

Dynamic-Kinetic-Affective-Sensation

Sarah Kelleher

A man in a white t-shirt stands under the frame of a wooden shelter. He is surrounded by four black clad performers who point their phones at him, lighting him with their torches. He begins to dance on the spot to some internal soundtrack, with exuberance, with something like liberation, until he falls to the floor, exhausted. He appears to be in distress. The people in black follow his descent, crouching alongside as he falls, keeping their lights trained on him.

A man enters a warehouse through battered concertina doors. He is bent at the waist, naked except for a pair of shorts and white trainers. Balanced on his back is a sheaf of sticks. The sticks are loose and unwieldy and long, almost as long as he is tall. The man attempts to contain the precarious bundle, his arms reaching backwards. His pose is tightly coiled, as if he is about to dive from a great height. The sticks fall in a tangle around him.

In a cavernous warehouse a man stands in a circle of salt. The salt is deep and neatly raked into two concentric rings, a narrow outer perimeter and wider inner band. He begins to move, his feet planted wide on the clean swept concrete, rolling his head in circles. His movements become more frenetic until, arms outstretched and head thrown back, he spins into the border of salt. As he turns, he kicks up the salt in heavy sprays, and the neat rings blur and scatter.

Yes, But Do You Care? is a work by Marie Brett that considers the Assisted Decision Making Capacity Act, a piece of legislation that supports the facility of people to make decisions about their own resources and personal affairs, free of intervention. The guiding principles of the Act emphasise minimal intervention and due regard to a person's right to bodily integrity, privacy and autonomy. It supports the human right to make a 'bad' decision. But it is a complex ethical area to navigate, if for instance the person with the right to make a 'bad decision' is living with a brain disease such as dementia, and is cared for by a family member, one whose human rights are also implicated.

How can you translate the cold abstraction of a legal document into a visual medium? How do you convey the complexities and nuances of a piece of legislation with far reaching consequences? How do you *perform* the deep and challenging truths of caring for a person with dementia, without simply representing or exemplifying them? For this work, Brett has collaborated with the dancer and choreographer Philip Connaughton to translate this conceptual and emotional complexity into 'dynamic-kinetic-affective sensation'.ⁱ Dance becomes an instrument for organizing meaning and the body becomes the medium through which the hidden truths of lived experience are fleshed out.

Brett's scenic design provides a framework for unfolding an oblique narrative around the social implications and lived realities of caring. The work is set in a vast, empty cold storage warehouse which dwarfs Connaughton's body. Other moments are staged under a wooden structure like a canopy or shelter, its linear framework dramatically lit so that it traps the performers in a grid of shadow. Brett's practice has previously engaged with the rich significance of folk materials: here, the circle of salt draws a protective cordon around Connaughton, while the sheaf of sticks can be read as both burden, literalising the expression of making a rod for one's own back, but also as instruments of defence, empowerment or protection.

Connaughton's choreography produces robust and intense kinetic metaphors for the emotional labour of caring: stop, start, fall and rise, backtrack, breakdown and remake, excitation, stumble and release. Four performers in black function as a chorus, giving voice to first person accounts of caring for someone with dementia, its hardships and tenderness, its moments of absurdity and occasional hilarity. Initially conceived as a live performance, the strictures of Covid meant that *Yes, But Do You Care?* was re-worked as filmed documentation and so the camera becomes another choreographic element. It whirls alongside Connaughton as he spins inside the salt circle, it transports us to several vantage points within and without the circle of performance. We can linger with the performers' expressions and gestures, we are granted an intimate proximity with the dancer's breath and exertion.

In its leveraging of the expressive power of the moving body, *Yes, But Do You Care?* sits within the recent choreographic turn (or more precisely 'return') in contemporary performance art, one that is characterised by a very particular use of dance to re-imagine the visual arts through its own procedures and forms.ⁱⁱ Through the constitutive qualities of dance, such as ephemerality, corporeality and precariousness, choreography can express problems and propose new relationships between bodies, movement, time, sensation and thought. The theorist André Lepicki argues that choreography possess a particular affective-political force within the broader field of contemporary art, because of the ways in which it demonstrates 'an ethics of persisting while facing the demands of absence'.ⁱⁱⁱ Dance is necessarily transient, it is a (potentially) endless citation of a singular yet absent choreographic source, a fact which, in Lepicki's words, 'insists on making a dance return:

again and again, despite (or rather because of) its ephemerality'.^{iv} In this sense, dance might be the art form that best communicates caring as a form of labour - physically demanding, immaterial, self-exploitative and (almost) endlessly repetitive.

Yes, But Do You Care? is both poetic and polemic, animating and enlivening in a cogent way the realities and contradictions of caring and the intensities of its physical and emotional labour. Vitaly, Brett and Connaghton position the moving, dancing body as more than an expression of grace and *jouissance*, but as a persistent, resilient and politicized entity.

ⁱ André Lepecki, 'Dance, Choreography and the Visual: Elements for a Contemporary Imagination', in Cosmin Costinaş and Ana Janevski (eds) *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive?*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), pp. 12-19, p. 15

ⁱⁱ Between 1958-65 there was a sudden emergence of works by very different visual artists that used dance to re-imagine the ways in which visual art conceived of itself as both a practice and a discourse. Examples would include Allan Kaprow, Robert Morris, Carolee Schneeman and Robert Rauschenberg in the US. Lygia Pape and Helio Oiticica in Brazil, the Gutai Group in Japan and Yves Klein in France. See Lepecki, 'Dance, Choreography and the Visual'

ⁱⁱⁱ André Lepecki, 'Dance, Choreography and the Visual'. 15

^{iv} Lepecki, 'Dance, Choreography and the Visual', 19

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