancers assimilate the system of value of the technique, they ‘internalize the impulse to evaluate and rank their own performance’ and end up constantly monitoring the discrepancies among their three bodies (p. 243).

With ten years of training, by the time I arrived in London I had already internalized the teacher’s gaze and could easily anticipate comments and corrections. When the inspector reached for my thigh, I knew what she was about to ask even before she posed the question. Although not very successful in keeping down the size of my hips and buttocks, I knew the rules of the game and quickly delivered the self-evident reply. Spelling out the answer to her rhetorical question reinforced a structure of power that conflated docility with commitment to dance.⁴ Why was I willingly submitting to this disciplinary system? The sense of mastery, power and control of my body and the space around me were clearly elements that sustained my self-disciplining. The pleasures derived from these elements, however, are not as clear and self-evident. Dance came with the implicit promise that the daily regulation, restraining and controlling of the body would make one move faster, cover more ground and eventually take one across the world. In other words, dance promised mobility not only in the studio and on stage but also out in the world. One of my ballet teachers, well illustrated how kinetic mobility was to transform into geographical and social mobility when, at the end of our barre routine, he declared to the class that our hard work would pay off the day we would be hired by a big company that would send us around the world on tour.⁵

⁴ When referring to this structure of power, I do not suggest the body is a passive object of inscription nor does Foster – as she later qualified, the body both writes and is written about (1995). This conceptualization is convergent with Elizabeth Grosz’s (1994) critique of a passive body appropriated and coerced by external forces. As my narrative reveals, this performance of docility was later accompanied by acts of disobedience that resisted this disciplinary system.

⁵ For a study of the culture of ballet and travel see Wulff (1998).

Twenty years later, I realize how my teacher's claim extended the meaning of covering ground, connecting it to the transnational mobility of a dancer and to a cosmopolitan pursuit of world access. The geographical mobility of a dance company was then a pay-off for a dancer's hard work: a metaphoric liberation from dance's disciplining and a doorway to social ascent. Romanticizing dancers' work, his statement made a revealing association of dance with travels and global circulation that uncovered how kinetic mobility was not only a requisite in dance technique but a fundamental aspect of a dancer's being-in-the world. Such a statement conveyed a desire for both physical and social mobility that symbolically stood for what I was training for: a control of the body that would allow me to move across geographical frontiers and lead to artistic opportunities, cultural mastery and worldliness.

POINTS IN SPACE

After a year of 'proper' training in London, my hips were no longer swaying, but my body was progressively refusing to perform the endless falls and rises of my Graham-based classes. I wanted to stand on my two feet and stay up there. Taking my ballet teacher's words to heart, I started planning my next dance and geographical move. A few months later I embarked on my first transatlantic flight. I was 'covering' ground, more precisely over six thousand miles, and was beginning to use dance to tour the world, albeit on my own and not with a dance company, like my teacher's remark had suggested.

I arrived in New York on a fall evening of 1989. The morning after my arrival I hurried towards the Hudson River looking for Westbeth.⁶ The elevator took me up to the eleventh floor and straight into a sky-scraping studio with a 360-degree view of Manhattan, where I was to spend the next two years of my life. The detached sensibility of the technique I had come to study across the Atlantic provided refuge from the anguished falls and pelvic contractions I had struggled to keep up with in London. After a year spent grinding my knees and sit bones against a cold morning floor, the uprightness of Cunningham's technique felt liberatory. Even though the Cunningham technique was as highly formalized and as rigorous

⁶ Westbeth is a landmark building for the arts in New York. The Cunningham Studio was housed there from 1971 to 2012.

as the Graham technique, its focus on movement devoid of superimposed emotional interpretations offered a neutral ground through which I could explore my body's possibilities. Through its constant practice I was to learn the mechanics that would enable my body to defy space and time and glide out into the metropolitan future of the city.

Cunningham's movements extended outward in clear and straightforward paths emphasizing the vastness and emptiness of space. Potentially free to choose fronts and directions, Cunningham's dancing bodies owned space. Stretching in infinite extensions and racing through ceaseless legwork, dancers' bodies pierced the space of the studio and, symbolically, that of the city in a kinetic and spatial apotheosis. The uprightnes of the bodies populating the studio mirrored the vertical dominance of the studio over the city, while their matter-of-fact movement across space merged in a symbiotic relationship with the architectonic motion of the city and its forward-looking urban thrust. Propelled upward and forward in multiple directions, these architectural and corporeal bodies seem to project into the future.⁷ The Cunningham technique, the studio's spatial arrangement and its architectonic and urban surroundings seemed to come together to embody the city's mythology of the American dream, its association with ideals of freedom, expansion and plenitude to enhance dance's premise and promise of expanded mobility.⁸

Reading Michel de Certeau's and Yi-Fu Tuan's work fifteen years later helped me understand the kinetic and spatial euphoria I first experienced at the Cunningham studio. Cunningham technique and the architectonic and urban setting of the studio seemed to bring to life de Certeau's illustrations of the totalizing gaze of the geometrical space of modern

⁷ Interestingly, former Cunningham's dancer Mary Lisa Burns (2010) remarks how 'Merce's work has always looked so much more like the future than like the past'.

⁸ For a discussion on how mobility has played a key role in the formation of the American nation-state and its ideals of freedom, see Ganser (2009) and Cresswell (2001).

urbanistic systems in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). The view from the top of Westbeth echoed de Certeau's description of the voyeuristic pleasure of escaping the city's grasp on top of New York City's World Trade Center. The distant and panoramic perspective of the city from Cunningham's studio froze and miniaturized the agitation of urban life down below, thus allowing for the primacy of the movement of bodies dancing up above. To put it in de Certeau's terms (1984 p. 92), the body in the high-up dance studio was like 'an Icarus flying above' ignoring 'the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below'.

De Certeau (1984 p. 92) explains that, by giving the impression of possessing and controlling the agglomerations composing the city, this top-down and all-encompassing vision provokes a sort of elation that comes from the idea of comprehending the city as a totality – 'the exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more'. This perspective, however, is a partial view that requires distancing from the object of investigation and a severing from any corporeal engagement.⁹ It is fictitious because it provides a sense of control of a totality only by virtue of its self-validation as objective. De Certeau's (1984, p. 93) description of the voyeuristic exhilaration that comes from such a totalizing, detached knowledge illustrates the euphoria I initially experienced at the Cunningham Studio: A sense of pleasure predicated on a fictitious knowledge of the body and the city that revolved around a disengaged and yet total control of the body in a studio up above the 'thresholds at which visibility begins'.

While de Certeau's work sheds light on the spatial pleasures associated with my experience of the Cunningham technique, Tuan's autobiographical writing further illustrates

⁹ To this distanced gaze, de Certeau juxtaposes the actual experience of pedestrians, who are constantly writing and rewriting structures and evading the grid of the urbanistic system by creating significant subjective mapping through their walking about and shortcuts.

how exercising extended mobility at high speed in the vast emptiness of Cunningham's studio nurtured a sense of freedom, albeit a fictitious one. A pioneer in the study of how humans interact with space, human geographer Tuan defined space and place in a binary opposition – where place is specific and imbued with meaning and power and space is abstract and interchangeable (a definition that crisscrosses de Certeau's and Lefebvre's interpretations of space as a 'practiced' and lived place). Tuan (1977) argued that, in order to define space, one must be able to move from one place to another, whereas, for a place to exist, it needs a space. In this way, he aligned mobility with space and fixed place as a location in space. Such connection of space with motion and freedom is made clear in his autobiography (Tuan 1999). In a passage where he confesses his own fascination with a sort of 'space conquest' that he pursues on a Harley Davidson motorbike, he elaborates on his vision of space in the following terms,

America's big appeal for me is that it has chosen to emphasize the positive meanings of space. Space connotes mobility, action, freedom, potentiality, the future. It connotes life, the sensation of coming to life. (Tuan 1999, p. 97)

Tuan's vision here mirrors a common perspective that equates space with the potential of movement, progress, and liberty. Cunningham's appeal worked in similar ways for me. Training the body to isolate parts and move them in different directions, his technique treated the body as a disjunctive machine that emphasized fast mobility over space. Similarly to how Tuan achieved a sense of freedom through a mechanical object, Cunningham's sense of liberation was predicated on the mechanization of the body. His technique ultimately felt like Tuan's motorbike: another hyper-masculine technology geared to the triumph of the technically proficient moving body over a 'static' and 'empty' space.

ABANDONING FANTASIES OF CORPOREAL AND SPATIAL CONQUESTS

Two years after landing in New York and my first class at the Cunningham Studio, a choreographer I was auditioning for asked me to slowly walk to a point of the room and stand still. In discomfort I walked and stopped. I felt naked. There were no complex steps to cover myself with. As I stood in an apparent stillness, I stared at the faint blue paint peeling off the wall of the old elementary school classroom we were auditioning in. Had I covered so much ground just to stand still? In spite of my reticence in the choreographic assignment, my body stood up on its two feet looking through the crack in the wall. The narrative of mastering bodies and space through movement had been suddenly stripped away from me. The beams holding up the discourse that bound together space with movement and freedom came tumbling down and the bodies of Merce Cunningham's dancers ceaselessly coming and going, assembling and dispersing, remained just points in space, as the title of one of his choreographies suggested.¹⁰ Shortly after, I took the elevator down from the eleventh floor one last time, leaving the panoptical view of the studio behind. Shadowing de Certeau's descent from the 110 stories of the World Trade Center, my body abandoned spatial and corporeal conquest and its fiction of freedom to descend and explore different corporeal practices and spatial approaches.

My training at the Cunningham studio seemed to reinforce dance's promise of expanded mobility and the idea that technique would help me defy physical and spatial boundaries.¹¹ As the means to challenge limits, movement became synonymous with freedom and moving through space became the redress for the daily disciplining of the body. This notion of movement rests on a vision of space that assumes it as pre-existent, neutral and existing on the outside. This space has been widely critiqued across social theory (see, among others, Soja 1989, Lefebvre, 1991). Feminist geographers, in particular, have pointed out the power structure inherent in this phallogentric conceptualization of space, seen as a

¹⁰ Cunningham often cited Albert Einstein's quotation that 'there are no fixed points in space', from which he derived the title *Points in Space* for his 1986 work for video that was later adapted for the stage (Copeland 2004, p. 177).

¹¹ Interestingly, the survival and fame of Cunningham's choreographies and technique owed much to the world mobility that his company was afforded, not without difficulties, from its first international tour in 1964 to its closing in 2011. For a detailed account of the impact of the continuous and sustained international tours of Cunningham's company, from the troupe's early inception to the early 1970s, see Carolyn Brown's autobiography *Chances and Circumstances* (2009).

bounded and static void to be filled, spanned or constructed (Massey, 1993, Rose, 1993). Doreen Massey (1993) further highlighted how in the Western binary system of world codification space is coded female and, like women, is defined in terms of lack or absence.

While feminist geographers led me to see the genderedness of Cunningham's approach to movement and space, Edward Casey's genealogy of the supremacy of space over place in *The Fate of Place* (1997) helped me understand and contextualize the sense of freedom I first experienced in Cunningham's classes.¹² Casey shows how throughout history the concept of space as pure dimensionality and as void of corporeality came to dominate scientific, philosophical, and artistic discourses while place – as a lived spatiality constituted through habitation – yielded to geometrical space. The axioms of Cartesian geometry, by abstracting space, cleared it of any content and relational ties. Thus cleared, space became something to be conquered, partitioned and controlled. Casey (1997 p. 184) explains how bodies find the vision of empty space appealing for it offers them an apparent sense of freedom that derives from the potential control and domination of space. Absolute space, Casey (1997, p. xii) argues, reached its apotheosis with the 'scientification' of knowledge, from the Enlightenment period on, and during colonialism, when the domination of native peoples was accomplished through the destruction of the places that served as settings for local culture.

The sense of liberation I experienced at Cunningham's rested on a similar body-movement-space power structure. Freedom derived from the potential control and domination of my body and space; in other words, it depended on the potential of mastering bodies and space through technique. While apparently innocuous, this fantasy of mastering

¹² Casey embraces the interpretation on space/place of Yi Fu Tuan and humanistic geography.

bodies and space through technique builds upon and reproduces a gendered colonial ideology while concealing the patriarchal and colonial history of this body-movement-space production behind abstract dance movement.

NOMADISM AND THE NEOLIBERAL PRODUCTION OF MOBILITY

Through, because, and in spite of dance I became a nomadic subject (Braidotti 1994).

My migration was not about economic displacement but about a new transnational mobility that afforded aspiring dancers like me the privilege of global artistic search. Granted I was privileged to pursue dance training abroad, there were ideological implications to this mobility: I was of course unaware of them at the time, but I am now seeking to uncover them. I embarked on the first of what later became a series of artistic migrations at a particular moment in history when mobility became key to philosophical and sociological theory (de Certeau 1984, Deleuze and Guattari 1986, Braidotti 1994, Appadurai 1996, Clifford 1997). Mobility was also becoming central to the economic and political climate of the late 1980s, when the collapse of the communist bloc triggered the global spread of neoliberal market reform policies that created the economic system we know today as neoliberalism. Inevitably, the migration that my dancing necessitated and prompted at that time was connected to the kinds of mobilities imagined, produced and privileged in that historical moment, such as the vision of mobility as alterity, difference and resistance of nomadic theories and the associations of mobility to freedom, opportunity and progress of both popular and neoliberal discourse.

My dance training mobilized a migratory subjectivity that resonated with the nomadic figuration first outlined by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986) and later by feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti (1994). For these theorists, the nomad

escaped territorialisation and fixity to dominant systems (namely, the state for Deleuze and Guattari and Western masculinist thought for Braidotti). Like the nomadism they theorized, my artistic wandering went beyond physical mobility and travelling. It was a state of constant transition between spaces, languages, experiences and modes. Caught between different countries, between the studio and everyday-life and between the expansion of its limbs and the shrinking of its flesh, my body's response was to move. Movement served not only to cross these geographical, physical and somatic spaces but also to negotiate spatial, linguistic and cultural discrepancies. However, the continuous work of moving, transiting, adjusting and adapting ultimately turned my mobility into a self-condemnation to incessant movement.

Nurtured by discourses that conflated movement with travels and their promises of accumulation of cultural capital (as in my ballet teacher's suggestion that international tours would be the pay-off of a dancer's hard work), my nomadic life turned into an affair with distance and global cultural currency. Rather than a practice of resistance, as imagined by nomadic theories, nomadism became the means for the accumulation of international experience, a training ground for the formation of a self-governing and self-mastering neoliberal citizen. Workshops, performances, exhibitions, reviews and all those elements that fill the curriculum of a dancer amassed in direct opposition to the resistance of the nomad to sedentary life and stocking. The nomadic life that was such an integral part of my dance training resonated more with neoliberal logic and objectives of self-enterprising, knowledge accumulation and expansion rather than with the transgressive subject romanticised by nomadic theories.¹³ Rooted in gendered colonial approaches to space and movement, my

¹³ See among others, Caren Kaplan's (1996) critique of nomadic theories and the value given to distance in these metaphors of mobility.

dancing mobility imagined and produced an idealized notion of artistic nomadism, which, in turn, validated and intensified neoliberal logic organised around the production of global flow, speed, and self-sufficient mobile subjects.

In sum, my early dance training prompted a mobility of capability, in that it enabled a physical and geographical movement and a critical consciousness that allowed a departure from the female role models I grew up with and from the fantasy of the potential of technique of mastering bodies and space. However, the gendered and colonial roots of this body-space-movement triangulation that my training espoused inevitably translated mobility into a privileged and individualist sense of cosmopolitanism – a worldly pursuit with recourse to neoliberal ideology and its scheme for reordering the social and refashioning the conduct of the self.

CONCLUSION

The instruction to cover ground reveals a particular approach to the body and movement. On the one hand, the instruction translates movement into a spatial mobility that focuses primarily on extending the body outward into space, as opposed to moving *in* space. On the other hand, the language deployed in this instruction suggests a mobility that extends a dancer's kinetic ability to move through space outside the perimeter of the studio and across national borders, thereby translating a dance technique principle into a life doctrine. Although perceived as an innocent metaphor to exhort dancers to expand the kinesphere of their bodies, covering ground rests on contested notions of the body, space and mobility and their problematic triangulation. My deconstruction of this instruction speaks to what seems to be still a predominant pedagogical approach in modern dance. To be fair a number of dance practices, including postmodern, site-based and conceptual dance, have moved away, both pedagogically and choreographically, from the forceful projection of bodies onto space that I critique here – namely by studying the organic flow of movement between bodies and spaces through the development of re-educational dance training such as Body-Mind Centering, Continuum Movement, Skinner Release and Klein Technique, to name a few, and by subverting dance's focus on the spectacularization of movement. Despite these efforts, mainstream modern dance classes are still imbued by the kinds of conceptualizations of space and movement that I refer to here and dance research has yet to fully address the socio-political implications of the pursuit of an expanded and incessant mobility in dance training.¹⁴ This essay seeks to address this gap. Engaging with the overlap of the symbolic

¹⁴ For detailed analyses of dominant pedagogies and training regimes in dance education see Sally May Gardner (2011), Shantel Ehrenberg (2010) and Jill Green (1999, 2003).

and the sociological in dance, it highlights how the emphasis on the expanded mobility of a dancer simultaneously builds upon and reproduces spatial and mobility discourses that are predicated on a gendered colonial power structure and shows how these become complicit in the construction of an idealized notion of artistic nomadism that aligns with the neoliberal organisation of the self.

In a climate of increased mobility that sees the acceleration of the global circulation of dancers and dances (aided in great part by technology), I seek to open up further investigations on the discursive and embodied uses of travel and mobility in dance training, on the interface between the representation of mobility in dance pedagogies and the embodiment and affect of that mobility and, finally, on the impact of transnationalism on dance practitioners. At the same time, I hope to mobilize a dialogic space between often immobile disciplines and methodologies and encourage dance research to contribute to transnational and mobility studies and the understanding of mobility in a wider context. Choreographing transversal moves between the body of the text and text of the body, I strive to continue feminists' and dance scholars' quest for new 'epistemic relations between history and memory, the aesthetic and the political, the social and the individual' (Foster 1996, p. xv) and for new theoretical and methodological possibilities that foreground the corporeality of theory and the contradictory multiple self always writing with a subjective and partial voice. *Uncovering the ground my dancing body covered, I hope to bring to life its memories and history.*

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