

Dance History in Contemporary Visual Art Practice

Kelly Nipper's *Weather Center*

Jennie Goldstein



Beginning in the 1960s and with increasing regularity, artists have incorporated dance into projects made for spaces and contexts once exclusively reserved for the plastic arts. Posed bodies captured in photographs, painted portraits featuring choreographers' likenesses, and objects with or through which gallery visitors move their bodies have surfaced in environments that painting, sculpture, and multimedia installations call home.¹ International curators and program

1. Consider Elad Lassry's photographs of ballet dancers and Silke Otto-Knapp's ethereal paintings derived from photographs of choreographers including George Balanchine and Yvonne Rainer. William Forsythe's "choreographic object" *The Fact of the Matter* (2009) encourages the spectator to traverse a gallery space filled with gymnastic rings, while Christian Jankowski's 2007/08 video installation *Rooftop Routine* includes hula hoops that are scattered around the gallery floor and propped against the walls, ready to be picked up and tried out (Forsythe n.d.).

Student Essay Contest Honorable Mention

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The Graduate Program in Art History and Criticism at Stony Brook University is uniquely focused on modern and contemporary art, as it is shaped by media, technology and material culture. At both the MA and PhD levels, we offer a dynamic, interdisciplinary and individually crafted curriculum. Our proximity to New York City's world-renowned museums and galleries offers extensive opportunities for research, internships, and professional networking, and our satellite campus in Manhattan affords an ideal space for guest lectures, conferences, and evening classes. Under the visionary leadership of Lawrence Alloway, the Program in Art History and Criticism was one of the first programs in the world to support graduate level study of modern and contemporary art, and we pride ourselves on remaining open to the latest interdisciplinary methodologies. We are a small, selective, close-knit program whose comparative and interdisciplinary orientation is well served by the resources of a large research university. Students benefit from our longstanding association with Continental Philosophy and Aesthetics, as well as from affiliated faculty in Cultural Analysis and Theory, Music, and the Consortium for Digital Arts, Culture, and Technology. They are able to take courses at Columbia, NYU, CUNY, and Princeton through the New York Inter-University Doctoral Consortium, and have ample opportunities for curatorial theory and practice in conjunction with the University's regular exhibitions at the Zuccaire, Alloway, and Simons Center art galleries.

sponsors have reacted to—and perhaps spur on—this move toward movement by organizing dance-centric exhibitions, film screenings, and live performance events.²

Exhibitions dedicated to live dance in museum gallery settings offer visual art audiences increased exposure to forms of time-based performance.³ At the same time, this type of curatorial agenda—for example choreographer Ralph Lemon's 2012 project *Some sweet day*, featuring three consecutive weekends of performances in the Museum of Modern Art's cavernous atrium space—triggers considerable debate regarding the conceptual and economic roles dance plays in the art museum.⁴ The dance seen in museums often assumes two interrelated, but dis-

2. Select recent examples include: *Dance with Camera* (2009) at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; the Hayward Gallery's imperatively titled *Move: Choreographing You* (2010–11), presented in London; *Dance/Draw* (2011–12), organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston; and *Danser Sa Vie: Art et Danse de 1900 à nos jours* at the Centre Pompidou (2011–12). Perhaps most telling of all, the Whitney Museum of American Art awarded 2012 Biennial participant and choreographer Sarah Michelson their Bucksbaum Award (a monetary prize that also comes with an exhibition slot), thus signaling their institutional commitment to programming dance in museum gallery spaces.

3. "Gallery" is here used to describe the architectural spaces in art museums where curators install works of art, whether static or otherwise. The museum gallery site is differentiated in this article from museum theaters or auditoriums as well as from commercial galleries.

4. Lemon co-organized *Some sweet day* with MoMA PS1 associate curator Jenny Schlenzka. The curators divided six choreographers into three pairings, one for each weekend of live events. Steve Paxton and Jérôme Bel presented

Figure 1. (previous page) Video still from Kelly Nipper's Weather Center, 2009. Single channel video projection (black and white, sound); 5:11 minute loop, dimensions variable. Dancer: taisha paggett; costume design by Leah Piehl and Kelly Nipper. (Image courtesy of Kelly Nipper)

tinct, forms: one in which visual artists working in a variety of mediums adopt dance and its history as subject or dancers and related dance professionals as collaborators; and another in which curators lead projects that invite choreographers and dancers to create live events. I'm addressing the former category, prompted, in part, by Helen Molesworth's explicit recognition of visual artists' growing interest in dance as set forth in the catalogue accompanying her 2011/12 exhibition *Dance/Draw*. While Molesworth identifies bodily movement as central to mark making—actions that create artworks—"the question of why" artists look to dance, she writes, "remains an open one" (2011:15). A close examination of Kelly Nipper's video installation *Weather Center* (2009), a project that is emblematic of the presence of dance's particular histories within visual art, proposes an answer to Molesworth's open question. *Weather Center* reveals what is at stake—both for history and for disciplinary borders—when the participants, physical locations, and discursive spaces of dance and visual art converge.⁵

Weather Center, like the majority of Nipper's works, is intended for display in museums. It was first shown in the 2010 Whitney Biennial exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and consists of a single channel, black-and-white video projection that recapitulates the German modern choreographer Mary Wigman's (1886–1973) *Hexentanz* (Witch Dance) from 1914 and 1926. In the five-minute looped video, Nipper and her collaborator, choreographer taisha paggett, reimagine Wigman's *Witch Dance*, a dance considered radical for its evocative gestures and its rejection of balletic tradition.

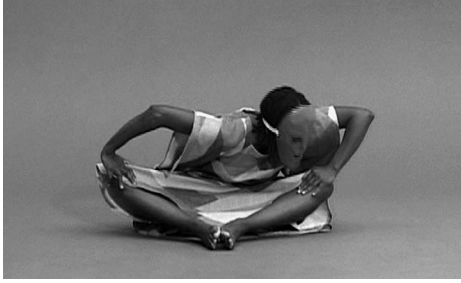
Weather Center is part of Nipper's larger, ongoing multimedia project that was initiated in 1999, called *Floyd on the Floor*, an eponymous live component of which the artist staged in the Judson Memorial Church gymnasium in 2007. In this performance, dancers executed steps derived from the modern movement analysis of Wigman's teacher Rudolf von Laban (1879–1958). Atop a Marley floor covered with large-scale renderings of his choreographic notation system, they moved through space in the same place where the Judson Dance Theater's participants developed postmodern techniques almost 50 years prior to Nipper's event. The artist's incorporation of multiple 20th-century dance histories in various components of *Floyd on the Floor*, her fluid passage across distinct historical contexts, proves



Figure 2. Installation view of Kelly Nipper's *Weather Center*, 2009. Single channel video projection (black-and-white, sound); 5:11 minute loop, dimensions variable. Dancer: taisha paggett. 2010 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. (Photo by Bill Orcutt; courtesy of Kelly Nipper)

their works first, followed by Faustin Linyekula and Dean Moss, then Deborah Hay and Sarah Michelson. Heated pre- and post-performance discussions, both in organized panels and in online formats, examined the role of race and gender in these performances (Goldman 2012), called attention to performer remuneration problems (Wasik 2012), and prompted speculation that the increase in experiential museum programming (as opposed to traditional forms of static display) was triggered by the post-2008 economic downturn (La Rocco 2012).

5. Kelly Nipper (b. 1971) received her MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California, in 1995, where she studied photography, film, and video.



Figures 3 & 4. Video still from Kelly Nipper's *Weather Center*, 2009. Single channel video projection (black-and-white, sound); 5:11 minute loop, dimensions variable. Dancer: taisha paggett; costume design by Leah Piehl and Kelly Nipper. (Images courtesy of Kelly Nipper)

essential to understanding *Weather Center*. On the two-dimensional image plane of a video screen, she filters expressive interwar modern choreography through the cerebral, detached dancing modes of the 1960s. The result is experimental historiography in a contemporary visual art form. By materializing modern European choreographies, postmodern American sensibilities, notational methods, archival documents, and sites of presentation together in one work, *Weather Center* casts the discipline of dance as the work's medium.

Stretching Images

Weather Center features a solitary dancer, paggett, clad in a loose-fitting geometrically patterned dress and a mask with incisions at the eyes, nose, and mouth (created for Nipper by costume designer Leah Piehl). She sits on the floor of an unadorned and unidentifiable interior space. Her legs are bent, the soles of her feet are pressed together; a hand positioned on each knee results in angular, crooked elbows. With her back curved and her head jutting out, she begins to rock from side to side, moving in rhythm to the sound of a disembodied female voice that methodically and repeatedly counts to 10. The dancer raises and lowers her knees. She mechanically shifts her weight from one side of her body to the other. With feet pounding against the floor beneath her, paggett scuttles forward on her butt, alternately raising her arms above her with fingers splayed and then firmly grasping her ankles. Each movement—echoes of Wigman's *Witch Dance*—both constitutes and generates energy, an effect that Nipper reiterates in the camera's unwieldy yet synchronized cuts and pans.

Nipper began working with professional dancers in 1998 to further her engagement with “stretching images in time” (in Goldberg 2009:85). She adapts this broad conceptual concern by rejecting traditional divisions of media: her project operates in the two dimensions of photography, drawing, and collage; in projected video and multimedia installations; and in embodied live performance. Nipper's 2009 video, completed and displayed nearly 100 years after Wigman first performed her *Witch Dance*, stretches this historical work into the present and filters it through the new mediums and critical developments of the intervening century.

Museum spectators are doubtless familiar with the rise in the numbers of visual artists working with projected images, moving images, and the presence of the mobile body in each.⁶ The ubiquity of “screen-based viewing within the institutional context of the visual arts” (Mondloch 2010:xi) has instigated new categorical designations including “artist's cinema” (Connolly 2009)

6. Sony's introduction of the affordable Portapak in 1967 initiated what has become commonplace in artist production and exhibition display. For a comprehensive history of video art, see Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (1990). For an early influential theorization of video as medium, see Rosalind Krauss (1976).

and “screen-reliant installation art” (Mondloch 2010).⁷ However, the very same museum audience is just as likely *not* to recognize *Weather Center*’s early 20th-century source material.

Weather Center is a historical reenactment and a contemporary dance as much as it is video art, and in resisting the privileging of any of these characterizations, Nipper’s work is clearly an example of art production in the “post-medium condition” (Krauss [1999] 2000).⁸ In keeping with what art historian Rosalind Krauss first articulated in the late 1990s, no traditional support *defines* Nipper’s object. Krauss recognized that because mediums such as oil on canvas

or welded metal had run their course, artists were free to take up new “technical supports” from other realms of culture (1999:289–305; [1999] 2000; 2006:55–62). However art making in this changed condition is still governed by rules regulating what can and cannot qualify as art. The success of an artwork remains based on its ability to point to the conventions governing the chosen technical support.⁹ *Weather Center* uses video but is not about video. Nipper’s primary goal is not to recursively examine properties inherent to that medium. Instead, video expedites a gathering together of moments from the disciplinary history of dance as the subject of Nipper’s visual artwork.

While the era of post-medium specificity may be well underway for visual artworks, an age of post-discipline specificity is perhaps less certain. Museum and performance curators, scholars, and critics advocate for increased interdisciplinarity, terminology that has evolved into calls for trans- or even non-disciplinarity. Yet as performance studies scholar Shannon Jackson has noted, the resulting “experimental art making cannot ignore the fact that artists are often ‘disciplined’ by previous training, and, as a result, do not always share the same standards” (2011:13). Practitioners’ applications of discipline-specific assumptions can provoke confusion. Jackson continues: “Performers find themselves becoming fabricators; body artists are learning the language of new media; introverted studio inhabitants have become extroverted site performers” (2011:13). As a result, territorial disturbances have increased as the dance-as-exhibition model proliferates in museums. Writing in the *New York Times* prior to Lemon’s 2012 dance platform at the Museum of Modern Art, dance critic Claudia La Rocco described increased curatorial attention to dance as a “marketing ploy [that] has engendered a skepticism among many in the performance world” (2012). The misgiving La Rocco articulates here is that if dance is



Figure 5. Mary Wigman in *Hexentanz II*, the second version of *Witch Dance*, 1926. (Photo by Charlotte Rudolph, © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

7. Similarly, as André Lepecki has noted, examples of dance *in* video art are numerous, and include Tracy Emin’s *Why I Never Became a Dancer* (1995) and Lillibeth Cuenca Rasmussen’s *Family Sha la la* (1998), among others. Lepecki also lists *Weather Center* in this category (2012:17).

8. *Weather Center* also takes the form of a photographic series derived from video stills (see Nipper n.d.).

9. So too are the institutional spaces of display typically still governed by these same rules.

consumed and valued as an art object then it risks becoming typologically absorbed into the commercial visual art sector.¹⁰

Of course, there is a history of dance done in museums. For example, Merce Cunningham adapted choreographies specifically for museum galleries beginning in 1964. The director of the Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts (Museum of the Twentieth Century) in Vienna, now known as the Zwanz'ger Haus, invited Cunningham to perform at his institution despite its lack of a theatre. Cunningham adapted to the open gallery space by reconfiguring fragments from existing repertory, and called the new work *Museum Event No. 1*. He went on to perform over 800 site-specific *Events*, significant predecessors to the recent influx of dance in museums (see Crimp 2008).¹¹

Nipper's descriptions of her working process signal her sensitivity to these disciplinary concerns. She has stated that she "work[s] less with dance per se than with the science of movement," and that she doesn't consider herself to be a choreographer "whatsoever" (Velasco and Nipper 2010:202). Despite the continual compounding of what choreography encompasses—its definition can extend, as Harmony Bench writes, "beyond the field of dance, implying any kind of movement orchestration, from the transnational migration of people, to the stop-and-go of automobiles in the street, to the crafting and staging of diplomacy" (2009:4–5)—Nipper's careful rhetoric evinces her discomfort with assuming this disciplinary categorization. She suggests that without years of training, cultivated vocabulary, and the embodied knowledge associated with a dance-based background, she cannot assume the role of choreographer. Nipper would cast movement more generically than the specific designation of dance; she equates movement with scientific inquiry, a data collection process that can yield results both predicted and unexpected. She ultimately eschews the terms "dance" and "choreography," opting instead to describe herself as "a visual artist who works with bodies" (Velasco and Nipper 2010:202). However, the bodies Nipper "works with" are not just any bodies, and the movements are not just any movements. In *Weather Center*, embodied histories—Wigman's modernism and Judson Dance Theater's postmodernism—are nested in the projected video loop.

It is worth briefly noting here that Nipper falls into a larger trajectory of painters, sculptors, and multimedia artists who have broadly contributed to choreographic enterprises throughout the 20th century. Pablo Picasso's designs for the Ballets Russes's *Parade* in 1917; Isamu Noguchi's sculptural sets for Martha Graham in the 1930s and 1940s; and Robert Rauschenberg's costumes and décor for Cunningham in the 1950s and 1960s are well-known examples of innovative cross-disciplinary collaborations.¹² However, each of these pairings

10. Performance curator and critic Andy Horwitz has expressed precisely this sentiment: "Unless we interrogate and question the museum's motives and long-term strategies, until we really look at the economics of cultural production and the frameworks through which value is being created around dance—and performance generally—the performing arts sector risks being subsumed by a visual arts world that is fundamentally a market-based system about creating value around objects, a system that is voracious as it constantly seeks novelty and new markets to exploit" (2012).

11. Precursors to Cunningham's *Events* include dance writer and museum programmer Grant Hyde Code's work to found and maintain the Brooklyn Museum Dance Center, where from 1935 to 1938 he organized dance-focused exhibitions and endeavored to start workshops for young choreographers. Amanda Graham began to assess this overlooked history in a lecture called "Stepping into Dance on Display: A Performance History of the American Art Museum," given at the Kaplan Institute for Humanities, Northwestern University, on 11 November 2015. In a 2014 issue of *Dance Research Journal* devoted to the topic of dance in museums, Claire Bishop outlined the history of the Museum of Modern Art's short-lived Department of Dance and Theater Design in the 1940s (see Bishop [2014]). Cunningham's *Events* helped to pave the way for numerous choreographers, including Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, and Yvonne Rainer, among others, to perform in the empty galleries of the Whitney Museum in the 1970s.

12. For discussions of these specific artist-choreographer intersections, among others, see Juliet Bellow (2012), Roger Copeland (2004), and Robert Tracy (2000).

served the ultimate goal of producing live dance events intended for theatrical presentation. In other words, ticket-wielding, seated spectators consumed these works before a proscenium stage in a darkened space.

These precedents offer rich historical context, but they cannot directly account for Nipper's *Weather Center*. While her predecessors generated these works within pre-existing theatrical designations, such as costume, set, or décor, Nipper reverses the direction of this collaborative process. In Nipper's project, the field of dance—comprised of specific histories, expert practitioners, reconstructions, and archival documents—operates as a partner in the field of visual art.

Malleable Modern Histories

Critic Rudolf von Delius, writing about Wigman's 1914 *Witch Dance*, presented as part of her first formal performance as a choreographer (Manning 1993:15), hailed the event as a triumph of "self-sufficient" dance, a "sovereign art" that was free to discard music, at that time seen as the art form from which dancers took their lead (Delius 1914:21).¹³ Wigman danced in silence or to percussive instruments, and rejected the narrative structures and character development central to ballet. She was praised for reimagining the role of costumes as intrinsic to bodily gestures instead of as decorative elements toiling in servitude to a story. Her choreographies bowed neither to music nor to literature; instead, she explored how her body moved in space. There was, according to Delius, "no conformity," in her earliest dances, "no masquerade, no theatrics" (21).¹⁴ Historians championed Wigman's dances from the early 20th century—*Witch Dance* included—for their modernist self-reflexivity. Wigman embodied an absolute dance that she developed under the choreographic umbrella *Ausdruckstanz* (dance of expression), a group of movement and teaching methods that emerged in the early 20th century in German-speaking regions of Europe (Manning 1993:18; Franco 2007:80).¹⁵

Wigman's refusals, her acts of saying—or dancing—no to conformity, no to masquerade, no to theatrics, were echoed in early 1960s postmodern dance. In 1965, dancer Yvonne Rainer penned what is described as her "No manifesto," which reads, in part: "NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe [...] no to seduction of the spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving and being moved" (Rainer 1965:178).¹⁶ By the late 1950s, dancers who trained in the highly expressive techniques of choreographers such as Wigman (but also Americans Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey), "found [in their classes and training] a system of representation rather than a form that could be experienced as spontaneous" (Goldberg 1990:21).¹⁷ With her text, and the dances that inspired it and followed in its wake, Rainer broke from the previously cutting-edge, but by then fully canonized, avantgarde of modern dance modes.

13. As cited in (and translated by) Susan Manning (1993:16).

14. As cited in Manning (1993:18) and Jiyun Song (2007:427). Translations by Manning and Song, respectively.

15. Wigman described her absolute dance in 1927 as "independent of any literary-interpretive content; it does not represent, it is, and its effect on the spectator who is invited to experience the dancer's experience is on a mental-motoric level, exciting and moving" (Sorell 1975:108). On the historiography of *Ausdruckstanz*, see Susanne Franco (2007). For Wigman's biographical details, see Susan Manning (1993), Hedwig Müller (1986) and Walter Sorell (1986).

16. Critics refer to Rainer's "manifesto" in any and all analyses of her most famous choreographic work, *Trio A* (1966). Its constant citation haunts Rainer, who lamented in her memoir that it has "dogged my heels ever since it was first published." Her original goal for the text was that it "do what the time-honored tradition of the manifesto always intended manifestos to do: clear the air at a particular cultural and historical moment" (2006:264).

17. Anna Halprin's improvisatory movement workshops in northern California (which Rainer attended along with Trisha Brown and Simone Forti) did much to spearhead this shift away from modern dance (Ross [2007] 2009).

Rainer's early 1960s performances presented the body as a vehicle for task-like, everyday movement. In *We Shall Run*, from 1963, a group of street-clothed and sneaker-clad participants jogged as a herd in one direction, then another, then another. In *Trio A* (1966), her most famous and also most theorized dance, Rainer combined a series of steps that never repeat, never speed up or slow down. *Trio A* denies the spectator the chance to "read" her choreography as phrasings that grow, reach a pinnacle, and conclude. With her eyes constantly averted, we never get the chance to meet Rainer's gaze, to create a link from her body to ours. Despite the overt stylistic differences between Rainer and Wigman's performances, Rainer's refusals circle back to meet her predecessor's acts: Rainer also refused narrativity and turned away from the rhythmic guidance of orchestral music.

Rainer's dances and many others were incubated within the space and context of the Judson Dance Theater, a loose collective of choreographers who ushered in the era of postmodern dance through the cooperative efforts of dancers, artists, and musicians. Gathering in the Judson Memorial Church's Greenwich Village basement in 1962, the participants championed pedestrian actions, the use of everyday items, and accepted nondancers onto the stage, a space not always clearly demarcated from that occupied by the audience. This historically charged site is particularly crucial to an examination of Nipper's *Weather Center* and to the live segment of *Floyd on the Floor* staged in the Judson Church gymnasium in 2007. Nipper has evocatively claimed that the basement location selected for the live performance serves as "the burial chamber of the most experimental period in recent art history" (in Goldberg 2009:83).¹⁸

This claim locates the Judson Dance Theater with the field of art history rather than dance history or dance studies, signaling Nipper's point of entry into the interdisciplinary works staged under the "Judson dance" rubric.¹⁹ In Carrie Lambert-Beatty's 2008 text on Rainer, which has arguably done more to further the status of Judson dance among visual artists and art historians than any other, the author evinces how Judson performance "entered art history of this period" by way of the group's earliest scholar-advocate, Sally Banes (Lambert-Beatty 2008:25). Banes is a dance historian, but as Lambert-Beatty points out, her positioning of the Judson Dance Theater as committed to "democratic or collective process" in her book *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* ([1983] 1993:xvii) was picked up just a few years after the 1993 reprint in art historian Thomas Crow's 1996 publication *The Rise of the Sixties*. In Lambert-Beatty's paraphrasing of Crow's argument, she lists the privileged qualities of 1960s art making, including "repetition and seriality, resistance to emotional display, and nonhierarchical composition" (2008:25). These elements, Crow posits, "first came together as ethical imperatives in the conduct of the Judson circle" (1996:128). In other words, Crow argues that Judson dance was the crucial innovator that underscored the postminimal, process-based art of the mid-1960s.

Nipper's morbid description of the Judson Church gymnasium as a "burial chamber" might simply be interpreted as a playful riff on the location's subterranean locale. However, with Crow's art historical framework in mind, it also reflects a discursive finality—whether experi-

18. The live version of *Floyd on the Floor* was commissioned by Performa, the biennial of new visual art performance. The artist has stated that she did not select the Judson Church gymnasium site because of its history. It was simply one of the spaces Performa organizers made available to her (Nipper 2012). Yet this step back from the site's particular historical significance seems to run counter to the "burial chamber" status she conferred on it.

19. "Judson dance" (as opposed to Judson Dance Theater) is used here in keeping with Carrie Lambert-Beatty's distinction between the two. She writes, "The phrase 'Judson dance,' referring to the artistic project rather than the sociological entity, expresses this wider sense of the new type of dance-based performance developed in New York at this time and embraces art that the narrower term would exclude, such as the choreography done in workshops that preceded the concerts at the church, and the performances of Simone Forti, who participated in the early workshops and often collaborated with members of Judson Dance Theater but did not participate in its concerts" (2008:276).



Figure 6. Kelly Nipper, *Floyd on the Floor*, 2007. Dancers (from left): Marissa Ruazol, Libby Buchanan, Matt Sweeney, Guillermo Ortega Tanus. Costume design by Leah Piehl and Kelly Nipper. PERFORMA 07, Judson Memorial Church, New York, NY. (Photo courtesy of Kelly Nipper)

enced by the artist herself, or one she projects onto others—as if the dances and concepts nurtured in this space have been sealed shut. Given the ubiquitous presence of Judson dance within both dance and art scholarship, it may seem as if this metaphorical door is too heavy to pry open. Nipper’s own projects make clear, however, that these histories, constituting art, dance, or otherwise, are anything but entombed. They are fungible, alive, and ongoing.

Situated in the specific place of the Judson gymnasium, amid increasingly fluid art and dance historical demarcations, Nipper presented the 30-minute live work.²⁰ When she initiated the *Floyd on the Floor* project in 1999, she derived its title from her abiding interest in weather systems, specifically Hurricane Floyd, a category-4 storm that generated in the Atlantic Ocean that year and battered the mid-Atlantic Coast.²¹ Nipper’s performance practice, she explains,

20. Nipper considers this segment of the *Floyd* project to be her “first actual ‘performance’ work” (Velasco and Nipper 2010:202). Previously, in 1995, she made one installation that included live performance. For the piece, called *Blond*, a terrycloth-clad, white performer stood in a long hallway, chewed bubblegum, and blew bubbles. *Blond* was displayed in a group exhibition called *Soap #2* at the Soap Factory in Minneapolis (see Goldberg 2009:84).

21. Additional related components include what Nipper describes as the “research-based studies” *Circle Circle* (2007), *Sapphire* (2008), and *Weather Center* (2009) (Goldberg, 2009:85). In addition to these video installations Nipper has worked on a performance and video called *Shifting Shapes (3, 6, 9, 12)* (2010) that she initially conceived as a part of the larger *Floyd* project. She has since determined that it “exists as a variation or supplement to the main piece.” The live event and the video “extend *Floydian* logic but also exist apart from it” (Velasco and Nipper 2010:203). In this work, paggett executes one of Rudolf Laban’s movement scales while moving through



Figure 7. The large-scale renderings of Laban notations are evident on the floor in this rehearsal for Kelly Nipper, *Floyd on the Floor*, 2007. Rehearsal director: taisha paggett. Dancers (from left): Sarah Leddy, Ryan Lawrence, taisha paggett, Guillermo Ortega Tanus. A PERFORMA Commission, PERFORMA 07 Biennial, Judson Memorial Church, New York, NY. (Photo courtesy of Kelly Nipper)

“expands from [her] background in photography and film [and] video, technologies that collapse vast fields and the passage of time into the here and now” (2012). The storm operates as a metaphor for history in Nipper’s work; artifacts and documents, events and ideas swirl around the hurricane’s eye. In the 2007 *Floyd on the Floor* performance, the artist combined her fascination with the unpredictability of meteorological patterns with notational systems such as Labanotation, a graphical process developed to record experimental dance and effectively ward off the threat of its persistent ephemerality.

Invented in the late 1920s by Wigman’s teacher, the dancer Rudolf von Laban, Labanotation maps a dancer’s body parts, specific steps, energies, and trajectories onto staves that can later be “read,” like musical notes, and then re-executed.²² Nipper’s discovery of Laban’s notational innovations and his scaled system for articulating movement ranges “opened up [her] entire world” (Goldberg 2009:85). In Nipper’s 2007 dance, four duos traverse a space as wrist-clasped pairs, or perform alone as they wind parachutes around their ankles.²³ Their movements alternately enact the technical repertoire of Laban’s movement analysis and playful, seemingly un-dance-like movements whose inclusion Judson dance made acceptable. Nipper covered the stage area—the gymnasium floor—with large diagrams that graphically chart the movement from one of her earlier video works, which also utilized Laban’s notational devices.

Floyd on the Floor correlates radar technologies and Labanotation; both systems attempt to render observable subjects that resist the impulse to fix ephemeral events. Weather is notoriously unpredictable, yet we rely upon Doppler devices to track and analyze precipitation. Live dancing bodies cannot be stilled before our eyes, but Labanotation can hold choreographic elements in place long enough for us to analyze steps and propulsions and then, ideally, embody them anew. And, just as the weather graphics on the evening news make perfect sense to the

oversized sculptural elements constructed to resemble the interior components of a camera. *Floyd* continues to unfold and develop. In 2009, Nipper stated that she does not “think it’s going to be clear what the project is about until the entire work is completed” (in Goldberg 2009:89).

22. Wigman studied with Laban and was deeply influenced by his structured improvisational methods. She debuted *Witch Dance I* at the Laban School (Manning 1993:15, 59). Wigman recalled her teacher’s passion for his notational systems, which were “the one thing to which he was absolutely faithful and for which he wrestled like Jacob with the angel. No error, no disappointment, no failure could ever keep him from pursuing this work” ([1970] 1983:302).

23. Libby Buchanan, Ryan Lawrence, Sarah Leddy, Eli McAfee, taisha paggett, Marissa Ruazol, Matt Sweeney, and Guillermo Ortega Tanus performed in *Floyd on the Floor* (2007).

reporter but seem obscure to the viewer, Labanotation functions as a language discernable only to the trained reader.²⁴

Down in the Judson Church basement the elements of Nipper's storm seem to swell. She utilizes crucial innovations of modern European dance history in the very place that postmodern American dance (or if we follow Crow, postmodern art) found its footing. While those associated with Judson dance endeavored to slough off the bodily and historical weight of modernist expressivity, decades before them modern dancers like Wigman and Laban said "no" to the narrative-dependent theatrics of 19th-century ballet. And while both art and dance historical accounts have positioned postmodern dance in chronological and ideological opposition to its modern predecessor, Nipper's project affirms Susan Manning's reclaiming of Judson dance as "one of the last outposts of modernism." Manning argues that Judson dance met modernism's two key stipulations by "focusing on the reflexive rationalization of movement" on the one hand, and "upholding the distinction between modern dance and ballet" on the other (1988:37). In Nipper's work neither the legacies of early 20th-century European dance nor 1960s New York innovations is privileged, no referent more celebrated than any other. Both *Weather Center* and the live segment of *Floyd on the Floor* recapitulate 20th-century dance. Instead of emphasizing a series of ruptures, as characterized by avantgarde rhetoric, Nipper proposes a field of continuity. The aspects that these mutually informing histories share benefit from simultaneous presentation.

Delegated and Durational Collaboration

In order to explore these dance histories through dance, Nipper relies upon expertise she does not personally have. She is not the dancer featured in *Weather Center*, nor does she appear moving among the dancers in the live portion of *Floyd on the Floor*. Nipper works with professional dancers "as a way to explore the mechanics of moving and still images in relation to bodily existence, the spatial environment, and time" (2012).²⁵ The dancers' trained agility is of paramount importance: their precision, discipline, and their "bodily existence" are powerful materials around and through which Nipper explores the broad themes of temporality and spatiality. By enlisting the work of experts such as choreographers and Certified Laban Movement Analysts, Nipper directs or produces art as much as she makes it.

Following Claire Bishop's assessment of what she terms the "social turn" in performance art, Nipper seems to "outsource" or "delegate" aspects of *Weather Center* to experts in order to seek "authenticity" (2012a:91–112; 2012b:219–39). Bishop primarily examines socially collaborative, politically oriented works as examples of "delegated performance." The most successful of these participatory artworks, she argues, are those in which artists seek out the specialized knowledge or abilities of a particular group that is bound by geography or ethnicity, class or occupation. The resulting artworks—if effectively executed—implicate, provoke, or disrupt the privileged art world audience. One pertinent example is Tania Bruguera's performance, *Tatlin's Whisper 5* (2008), for which the artist hired mounted policemen to demonstrate crowd-control methods to viewer-participants assembled in gallery spaces (Bishop 2012b:223; see also 2004:51–79). These

24. In a further weather/Laban/Wigman connection, the relationship between weather and witches has a long historical precedent, yet another way in which *Weather Center* is tied to *Floyd*. For example, according to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, a treatise on witchcraft in the early modern period, women accused of sorcery could "stir up hailstorms and rainstorms and also make lightning strike humans and domestic animals" (Mackay 2009:380).

25. Nipper began working with paggett after she saw her performing in one of Yvonne Rainer's works at the J. Paul Getty Center in Los Angeles. Nipper "really responded to the way she moved and her presence and grounding/weight in [her] body" (2012). The first project they worked on together was *Circle Circle* (2007), a silent two-channel video projection that features a dancer (Aubre Hill) who faces away from the camera and performs rotations from her hips clockwise on one screen, and counter-clockwise on the other.

trained officials, Bruguera suggests, are much more capable of instilling in the corralled audience feelings of fear or powerlessness than would a group of actors or the artist herself.²⁶

Bishop rightly posits that the tendency among contemporary performance artists to assign the physical enactment of their artworks or events to others, often professionals, constitutes a significant shift away from the body-based practices of the 1960s and '70s. Then, the artist's own body was seen as available free of charge, at any time, and as the perfect material basis for projects that stressed physical and psychological endurance.²⁷ In the subsequent decades, as the art market effectively monetized live and recorded performance art, artists have in turn been able to increase the scope and attendant costs of their works by bringing skilled collaborators into their processes (Bishop 2012b:229). Nipper, for her part, looks to paggett's particular expertise, her movement abilities and sensibilities. Dancers "know their bodies more than anyone," Nipper avers (Velasco and Nipper 2010:202). paggett's dancing body conjures Wigman's witch; indeed, Nipper's own attempt would certainly appear inexpert, perhaps even farcical. Yet, while paggett's dance is an instance of outsourced authenticity, it lacks a crucial element of Bishop's formula: when presented with *Weather Center*, viewers do not experience the shock or disruption that Bishop identifies as crucial for successful delegated performance.

Wigman's choreography reinstated as Nipper's contemporary video projection (via paggett), in fact, shares an affinity with contemporary collaborative art making that Grant Kester identifies as "concerned with the generation of insight through durational interaction rather than rupture" (2011:65). For Bishop, the intense burst of frustration, panic, and sympathy for corralled political protesters that Bruguera's audiences feel serves as a catalyst for political change. Kester alternatively advocates for "durational interaction" in artistic endeavors predicated upon sustained and continuous relationships that can effect social change in lived environments instead of museum sites.²⁸ Artists operating in the mode Kester champions include Dialogue, a collective working in the Bastar region of central India to design ergonomic and efficient water pumps. Groups like Dialogue and others often assume grassroots methods familiar to activists and urban planners that require organization, communication, and perseverance.²⁹ Kester's model is predicated on social and political intervention outside of traditional museological frameworks, but Nipper's *Weather Center* works within the museum to suggest a form of durational interaction committed to creative historiographic investigation.

Neither Bishop's nor Kester's analysis completely accounts for Nipper's working methods. However, both "delegated" and "durational" vocabularies describe how she collaborates with select dancers and choreographers across interrelated projects and over sustained time periods. The Laban-derived movements Nipper uses require embodied skill, but also significant amounts of time to develop and perfect. Delegating to expert Certified Movement Analysts indicates her commitment to dance, to creating work that is authentically dance-based. It is only through prolonged effort that *Weather Center* can evoke the discipline of dance as its medium.

Outsourcing solves the problem of effectively working with dance as subject. Yet for spectators unfamiliar with Wigman or her dances but steeped in visual art and exhibition history, paggett's masked African American body immediately signals the unsavory role museums have

26. For a discussion of the relationship between policing and the public in Bruguera's work, see Lepecki (2013).

27. Bishop references the performances of Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, and Marina Abramović as examples (2012b:219).

28. As an adjective used to describe performance art, "durational" is typically associated with projects that extend for many hours (or even weeks or months), and that push upon the limits of mental and physical stamina. Abramović is perhaps the most famous artist working in this mode.

29. See Kester (2011). The artists in Dialogue are Navjot Altaf, Rajkumar, Shantibai, and Gessuram. Kester also cites international groups including Park Fiction in Hamburg and Ala Plastica in Argentina, as examples of durational collectives.

played in decontextualizing and essentializing non-Western art throughout the 20th century, particularly in the case of so-called “primitivism.” Not only did early 20th-century Cubist and Expressionist painters and sculptors appropriate African, Iberian, and Oceanic art forms while discarding their religious and other use values, museum curators have also displayed non-Western objects side-by-side with the European works they formally influenced, most infamously in the Museum of Modern Art’s 1984 exhibition “Primitivism” in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern. As Hal Foster wrote in the aftermath of MoMA’s controversial exhibit, “the primitive/tribal is set adrift from specific referents and coordinates—which thus allows it to be defined in wholly Western terms. And one begins to see that one of the preconditions, if not of primitivism, then of the ‘Primitivism’ show, is the mummification of the tribal and the museumification of its objects” (1985:52).

Artists have explicitly critiqued the structuring systems of art institutions that made possible these cultural misappropriations. A potent early example include Hans Haacke’s *MoMA Poll* (1970), which posed the printed question “Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon’s Indochina Policy be a reason for you not voting for him in November?” above two transparent boxes into which visitors could place their yes or no votes (then-Governor Rockefeller was a Museum trustee). Fred Wilson’s *Guarded View* (1992), a sculptural installation comprised of four headless, painted brown mannequins dressed in the security uniforms of major New York museums, signals the daily performance of guarding, and the invisibility of the men and women (often of color) who protect art objects.

Contemporary artists like Nipper have internalized the debates works like these bring to the surface. Her practice is more invested in institutional reflection than in overt critique. As artist Andrea Fraser argued in 2005, “It’s not a question of being against the institution: we are the institution. It’s a question of what kind of institution we are, what kind of values we institutionalize, what form of practice we reward, and what kinds of rewards we aspire to” (2005:283).³⁰ In Nipper’s *Weather Center*, paggett, like Wigman before her, moves while wearing a mask. Wigman’s use of the mask is implicated in “primitivist” appropriation. She worked with a mask-maker, Viktor Magito who, according to Wigman, was inspired by Japanese noh theatre. She took this culturally specific art form and generalized it to achieve an indistinct “ceremonial figure” that for her, assumes a universal expressive power (Wigman 1966:34). The resulting feature-obscuring device, she explained, “possessed its own personal life. Every movement of the body evoked a changed expression of the face” (42). In Nipper’s video the mask refers to



Figure 8. Installation view of the exhibition “Primitivism” in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 12 September–27 November 1984. Pablo Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Avignon* (1907) is on the right, African and Iberian masks are displayed on the left. (Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY)

30. For a history of institutional critique see A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (1983), Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (1990), Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (2011).

Wigman's costuming but not to her universalizing intent. When paggett wears a mask, according to Nipper, "expression is completely wiped away" (Velasco and Nipper 2010:202).³¹ Instead of summoning a tribal essence adrift from its cultural specificity, the mask in *Weather Center* serves to dull its wearer's expressive potential. And rather than continuing the museumification of non-Western history that Foster identified in the mid 1980s, Nipper conscientiously refers to that institutional legacy while using the mask to alternate ends.

Shifting Shapes

paggett's performance of Wigman's choreography, however considered in its reenactment, is actually quite different from the original.³² Wigman derived her movements from "spiritual characters [that] evoked pagan religiosities, once associated with polytheism and pre-Christian Europe" (Funkenstein 2005:841). Where Wigman's body is explosive, her splayed fingers evoking gestural incantations, paggett is cool and distanced. She moves deliberately yet unemotionally to the steady counting of an overlaid voice; her body offers the kinesthetic facts, plainly stated. Absent Wigman-esque expressivity, something more than just a will to recreate historical dance must be underway in *Weather Center*. There are several possible ways to account for the dancing differences in Wigman's *Witch Dance* and Nipper's *Weather Center*. First, a most blatant reading: paggett is not the choreographer of this dance; she cannot *feel* the dance internally in precisely the same way as her predecessor, who "loved it, this growing into the excitement of its expressive world, how intensely I tried in each performance to feel myself back into the original creative condition of *Witch Dance*" (Wigman 1966:42). paggett (and Nipper, too) functions in the role of imitator, however deferential. But a more productive analysis hinges on the dance's history.

As we have seen in both the live segment of *Floyd on the Floor* and in *Weather Center*, Nipper circles back over and across dance historical and contextual divides. Nipper requires expert collaborators to enact her works, but her initial point of access to these histories is through images and artifacts both still and moving. Extant photographs of Wigman's *Witch Dance I*, for example, capture her mid-jump and the billowing, capelike costume in suspended motion, feet elevated off the floor and arms spread wide overhead. Wigman does not pose for posterity; instead the fixed moment conveys active propulsion.

Nipper's video, however, directly refers to the German choreographer's revised 1926 *Witch Dance*, also known as *Witch Dance II*. Where *Witch Dance I* is documented in photographs, *Witch Dance II* survives in still images and as a film, although the film records only part of the dance. The footage may have been intended to serve as publicity for Wigman's first American tour in 1930, and the filmic style supports this theory.³³ In the film Wigman appears adorned in a long, brocaded dress with a high neck and wide openings for each arm. Her body is nearly subsumed,

31. Nipper's use of the mask is not only historically informed, but also intrinsically connected to the body. In *Weather Center*, paggett's mask is blood red, a detail obscured in the black-and-white video. Nipper explains: "If you remove the mask, it's just like if you take the first layer of skin off the face—just blood and nothing more. The dancer is recognized through movement, through the body. It's getting rid of the false front of the face (Velasco and Nipper 2010:202–03).

32. The affective results of *Weather Center* are very different from those in the work of Fabián Barba, a contemporary choreographer, who in 2013 presented his reconstruction of nine short solos from Wigman's first US tour in 1930–31. For *A Mary Wigman Dance Evening*, Barba made use of available film footage, documentary materials, reviews, and consulted with former Wigman students. Barba shares with Nipper an interest in considering how modern (historical) dance operates in contemporaneity (see Franco 2013).

33. See Manning (1993:303). The film footage is included in Allegra Fuller Snyder and Annette MacDonald's documentary *Mary Wigman, 1886–1973: "When the Fire Dances Between the Two Poles"* (1991). The fragmentary documentation has also been screened or projected in several museum exhibitions, including *Art & Dance: Images of the Modern Dialogue, 1890–1980* (1982–83) at the Institute for Contemporary Art, Boston; *Danser Sa Vie*

and a mask, not present in *Witch Dance I*, obscures much of her face.³⁴ Seated on the floor of what is surely a stage, Wigman moves in time with jarring, percussive accompaniment. When she is not moving, the drums and cymbals stop. Wigman is positioned straight on and the camera is held steady until the dancer propels her body forward, picking up speed with each straightening of her leg at the knee and subsequent smack of her floor-pounding foot. At this point the camera retreats in an attempt to maintain distance between the apparatus and the gesturing body. It is only at this moment, as the camera wobbles slightly and angles down to maintain the centrally framed dancer that the viewer is forced to attend to the fact that there is someone else—the camera operator—moving out of sight.



Figure 9. Mary Wigman performing Hexentanz 1 (*Witch Dance I*), 1914. (Photo by Hugo Erfurth, © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn)

Since the film excerpt of *Witch Dance II* ends before Wigman’s propulsive energy sends her into an erect position, scholars and artists alike rely upon still photographs and contemporaneously written criticism in order to reconstruct this dynamic choreography. Critic Rudolf Bach described Wigman’s “powerful swing” from seated to standing. “Like a giant,” he wrote, “the red and gold, phantom-like figure rears up in the space. Now it leaps around in a circle, the right foot is thrown out, the hands of the speeding arms perform a kind of spurting throwing action” (1933:29–30).³⁵ Nipper interweaves research with structured improvisations for the section of *Weather Center* in which paggett, like Wigman, stands, executes a series of rotating gestures, and then returns to the floor. Nipper’s archival and improvisatory working modes enable her to explore, as she claims, the “sustainability of recorded and repeated information as it changes from one form to another” (Nipper 2012). Because this segment of *Witch Dance* is, for Nipper, without an original, her artwork cannot be rightly understood as a copy. For the portion of *Weather Center* that operates without a documentary, moving-image counterpart, Nipper and paggett must construct a moment of dance history.

(2011–12) at the Centre Pompidou; and *Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art* (2012–13) at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

34. The role of Wigman’s mask and its relationship to the male gaze is crucial to Manning’s argument but is beyond the scope of this study (1993:85–130).

35. Cited in Manning (1993:129). English translation in Manning provided by the Dance Film Archive, University of Rochester.



Figure 10. Installation view of the exhibition *Inventing Abstraction: 1910–1925* with footage of Wigman performing *Witch Dance II* projected onto the gallery wall. The Museum of Modern Art, 23 December 2012–15 April 2013. (Photo by Jonathan Muzikar; digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY)

At the start of Nipper’s video, paggett is centered within the frame, and the resulting footage is reminiscent of the *Witch Dance II* documentation. Then, unexpectedly, the camera starts to move to the dancer’s left, as if some other action is about to take place beyond our view. A sudden jerk shifts our full attention, and the camera’s focus, back to the re-centered dancer. There is no visible bodily action beyond the frame; the camera is effectively active. Nipper used a tripod-mounted camera and a second dolly-mounted camera to capture footage for *Weather Center*. Standing either behind the tripod or off to the side (particularly when implementing the dolly that ran along

tracks laid on the floor in a half-circle), Nipper shot take after take. This repetitive method is crucial to her working process and, like the dance histories she manipulates and reforms, it aligns with her durational, rather than rupturing, practice. While filming paggett moving, Nipper considered Wigman’s tendency to “send everything in one direction” while performing her *Witch Dance*. “The eyes follow the direction [of] the body or a limb or the thrust of weight [in] the movement,” and in response the camera either “moved in the same direction, lagged in speed in moving in that same direction, or moved counter [to] that direction” (2012).³⁶ The artist’s reimagining of *Witch Dance* at once derives from and results in so much filmed footage to be utilized, altered, and edited into a new, projected product. paggett moves, Wigman’s histories move, but so too does Nipper move—behind the camera, out of our sight. And just as the cameras that make photographic documentation possible shape how we see *Witch Dance*, so too do they in *Weather Center*. Nipper’s camerawork brings our attention to her bodily presence, but her role extends beyond wielding the camera. Nipper shapes more than how we literally see *Witch Dance* reenacted by paggett. *Weather Center*’s pans, zooms, and edits evoke Nipper’s understanding of the shifting shape of the discipline of dance.

Notational theories, photographs, filmed footage, and published reviews form the basis of Nipper’s research-based projects. Her status as an archive-driven artist derives from her years of experience working as a professional archivist for the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles and in a similar capacity for artist and performance innovator Allan Kaprow, a position she held for almost 10 years. Kaprow’s influence looms large; in describing her process to interviewers Nipper has repeatedly recalled his firm belief that changing his mind was always permis-

36. Nipper’s description of her filmic processes echoes those used by artists who make screendance, or dances reliant upon screen technologies. Because screendance as a field of study operates primarily under the dance studies umbrella, visual artists (and art historians and curators) are less likely to consider this closely related mode of dance and filmmaking—despite the clear formal and methodological resemblances between artworks like Nipper’s *Weather Center* and screendance practices.

sible (Velasco and Nipper 2010:200; Goldberg 2009:90). This stance has allowed her to work within and around the open-ended, ongoing *Floyd on the Floor* project, of which *Weather Center* is one part. More crucially, however, it fosters thinking about and utilizing dance across its various mediations, whether live or stilled, annotated or textually described, repeated or lost. Nipper's mutable process involves recognizing that "the environment is a shifting shape (in Goldberg 2009:85)."

Weather Center acknowledges that *Witch Dance* is a malleable entity comprised of its documents and the critical understanding of dance available at the moment any reconstruction takes place. As a result, Nipper can present possible alternatives for history within a contemporary work. Together, Nipper and paggett call upon Wigman's expressive gestures, Laban's precise scales, and Judson-era pedestrian movement in order to complete the video installation. The revolutionary qualities of these elements and modes of making were recognized at their instantiation. Yet, with the full breadth of the 20th century in view, Nipper can render these histories and ideas of history as contemporary works that resist supplanting or eradicating what came before. Using "the science of movement," Nipper filters Wigman's choreography into her own sustained interest in Laban and through the lingering valences of Judson dance.

Engaging the discipline of dance as medium requires Nipper to both select discrete historical instances of dance and to consider their evolving historiographic presence. She positions these elements as operating together, highlighting less-examined continuities rather than promoting opposition. Her artistic practice foregrounds the subtle workings of dance, but also models a conscientious attitude toward disciplinary boundaries. Her delegated and durational collaborations respect dance's autonomy, the training of dance practitioners, and the time required for choreographic development and physical execution. While *Weather Center* encourages a reconfigured field of dance history, it does not do so as dance. Instead, Nipper creates a work of visual art, one that expands the possibilities of the artistic medium.

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