The January evening was gelid and black, but inside SculptureCenter the light was bright; the room, a rectangle in concrete and brick, fully illuminated. Chairs lined its perimeter for a performance in the round. A carpet stretched across the gallery, cushioning the floor. When they entered the space for Moriah Evans’s Figuring, which premiered this year in a five-night suite copresented by the American Realness festival, the three dancers were already at work. Their small, fitful movements registered primarily along the torso: shoulders, chest, abdomen, pelvis. Their spines undulated awkwardly. Their arms reached for static positions—out to the side or up in front, rarely perpendicular. Knees bent in support of the upper body. Hips and glutes stabilized. Faces were free of makeup; hair was styled with dutiful practicality. The dancers sported knits in a mismatched array of vibrant colors: Lizzie Feidelson in a mustard yellow sweater with a standup collar; Nicole Marie Mannarino in a fuchsia three-quarter-sleeve wool crewneck; Sarah Beth Percival in fluorescent yellow leg warmers. Shorts on top of leggings, wool on top of cotton—the performers wore athletic apparel, but it was not athleisure. Their layered attire, assembled by Strauss Bourque-LaFrance, might serve well on a cross-country ski run. It was January after all, and the room was cold. A red sweater, evidently peeled from a body and tossed aside, lay collapsed in a pile, evidence that the layers were more functional than aesthetic. All practices are available. Evans, seated against the brick wall, legs crossed, leaning forward slightly and clutching her notepad and pen, marked the start of the performance with her voice; it was the only perceptible sign that something had begun. The lighting, designed by Kathy Kaufmann, did not immediately go dark; the sound, a mix of tones, drones, and field recordings, improvised live with various electronics by Ka Baird, continued. The dancers betrayed no discernible change. They did not suddenly come to order, line up, and break into precise movement phrases in unison. For the next ninety minutes they continued their staccato vibration, each on an individual trajectory. Little jumps, two feet at a time; soft landings. Slowly, steadily, one leg extended in front of another or reached out behind. The dance seemed to be unfolding in a series of episodes, although nothing

**INNER WORKINGS**

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In the way that Conceptual art is often about art and art-making, Evans’s dances are about dance.

Like narrative could be used to describe them. What marked these segments—or, at least, what stood out in the dance as strikingly different from what we have seen before or in a new way. They founded on two, querying back to two, or, holding hands, they walked, leading each step in unison, pausing to bend at the waist before turning 180 degrees to extract their steps. At times, all three dancers came together in a pulsing unit, first upright, then entangled in a pile on the floor. The dancers offered one another instructions, encouragement, or criticism. Kneeling in the energy fields, I think you can do better than that. They vocalized, at first appearing as if speaking to its own. They made guttural grunts, low murmurs, grunts. They blasted and taunted. They cried out. They attended handshakes, quiet conversations, their addresses vague. Do you like this dance? I think so. Should we have you all give three pros and cons. You have to want a baby if this is your idea. Whatever happened in your parties? You could be a baby.

What had prompted the dancers to speak or what their speech meant in relation to the movements was not easy to discover. Still, it seemed most important that they were speaking at all. Their use of proses—You returned—return them from their private world into the world in which the audience resided. A world formed by language, a social world. And for this, it seemed, the audience felt relief. I heard exhalations, soft laughter. We were relieved, perhaps, that dance could be taken seriously outside the ballet academy. She could be a birth doula.

Whatever happened to our poetry club? You could be a birth doula. This dance did not subscribe to traditional aesthetic codes of beauty. Like narrative could be used to describe them. What marked these segments—or, at least, what stood out in the dance as strikingly different from what we have seen before or in a new way. They founded on two, querying back to two, or, holding hands, they walked, leading each step in unison, pausing to bend at the waist before turning 180 degrees to extract their steps. At times, all three dancers came together in a pulsing unit, first upright, then entangled in a pile on the floor. The dancers offered one another instructions, encouragement, or criticism. Kneeling in the energy fields, I think you can do better than that. They vocalized, at first appearing as if speaking to its own. They made guttural grunts, low murmurs, grunts. They blasted and taunted. They cried out. They attended handshakes, quiet conversations, their addresses vague. Do you like this dance? I think so. Should we have you all give three pros and cons. You have to want a baby if this is your idea. Whatever happened in your parties? You could be a baby.

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Look, she is saying, these utopian elements—the collaboration, the cooperation—are just display.

Judea comprised forty-five dance steps that Evans sequenced using the square pattern on the marble floor of Issue Project Room’s Beaux-Arts building, originally the posh ballroom setting for Ellis Lodge social convocations in Brooklyn. The dance began as one by one the five dancers (Maggie Cloud, Lizzie Fiedelson, Benny Olk, Sarah Beth Percival, and Jeremy Puflichi) showcased a sequence of precise movement phrases along the marble grid, stop timing, pivoting forward and back, sidestepping, turning on both feet—all with hands resting gently on hips, or arms swinging from front to back or out to the side but never above the shoulders. After each dancer’s solo, the performers绛expressed to form a circle, holding hands and looking at one another while continuing their precise movements. The circle became a line, then a circle again as the dancers moved in and out of unison. For the most part, the group seemed to be performing for themselves, except when they moved en masse to engage a seated audience member to join in their affectations of hand-holding harmony. Wearing deadpan expressions, the dancers came off as more sinister than lighthearted.

The repeating phrases on display were pared-down interpretations of vernacular dance movements, drawn from what is often called “social dance,” those sequences of steps meant for the dance floor at the club or the wedding party: the Charleston and the Tango, the Foxtrot and the Box Step, the Big Apple and the Lindy Hop, the Twist and the Electric Slide and the Grapevine. Evans selected a handful of these and abstracted them to foreground their structure, reducing what ordinarily are expressions of joy and catharsis, even self-determination, to pure form. Although the dancers’ steps were circumscribed by the floor pattern, their arm movements were less restricted; they could choose from among seven. What they did with their heads was entirely up to them: which way they turned or cast their eyes; the nature of their facial expressions. Again, the system was closed but also porous; personality, expression, could creep in. The costumes reinforced this tension: designed by Alan Calpe and Strauss Bourque-LaFrance, the sparsely beaded and long fringes, seemed somewhat at odds with the dancers’ constrained, minimalist choreography. The garments would not have been out of place in a teenage dance recital or a football halftime show, where “personality” is so essential as to be over-performed.

In the second half, the dance became more dynamic, more exciting, the group alternately dissolving and reforming. A series of duets partnered the dancers, including works by Judson choreographers, further complicated this relationship by making dances within “collective” settings, which have been created first and performed later dominated nineteenth-century show, where “personality” is so essential as to be over-performed.

By calling attention to eye contact as a basic form of exchange, Evans has taken a form of dance eventually transitioned from the face to the body, with each individual dancer moving independently. The dancers began with simple, near-down-motion bends, sits, and rotations, executed with precision and control, and by midway through had elevated the energy into a kind of frenzy, still moving independently but at a feverish pace, privileging flesh over form. The piece closed with the audience entering, the dancers were already there, seated on the floor (1992). When the audience entered, the dancers were already there, seated on the floor (1992). When the audience entered, the dancers were already there, seated on the floor (1992). When the audience entered, the dancers were already there, seated on the floor (1992). When the audience entered, the dancers were already there, seated on the floor (1992). When the audience entered, the dancers were already there, seated on the floor (1992). When the audience entered, the dancers were already there, seated on the floor (1992). When the audience entered, the dancers were already there, seated on the floor (1992). When the audience entered, the dancers were already there, seated on the floor (1992).
The dancers’ initial exchange with the audience members, which proceed from facial “scores” authored by Evans, end up influencing the way the dance unfolds. The face-to-face encounter sets up a chain reaction, the way such interactions so often do as we make our way through the world, as humans encountering other humans. One exchanged glance can throw off a day—or drastically improve it. But the piece adds complexity by accounting for setting: what does it mean to exchange a private gaze in public? What does it mean to witness a private exchange in front of a group? What does it mean to be a spectator, which is so to say, to direct a gaze but not have it returned? In India, the dancers seemed to be restrained by Evans’s choreography. But Evans was, at times, something of the opposite effect. The choreographic system was more subtle, and as I watched the dance, I felt that the dancers were being imposed on less than I was—restrained by the social conventions of the performance space and by social etiquette more generally. I felt self-conscious and hyperaware of how I was expected to behave. The possibilities, whereas empowering, come with a price. Consensus-building—in this case, to oversimplify, on how to do the dance—is about conflict as much as it is about agreement, and conflict making (and resolving) was essentially built into Figuring. The dancers, Evans included, were invited to challenge each other. Conflict is not an inherently adverse experience but it can be emotionally stressful, even when it is resolved respectfully. Preparing for Figuring required the dancers to engage an expansive set of intellectual, physical, and relational responsibilities that pushed bodily limits and tested choreographic agreements. Evans is in search of dance’s utopian potential while also expressing doubt about the possibility of same; or to put it another way, utopia appears and then it disappears, and all you can do is to try to find it again.

**NINE SETUPS, five duets, two walks.** Think of them as a miniature world. The worlds have their own rules, the roles—they are strategies for relating. Throughout the dance, movement (entirety of the work the dancers engage five energetic modes of movement—“research,” “displacement,” “interaction,” “dissection,” “score”). In ninety minutes, the dancers try to move through all nine of these worlds, performing the duets and the walks as they do so. They don’t necessarily get through all the material on every occasion; however, for instance, they may end up performing all nine setups, but only two of the duets. The roadmap tells the dancers where they need to go (i.e., the setups and so on) but, crucially, not how to get there or in what order. The dancers, through a kind of nonverbal group communication, make these decisions as they are performing the dance. The sequence of worlds is determined by the dancers. Evans is merely watching them. When Evans began rehearsals for Figuring in December 2016, Donald Trump was weeks away from being inaugurated president. “We were at a frightening place historically,” she said. “I didn’t want to tell people how to be in their bodies or what to do with their bodies. I didn’t want to impose historical dance modes onto the performers.” Evans addressed this problem by inviting the dancers to join him in trying to artikulate a system for dancing that would begin with “sensation inside of the body” rather than with a preformed image of what the dancing body should look like. Each movement would start with a thought in a place of sensation. Dancers think a lot about where movements are initiated, and it tends to be somewhere on the body over which we have voluntary control: initiate from the fingers; initiate from the pelvic; initiate from the nose (in one segment of Evans, for example, scores instruct the dancers to initiate movement from somewhere on the face). But for Figuring, the dancers were asked to initiate movement from an organism. Any organism. Heart, feet, pancreas, brain; it is up to the dancer to decide. A dancer in “justposition as viewpoint” who has been assigned the mode of displacement may decide to initiate movement from her heart. She could imagine the liver or try to access it through sensation. What does displacement look like when initiated from the liver? There is no “correct” answer to this question. But the dancers know. Evans knows. They know because together, through an entire year of near-daily rehearsals, they have practiced initiating displacement from the liver (and other combinations of energetic modes and organs). Through this practice—which Evans characterized to me as “research”—they have arrived at an agreement about what displacement from the liver feels like and looks like—not only inside the body but as a kind of energy (for lack of a better term) transmitted to and perceived by the other dancers.

These agreements exist but they are in effect fragile agreements. They are fragile because when a consensus is arrived at by these four people it can easily be questioned or undermined. There is always subjectivity; there is always interpretation. With so few people, it takes only one to withdraw from the consensus to upset it. This dynamic means each dancer is encouraged to pay attention to her own body and assert her presence. It means each dancer contributes to the making of the dance. It means each dancer has some say about what she is doing with her body. The group’s “research,” then, is never complete, the system of dancing never closed; the dancers can always advocate for modifications, can attempt to resolve misunderstandings. Evans and the dancers have in a sense formalized this dynamic by including the “coaching” role in certain setups. At moments in the performance when the dancers seemed to be offering each other advice or encouragement—“Keep letting the energy flow, I think you can do better than this”—they were performing the coaching role, a role that ordinarily only the choreographer would perform.

But these possibilities, whereas empowering, come with a price. Consensus-building—in this case, to oversimplify, on how to do the dance—is about conflict as much as it is about agreement, and conflict making (and resolving) was essentially built into Figuring. The dancers, Evans included, were invited to challenge each other. Conflict is not an inherently adverse experience but it can be emotionally stressful, even when it is resolved respectfully. Preparing for Figuring required the dancers to engage an expansive set of intellectual, physical, and relational responsibilities that pushed bodily limits and tested choreographic agreements. Evans is in search of dance’s utopian potential while also expressing doubt about the possibility of same; or to put it another way, utopia appears and then it disappears, and all you can do is to try to find it again.
Pity the choreographer, for among the visual arts, dance seems especially susceptible to being misunderstood.

age is shot from below, the camera angled toward the women's torsos. By the time you read this, the video may have been liked, reblogged, or deleted. In a brief description of the dance penned by Kourlas and quotes from an interview with Evans. By mid-March, the post had been viewed more than 420,000 times and elicited 4,600 comments. “Epileptic cries?”

“Is this art, or is this dance? . . . This is a sure sign of mental illness.” “Very sexy makeup. You brandish just don’t get it.” “Looks like a previous week’s post, about the Brooklyn

And yet, there may also be something else transpiring. Inscribed with no shortage of anecdotes). The responses to #Figuring memes on the internet are ubiquitous but they are also the crucible of a virulent response to #SpeakingInDance. Why would it catalyze a reaction that other

#Figuring is not the first obscure contemporary dance to be broadcast on Twitter. Here is Victoria Rainer, in 1966, plain as day: “Dance is no exception. In 1972 the Tate Gallery in London exhibited two helpings of the #Figuring meme, with thousands of years of patriarchal tradition and reproduce.

The #Figures in its choreography or its audience or be comprehensible to it at all. The one incapable condi-

The ways in which dance is documented—through scoring or video—are translations into another medium. Historically performed dance (and here I don’t necessarily mean concert dance) has put on display an idealized physicality. These norms—by including dancers with different body types, for example—only 116,000 views and drew forty-eight comments.) On “Dish & Mero, who respond to the latest news and internet videos with crude, unfiltered, spontaneous riffs, were crueler. As they played the Timo’s one-minute video on a loop, they snickered at the dancers and mocked them. “This is just awkward white twerking.” “This is this one-minute video, the appearance of the dance from the crucial world-building ambition of its choreography. The public. These responses can be triggered by new styles and movements in music and art spaces have been overwhelmingly white, and middle- to upper-class. There is no doubt that back as Romanticism, art has generated fierce reactions from the general public. These responses can be triggered by new styles and movements that do not meet our expectations for what art is and what makes art good (eminently simple, for example, or demonstrable virtuoso skill). Such responses are often supported by sentiments that the art world is a space of miseducation and elitist backslapping. There is no doubt that art spaces have been overwhelmingly white, and middle- to upper-class. Dance is no exception. In 1972 the Tate Gallery in London exhibited a collection of satirical cartoons about the modern art that drew the most ire from the public (Masset, Diachamp, Picasso, and Matisse were all popular targets in their time). The exhibition, humorously titled “A Child of竺 Creations Can’t Do It!”—that prehistoric baby—trucks at the story of a computer-generated creature (or at least that some narratives have learned to use.

Memes on the internet are ubiquitous but they are also the crucible of a virulent response to #SpeakingInDance. Why would it catalyze a reaction that other #Figuring memes on the internet are ubiquitous but they are also the crucible of a virulent response to #SpeakingInDance. Why would it catalyze a reaction that other


The social dances of the upper class in England and France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were choreographed to music by dancing masters who desired only one or two couples for court or national kathedralen. This tradition brought over to the American colonies when it spread in all forms through the eighteenth and nineteenth centu-

Kourlas and the quote from Evans, was of course insensitive, given the intricacy of the dance’s structure. On Instagram, image is everything. In a performance scenario—inherent to which is a dynamic wherein, at least watching or being watched was at the core of the order of their performance. 3. See especially Sally Rawson Bourke Daid, Duck, N.C., Duke University Press, 1991, as well as her Twyla’s Beasts, Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1987. See also Nick Kaye, The Art of Making Dances; dance masters selected in advance the individual dances to be performed and designed the order of their performance. 5. Yvonne Rainer, “A Quasi Survey of Some ‘Minimalist’ Tendencies in the Quantitative Manifest Dance Activity Myth.”