

Ladies Night at Exedus: Dancing Humor, Sex, and Subversion¹

Greg Downey

If I could *tell* you what I mean, there would be no point in dancing.
– Isadora Duncan²

Your body can't lie to me 'cause I know just what you're thinking.
– Maxi Priest in Shabba Ranks Housecall

To *write* about dancing is a problematic endeavor. Isadora Duncan located her impetus to dance in the gap between the word and the performance—she danced what she could not express in words. I had always presumed that her point was to criticize the assumption that all of human experience (or perhaps dance specifically) could be encompassed by or translated into the spoken (or written) word. An incident which I witnessed and in which I participated during my research on

1. This paper is a substantially rewritten version of a paper presented as part of the panel “Gendering Musical Contexts” at the 1992 Midwest Regional meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology. It was then entitled “Ladies Night at Exedus: Humor, Sex, and Dancing Down Authority.” The project has benefited throughout its execution from the continued guidance of Philip Bohlman and the critical input of Carolyn Johnson. Brian Currid, Nick DeGenova, Joanne Marron, Eve Meceda, Trevor Wade, and Michael Zwiebach have also read and commented insightfully on various versions of this paper. I use “Ladies” rather than “Ladies™” to preserve the title given to the event in the club’s billing.

2. Quoted in Judith Lynne Hanna 1983, 7. Martha Graham is reputed to have said something very similar: “The body says what words cannot.” In the preface to her book *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (1986), Susan Leigh Foster discusses the widespread hesitation of choreographers and dancers to speak or write about dance.

dance in reggae clubs in Chicago broadened my interpretation of Duncan's statement, and may serve as a point of departure from which to explore several gaps between the ideas of "telling" and "dancing," and their possible implications for the discussion of dance.

Duncan's statement might be understood to suggest that dancing is not exclusively about "telling." Because of a persistent assumption that dance is like theater (as indeed some dances are), dance performances are often treated as enactments of abstract ideas or narratives, as if there were necessarily a choreographed plot lying behind the movement. Studying dances in settings like a reggae club, however, offers a fertile contrast with the metaphor of dance as theater (a metaphor which is nonetheless very useful, and which I will use). I argue that dancing is a form of social production, through which space is inscribed with meaning, relationships negotiated, and dancers' identities generated.

Also, one might not be able to "tell what one means" by dancing because "telling" is not permitted. Dancing and other forms of performance can be seen as forms of everyday social resistance or alternative modes of expression, oftentimes difficult to interpret definitively (see, for example, Scott 1990). Discussion of the subversive potential of dances will bring the subjects of play, joking, and ambiguity in performance into this essay, topics that merit far more detailed treatment than the scope of this project permits.

Finally, this discussion of the difference between "telling" and "dancing" poses questions about the objectives both of dance and of dance research. I believe that in this final regard, the study of dancing has a great deal to offer to the study of music-making. Talking (or writing) about dancing helps us to think about the ways we make and use music and, in the process, *make ourselves* in practical, physical ways. This work, it is hoped, will add to this greater discussion in a suggestive way, reconnoitering the terrain without definitively mapping it.

I wish to focus on a brief interaction that I observed on the floor of a reggae dance club in Chicago. After describing the setting and the social dynamics that it might bring to bear on the participants in the event, I will “perform” three textual interpretations of what took place. Each representation is a performance in writing, about dancing, and each is intended as a potential interpretation of this particular dance. The original performance in the club lasted, at most, thirty seconds; but during it, a myriad of forces, symbols, and practices were brought into play whose patient unwinding reveals a very rich performative moment.

Setting the “Stage”

Exedus II, the reggae club in which I was dancing and doing field work on the night in question, does not simply *exist*; it *happens*. While the space of the club is a configuration of concrete, wood, electrical wiring, plumbing, sound equipment, mirrors, bottles, tables and the like, it is also a collection of movement, meaning, and people. Bodies moving in the space—dancing, drinking, singing, working, playing—are understood by actors and observers both as determined by their position and movement, and as inscribing the concrete, wood, electrical wire, and such with significance by their actions. A dance floor becomes a dance floor by means of the dancing.

Exedus II is a frame; or, the place is framed as a particular type of space, a reggae dance club (on the concept of a frame see Bateson 1972 and Goffman 1986). The term “frame” emphasizes a double movement: on the one hand, the club-goers frame the space, and on the other, they are framed by it. In the first respect, “frame” denotes the determination of the relevant context for a social event—what Erving Goffman characterized as the process of defining “what is it that’s going on here?”

(1986, 8). Through the way they behave, how they interact, those in the club assert a conception of what is happening. In a movement in the “opposite” direction (as I describe more completely below), the “definition” of the event and of the space enables certain activities by the club patrons and personnel and makes sense of what they do. By moving in the frame, positioning themselves, and relating to significant spaces, people communicate with each other and establish who they are.

The most obvious delineation of the space of Exedus II arises from the stage separating musicians from dancers. Those on stage are “performers,” separated from and raised above the “audience.” But this obvious spatial boundary may direct attention away from the majority of performances of gender taking place in the club. The primary actors in the incident I shall relate below were not on stage. In order to understand social dance (as opposed to stage dance) as performance, it is necessary to envision all space in Exedus II as performance space. Everyone in the club is a performer, not in the sense that they are sending messages to a passive audience, but in that all of them are players creating a “performance”—the club itself.

The dance floor is tacitly gradated from the stage into concentric zones, distinguished from one another by the gender and behavior of the dancers. The area immediately in front of the stage is typically female-dominated, occupied by a group of women who diligently frequent Exedus II. It is they who respond most energetically to the music, dancing enthusiastically and interacting with the musicians on stage. The lead vocalist (Kelly Rankin, on the night in question) directs much of his performance to them.

The female-dominated core gradually gives way to a ring of less gender-specific space reserved for dancers who also face toward the band. This area is still reserved for “serious,” deliberate dancing; anyone not wanting to move vigorously will generally retreat to a yet further ring to drink and sway and watch the band. Around this core of dancers is a transitional space where the crowd is thinner, and through which people

weave toward the bar or the door. It is here that the imperative to face forward is relaxed, and one often sees couples dancing face-to-face. Behind this area, along the walls and the bar, is the gallery, a predominantly male space. Dancing here is less focused than elsewhere, but nearly all spectators in this area will face the stage to watch either the band or the dancers.

Kelly Rankin and the Mix, the band for Ladies Night, is a group consisting of a vocalist and four musicians: a drummer, bass player, guitarist, and keyboard player (an additional percussionist sometimes performs with the group). Other vocalists may join Rankin on the stage, some expected by the band, others simply appearing out of the crowd. Instrumentalists maintain the groove of the music, laying down a thick mat of interlocking rhythms and melodic fragments over which the "toaster" improvises. "Toasting," a relative of "dancehall," a musical style of Jamaican origin, is a type of performance resembling a fusion of reggae, rap, and scat. Vocalists trade lines or stanzas of lyrics, each toaster performing in turn as a soloist. Toasters improvise lyrics, displaying virtuosity by the dexterous use of particularly appropriate "borrowed" lyrical references in verbal duels, by adept reinterpretation of a well-known line, or by improvising an extended series of rhyming lines based on a familiar, borrowed phrase.

The principles governing the configuration of performers on the stage are similar to those which enable the audience to fashion a coherent dance space. The immobile musicians (drummer and keyboardist) form a gallery along the back and side of the stage; the guitarist and bass player are inside this, and the vocalists move dynamically throughout a performance "core" in the front and center on the stage. Performers at the back of the stage typically sway in a restrained manner, increasing the intensity of bodily movement and maneuvering toward center stage if possible when they begin an instrumental solo.

The apparent structuring of space in the club does not derive from adherence to an abstract mental template or to conscious rules. Rather, regularity in behavior is the result of the

successful incorporation or embodiment by dancers and musicians of principles for the generation of action.³ Although it is possible to articulate rules as I have done above (for example, "movement toward the center of performance space accompanies an increase in dance intensity"), these commonsense inclinations are generally unreflected and instinctive. The internalization of these generative schemata or proclivities allows social actors to behave coherently, even in novel situations; each night, socialized reggae dancers are able to generate an appropriate frame with whatever music, people, and bodies happen to be at their disposal.

The musical/dance space is, I would argue, sexually charged. Songs performed by Kelly Rankin and the Mix focus thematically on heterosexual relationships which are generally characterized as antagonistic, potentially dangerous, or contested. In toasted dialogues Kelly Rankin borrowed lines on the night in question from well-known songs like "Poison" or "O.P.P." The song "Poison," a popular dance record by Bel Biv Devoe, cautions a male listener that a certain woman is "poison"—attractive but dangerous. "O.P.P.," by the group Naughty by Nature, is a rap song that explores the perils and rewards of illicit sexual relations.

The tension between men and women described in lyrics is elaborated in dance and nonverbal performance. During one performance the men on stage (with the aid of the women dancing around her) succeeded in goading a female toaster to step up from the dance floor. When the woman joined Kelly Rankin and his male vocalist/foil, the pair of men exchanged stanzas in competition with her. Each side in turn drew on an extensive repertoire of borrowed song lyrics while physically

3. This short discussion of practice-oriented approaches to performance owes its impetus to Pierre Bourdieu (1977); to other elaborations in the work of William Hanks (1990), Margaret Drewal (1992), Michael Jackson (1989), Marcel Mauss (1973), and Sherry Ortner (1984); and to seminars and discussions with William Hanks and Jean Comaroff.

driving the other back across center stage in reproach—the partisan crowd cheering when a verbal salvo found its mark. On another evening later the same month, the jousting between the lead vocalist and the women at the front of the stage apparently exceeded the fragile bonds of the frame. After a set, as Kelly Rankin went to the back room, an intense argument broke out between the singer and several women. As bottles were thrown, I was pushed off the dance floor by the stampeding patrons, and the police came in to break up the fight.

Similarly, performances on the dance floor between dancers are, in part, “performances” of interpersonal relationships. They both signify and generate relations among dancers. Body movement and attitude, for example, are used to “mark” one’s date to discourage others from approaching. Through dancing, people create boundaries around groups of friends, sexual or romantic interest in another dancer is indicated, these advances are rebuffed, and attention is drawn to dancers. These strategies of interaction all make use of implicit principles governing body and movement which operate in and constitute the dance club frame.

The set of behaviors available to actors and the meaning of these actions depend upon their being staged within the Exedus II frame. While dancing, for example, people generally stand closer to each other and tolerate a much greater amount of incidental body contact than they would outside this frame. In a concert hall, by contrast, while bodies are sometimes crowded together as closely as they are in a dance club, people tend to shrink in their seats, avoiding a contact with others that, in that frame, would carry a quite different meaning.

The alignment of one’s body in the space also becomes meaningful in relation to the presence or absence of musicians on stage. In a dance club that plays prerecorded music—or during breaks in the live music at Exedus II, when a disc jockey plays recordings—there is no natural axis upon which the dancers may align, and they reconfigure the space and face in numerous directions. While the band is playing, by contrast, a

strong spatial axis is set up; to veer from this axis is socially significant and indicates (or produces) a type of social approach or attachment.

These principles also allow the dancers and club patrons to create the frame itself through their actions. There are other situations in which dancers do not face toward live performers on stage, and in so doing define differently both the frame (for example, a “wedding reception” instead of a “concert”) and the role of the performers (“social facilitators” rather than “performers”). If people in the dance area all stood still and faced a polka band during an Oktoberfest celebration, or patrons stood up and wandered around during a performance by a string quartet, they would create (or define) a different event.

With the stage for the performance set, I will now tell three stories, all ostensibly descriptions of the same event, but each focusing on a different collection of performers. In all three stories a woman dances with a police officer in Exedus II, but the meanings of her dance shift as it is interpreted as a communication with the officer, with her date, or with the primarily male onlookers.

First Performance

On a cold Wednesday Ladies Night in early November, Kelly Rankin and the Mix were playing to an enthusiastic, packed house at Exedus II, a Chicago reggae club. As the crowd grew and the temperature rose in the bar, the band settled into their second set of extended grooves while Kelly Rankin toasted and worked the audience. An on-duty, uniformed police officer came into Exedus II—as he did nearly every night—and stood at the edge of the dance floor. He was unusually tall and intimidating, armored in a police-issue black leather jacket and talking periodically into the radio receiver attached to his shoulder—a static outcropping of

surveillance in a skanking sea of dancers. I smelled marijuana smoke mixed in with the aromatic combination of beer, sweat, and heat. Perhaps it was the officer's presence in the club that sensitized me to the ambient traces of ganja lacing the air; perhaps the unceremoniously opened washroom door was exhaling the simultaneous extinction of numerous joints. The police officer normally made only a cursory scan of the audience, talked with the manager or bouncer, and left after a few minutes, satisfied that nothing was so legally awry as to warrant his continued attention. This night the officer stood longer than usual among the dancers, watching the crowd. Suddenly, a well-dressed woman left her date, walked over to the police officer, and began to dance with him, against him, on him. First facing him and then turning her back, she ground her pelvis against his body. Her face was frozen in an intensely blank non-expression. The police officer was dumbstruck, paralyzed. Before he could react, she stopped and left the bar with her date. The crowd around me erupted in hysterics, and the embarrassed police officer abruptly and awkwardly terminated his overly long stay.

When the police officer strode into Exedus II and stood watching the crowd, he performed his power. Drawing on a repertoire of available behaviors, he fashioned a performance which not only signified his status but manifested the authority of his position. The police officer's action (or inaction) created and declared his difference from other patrons, implying that the frame did not apply to him. He stood still, faced away from the stage, and stared intently and obviously at the crowd. In so doing he attacked the definition of the space and the role of the musicians. His gaze and immobility created a sphere of self-consciousness which rippled outward in the dance frame maintained by Kelly Rankin and the Mix and their audience. He was not simply enacting or symbolizing power from "outside" the frame; his behavior and its effects were a real incursion of that power *into* the frame.

The officer also implied through his activity that he had the power to impose a new frame on the situation. He created

a rival “center” in the space of Exedus II, a slowly-expanding rupture in the dance frame. Whereas the band and audience generated a space of play, license, pleasure, sexuality, and celebration through music and movement, the police officer established himself as a point of surveillance, even menace. A world accompanied the officer when he strode through the door, and the play frame began to be eroded by this intrusion of outside authority into the space of the band, the dancers, and the music. His scrutinizing body, defined by its legal capacity for legitimate violence, stood menacingly against those bodies being used as instruments of pleasure.

The woman who stepped forward to dance against the police officer reasserted the primacy of the Exedus II frame and recontextualized his inactivity. Her physical dance movements were not unusual motions for interactions between friends. Through this aggressive invitation, she was overtly challenging the officer to dance and indicating an interest in him. Within the Exedus frame, this type of interaction is considered normal; indeed, it is presumed desirable from a male perspective. However, the movement was understood—both by the embarrassed officer and by the laughing audience—to indicate something else entirely.

By dancing with the police officer, the woman revealed the rigid constraints placed upon him by his position. Uniformed police officers on duty, although they have a great deal of social influence and legal authority, do not dance in reggae clubs. In fact, the authority generated by his “police officer” behavior would have been shattered had he behaved in a manner inconsistent with this position—that is, had he responded by dancing. If he were to maintain his power and identity as a police officer, it was necessary to decline this invitation to dance.

In order to be a social player within the Exedus II frame and to inhabit the place in which the officer stood, one must dance. Too close to the stage to be a spectator in the gallery, the officer would have had to reconcile his immobility with the space generated by the other dancers. He could have done so,

either by asserting that his role was different from the others (the rules did not apply to him) or by redefining the space (that is, discouraging all other dancers). By attempting to dance with the officer, the woman in the reggae club exposed his inadequacy or incompetence as a social being inside the Exedus frame. She, in effect, danced “you don’t belong here” at him, bringing his inability or unwillingness to dance into confrontation with social context.

This censure was aggravated by the sexual dynamics of the encounter and the ongoing bodily “gendering” performed in Exedus. While her dance had the same appearance as a typical expression of social, romantic, or sexual interest—that is, an affirmation of the officer’s socially constructed masculinity—it was understood in the opposite way. It is generally assumed in the Exedus II frame that “masculine” men should always be sexually ready and responsive to women. When he seemed unable to respond actively to a female advance, the officer’s masculinity was thrown into question. It mattered little whether his refusal stemmed from surprise or lack of interest; the stigma is the same in an environment where men are assumed to be both sexually active and heterosexual.

Not only did the woman’s performance reveal the officer’s “inadequacy” as both a social and “masculine” player within the Exedus II dance frame, but it also claimed for her the role of “active” subject and forced him into the role of “passive,” reacting object. As representatives of legal authority, the police ordinarily assume the role of active agents, exerting power and influence over those around them. But if this officer had chosen to act and accept the woman’s invitation, he would have abandoned his position and relinquished all privilege derived from his status as a policeman. In addition, had he responded to the provocation, he faced the possibility of rejection and humiliation.

Trapped in this frame between his conflicting roles as “sexual, masculine male” and “on-duty, active police officer,” his inadequacy as both in the musical space was revealed. His be-

havior had threatened the continued viability of the dance frame; dancers became self-conscious and discouraged as their behavior was reframed. The dancing woman reasserted the primacy of the dance frame, within which the officer's behavior constructed him as deficient of agency, socially inept, and sexually inadequate. When he left quickly to the laughter of the audience, everyone present, including the officer himself, appeared to concede that the women's framing of the situation was definitive.

Second Performance

I had come to do field research at Exedus II and was standing at the edge of the dance floor watching the band. Immediately in front of the gallery of men was a dancing couple who had been in nearly the same spot for the entire second set. They were hard to miss, perhaps because they were directly in front of me, perhaps because the woman dancing was both attractive and an excellent dancer. She was dressed well, especially for a Wednesday night, in a club which is generally extremely casual. Her date was also an animated dancer, but he appeared awkward, draped over his date, while she virtually ignored him. Although his hands were hung over her shoulders and his smiling face was attentively only inches from hers, her face, turned to the side, was frozen and unsmiling as she appeared to concentrate on dancing. This frozen indifference, which she maintained throughout the night, only accentuated the intensity with which she danced.

A police officer came into the club and stood at the edge of the dance floor. When he stayed longer than was his custom, his presence started to discourage those dancing around him. The woman in front of me broke from her date and began dancing with the officer. While the astonished police officer collected himself, she shimmed suggestively against him.

The woman's date was standing at the end of the arc of men in the gallery during the dance with the police officer. When all the men around me began to laugh, the date pretended to lead the laughter, as though he were in on the joke. It appeared to me that his reactions were exaggerated. He gestured outrageously, covering his mouth with one hand and pointing with his other arm at the odd couple on the dance floor. When she suddenly stopped dancing, she strode over to him, calmly took her coat, and left, walking in front of the laughing gallery of spectators. Her date trailed along behind her toward the door of the club; his steps were bouncy compared to her businesslike, grounded exit. The police officer left soon after, his departure as abrupt as the dancers' had been.

The possibility of multiple interpretations raises the question, "Why dance?" Because it is the predominant medium through which all social interactions are performed in this particular frame? Perhaps. But if the objective of the performance was simply narrative or communicative—telling the officer to go away or questioning his masculinity—a verbal confrontation might have been equally effective and less equivocal. The strategic ambiguity of this dance allowed for the possibility of multiple interpretations and prevented any easy resolution of its meaning or intent.

The second interpretation of the dance favors the possibility that the intended "target" of the woman's dance was her date. The young man, whom she had ignored most of the evening, tried to mute this possibility with his loud peals of laughter. Yet there was a strain of discomfort in his overly large gestures, an edge of insecurity. His actions indicated that he was painfully aware of the acute danger this ambiguity posed for his social position. There were potential subversions within subversions, and he could not be certain of his own status in relation to the mockery—as an insider or outsider on the joke. The intention of the dance was hidden from those who observed it, concealed by the fog and ambivalence of possible double- and triple-entendres.

While not all dances are ambiguous, the intractable polysemy of this particular dance is part of what makes it particularly subversive. The use of strategic ambiguity plays on the distinction between what James Scott has called public and hidden transcripts (1990, 2, 4). Scott defined discourse that takes place outside the observation of those who hold power ("offstage") as hidden, articulating a different, often critical, interpretation of social conditions than the prevailing, public discourse. But in this case, the subversive text does not take place "offstage," as in Scott's model, since the whole of Exedus II functions as a stage. The attack on public authority is in full view of all participants, dominant and subordinate alike. Herein lies the power of its subversion. The "hidden transcript" is only thinly veiled, the irony scarcely concealed. The division between hidden and public becomes uncertain. Indeed, who is in on the joke? And, for that matter, what exactly *is* the joke?

The ambiguity of the dance afforded the dancer protection from retaliation. The police officer (like the woman's date) had no definitive grounds for reaction or retaliation as he would have had in the case of a less equivocal verbal confrontation. An overt, unambiguous challenge to the officer's prestige (or the date's status) could be disputed or punished. But the same ambiguity that protected the dancing woman threatened her date.

The woman was also protected by the fact that the challenge was danced as a parody. As I have suggested earlier, her symbolic defacing of the officer's authority and socially constructed masculinity took a form nearly equal to an expression of female sexual interest or availability. The insult resided in the careful parody of congenial behavior. Thus it was also difficult to punish or refute her dance because it superficially resembled a friendly act, even if it was recognized as a corrosive mockery of the social order the policeman attempted to impose.

By calling it a joke, I do not intend to belittle this multiple subversion of masculinity and authority. Jokes often make those in positions of dominance extremely uncomfortable. As

the political satirist and the grade-school class clown attest by their actions, and their targets by their attempts at repression, laughter has an irresistible and insidious effect upon the foundation of authority. It is difficult to argue with the absurd. The woman in Exedus II was also protected by the fact that her attack was "play." The entire club, in fact, may be said to be a "play" frame, in the sense that it is "not serious," set apart in space and time from "real life" or "ordinary time." The dance is "only" play or "merely" a joke, performed "just for fun." But in this performance, the joke detonated on the edge separating seriousness and play, threatening several potential targets. The dancer's frozen-straight face offered no relief to either the officer or the woman's date. There was no sly wink to tell anyone that they were in on the joke and could laugh with abandon.

Third Performance

On a cold week night, I decided to brave the Chicago snow and head to Wrigleyville to gather data for my field research. Fellow graduate students, who swore the previous weekend that a night spent dancing was exactly what they needed to snap out of November malaise, decided on this particular Wednesday that they really should stay out of the vicious cold and study. So, after another disappointing round of phone calls, I headed for Exedus II alone. When I had begun my research, I had been looking for uses of the icons, symbols, or images of Rastafari religion in reggae performances in Chicago. By this time, I had given up on finding references to Rastafari and was thinking about gender and dance.

I was always worried that someone might see me, so I never took notes where anyone might observe. The reporter's notebook I carried looked to me like that of a police officer and made me self-conscious. Perhaps others in the club thought I was an undercover cop—maybe they did not care. I only took notes infrequently, hid-

ing in a stall in the bathroom. Better to be suspected of having a weak bladder than to be recognized as a researcher.

That night, I stood in the gallery and watched other club patrons dance, feeling more than a little lame. Like a number of men grouped near the wall of the club, I danced reservedly with beer in hand, guarding a tile square in the floor with my swaying. I am certain that the woman dancing in front of me attracted as much attention from the other solitary men nursing beers as she did from me. When she danced with the police officer and left with her date, I joined in laughter with the other men in the gallery. Whether it was because I was already a little frustrated that I repeatedly went to the club alone with a notebook shoved in my back pocket or because I have subsequently thought often about this event, the woman's dance made me self-conscious. Perhaps some of the other men in the gallery who were standing, watching, and not dancing much of the night shared my discomfort.

When the woman's date pointed at the odd couple on the dance floor, he attempted to assert a particular construction of her actions. He tried to frame the encounter, putting forward one definitive explanation as a way of forestalling the possible others. Although I have indicated that I was unconvinced by his performance, *any* "understanding" of the woman's dance involves imputing motivation (or, more generally, meaning) to her motions—an assumption of intention which may or may not be correct. Like the woman's date, I may attempt to assert publicly a definition of the performance frame through my actions. This essay, indeed, is itself a performance through which I have attempted to frame the dance event, to contain the parodic force of the performance, and to assert my own interpretation of what occurred. Like a man on the dance floor pointing and laughing, this analyst pecks at the dancing from the gallery on a computer.

It is interesting to note that, because of the officer's position on the dance floor, the audience for this performance was predominantly male. The policeman appeared to have the

greatest effect upon the men in the club whenever he entered. Whereas women dancing primarily in the “core” of the space may not even have noticed his transitory presence behind them, the men around the periphery were aware of his every move. Perhaps because his position as an “authority figure” made him seem a type of superman, or perhaps because the men in the club were the particular objects of his surveillance, he seemed to have a more profound effect on male behavior than female behavior. (It is the men in the club who tend to start fights which the police are then called in to stop, and it is primarily men who appear to smoke and exchange marijuana. But, as most of this latter traffic occurs in the men’s restroom, perhaps I am simply not privy to women’s activity.)

In a broader context, the woman’s dance might be construed to be a more general attack on those who would stand and watch without participating. Perhaps it might even be read as an indictment of masculinity. Were these effects that the woman intended? No one, except the dancer herself, can know, and for my purposes her consciousness of potential interpretations is not absolutely necessary. This is one of the singular powers of this dance: the more that I reflect upon the encounter, the more the potential interpretations multiply, and my uncertainty increases. The dance could “mean” everything I have suggested (and more), or it could mean none of these things. The actions of those involved indicate that some consensus emerged about the woman’s intentions—the crowd laughed as the officer retreated—but that contingent consensus cannot be mistaken for a definitive interpretation. All those involved were potentially implicated in the joke, and their reaction—laughter—might be seen as a strategic performance designed to construe the dance one way or another, a type of performative damage control leveled against the insurrectionary ambiguity of the dance.

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As the expanding literature about the body and physical practices continues to demonstrate, attention to the details of physicality can reveal interesting ways in which power and resistance are enacted or performed. In discussions of embodiment, it often seems that the bodies themselves—the practices, the dances—remain one step outside the analysis. Many arguments focus on the space or material culture which bodies inhabit or on discourse *about* bodies and physicality.⁴ Seldom do the fluent limbs, articulating torsos, and muscular exertions of particular, idiosyncratic individuals and their bodies impress their image upon the page. The analysis of dance events offers a fascinating opportunity to redress this imbalance with a sensitive study of particular dramaturgies of power through bodies. I offer this short examination of an even shorter performance as an example of one possible approach to the rehabilitation of the particular in the study of music, dance, and embodied discourse.

“Embodied discourse” is, perhaps, a misnomer, to the extent that it leads us to suspect that movement and dancing are easily translated into a written form. On the contrary, it is the ability of different forms of dancing simultaneously to communicate multiple, even contradictory, possible meanings without resolution that can make them particularly interesting. The ambiguity of dance is not a problem to be solved, but a potential to be explored, both in dance and in that other “performance” that is writing about dance. The translation of practices like dance challenges the writer to take dancing not simply as a subject, but as a model for the practice of writing. The writer, like a translator, “must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language” (Benjamin 1969, 81), even if in this case the foreign language is a danced one, stretch-

4. Susan Leigh Foster (1992) lodges similar complaints against prevailing tendencies in discussions of corporeality in her trenchant discussion of dancing bodies. This work is indebted to suggestions that she makes for dance research.

ing the limits of written language's tolerance for "assuming unaccustomed forms" (Asad 1986, 157).

It should come as no surprise that the same academic tradition that has historically neglected gender issues in the study of music—that has suffered, in Susan McClary's words, from a "fear of the body" (1991, 4)—has also granted an inferior status to writing about dance. To leave *Exedus II* with a disembodied "music"—a recording or a musical "text"—would be to ignore the richness of the music-making taking place within its walls. The objective of this short essay, then, has been not only to suggest that more work should be done on dance, but also to illustrate the potential rewards of looking at music from a performative (or dance) perspective, to focus on the bodily or "danced" features of music. Dance thus points the way toward the recovery in our work of a sense of the physicality and particularity of music.

Studies of dance and music typically approach performance by way of the metaphor of the theater stage, where the proscenium separates a passive, "receiving" audience from active, "transmitting" dancers or musicians. While the use of theater as a guiding metaphor in the social sciences and humanities has proven extremely fruitful (one need only look at the myriad offshoots of Goffman's work to see this), the ease with which studies of performance can assume this form is sometimes perilous. The idea that performance is a representation or presentation of some preexisting text can obscure the ways in which both social actors and systems of meaning are produced in performance. The pleasure of these arts is in large part this pleasure of the creative and recreative. Through dancing we produce dancers and audiences, social relations and distinctions, time and space, order and insurrection, ideas and sensations. Dance is not simply "about" people, ideas, society, or reality; it is one of the experiences from which all of these are fashioned.

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