

# A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality

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Precarity bears its own undoing. It teeters between prayer (*precor*) and debt (*precarius*), between a wish tendered on a promise, and a claim to inhabit a space or tenancy held at the pleasure of others. This uncertain movement casts bodies into a state of vulnerability and risk that may prove depleting or sustaining, a marginalizing call to bondage, or a realization of value yet to be rewarded. Precarity poses a transformation of one kind of encumbrance into another, an embrace of debt for some other expression of mutuality.<sup>1</sup>

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1. The Oxford English Dictionary provides this double etymology of prayer and debt, the latter which takes on meaning as a claim to inhabit a space through the will of others, hence, a “right, tenancy, etc.: held or enjoyed by the favour of and at the pleasure of another person; vulnerable to the will or decision of others” (*The Oxford English Dictionary Online*). This internal movement of precarity with respect to linguistic- as well as labor- and exchange-value is exquisitely established by Angela Mitropoulos (2006). She observes, “precarity might well have us teetering, it might even do so evocatively, for better and often worse, praying for guarantees and, at times, shields that often turn out to be fortresses. But it is yet to dispense with, for all its normative expressions, a relationship to the adjective: to movement, however uncertain.”

Getting to such possibilities, however, might entail traveling a rather tortured road. The power to forgive a sin or an unpayable bill, as the term precarity was applied in ancient Rome and feudal Europe, might once have allowed the otherwise dispossessed to work or occupy common holdings, but it also may have affirmed the authority of those in the church or state that held the underlying right, even if then, as now, the legitimacy of those powers was being contested. The figure of the marginalized implicates some normative conception and potential assimilation to the center. Further, if precarity descends from some foundational meaning, geopolitical ground, or historical point of reference, the salient global differences between, say, displaced urban professionals and expropriated subsistence farmers—to say nothing of how non-capitalist formations persist in or depart from the present—may not be adequately addressed.

For precarity to yield some form of debt that generates an expansive sociality and not simply be all subsuming or consuming—as the recent financial debacle threatens—attention will need to be paid to what is made in movement together. A politics of precarity would need to dance between a ceiling of debt that has become punitive, and a floor of forgiveness that does not interrogate what we want to be liable for; it would need to move off-center, fly low, gather its forces laterally, to animate the coincident rhythms of dance and finance. Fleshing out how dance moves in and makes a world entails breaking from the weak links of metaphor that confine arts politics to questions of reflection in order to grasp the powers of incorporation and interdependence that finance bears but does not disclose.

## Dance and Finance

Politics today suffers a crisis of evaluation. Millions around the world have taken to the streets to depose governments, gathered from one state of precarity to enact another. But the tendencies of those on the ground, the dispositions of those who assumed positions of authority, the conditions of the institutions issuing debt and demanding ransom have not been so easy to figure out. The political appears at once as a problem of too much and too little. No aspect of human endeavor or expression is beyond deliberate contestation and yet each spirited intervention can leave the sense that not enough was done. Movement everywhere, crescendos of volatility, vertiginous shifts in direction leave an impression of being out of time or adrift in space. The ensuing disequilibrium has proven disorienting to thought and has made it difficult to discern direction amidst a thicket of practices moving this way and that. General assemblies, mass occupations, are said to lack demands or orienting ideas; mobilization is posed as the enemy of representation.

But surely moving through disequilibrium and divining ways through spaces made for infinite possibility are what dance does best. Dance, at least in its Western modernist formulation,

*Figure 1. (facing page) Trisha Brown, Woman Walking Down a Ladder, 1973. (Photo © 1973/2010 Babette Mangolte. All rights of reproduction reserved)*

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is conventionally considered as movement for itself.<sup>2</sup> Yet such hard-won autonomy has not always secured it a place in the world. Precarity, ephemerality, instability are frequently voiced as lamentations by dancers, presenters, and audiences alike. Dancers too struggle to make a living; presentation venues strain against diminished support; audiences contend with escalating ticket prices. For dance to move the political beyond arrested development, its knowledge of how bodies are assembled, of how space and time are configured, of how interconnections are valued must be made legible beyond the ends of choreographic endeavor. Foregrounding the analytics of movement so redolent in dance can make for a richer evaluation of what is generated through political mobilization. For a politics that is abundant and undervalued, the question becomes, how can dance be mobilized to think through the present?<sup>3</sup> No doubt the present itself is not one thing but many. Indeed politics is the pathway forged through possibility, the realization of purpose in a contentious field of movement. What moves us beyond existing conditions and constraints usually consists of finding a way between obdurate oppositions that threaten to subsume the imagination of generative and fluid socialities.

This dilemma pertains to the very language most familiar to thinking political mobilization. On the one hand stands the fluid, distributed, horizontal, decentralized figure of the network, central to affirmative claims of precarious politics.<sup>4</sup> On the other sits the structured, enclosed, vertical, and centering institution known as “organization.” The financial crisis that has proven so disruptive to economy and disorienting to politics has positioned network and organization in a paradoxical light. In the case of the United States (which claimed authorship but not ownership of what quickly became a global matter), the proximate political response to the bailouts of banks and large corporations was staged as a kind of populist rage identified with the insurgent Tea Party. This rightist formation enlisted social media, suspected establishment politicians, disbelieved government institutions, invoked network sovereignty—all to channel its energies quite instrumentally into a party organization that would elect state representatives. The Tea Party targeted government in reaction to the appropriation of public funds for private corporations. Yet those very banks and investment houses, in the face of a lapse of organization, effectively distributed their risks of doing business through a network of homeowners who suffered foreclosure, school children who bore the brunt of fewer teachers and greater accountability, and public workers whose pension plans were targeted for triage. Certainly this transposition of network and organization has also complicated any sense of how to restore order through regulation, recognize the tendency of political mobilizations, and imagine a future under present conditions.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the occupationist movements that rippled from the streets and squares of Tehran, Tunis, Cairo, London, New York, and elsewhere in the United States, bore a wide range of political tendencies and trajectories that confounded any ready assessment along straightforward lines of network versus organization.

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2. Of course this tension between dance’s particularity and its universalism runs through the historical and ethnological impulses that had constituted the conventional approaches to the study of dance until dance studies undertook a more philosophical and theoretical turn. See, for example, John Martin ([1933] 1965) and Judith Lynne Hanna (1987); and for the text of the break in dance studies, Susan Leigh Foster (1986).

3. This question has informed my previous work on dance (see Martin 1990 and 1998).

4. See, for example, the special issue of *Fibreculture Journal* on Precarious Labor edited by Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2005); and Gerald Raunig (2007) whose notion of the transversal is meant to undo the binary between vertical and horizontal political orientation. For a recent effort to examine the intersections between logics of networks and organizations see Rossiter (2006).

5. The literature on the financial crisis itself looks to be a genre out of control, with new titles appearing daily. Yet the tropes of missed regulatory opportunity, of excess by a few outliers, or insufficient cash reserves often miss the normalization of disequilibrium that continues after the fall. For some representative accounts see, Mason (2010) and Tett (2009), which contains a chapter entitled “Dancing Around the Regulators,” a hint at the kind of suspect politics associated with dance.

If these various mobilizations cannot be neatly aligned through an ideological genealogy, there is—perhaps more speculatively—a common figure that twins these crises of the economic and the political and that entangles the logics of network and organization. It is that of the derivative. The term is used in a whole variety of fields—medicine, law, grammar, mathematics, music—to refer to the transmission of some characteristic from an originating source to a consequent site, expression, or manifestation. As an instrument of finance, derivatives are the variable attributes of some underlying commodity such as interest rates on loans, expected rates of default on mortgages, or rates of exchanges between two different currencies. Sold on open exchanges or directly between businesses, derivatives can bundle together or package the common variable features of many different sources with different expected outcomes—say, loans with a relatively high expectation of default with others that have a lower probable default rate. The derivative is a contract to buy or sell a certain amount of that variable feature at a particular time. Since prices of goods and services constantly change, and markets in different locations where things are made and sold have different characteristics and are volatile, derivatives are used as insurance to hedge against future transactions in which interest, currency exchange, and mortgage rates can vary between the time a contract is made and when it comes to term. Different outcomes—a gain or loss, a default on mortgage payments—can be balanced or hedged against one another, as was the case with collateralized debt obligations, which combined mortgages rated secure with subprime loans deemed more likely to default when interest rates rose beyond borrowers' abilities to pay. In this respect derivatives bring together things that are far apart and make the future actionable in the present.<sup>6</sup>

The traffic in derivatives can move in markets around the world while the bundle of goods to which they are tied—the house, car, or student loan—have local attachments. The value of those goods being insured is called the face or notional value, whereas the derivatives comprise a kind of composite body that both particularizes certain risks and generalizes a condition of risk, which in financial terms is a measure of potential gain beyond what would be expected. These financial conditions have entered deeply into productive activity, not simply because companies like General Motors came to make most of their profits financing loans on cars they manufactured but also because industrial production in a global economy has come to rely on derivative contracts to commensurate all manner of difference in costs of labor, supplies, currency exchange, and the like.

When taken as a broader social logic, and not just as an activity that takes place within one sector or domain called the economy, the dynamics of the derivative can be seen across all manner of human activity in ways that engender mutual indebtedness, interdependencies across different times and places, and a swelling socialization of what people take to be and expect from life, history, and their future. Rather than a moral compromise to be avoided, the social entailments of indebtedness are the basis of political engagement.<sup>7</sup> What we call identity is certainly an attribute of self that gets bundled, valued, and circulated beyond an individual person.

The understanding of social problems as risks to be managed by mathematical models of outcomes applies to weather variations, military interventions, student and employee performance, health care allocations. Populations are cleaved between those who master these arts of risk management and those who fail to do so. In conventional policy terms, the latter have been labeled not the actually marginalized precariate, but the potentially fallen and contagious at-risk (see Martin 2007). The consequence of a world suffused with derivative logics is that it becomes a riskier place. When all act based upon risks they anticipate, the environment that they inhabit becomes all the more volatile; the impossibility of forecasting outcomes when forecasts collide and cancel one another enhances the likelihood of unlikely and catastrophic events.

6. For accounts of derivatives beyond their technical financial aspect see, Bryan and Rafferty (2006), LiPuma and Lee (2004), and Martin (2002).

7. For a conception of the political grounded in a nuanced understanding of mutual indebtedness see Dienst (2011).

Contrary to the notion that finance is separate from the real world—that it is ethereal, ephemeral, epiphenomenal, immaterial—derivative logics suffuse the flows and structures of our daily lives, and compel us to rethink where to turn in the face of crisis. Across the ideological spectrum the moralizing calls to return the economy to fundamental values, to punish the excessive few and regulate the normal course of affairs, assumes that this chimera called finance can be neatly extracted and banished from the world as we know it.<sup>8</sup> For dancers, it is hard to miss that these epithets of ethereal sylph-like presence have been applied to dance itself, at great cost to the ways in which it has been valued and supported. At the same time, dancers are valued for their creativity, flexibility, absence of material needs—they can make work in spare rooms with nothing more than their bodies, often unshod, subsist on few calories, and even among performing artists deliver more for less by garnering the most meager wages.<sup>9</sup> Their love of art subsidizes their pursuit of perfection—making them the ideal laborers in an idealized creative economy.<sup>10</sup> Rather than accepting this nefarious dichotomy between the real and the fictitious said to distinguish industrial from financial sectors of the economy, dance might be taken as a key site where bodies in movement make value, and where circulation is fully inside of production in ways that yield insights into what sociality can be.

At first blush, dance might be embarrassed to take on the mantle of the derivative. Modernist pride would dictate an/the embrace of originality, innovation, autonomy as what makes dance capable of ruling its roost and securing its treasures. If, however, that confidence belongs to conditions of dance-making that no longer prevail, other principles of sovereignty will need to be divined for dance (or any other performative practice for that matter) to realize its aesthetic and political value. The point of departure here is that the derivative, when treated as a social logic and not only a financial instrument, discloses what these altered conditions of sovereignty entail. The derivative brings to notice the potential impact issued from seemingly minor variations, and how agency is incorporated and dispersed such that the capacities to direct the flows of life, which might have appeared scarce, is reappraised as a kind of abundance. Seeing how a derivative logic operates in dance holds the double promise of giving notice to what dance generalizes as social life beyond itself, and what sustainable principles may already be at hand in what otherwise appears as a world in ruins.

## Derivative Doubles

Derivatives here are doing some heavy lifting, both practically and conceptually. Some unpacking is in order to see how the derivative moves from finance through the political quandary posed to dance by the untenable split between precarious networks and durable (or obdurate) organization. In finance, derivatives insert commodity production, with its specific purposes and local destinations, into global economic circuits and transnational dynamics. A table might be made to serve a simple meal. But when interest rates on loans to the factory, futures contracts on the price of wood, and currency exchange rate variations are blended together with similar factors of production in other quite distinct goods and services, upon the humble table can be placed a global feast. Derivatives, in the very manner in which they come to be, reference

8. Curiously, the notion of fundamental value, as opposed to its representations that lead to speculation, obtains over much of the discipline termed economics, especially its neoliberal formulation, an antinomy that Philip Mirowski has effectively disclosed recently in his edited collection with Dieter Plehwe (2009). The transposition between what Marx called fictitious capital (disintermediated financial transactions between firms) and a false realm of finance *tout court* is a temptation of some recent Marxist political economy (see Foster and Magdoff 2009).

9. Dancers in the United States are, at under 25,000, the smallest of the listed arts occupations and average \$27,392 in annual salary as opposed to \$27,558 for musicians and \$30,254 for actors (NEA 2011).

10. This affective subsidy of artistic labor is what Andrew Ross (2000) has called the “cultural discount.” For a trenchant critique of creative class appeals see Matteo Pasquinelli (2009).

a double life: they are reinventions of things for themselves into matters of interest to others, of local capacities viewed from the perspective of global attentions, of future prospects seen as present opportunities.

The imperialist order that was to replace the colonial regimes after World War II traded the direct political administration of one territory over another for an invitation—albeit always backed by threat of military force—which in turn rested upon a financial authority that choreographed the world's exchanges.<sup>11</sup> This monetary architecture is often referred to as Bretton Woods (after the agreements made at a resort in Mt. Washington, New Hampshire, in 1944 that established the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank). The social and historical conjuncture in which the derivative has figured so prominently emerged from the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in the early 1970s.

In effect, global finance morphed from the rule or sovereignty of one currency, the dollar—a standard by which other currencies could be equilibrated and a store of value in which their worth would be measured—to a schema in which derivatives would allow the exchange of goods to be rendered directly into a global monetary identification that made them intercomparable, or subject to a common measure. This process displaced banks as the sole brokers of commercial financial exchange (what is called disintermediation) and re-engineered industrial firms (like General Motors or General Electric) into manufacturers of financial activities and services (now Ally Bank and GE Capital, respectively).

In 2007, on the eve of the financial meltdown, the combined notional or face value for derivatives contracts traded publicly in financial markets, and privately and directly between firms (what is called over-the-counter, or OTC), exceeded one quadrillion dollars—nearly 15 times the world's gross domestic product.<sup>12</sup> What passed for evidence that finance had become unmoored from industry was in actuality an expression of the profound imbrications of production and circulation, of creating and realizing value.

The world in which derivatives came of age was eventually one oriented more to consequences than causes, to the capacity to achieve results rather than the integrity of first principles. Certainly this was true for the quantitative models used to manage risk. If they worked in measuring outcomes of events so that actions could be taken or prices assigned, then the laws of the markets were being upheld and the models must be working. This tautology, which has come to be called performativity by those who study the effects of economists' discursive and mathematical representations on the object they refer to as the market (a trope that elides the question of labor and production altogether), was meant to translate the uncertainties of *why* into the actionability of *what* (see MacKenzie 2006).

Accordingly, risk would move from being an unwanted outcome that compromised the security of certainty by becoming an opportunity for gain whose avoidance would assure certain loss. If we are to gain any purchase on the social significance of derivative logics it is vital to focus not only on the ways of knowing risk but also on ways of being risky. The kind of being that embraces risk, the types of policies that punish those unable to undertake risk to their self-betterment (the at-risk populations), the confidence that every performance of self can be translated into models that measure outcomes: all display myriad incarnations of the derivative logic.

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11. The link between the rise of finance and the proliferation of imperialist war was made by Hilferding ([1910] 1981) in his seminal formulation of finance capital. The specificity of the US turn is contextualized by Arrighi (1994).

12. The notional value of exchange-based and over-the-counter derivatives is tracked by the Bank for International Settlements. The quadrillion-dollar figure comes from adding up the two kinds of derivatives for June 2008 (\$672 billion for OTC and \$428 billion for exchange-based). Present notional values exceed that amount. For a breakdown of various kinds of derivative contracts that circulate globally, see Bank of International Settlements (2011a and 2011b).



From the perspective of the ways derivatives double in network and organization, and given the loss of security and elaboration of indebtedness that constitute the precarious, the terms of this conjuncture are rendered more specific (and with dance, more particular still). Identity can certainly be understood as a bundling together of attributes of personhood (through hierarchically ordered classifiers of value such as race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.) and placing these in circulation. That identity is made through some kind of affiliation with an (imagined) community points to all manner of organizational forms—employment, cultural and legal rights or citizenship, market participation or consumption—that array and are differentiated by these various yet simultaneous classifications of self. So too, identity does not sit still in its place, but has become a domain of increasing volatility, negotiation, flow, and dispersal—precisely what “network” would seem to name. That the networks in turn order value, as in the rankings of preference and judgment, of aggregations of like and dislike through which the internet becomes a means of commerce, suggests the insinuation of a derivative logic. Further, the focus on the ways in which small movements can be leveraged to larger gains, positions the practice of arbitrage as the key subject position of the derivatives trader. By aggregating these bits of attention, the idea is not to capture the whole person but to set identity in motion, to deliver what will momentarily stand as a public interest in which so many small hits add up to a hit with significant impact.

Hopefully, this account of the derivative is beginning to get a bit more physical, to inscribe the ephemeral in some tangible corporeal animation. Finance is indeed all about compulsory movement, the obligation to keep going at all costs, to go forward into the future unencumbered by historical claims. But if finance spreads movement everywhere, it generates no language of movement, no sensibility regarding how we are disposed to go one way and not another, no logic by which we might grasp how the imperative to move rules us, how we are oriented by it, through it, against it toward some realization of how else we might be moved and by what we might rule together. This silence and stillness at the heart of finance stages the turn to dance, a jubilee of practices that sing the praises of bodily indebtedness and provide flight patterns by which friendly skies might be known. In dance terms, we can expose the derivative logics that course between network and organization through the concepts of mobilization and the social kinesthetic. Mobilization pertains to the medium-generating consequences of movement that render tangible the otherwise ephemeral entailments of time and space. Dancing mobilizes, in one place, particular time- and space-making capacities that draw from wider sensibilities and are dispersed through aspects of many movement practices by which bodies move together. To inquire into what dance is made of and what it makes *besides* itself is to refer to questions of context or conjuncture—to cultivate a sensibility that slices through as it conjoins or cleaves bodily attentions and orientations.

Like the ideas of a structure of feeling, a prepolitical disposition, tacit or virtual socialities, it is possible to imagine the material surround of corporal activity before it crystallizes as a specific practical expression. A social kinesthetic can be understood as the orientation, sensibility, or predisposition that informs approaches to movement, the historically specific microphysics that generates and governs motional force fields.<sup>13</sup> From within mobilization all is networked and from the perspective of a social kinesthetic an organizational rule or logic is discernable. Neither term is originary; both are derivative. Mobilizations coalesce in one place from what has been made and will wind up elsewhere. Social kinesthetics do not impose a genealogy of influence but a series of lateral connections in which disparate practices are joined through some (but not all) of what organizes them. This vocabulary is as abstract as that of financial derivatives. It needs to be grounded in a few practices that will make tangible the operation of

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13. “Structure of feeling” is a term from Williams (1977); the prepolitical describes the emergent sensibilities of the working class in Thompson (1963); the idea of the virtual as tacit norms that govern activity is developed by Goffman (1963).

a derivative logic in dance, and that allow us to see the ways in which dance fleshes out what a derivative might do.

## Decentered Social Kinesthetics

The history of finance is conventionally told as a succession of sovereignties, or currency reigns, of one standard yielding to another as gold, then the dollar, and then derivatives edge each other out for primacy.<sup>14</sup> The history of dance, or at least Western concert dance, might be imparted with a similar inflection. The sovereignty of one body over others or one technical way of dancing over others establishes not simply self-rule for dance, but discloses a principal of bodily affiliation by which we can detect the contours of a social kinesthetic. The triptych of classical, modern, and postmodern ways of knowing would more properly be rendered as a trivium, as three ways of moving that come together. Certainly we can spin the originary tales of ballet in the command made by King Louis XIV that the aristocracy join him in court, or of Martha Graham's invention of a new technique that would provide the basis for her movement oeuvre. These two would then be superseded by a third, the postmodern, in which composition would be drawn from pedestrian movement and collaborative creation. As a glance at the offerings at any major dance city would suggest, classical, modern, and postmodern are contemporary with one another and in many ways convergent. If epistemes suggest some sort of progressive succession, kinesthemes demand a body to be many things at once.<sup>15</sup>

What is of greater interest here are the ways in which those demands afford a field in which bodies can be articulated. The classical would then stand for a condition when imitation of a sovereign, following his steps as he would follow those of god, imagines a divine verticality that orients balletic movement. If the King's authority is derived from god, the steps he takes are codifications of what could be found among the common folk. Rule would be embodied in this capacity to orient all movement along a vertical axis, to impose the space of the sovereign on his vassals, to partner with him in a manner that assures their subordination.

The world that extends from the body of Martha Graham is of a different order, even if it shares the same vertical orientation. The modernist genius, of which she is the exemplary species in dance, is marked by an extraordinary dimension of depth. From this unfathomable well of creativity will issue the self that is made by making art, a secular transcendence couched as a



Figure 2. Tony Alva in *Dogtown and Z-Boys*, directed by Stacy Peralta (Sony Picture Classics, 2001). Backyard swimming pools, the icons of suburban success, were left as fetid waters when residents fled home foreclosures. Teams of skateboarders drained the pools and rode the undulating surfaces of concrete.

14. For a representative recent account see Elson (2011).

15. The spatial and temporal multiplicity of the notion of kinestheme may go further in realizing Michel Foucault's critique of continuous time and space developed in *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972).



universalism. In Graham technique this wellspring is the contraction, a mainline to the archetypes lodged in the unconscious strata of species or blood memory. Graham is also willing to admit that her movement derives from two great cultural sources, African and Native American dance. So far in dance, everything is on the up and up, as ascent is grounded in genealogical descent. The classical and the modern combine the age of discovery with that of empire.

In many ways, the new financial order is installed to break up these very sovereign claims to bodies the world round, something made legible in the play between centered and decentering social kinesthetics in dance. This takes place under the aegis of a very partial multilateralism that a late imperial United States strained to sustain after losing both Vietnam and the Soviet Union as orienting political referents. In the resulting amalgam of doctrines, ideologies, protocols, and unspoken assumptions variously named as neoliberalism, the New World Order, globalization, the War on Terror, the Washington Consensus—just to rehearse a few of the episodes in the making of contemporary precarity—some will be included and enclosed and others reconstructed and exceded. At the same time, various populations would mobilize new expressions of liberation, affiliation, and organization (from national revolutions to the coalition known as the Third World, to OPEC—the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). Together, these shifts will bring about the formal demise of this vertically integrated colonial reach. It will be displaced by a lateral, asymmetrical, horizontal, contest between neo-colonialism and decolonization. This rupture, self-interestedly dubbed *Pax Americana*, takes a course in dance from the pedestrian elaborations of Judson Church to the risk-taking pyrotechnics of contact improvisation, along the way upending conventional locations of figure and ground, superstructure and base, culture and economy.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of a social kinesthetic, this break figures a shift from the vertical to the horizontal, a promissory decolonization of the body that suddenly brings to notice troves of movement riches that were once consigned to the periphery. Certainly the desire that ran as a thread through Western culture more broadly for what was taken as the innocence of nature and the exoticism of the orient had been worthy fodder for the classical and modern kinesthemes as well. Now choreographic appropriation would have to contend with a cacophony of bodily practices that erupted in this dispersed and lateral topography. Just as Third World liberation movements were delivering forms of national sovereignty that jostled against colonial claims to have possession of the word, the bodily mobilizations that issued from the ruins of financial sovereignty bore their own demands for how people might discharge their debts to one another. Postmodern dance, hip hop and boarding culture turn out to be more generatively derivative in their expressions, more assertive about what can rise from the ruins of progress, and are able to spin webs of creativity out of precarious conditions.

What is now called financialization emerges from the ruins of the Bretton Woods agreements in which the postwar sovereignty of the dollar is undone. What begins to be ruined in this moment as well is the very dreamscape by which America can be imagined. Innovations like mortgage-backed securities respond to a real estate market gone south. The home was to be a haven in a heartless world, a space that enclosed privacy from the contentious politics of the public realm. With the destruction of social housing and the collapse of real estate markets, a house could no longer be the receptacle of such secure intimacy. What was released—both the unsustainable promises of the private and the potent capacities of undomesticated bodies—were taken to the streets. Such is the setting for the movement examples that follow, each of which figures a capitalist promise of utopia that is subsequently abandoned. Liquidating these grounds—through forces of markets and bodies alike—is the basis for lateral mobility that suffuses a decentered social kinesthetic, and for derivative mobilizations that do not require unity to move together. While ruins in general, to say nothing of the pronouncements regarding the

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16. The dance accounts here are clearly telescopic. See, for elaboration, Franko (1993); Graham (1973); Baner (1983).

postmodern itself, tend to emphasize disorienting fragmentation that results in political impotency (Harvey 1990; Jameson 1991), a closer look at the socialities carried by derivative forms opens the blockage between a seemingly declining sphere of production and a hyperactive domain of circulation.

The movement practices that help specify a decentered social kinesthetic in which decolonized bodies assert other modalities of risk are themselves derivative forms that share not so much aesthetic influence as attributes that are features of their self-production. In addition to postmodern dance, we can look at hip hop and boarding culture as practices sharing kinesthetic attributes and principles of mobilization that enable us to grasp political potentialities that inhere in the social logic of the derivative. The *fin* that lies at the root of finance pertains to the process of bringing transactions to an end, but this closure refers to a process of life as well. Against the indifference to how movement is made and where it might lead us, we can look carefully at the ruination that the compulsory drive of finance leaves in its wake to see what else arises from it.

### Dancing Derivatives

Treated heterotopically, postmodern dance, hip hop, and boarding culture point toward a trivium of abandoned space turned to ground for distributed sovereignty. Consider Trisha Brown's 1971 *Roof Piece*, or *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, from 1970.<sup>17</sup> The buildings in question in Manhattan's Soho became surfaces for dance when the manufacturing businesses that had occupied these loft quarters left the city. This capital flight was no doubt a condition for the creation of a downtown dance scene, which in turn became part of the transformation of Soho into a destination for cultural tourism and subsequent gentrification that made loft spaces unaffordable for newer arrivals to the dance scene (see Zukin 1989; Smith 1996). It was also spatial and temporal material from which a pedestrian movement could be crafted from an urban fabric. In the context of then-emergent environmental art, the minimalist descent of a harnessed walker down



Figure 3. Buildings in Manhattan's Soho became surfaces for dance when the manufacturing businesses that had occupied these loft quarters left the city. This capital flight was no doubt a condition for the creation of a downtown dance scene. Trisha Brown, *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*, 1970. (Photo by Carol Goodden)

17. For video documentation of these dances, see Brown (2004).

ED.: In notes 17 and 18, we moved the comma from after to before "see": it was "dances see, Brown..."—Comp.

the side of a building to the dead-space between, or the long shot of dancers engaged in accumulation phrases across a series of water-towered roof tops might seem like a bit of a sight-gag in which the city, visually emptied of nondancer human life, is renaturalized. More properly, these derivative forms of pedestrian movement will lay claim to the city, will invert its conventional coordinates, and render spaces of lost utility subject to another principle of speculation. The placement of dance in settings where the body is no longer a temple is not so many steps away from what will become (in Trisha Brown and others who develop contact improvisation from various release techniques) an embrace of risk where walking sidewise quickly becomes flying low.

A bit further uptown and farther into the scenes of what would become the epicenter of urban abjection, the public projects that were to house an upwardly mobile industrial proletariat were subject to what was politely called decay. As if broken down by auto-digestion and fermentation, the projects once treated as the utopian horizon for the urban poor, the confident affirmation of better living through design, were being dismantled as their promise was abandoned. The epitome of this collapse was the 1972 demolition by explosion of the Pruitt-Igoe Housing complex in Saint Louis, Missouri. When built in 1955, these dense blocks of residential warehouses were praised for their elegance born of a new formalism claimed by their architect, Minoru Yamasaki. The year after Pruitt-Igoe went down, work was completed on the north tower of the World Trade Center, another Yamasaki design. The twinned fates of these buildings was in some respects anticipated by the turn away from what came to be considered modernist hubris among architectural critics and the coining of the term postmodern in architecture (see Jencks 1977).

While public housing remains part of the cityscape in New York and a new tower rises where the old fell, the time in between has been marked by the emergence of a quintessentially urban movement form: hip hop.<sup>18</sup> As with postmodern dance, it takes the streets and other unsanctioned surfaces of the city, subway cars especially, as a means of expressive self-production. As movement performed in the round, hip hop joins other practices derivative of slave expressions like the ring shout. Its own embrace of released pelvis, reversed polarities of hands and feet, flying low to the ground, risk as reward, and the posse or ensemble that sustains it organizationally bear overtones of what will become contact improvisation in a parallel development over this same period.

That the projects would become but a partial reprieve from the sordid conditions of the tenement slum inspired the fantasy of the urban getaway, like the waterfront pleasure zones of Coney Island and Rye Playland, which, at the same time, had their suburban counterparts. The notion that a pastoral realm of leisure and consumption could become the organizing principle for laboring masses who left their workplaces behind was no small inspiration for the suburbs. With water diverted from agriculture, Southern California real estate developers of the 1950s wanted to make a strong run on this dreamscape. The seaside precincts of Santa Monica and Venice would be augmented by the fantastical Pacific Ocean Park or P.O.P (1958–1967), which, perched atop the main pier, could serve as a port of call for suburban bliss. Once again, the mysterious blight that descended on this paradise issued from a toxic mix of housing market collapse, drought, and job loss. As the pier itself fell into ruin, it drew the attentions of surfers, here too picking up what had been an indigenous (Hawaiian) practice and turning its attentions to the perils and conditions of extreme sport. Like amphibians emerging from the sea, the moves of sweeping low off-center, gathering lateral momentum, and customizing equipment with neighborhood tags propelled ocean-going boards to become landed-planks on wheels. Backyard swimming pools, the icons of suburban success, were left as fetid waters when residents fled in foreclosure. Teams of skateboarders, most notoriously the Zephyr Boys, drained the pools and

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18. For audio-visual documentation of these forms, see Silver (1983).



*Figure 4. Like postmodern dance, hip hop takes the streets and other unsanctioned surfaces of the city as a means of expressive self-production. The Rock Steady Crew at the 204th St. playground, New York City, 1981. (Photo by Henry Chalfant)*

rode the undulating surfaces of concrete. The migration to snowboards and BMX bicycles was not far behind.<sup>19</sup>

### **Generative Risk**

It has become common to narrate this migration as one of the commercialization and even recuperation of resistant impulses.<sup>20</sup> Surely these instances of upward mobility are evident in postmodern dance and hip hop, but the intriguing feature of derivative logics is what they leave behind—which turns out to be most of the precarious materiality crafted and created by the practitioners engaged in these forms. Assessing the significance of a cultural practice in terms of the commercial success or stardom of a few trades a selective outcome for a reductive account of intentionality. The question remains why so many people spend so much time doing an activity that they claim as their own. A decentered social kinesthetic runs on sentience in a world marked by spectacle. Yet the very conception of a society of the spectacle rests on a chasm between performance and audience that is both violated and bridged in these movement practices. The iterative process of rehearsal, of taking turns doing movement for one another, amounts to a continuous shuttling between viewer and actor so as to render the spectacular internal to performance. The turn-taking and exchangeability of audience and performers was certainly a feature of the Robert Dunn workshops that led to the initial performances at Judson Church. The cipher or circle of breakdancers share this dynamic of reciprocity couched as a

19. For documentation of these practices at their inception and a treatment of the cultural and geopolitical surround, captured on film by the participants, see Peralta (2001).

20. This is the argument in Borden (2001). The racial politics of whiteness in such extreme sports are analyzed in Kusz (2007).



battle between movers, an underlying cooperative ethos also evident in skateboarders' repeated performances of stunts for one another in skate parks or on stair railings. Watching does not substitute for, but enables, doing. Nor is the rest of the ensemble merely watching. They are securing the space; documenting the event (whether by newly available capture technologies such as super-8 or portable video cameras, or for that matter graffiti tagging on subway cars, which is itself a means of image capture and dissemination); and serving as critics and publicists, showing, comparing, appropriating what others are doing. That all of these practices from the 1970s and early '80s can be accessed now through short form, do-it-yourself (yet commercial) video-sharing sites like YouTube or Vimeo only speaks to the deeply imbricated relations of production and circulation, networked dissemination and organization of productive capacities, leverage of small volatilities (of movement and space), and arbitrage of how and where to place one's body in situations of generative risk.

The emphasis in these three movement practices on flying low, off-center release to gravity, reversing position, and purpose of hands and feet (for mobility and balance) all reorient the motional drive of the body from vertical lift to horizontal propulsion. These kinesthetic conditions do not form a stylistic unity but could be said to express the lateral mobility by which derivative logics themselves become so prominent a feature of movement. The underlying sources of pedestrian, slave, and indigenous bodily practices are decolonized from their initial terms and settings. The postmodern dancers, hip hop artists, and boarders who by tradition would be assigned to populations at risk also craft corporal economies where risk counts as its own reward.

A risky move is granted immediate value by the creative ensemble; it need not await final delivery in a concert, competition, or recording precisely in the manner that a derivative affords a price on a good or service that has not yet been made or come due. Derivatives promise continuous and real-time assessment of value via the arbitrage of practitioners that moves the constant calibration of the market into the hitherto hidden abode of production. The streets, pools, walls on which these decolonizing bodies move are exposed already to the prospects of evaluative surveillance—whether cops chasing out boarders and taggers from illicit grounds, or cameras capturing the deed itself for further distribution. The question of who owns a given move may certainly be an object of spirited contention but the insinuation of these lateral, risk-making maneuvers across so many ruinous sites eclipses the proprietary claims of possessive individualism by which celebrity may be measured, replacing it with a distributed possession by which participation in these practices multiplies. The effect of these risks taken is to reappraise which attributes will get bundled together given excess capacity.

The capacity to collectively revalue the lateral mobility that these movement practices evidence also speaks to the very demographic shift away from opportunities for upward mobility that will characterize the prospects for so many young people during the course of the risk-shifting '70s and '80s. The disinvestment in infrastructure and social services, the flattening of wages and mounting consumer debt, the repositioning of government from a guarantor of security through a bundle of defined benefits to an investor-based citizenship contingent upon contribution—all converge here to darken the screen of the American dreamscape and spread a dissolute precarity. The supposedly iconic figure of the yuppie, the hyper-affluent precocity of effective self-investment, effaces the much broader trend of diminished opportunities and rewards for those who would follow the postwar boomer generation.

While the ranks of the professional managerial class continued to swell, the autonomy by which these knowing selves would achieve sovereignty was increasingly diminished. While public funding for the arts might be under attack from the '80s forward, the notion that artists could serve as models for revitalization of what financial ascent had left in ruins led to a litany of privatizing public works by which creativity would raise all boats—be they depleted cities or de-plenished middle classes. Cancelled entitlements and shredded public goods would be compensated for by a growing self-help industry through which companies would profit from

risk-induced anxieties once held at bay by the social security of government, labor unions, and professional associations. At the same time, youth culture, taken as both a marketing opportunity and an achievement of self-organization and production, was reoriented around a do-it-yourself ethos (DIY) in which precarity might seem to have been a virtue.<sup>21</sup> The moral panic directed by reenergized conservatives at idle (but really idled) youth would cast a broad net of guilt over errant culture—whether taking place onscreen or onstage, digital monomania, or life seen to be excessive because it has spilled out into the street.<sup>22</sup> But we could see in these decentered movement practices derivative cousins of moshing, mashing, and mixing; in alternate artistic practices of collectives and collaboratories, we could see images of self-production, self-representation, and self-dissemination.<sup>23</sup>

The past 40 years, during which finance emerged from one ruined ground to plough through yet another, have reoriented some common understandings of what can be done, what is available for doing, and what wealth exists for. Derivatives came to stand for vast aggregates of wealth unmoored from any particular purpose. The imperial power that has historically underwritten financial sovereignty has also morphed into a kind of discretionary intervention that is entered hastily but difficult to sustain justification for, as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the financial bailout make increasingly apparent. Yet what is also clear is that among these imperatives to be driven by risk, other sensibilities of what it means to make more or other out of what we have are also available. Sensing dance from the perspective of the derivative, between the fluid ephemerality of networks that vanish without a trace and the static durability of organizations that lurch from crisis to crisis replicating their structures, opens approaches to embodied ensembles that leverage further movement and value. If the polarity between network and organization into which precarious movements have themselves been cast has proven to be a trap that promised escape but leads back to the starting point, the derivative logic as presented here plays inside and outside of these dance practices allowing them to shuttle between the ground they inhabit and the world that they ripple through. Difference is realized immediately in the risk well taken, and deferred to other connections that remain promissory notes—a lateral move teetering on a wing and a prayer. The derivative logic might also help dance out of its own trap of ephemerality and location. Performances are, after all, derived from many other times—of rehearsal, of training, of touring; they gather together movements from myriad locales, experiences, and sources to recalibrate and recompose them for a given intervention. Seen from this expanded field, dance is already everywhere. Rather than appearing merely fleeting and ephemeral in performance, dance is the concatenation of varying durations, of reaches near and far that nestle among the moving bodies.

Conversely, finance has touted vast abundance that leaves scarcity for others in its wake. But like the hands and feet of decentered movement practices, the polarities of value can readily be reversed and the extremes of movement possibility mined to point to what else we might be and do together. Lateral mobility lives with what it has. If capital has jettisoned its own utopian promises, emerging social logics of the derivative point us in different directions. Utopia as an end we touch through our own means of intervention. The ruins left are not sources of poverty, depletion, or shame but the very roots of what could make a population assemble for its own sake, to establish its own terms of tenancy, to value its ensemble capacities as creative choreographies. Populate (from the classical Latin *populāre*), like precarity, has a double and internally

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21. For a critical look at the advent of self-help, see McGee (2006).

22. The notion of moral panic was developed in British cultural studies of youth culture and crime, and has morphed into a generalized trope of war on domestic populations. The seminal study is Hall (1978) and the updated reflection in the US context of generational abandonment is provided by Grossberg (2005).

23. For an account of this elaborate but unseen and undervalued mass of creative labor that underwrites the art world see Sholette (2010).



antagonistic etymology: it refers to both the action of laying waste or bringing ruin to a country, and to the process of peopling or inhabiting a domain. Valuing the ways in which we are linked together without being one, that we share certain sensibilities of moving together without needing to model or imitate someone, opens conceptions of sovereignty as self-production that just might serve as a momentary realization of the future in the present. The much vaunted and readily dismissed ephemerality of dance (and finance) would thereby assume a generative durability, an elaboration of times and spaces in which collectivity itself would gain and circulate its own currency. This self-conferred tenancy would claim a different ground from which the uncertain movement of precarity might circulate its politics.

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