

Chapter 1  
To the Point: The Theatrics of Grammar  
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*Ay me, what act, / That roars so loud and thunders at the index?*  
– Shakespeare

In 1977, polymaths George and Susan Quasha founded Station Hill Press, named after one of the main streets in the Hudson River Valley hamlet of Barrytown, where the couple lived. The press would feature a certain strain of post-Poundian poetry, at once vatic and attentive to the linguistic facture of the signifier, by poets such as Robert Kelly, Kenneth Irby, and Ted Enslin. From the beginning, it also brought together poetry grounded in the other arts: filmmaker Franz Kamin's *Distance Function* (1977), visual glyphs and sound-poetry performance scores by Charles Stein (1978), Hannah Weiner's intermedia *Code Poems* (1982) and, from the same year, composer John Cage's *Themes & Variations*, a work even the publishers had trouble pinning down. They describe it on the dust jacket as:

a poem, a score for oral performance, a typographic experiment, a musical composition in which the words are notes and the ideas phrases, a series of mesostics is determined by chance operations and combined with the Japanese form of Renga.

In the midst of these multimodal publications, in 1979, Station Hill issued Jackson Mac Low's *The Pronouns: A Collection of Forty Dances For the Dancers, 3 February — 22 March 1964*.<sup>1</sup> The title is worth pausing over. What, to begin with, might be the connection between "the pronouns" and dance? Furthermore, is the strange locution of "dances for the dancers" merely redundant? For whom else would a dance score be? This essay will argue that the phrases in fact make perfect, quite literal sense, and that the odd genitive resolves both grammatically and bibliographically.

In *Détruire la peinture*, published just as Station Hill was established, Louis Marin undertakes an extended analysis of Nicolas Poussin's *Les Bergers d'Arcadie*, drawing on Antoine Arnaud and the seventeenth-century grammarians of the Port-Royal in order to demonstrate the ways in which every proposition implies a pronoun, and that

even the simplest, abstract grammar points to the first person pronoun.<sup>2</sup> Marin rehearses this *reductio* reasoning, by which all verbs – whatever their ostensible action – distill to the verb “to be” by virtue of their indication of an assertion and a judgement. We still retain this sense of a “sentence” as a judgment in idioms relating to the juridical sentencing of criminal law, but the connotation is there already from the beginning, in the grammatical unit as well. By encoding a judgement, moreover, verbs are thus a kind of pronoun; they stand in for a noun. Every verb intimates a subject behind its theatrical mask. Even the most innocuous statement, such as “The sky is blue,” communicates not so much something about the color of the sky as it does something about an asserting subject behind that statement, which can be parsed as: “I, who speak to you, affirm that *the sky is blue*, and we share the temporal frame of the sky’s blueness in the ‘here and now’ in which my discourse exists.” This analysis holds even when the demands of grammar have generated the spectral cipher of the sentence predicate – the *it is* or *there are* which permits a sentence to launch in English without an ostensible subject – as in *It is raining*. The sentence predicate erects a scaffolding on which to hang the drapery of a grammatical costume. Ontologically, there is no *it* except for the summoning of a world, a time and space sketched as the barest stage setting in which there is room for the pronoun to enter: I, who speak to you, to affirm that *raining is occurring* and that we share its temporal expanse.<sup>3</sup> This predicate is the “it” printed and the *I* implied in the 7th Dance of *The Pronouns*, subtitled “Being Earth” (a grand setting if there ever was one):

it darkens  
 putting a story between much railing  
 and mouthing

For the grammarians of the Port-Royal, grammatical utterances such as “it darkens” reduced to the *ego* (the Latin first person singular pronoun), of the Cartesian *cogito*.

Arthur Rimbaud will continue the analysis, with a dark transformation of the subject into the object as it is caught in the net of socially regulated language under a regime of semantics and grammar. In his famous, first, 1871 letter to Georges Izambard Rimbaud writes: «C’est faux de dire ‘je pense’, on devrait dire ‘On me pense’ (Pardon du jeu de mots). Je est un autre [It is wrong to say, ‘I think’. Better to say, ‘I am thought.’ The pronoun *I* is an other].”<sup>4</sup> In Louis Aragon’s first novel *Anicet, ou le panorama*, published in 1921, the fictionalized

Rimbaud reverses this realization of grammatical implications to satirize the logic of the Port-Royal grammarians; working outward from the pronoun he unspools the verbal world it implies, introducing himself in the first chapter:

Je m’appelle Arthur et je suis né dans les Ardennes, à ce qu’on m’a dit, mais rien ne me permet de l’affirmer, d’autant moins que je n’admets nullement, comme vous l’avez deviné, la dislocation de l’univers en lieux distincts et séparés. Je me contenterais de dire: je suis né, si même cette proposition n’avait le tort de présenter le fait qu’elle exprime comme une action passée au lieu de le présenter comme un état indépendant de la durée. Le verbe a été ainsi créé que tous ses modes sont fonctions du temps, et je m’assure que la seule syntaxe sacre l’homme esclave de ce concept, car il conçoit suivant elle, et son cerveau n’est au fond qu’une grammaire. Peut-être le participe naissant, rendrait-il approximativement ma pensée, mais vous voyez bien, Monsieur,» et ici Arthur frappa la table du poing, «que nous n’en finirons plus si nous voulons approprier nos discours à la réalité des choses

My name is Arthur and I was born in the Ardennes, or so I have been told, but I cannot be at all sure that the assertion is correct, particularly since, as you have divined, I do not in the least accept that the universe can be broken down into distinct and separate locations. I would say simply ‘I was born,’ if even this proposition did not mistakenly present the fact it expresses as an action completed in the past, instead of a state where time is boundless. The verb was created in such a way that all of its modes are a function of time, and I am convinced that syntax in itself anoints man as a slave to this concept, since he can only conceive thought through syntax, and his brain is essentially no more than a grammar. Perhaps the present participle *being born* would approximate to my thought, but you are well aware, sir — at this point he thumped the table — that there will be no end to it if we adapt our speech to the reality of things.<sup>5</sup>

Even without the satire of this anti-cartesian surrealism, we can note that the first-person pronoun – *je, I, ego, et cetera* – are, like all pronouns, a species of what Roman Jakobson called “shifters.”<sup>6</sup> Jakobson is resurrecting a coinage proposed by the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen

in the early 1920s, to account for the referents of words such as *home*, or *enemy*, or *mother and father*. Such nouns seem to encode an implicit first-person possessive; *mi casa* may not in fact be *su casa*, for instance, just as *the enemy of my enemy* could well be my friend but may not be my enemy's friend, and so on. Furthermore, when Jakobson takes up the term "shifter," he is following Émile Benveniste's work on the way in which pronouns indexically point, with an essentially deictic function (from the Greek δεικνῦμι [to point out]).<sup>7</sup> Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's dynamic "schéma corporel [bodily field]," anthropologist William Hanks puts these arguments in terms of epistemology :

In acts of deictic reference, speakers integrate schematic with local knowledge. It is critical to an understanding of deixis to recall that even very "local" elements of context, such as a speaker's own corporeal experience and perceptual field, are susceptible of schematization.<sup>8</sup>

In short, a relational predicate is necessary for a full grammatical analysis of any indexical phrase. Understanding the subject in its context requires reference to some thing other than the subject alone.

In addition to these scientific interests in deixis, drawn from the disciplines of linguistics and anthropology, one might also consider the literary interest in pointing. For instance, the very opening of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, a text that Jackson Mac Low knew well, evinces a manifest poetics of deixis at work:

A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading.<sup>9</sup>

Obviously, much could be said about a spectacularly strange text like this. For our purposes, I want to note that the first phrase could be parsed to understand "that" as the subject of the statement, in mention rather than use; the word *that*, as a deictic shifter, is a kind of "blind glass" in comparison to the looking-glass of mimeticism and the kinds of "resemblance" that Stein, with her interest in the genre of portraiture, was concerned. It is "not resembling" since it can stand for so many different things, but it is "not unordered" either, since it effects the relational ordering of grammatical terms in a grammatical space,

reflecting, if not figuring, the arrangement of implied subjects with a corporeal schematization. Regardless of how we parse the pronoun "that," these questions of relationship and resemblance may explain the allusions to *Hamlet* in the opening phrase "a kind in glass and a cousin." In Shakespeare's play, the new King's entreaty "But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son,—" is met by the Prince's rebuke: "A little more than kin, and less than kind."<sup>10</sup> The King, although related to Hamlet and promoted by the system of marriage to the structural position of his father, does not resemble him. Hamlet, urging the Queen with an indexical pointing to "look here upon this picture and on this" (the two *this* are pointedly not resembling one another), chastises his mother's inability to see "such a difference" between the two "counterfeit presentments" as being "blind."<sup>11</sup> Her name, of course, would resonate with Stein's: *Gertrude*.

Its periods are punctuated by full stops in "a system to pointing," in the sense of punctuation: *to point*: "To insert points or stops in (writing); to make the proper stops or pauses in (something read or spoken); to indicate the grammatical divisions, or the pauses, by points or stops; to punctuate." But with a syntax that calls into question the coherent semantic status of grammatical sentences, the foregrounded "pointing" and "ordinary," abutting its cousin "[un]ordered," may suggest the juridical sense of the sentence as well. The first definition of "ordinary," in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, indicates a "Judge Ordinary," from the classical Latin *ordinarius* ['legitimate, normally appointed'], with the etymon, from *ordō* [order], indicating something "arranged in regular lines," like prose sentences "arranged in a system" of printed lines. Indeed, we might think of Stein's "carafe" and its suggestion of writing – with the paradoxical characteristics of being simultaneously "nothing strange" and "not ordinary" – when we encounter Mac Low's line, repeated in *The Pronouns* and returning as the final line of the entire book: "quietly chalking a strange tall bottle."

Regardless of the associations, the written pronoun's deictic function – its requirement of a system of pointing to establish reference, positioning bodies in space – ties it to dance, and the positioning of bodies in space by the dance writing of choreography [χορεία + -γραφία]. As Cameron Williams has written, with respect to Lisa Robertson's poetry: "deixis is the grammatical structure that corresponds to situations, circumstances, and spaces. It 'points to' these specific contexts." Moreover, deixis goes beyond the merely descriptive to motivate and animate those spaces. Williams continues: "deixis plays a privileged role in the creation of settings inasmuch as its function (as a basic grammat-

ical structure) depends on contextual meaning to establish reference.”<sup>12</sup> Deixis, in short, has the capacity “to produce, rather than merely reflect contexts.”<sup>13</sup>

Although I am going to question the equation of dance with motion, Williams’ sense of active, productive, animating function of deixis calls attention to the sense of movement inherent in Jakobson’s promotion of the term “shifter”: something that changes position in space (*to shift*: “to move from one place to another”; “to move from one position to another”). Indeed, we might consider the connotations of the term more fully. In his adopted English (Jakobson is working at Harvard and MIT when he develops his theory, in the late 1950s), the word carries an echo of duplicity or untrustworthiness, from things that are *shifty*: “indirect or dishonest methods; addicted to evasion or artifice; not to be depended on,” as the *O. E. D.* defines those connotations. The meanings recall the opening of Mac Low’s 32nd Dance: “Which begins by giving falsely,” a phrase that repeats through earlier dances and is the title — “Giving Falsely” — of the final, 40th Dance, which might be glossed as “showing it to be other than it seems,” as another motif divulges. “Dishonest” or “evasive” could also describe whatever duplicity might lie behind “seeming to keep rods under bits of cushion” or “seeming to hand snakes to people.”

Jakobson, however, was also thinking of Russian (and perhaps in Russian); his touchstone article on shifters, we might recall, developed from a project on the description and analysis of “verbal categories and the Russian verb.” “Putting in languages other than English,” as Mac Low’s 39th Dance has it, and translating to his native tongue, the word would have inescapably recalled сдвиг [shift], one of the central *termes de metiers* of Slavic Formalism and Russian Futurist poetics. Vladimir Mayakovsky, a poet close to Jakobson, and about whom he wrote movingly, provides a nice dramatization of the shift of verbal mass denoted by сдвиг in the opening lines of his 1913 poem “из улицы в улицу [From Street to Street].”

из улицы в улицу	From Street to Street
у-	the
лица	street
лица	faces
у	of
догов	Great
годов	Danes
рез	are

че	sharper
че	than
рез <sup>14</sup>	years

Here, the сдвиги – the shifts of syllabic matter from the front to the back of words in lexical inversions – generate a series of material mirrors, at the level of the grapheme, but symbolic disjunctions at the level of semantics. The street [улица] becomes faces [лицау]: “the faces of great danes sharper than years,” as time and architectural space are summoned from the declensions of words themselves. The linguistic experimentalism of this poetic avant-garde is the very milieu from which Jakobson also emerged during his “futurist years.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, there is a contribution to Aleksei Kruchenkyh’s 1924 pamphlet *500 новых острог и каламбуров Пушкина* [500 new puns and wordplays in Pushkin] on the very subject of *sdvig* attributed to a “K. Jakobson.” When queried about the essay, Jakobson “forcefully rejected the supposition, or the suspicion” of any involvement, as Remo Faccani documents with a letter from 1979 (written in English):

As to his *pyatsot novyx ostrot* [500 new puns], I have never seen neither this pamphlet nor its review by an alleged K. Jakobson, and, of course, needless to say, I have nothing in common neither with this review nor with the reviewer.<sup>16</sup>

Did the great linguist, so certain of his memory, momentarily forget the rules for double negatives in English, falling back on the syntax of his native Russian (in Slavic grammar, doubled negations are requisite, rather than disallowed)? Or does he protest too much, risking the appearance of being shifty?

In either case, there are certainly further nuances and theoretical contradictions in all of these arguments about linguistic shifters, and I do not mean to suggest that the Port-Royal and the Prague Linguistics Circle are equivalent, or that there are not fundamental disagreements between Benveniste and Jakobson. Moreover, a more thorough account of indexicality would situate their discussion in the broader critical field that would include important touchstone essays not only in linguistics but in art history and poetics.<sup>17</sup> Instead, I want to emphasize that all of these theorists offer a sense that grammar is not simply an ideal, abstract relation between immaterial words, or a disembodied relation between ideas, but rather that grammar projects a physical disposition of bodies in space. Pronouns, in all of these cases, set the stage and populate it with

choreographed bodies. (It is interesting, though, that the first version of notecards used by Simone Forti specifically did not contain pronouns. And yet they generated dances. Perhaps pronouns are redundancies [if they are already implied in verbs] and verbs are already shifters.)

When read aloud, *The Pronouns* "are to be enunciated with straightforward seriousness."<sup>18</sup> The imperative for this damped affect is figured by two motifs that always occur together in the poems: "harbor poison between cotton" and "breathing to a common form" (they recur frequently in the 8th Dance, for example); taken together, they suggest inhaled CHCl<sub>3</sub>, or chloroform, commonly administered by saturated cotton.<sup>19</sup> Anesthetizing, the poison stands as a counter to the "happy & willing" mind that occurs elsewhere in the poems. Another triangulated, but not explicitly named phrase is summoned by a couplet from the 4th Dance. Morphing through the book, the motif provides a nice example of the specific textual effects of a shift of verbal mass: "you blacken something/ while you write with a bad pen." Writing about the scene of writing, in all its messy materiality (a setting to which I will return), the passage is patently self-reflexive. Moreover, it also allegorizes the themes of chance, repetition, and fragmentation at the heart of Mac Low's poetics in *The Pronouns*. The final phrase suggests a truncation of the idiomatic term *bad penny*, which goes back at least to the early fifteenth century, as attested by William Langland's assertion, in *Piers Plowman*, that "Men may lykne letterid men [...] to a badde peny."<sup>20</sup> The idiom is bound to writing, to the "letterid," from its earliest recorded, written instance. Mac Low's 10th Dance, with an archaism recalling this long history of the phrase, which turns up in the written record all the way back to earlier forms of English, writes: "thou writest with a bad pen." The 14th Dance, with an opening statement of deictic pointing, reiterates: "one of these points to a fact that seems to be an error & shows it to be other than it seems/ while another of these writes with a bad pen." The phrase returns in the 30th Dance, and so on, where *returning*, since at least the eighteenth century, is all to the point for a bad penny, which colloquates to "a bad penny always returns" or "a bad penny always turns up." As the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains: "in simulative and figurative use in allusion to this, with reference to the predictable, and often unwanted, return [...] or (more generally) to the continual recurrence of someone or something." With the blackening smudge or stain suggested by its first appearance ("you blacken something/ while you write with a bad pen"), Mac Low's "bad pen" is a badly written – truncated, cacographic – version of the fully written *bad penny*. The "bad pen," as one iteration has it, "seems to be an error

& shows it to be other than it seems." The line announces the dissimulating shiftiness of the "bad pen" but also hints at the error ("pen" for *penny*). By returning repeated throughout *The Pronouns*, the phrase proves itself to be a "bad penny" regardless of whether we see the "pen" as a syncope or not; it performs the meaning of the phrase it approaches, even if the association is mere chance.

That specter of chance, however, mints the emblem of the aleatory in the coin of the coinage. The implied penny, as a coin, in Mac Low's text, is not coincidental; it stands as the very figure of chance and the tool of the toss, a model of the "chance operations" at the heart of the composition of *The Pronouns*. Mac Low selected the book's vocabulary by consulting the Rand Corporation's *Million Random Digits with 100,000 Normal Deviates*. In preparation for rehearsing a performance of the work, its poems are meant to be selected by dancers according to "systematic chance" procedures. The *bad penny* that keeps turning up in the writing of *The Pronouns* by its "bad pen" might be considered alongside Judith Dunn's first choreographed work, written for Judson Dance Theater and performed in 1963, just a year before Mac Low's *The Pronouns*. Her work was titled (significantly) *Index*. A duet between Dunn and Steve Paxton, *Index* was also composed via aleatoric techniques, which are theatricalized when she gives Paxton a handful of coins while he held his hands behind his back. As he recalls: "it had a lot of references to indexes, including index fingers, and pointing gestures." The score, moreover, as composed by Robert Dunn was devised for index cards containing "instructions for performing vowel and consonant sounds" in what was apparently an analogue, biological, imitation of the electronic music of the day.

*The Pronouns* was also composed on index cards, developing from the "3 by 4 inch filing cards" that comprised the *Nuclei for Simone Morris* in 1961 (retitled as *Nuclei for Simone Forti*, following her separation from Robert Morris), so that format and title both point to the deictic or indexical, but where that format also explains the dedicatory title of *Forty Dances for the Dancers*.<sup>21</sup> The palm-sized sheets, as we will see, served a utilitarian function in the dance studio, but they also facilitated the aleatory randomization of language in the composition of *The Pronouns*, as the nuclei cards could be shuffled, cut, and selected with ease. As Mac Low explains: "In composing each dance, I would first shuffle the pack & then cut it & point blindly to one of the actions on the card cut to."<sup>22</sup> Following numerous periodical publications, those dances were published "twice in book form," as Mac Low explains: "first in my own mimeographed edition, produced with mimeo machine,

stencils, paper & ink supplied by the Judson Memorial Church [...] in 1964." His specification of a mimeograph "produced with mimeo machine" at first sounds redundant – how else, one might wonder, would you do it? – but along with those readymade office supplies Mac Low is underscoring the 8-1/2-by-11 inch format of the printed publication. "Who is printing," as the 22nd Dance asks, turns out to be all to the point. For instance, when *The Pronouns* was subsequently printed in 1971, a fine-press printer worked in a dramatically larger format: "Ian Tyson's magnificent boxed folio edition (26" by 21-1/4" by 1-1/4")," as Mac Low again specifies the trim of the text's publication with precision when discussing the bibliographic history of his poems, underscoring the oversized, magnificent format of the "sumptuous" edition as he describes it elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> These earlier versions, from the do-it-yourself bricolage of office-machine exigency to the carefully crafted art commodity, may all be "Dances," but they are not suited for the dancers. In contrast to those editions, which are impractical for rehearsal and the working space of the studio, the thermal-bound, trade-format Station Hill book is both announced as a publication in honor of certain dancers ("This edition is dedicated to Merce Cunningham, Simone Forti, Trisha Brown, Meredith Monk, Kenneth King, Lanny Harrison, & the late Fred Herko," as the front matter announces) and also printed in "a small format paperback for the dancers": for those who cannot afford one of the limited-edition artist's books or who no longer have access to the few hundred fugitive mimeos self-published and quickly scattered fifteen years earlier.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in addition to the 1300 copies printed in the compact 8.5 x 5.75 inch paperback trim (the octavo size of a Victorian two-volume novel, as it happens), the Station Hill printing also included a special edition of 150 copies of boxed cards, returning to the index-card format from which they were composed. As Mac Low elaborates, the special edition offered "a compact printed format which a dancer could slip into a bathrobe pocket" (a robe presumably worn backstage while keeping warm before a topless performance, as the photographs documenting early performances of the dances reveal).<sup>25</sup>

The practicalities dramatized by Mac Low's description of his robed dancer are inherent in the affordances of every medium, and his detailed descriptions might remind us that the format of a publication – the material properties of the substrate of print – operates as a kind of pronoun in its own right: situating bodies in space, in relation to a text. And those positioned and placed bodies, like all pronouns, might be considered as a genre of dance. Writing, to be sure, sets bodily activity in motion at the moment of its inscription, such as the dactylic dance

of the fingers over typewriter keys producing the stencil for the mimeograph edition of *The Pronouns*. In the milieu from which that edition emerged, in fact, Yvonne Rainer had already aligned such activity with dance, establishing its claim to the genre with her 1968 *Hand Movie*, a five-minute "miniature choreography of moving fingers" as it has been described.<sup>26</sup> But despite the ideologies that would figure reading as a disembodied and abstractly mental activity – more ideal mind than material body – the act of reading is equally corporeal and fully embodied. Media suggest our corporeal dispositions before language: do we face it head on, standing erect, when it is hung on a wall, perhaps framed in a gallery like one of Tyson's prints; and if so, do we need to move to account for glare, perhaps leaning the torso in a sagittal contrapposto, or step back, *avec un pas en arrière*, to take the composition in as a whole, or lean with a *cambré en avant* in order to make out small type; do we incline our heads – elevating the shoulder by the trapezius and tensing the levator scapulae – toward a heavy volume resting on a desk; can we comfortably lift and hold a paperback with two hands; or can we do it with just one hand, flexing the spine, holding it open with the thumb; can we slip a deck of cards into a bathrobe pocket; *et cetera*. Writing itself is always thus a kind of choreography.

At the same time, I want to be cautious about equating dance with movement. This is not the place to work out all of the parallels in detail, but I want to propose that as we consider dance in the orbit of John Cage's influential theory and practice of "composition" in the expanded field, we should think about how his double deconstruction – of music and noise, and noise and silence – might apply to the other arts that he influenced. Following André Lepecki's critique of an ontological grounding of dance in motion and his insistence instead on possible kinds of non-kinetic dance, we might imagine a non-motile dance along the lines of Seth Kim Cohen's non-cochlear music.<sup>27</sup> If Louis-Ferdinand Céline can propose *Ballets sans musiques, sans personne, sans rien* [*Ballets without Music, Without Dancers, Without Anything*], can we conceive of a ballet without movement?<sup>28</sup> Such an imagination might begin by recalling specific works, such as Paul Taylor's infamous, motionless 1956 dance piece *Duet*, one episode in a series of short pieces that is a touchstone in dance literature but seems to be referenced far more often than it has ever been seen (perhaps not unlike like the number of people who refer to Cage's *4'33"* without having actually heard it in concert). The details, accordingly, are rather fuzzy. To begin with, it is often listed as a work from 1957, and sometimes from 1952, which would put it among Taylor's very first choreographies, while he was a

student at Syracuse University. According to witnesses: he stands next to a reclining woman in street clothes; he is wearing a business suit and tie; they are in Spanish costumes; he stands next to a seated woman, or a partner sitting on the floor, or on a chair, or with ankles crossed on the floor in a dark full-circle dress, or in an evening gown; Taylor's partner in the duet is Toby Glanternik, or Anita Dencks, or David Tudor; the duration might have been for three minutes, or four minutes, or "several minutes," or "an interminable length of time"; the accompaniment is an unremarkable silence, or a simultaneous performance of *4'33"*, or a strictly timed three-minute, graphic-score, solo-piano composition by Cage, or a magnetic-tape piece by "George Tacet" (an obvious pseudonym), or something in imitation of Cage, or a composition by David Tudor, or sounds by Robert Rauschenberg (who does seem to have been responsible for the design), and so on. I have never seen it myself, and I do not propose to set the record straight here, but the talismanic resonance of the work even for those who have not seen it speaks to the conceptual power and intellectual appeal of imagining an akinetic dance.

One result of Cage's investigations into musical silence was to reveal, as he puts it in his 1954 lecture "45' for a Speaker": "There is no/ such thing as silence. Something is al-/ways happening that makes a sound." Accordingly, we might be attentive to whether investigations into motionless dance would reveal that there is no such thing as stillness, because something is always happening that makes a movement.<sup>29</sup> Ivana Müller's 2006 *While We Were Holding It Together* offers one answer. Five performers on stage hold different poses, for almost an hour, in a *tableau vivant*, as if caught mid-motion; they speak in speculative turns to give context to their stances with a script that takes associative cues from each previous speaker. "I imagine the woman of my life jumping into my arms," says one, his arms held out in a cradle; "I imagine I fell badly when I jumped," another twisted on the floor follows, continuing: "and I injured myself; I imagine being taken to the hospital, they are telling me I am going to stay like this forever." That bodily paralysis provides the kernels of the various narratives suggested to account for their poses: soldiers frozen after hearing a click in a minefield; polar explorers literally frozen to death; statues in a museum; a family photograph; a game of charades; victims restrained; fugitives in hiding; and so on. To "stay like this" is also part of the physical challenge for the dancers. No matter how hard their trained bodies try, the tremulous spasms of muscle fatigue begin to be visible after fifteen or twenty minutes. Accordingly, the rounds of comic, philosophical, erotic, absurd, and meta-theatrical monologues give way to accounts of

their strained quivering: "I imagine I am an oak tree, I am afraid winter is coming," says another, trunk stock still but outstretched hand trembling uncontrollably like a leaf shivering in the winter wind; another, similarly, imagines the palsy of old age. "I imagine this position must look quite comfortable to you," says one, half-reclining, with evident irony as he and his companions become increasingly stiff and strained and uncomfortable over the duration of the performance.

The last words heard, from off-stage, speaking for the audience as well as the dancers, is the repetition of the phrase that marks the midpoint of the dance: "I imagine we are all in this together." Like the audience at a concert performance of Cage's *4'33"*, who are not asked to do anything unusual, but simply sit and listen as in any other musical performance, the audience of *While We Were Holding It Together* is – like the performers – meant to 'sit still,' however much their disappointed expectations of a dance might have them fidgeting restlessly in their seats. Müller describes one of the main challenges of her experimental dance piece: "How could I create a performance that only comes into being if the audience participates, while not asking the audience to be anything other than the audience?"<sup>30</sup> Indeed, spectatorship rather than dancing may be the very requirement for movement, as Maaïke Bleeker has argued with regard to Müller's piece, which she sees as transforming movement itself into an element of perception rather than willed activity.<sup>31</sup> What that audience may realize, as their perception turns from the involuntary quavering of the bodies onstage to the micromovements of their own bodies, is that stillness, like silence — however interesting and provocative — is always a fiction, an ideal ultimately belied by the reality of materiality. The realization establishes the degree to which one of Gordon Matta-Clark's *Word Works* – index-card compositions made about a decade after *The Pronouns* and looking back to the genre of Fluxus event scores – should be considered as a thought experiment rather than anything that could actually ever be performed:

Standing perfectly still  
not moving from your spot  
A place that does not move<sup>32</sup>

"When I have talked for an hour I feel lousy," Ian Hamilton Finlay writes in the opening line of the title poem in his early book *The Dancers Inherit the Party*.<sup>33</sup> "Not so when I have danced for an hour," the next line continues (perhaps not envisioning an hour-long dance like Müller's *Holding It Together*). Finlay declares, triumphantly: "The

dancers inherit the party/ While the talkers wear themselves out and sit in corners alone, and glower." With the recognition that even silent, wall-flower reading – much less talking with "much [...] mouthing" – is also a kind of dance, there might be less reason to glower. Whether quietly talking or "quietly chalking," language choreographs with its myriad shifts. To return to the strange tall bottle of Stein's "carafe" and its "arrangement in a system to pointing," we might note that the first entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *shift* as "to appoint, arrange." The "difference," as Stein remarks, "is spreading." It takes only a shift, in Jakobson's Futurist sense of a displacement of verbal mass, to see how "spreading," with just a slight difference, becomes [sp]reading. That shift, and the recognition of that shift, are what Ezra Pound called "the dance of the intelligence among words" (and later, with a slight shift, "the dance of the intellect among words") — a dance only witnessed by an audience themselves always dancing. Like pronouns, as bodies situated in space in relation to words: a corporeality indexing materiality, and vice versa.

Even now, reading this essay, you, too, are dancing.<sup>34</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In his catalogue of pronouns, Mac Low associates "he" with Fred Herko, given the first two letters of the last name; one might, accordingly, hear *Forti*, as in Simone Forti, behind the number *Forty* in the title.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Marin, *Détruire la peinture*, series écriture/figures (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1977). Marin is drawing primarily from Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *La logique ou l'Art de penser* (Paris: Jean Guignart, Charles Savreux, & Jean de Lavray, 1662).

<sup>3</sup> One might arrive at the same conclusion by the implications of the logical inverse of Ludwig Wittgenstein's proposition that "Der Raumpunkt ist eine Argumentstelle [a point in space is the location for an argument]": grammatical possibilities (the groundwork for any meaningful statements that would permit judgements, or sentences) open the necessity of real, material bodies in space.—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge, 1922): 2.013.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954): 268.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Aragon, *Anicet, ou le panorama* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1921): 8-9; *Anicet, or The Panorama*, trans. Anthony Melville (Lon-

don: Atlas Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Tyrus Miller makes the same connection with respect to Mac Low's *Pronouns*; see "Me, You, Nobody, Who: Pronouns Set to Dance," *Jampole* (October, 2012): <https://www.jampole.com/OpEdgy/?p=150>.

<sup>7</sup> Confusingly, Benveniste subsequently published his work in the *Festschrift* for Jakobson's 60th birthday, giving the impression that he was in fact following Jakobson, and not the other way around. The conversations, correspondence, and publications between the two linguists at this moment are too fast and furious to let us now tease out the exact lines of influence between them, but suffice it to say that in the mid-1950s Benveniste and Jakobson are developing these ideas in tandem.

<sup>8</sup> William F. Hanks, *Referential Practice: Language and Lived Space among the Maya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990): 81.

<sup>9</sup> See Jackson Mac Low, "Reading a Selection from *Tender Buttons*," *L=A=N=G=U=A=A=G=E 6* (December, 1978): np; Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons: Objects / Food / Rooms* (New York: Claire Marie, 1914): 9.

<sup>10</sup> The King twice reiterates the relationship, using "Cousin" as an epithet, and describes Hamlet as "our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son."

<sup>11</sup> A later "system of pointing" turns deadly with the envenomed points of the rapiers ("I'll touch my point with this contagion"), leading Hamlet to exclaim "The point!"; at the beginning of the play, Horatio describes the ghost of Hamlet's father's as "armed to point."

<sup>12</sup> Cameron Williams, "Deictic Settings in Lisa Robertson's *The Weather*," *Textual Practice* 33: 7 (2019): 1202.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1215; Williams elaborates that deixis "generates a state of simultaneous presence and absence of contexts" (in the way that "social totality proceeds from the 'non-identity' or 'internal differentiation' of a standpoint").—*Ibid.*, 1211]; deixis, that is, operates via a negative dialectic: negative space is both produced by deixis and is the fundamental source of its own grammatical productivity.

<sup>14</sup> Духлая луна (Москва, осень 1913): np.

<sup>15</sup> Roman Jakobson, *My Futurist Years*, ed. Bengt Jantfeldt and Stephen Rudy (New York: Marsilio, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Qtd. Remo Faccani, "Two Letters from Cambridge, Mass.," *Europa Orientalis* 26 (2007): 205.



<sup>17</sup> See Peter Mühlhäuser and Rom Harré, with the assistance of Anthony Holaday and Michael Freyne, *Pronouns and People: The Linguistic Construction of Social and Personal Identity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," *October* 3 (Spring, 1977); and *October* 4 (Autumn, 1977): 58-67 and 68-81; Daniel Tiffany, "Lyric Poetry," *Oxford Encyclopedia of Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Janet Rodney, "The Pronouns," *Crayon* 1 (1997): 289.

<sup>19</sup> The use of cotton is a commonplace, but see, for one instance: "Woman Doctor Uses Chloroform to Die," *New York Times* (17 November, 1911).

<sup>20</sup> William Langland, *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Ploughman*, ed. Walter Skeat (London: Early English Text Society, 1873): 311.

<sup>21</sup> Trisha Brown described the "dance instruction poems" of the nuclei as being typed on "about 60 cards." See Trisha Brown, *Dance and Art in Dialogue, 1961-2001* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 2002)].

<sup>22</sup> Jackson Mac Low, "Some Remarks to the Dancers (How the Dances Are To Be Performed & How They Were Made)," *The Pronouns: A Collection of Forty Dances For the Dancers* (Barrytown: Station Hill, 1979): 72.

<sup>23</sup> Jackson Mac Lowm "(from) *The Pronouns*," *Dance Scope* 8 (1974): 120.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, eds. William Baker and Kenneth Womack, (Westport: Greenwood, 2002): 33; Mac Low, "(from)," 120; see the cover photo to the Station Hill paperback. As mechanisms for transforming language into dance, *The Pronouns* are shifters in the second sense described by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where the verbal form of the word denotes transfers and replacements (as a soldier at a post; a sense we still have idioms around labor, as in working the "late shift"). As a noun, the word indicates "an expedient or device for effecting some purpose," or some sort of resourceful contrivance, like cards that can be carried in the studio. There are hazards as well as affordances to the index-card format, however: Jill Johnston recalls dropping her score for John Cage's *Music Walk* in a puddle on her way to perform at the 92nd Street YMHA, in 1962, rendering the cards illegible (she improvised, much to Cage's annoyance). See Mike Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance & the Limits of Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008): 155-156.

<sup>26</sup> Catherine Wood, *The Mind Is a Muscle* (London: Afterall, 2007): 69; see Yvonne Rainer, *Work, 1961-73* (New York: Primary Information, 2020): 210; 212.

<sup>27</sup> See André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2006), and Seth Kim Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (London: Continuum, 2009), and also G. Douglas Barrett, *After Sound: Toward a Critical Music* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Ballets sans musiques, sans persone, sans rien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959).

<sup>29</sup> John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961): 191.

<sup>30</sup> Pieter T'Jonck, "Radio Review Excerpts," *Rambias* (Belgium: Radio Klara, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Maaike Bleeker, "Media Dramaturgies of the Mind: Ivana Müller's Cinematic Choreographies," *Performance Research* 17: 5 (October, 2012): 66-67 *et passim*.

<sup>32</sup> Gloria Moure, *Gordon Matta-Clark: Works and Collected Writings* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2006): 373; cf. 381.

<sup>33</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay, *The Dancers Inherit the Party* (Worcester: Migrant Press, 1960): 1.

<sup>34</sup> Ezra Pound, *Little Review* 4: 11 (March, 1918): 57; *How to Read* (London: Harmsworth, 1931): 25.