



A Process and a Frame: Ballet on Instagram and a Sense of the World

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Over the last several years Instagram has significantly reshaped how ballet and ballet practice appear as gestures. Compared to its institutional sites of display, ballet on Instagram shows shifts in visual ideology, aesthetic materiality, and relationship to its audience. The platform's technological, digital, and visual specificities transformed the operating image of ballet on it. I argue that Instagram changed ballet's mode of representation by reformulating its social and temporal profile, while shifts in ballet's contextual and visual appearance overhauled its ideological workings.

In Instagram's environments, the body exists as ballet's proxy—held in place by the collective digital labour of social media users. Moreover, ballet on Instagram is an infinite diary of the body in becoming, powerfully reflecting Jean-Luc Nancy's 'end of the world that is of no end' (Nancy 1993: 5). I employ Nancy's ideas of image, sense, and singularity, and I look into the dialectics between the matter and the sign to describe the body's digital outline in relation to its material signature. Ballet on Instagram is embedded in the vast, propulsive, yet unpredictable environment of the digital and is both reshaped and challenged by it.



Introduction

Instagram caught my attention while it was still a simple photo application. For a while, I followed its developments from a distance. In 2016, I finally opened my account. Entering that space was both enthralling and daunting. However, the way the content was spatially organized, or rather, reorganized, as well as circulated, piqued my interest right away. The steps of interacting with the platform raised, in essence, choreographic questions: what kind of sequencing does Instagram support and strengthen? What kinds of relations are established between digital objects? And, by what kinds of framing are objects repositioned and reconnected?

This first encounter with the platform occurred while I was completing my two choreographic pieces, both were structured as ballets. One was experimenting with the grid of ballet in relation to complex avant-garde music, while the other was experimenting with the ensemble form of ballet in relation to durational and spatial sonic landscapes. Both choreographic processes explored the conceptual structures of ballet: through forms reorganized as choreographic scores, with fragments of movement as residues of somatic memory and motion, with duration of form and sound with and beyond their spatial display, and, finally, through a choreographic grid designated as ballet and ballet as an expanded field of its movement form.

Information scholar Johanna Drucker posits that ‘all acts of migration from one medium to another, one state of instantiation to another, are mutations’ (Drucker 2013: 42). Such mutations raise a number of questions while also causing others to be posed differently. Both choreographic processes produced ballet as a conceptual, sonic, formal, and spatial glitch, even before my engagement with digital spaces. What took place was a certain foreshadowing through a conceptual uptake of ballet seen from its formal interiority. In this sense, my interest in Instagram arose from a desire to remain aware of those intersections, mutations, and developments, particularly concerning ballet and its digital practices.

In comparison to its institutional sites of display, ballet on Instagram shows shifts in visual ideology, aesthetic materiality, and relationship to its audience. Technological, digital, and visual specificities of the platform transformed ballet’s operating image. I argue that Instagram changed ballet’s mode of representation by reformulating its social and temporal profile, while shifts in ballet’s contextual and visual appearance overhauled its ideological workings. In Instagram’s environments, the body exists as ballet’s proxy—held in place by the collective digital labour of social media users and is therefore both created and challenged by the platform.

Ballet on Instagram emerges as an infinite diary of the body in becoming, powerfully reflecting Jean-Luc Nancy’s ‘end of the world that is of no end’ (Nancy 1993: 5). I employ

Nancy's ideas of image, sense, and singularity, and turn to his explanation of the matter and the sign to describe how the body appears as an outline of its material signature (Nancy 1993, 58). In sum, I discuss several digital history studies and bring them into conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy's phenomenology while applying methods of digital and performance ethnography as well as analysis of movement as it is dispersed across the Instagram platform.

Digital history studies that I am engaging with consider the object, the content, and the application simultaneously because, as technology and data research scholar Anne Beaulieu points out, 'computational ethnography stands in tension not so much with the analogue, but rather with the narrative, the unfolding of events, which is central to ethnographic practice and accounts' (Beaulieu 2016: 33). Moreover, digital ethnographer Wendy F. Hsu explains that the digital challenges the distinction between archive and repertoire because it allows the unification of two very different entities—the fixed one with orientation to the past and the live, collectivist practice that is engaging in here and now (Hsu 2016: 45). However, the platform's corporate background raises a number of issues. I unpack some of these significant critiques and contentions by considering complex problems arising from Instagram's corporate constitution and organization. Finally, I argue that the ideas that emerge along and around the body, as well as the body's (new) realities—pressed between the technological and the digital—open up, in all its complexity, ballet's new horizon.

Going Through the Instagram Door: Ballet's Internal Else

Ballet is commonly imagined in the context of an on-stage evening performance, as part of an annual repertoire or program. The concert stage of ballet is a site where the audience's social class plays a significant role in its performative profile, both on and off stage. It's a fancy-dress gathering, frequently packed with benefactors, local political or cultural elites, and the affluent general population. The typical ballet evening reproduces such social profiles while ensuring that performances are in line with it. Even if the program includes works that are contemporary, engaged, or daring, they are all firmly framed by these aesthetic and social presuppositions.

The daily labour of ballet is usually not visible to audiences and rarely plays an overt role. Some companies or houses share rehearsals with the general public on occasion, but usually in relation to the main event—the evening performance. On these premisses, ballet is firmly embedded in the larger concept of the central stage, whether of a city ballet company, national opera house, state theatre ballet, or similar. Such constitution of ballet's performative site has a significant impact on how ballet reproduces its gesture, while remaining inextricably linked to centralized spaces of

elitist powers. In this configuration, ballet can be understood as reproducing and being bound by its external logic—the logic of externalized and performative political power as it passes through the aesthetic affordances of the ballet stage.

Ballet dancers on Instagram show and share something else. That ballet's *else* is not (only) ballet's *other side* or ballet's daytime face but it is ballet's *else* as *otherwise* in the making. Such *Otherwise* can be understood both as a new site for ballet's processual practice but also a novel history—a trace—captured and then released to be reformulated—in a multitude of ways, by the larger dynamic of the social network itself. Being thrown into the specific digital-social, ballet shifts out of the confines of its class ideologies and can comprehend itself as a trace and a sign of contemporaneity, propelled and encouraged by it.

Ballet on Instagram ushered in a completely new sphere of ballet in which dancers used Instagram to document their daily work. Ballet dancers began sharing stories and struggles, celebrating small and large victories, while wrestling with costumes, sequences, and choreographers, but also—posting memes and encouraging each other in dance studios and rehearsal spaces, in theatre hallways and on city streets, in living rooms and kitchens, while working, rehearsing, or exercising. In other words, this could be interpreted as the other side of ballet, its internal logic and horizon. Sandra Noll Hammond has proposed a distinction between a mode of ballet history that focuses on its aesthetic aspects, artistic personalities and performances, symbols and meanings, and a mode history that traces ballet's internal reconfiguration as its spatial, technical, and formal development (Hammond 1979: 593). Those internal changes and innovations are implemented cumulatively, challenging, but internally, the form's status quo in a given period.

Simply put, ballet on Instagram highlights the differences between a daytime dance studio and an evening stage. It demonstrates how they differ in terms of labour and aesthetics, as well as how those differences affect ballet audiences and ballet institutions. In more complex terms, ballet dancers on Instagram recognized and amplified what is at stake in the practice to which they are committed, both individually and collectively. Gemma San Cornelio and Antoni Roig argue that *selfies* are not just representational objects but are objects of personal communication organized by the collective narrative (Cornelio and Roig 2018: 2776). In this sense, ballet is not only followed and evaluated by a collective narrative on Instagram, but it is also directly (re)constructed by it.

Furthermore, the reach of Instagram has enabled new audiences to join ballet's spectatorship. Today, the keyword *#ballet* yields an average of 19,3 million published posts, while *#balletdancer* yields 2,9 million. What was previously the exclusive domain of opera and ballet goers, or anyone with the social and economic means to participate

in those kinds of cultural reproductions, now includes a much broader and differently structured audience. Moreover, the younger generation of ballet artists are social media natives, expanding the concept of ballet through those platforms. Furthermore, the next generation of ballet artists recognized Instagram as a critical infrastructure to advocate for an inclusive, non-elitist, anti-racist, anti-ableist, and socially conscious ballet practice.

These are remarkable possibilities accumulated in a relatively short period of time, and when the 2020 pandemic arrived, the structures already in place saw a significant takeoff. The recent rise of the video-only platform TikTok is part of these developments, and the acceleration of the divide between what I've positioned as an external and internal logic of ballet may result in even more interpellated and complex forms. It remains to be seen how, if, and to what extent, those forms shape ballet's emancipation. 'Video is here', Arthur Holland Michel writes, 'a torrent of pixels, fury, and sound that is, if not literally infinite, effectively endless', while 'the likelihood that we'll find ourselves hurtling down one of those black holes of content—where time seems to dilate and lose all meaning—will depend less on whom we follow and more on what the machine decides to serve us next' (Michel 2022). At the precipice, it makes sense to capture the moment in time.

Translocation: Ballet's Digital Spaces

In 2022, Instagram reached over 2 billion monthly and over 1.9 billion daily active users. The 25–34-years-olds make the most populous group on Instagram, with 18–24-years-olds coming second. Instagram's explore page is accessed by 200 million accounts daily. So far, more than 50 billion photos are uploaded on Instagram in total (Omnicores and Statista 2022). Instagram launched in 2010 as an application for photographers but was swiftly adopted by a wide range of users. As mobile phone technology improved, so did the application. Accessible only through smartphones, the platform prompted users to create and publish content directly from their phones. In 2013, the platform introduced a 15-second video sharing option, followed by Instagram Stories in 2016, and Instagram TV (now Reels) in 2018.

According to media scholar Lev Manovich, Instagram utilized smartphone technology to combine sites of photography and cinema that were previously clearly separated. 'Camera, photo paper, a darkroom, exhibition spaces such as galleries, and publication venues such as magazines exist together in one hand-held device' (Manovich 2017: 11). Moreover, its technology eliminated grappling with 'hundreds of different cameras and pieces of professional equipment and endless possible editing operations' making it easy to use, transparent, and systematic (Manovich 2017: 12).

As the platform rolled out various video-based features over time, its possibilities were recognized and adopted by choreographers and performing artists but most specifically by ballet dancers. It would make sense to argue that initially, ballet dancers joined the thread of the influencer appeal and profession-related exposure possibilities. However, the second and especially the third wave of Instagram users were less interested in the filtered glamour. Instead, the immediate experience of the everyday took over, with ballet dancers sharing their daily routines in and outside of the dance studio.

Johanna Drucker argues that an interface is not merely a technical object but is 'a space of affordances and possibilities structured into organization for use', moreover, 'an interface is a set of conditions, structured relations, that allow certain behaviours, actions, readings, events to occur' (Drucker 2013: 31). On Instagram, these relations and conditions resulted in specific formal and aesthetic consequences that can be summarized as follows: visual representation matters, videos should be short, photos are a form of diary, and visuals captured in real life are interesting, no matter how random.

Harmony Bench proposes the ephemeral 'not as an ontological condition of either performance or of digitality, but rather the tense of their occurrence—a tense of refraction and return more appropriate to the way performances and dances flow across human and non-human bodies' (Bench 2019: 365). In this sense, the platform captures, creates, and deconstructs multiple signifying ideas around aesthetics, corporeality, and culture, while the body as the site and the vector of such signifying operations remains central.

Body practices on Instagram emerge as a specific form of public pedagogy as well as a reconstruction of the notion of the self (Camacho-Miñano, MacIsaac, and Rich 2019: 652). For example, research showed that young girls are not just engaging in but also expanding the notion of 'aesthetic labour' (Elias, Gill, and Scharff in Miñano, MacIsaac, and Rich 2019: 658). The body is a site of aesthetic struggle but is also a site of transformational possibilities. A dialectic opening that such labour creates introduces new negotiations around the idea of the body's 'real' as well as the nature of this reality.

The body that ballet is invested in resonates with these deconstructive investigations, aware of the complexities of the process. The idea of the body in ballet works on the corporeal as a possibility—the body at its limit, at its utmost. Erin Manning argues that 'dance has the capacity to push the becoming-body to the limit of its own potential technicity' (Manning 2012: 91). Propelled by the digital, the body both elates on and crashes at the edges of its unreal-real corporeality. Ballet and (its) body on Instagram are translocated both in terms of its corporeality, materiality as well as temporality.

Wendy F. Hsu states that ‘digital information is always a copy without an original’, thus that ‘within the [digital] performative framework, each object (a file) and its relationship to the whole are constantly shifting in time and over space’ (Hsu 2016: 43).

Similarly, Johanna Drucker explains that ‘the many dimensions of performative materiality, then, touch on each layer of digital media—in an analysis of the co-dependencies and contingencies of the material substrate, [...] in the engagement of users with the generative experience of viewing, and in the mutability and reinscribability of files in the mutable substrate of digital technology’ (Drucker 2013: 13). Such an exploded digital view that ballet dancers engage in allows new procedures in frame, content, and time to emerge. Eyes are no longer fixed, observing, following, but are now dispersed, metaphorically and concretely. Then again, the body is not fixed either. Both are diffused and circular, and yet are totally present.

On Instagram, the theatrical workings of the stage and the distance from it are stripped away. What is instead in focus are various realities of the body and its ballet technology. For instance, pointe shoes up-close on Instagram are clearly visible as augmenting tools. Elongating and augmenting the body’s lines and structures, pointe shoes emerge as an extended technology of the overall body’s architecture. In up-close-and-digital environments, the body presents itself as boundless corporeal architecture, a technology of forces navigated by the dancer. I understand such corporeal architecture in relation to the body’s architecture that emanates its corporeal design. Overall, this is in striking opposition to what is usually understood as ballet—a set of movement elements engaged in theatrical narratives.

Ballet Dancer’s Camera and the Daily Labour of Dance

The most popular ballet Instagram setup is simple and minimalistic: a smartphone as a camera (usually on the floor) captures a ballet dancer while (usually alone) in the dance studio. Frequently included are warm-up exercises, ballet barre sequences, or a challenging movement element. This is a ballet dancer’s daily labour, often accompanied by the dancer’s favourite music, either from the studio or added later. Interestingly, the dancers regard a camera lens as merely a witness. The setup is simple, and the focus is on work.

Often captured are a series of *développés* and *arabesques*, *relevés* and *elevés*, or turns and jumps. Faces are calm and focused on the task at hand. When something is completed, there is a brief hand wave and a quick smile—the end. This is a record of the daily labour of dance, its progression and effort. Furthermore, the matter-of-factness of these posts reveals the form’s structure: movements segmented into elements, technical details, and how it all works together. Some of the posts showing movement

are audio-overlaid with a dancer's spoken thoughts. Indeed, this is an education, even if contingent and partial, and as such, it is extremely interesting to both ballet peers as well as ballet audiences.

Ballet dancers' Instagram feeds are populated with sequences captured in the studio, on the street, or outdoors. In a matter of minutes, they expand the idea of ballet qua its site. Bench argues that 'dance in public modulates space, making room for other actions to occur—without dictating what those might be' (Bench 2020: 81). The social-digital migrates toward the temporary meta-common—not as owned but owned as an event. In this sense, the digital common of ballet is distinguished by the in-the-moment, instant, how-to, and spontaneous. This panorama is completed by the attitudes of personal diary and documentary.

I Am My Hand: The Distinct, the Loop, the Noise

In 2011 Instagram introduced its most important archival feature—a hashtag. Digital scholar Andreas Bernard argues that the hashtag, a digital tool between text and metatext, 'has become the most popular signature of the present' (Bernard 2019: 3). A hashtag organizes digital content across a platform based on its theme, symbol, or metaphor. Allowing amalgamation of the content and the metadata Bernard explains that both are now 'fluidly and inextricably interrelated' (Bernard 2019: 35). The hashtag significantly altered content organization, dislodging media as a time-bound or time-lined event and altering its spatial configuration.

Furthermore, the hashtag enables searching across content regardless of its initial publishing context, while bypassing the constraints of language, style, or time. What remains is a never-ending event of digital data. Hsu therefore detects that 'in this environment, each instance of navigation can be considered an interpretative event within a specific time-space' and the sequence in which the content is traced by the user 'creates a unique interpretative event' (Hsu 2016: 44). Such a new presentative and interpretative environment deconstructs institutional trenches of ballet's performative possibility. Instagram's new performativity expands in multiple directions while challenging ballet's aesthetic, ideological, and institutional power structures.

Furthermore, while ballet dancers on Instagram take on the role of author-creator, they are also the platform's audience: readers, followers, and users. Through all of these lenses, they actively restructure ballet's aesthetic positions, capitalizing on the fluidity and pervasiveness of the event that is Instagram's (re)presentation of ballet. Patricia C. Lange explains participation in video-sharing environments as the question of the archive, in which 'the "artefact" that is created is not just a single video, and not even just a video along with its text description, text comments, and video responses,

but rather is part of a collection of videos and all their associated discourse' (Lange 2016: 153). One of Lange's interviewees urged his colleagues not to remove their old published content because 'we have collectively been contributing to the creation of an ongoing, historical document' (Lange 2016: 155).

In this sense, and taken together, such new relationships open up a completely new set of ideas about and around ballet. Following Henri Lefebvre's argument that space is a social construct, Didem Özkul proposes that the mobile phone is a medium of public space (Özkul 2016: 227). Along these lines, I propose that ballet on Instagram is held in place by both its creators and its followers. It could be refuted that theatre has a similar relationship. We are indeed held in our theatre seats by a specific cultural agreement that negotiates performative space, the stage. What is different on Instagram however is the reorganized relationship between what is *in front of us* and what is *us*.

Jean-Luc Nancy argues that 'we are neither "in" nor "in front of" the world anymore', instead, 'we are the world, and the world relates to itself in us and through us', so that 'the world is itself the "subject" of which we are an effect' (Nancy 2014: 5). Digital ethnographers Ingrid Richardson and Brendan Keogh arrive at a similar conclusion and suggest that 'our being-in-the-world is rendered as always-already a *technosomatic* relation' (Richardson and Keogh 2016: 212), while citing visual artist and researcher Mika Elo, for whom the 'mobile media is complexly multisensual and synesthetic' (Richardson and Keogh 2016: 214).

Nancy in return suggests 'the articulation of *phusis* and *technē*', nature and technology, arguing that 'technology does not come from outside of nature', rather, 'it has a place within nature, and furthermore, if nature is defined as what achieves its own ends by itself, then technology too must be defined as one of nature's ends' (Nancy 2014: 43). In this sense, ballet on Instagram is not concerned with its presentation qua stage, perhaps not even with its relation to the stage-performative in general, rather, it is invested in ballet as structure. It reveals the inner logic and structural organization of ballet through examination of its labour. Ballet emerges here as a multiplicity and a multitude of bodies communicating through the technosomatic environment, co-creating, co-structuring, and rethinking a vast array of digital and corpo-architectural concepts.

So, how does ballet exist on Instagram, and how is it taken up by its massive archive? Here is one such stream of steps: I am at whatever location. I grab my smartphone. I open the application and go to the function *Search*. I type in *ballet* and tap on the section *Tag*. The archive comes up, organized into Popular, Recent, and Video. The posts are organized in a grid of rows, three posts across, scrollable downward into the infinite.

The search function also suggests related tags: *#balletphotography #balletclass #balletlife #balletworld #balletlovers #balletinspiration #balletlove* and so on.

The posts occur side by side, interspersed by other non-related content. I come to a halt at the video, which appears to be from the early days of the pandemic. It shows an empty dance studio in Massachusetts. The camera pans across the studio space while the caption describes: ‘Missing all our barre fam and can’t wait for this to be behind us and we are all back together!’ The bodies are not present, but the studio’s emptiness retains them, as the social that the bodies construct while both absent and present, and as the site, space, place, and *dispositif* that holds the context of dance in place.

During the 2020 pandemic lockdowns, ballet on Instagram exploded. Away from studios and stages, dancers began broadcasting their daily ballet practice from kitchens, living rooms, and bedrooms. Ballet classes on Instagram streamed in real time by ballet teachers, dancers, choreographers, and ballet students proliferated, providing both practice as well as encouragement and community. Removed from the stages and even the studios, ballet on Instagram emerged to itself, as belonging to the order of thinking, doing, and sharing. Once so replenished, it can be argued, it returned to its institutions, possibly changed. Ballet leaned into its own self, building on developments that were on Instagram already underway. Something clicked, as distinctly belonging to ballet, and expanded.

Jean-Luc Nancy explains that ‘the distinct is distinct according to these two modes: it does not touch, and it is dissimilar’. Adding that ‘such is the image: it must be detached, placed outside and before one’s eyes [...] and it must be different from the thing. The image is a thing that is not the thing: it distinguishes itself from it, essentially’ (Nancy 2005: 2). In other words, to capture a body that—in a technosomatic conversation with a camera—creates images that we categorize as belonging to ballet means to introduce the idea of ballet—through a gap, a void. Such an echoing space—between the thing and the image—interferes with the usual collapsing of the thing and its image into a single self-referential entity, and this delay in signification allows for alternative meanings. Something previously considered as understood is showing new aspects, something considered familiar is now different, and what was deemed as already done with, even belonging to the past, is now appearing as vital and as yet-to-be-discovered.

Nancy furthermore explains that ‘the image must touch on the invisible presence of the distinct, on the distinction of its presence’ (Nancy 2005: 12). In other words, a myriad of different presences is to be juggled with, none of which are more relevant, actual or real than the others. In Instagram’s ever-proliferating archive there are posts tagged as *#ballet* that are only remotely related to ballet’s practice. We might encounter dogs in *arabesque* poses, cats wearing pointe shoes, trees resembling ballet arms, and

cookies baked for ballet studio friends, but also ballet memes, encouragement quotes, and similar. Is this any different from the Internet in general? In essence yes, because of the distinction of presence—presence organized by a signifier that unifies all things ballet, or *#ballet*, held by the digital archive that has collapsed all contextual distance and is now, so to speak, cross-contaminating everything simultaneously.

Nancy posits that ‘every image is in some way a “portrait”, not in that it would reproduce the traits of a person, but in that it pulls and *draws* (this is semantic and etymological sense of the word), in that it *extracts* something, an intimacy, a force’ (Nancy 2005: 4). In such *passing on* and *producing of* images as on Instagram, there is both an aboutness that is being created and a confirmation of participation via such ‘image traffic’. It is, in a sense, a two-way street: the image and its discourse are being created, and in doing so, the reader is also that image—not as depicted *in it* or *on it*—but more profoundly, the reader *is* that, however digitally—most intimately. Or, as Nancy concludes, ‘there is no image without me too being in its image, but also without passing into it, as long as I look at it, that is, as long as I show it *consideration*, maintain my regard for it’ (Nancy 2005: 7).

Douglas Morrey elaborates this point further by suggesting that ‘the image is not experienced as coming from some depth or recess of the screen but is the spacing of the screen itself, existing as the expanse or extent of the screen, and not as an idea presented to me or my vision as subject, but rather experienced directly as evidence within my very eyes and body’ (Nancy 2006; Morrey 2008: 20). Moreover, and similarly as in cinema, visual representation ‘does not reflect an outside (itself), but, according to Nancy, *opens the inside upon itself*’ (Morrey 2008: 20). In this sense, what emerges as *#ballet* on Instagram is not just ballet as changed but ballet as opening upon itself while propelling itself towards a different horizon, as both an aesthetic and a political gesture.

Jean-Paul Sartre argues that ‘I am not in relation to my hand in the same utilizing attitude as I am in relation to the pen; I *am* my hand. That is, my hand is the arresting of references and their ultimate end’ (Sartre 1956: 426). In other words, Sartre explains the body as an instrumental complex. For the body to emerge amidst the world it first needs to be its constitutive part. Or put differently, we are implied, embedded, into the possibility of our appearance, in the most concrete structural sense. Moreover, Sartre writes, the body is not *in* the world but is an adaptation to the world amidst which it emerges because ‘my body is everywhere: the bomb which destroys my house also damages my body in so far as the house was already an indication of my body. This is why my body always extends across the tool which it utilizes [...] for it is my adaptation to these tools’ (Sartre 1956: 428).

It is for this reason that a hand that holds the smartphone is the same hand captured by that phone, in which this arm now lives among other arms. But also, it is perhaps my ballet hand holding the phone as *#ballethand* while capturing the idea of ballet *through that hand* because *it is it* while adapting to both at the same time. In other words, there is no idea of ballet without numerous hands engaging in it—physically, digitally, metaphorically, theoretically, or directly. Conversely, there is no ballet hand without the idea of ballet that organizes a set of relations termed ballet, that now appears as such.

The ballet dancer's body, therefore, is constructed by ballet's larger multitude that co-creates its corpo-architectural idea, which constructs that body in return, while giving rise to the structure of ballet in its fluid and digital capacity. The digital intersects in this procedure by expanding the scope and the locale of the structure and by externalizing some of its parts. The structure is shared and dispersed across the corpo-real and corpo-digital, echoing and reverberating its glitches, while constituting the body that now *is*, and is so in its fluid totality. In sum, the body on Instagram is its own multitude, simultaneously image-intimate and image-instant, dispersed and echoed, with each refresh-tab activation, here and there and everywhere in between.

Paolo Favero explains that objects in digital observation have changed the traditional understanding of body, text, site, and meaning to such a degree that we need other modes of thinking around the culture-nature that surrounds us. Favero argues that it 'is not about stories, about actions oriented towards an end, but about situations open in every direction' because 'life has nothing to do with dramatic progression, but is instead a long and continuous movement, made up of an infinity of micromovements' (Favero 2016: 285). Along these lines, Instagram's archive can be understood as a continuous co-creation of the body and the idea of ballet, through the inexhaustible micromovements of digital objects.

These objects, to a certain extent, are able to resist the platform's commodification and reconstitute themselves as a non-commodified contemporary. Such new contemporary institutes a sense of the world as it is opening, again, upon itself. Ballet on Instagram radically opens ballet's horizon, including its form, and changes the idea of ballet. Ballet dancers on Instagram exchange the immediateness of the body for fragments, loops, reverberations, even noise, allowing ballet to transform itself into a multitude, a multiplicity, and a larger collective.

Critique: Commodification, Appropriation, Exploitation, Data Mining

However, much needs to be unpacked related to Instagram's corporate ownership. Unlike a traditional commodity that turns on the exchange of value, digital services and social media, Cédric Durand argues, are commodified through the logic of access.

‘Digital platforms are ecosystems’, he explains, and ‘their function is to manipulate social interactions on the basis of the patterns of behaviour’ (Durand 2022: 35). Moreover, the effectiveness of the service is predicated on the high number of users while free access ensures growth, strengthening the provider’s market position. It is user metrics, Durand concludes, ‘numbers of people, degrees of engagement—that serve as the basis for assetization’ (Durand 2022: 37). What is commodified is the social space under corporate control.

In another study, Liron Simatzkin-Ohana and Paul Frosh call for the critical examination of strategies with which commercial brands appropriate vernacular and everyday practices created on social media. Such appropriation, they argue, ‘intensifies the integration between social media and brands: it positions brands more fully as social beings, as equivalents’ to the cultural vernacular produced on the platform (Simatzkin-Ohana and Frosh 2022: 1235). In other words, commercial brands are after the authenticity of the vernacular and the everyday, and they commodify it by extracting and repurposing its very cultural value.

Another layer of issues is uncovered by media scholar Hito Steyerl who warns against the ubiquitous presence of image data. She examines how both corporate and military structures convert digital images into a set of data and construct behavioural projections using pattern recognition procedures. She argues that ‘social scores of all different kinds [...] as well as commercial and military pattern-of-life observations, impact the real lives of real people, both reformatting and radicalizing social hierarchies by ranking, filtering, and classifying’, moreover, that ‘expressions of life as reflected in data trails become farmable, harvestable, minable resource managed by informational biopolitics’ (Steyerl 2017: 58 and 60).

Moreover, Steyerl argues that ‘digital technologies provide additional possibilities for the creative wrecking and degradation of almost anything’, and thus are ‘amplified by political and social violence’, and therefore ‘despite its apparently immaterial nature, digital wreckage remains firmly anchored within material reality’ (Steyerl 2017: 102). Harmony Bench confirms these concerns by questioning if a non-place—a term suggested by Marc Augé—is a place of unchallenged surveillance: a transitory and indeterminate space that forces visibility which ‘interpellates individuals into a hierarchical social matrix’ (Bench 2020: 80). Instagram’s application is one such non-place, a data gathering and mapping software that tracks its users’ location, profile, and activity.

Furthermore, various corporate myths about artificial intelligence’s autonomous efficiency obscure the fact that machine-learning algorithms continue to rely heavily on human labour, while the computing underbelly is made up of precarious workers from the Global South. Similar to other supply chains, Global South is powering the

computing systems ‘by doing often low-wage beta testing, data annotating and labeling, and content moderation jobs, while countries in the Global North are the centers of power benefiting from this work’ (Howson in Xiang 2022). Such asymmetry exacerbates inequalities by taking advantage of the social and economic vulnerabilities of precarious workers, while a lack of transparency obscures provided labour and its conditions.

The metric-based creative labour on social media is coming under scrutiny as well. The study, which included both aspiring and established social media creators, concluded that platformized creative production organized around quantification is ‘increasingly reliant on automated systems of demand prediction and evaluation’ (Duffy, Pinch, Sannon, and Sawey 2021). The logic of metrics and a dynamic of massive amounts of data shape both creating and following, while the underlying configuration based on algorithm exposes creators to volatile changes in its direction.

The ownership of content and data on Instagram is also fraught with complications. Hayleigh Boshier, an expert in intellectual property law, explains that although the platform claims having no direct ownership, the terms of use ‘state that the user grants Instagram a “non-exclusive, fully paid and royalty-free, transferable, sub-licensable, worldwide license to use their content”’ (Boshier 2018). In other words, Instagram does own the content, but not exclusively. Furthermore, without asking for permission, the platform can sublicense user content, use it for its own purposes, or pass it on to a third party. Instagram’s business model is based on sharing and interacting, and as such, it is reliant on the absence of restrictions.

To summarize, there is much to be questioned and problematized at the corporate and application-software levels of Instagram. Ballet on Instagram, embedded in this environment, is steeped in contradictions and dilemmas. Ballet content on Instagram draws from and gives back to ballet practitioners, while participation becomes entangled in the attention economy and algorithmic logics, shaping users’ ability to participate in online cultural production encapsulated by technocapitalism (Suarez-Villa 2009). Furthermore, Instagram users have no control over the platform’s overall strategy, making long-term transformations difficult to predict. These include concerns about Instagram’s corporate use of data, changes in content management and algorithm, as well as the platform’s demise or disappearance.

In ‘Music Collectivities and MySpace: Towards Digital Collectives’, Camilla Rossi and Maurizio Teli have argued that the notion of the collective has changed to *collectiv-ing* ‘as the work of construction of the collective’, while ‘MySpace can be reasonably considered a technological element involved in this construction’, creating ‘four main processes: perplexities, pertinence, hierarchy, and institutionalization’ (Rossi and Teli 2009: 9). Whether or not these and similar processes are or can be created and (re) imagined as mechanisms of emancipation—remains an open question.

Conclusion

Ballet on Instagram is embedded in the vast, dynamic, yet unpredictable and contradictory digital environment, and is both shaped and challenged by it. María Regina Firmino Castillo suggests a framework for movement practices as dancing pluriverses, in which the 'central axis is not a shared ontology, but an ontological complexity' (Firmino Castillo 2016: 70). Ballet practices on Instagram appear to be capable of reimagining ballet as one such complexity in the making. Ballet's pluriverse is thus created, shared, and shaped by Instagram's archival organization, as well as being affectively and effectively reinvented and influenced by its collective structure.

A dialectic between the matter and the sign that emerges hereafter is what Nancy refers to as an exposition being itself *via* the exposed body, as an outline of a signature conveyed by the body's singularity and thus materiality (Nancy 1993: 58). The sign and the signature (that is the extension of the body itself), create a spatial totality of the sense of existence, 'a totality that is itself *existent*, even if not in the mode of *Dasein*' (Nancy 1993: 56). The body encountering the digital undergoes profound changes in its constitution, perspective, and objective.

Ballet on Instagram reveals and strengthens the internal logic of ballet's structure. It expresses ballet's own social and political potential. On Instagram, ballet taps into its own overarching sense, reconstructing each second anew with every activated refresh-tab, contained and yet boundless, inexhaustible in its creative accumulation. A *mundus*, a *cosmos*, a tangible and orientational place, its sense included, Nancy suggests, is gone. What has replaced its interpretation is the need for its transformation, because 'it is no longer a matter of lending or giving the world one more sense, but of entering into this sense, into this gift of sense the world itself is' (Nancy 1993: 9). Ballet on Instagram reaches beyond its performative appearance to create a specific multitude, a kind of sign. What this sign is pointing to is not quite tangible yet, but it surely does suggest an openness, a readiness to be constructed by the collective whole.

Finally, Nancy maintains, 'the co-implication of existing is the sharing of the world' because 'a world is not something external to existence; it is not an extrinsic addition', but rather, the world is a continuum of coexistences with sharing being the very constitution of it (Nancy 2000: 29). In this sense, the core of this proposition is less about an exclusive reliance on a digital platform as such, and more about speculating with, counting on, and pointing to an inherent possibility of a larger flow, a profound continuum of the shared world, that is being revealed through (our engagement with) the digital.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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