

Notes on Motion

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1. Maybe I have to begin by admitting that I'd fallen in love with someone, or in this case an image of someone.
2. It was all the same. For breakfast: a bowl of porridge, two slices of bread and a cup of coffee. In the background, one could hear a voice on the radio reporting the daily news, and outside, the noisy London traffic. I was sitting by my kitchen table and skimming through a museum's online archive. I was expecting nothing from these pages.
3. Click. Click. Click, click, click. Click.
4. *A photograph made me pause.* It was nothing extraordinary. It was a black and white photograph of a dancing body. Photographed in 1949 with an archival date of 1988. DIMU-CODE 011 015 019 662.
5. A dancer in a silent movement, frozen. Bare feet on a wooden floor, in front of a drapery. The body had molded itself into a sculptural shape where the head and shoulders were resting on the floor. The eyes were closed.
6. Legs in two twisted lines.
7. I stared at the image. Its diagonals and horizontals were stronger than the verticals. The body was centred, but the room did not confess her secret. It revealed almost nothing. No disorder, no unrecognisable objects. No hang-ups. Just a room as in r-o-o-m... *nothing could be added to it.* She was stacked in a quadrilateral.
8. It was only History that separated me from her, and traces she had left in the air.
9. I forfeited my morning to search for more information on her. It was a broad and aimless search, a way to expel time.
10. Whatever I did that day would be positive and negative, I would gain and I would lose.
11. She was complex, I already knew. But who would grant me access to this, through their own written words?
12. Before her runs History.
13. I had fallen backwards into a new world.
14. "Tell me whom you haunt and I'll tell you who you are."
15. I did love. I had found love. Yes, I had fallen in love, in this case with something that was long gone.

16. My love for this figure was *fully completed by coincidences* of her captured in this particular movement. She was captive, and captivating.

17. Love proliferates whether or not it's realistic. Even though the love might fail, it's immeasurable. But what kind of love was this, really? It could almost compete with the Romantics' search for awe and reverence, the emotion that transcends all rational thinking. Or, did I suffer from what my mother used to call a condition similar to psychosis? Yes, love as an abnormal condition, where the mind lost all contact with reality. A condition so serious, one should be home on sick-leave.

18. Outing the inside.

19. It is maybe time to admit that I felt lonely. Without companions: solitary. Unfrequented and remote. Isolated.

20. I recently read about someone who had fallen in love with images too, and had found solace in them as nowhere else. She and I were both possessed with desire to find evidence of what it is in an image that corresponds with feelings.

21. I read through my notebook. I found: "In order to see well, it's best to look away or close the eyes."

22. My love constituted a real opportunity; it touched the deepest longing to belong. It was a bodily phenomenon and had existential significance.

23. It was like her body's formal activity was sending me nonverbal codes. All her patterns and repetitions were my analytical tools. She told me that her body had no pronounced symbolism or theatrical character.

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24. Months later I was steered towards an essay by Siri Hustvedt. She shares her experience of looking at a portrait, in this case a painting. She describes how she sees the imaginary person in the image, and how this depicted person fills up her perception. Both Hustvedt and I can give evidence of how we, in front of each picture, haven't disappeared from ourselves – we're still filled with all our feelings, but somehow the depicted person has taken over our worlds. The depicted person is *of us* when we look and remember. Hustvedt writes; "Something happens between me and it."

25. In the essay, Hustvedt continues by quoting contemporary neurobiological research on how we don't exclusively come to know the world through our senses, but rather how emotions influence our perception of the objects we encounter. What is learnt through feelings, expectations, and the outside world affects the process of our visual perception.

26. My photograph awoke feelings of curiosity, admiration, longing and sadness.

27. I imagined she said: "I become body, I'm of bodies."

28. And apparently it wasn't until 1873 that the German philosopher Robert Vischer invented the term *Einfühlung* – in-feeling or feeling into – the capacity to enter into a piece of art, and engage emotionally with the world. Later translated into English as empathy.

29. OED: Empathy is the quality or power of projecting one's personality into or mentally identifying oneself with an object of contemplation, and so fully understanding or appreciating it.

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30. "Here she is," I said when I showed the photograph to a friend one day. Afterwards, I realised I should have said, "Here's a photo of her." But it was as if the actual photograph was disappearing when I was looking at it. I see straight through it because the photographic image itself is rendered invisible.

31. The referent had melted in with the photograph.

32. I could see the pulsing of her pulse.

33. The photograph of her had become a bizarre object.

34. Her body delivered material: monologues, house-bodies, camouflage.

35. Toenails and fingertips, earlobe, hallux and canthus, columella nasi. Yes, that's the space between your nostrils.

36. I imagined she said: When the dance is released, the movement sings.

37. Movement as such had always fascinated me. People's gestures: how they walk, stand and sit, how they smile and talk, and with what attitude they enter a room – this had all been something I was sensitive to.

38. The claim that movement never lies did not come as a surprise to me.

39. Later that spring I came to a point where I had to act, not just react but interact. I mounted a camera and turned myself into an object, to shrink the difference between seeing and doing.

40. I moved. I danced.

41. I was enclosed in my envelope of skin.

42. I was imitating, trying to copy. I wanted my inner workings to be as realistic as possible. I wanted to see if I could create conditions so that I could simulate her movements... as if I were new software that could simulate cellular re-production.

43. Imitation: (1) The observer produces behavior similar to the model. (2) The perception of an act causes the observer's response. (3) The equivalence between the act of self and other plays a role in generating response.

44. For me, I was imitating the idealised.

45. Repeatedly, I was acting.

46. Imitating: learning to do an act from seeing it done. As a child imitates its parents in order to create closeness.

47. Copy of a copy of a copy.

48. *Imitations of imitations.*

49. The image was evidence of me as another. Like a hallucination in which I see my own body at a distance, a mimetic perception. Both true and false. I'm not there, but indeed I have been. *I am seeing a vision of the double.*

50. I had created myself in the process of posing as her – *I instantly made another body for myself* – and I felt active. *I lent myself to the social game.* I had transformed myself from subject into object in order to come closer to her. And as requested of early photographic models, I also had to support and maintain *my body in its passage to immobility.*

51. You don't really dance; a dancer does not really dance (as a French symbolist poet so famously described) but rather suggests, through the miracle of bends and leaps, a kind of corporal writing: a poem independent of any scribal apparatus. It is like words becoming meaningful only in relation to the surrounding words – so my engagement should be extended beyond her singular gesture. All the movements that have been left out of the frozen picture of her should be included in order for me to capture her final shape.

52. Every action requires some kind of grammar. I'm an unwritten body that's writing.

53. The movements negotiate the area, indoors and outdoors, between the physical objects and the organisational principles.

54. I tried to embroider myself into her arms, her legs, her hooking elbow. Ankle in an angle: pointing in the direction of her toenails. I sculpted my body in hers. Tense thigh. Not... merely an imitation. At first glance, you would think we had exchanged skins, but then you'd notice that she was longer, harder, flatter – edgier. And I was shorter, rounder, and stronger. Perhaps this wasn't as delightful to those who prefer the first example... but this was now what could be created.

55. Ached. Whined in pain. I wanted to cry out loud. But as Susan Sontag wrote in her diary, "It is only my physical I that feels the physical pain and from that the greatest satisfaction arises."

56. I worked to master her shapings and postures, and through the process I learnt what my own body could and could not do. The reward came less from mastering specific skills, but more from the sense of the body unfolding as a sort of intimate possibility.

57. Forming and transforming.

58. Corporeography.

59. It's a telling in flesh.

60. Flesh: the site where our body takes shape.

61. Flesh: meaning something more than just physical substance.

62. Flesh is what we share with the world; the point of connection, but also its boundary. Yet, I'm *both flesh and not*.
63. My body remembered everything.
64. In a medical dictionary I found 'kinesthetic sense' described as the: "Recognition of the body and its parts in space as the parts relate to each other."
65. Discipline: (1) The practice of physical or mental training. (2) The practice of training people to obey rules or codes of behavior. (3) A branch of knowledge.
66. She is aware of her muscles, tendons and joints.
67. Someone once told me: Put your body in new movements to broaden your way to act.
68. The image of her, when she is posing in front of the fabric curtain, can appear as a spontaneous act, but it can also be interpreted as a careful arrangement of her considerations at that time.
69. I came to the understanding that her performance was stripped from all theatrical props, that it was pure movement. Minimal. Even her gestures were as slow and minimal as possible. She was using dance as an exploration of actions rather than a vehicle for dramatic storytelling.
70. In my diary I could read a penciled thought: My body remains the enduring reality.
71. I imagined she said, "We must have confidence in ourselves because inside of us there is a voice that says: We want dance."
72. Each point in the body is situated next to another point in an unbroken connection.
73. A hand was stretched out from my words.
74. In his book *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes that, "The body is our general medium for having a world," or that the body is the premium site for knowing the world. He argues that perception isn't simply a channel that can filter information from a separate environment, but rather that it is a kind of interconnected interaction between body and surrounding.
75. I grow in and through Her, and my body shares the consciousness of another.
76. Towards the end of Merleau-Ponty's book you can also find a couple of lines describing a patient who constantly turns around – and looks over his shoulder – to make sure the world is still there, still existing behind his back.
77. To turn your back, and in that sense turn around, is said to be a way to show contempt. But to turn around could also be the desire to see for yourself: out of curiosity, lust, distrust, worry, or fear – if not maybe out of desire or need.

78. Orpheus lost his beloved Eurydice to the Underworld after turning around to admire her beauty. The myth says that Orpheus was allowed to take Eurydice back to the Surface on one condition: that he walk in front of her and not look back until the both of them reached daylight. When Orpheus entered the top and stepped into the daylight, he turned around. As Eurydice had not yet reached the Surface, she immediately disappeared back in the Underworld.

79. Photography seems to belong to a world sensitive to myths: a story of great but unknown age. Here is something mythical in photography's ability to literally capture and restore the light that once made contact with an object. *To know that the thing of the past, its immediate radiation, has really touched the surface which in its turn my gaze will touch...*

80. A myth is nothing but a story that has gained a certain authority, a certain age. How come we have such a need for these stories – those that have been repeated for centuries? Maybe the myth has succeeded in producing something truly human, something recognisable, but confined; what can't be understood and reconciled with. Perhaps the myth helps us to familiarise ourselves with the impossible.

81. Carl Jung stated that myths are the means to bring us back in touch.

82. "Myths can through picture language be recognised and integrated in our lives," Jung writes, "and those can never be displaced by findings in science."

83. I come to understand that most of Her movements were presented as sequences of static pictures. Her dance was motionless, posed in positions so that she could connect with each individual muscle and in that way find the true essence in dance. She adjusts her position or moves to alter the picture. The picture remains for a movement, or perhaps for quite a while, until its time to alternate and change it again.

84. Her movement was not haunted by any stories.

85. I imagine she said: Through choreographed form dance creates its own inner and outer space.

86. Scratch. Shift. Stretch. Relax. Tense.

87. Strength, control and timing.

88. An inner intention. Breath.

89. In the book *Kinesics and Context*, the writer collected his work on the study of human movement as culturally patterned visual communication. He defines kinesics, taken from the Greek word for movement, as "The study of body-motion as related to the non-verbal aspects of interpersonal communication." Isn't it fascinating that body movements and gestures, different kinds of bodily activities, are a socially learnt form of communication? The idea that kinesics is an equivalent tool for examining situations is as optical and color theory was in the time of Manet. It's like a pattern within a culture which can be broken down into ordered systems – so that interacting in a given situation can continue to send messages.

90. Open-eyes. Droopy-lidded. Squinting. Eyes squeezed tight.

91. This whole process might have been an attempt to trace her journey from image to subject: to pivot her from being the object of the look to the subject of the look.
92. The writing becomes an entrance to her world, and, by realising that her words are engraved in the picture, I start to understand the complexity in her aesthetics.
93. It was at this time I realised that I was writing in my adopted language.
94. After a while, the thinking process had drifted into a Swedish realm that couldn't be translated into English. It felt like I had had two different dimensions in my head and that certain ideas were easier to elaborate-on in one language than in the other. It was like each language developed different images and trains of thought.
95. It was all too much...
96. It was at this point I became physically aware that my thinking and writing processes couldn't be separated.
97. I couldn't continue to write because I got distracted by the word *historia*, which in Swedish has a double meaning. *Historia* can mean both (make account of) the past, and (partly fictional) story.
98. I was stuck in translation. I felt like a character in a Borges story – the one who rewrites the *Quixote* word for word just by imitating Cervantes' life. In fact it was Borges who wrote in this very story that, "Historical truth... is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened." It is: "The final phase."
99. Some things melt before they become memories. Or as an anonymous woman once told a female storyteller, "Memories, they are neither history nor literature."
100. I shared Her performances, as a well-behaved actor. She had achieved some valid movements, but her movements cannot save me. Maybe because they don't belong to anyone, not even to her, but to the language and the tradition. (This is copied, almost word for word.)
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101. She was imprinted in the past. Haunted by death.
102. From those who had the chance to see Her perform live: "The attraction," I read, "lies in the mystery and utter integrity of her works and her persona." As if her work mediates a deep understanding of that which is eternal and untouchable, also said to be *the rhythm of life*.
103. Her picture only existed where her movement ended. She had become a part of my bodily self in memory.
104. I imagine her shifting her body's weight from one foot to the other, and describing it as "movement of transition", like a passage of time. I imagine her telling me that to stand is to dance, too. □