

163—165

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BRUSSELS, FEB 19 - Jan Mot is pleased to announce the seventh solo exhibition with **Rineke Dijkstra** which will include a new video work, entitled *The Gymschool, St Petersburg, 2014*. This work was filmed in Russia and commissioned by Manifesta, the European Biennial of Contemporary art, for its last edition in 2014. The show marks the gallery's 20 year long collaboration with Dijkstra which began with a first presentation at the art fair in Brussels in Spring 1995. (image: Rineke Dijkstra, *The Gymschool, St Petersburg, 2014* – detail)

Placeholder text for the advertisement, consisting of a grid of characters.

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163

Exhibition
06/03-18/04

Opening
05/03
6–9 pm

**RINEKE
DIJKSTRA**

**THE
GYMSCHOOL,
ST PETERSBURG,
2014**

Jan Mot
Rue de la Régence /
Regentschapsstraat 67
1000 Brussels, Belgium

Series of one day solo exhibitions that present...



A selection of books from the library of Douglas Crimp

Dance

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Agon

By
Douglas Crimp

NEW YORK, FEB 15 - *“Agon” is the seventh of eight chapters of Before Pictures, a memoir of New York in the decade before the Pictures show, which took place in 1977 (I arrived in New York after college in 1967). The memoir, which will be published in the spring of 2016, weaves together anecdote, research, and analysis in an attempt to bring the two most significant aspects of my life during that decade into dialogue: the experiments taking place in the art world and the culture of gay liberation. But other often-incommensurate things are juxtaposed in each chapter as well. In “Agon” those two things are the ballets of George Balanchine and post-structuralist theory, particularly the work of Jacques Derrida. My friend and fellow graduate student Craig Owens was a devotee of Balanchine’s ballets and his great ballerina Suzanne Farrell; he also translated Derrida’s “Parergon” into English and had a precocious understanding of Derrida’s work. I came to both Balanchine and Derrida through Craig. So the larger topic of the chapter is ballet and theory, but my two excerpts—the beginning of the chapter and a brief segment from the middle—don’t get to the theory part.*

Symphony in C is one of George Balanchine’s finest ballets. Made for the Paris Opera in 1947 to a newly discovered Bizet symphony, it was originally called *Le Palais de Cristal*. Léonor Fini designed the set and the differently colored costumes for each of its four movements, but when Balanchine restaged it for Ballet Society (predecessor to the New York City Ballet) he stripped it of its décor and dressed the fifty-two dancers in black and white—black tunics for the men, white tutus for the women. “*Symphony in C* makes everyone happy,” says critic Nancy Goldner. The first time I saw it I resisted its charm. Seeing it now, I don’t know how I could have, but it was undoubtedly connected to my affair with a brawny black modern dancer. I remember saying, “It’s too *ballet blanc* for my taste,” even though I didn’t know what “*ballet blanc*” meant at the time. I had been taken to the ballet by my friend Veronica Geng, an avid City Ballet-goer. To entice me, she

said that Balanchine created wonderful, constantly changing patterns of dancers on the stage. She couldn’t have been more right about that, but I didn’t appreciate the genius of it immediately.

Not long after that first encounter with City Ballet, I entered the Ph.D. program in art history at the CUNY Graduate Center, which was then the only art history department in the country where it was possible to specialize in contemporary art and criticism. Two former *Artforum* critics, Rosalind Krauss and Robert Pincus-Witten, taught there. I knew Rosalind slightly, and it was with her that I wanted to study. At the Graduate Center I formed a strong bond with Craig Owens, a classmate who had also come to study with Rosalind. Like me, Craig was gay, but he was several years younger and several inches taller. He was also a balletomane, and under his guidance I was won over to Balanchine, although my initial skepticism continued in several respects, at least for a while: I didn’t like tutu ballets and I especially disliked story ballets. These weren’t so much an issue at New York City Ballet, though, because many of Balanchine’s works were performed in practice clothes, and most had no explicit story. I quickly came to appreciate the starkly modernist works such as *The Four Temperaments*, *Agon*, and *Episodes*. But there were also a couple of exceptions in the lushly romantic *Serenade* and *La Valse*, both of them costumed by Karinska in romantic-style ankle-length tutus and both telling ambiguous, haunted tales. *La Valse* is probably the least likely ballet for me to have loved so unreservedly at first sight, but maybe I can explain it.

Let me say to start that the more I understood about Balanchine, the more I realized that the term “modernist” applies to his work in general, not only to the ballets choreographed to music by modern composers such as Hindemith, Stravinsky, and Webern and containing deformed classical movement in which sharp angles replace soft curves, legs turn in as well as out, feet are flexed as well as pointed, and extensions are stretched to the breaking point.

Initially it was only ballets of the *Agon* type that I apprehended as modernist. *Agon* (from the Greek for “contest”) has a commissioned serial score by Stravinsky

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164

Library
10/04 –

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Conversation with
Douglas Crimp
10/04 at 7 pm

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and is performed in black and white tights and leotards on a brightly lit bare stage with a backdrop blue as the sky on a crisp, clear day. The choreography is rigorous, almost mathematical: twelve dancers, twelve movements, twelve-tone music. The long central pas de deux is preceded by two pas de trois, each divided into three parts, the first requiring one male and two female dancers, the second, one female and two males. *Agon* begins with a quartet, followed by an octet, then all twelve dancers together. The finale repeats the combinations in different order: eight, twelve, four.

Stravinsky based *Agon* on a French baroque dance manual by François de Lauze, using such early dance forms as the *branze*, the *gaillard*, and the *sarabande* for the two pas de trois, whose choreography likewise reflects the old forms. The choreography for the opening and closing sections of the ballet, with names like *double pas de quatre* and *danse des quatre trios*, employs such unclassical movements as walking, skipping, sliding into splits, swinging the arms, pulling the elbows in and folding the wrists to flap the hands downward, and bending all the way over forward and then backward. But even the more classical pas de trois have moments of extreme deformation. Dance critic Edwin Denby captured this perfectly when he said of the first of them, “In triple canon the dancers do idiotic slenderizing exercises, theoretically derived from court gesture, while the music foghorns in the fashion of musique concrète.” (This might sound derisive, but it’s not; Denby’s tone is good-natured, and his essay on *Agon* is a paean.)

What I found most exhilarating was the pas de deux. Denby says of it that Balanchine turned the conventions of the pas de deux upside down. Even not knowing well what those conventions are, you can’t miss the tension of it, which derives in part from the lack of danceable rhythm in the music; Balanchine said the movement should be “like one long, long, long, long breath.” Nor can you miss the *unclassical*, contorted, sexually suggestive moves the dancers make. At one point, as the danseur lifts the ballerina in front of him she opens her legs in a spread-eagle, and he carries her forward. When he lowers her to her feet, she slides into splits and falls backwards between his legs. He drops to his knees, opens his arms, and does a deep back bend to grab her hands, then bends back forward as she rises into arabesque. He supports her there from the awkward position of leaning forward, arms reaching back. At another moment,

as he kneels supporting her, she steps over his arm with one leg, which leaves him holding her hand right under her crotch.

The male dancer spends a great deal of time on his knees in the *Agon* pas de deux, sometimes supporting the ballerina by grasping her leg rather than her arm. At the most dramatic moment, while supporting her in an arabesque on pointe, he falls to his knees, lies down on his back, then scooches around from sideways to front. By the time the ballerina comes off pointe, he has rolled onto his side and done another back bend, this one on the ground. Toward the end of the pas de deux, he once again supports the ballerina while lying down (she’s not on pointe this time). Afterward, he gets up on his knees and she collapses her upper body over his in a final embrace, whether of protection or exhaustion it’s hard to say.

Balanchine made the *Agon* pas de deux in 1957 for Diana Adams and Arthur Mitchell. Mitchell, who is black, thought that Balanchine was interested in exploiting the contrast of white and black skin: “There was a definite use of skin tones in terms of Diana being so pale and me being so dark, so that even the placing of the hands or the arms provided a color structure integrated into the choreographic one.” It was surely highly provocative in the late 1950s for such a sensuous pas de deux to be danced by an interracial couple, but nothing seems to have been made of it publicly. Denby wrote simply, “The fact that Miss Adams is white and Mr. Mitchell Negro is neither stressed nor hidden; it adds to the interest.” When I first saw *Agon* there were no black male soloists in the company. Suzanne Farrell and Peter Martins danced the performances of it that made the ballet a touchstone for me. Soon thereafter, Mel Tomlinson, a black dancer from the Dance Theater of Harlem, the company founded by Mitchell, joined City Ballet and danced the role with Heather Watts. Albert Evans and Wendy Whelan formed a more recent celebrated interracial partnership in the pas de deux.

*

La Valse is less a story than an atmospheric allegory—but of what, exactly? Phrases from John Martins’s *New York Times* review are suggestive: “Piquant decadence,” “sickly hedonism,” “dainty madness.” Choreographing the work to Maurice Ravel’s *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* and *La Valse*, Balanchine returned in it to ballet romanticism, especially to the equation of dancing

with death. *La Valse* is constructed as a series of eight waltzes danced variously by three women (sometimes interpreted as the fates) and four couples, together with a figure of death. The lead ballerina (originally Tanaquil LeClercq, Suzanne Farrell when I first saw it) wears white. All of the other women wear tutus that are among Karinska’s most dazzling creations. Essentially reinterpretations of the romantic tutu through the lens of Dior’s New Look, they have long grey bodices and skirts made of layer upon layer of different colors of tulle—orange, red, pink, lavender. The top layer is gray like the bodice, and at first you think the skirts are a sort of muted crimson, but as the dancers move, you constantly catch flashes of the half-spectrum of colors underneath. The women also wear long white evening gloves, which accentuate the angular arm movements that form an integral part of the choreography. All of the men are dressed in black, which makes the figure of death indistinguishable from the others at first. Francisco Moncion danced the role of death when *La Valse* premiered in 1951, and he was still dancing it when I saw it in the mid-1970s. His seduction of the “decadent” girl in white takes the form of re-clothing her in black—black gloves to cover her white ones, a black tulle robe over her white gown, a black necklace, a black bouquet. He then dances her to death and drops her lifeless body to the ballroom floor.

Why was the girl in white referred to as decadent? No doubt because LeClercq danced it that way. According to Moncion,

“The quality Tanny gave to the character was a kind of discontent and then an avidity—not really greed—for reaching out to something new, a discontent not assuaged by the man she has met [Nicholas Magallanes in the Eighth Waltz]. Somehow, with the Death figure, it is the allure of the unknown that tantalized her. She clutches the necklace, tries it on, and suddenly something fulfilling begins to happen. She looks into the broken mirror, which distorts her, and recoils. Always Death is leading her, leading her—at this point she’s completely mesmerized...”

And Denby: “The way I remember Tanny’s marvelous gesture of putting on the gloves was that when she put her hand into the glove she threw up her head at the same time, so that it was a kind of immolation, you felt, like diving to destruction.” Nancy Goldner uses a phrase of Martha Graham’s: “doom eager.” Farrell didn’t dance the role with the fervor that clearly

characterized LeClercq's performance, but the way the choreography requires the ballerina to plunge her arms into the long black gloves makes it obvious that she is willingly seduced. My seduction followed hers. Moncion was no longer the spectacular beauty he had been in his youth, a beauty obvious in photographs of him by Carl van Vechten and George Platt Lynes. But Ravel's music for what he called "dancing on the edge of a volcano," the "piquant decadence" of Karinska's costumes, and the ballet's depiction of the ballerina's acquiescence in forbidden pleasures, represented by her eagerly donning black garments, struck a chord.

On many a night, with Balanchine's ballets fresh in my mind, I walked after performances further uptown on Amsterdam Avenue to the Candle Bar, which had one of the largest, darkest, and most active back rooms of any gay bar in the city. I wasn't attracted, as others were, by the possibility the pitch-dark room provided for tactile sensation entirely divorced from visual stimuli, of connecting just to bodies or parts of bodies independent of any sense of a person. For me, faces and their expressions were requisite. But all it took was a come-on from an attractive-enough guy in the front of the bar, and I eagerly followed (or led) him into the darkness.

Other times after the ballet I walked in the opposite direction, down Ninth Avenue to a neighborhood gay bar filled with a congenial Hell's Kitchen crowd—congenial enough that City Ballet soloists (and eventually husband and wife) Daniel Duell and Kyra Nichols sometimes showed up for a post-performance drink. They were among my favorite dancers, so seeing them at the bar was a special thrill, even if their off-stage ordinariness tempered the feeling. Nichols went on to a long and illustrious career with the company; her dancing of the lead role in *Serenade* in her final years as a ballerina (she retired in 2007) was finely nuanced and deeply affecting. Like Nichols, Duell was promoted to principal dancer in 1979, but he left the company not long after his younger brother, Joseph Duell, also a City Ballet principal dancer, committed suicide in 1986. Daniel Duell, like his fellow dancer Bart Cook, seemed made for Balanchine's modernist roles; both were solidly built, with broad shoulders and flexible backs, but were slightly too short and had heads slightly too large to be right for the part of the classical ballet cavalier, even though they had excellent partnering skills. I think of them as the sarabande guys, the type of

male dancer—like Todd Bolender—for whom Balanchine made the sarabande in the first pas de trois of *Agon*. In fact, when he revived another work from 1957, *Square Dance*, in 1976, Balanchine added a solo for Cook to Corelli's *Sarabanda*, "a majestic, stately piece, full of sculptural poses (interspersed with beats and turns)." Duell was not as great a dancer as Cook, but he was the one who most captivated me.

Douglas Crimp is Fanny Knapp Allen Professor of Art History at the University of Rochester, New York, and the author of On the Museum's Ruins, 1993; Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics, 2002; and "Our Kind of Movie": The Films of Andy Warhol, 2012. Crimp was the curator of the Pictures exhibition at Artists Space, New York, in 1977 and an editor of October magazine from 1977 to 1990. With Lynne Cooke, he organized the exhibition Mixed Use, Manhattan: Photography and Related Practices 1970s to the Present for the Reina Sofia in Madrid in the summer of 2010. He is currently completing a memoir of New York in the 1970s called Before Pictures.

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165

Exhibition
24/04 – 30/05

Opening 23/04
6-9 pm

**PIERRE
BISMUTH**

**WHERE IS
ROCKY II?**

Jan Mot
Rue de la Régence /
Regentschapsstraat 67
1000 Brussels, Belgium



BRUSSELS, FEB 20 - At the end of the 1970s, artist Ed Ruscha left an artwork – a fake rock – somewhere in the vast Mojave desert. **Pierre Bismuth** has spent a decade trying to find it – with the help of a private detective and a film crew.

Letter to the editor

By
Susana Vargas Cervantes

February, 2015
Mexico City

Dear Jan,

Since we met, we have always joked about my taste. I actually started this series of letters with a conversation about how the term aesthetics, coined by Alexander Baumgarten during the mid-eighteenth century, emerged to describe the ‘whole of our sensate life together’. That’s everything. Aesthetics was used to talk about all passions, affects and emotions. This everything is “art”, which exemplifies perfectly an experience and makes aesthetics, according to Highmore, a “synonym with art theory”.

Presently, for something to be aes-

thetic means, that it is better in all ways, as we perceive it and feel it, making it what we have come to know as beauty, morally superior or almost unachievable. This discourse has resulted in anxiety. Anxiety being at the core of aesthetic judgment, pushing you to make a decision about an art piece, it moves you into a “straight-line to judgment, rather than get mired in uncertainty and overwhelmed by the possibilities”. An example of this process is how, for instance, my anxious *movement* pushes me to understand aesthetics as the kind of sublime and beautiful as seen in a video by Mario García Torres, instead of what may or may not make my personal taste, as in Beyoncé’s, aka Queen B, latest video.

It will be very easy, by almost anyone reading this newsletter, to dismiss Queen B. Tastes, in art, food, style, are of course a class distinction, as taught by Bourdieu.

It is not the same to like Schubert as to like Beyoncé because the former is seen as sublime and the latter as popular. This distinction, more than classifying taste, is about economic social class and power. Enjoying Schubert, we know, is better, because it has been legitimated as such by the ruling classes.

You can see where I am going. And I am not trying to defend my tastes through social resentment. Or trying to convince you of how awesome Beyoncé is.

We have joked about my taste for Beyoncé many times. I like Queen B but also find her problematic, although not for the obvious taste distinctions discussed before. Hear me out. I have a very good example.

In August of 2014, Beyoncé performed for the MTV Video Music Awards. To millions of viewers she came out as a “feminist”. The term “femi-



nist”, in capital letters, was displayed as the background of her performance. Since 2011, when she declared “girls run the world”, she has self-identified as a “modern-day feminist”. What does this mean? That Beyoncé’s feminism is based on her individuality, her financial and economic independence, and capability. Her empowerment is based much on her economic prosperity, valued by Forbes at 115 million dollars, which comes from her own hard work. Aren’t these the values we are supposed to embody to be happy (and therefore rich)? And what is wrong with achieving these things with one’s sweat and hard work?

As you know, Mexico has been undergoing a civil war. Four months ago, 43 teacher students from the town of Ayotzinapa, in the southern state of Guerrero (most known because of Acapulco), disappeared with the complicity of the military. I won’t go further into that painful story, but I will just mention that as a result of the social upheaval it caused, an investigation showed the conflict of interest between a private company, Grupo Higa, and “The White House” of the President Enrique Peña Nieto, a private residence valued at 7 million US dollars. When this came to light in November 2014, Grupo Higa along with Constructora Teya and the Chinese company Railway Construction Corporation, had just won a contest to build a fast train between Mexico City and Queretaro. The deal has now been cancelled. President Peña Nieto stated the “White House” was property of his wife, Angélica Rivera, and that it was up to her to defend their family from such accusations that could contribute to the “destabilization” of the country, accusations too that go against the “national project”.

For the first time in Mexican politics, the first lady of Mexico, Angélica Rivera addressed the nation, in a seven minute Youtube video available on her website angelicarivera.com. Rivera stated that the “White House” is a result of her 25 years of “hard work” as a soap opera star, which have given her the “economic capacity” to build a future for her daughters. She has been made angry by the “accusations that have put in question her honor”. Her anger resides in the fact that she has worked hard all her life to become a financially independent woman, whose sweat and tears have brought her to a place of economic independence. In the video she is not defending democracy and transparency in Mexico, but “the integrity of her family and husband” through the values of individuality and independence as a hard working woman.

What does this have to do with Beyoncé? A lot. Both Beyoncé and Rivera resort to the post-feminist values of individuality, financial independence and capability to position themselves as empowered women. These values are in line with those values that neoliberal ideology promotes. Values that have served to obscure gender violence and assist those elites in power to gain more economic profits.

Now, I find this very problematic. Not only because gender equality (just to name a very mainstream value of feminism) has not been achieved in Mexico or in the rest of the world. In fact, gender violence is only escalating in Mexico, a country that has coined the term “femicidio” to mean the killing of women, just because they are women. Since 1994, more than 460 women have been murdered in Ciudad Juárez, in the North of México, and according to the National Human Rights Commission report (November 2003) another 4,587 women have disappeared. Most of them were young, poor mestizo women who have died after having been raped, tortured and dismembered.

How in Mexico can we talk about “post” feminist values -- which happen to be the same as those promoted by neoliberal ideologies – while facing this reality?

During the last November 20 march, my dentist was driving back to her house. She lives close to the Angel de la Independencia, the march’s starting point. She uploaded a video of her experience on Facebook. In the video we see her filming from her cellphone inside her car, her husband driving and her 3 year old kid in the back. She starts filming while caught in the middle of the march, with many people around her car. She is shouting: “Enough, enough, I’m with my son. I am with my son, please!” Her voice starts panicking, shouting even more loudly: “I’m with my son, please,” as she starts crying, panicked.

It is not clear what happened next, but to her almost 3,000 likes and more than 7,000 shares, and drawing from the comments, it was clear that she was the victim of violence by the protestors. The next day, she wrote a declaration about what it is “to be Mexico”. Among other statements, she states that “we are Mexico”, those who “create new enterprises to give jobs and a better quality of life, who search for excellence, who break our backs every day to give our children a better quality of life, who know we deserve better...”

What do my dentist, Rivera and Beyoncé have in common? Again, the values of the ideal neoliberal subject and the post-feminist women: hard work to gain economic independence, and then achieve happiness.

Yes, I still love Beyoncé, will dance to her music at any party and understand what a great role model she can be (if contextualized) for many black girls in United States. But in Mexico, the values she promotes are very dangerous.

Tastes are complicated, as Bourdieu pointed out. They point out to class distinctions that in this neoliberal savage world are a matter of life and death. Yet, my plan B if writing doesn’t pan out is to sell art to Beyoncé and her husband Jay Z. Jay Z’s art collection, about which he rapped so often, is roughly valued at \$1.445 billion.

Now, you will find that problematic. Jay Z is a perfect neoliberal subject. He has made it out of the Brooklyn housing projects to building a real estate empire worth estimated at 520 million US dollars. Jay Z has a Hirst, Rothko, Rembrandt, Bacon, Warhol, Koons, Simmons, and Picasso baby. Rappers buying art to experience the sublime through aesthetic? What would Bourdieu say about that?

Agenda

Sven Augustijnen

Ce qui ne sert pas s'oublie, CAPC musée d’art contemporain, Bordeaux (FR), 22/01 - 12/04; *The Unfinished Conversation: Encoding and Decoding*, The Power Plant, Toronto (CA), 24/01 - 18/05; *Spectres*, CAPC musée d’art contemporain, Bordeaux (FR), 04/03 (screening); *Summer Thoughts*, Kunsthall Trondheim, Trondheim (NO), 12/03 - 26/04 (solo); *EUROPE – The Future of History*, Kunsthau Zürich (CH), 12/06 - 06/09

Pierre Bismuth

Der Kurator, der Anwalt und der Psychoanalytiker (The Curator, the Lawyer and the Psychoanalyst), Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, 04/02 - 22/03 (solo); *Presque la même chose*, La Kunsthalle Mulhouse, Mulhouse (FR), 12/02 - 10/05; *Maison Particulière*, Brussels, 22/04 - 05/07; *Where is Rocky II?*, Jan Mot, Brussels, 23/04 - 30/05 (solo)

