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After Douglas Crimp Questionnaire Response: Amanda Jane Graham

Amanda Jane Graham

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Imagine an alternative space to museums. Describe what this space might look like.

- A city (for us, probably New York City)
- A stage
- A dinner party

Share an anecdote or memory you have of Douglas. Or, if you had the opportunity to share anything with Douglas now, what would it be?

In October 2009 I took the train from Rochester to New York City to see *DANCE* at The Joyce Theater. Originally performed in 1979, *DANCE* is a collaboration between three artists: choreography by Lucinda Childs, music by Philip Glass, and film décor by Sol LeWitt. *DANCE* is a haunting piece filled with transcendent repetition, live and through projection. Eventually it would inspire a chapter of my dissertation.

I had seen *DANCE* July 2009 at The Fisher Center at Bard College. My first watch was purely for pleasure. It was my thirtieth birthday and I wanted an excuse to see a performance in the Gehry-designed building a stone's throw from my undergraduate dormitory. However, seeing *DANCE* once didn't feel sufficient, especially since I had enrolled in Douglas's *Dance, Art, Film* class. Douglas saw the Fisher performance too. We talked about it the first day of class and I later stopped by his office hours to ask him to revisit his impressions. He urged me to see it again. Seeing performance again was never part of my viewing practice. It is now, and that's something I attribute to Douglas's tutelage. If Douglas was moved by a performance, he would attend a show several times, sometimes every night of its run. Later he would write lengthy emails noting the major and minor variations in choreographic execution and audience reception. A dance is never the same twice.

The second time I saw *DANCE* it was different from the first in venue, commute, weather, and because I ended up sitting next to Douglas, purely by chance. Not only did we have adjacent seats, we also happened to be wearing matching outfits: black and red checkered flannel shirts and dark jeans. Bemused and checkered and in the hum of the pre-performance announcement, Douglas leaned over and whispered to me that LeWitt's film was influenced by 19th century photographer Edward Muybridge, who studied the component parts of movement through his lens. I prepared to watch *DANCE* again, with Douglas, who watched everything that mattered to him more than once.

Seeing things together—I guess this is how we learn.

—David Velasco to Douglas Crimp (June 30, 2014)

In *Before Pictures*, Douglas describes navigating between academia, life outside, and how each informs the other. Discuss leisure, and how academic work reflects personal life, or vice versa.

Dear Douglas,

Motherhood is awfully hard. Honestly, it's a little crazy to me that so many people choose it. Now that I am a mom, I am always looking for nuanced ways to describe it, but usually I am too tired or my audience is prepared only for the highlights. If I had more time, I would like to weave my experiences with new motherhood through dance criticism. I already have a dance in mind. Former Batsheva dancer Bobbi-Jene Smith and her partner Or Schraiber recently choreographed and performed a dance on film called *Part III*. It is the best, most elegant, subtle, and accurate performance of early parenthood I have witnessed in any medium. Throughout their black and white duet, Bobbi-Jene and Or attempt gestures of physical intimacy but end up with absence or dancing alone, signaling the loneliness of adapting to the responsibilities and identities of co-parenting.

Eamon is almost 21 months now. He is adorable and hilarious. I feel obligated to say that because I opened this letter with the weight of motherhood. But it's true too. We both know that difficult things are often the most worthwhile.

If you count the months backward you will quickly realize that he was born right around the time that Covid shut everything down in the United States. That means that like many (privileged) parents I have spent what will soon be years navigating the world in a way that my child will stay safe from an invisible threat. Daily, I am caught up in a social choreography, always cognizant of strangers' bodies, ever aware of proximity and distance. I have never experienced such ambivalence around everyone's mouths and hands (including my own) or felt suspicious of the performance of everyday ritualistic kindness. *Person holding the elevator door for my stroller and dog caravan, thank you but go ahead please.*

Looking for your voice and what you might say about the choreographies of the pandemic, I recently returned to your 1987 *October* introduction to AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism. The pandemic has given me insight into what you call "practices," a term you borrow from François Delaporte's *Disease and Civilization: The*

Cholera in Paris, 1832. Following Delaporte, you write “AIDS does not exist apart from the practices that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it. We know AIDS only in and through those practices.” Your contention that AIDS is not only illness or diagnosis but also a set of cultural practices, including responses, is clarifying for me as I think (and don’t think) about how I have learned to literally move through Covid (with an infant and now toddler in tow). At the intersection of Covid and motherhood, is a movement practice of care and caution, informed by public health and journalistic representations, and anecdotes from family and friends who are all searching for score and compass.

Following Eamon’s birth, people ask me if I am still dancing. I am.

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