

Friday, March 4th, 2016

[Share](#) [Tweet](#) [Email](#) [G+1](#) [Print](#)

Data Dance: Ode to an Information Theorist at The Kitchen

by Mira Dayal

Liz Santoro and Pierre Godard: For Claude Shannon at The Kitchen

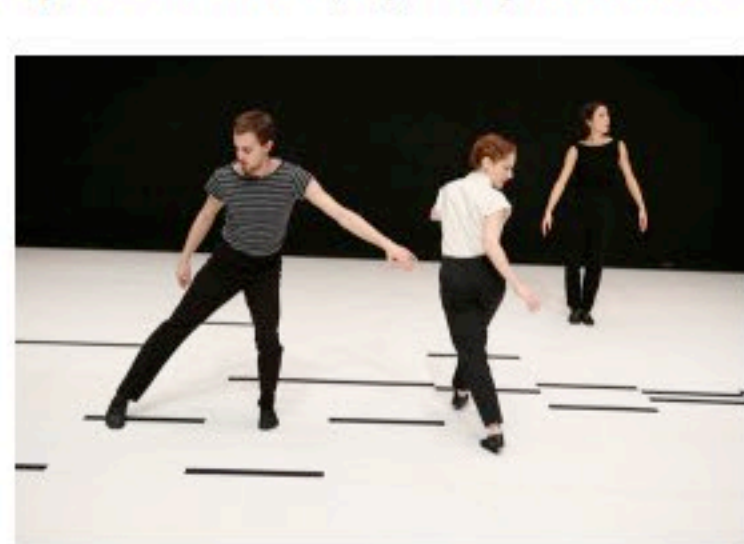
February 18 to February 20, 2016
512 West 19th Street (between 9th and 10th avenues)
New York, 212 255 5793



Liz Santoro, Teresa Silva, Marco D'Agostin, and Cynthia Koppe in "For Claude Shannon," 2016, at The Kitchen. Courtesy of The Kitchen.

In the tradition of Trisha Brown's dance diagrams, Liz Santoro and Pierre Godard presented an intricate work at The Kitchen, called *For Claude Shannon*, with its own palette of densities, gestures, and articulations. Each performance is individually coded "using the syntactic structure of a sentence by Claude Shannon," the influential founder of information theory, which is translated into a combination of movement "atoms," forming a kind of algorithmic lexicon.

As I entered the black box theatre, speakers emitted sounds like air vents blowing in an airplane, always too cold. My "vent" turns closed; my hearing shifts to another aisle.



Marco D'Agostin, Liz Santoro and Cynthia Koppe in "For Claude Shannon," 2016, at The Kitchen. Courtesy of The Kitchen.

After awhile, I begin to wonder if this performance will ever start, if the lights will ever dim, if the audience will begin to check their watches and then realize, half an hour into the performance, that it had already begun before they walked into the room. "The dancers begin to learn this particular choreographic sequence two hours before the public enters the space," we have been told, "and continue this learning process during the performance." We watch them learn.

The fans all close. Four bodies turn to face us.

One of the three female dancers lifts her arms, holding an expanding bubble. Her male partner's left leg rises imperceptibly, then again more pointedly as hers lifts, too. Another female dancer's torso turns. I concentrate on the small sound of a shoe's sole — with tiny, pebbled bumps, it seems — lifting off a flat floor, as if adhesive.

They move so slowly that if I stop to trace one, as I would like to do, I miss the subtlety of the others' movements. An arm held perpendicular or parallel to the floor, a leg either supporting or extending diagonally away from the body — these are the movements to which I become attuned, looking for symmetry or failure.

The farthest female dancer's eyes blink rapidly, like shutters, as all turn to face each other. They are suddenly, now, in coordination, at least for a moment. Their slipper shoes create a soundscape, within which they weave closer together, folding their arms like leaves of creased paper to create an origami box. I feel tension, can't breathe too hard for fear of coughing and interrupting the intensity of their concentrated gazes.

Closer, nearly intersecting, then apart, one movement at a time, they drift. The dance becomes a waiting game.

Then, a prick of disbelief: two touch! And one goes still. I read in her immobility the shock of having been interrupted during a mechanical sequence. Yet this is not an inhuman dance; if it were, we would not sense their effort and uncertainties, hesitations and unravelings.

Why these "atoms" of movement? Never two arms up together, never two legs straddled apart. Is the sequence there, written on the floor like Braille or Morse code in black strips of alternating lengths and positions? Is Shannon's phrase a chain link through their limbs?

They dance in dress clothes. The lights never change. How are the pauses, turns, positions, and relative durations of each movement determined? What portion of sequences are repeated? Does a choreography determined by a form of speech count as one of chance? What was the phrase that we now must exhaust?

Eventually they return again to their original positions. They pause, then begin to move in synchrony. Gradually, the air pressure changes, which we experience as shifts in pitch, crackles like static in the soundscape, and popping ears in a disjointed physicality. One dancer breaks out of line and another follows, then returns. Was that a mistake? A moment of learning?

The sound is now regular, having incorporated the static clicks into a new beat. Each body moves in sync, but each turns individually until none face forward.

A word is uttered. Was it from the audience?

Again. No, it came from the stage.

"Either"
"Accidentally"
"Passage"

They are revealing the phrase.

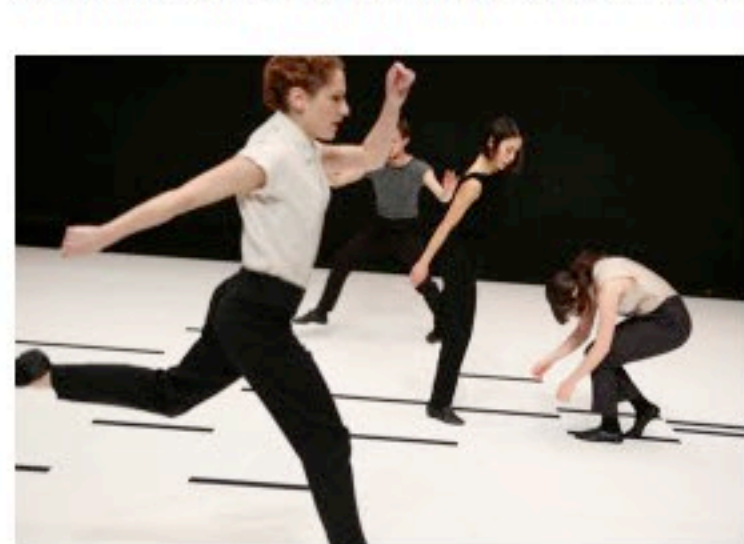
"Selecting"

But this is too easy, too obvious, for them to expose the mechanism behind the dance.

"Use"
"One"
"Wait"
"A"
("Minute"?)

I want to think. But the phrase is incomplete. The clicks pick up, coordinating time and dictating movement.

"Point," spoken all together. They move quite quickly now, nearly fluidly. The clicks sound like two blocks clacked together, as in Joan Jonas's *Song Delay* (1973). The spatiality of sound seems important but does not clearly correspond to their configurations on stage. The words come too quickly to record now, and I wonder when the sound will mark a tempo too fast for them to follow. Who will collapse? Which atoms will be sacrificed?



Liz Santoro, Marco D'Agostin, Cynthia Koppe and Teresa Silva in "For Claude Shannon," 2016, at The Kitchen. Courtesy of The Kitchen.

Then, the dancers are still. Can they not continue? Has the phrase ended?

One dances again, so quickly, as if tap dancing. Another begins, too. The clicks pick up again to the point of becoming static, so loud that they obscure the sound of the dancers' voices. Sometimes a body will pause, as if to remember its place in the sequence. Is this learning? What are the stakes? How can we know when they have failed?

Static turns to hail. They speak louder, but move elegantly. They must fight their inertia.

New movements emerge out of transitory positions: a leg raised too high, a jump kick, a sideways stance, a lunge.

Then a diagonal movement by one dancer across the floor— there have been none thus far — and the heaviness of the bass begins to parallel the new heaviness of their bodies.

Yet this improvisational segment lasts too long; rather than demonstrating a collapse of the code or a fracture, it becomes a new segment in itself, forcing me to lose my hold on the atoms that seemed so clearly defined from the start. Or was that the intention, for us to unlearn what the dancers had learned only "two hours before the public enters the space"? The chance of subjective improvisation has trumped the chance of an atomic composition.

Finally, the beat slows. The bass fades and the clicks return to irregular taps. Jostling bodies move but without grandiose gestures.

All face the front.



Cynthia Koppe, Marco D'Agostin and Teresa Silva in "For Claude Shannon," 2016, at The Kitchen. Courtesy of The Kitchen.

More from artcritical

- [Sensing Absent Bodies: Amanda Turner Pohan at FiveMyles](#)
- [Devotion at the Kitchen](#)
- [The Memory of the Dance: Trisha Brown at Sikkema Jenkins](#)
- [Special Low Frequency: Yoshi Wada & Tashi Wada at Issue Project Room](#)
- [Who Laughs Last: Chantal Akerman Reads at the Kitchen](#)

[Share](#) [Tweet](#) [Email](#) [G+1](#) [Print](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

Kendall Shaw

Energy in Space

50 Years

Jan 21 - May 24
The Gallery@1GAP
Brooklyn

Richard Meier
On Prospect Park

MORE ARTICLES BY MIRA DAYAL

[Sensing Absent Bodies: Amanda Turner Pohan at FiveMyles](#)

RELATED | SUGGESTED

[Sensing Absent Bodies: Amanda Turner Pohan at FiveMyles](#)

["The object of power is power": Erika Blair at Rope Gallery](#)

[In a Distant Temporal Realm: Mary Lucier at the Kitchen](#)

[Trees, Petals, Dust, Stone: Andy Goldsworthy at Galerie Lelong](#)

[The State and the Studio: Coco Fusco on Performance Art in Cuba](#)

["Not-knowing is most intimate": Helen Mirra in Conversation with Emmalea Russo](#)

[J.S. \(Je Suis/Jack Smith\)](#)

[Justin Randolph Thompson in Conversation with Jessica Holmes](#)

[Sophie Calle's Suite Vénitienne: Following as Performance and Book](#)

[Marx, Africa and the Serene Republic: A Dispatch from Venice](#)

OTHER ARTICLES IN "FILM/MUSIC/PERFORMANCE"

[Missing People: An Art Dealer on the Trail of Unsolved Murder and Outsider Drawings](#)

[Author as Imaginary Friend: The Dull Spectacle of "The End of the Tour"](#)

[Always the Bride: Maria Yoon's Marriage Experiment](#)

[Upstairs Downstairs: Frederick Wiseman's National Gallery](#)

LINKS FROM OUR SUPPORTERS