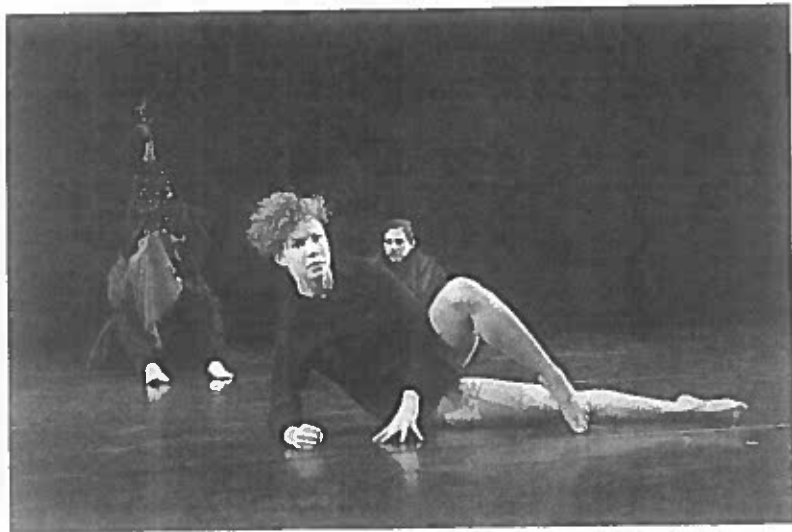


Queer Dance

Meanings and Makings

Edited by

CLARE CROFT



From left to right: Anna Martine Whitehead with Efrén Cortez Cruz and Anthony Alterio in Whitehead's "Memory Loser." Photo by Sarah Nesbitt.

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44. Claid, *Yes? No! Maybe*, 70.
45. Butler, "Critically Queer," 154.
46. Case, "Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," 64.
47. Mark Franko, "Repeatability, Reconstruction and Beyond," *Theatre Journal* 41, no. 1 (1989): 58.
48. Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

5

Chasing Feathers

JÉRÔME BEL, *SWAN LAKE*, AND THE ALTERNATIVE
FUTURES OF RE-ENACTED DANCE

Julian B. Carter

This essay follows the fleeting trace of swans across time and choreographic tradition. Airborne, feathers materialize atmospheric currents felt more than seen; pursuing them carries me again and again away from the dances of the here and now and into a magic room in the back of my head, a room fluttering with generations of bird-women repeating the rituals of their becoming. I am grasping at feathers, trying to articulate what swans make manifest as they flit through contemporary performance, rather than situating a whole ballet in its larger tradition. And yet each pinion dropped into a contemporary dance seems to materialize and transmit the cultural DNA that shapes ballet's entire elaborate system of technique, its affective aesthetic, and its shared imaginative forms. Each feather evokes the sensory appeal of accumulation, pattern, and geometric triangulation. Each quivers with pride in elite status; with the dangerous romance of submission to power; and with the legacies of misogyny, elitism, and imperialism that inform classical dance in the West. Inherently compound and repetitive structures, feathers do not lend themselves to conventional argumentative trajectories.¹ They make me want to re-enact in text the cygnine idiom's tendency to curve back on itself, and with it the power and the limit of queer temporality theory to describe these floating fluffs of down.

Re-enactment and Repetition

This text is not an attempt at the literal reconstruction of the dance that is its subject. Instead the following pages consider Jérôme Bel's 2004 *Veronique*

Doisneau in relation to recent discussions of re-enactment in performance art, the better to follow the fleeting trace of swans in/to contemporary choreography.² Bel is a French avant-garde conceptual choreographer whose work interrogates conventional understandings of what constitutes "dance." In *Veronique Doisneau* Bel merges spoken word with movement (and stillness) to re-present both past and future aspects of one individual's career as a dancer. The resulting complex temporality allows Bel to launch a (characteristically critical) exploration of classical ballet's aesthetic and institutional intersections with contemporary dance. As part of this project Bel draws on Rudolph Nureyev's 1984 staging of *Swan Lake*, opening questions about how the queerness of Nureyev's characters informs the different works into which they travel, remnants of their previous contextual connotations clinging to their feathers as they fly into new stories.

I do not mean only that we can look back at *Swan Lake* and reinterpret it from a queer perspective, nor that its history informs its present usages, though both these things are also true.³ Rather, I am thinking of the specific narrative construction of queerness in Nureyev's ballet, where it expresses a morbid and irresponsible attachment to juvenile subordination. In this pathologizing analysis the essence of queerness lies in the prolongation and repetition of an outmoded dependency: childhood goes on too long and goes over the same ground again and again. *Veronique Doisneau*'s extensive movement passages from *Swan Lake* and *Giselle* seem to express just such a reiterative, drawn-out relation to time.

This temporality initiates a peculiar multiplication effect. Balletic quotations in the context of a specifically retrospective biographical dance are little re-enactments folded into larger (re)creative projects; even at this level of generality *Veronique Doisneau* is not one but several dances, which can be understood as belonging to several possible times. Such choreographic and temporal pleating brings different historical cultures into intimate proximity. Thus in *Veronique Doisneau* feudal peasants' vulnerability to aristocratic predation is performed through the same gestural sequences that meditate on strict occupational hierarchies and mandatory retirement for twenty-first-century French government workers (but here I'm getting ahead of myself. More on this later).

Much critical work on re-enactment engages its queer temporal effect, what Rebecca Schneider describes as the "warp and draw of one time in another time" and Elizabeth Freeman calls "the mutually disruptive energy of moments that are not yet past and yet are not entirely present either."⁴ Such work suggests that both past and present can change as the interface between them is altered by re-enactment's capacity to revivify the past outside of what

we usually understand as its proper moment. Indeed, Schneider's brilliant book *Performing Remains* argues that the pursuit of an embodied experience of authenticity (such as takes place among Civil War battle re-enactors) can bring different historical moments and historical actors into powerful juxtaposition, such that "the bygone is not entirely gone by and the dead not completely disappeared [... while] the living are not entirely (or not only) live."⁵ These descriptions resonate powerfully with *Veronique Doisneau* in that no choreography can make biographical claims without folding and compressing time, if only because any given dance is shorter than (most) lives. Different historical moments can, however paradoxically, coexist in the bodies of dancers who are simultaneously present in performance as themselves and as the (past and future) persons they re/present.⁶

The intimacy between temporal multiplicity and the proliferation of the subject onstage suggests that re-enactment theory's temporal address needs to be expanded so that it can attend to the way that bodies multiply in the folds of time. Yet dance, like theater and music, has been neglected in discussions of re-enactment.⁷ Performance scholar Amelia Jones suggests that this may be in part because these arts are based in a script or score and so are inherently and intentionally repeatable.⁸ In sharp contrast, performance art is widely believed to derive its force from a kind of 'real-life' corporeal and affective presence that has been imagined as allowing for a powerfully unmediated, unique, and ephemeral moment of contact between performers and audience members.⁹ Concert dances are less likely to generate this kind of force as an event because they are composed in the shelter of the studio and are designed to be repeated; their basic form does not usually rely on or respond to live interaction with an audience. Even when a dance work is improvised in performance it is backed up by the process of rehearsal, and behind rehearsal, the classes or other practice sessions that build technique. As a result it is not immediately obvious that anything conceptually significant can emerge from an intentional re-performance of something that is always a re-performance anyway.

Nevertheless, the distinction between dance and performance art has been questioned and undone for decades, both choreographically and critically.¹⁰ Concert dance's very reliance on repetition can be imagined as a kind of ontological intimacy with re-enactment, and so construed as an incitement rather than a barrier to interpretations that focus on re-enactment's temporal fold. On the one hand, both choreography and embodied technique change over time. So do the myriad aesthetic/social conventions and material/technological resources that shape programming, orchestration, lighting, and audience participation and response, with the result that even the most carefully

reconstructed dance can never be an exact replica of its previous materializations.¹¹ On the other hand, the repetition across time of particular choreographies (construed broadly to include narratives, characters, motion pathways, gestural sequences, dynamic impulses and associated costuming) also may have the effect of bringing those movements from the past into the present and with them material echoes of the social worlds in which they took shape. Re-enactment is an artistic strategy for engaging repetition's interface with temporal change. As André Lepecki has proposed, re-enactment facilitates understanding, at once retroactive and anticipatory, of the creative and critical potential in an original that was not materialized in its previous forms and yet was in a sense already there as an alternative expression of its inventiveness.¹² Thinking of dance through re-enactment theory's attention to the mutual "warp and draw" of past and present highlights the charged and contradictory relation between the choreography of a work—its abstract formal existence—and an actual physical instantiation of that work in a body that can never be only itself.

Proliferating Subjects Dreaming Alternative Futures

Veronique Doisneau was a dancer who was beginning her final season when Bel received a commission to make a dance for her company's repertory. He responded with what he describes as a "documentary" in which "the dancer, close to the retirement age, alone on stage, retrospectively and subjectively considers her own career as ballerina inside this institution."¹³ But the work positions Doisneau as a hyperbolically plural subject in relation to the material she performs, with the effect that "her own career" appears to be neither hers alone nor entirely about her subjectivity. Neither is the time of this retrospective performance simply past. On the contrary, Doisneau's career is a vehicle for a temporally complex and socially objective account of "this institution."

The institution in question is the time-drenched Ballet de l'Opera National de Paris (Paris Opera Ballet, or POB). POB's global prestige reflects its status as the oldest national ballet in the world, whose broad and deep repertory includes both glorious staging of the classics and avant-garde contemporary work. As a contemporary account of a venerable institution, *Veronique Doisneau* necessarily takes place in several times at once: it draws on and represents the classical tradition of Western theater dance, but does so "retrospectively," within the dramaturgical frame of a moment in the future of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century works it presents on stage. The folded time of re-enactment thus shapes Bel's basic concept. It is also reflected in

his repetitive choreographic structure, which cycles from speech about dance to illustrative movement and back again. This structural folding initiates the multiplication of Doisneau's physical presence onstage, a multiplication underscored by the content of both narrative and choreography.

Almost half of *Veronique Doisneau* consists of Doisneau standing downstage center, in rehearsal clothes and a wireless mic, talking to the audience about her experience of dancing at POB. She begins with the kind of data that appears in her Human Resources dossier—her name, her age and marital status, her salary and her place in the institutional hierarchy—and so we learn that Doisneau holds the status of *sujet*, a mid-level dancer who works with the corps de ballet and is also eligible for casting in some soloist roles. *Sujets* are talented and seasoned performers but they are not feted and idolized: they do not conventionally have dances named for them, nor is their retirement usually treated as an occasion of any significance for the institution or the public. As the subject of Bel's dance, however, Doisneau acquires an institutional prominence usually reserved for *étoiles*, the most celebrated dancers in the company. Doisneau thus appears as a paradoxically plural subject/*sujet*, at once the subject of Bel's institutional documentary, a lowly member of the corps, and the solitary star glowing on Paris Opera's deep and historic stage.

A further multiplication: all of the movement Bel quotes from other choreographers was composed for more than one dancer. Doisneau performs a pas de trois from *La Bayadere*, an ensemble passage from a Merce Cunningham piece called *Points in Space* (1987), and a pas de deux from *Giselle* before taking on a full-corps sequence from *Swan Lake*. These dances are simultaneously referential fragments of larger works and complete re-enactments of the single *sujet*'s movements; as such they draw attention to the gap between their choreography and their actual materialization, the gap in which time folds and the subject proliferates. This is what I mean when I say that the body re-enacting a dance is never only itself. When Doisneau performs these bits of dances, she materializes them in the bodily present she shares with her live audience. She simultaneously indexes her previous experience of executing these steps, as well as her physical ability to dance roles she tells us she has not previously performed. Finally, she directs our attention to the absent bodies of additional dancers who were integral to Doisneau's experience of ballet and yet who do not appear before us in Bel's re-creation of that experience.

When we see Doisneau as one among many, even though she is alone onstage, we are witnessing the institutional hierarchy that mediates relations between the individual performer and the larger collective: Doisneau stands before us as a soloist who embodies and is embedded in the *corps de ballet*,

the inherently plural body of ballet. Classical corps work consists of many dancers moving in perfect time, their individual expression subordinated to the theatrical effect of the flock. Achieving such unison requires strong technique acquired through years of repetitive practice that mirror in the individual dancer's body the larger history of ballet, each performance of the classical repertoire repeating and referring to its predecessors. Every member of the corps, then, manifests many bodies striving to resemble one another both synchronically and diachronically. This striving for physical resemblance stretches time like a bird's wing, extending to enfold the dancers in a present experience of the past. In so doing it constitutes their collective movement as specifically classical ballet.

Like the classical body politic whose structure it repeats, the body of ballet is organized into strictly segregated ranks, each with its own functions and duties. The maintenance and replication of hierarchical social order is a persistent theme in the dances Bel quotes in *Veronique Doisneau*.¹⁴ After Doisneau has explained that there was never really any question of her promotion to starring roles, she tells us that she dreamed of dancing the title role in *Giselle*, one of the most prestigious roles in classical ballet. Then she steps into a practice tutu and walks calmly offstage, the better to enter again as *Giselle*.

This moment is a retirement gift that Bel makes to Doisneau, who gets to realize some measure of her dream, albeit on a bare stage and humming the music over her headset as she dances. In a larger frame, however, this dance is not only about Doisneau and her dreams but is also about Paris Opera Ballet's institutional hierarchy and the way that it materializes and aestheticizes a deep cultural tradition of social inequality. Bel uses Doisneau's miniature re-enactment of *Giselle* as a vehicle for putting POB's caste system onstage, and so opening it to critical review.¹⁵

Bel's critique works in large part through re-enactment's effects on time. Re-enactment tends to produce futural effects while looking backward—that is, it draws awareness to the present as the past's future, while it simultaneously opens possibilities for an alternative future that may follow from its present alternative version of the past. Choreography, too, speaks to the traditions from which it emerges while it anticipates its own performance as well as the re-performance that provides the measure of its success. Dances live to the extent that dancers embody them in ever-changing present moments. Thus *Giselle*'s world premiere was at POB in 1841 and again in *Veronique Doisneau* in 2004. This latter performance contains the ballet's multiform past while it also materializes that past's future, both linked to and different from its origins.¹⁶ But while the dance itself can inhabit multiple temporalities

with ease, the dancer is rendered less nimble by the institutional constraints on her movement: Doisneau stumbles over the future tense.

When Bel has Doisneau re-enact her career, she seems simultaneously to narrate and redress her unfulfilled desire to embody *Giselle*: the alternative present of re-enactment moves toward an alternative future, one in which Doisneau will have danced *Giselle* at POB. Put another way, her performance of the dance that bears her name is a moment of emergence into a future that is physically different from and socially more celebrated than the one her previous career trajectory supports: it is the future to a past other than the one she has actually lived. *Giselle* as re-presented in the context of *Veronique Doisneau* would then seem to be a breakthrough role, taking place in an opening in time that also opens the occupational hierarchy. Act I of *Giselle*, in which the eponymous peasant girl thinks she's going to marry the Duke, echoes this opening to an alternate fairy-tale future. But just as *Giselle*'s infatuation is fatally dashed by the revelation that her Duke is about to wed a woman of his own rank, Doisneau's new future as a Paris Opera Ballet star runs smack into institutional limits. This performance will be followed by her state-mandated retirement, so that her first appearance in the position of an *étoile* is also necessarily her last. Besides, her execution of this choreography does not effectively compensate for her previous failure to achieve the promotion necessary to legitimate her adoption of the role. Danced without costuming, music, or Duke Albrecht, the steps of the pas de deux themselves lack the performative authority retroactively to change her occupational rank. Thus Doisneau's performance does at least three things: it presents Doisneau as *Giselle*; it re-enacts *Giselle*'s class predicament; and it represents Doisneau's failure to dance *Giselle*. Doisneau's position at Paris Opera Ballet cannot be changed to allow her emergence into stardom because POB's caste structure is not flexible enough to accommodate the temporal opening that promises a different future than the one the past predicts.

Complicity in Hierarchical Time: *Swan Lake*

There is another reason that Doisneau cannot be said to dance *Giselle*: her excerpt from the ballet is only three minutes long, a compression of time extraordinary even in the already-squeezed temporal frame of biographical dance. At the climax of *Veronique Doisneau*, Bel develops duration in the opposite direction, toward gesture that is sustained too long. He does this with the grand pas de deux from *Swan Lake*. Conventionally *Swan Lake*, like *Giselle*, deploys dozens of identical corps dancers to support its female star; but while Bel allows Doisneau to embody the title character in *Giselle* for a moment,

Bel's version of *Swan Lake* keeps her firmly in her place in the corps. This segment begins when Doisneau tells us "One of the most beautiful things in classical ballet is the scene from *Swan Lake* where thirty-two female dancers of the corps de ballet dance together but in this scene there are long moments of immobility, the 'poses.' We become a human decor to highlight the stars. And for us it is the most horrible thing we do." Then she calls for music and begins to dance; but the dancing in question is almost entirely still.

Doisneau's plural pronouns prepare us to be alert to the immaterial presence of the swans that have surrounded her in previous performances of this dance, their feathers trembling just at the edge of perception; at the same time our eyes register Doisneau's solitary stillness because there is nothing else to look at. We have time to reflect on the importance of still presence in contemporary choreography, and on the fold in time that lets us see such stillness as something that has been present in classical dance for a century and a half. And we have time to contemplate how dancing collective dances as solos simultaneously magnifies and diminishes Doisneau's importance. She is the focus of all eyes, unaccompanied and uncostumed, executing movement choreographed as a contribution to a collective effect. As we wait and watch we may waver between seeing the dance as a showcase for Doisneau's effort and accomplishment, and as a mocking exposure of her inadequacy to the impossible task of representing thirty-two swans and a pair of principal dancers all by herself. Nothing in the choreography itself supports or refutes either interpretation, so that the opposites co-exist in a perfect balanced tension much like that exhibited by Doisneau's slender muscled arms.

Then again we may get bored, or tense. The audience begins to rustle and cough after only ten seconds. Even as we witness the labor Doisneau is performing, we experience the force of the evaluative schema that would interpret her as "doing nothing," or nothing significant, because she slows down time to the point that we can't see anything happening. Her performance of suspended time is simultaneously a dramatization of her impressive self-discipline and of its failure to propel her career further up the ladder of rank. A few steps provide beautiful relief. Doisneau is suddenly a swan, wings beating as she extends her neck parallel to the floor—but these few steps lead only to another sustained pose. Seven full minutes later, the music swells. Doisneau inclines her head toward center stage and ripples her elbows slightly, and the audience bursts into applause. Doisneau, however, reacts neither to the music nor the applause, maintains her position for several more seconds, then steps to a new position as a new musical theme begins. The applause dies unevenly, as though the audience is developing that uncomfortable sensation of having clapped at the wrong time. Or for the wrong reason.

We have been applauding for the principal dancers who would have concluded their grand pas de deux at that moment, had they been onstage at all.

In this awkward moment audiences are asked to recognize our complicity with the hierarchical structures of value that make Doisneau's dancing body appear to be worth less than those of the principal couple who are not actually present on the stage before us. Those structures of value refer not only to rank within the POB but also to the monarchies in which the national ballet of France took shape. Paris Opera Ballet was founded in 1661 by Louis XIV; the Palais Garnier, in which *Veronique Doisneau* was staged, was built for the Opera in the 1860s by Napoleon III and includes an architectural tribute to the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. When Bel sets us up to applaud for the invisible principals in *Swan Lake*, we are given the opportunity to consider extended duration and suspended time in terms of the stubbornly persistent aesthetic legacies of absolutism as these are re-enacted in every performance of the great classical ballets. In the world of Paris Opera Ballet, princes must marry for dynastic reasons while peasants must keep their place; princesses are political pawns; and everybody wears magnificently embroidered velvets and silks, sewn by invisible hands. On one level this means only that POB is in the business of staging fairy tales. On another level, this stage, in this palace, is where the kings and queens of France still command adoration for their superior grace and poise.

When we applaud for Prince Siegfried and the Swan Queen despite their absence, we are experiencing the pull of an absolutist aesthetic, caught up in admiration for power expressed as and through physical control: ballet's beauty manifests the triumph of the rational will (Louis XIV is still known as the Sun King for his character in a court ballet that glorified his rule as a model of Apollonian order).¹⁷ But our admiration does not simply transport us backward in time or carry the politically laden posturing of the *ballet de cours* into the present unchanged. Complicity means "folded together"—in Bel's quotation from *Swan Lake* the temporality of postmodern dance, its interest in stillness and bodily presence, mingles across four centuries with the temporality of court dance at Versailles. Past and present tug on one another. For a moment we seem to be living in an alternative future in which the Revolution isn't quite complete, so that the civil servant standing center stage both replaces France's toppled royalty and manifests its continued potency.

Arrested Development and Alternative Futures

The swansdown wafting through Bel's dance carries a history that remains stubbornly present after its moment has passed, so that we see the persistent

influence of political forms long after their original governmental supports are overturned. *Veronique Doisneau* is a critical call for an alternative future for French dance, one in which affective and aesthetic attachments to ballet (figured as an archaic art reflecting relations of domination) are left behind more decisively. This critical logic is so familiar. Inappropriate attachments, archaic forms, illegitimate exercises of power: Bel's call for a new approach to choreography sounds eerily like an argument for reparative therapy, the psychic and social reorganization of desire around a more proper object. In this logic ballet occupies the position of a gayness that needs maturational development, both personal and political, into a potentially (re)productive relational form.

The flurry of feathers thickens: from behind the swan corps, enter the Prince who doesn't want to grow up. The *Swan Lake* performed by POB is based on the usual nineteenth-century Petipa/Ivanov choreography but was restaged by Rudolph Nureyev in 1984 so that the story focuses on Prince Siegfried and his inner turmoil.¹⁸ Earlier versions of the story depict Siegfried as a party boy who would rather go hunting with his friends than marry and take up the mantle of kingship. His attitude threatens dynastic stability and must be corrected, but the stereotypical masculinity of its expression seems to promise that this Prince will straighten out when he finds the right woman. In Nureyev's version, however, the situation is much more dire. His Siegfried is a sensitive, solitary youth indifferent to women and awkward in the company of men. His father is dead and his mother is distant; his sole intimacy takes the form of dependence on and submission to his handsome, domineering tutor. It is therefore no surprise that the only woman he can imagine loving is not a woman at all, but a bird—and even then he finds it challenging to distinguish his beloved from other waterfowl. Siegfried personifies a classic mid-twentieth-century psychoanalytic description of gay men as castrated, narcissistic, deluded, prone to valuing inappropriate objects, and vulnerable to domination by more powerful people.

Although this reading of POB's *Swan Lake* is rarely articulated, Siegfried's queerness is something the dance can be said to know about itself. Even the Nureyev Foundation acknowledges that one might choose to read this *Swan Lake* as referring to "latent homosexuality."¹⁹ The adjective works as a rhetorical strategy for maintaining the open secret of Nureyev's own gayness, but it is no more accurate as a descriptor for the dance than for the life. In one extended exchange in Act I, the tutor lifts, spins, and manipulates the entranced Prince until the boy is on his knees at his feet, one pale sculpted leg extended behind him in a mirror reversal of the White Swan's famous bowing pose; at that moment, the tutor hands the Prince the crossbow his mother gave him when he came of age and ordered him to marry. The symbolism

is not subtle, nor is the gestural placement of the bow's central shaft. In this scene of instruction the lesson seems to be that access to virile power requires submitting to an older man's authority.²⁰ Then there is the striking way that the tutor mediates Siegfried's introduction to the Black Swan in Act 3, offering his daughter not only as a replacement for the White Swan but also as a female substitute for himself in a crystalline triangle of homoerotic displacement. My point is not that this *Swan Lake* is an unambiguously gay text, but rather that its ambiguities are drawn from a conventional menu of strategies for avoiding direct discussion of sexual variance. Most pertinent for my purposes here is that Nureyev figures Prince Siegfried as problematically immature.²¹

Queer analyses of heteronormative time emphasize the conventional life trajectory from birth through childhood and adolescence to reproductive adulthood, punctuated with milestones that certify our progressive development through these predictable stages or that identify our failures to move forward at the expected time. Prince Siegfried's birthday party opens the action of *Swan Lake* because his coming of age marks the moment when he must take his father's crown and find a queen. The narrative arc of the ballet traces the tragic consequences of Siegfried's lack of interest in these adult projects in favor of sustaining a boyish dreaminess that he expresses through his dependence upon his tutor. The homoeroticism of Nureyev's *Swan Lake* converges with its pathologization to produce a vision of Prince Siegfried as tragically suspended in an androgynous youth whose extension past its acceptable temporal limit renders him inadequate to the royal mantle of manhood.

Veronique Doisneau's re-enactment of *Swan Lake* uses a similar temporal suspension to represent the limit of Doisneau's development as a dancer at Paris Opera Ballet. Queer cultural theorist Jack Halberstam notes that many gay cultural practices—such as nightclubbing—are not deviant for their content so much as for their temporality, specifically their persistence past the age at which we are supposed to grow out of them. He makes the case that not growing out of going out allows queer people to invest in collective social experience, sharing a kind of perpetual adolescence oriented toward the group, long after their straight age peers "normally" pair off into isolated family units.²² Halberstam's insight can be laminated onto *Veronique Doisneau* to suggest that Doisneau's career as *sujet* approximates the same kind of developmental arrest that is manifest in Prince Siegfried's queer failure to marry and to rule. Spending decades with the corps means maintaining a permanent adolescence in relation to the expected trajectory of maturation as a classical ballet dancer, in which each promotion means less stage time embedded in groups of women or dancing alone, and another step closer to starring as half of a featured heterosexual couple. Bel literalizes this arrest in

Doisneau's physical stillness in her excerpt from *Swan Lake*, where the corps dancer's role is shown to be one of endless deferential support for a romance that does not address her directly. Always a bridesmaid, never a bride: where Halberstam imagines a thriving queer nightlife, Doisneau's suspension in the corps paradoxically leaves her as isolated in her *Swan Lake* as the Prince who, surrounded by eligible young ladies, wishes he could marry a bird.

Entr'acte

It is tempting to conclude that Bel sees POB's institutional hierarchy as in need of a revolution as decisive as the one that undid dynastic rule in France, and that he is using Doisneau to question a problematic affective attachment to an archaic art that aestheticizes relations of domination. Shouldn't Mme. Doisneau have grown out of her little-girl ballerina dream? Shouldn't dance in general have moved on to more current, more democratic forms?

Certainly there is something both pathetic and poignant about Doisneau's effort to fill the stage, alone and without support from the dramatic technologies of costumery, lighting, sets, and music. But the very absence of theatrical magic and the emphasis on her simple physical presence suggest that if Bel is staging the inevitable failure of an outmoded art form, he is simultaneously staging something we can recognize as successful according to present aesthetic standards and needs. The rejection of the arts of illusion in order to allow a less mediated contact with the artist's presence is a hallmark both of performance art and of the tradition of critically engaged dance-making out of which Bel's work emerges.⁴¹ Bel offers thoroughly contemporary dance that re-enacts past choreographies in and for the now.

Re-enactment complicates the present, making us feel how we are always folded in time, always in physical relationship to a past that can take new forms through and in our bodies. As Doisneau's re-enactments fold time, they bring the forms of beauty enabled by France's monarchical past into its republican present and vice versa; that is to say, Bel has his dancer materialize the unexpected aesthetic convergence of classical and postmodern choreographic devices. Thus, in its extended stillness Doisneau's performance of *Swan Lake* echoes a contemporary strategy for pushing at the boundaries defining what dance is and can be, creating a moment of slippage between postmodern work and the multiple traditions it both mobilizes and critiques. What alternative forms can emerge in that temporal slide?

Following feathers through folded time has led me from absolutist aesthetics to a pathologizing vision of homosexuality as a fundamentally anti-social manifestation of arrested development. Still I want to emphasize that Bel does not simply use Doisneau to indict ballet as an artistic reflection of

entrenched systems of power and oppression. While his re-enactments of the classics demonstrate how aesthetics and politics dovetail in a cultural legacy that works to keep people, including Doisneau, in their allotted places, he simultaneously has his *sujet* perform an alternative future. Again and again Bel offers us oppositions that turn out to be leaning on one another for support. While he exposes the cultural logic through which Doisneau's career at Paris Opera Ballet can be narrated as a failure to leave the corps, he also creates a starring role for her at POB. When he stages her inevitable inability fully to represent multiple dancers in her own small frame, he also stages the importance of the collective to which she is integral. When he has her dance the scene of Giselle's first appearance in her afterlife, he shows us Doisneau's emergence into the character at the same moment we witness the death of her career. For each affirmation he offers a critique; in every criticism we are shown something to admire. The two gestures cannot be separated. We are left suspended and without direction in the space between judgments, hovering like wisps of down carried on a current of warm air.

The alternative future for dance that Bel proposes, then, cannot be said to leave history behind in search of a new or less contaminated movement idiom. His future dance features and foregrounds the impurity of cultural forms. As the swans vanish in the mist and the curtain falls, I want to make one final plea for the exploration rather than denial of complicity. The imperial history of ballet persists. We remain vulnerable to seduction by power. That same seduction is what compels me to chase feathers: they are beautiful and alluring; they promise transformation. And therein lies their political potential. They offer the foundational knowledge of the past in all its sadness, a certainty from which we can launch our own changing and reiterative futures.

Notes

1. Nonetheless feathers display a collective organization recognizable as variations on modes of linearity. Such linear variation subtends the genealogical fictions I unpack and so is mimicked in the structure of this essay.
2. *Veronique Doisneau* was filmed in performance at Paris Opera Ballet for French television; I originally encountered the dance through a YouTube upload of this film, available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OluWY5PInfs>> as of October 1 2016.
3. I discuss Matthew Bourne's all-male *Swan Lake* later, but focus on Nureyev's *Les Lac des Cygnes* because it provides the choreographic and narrative intertext for Bel's work. On Bourne, see Suzanne Juliusz, "Queer Swans: Those Fabulous Avians in the *Swan Lakes* of Les Ballets Trockadero and Matthew Bourne," *Dance Chronicle* 31, no. 1 (2008): 54-83.

4. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011): 2; Elizabeth Freeman, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," *New Literary History* 31, no. 4 (2000): 742.
5. Schneider 15.
6. Julian Carter, "Embracing Transition, Dancing in the Folds of Time," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, Volume 2, ed. Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 130–44.
7. This neglect is changing; Mark Franko's *Handbook on Danced Reenactment* is anticipated from Oxford University Press in 2016. See also Andre Lepecki, "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances," *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (2010): 28–48.
8. Amelia Jones, "The Artist is Present': Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence," *TDR: The Drama Review* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 20–21.
9. Performance theorists have rejected this claim repeatedly for decades, which seems to have had little impact on its popularity. See Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 151–52; Amelia Jones, "Presence in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 11–18.
10. André Lepecki offers a useful overview in "Concept and Presence: The Contemporary European Dance Scene," in *Rethinking Dance History*, ed. Alexandra Carter (London: Routledge, 2004), 170–81.
11. See, e.g., Christel Stalpaert's description of audience responses in "Reenacting Modernity: Fabian Barba's *A Mary Wigman Evening* (2009)," *Dance Research Journal* 43, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 90–95.
12. André Lepecki, "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances," *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 28–48, esp. p. 31.
13. See Jerome Bel's website at <http://www.jeromebel.fr/eng/jeromebel.asp?m=3&s=8&sms=5>.
14. *La Bayedère's* tragedy ensues when a temple dancer resists the advances of the High Brahmin; *Giselle* is about a peasant girl who falls in love with a Duke; *Swan Lake's* plot unfolds from a Prince's lack of interest in the marriage necessary for perpetuating his royal line. Merce Cunningham's abstract *Points in Space* would seem to be an exception, but Doisneau contextualizes her excerpt from that work with the explanation that dancing without music (as Cunningham required in this piece) is made possible by strict attention to all the other bodies onstage. Thus, in Bel's hands, the modern work is also "about" the importance of relative positioning within a larger order.
15. Actually this point applies beyond the re-enactment of *Giselle*; I would go so far as to say the whole dance is meant as a provocation to consider the traditional hierarchies that structure POB as an institution. When POB commissioned Bel to make the company an original work, he responded with a dance that seems deliberately difficult to incorporate into the company's repertory after Doisneau's retirement. As an extended solo, the part would conventionally go to someone of a higher rank than Doisneau, but that dancer would then be required by the dance's text to disavow her success, claiming Doisneau's relatively modest career as her own. Alternatively, the role could be danced by another *sujet*, but doing so would necessarily mean her being allowed to perform a major part without being promoted to the rank at which she becomes eligible to do so. If Paris Opera insists on its customs and rules of rank, it has wasted its commission; and if it relaxes them, it moves that much further away from its own institutional values and tradition.
16. The political discussion inherent in *Veronique Doisneau* is tightly linked to issues of re-enactment and medium. If Bel was thumbing his nose at POB by making them a dance they couldn't restage, they recouped their investment by freezing the moment of its staging and allowing its endless and unrestricted replay: *Veronique Doisneau* was filmed for public television and put into the digital public domain. Because Doisneau's farewell performance is easily available on YouTube, POB can be understood as continuing to restage the piece despite her retirement and without adjusting its values. Further, Bel's commentary on POB's internal hierarchy repeats itself without respect for changing times and circumstances, and in this respect the technology of its reproduction drags the dance into duplicating the stubborn persistence of social and aesthetic hold-overs from absolutism that it critiques.
17. In 1993 POB acquired the right to stage Mats Ek's 1982 reinterpretation of *Giselle*, which has become a very popular part of its repertory. Thus, the Swedish choreography is part of the ballet's multiform past at POB, and well worth further consideration, but space limitations prevent examination of the way that Bel incorporates Ek's work into his own. On the Mats Ek *Giselle* at POB, see Patricia Boccadoro, untitled dance review (July 13, 2004). Available at http://www.culturekiosque.com/dance/reviews/mats_ek.html.
18. Mark Franko, *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
19. For *Swan Lake's* basic libretto and history, see Selma Jeanne Cohen, *Next Week. Swan Lake: Reflections on Dance and Dancers* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), esp. ch. 1. The Nureyev *Swan Lake* has been filmed by Paris Opera Ballet for public television and as of this writing is available on YouTube.
20. For more on the potential to read "latent homosexuality" into Nureyev's Siegfried, see the Nureyev Foundation website. Available at <http://www.nureyev.org/rudolf-nureyev-choreographies/rudolf-nureyev-swan-lake>.

20. Interestingly, Kent Drummond describes Matthew Bourne's pas for the Prince and the (male) Swan as a scene of instruction, as though that precludes eroticism. On the gayness of such moments, see David Halperin, "Deviant Teaching," in *A Companion to LGBTQ Studies*, ed. George Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell 2007) 146–167. "The Queering of Swan Lake," *Journal of Homosexuality* 45, nos. 2–4 (2003): 241.
21. Drummond has suggested that mass audiences, presumably largely straight, are able to respond positively to the portrayal of same-sex desire in Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* because the Prince is too childlike to be taken really seriously as a gay man; he is ultimately exonerated "of agency and even reality . . . [The ballet] can be read, in the end, as a sad, bad dream of sexual vagrancy: the misguided adventures of a child [who lacked] proper parenting" (251). In many ways I see Bourne's *Swan Lake* as a literalization of what remains implicit in Nureyev's staging.
22. Judith Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005) 174.
23. Bel's foremothers in this area include, most notably, Yvonne Rainier, Trisha Brown, and Pina Bausch; Rainer's 1965 *No Manifesto* remains one of the most powerful verbal articulations of this choreographic vision.

6

Dancing Marines and Pumping Gasoline

CODED QUEERNESS IN DEPRESSION-ERA
AMERICAN BALLET

Jennifer L. Campbell

Among George Platt Lynes's many photographs of male nudes, one particular image of a dancer in the role of Mac, the gas station attendant hero from the American ballet *Filling Station* (1938), offers a compelling visual paradox.¹ In the photo a young Jacques d'Amboise stands with his right leg propped up on a stool, clothed head to toe in coveralls, the type of long sleeved, one-piece safety garment often worn by mechanics and factory workers. Although the outfit covers the dancer's entire frame, the costume itself is fashioned from thin, translucent material, allowing Lynes to capture the nakedness of d'Amboise's body underneath. Because of its transparency, this loose-fitting, traditionally functional garment deftly serves an ironic purpose: although technically intended to conceal nudity, the clothing actually provides a peep-show of d'Amboise's chest and genitals, leaving little to the imagination.² When contextualized in ballet performance, the costume design achieves more than ironic statement: it connotes a hetero/homo duality, suggesting that Mac simultaneously inhabits two worlds—the typical, everyday life of the working man (coveralls) and a realm associated with something more provocative, risqué, and "other" (see-through material).

Filling Station belongs to a group of several Depression-era ballets developed by arts impresario Lincoln Kirstein for his troupe, The Ballet Caravan, and in this essay I offer a close reading of two of these works, *Filling Station*