

Still Moving Still

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Still Moving Still combines two enduring loves, dancing and artists' books, in order to see what ideas might be produced through that union. Dance is not a book and a book is not dance. But is there potential for dance and possibilities for an expanded notion of dance to be found and or created in book form? How might we bring an understanding of dance and the body to the book providing a lens through which to perceive/read? How might the book attain a 'state of dance?' (Brakhage, 2008, p. 24).¹ In '*Still Moving Still*' the paradox between the static and moving image is examined to discover how we perceive movement that continually 'escapes the eye' and how the temporal might be inscribed on the page.

Anything, which occupies a space just as its own size, is stationary. But in each moment of its flight an arrow can only occupy a space just its own size. Hence at each moment of its flight the arrow is not moving but stationary. But what is true of the arrow at each moment of a period is true of it throughout the period. Hence during the whole time of its flight the arrow is not moving but stationary.²

And so what is movement but a series of stills and how long a period of time does a still need to be still in order for it to be perceived as static, and how short a period of time before it is in flow and imperceptible? Can a still move and if so how? If, as Grosz states, 'Perception is the way living beings deal with matter, utilise the images that are the world itself for their needs and activities' (Grosz, 2004, p. 164) then how might I perceive motion within static images or bodies or things?

The focus for this research is the collection of over 5,000 artists' books held at the National Art Library (NAL) of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London.³ Over time I have become increasingly aware of how the process

and focus of this research and the ways of looking at books has altered. It has become the watching of the book rather than the dancer ‘... with the extraordinary, ultra-lucid eyes that transform everything they see into a prey of the abstract mind’ (Copeland & Cohen, 1983, p. 59). I am hunting dance therefore it is important to understand that I am looking at the books with the intention of seeing dance; that these personal deliberations draw on my own experiential understandings of dance and knowledge of contemporary choreographic processes and strategies.

Moving still moving still moving still moving still, even the small inclination of the italic suggests movement – a lean towards overbalance. It is the forward, ongoing nature of things that simulates or suggests movement, providing a sense of looking out towards the next moment. This looking forward to the next is a powerful force of the imagination and can produce dramatic physical responses. Steve Paxton, dancer, movement educator and originator of contact improvisation, teaches a movement exercise that asks the dancer to firstly place their thinking in front of themselves and then to reverse this, placing their thoughts behind them. The change in speed that is produced – faster when in front and slower when behind – is striking and clearly demonstrated to me the ability of thought to influence physical action, and also how the directions of forward, out, and onwards all encourage movement.⁴ The ‘still’ in written and spoken text is determined by the grammar and punctuation of the full stop, comma, and colon, etc., as well as the spacing left between words, which differentiates them from each other. In response to a performance by Yvonne Rainer of *Trio A*,⁵ Jean Nuchtern a journalist for the *Soho Weekly News* wrote the following text:

There is no part of this article that is any more important than any other part each word in a sentence paragraph carries the same weight as any other and its smoothness lies not only in the equal weightedness of each word sentence and paragraph but in the juxtaposition of one paragraph to another which causes the reader to react to the article as a whole rather than as segments.

(in Lambert, 1999, p. 96)

The removal of the gaps between the words is a typographical attempt at horizontality, a way of flattening the energy of the syntax and parallels Rainer’s desire to ‘make no one thing (is) any more important than any other’ (Lambert, 1999, p. 97). It removes the still moments between words placing them in continuous transition.

The still photographic image as potential dance requires a shift, a re-positioning of the perceptual field of the subject in order to activate it into motion. The photographic images in Ines von Ketelhodt’s *Leporello 1* and *Leporello 2* animate me kinaesthetically through the felt, imagined, and remembered experience of movement in my muscles. Having perceived that sensation that I recognise as dance, I then invest it back into the photographs.⁶ ‘According to Gibson (1968) we can proactively derive kinaesthetic information from static visual objects such as the photograph, but until that information is itself integrated as the felt trajectory of a moving force we will not grasp the dance image’ (Stewart, 1998, p. 45). To enable this feedback loop there needs to be a kinaesthetic relationship with the image in

order to bring the dance forward, out of the photograph and into the body to experience the physical sensations it produces. 'Each viewer must project knowledge of their own body into that other body they are looking at' (Warr, 1998, p. 119). This process is enhanced by a refined sensitivity to the kinaesthetic and haptic senses giving the ability to sense the body's interiority – the lengthening of a muscle or the rotation of the head of the femur in its socket. It is this experiential understanding of the body in movement that enables an empathic relationship and openness to the suggestion of movement.

This perception and experience of a state of dance is further heightened and perhaps even triggered by the blurry quality of the photographs. A blurring in the photograph immediately suggests that in the moment of it being taken something moved, either the camera or the subject being photographed. The blur *B L L L U U R R R R* then produces a state of in-between, a not quite here or there. It widens the boundary, edges or margins of the image. The blur evokes a sensation of movement giving the perception of being in transition, between one place, moment in time, and the next. It leaves a visual trace of where the body has been and extends time from one instant to a series of many. This indistinctiveness of the figures produces an appearance of movement recognised by our visual sense and 'read' as motion. The blur, vibration, flutter, trace in the still photograph all signal an effect of movement and a resistance to definition. This makes von Ketelhodt's blurred photographs, in a way similar to dance being often obscure, difficult to see, or to pin down in one place. Dance is in a continuous process of making itself and the impossibility of seeing movement is made visually apparent by the smudge.

What other roles can vibration, the blur, tremor, wobble or the twitch play in the perception of movement and the moving image? The eye has to move in order for the still image to appear. 'We know how the eye must permanently dance, imperceptibly, in order for any image to be perceived' (LePecki, 2000, p. 348). On the one hand the tremor-like movements of the eye enable us to perceive stillness, whilst on the other any visible tremor even in a static object or image suggests movement. In this way according to LePecki: 'Against a background of static objects, perception can only be obtained as long as the whole body engages in vibration' (ibid., p. 350). The tremor/ vibration is needed in some form in order to perceive and the contraction and extension of our muscles that produce movement is mirrored in this fluttering of the senses. Vision needs this shifting back and forth, these oscillations of the eye in order to perceive stillness.

Seeing movement clearly and finding ways to make it visible were major scientific and artistic endeavours during the 19th century. Two major figures involved in these experiments in the late 1800s, pre-cinema, were Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey. Both were independently working with chronophotography in order to freeze time, arrest motion, and see what is normally invisible to the naked eye. Marey, a French physiologist, was fascinated by the temporality of movement, and its transition in space and time. Of particular concern was discovering ways of 'rendering the true form of

a movement as it is described in space' (in Giedion, 1969, p. 21) and he devised numerous experiments to find ways to grasp, and lay hold of it. His *Vibrations of an Elastic Rod* (1886) and *Bird in Flight* (1886-87) trace the trajectories of movement showing repeated instances captured on a single photographic plate. It is the repeated marking of these stills with slight shifts in time and position that produces a map of the movement, a trace or trail of where it has been: 'Marey's images ...constitute a visual field in which the viewer shifts back and forth between different levels of organization – between a holistic perception of a single temporal vector and an aggregate apprehension of isolated positions' (Crary, 1999, pp. 161-162). It is the still image – as a series of stop motion frames – that enables us to see movement more clearly, providing a means to understand motion as past, present and future.

At the same time, in America, Muybridge was working with a line of still cameras making numerous strips of still images of people engaged in various sporting and everyday activities. It is the repetition of these images in sequence at a speed of 16 frames per second and the phenomena of persistence of vision that enables the eye to see the still as motion (Prodger, 2003). 'Film, to all intents and purposes the genre of the 20th century, exposes the paradox of movement: the inextricable interweaving of stillness and motion, of body image and the simulation of movement' (Brandstetter & Volkers, 2000, p. 16). As Marina Warner asserts: 'Animation is the very sign of the presence of life' (Mannoni & Warner, 2006, p. 22). Stillness signals death and the sudden transformation from still to moving images produced in the experimental projections of early cinema was shocking for the viewers, I suggest, because it was perceived as 'a coming alive'. The phenomena of persistence of vision that is required to produce moving images lasts '*a minimum of 8/60th of a second*: this means sequential images projected at 16 frames per second are perceived as continuous movement' (Mannoni & Warner, 2006, p. 194). The image persists as an afterimage allowing an overlap with the following image, thus linking the two together. The earliest and perhaps the simplest form that demonstrates persistence of vision is the thaumatrope (*Greek: thauma = miracle; tropos – turn*) or wonder-turner. The twirling of the disc causes the two images, one on either side to optically blend creating a single image. Created in 1827 by John Ayrton Paris '[t]his was the first device to tune into the "critical fusion frequency" of human perception, the speed at which the brain no longer grasps individual still images but superimposes one on the other' (Prodger, 2003, p. 19).

This illusion has been incorporated into book form as flick-books; these create movement through the flicking of the pages with the thumb or in earlier versions through blowing to turn the pages. Flip or flicker books create motion on the page and Gilbert and George's *Lost Day* (1996) the action of smoking a cigarette standing by the Thames and *Oh the Grand old Duke of York* (1996) walking down a flight of steps, are two humorous examples.⁷ Others, like the series of Flicker books give artists the opportunity to animate short actions for example blowing up a balloon by Roy Grayson or the word LANDSCAPE disintegrating into an image of hills and sky by Chic Taylor, while Cinder by Daniel Jubb bursts into flame and burns.⁸ These books all

mark a period of time for an activity to occur such as the length of time it takes to walk down a flight of stairs or to blow up a balloon. They can be examined as individual still photographs but what produces movement is the speed at which they follow one another and the amount of difference between each image. It is the size of the gap – of time and variation – that determines the existence and fluidity of movement. Rapid succession takes them into fast-forward while slowness reveals what they truly are: a series of stills.

Film by Ernst Jandl whilst not in the form of a flip book deals with animation as a visual poem. 'The poem is a film.' The word FILM is repeatedly printed in a vertical line down the left-hand side of the page at various times with or without the 'i' or the 'l'. In the accompanying notes it states:

There are two actors *i* and *l*. The action starts in line 5 and ends in the 5th line from the bottom. *i* is alone, changes position 3 times, disappears, *l* appears disappears, *i* appears disappears, both appear together changing position, like dancing; then *i* disappears for a long time, which, after stunning *l*, makes *l* restless, then immobile, like resignation; when at last *i* reappears, the dance-like jumping about and out of the picture and back again is resumed for a longer stretch than the first time. This state is final. It is the happy ending of the film (*flim*, if you like, is the weightier half of the German *flimmern*, to flicker).

(Cobbing & Upton, 1998)

This repetition with small shifts and variations produces movement on the page and the alternating pattern of there – not there – there, by its changing absence and appearance, suggests movement from one place to another.

Forms of repetition and reiteration have the potential to emphasise, strengthen, and clarify whatever 'thing' they are applied to. The repeated viewing of a dance *again*, for the second time, gives it substance, 'by comparison with the memory of the first ... music by nature moves in time and can project its rigidity only upon second hearing' (Young & Maciunas, 1970). In this instance Richard (Chard) Maxfield is referring to music, yet a similar statement could be made about dance. Yvonne Rainer also noted the difficulty of seeing movement in what could be termed her artist's book: 'Dance is hard to see. It must either be made less fancy, or the fact of that intrinsic difficulty must be emphasised to the point that it becomes almost impossible to see'. Identifying repetition as a form of 'ordering material, literally making the material easier to see', she proceeds to make *Trio A*, a dance phrase of four and one-half minutes that as she states 'did *not* repeat itself' (Rainer, 1974, p. 68).

This idea of repetition as a way of making movement easier to perceive brings me back to work mentioned earlier, Ines von Ketelhodt's books *Leporello 1* and *Leporello 2*. Both books have the same images repeated in the same sequence but with different additions of coloured lines/bars replacing the text. They use the form of the concertina fold to display a repeating series of stills that add to the perception of movement by allowing a phrase of dance to be seen at the same time and if they are unfolded and displayed together a doubling effect is created. They are in effect, dancing a duet. The form of the

duet with two performers dancing the same material together at the same time and often in unison creates the double and increases the 'visibility' of the dance by making it more substantial, thicker. Slow motion almost enables us to see still frames and certainly makes the dance more legible. It maintains the fluidity and ongoing nature of movement but allows time for the eye to capture and register the whole.

Trio A, the early photographic/cinematic experiments, and the artists' books discussed, all illustrate or are concerned with the difficulty of seeing movement; how motion is perceived and/or how it might be captured. They explore and experiment with the gap between still images, and the role the still image plays in the construction of movement through space and time. This relationship between the still and movement is reflected in the mechanics of the eye and the process that occurs in the brain of converting still images into motion. Vision is constructed by the brain 'our eyes only capture static images, still photographs of the world outside. These images travel to the back of the brain where they are incorporated into the sensation of seeing movement' (Greenfield, 2001).⁹ We do in fact see in stills and only perceive motion through the processing that occurs in the brain. We literally make dance in our heads and our capacity to do this is informed by past experiences in movement, memories of choreography, and the subtlety and development of our proprioceptive systems. Movement can be suggested by the external image but it is realised in the brain; a book is given a 'state of dance' through my investment in it.

Notes

¹ In Realtime 83 Feb-March 08 p24 Stan Brakhage describes the trees in the opening shot of Maya Deren's *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* (1945) as attaining 'a state of dance'.

² Aristotle paraphrasing Zeno the Eleatic in 'Unnatural Pebble: Still/I' (1981) Ian Hamilton Finlay with Richard Grasby in *Unnatural Pebbles: with detached sentences on the pebble* Graeme Murray Gallery, Hatfield: Stellar Press, Special Collections, Pressmark: 801.AH0110.

³ The collection at the NAL includes early works such as Mallarmé's *Poème: un coup de des jamais n'abolira le hasard* and continues up to the present day. This paper has been generated through the direct experience and handling of this collection and all the artists' books referred to can be found there by following the 'artists' books in the collection'. http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/prints_books/artists_books/index.html (8/9/08)

⁴ From workshops taken with Steve Paxton in New York 1985, journal notes.

⁵ Yvonne Rainer, a dancer/choreographer working in the mid-1960's in New York, made a four-and-a-half minute movement series *Trio A* in which 'a great variety of movement shapes occur, but they are of equal weight and are equally emphasised.' Rainer, Y (1974) *Yvonne Rainer Work 1961-73* The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, New York University Press, New York p 67. See also Sally Banes and a small section of *Trio A* performed by Rainer at www.vdb.org/smackn.acgi?stapedetail?TRIOA (3/10/08).

⁶ *Leporello 1* Name: Ketelhodt, Ines v., Schumacher, Joachim, Unica T (Group of artists). Offenbach: Unica T, 1989. Collection: Special Collections Pressmark: X910029.

Leporello 2 Name: Ketelhodt, Ines v., Malutzki, Peter Lahnstein: FlugBlatt-Presse, 1989. Collection: Special Collections Pressmark: X910030 National Art Library Catalogue: nal.catalogue@vam.ac.uk (12/11/08).

⁷ *Lost Day* Name: Gilbert & George, Obirst, Hans-Ulrich, Oktagon Verlag Koln: Oktagon, c1996 Pressmark: 970059.

Oh, the Grand old Duke of York Name: Gilbert & George, Obrist, Hans-Ulrich, Oktagon Verlag Koln: Oktagon, c1996 Pressmark: 970060.

⁸ Flickr books: Taylor, Chic (1972) Aleco International Ltd. Publisher, Special Collections Pressmark: X930182 and Grayson, Roy (1972) Aleco International Ltd. Publisher, Special Collections Pressmark: X930185.

Jubb, Daniel (1993) *Cinder* publisher: Daniel Jubb, Special Collections, Pressmark: X930190 'Artist's book in the form of a flip book that illustrates the process of a book burning.' (NAL notes).

⁹ Greenfield, Susan (2001) 'The Mind's Eye' part of *Brain Story* BBC video, BBC Worldwide Ltd. Professor Susan Greenfield examines the case of Gisela Leibold who suffered a stroke 'which left her unable to see motion – everything she sees is frozen.'

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Biographical statement

Judith Walton currently teaches theory and practice in performance making on the BA in Performance Studies at Victoria University, Melbourne. Recent work includes: *reconfigured* at 24HR Art, Darwin, *no hope no reason* for the Melbourne International Arts Festival, ACCA, *Tactical Operations/Eudemonia* with Rachel Fensham for Performance Studies international (PSi) #10 Singapore, and *paralla x*, at the Moving Image Centre, Auckland.