



The Lite-Bright is a toy created by Hasbro in 1967. It is a light box into which the user inserts colorful plastic pegs into opaque black paper, to produce a glowing image or design.

DD Dorvillier

and Jenn Joy

in

conversa-
tion

DD Dorvillier: Dances are ghosts. You don't have to believe in them. You learn a dance and it resists your believing in it. You can dance badly, but the dance doesn't dance badly.

Jenn Joy: Can we imagine a movement then from the spectral to the image? Particularly in this project, image becomes a central organizing principle both for the choreography and for this book. I remember talking with you about *Choreography, a Prologue for the Apocalypse of Understanding, Get Ready! (CPAU)* in 2009 and you described a very specific image – the Lite-Brite – as a figure for the relationships between artists, histories, influences. You wrote: “I don't think a single work can be the ultimate summation of a time, the exclusive definer of a movement. I see the role that I play, as well as other choreographers, as one that is part of a bigger collective picture, as if each work made was a small

hole punched into opaque black surface, through which a small stream of light is allowed to pass. Each hole has a peg, and each peg has its own color.

When you look at the image produced in light you see a new thing, when you look closer you see many different single pegs still remaining as what they are – their own color in their own unique position.”¹

This image of the Lite-Brite resonates strongly with the ways you are engaging collaborators in this project. Puncturing your own Platform [*Diary of an Image* by DD Dorvillier] with a density of affiliation, with other lights, other ideas that, while not retrospective, do stage an intimate relationship to your own histories of making and collaborating. How do you dance history?

What makes these particular histories urgently contemporary?

DD: I don't think there's any way of making dance anything but dance. Dance is a time machine. I want to touch the French soldier's calves dancing the gavotte. I want to sniff the hair of the Haitian dancer at the crossroads. I want to be there when Mr. Wiggles wiggles. I want to hear the clunking toe boxes of all the ballerinas exiting the stage at once. I want to be there when they throw tomatoes at Nijinsky. I want to be there in Tiananmen Square, in Ramallah, in Bulgaria, for all those dances, and all those reasons for dancing. These are images of dance, a mere pinch of salt from an inexhaustible mountain that continues for days, weeks, years, forever. I wonder if there are as many unnamed objects as there are unnamed dances in the universe.

JJ: The ways that you mine these disparate histories of movement remind me of Walter Benjamin's writing of history as a series of images that "flashes up at a moment of danger."² It is not that history proceeds as a seamless narrative but rather as a complicit structuring of experience where images touch us and force us to pay attention. And specifically in dance, I sense the steps acting as images of particular histories and cultures. Early on in the process of *No Change* or "*freedom is a psycho-kinetic skill*" you had just returned from Barcelona and were working with a folk song?

DD: I had met these kids from Ramallah and they taught me a dance that everybody does for weddings or funerals. It's a dance you see all over the Middle East, but the way it is danced and the reason for dancing it are very particular to each community and each region. Then I heard this wedding dance music and remembered that I had studied Balkan singing with Carol Freeman when I first came to New York and that's when I started bringing these Bulgarian folk songs that I had learned into my process.

JJ: So there's a long history of turning to these culturally and historically specific

forms. The jingle dance that influenced *Diary of an Image* is part of your own lineage in a way.

DD: The first dance I ever learned was the hula – it wasn't ballet class although I was doing that around the same time. I took classes with a woman from Hawaii who taught on her patio. There were certain dances – beautiful fertility dances, secret dances – that I couldn't learn because I wasn't old enough. For me, that dance, those steps, the repetition and its variations, are where I started.

JJ: This relationship to steps as histories, in terms of how you translate this into your current work feels deeply anachronistic. Careful and generous, in your negotiation of the details of the dance in its revised context, but also a forceful anachronism perhaps along the lines of what Giorgio Agamben demands of the contemporary.³ He writes of the contemporary as not only a time, but as a demand. I love that this essay appears sandwiched between one on friendship and another on the apparatus (or *dispositif*, in French). We cannot think of anachronism or the contemporary without gesturing toward friendship and instrumentality, affiliation and institution. In the making of your own new work and curating for this Platform the negotiation of these relationships seems important.

DD: Curating is taking care of the work of artists and that's really a social gesture. This comes out of countless formless conversations on many different topics around the Platform. These endless conversations go in different directions and definitely inform the work and exist because of it.

JJ: Yet your curating of the Platform extends beyond just the program, becoming a structure for making a new dance (that shares the title of the Platform)

that is and is not a solo. Or rather, undoes an idea of solo as you accumulate movement, sound, source.

DD: *Diary of an Image* [the dance] tries to make a dance with a purpose, a healing dance. To make a healing dance because to dance when your dear friend is dying seems impossible and stupid. You can't just dance for no reason while she is there and can't dance with you and can't see you dancing for her. I know you can dance for no reason and that it's beyond a reason. I can't accept it. Like I can't accept death, like I can't accept a lot of things.

I don't want the reason to get in the way of the dance either, because if you don't dance, you won't get to the purpose of dancing. There has to be a purpose, a reason for making a dance that is stated, at least stated to myself. Healing dance? Heal what? Make my friend healthy? Not possible. Make me consider my own health? Obvious. Make a dance that makes the viewer consider their health?

Not possible to make a dance with a fixed result in a viewer, but when I try, it gives the dance a fixed purpose, whatever the result.

The steps of the dances in *Diary of an Image* come from different places and now it's starting to feel like they come from me, like they are mine, like I made them up, but I didn't. How can you make up a step? It's like saying you invented the foot or the leg. I'm dancing these steps. I am not them. They don't belong to me. I'm borrowing them, and living in them, and they let me. One time I thought I would get kicked out of the steps, out of arrogance, or lack of respect. The object of respect was totally abstract, but it turned out I had to be careful. I had to calm down and respect my limitations. There is no speed. The steps are their own path. They have a colorful history in a big

community. They are claimed by many; owned by none. I don't dance the steps very gracefully or beautifully, and it might be even slightly unbearable to watch. I don't know. I need to do this dance. So I'm doing it.

Diary of an Image is not exactly a solo or a duet or a trio or anything that has to do with the number of performers. I'm making it very closely with Zeena [Parkins] and with Katerina [Andreou], but also with Olivier [Vadrot], Christine [Shallenberg], Thomas [Dunn], Tymberly [Harris], you, Judy [Hussie-Taylor]... and with my past and present, and very importantly having spent time watching Nibia [Pastrana], Elizabeth [Ward], Oren [Barnoy], Walter [Dundervill] learning the fragments from *A catalogue of steps*. That has been a big part of me learning about steps and carrying them.

JJ: When we first began discussing what this Platform might be there was a debate about showing video of the older pieces and you were adamantly opposed. Instead *A catalogue of steps* offers fragments of past works as steps stripped of all other qualities. How does this complicated act of withholding reveal these older pieces? Is it transposition or translation?

DD: I'm working on taking apart these old dances of mine. Initially I thought I could look at them objectively, and that this scrutiny would have little impact on my current work, on my life, on my future. In some ways it doesn't have an impact, it's almost invisible. It is research. Not transposition or translation. I'm trying to get to something that I didn't have time or patience or distance enough to get to before. The older works are permanently situated in my past from where they continue to teach me things and remain intact like silly putty, like history. The fragments allow me to get closer to a mysterious and slippery purpose

of choreography. To ask why and how and what it does.

I am discovering that I will never see the whole; that no one ever does. This is exciting. I'm focusing on fragments. What do they do all by themselves? Do they do anything at all? At first I think they do nothing at all, but they do something, and this is what I'm trying to feel, to smell out, to see if I can get farther than I am now. When I get there it will already be too late because I will have had more questions in response to the answers. It's weird to use this past as a way to project into the future. It might be a mistake but that it might be a mistake is grounds for trying.

When you see the fragments danced and you don't know the old works it looks like a bunch of dance fragments that all have something quirky and interesting in common. As I get closer, the viewer will also be able to get closer. I want to feel the impact of a little phrase of choreography learned by a dancer now, off a video from 20 years ago. I know that dancer will have to time travel and might discover that we are similar or very different, that it's impossible without a certain training, that it's boring without the music.

JJ: Is it boredom or the labor of waiting required by the work? Anticipation seems such an important aspect of your choreography.

DD: The stillness at the beginning of *No Change* or "*freedom is a psycho-kinetic skill*" or nine bodies and the dark part in *Notthing is Importantttt* or the opening of Part 2 in *Choreography, a Prologue for the Apocalypse of Understanding, Get Ready!* or even the beginning of *Danza Permanente* where no one is on stage. These are all instances where in some way I'm listening to the time passing and asking the audience to do the same – to listen to the time, to count

the inaudible and infinite beats, to feel the pulse, as a way to survive an imaginary war with time. I'd like to propose the pleasure of listening to the time, and not so much about waiting. Though I guess this pleasure anti-pleasure is part and parcel with waiting. My aim is to find a *way out of waiting for something to happen*, a space of time out of the anticipatory and into a sensual, though not always comfortable, experience of being in time as it rolls over into being alive or present.

I found this in my notes about *Notthing Is Importantttt: What is the relationship between time and image? For me it is running out of the TIME required to PRODUCE the IMAGE. So in this case the relationship between time and image is PRODUCTION.* At the moment I think time, in my work, is square, pregnant, bloated, awkward, obnoxious, insistent, but then it's also all its contrary... smooth, thin, fragile, hollow, sweet, sad, a little boring. So as a performer this waiting while time simply passes – while the watermelon grows in the patch and the kids grow boobs and beards – is a conditioned sense of nervousness that I'm always trying to calm, so what comes of the quiet, still moments of my work is something charged and ambiguous.

JJ: Always it seems there is an intertwining of opposing forces – awkward, anxious adolescence against fierce beauty, relentlessness with generosity...

DD: I use antagonism to open things up rather than to resolve or soothe. To put these antagonistic things (sound, darkness) side-by-side, knowing, hoping that it's not about them fusing, or if they fuse, it's our perception. Our experience is the thing that fuses and it's not my artistic style to make them fuse before they get to you. Yet these elements have to be put together in order to experience

them as different and also as related. Not their coexistence but their simultaneous existence is a reality.

JJ: So perhaps through your work, we can understand choreography as an intense form of relationality. Again, I am reminded of something you said in relation to *Choreography, a Prologue for the Apocalypse of Understanding, Get Ready!*.

That choreography as a suggested prologue functions as a practice which makes possible the reorganizing of thought, sense, and perception after the communicative means we've come to take for granted have exhausted themselves out of boredom or overuse. I would like to propose choreography as a strategy that can be used to prepare the ground for new means of working together, producing knowledge, and sharing experience. Apocalypse certainly points to the end of something as we know it, but is also inciting its potential opposition, utopia.⁴

I'm curious how your definition or use of choreography has shifted in this current work? Is choreography still closely aligned to a rethinking of communication and perception or are you are pushing it elsewhere?

DD: Dance has to get in there somehow, dance as it becomes itself, as it teaches itself about choreography, as it teaches itself how to remember its own steps. Dance as it teaches us. This is the dance and thus the choreography that I'm involved with right now. It's very much coming out of this idea as choreography as a means of moving with the unknown into the future.

In the moments in between what could be called or what could NOT be called choreography, in these yet undetermined moments, this is where I'm currently floundering. Very existential, lonely, sad.

But what's exciting about it is that forward thinking may not be the only important duty I have as an artist. It looks like it's all going to be about the past but actually I think it's about distance, being able to look at things while they are happening, and being able to observe how this multi-faceted observation has been taking place all over my work for a long time. I start considering time more like a vapor or a gas, and less as a series of bricks. That's the good news; time is important, but not really.

Choreography is still closely aligned with thinking and perception for me, as I can't really do it without those, personally. Building things that rely on perceptual manipulation or expression has been shorthand for getting me, my collaborators, and the audience to immerse themselves in another way of thinking about time. If the sound is magenta, and we are the letter "M", and the light is magenta... might it follow that time is magenta, and if time can be magenta, if time can be pink, then what a nice way to pass the time, or maybe not so nice, if you don't like pink. I guess at some point we recognize that we don't all share the same utopias.

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¹ Jenn Joy, "Interview with DD Dorviller." *Movement Research Performance Journal*, 35, (2009): 6-7.

² Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, 253-264. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 255.

³ Giorgio Agamben, "What is the Contemporary" in *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, translated by David Kishnik and Stefan Pedatella, 39-54. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

⁴ Jenn Joy, "Interview with DD Dorviller." *Movement Research Performance Journal*, 35, (2009): 6-7.