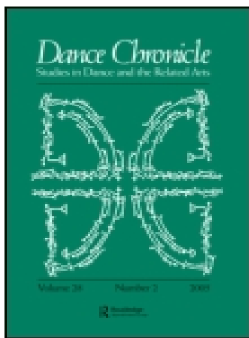

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Dance Chronicle

ISSN: 0147-2526 (Print) 1532-4257 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ldnc20

Dance's Shimmering Call

Megan Bridge

To cite this article: Megan Bridge (2014) Dance's Shimmering Call, Dance Chronicle, 37:2, 267-271, DOI: 10.1080/01472526.2014.914945

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01472526.2014.914945

Published online: 18 Jun 2014.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 75

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=ldnc20

Download by: [megan bridge] **Date:** 27 December 2016, At: 14:38

Dance Chronicle, 37:267–271, 2014
Copyright © 2014 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC
ISSN: 0147-2526 print / 1532-4257 online
DOI: 10.1080/01472526.2014.914945

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Dance's Shimmering Call

MEGAN BRIDGE

Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance
By Erin Manning. 295 pp. Illustrated.
Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2013. $24.95 paper.
ISBN 978-0822353348.

It is a call to attention. Erin Manning's *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* invokes dance, choreography, philosophy, film, and even autism to advocate for a richer relationship to the world around us. Steeped in the process-relational philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, Manning's book speaks to both theorists and practitioners with words that "are never just what they seem to mean: they dance, they gallop, they rest, they tune in or out, they call forth and efface" (p. 164). Manning introduces artwork and neurodiversity as two realms of human experience emblematic of her proposition that life be lived more "relationally." Through inventive language and a deep engagement with continental philosophy, her authoritative text pushes thought to the limits of expressibility, and presents to the reader a world that shimmers with potential.

In reference to Daniel Stern's work on infant psychology,[1] Manning posits the "relational as the very core through which any sense of self is constituted" (p. 3). Picking up threads woven by Brian Massumi,[2] after Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Manning goes so far as to say that "there are few starting points as lethal as the totalitarianism of Being: 'I' is a habit and where it leads is toward the supremacy of the human" (p. 46). She calls for a recentering, a shift of the frame away from human-centered experience, to make room for the "complexity of other ecologies, of other surfaces of experience" (p. 46). The book's first chapter, "Toward a Leaky Sense of Self," starts with the infant. Traditional child development theory suggests that skin-to-skin contact is key to infants developing a healthy sense of "self" and self-sufficiency. But what if the skin were conceived as porous, rather than as a limit or container of a bounded self? What if, through relation,we could experience the ineffable, could experience the world as more than the sum of its parts?

Stern claims that relationality is at its most intensive in infancy. Expanding on this notion, Manning points out that autistics do not lose the ability

to live in "intensive relationality—a lived experience of affective attunement at its preconscious limit" that "gets backgrounded in most adults" (p. 8). Manning celebrates the neurodiversity that allows autistics to experience the world through nonhierarchical and intensive relationality, as opposed to the "neurotypical" approach, which uses cognition to sort, classify, and filter out much of what shimmers around us. Many autistics are unable to communicate in language. While some researchers might classify autistics as "nonrelational," Manning posits their special perception as an example of "hyper-relationality," an ethics of relation that is missing from our hurried and "fully-functional" pathways through life.* For Manning, the fact that some autistics are mute "touches on the ineffable in expressibility. It is more-than a silence, more-than a not-speaking" (p. 193).

Manning introduces autistic Amanda Baggs and her online video *In My Language,* which unfolds in two parts.[3] In the first, Baggs sounds, touches, and otherwise physically and emotionally relates to her environment in an entirely experiential way. In the second part, Baggs does use language to communicate, but Manning foregrounds "the inadequacy of concepts that apply hierarchical dichotomies to experience" (p. 9) as she challenges "the notion that by 'translating' this experience into spoken language she [Baggs] will make it more 'complex' or more 'real' " (p. 9).

Dance artists and scholars have similarly critiqued the privileging of language over embodiment. For example, choreographer Susan Rethorst attends

---

* Manning clearly defines her terms when talking about "autistics" and carefully tries to avoid a glorification of what many experience as a debilitating disorder:

> Autism is a modality of becoming before it is any kind of state. This is not to negate the movement disorder that tends to accompany the "classical autism" of which I speak throughout, nor to downgrade the myriad everyday challenges that tend to set autistics apart. It is simply to emphasize what classical autistics themselves continuously underscore: that autism is also and perhaps especially a way of perceiving the more-than of the coming-to-appearance of a worlding always under way. (p. 180)

Later she writes,

> Lest it has not been clear enough when the concept has come up throughout this book, let me repeat: while all autistics I have encountered prize this mode of perception, none of them would ever create a simplified relay between autistic perception and the everyday experience of an autistic. For autism is a complex world at once full of perceptual richness and replete with painful misalignments to everyday neurotypical existence, many of them of the motor variety that make independent living if not impossible, then very difficult. Not only that: there is no "single" autism. Autism is a spectrum, with as many infinities of perceptual difference as there are within the misidentified "neurotypical" group. (p. 218)

to the primacy of bodily intelligence. Dance and choreography, Rethorst says, need not rely on analytic thought to ensure intellectual rigor. For Rethorst, a dance's ability to "work" on a viewer is inherently bound up with a body's knowledge, a physical "knowing" that comes before cognitive thought.[4] But in opposing physical knowing and cognition, Rethorst's theories appear to reinforce the Cartesian body/mind dichotomy. Manning, however, claims that "'The body' is a misnomer" (p. 16). What we experience as "body" is a collection of processes that collide and emerge to give the illusion of a fixed form at any given point: "The body is infinitely variable, not subject but verb. And as verb it persists, infinitely" (p. 29). Choreographer Deborah Hay's teaching embraces this concept.[*] One of her regular studio mantras, "What if where I am is what I need?" places the "body" in a processual relationship with space, creating what Manning calls "experiential spacetimes." In Manning's concept of body, as in Hay's, the "body" is a fleeting landing site, part of an infinite process of individuation, a process in which the relationship between form and matter is unstable (p. 19).

In dancing, we are able to connect more to movement's durational and experiential qualities, qualities that are backgrounded and habituated in most of our functional movements through daily life. Manning has spent much time in the studio with choreographer William Forsythe, who calls for a heightened connection to the experiential in movement, what dancers might refer to as "embodiment." According to Manning, "Forsythe calls it 'looking for a chain of sensations rather than a chain of positions'" and he "speaks of refraining from 'holding the sensation hostage to your expertise,' of making the experiential felt" (p. 39). The expertise that Forsythe refers to resides in technique. As a choreographer, he is asking his dancers to build technique on technique; rather than just lifting the arm across the body, for example, he asks for movement to initiate in the rib cage, activating lines of force to create a "movement-moving," as Manning calls it, rather than "a movement from the pretense of a stability" (p. 34).

Much as the concept of "the body," for Manning, is a fleeting landing site, choreography too is mobile, relational, processual. In her chapter "Choreography as Mobile Architecture," she proposes that "what makes a work work" is when choreography becomes relational, when it expands beyond individual bodies moving, "when the choreographic begins to shift toward a wider fielding of movement where spacetime itself begins to vibrate with movement expression" (p. 101). The work outlasts itself, haunting the viewer long after the performance is over, but "It's not the *form* of the work that stays with you, it's the how of its capacity to dislodge the you that you thought you were. It's the how of the work's capacity to shift the ground that moves you" (p. 102). This open choreographic field is made up

[*] I participated in two week-long intensive dance workshops with Deborah Hay in Philadelphia (2008 and 2012).

of the movement of individual bodies, but it operates across many bodies that move together. Rather than individual dancers making individual decisions, or responding to individual cues to carry their "own" part of the dance forward, the dance carries and shapes the dancers. The process of cueing and the dancers' real-time relation to those cues creates a feedback loop in which the field is continuously realigned. We witness a shifting, "not simply the body in space, but the space bodying" (p. 136). Space and time become entwined. Our experience of space is completely shaped by the duration of what unfolds before (or within) us, and our experience of time is inseparable from the environment that contains us: "spacetime."

While Manning writes extensively about Forsythe, and mentions Hay in passing, the choreographer I think of most while reading this book is Lucinda Childs. In 2013 in Philadelphia, I was privileged to be part of a group that reconstructed and performed several of Childs's dances from the 1970s, including *Melody Excerpt* (1977). In Childs's work, there is a slippery and expansive relationship to space and time. In her early minimalist works, Childs distributes a limited number of movement phrases across a certain number of bodies, using her understanding of space and tight, repetitive, looping structures based on music or on intricate visual scores to determine how those phrases interweave. As a performer in Childs's work, I experienced directly what Manning refers to as "a relational movement that exceeds the terms of the dancers' individual bodyness" (p. 210). When watching choreography that "works" in this way, the viewer, too, Manning claims, senses that the dance "is happening with and across bodies rather than on them" (p. 101).

Manning refers to cues in dancing (and living) as "landing sites." Cues are wrapped up with memory and time, but they should not be linked with mere functional repetition or with a "stable notion of recall." Rather, "The cue functions not as a simple tool for the memory of a rehearsed past, but as a call toward the future" (p. 105). In Childs's *Melody Excerpt,* three simple movement phrases wrap and weave across five dancing bodies in endless permutations, building rhythmic relation through cues and alignments that densely pepper the score, the dance, and the consciousness of the dancers. This moves toward what Manning refers to as "event-time . . . a miring in the multiplicity of nows—the now that has passed, the now that is passing, and the now that will have been, each phase of nowness contributing to the occasion at hand in a time-loop that resists the organization of experience into a linear continuum" (p. 80). It is no surprise to me that the two dances in *Einstein on the Beach*[*] are referred to as the "field dances." As choreographic fields, they stand out in high relief, clearings in the opera's dense texture and surreal sequences of images. The dances create a shift in the way time

[*] The opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) was directed by Robert Wilson, with music by Philip Glass and original choreography by Andy de Groat. Childs's choreography was used in later stagings. It recently finished touring its fourth staging in the opera's four-decade history.

unfolds in the opera. Up until the field dances, we see the performers as characters in a nonlinear, mostly nonnarrative structure. With the field dances our perspective zooms out, and the performers are now seen in relation to one another, to time, to the choreography, and to the expansive stage of the opera house.

Art, in particular dance and choreography, and autism are lenses of experience through which Manning asks us to encounter her propositions. Just as time and space ripple through the bodying of a choreographic field, Manning repeatedly reminds the reader that the individual "body" is not fixed: "Like all bodies, but perhaps more experientially so, the autistic's body is always already more than one, expressive not in its parts but across the registers of its emergence in co-constituting spacetimes of experience. . . . [F]or many autistics the body does not feel precomposed, with preordained roles: it travels, shifting, changing, recomposing with events of experience" (p. 153). Manning's concept of "body" extends beyond its skin boundaries and is always constituted in relation to other bodies. Movement, thought, and experience itself are also constituted relationally and are thus "always more than one," exceeding a fixed or singular form. Through this multitude, individuation is never actually achieved, but rather experienced as an infinite process, a call to awareness that shimmers and shifts, a never-ending dance of attention.

NOTES

1. Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Harper Collins, 1985).

2. Brian Massumi, "What Concepts Do: Preface to the Chinese Translation of *A Thousand Plateaus,*" *Deleuze Studies*, no. 4 (March 2010): 1–15.

3. Baggs, *In My Language*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hl2jc (accessed May 19, 2014).

4. Susan Rethorst, *A Choreographic Mind: Autobodygraphical Writings*, Kinesis 2 (Helsinki: Teatterikorkeakoulu, 2012), 33–36, 53.Susan Ruthorst.