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## Claudia Rosiny: Tanz Film. Intermediale Beziehungen zwischen Mediengeschichte und moderner Tanzästhetik

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# Neuerscheinungen: Besprechungen und Hinweise

## Im Blickpunkt

### **Claudia Rosiny: Tanz Film. Intermediale Beziehungen zwischen Mediengeschichte und moderner Tanzästhetik**

Bielefeld: transcript 2013, 357 S., ISBN 978-3-8376-2329-1, € 32,80

„Idee dieses Bandes,” writes Claudia Rosiny in the introduction to *Tanz Film. Intermediale Beziehungen zwischen Mediengeschichte und moderner Tanzästhetik*, “ist es über einen längeren historischen Zeitraum intermediale Beziehungen zwischen Tanz und Film aufzuspüren und deren ästhetische Verknüpfungen zu analysieren” (S.34). True to her word, she surveys dance history from the late nineteenth century – when dancers became subjects for the new medium of film – to the present – when digital works realize choreography with nary a live dancer in sight. The author marshals her material under six themes: media influence on dance aesthetics, media insertion on the dance stage, film musicals/dance films/music videos/televised dance, video-dance, dance and digital technology, and dance aesthetics in/via the Internet. The study itself assumes a certain rhythm as Rosiny describes and then analyzes dozens of dance performances, all of them interacting in various ways with the most advanced representational technologies of their generations, before summarizing her findings under the parameters of movement, time, and space.

The author begins her analysis with actualities, shorts, and feature presentations of motion picture pioneers Thomas Edison, George Méliès, and D. W. Griffith. The first U.S. commercial film screening, an 1896 Edison Studios production, featured two dance sequences. Edison had already filmed dancers Annabelle Whitford Moore and Loïe Fuller the year before as the young women, wearing long, flowing dresses, waved their arms and whirled dervish-style, simulating the flight of large, frenetic butterflies. The women’s steps were elemental, with none of the polish and sophistication found in classical ballet. But what these „serpentine” or „skirt” dances lacked in choreographic and cinematographic complexity they made up for through special visual effects. The ever-innovative Edison overcame limitations on the parameter of movement by lighting the dancer from below (using, presumably, another of his inventions, the incandescent, carbon-filament light bulb). As Rosiny observes, „[d]as farbige Licht, das von unten durch die Glasscheibe ihr Kostüm überflutete, erzeugte eine beschleunigende Wirkung des Tanzes

– technische Effekte steigerten die Wirkung der reinen Bewegung” (S.52). Time and space still restricted the great inventor, for turn-of-the-century films – shot from stationary cameras – lasted no more than a few minutes, while the dancers themselves performed on small vaudeville and circus sideshow stages.

In the chapter on media insertion in theatrical dance, Rosiny argues that „Projektionen – ob auf Monitoren oder auf Leinwänden oder anderen Materialien – bilden einen Gegenpart zum Tanz auf der Bühne” (S.130). To illustrate this, she explores the works of several choreographers, the most influential among them being Hans van Manen. His 30-minute piece, *Live* (1979), featured live projection of ballet dancer Coleen Davis as she moved about the stage of Amsterdam’s *Royal Theater Carré*, through hallways and rooms of the building itself, and beyond to an adjacent street. As Rosiny observes, van Manen thereby played with movement, time, and space not only by extending the ballet performance far beyond its traditional theatrical dimensions but by doubling the dancer’s appearance through simultaneous onstage projection. She contends further that, despite the size of the Royal Theater, spectators experienced a disturbing intimacy with the dancer as video close-ups of her various body parts were projected on a large screen.

In the chapter on dance and digital technology, Rosiny examines (too briefly) *Afasia* (1998), a work by Spanish performance artist Marcel-Lí Antúnez Roca. Words cannot do justice to any of Roca’s multimedia extravaganzas.

Nevertheless, they typically feature the artist dressed in little more than a kind of electronic exo-skeleton in which he assumes poses onstage like some cybernetic *lucha libre* wrestler. All the while he controls visuals projected behind him depicting himself, naked dancers, computer and psychedelic images, bodily organs (intestines seem to be a favorite), and simulated acts of violence and sex, among other attractions. Rosiny maintains that Roca extends the spectator’s sense of space by commanding large-scale movements and constructing overpowering visuals with mere gestures, while manipulating time by condensing and layering events through collage. She’s at a forgivable loss to describe the artist’s exploitation of movement. Instead, she invokes Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” (1991) and its proposals to eliminate lines between man and woman, between man and machine, to argue that „Roca reflektiert als Cyborg in *Afasia* auf der Ebene der Bewegung einen solchen Diskurs, obschon dichotome Bewegungsmuster und kein möglicherweise androides Vokabular – wie würde dies aussehen? – gezeigt wird” (S.288).

Perhaps because of her strictly academic approach, Rosiny can sometimes give short shrift to or overlook more popular – and arguably better executed – exponents of media-dance interactions. For example, in discussing the pioneering motion capture work, *Captive (2nd Movement)* (N+N Corsino, 1999), the author states without irony that the „Bewegungen der drei animierten Figuren wirken vereinfacht und formalisiert – die Körper ähneln eher der Spielfigur Lara Croft

oder einer Barbiepuppe" (S.277). Yet, only two years later, technology had advanced far enough to satisfy the artistic standards of Danish choreographer and Balanchine-protégé Peter Martins and members of the New York City Ballet, who performed for the motion capture dance sequences in *Barbie in the Nutcracker* (Owen Hurley, 2001). And neither *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1964), with its insertion of animated dancing penguins amidst live action, nor *Happy Feet* (George Miller, 2006), featuring almost nothing but computer-animated dancing penguins, receives mention. In the chapter on video dance, Rosiny analyzes the seven-minute work *Weightless* (2007). Created by Swedish choreographer and interior designer Erika Janunger, the video features a young woman who dances playfully on the walls and ceiling of a small, modern bedroom. Although the author notes that the trick used to capture the sequence – a studio that rotated on an axis – can also be found in Fred Astaire's

exuberant dance in *Royal Wedding* (Stanley Donen, 1951), she neglects to mention that Donen also directed the 1986 music video, *Dancing on the Ceiling*, wherein Lionel Richie lives up to the song's title, two decades before *Weightless*.

Though Rosiny's study also suffers the inevitable shortcoming of any written work dealing with an art executed in three dimensions over time, her descriptions of dance performances are clear and insightful. Fortunately, most of the dances she refers to can be viewed with minimal effort on the Internet. *Tanz Film* should find a place in undergraduate and graduate level courses in dance history and media and cultural studies. One hopes the volume also finds an English translator so that it may enjoy the larger readership it deserves.

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