DANCE IN ANOTHER DIMENSION:
THE PHOTOGRAPHIC WORK OF LOIS GREENFIELD

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the work of photographer Lois Greenfield as an integral contribution to dance history and photography. As a photographer who works in the medium of postmodern dance, Greenfield says she does not document the work of choreographers, but rather she uses dancers to create scenes in her photographs through a variety of methods involving dancers dancing and improvising in her studio. Further questions addressed in this study investigate the aesthetic quality of motion portrayed in a Greenfield image, as she does capture a living, four-dimensional art form in two dimensions; and what, if any, documentary nature remains inherent in Greenfield's photographs of specific choreographies. In this study I use a modernist analysis to examine four Greenfield images of the Bebe Miller Company.

Research methods for this study center on phenomenological hermeneutics as defined by dance researcher JoAnn McNamara. McNamara, who builds upon the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, discusses hermeneutics as a mode of inquiry that provides an "anti-objectivist" reading of a text. This methodology entails drawing from outside sources to make inferences. The texts in this research are the Bebe Miller Company photographs. I draw my conclusions by analyzing them for what they are and also by drawing upon outside resources—interviews with both Greenfield and Miller, and video viewings of the actual Miller works portrayed in the images. In addition, similar
text-reading methods of dance historian Lynn Matluck Brooks, who builds upon McNamara’s hermeneutics, and photography critic Terry Barrett’s methods of viewing images, add to the approach of investigating these photographs.

This study explores new research areas at the intersection of art and documentation while questioning the roles of the choreographer and the photographer in preserving the moment of movement. In this thesis I engage the complexities presented by Greenfield’s work: photograph as record versus photograph as art of dance versus photograph as autonomous art form. Through the collaborative improvisational structure she establishes in her studio, Greenfield creates new dance moments in her photographs, which present the form of the dancers’ bodies in space as the content of the images.

Dedicated to Mom and Dad.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A close examination of the linkage between dance and photography suggests a paradox; for all the dance world's dependency on photography to represent its accomplishments, photography is inherently the least suited medium to do the dance justice. After all, dance is the controlled passage of bodies through time and space. The essence of the dance—and our comprehension of it—stems from the seamless interconnectedness of its movements and gestures. But photography fragments time, it fractures space. Its absolute universe is the frame, outside of which nothing exists. What once happened in the fullness of space is now brutally cordoned off, and what we are allowed to see is imprisoned in two dimensions. ¹

Dance iconography has portrayed dance performance throughout dance history. Etchings, popular during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, gave way to the lithographs of the Romantic era. Coinciding with the widespread availability and popularity of lithographs was the development of photography in the mid-nineteenth century. Soon on the heels of this technology came cartes-de-visite, eight photographic images on a postcard of a popular ballerina of the day.² Images of dance became fashionable. Examining these images now, lithographs and photographs tell historians not only what the dance or dancers may have looked like, but they also portray societal values and technological advances of the day. These clues include the portrayal of the ethereal female body in a lithograph or the scientific advancements of
photography. While at first photographic production was as laborious as painting and
drawing, due to its early developing, even primitive, technology, with the development
of flash photography in the twentieth century the art form blossomed into a way to
document, preserve, and capture instants of dance movement in a two-dimensional
image.

In the late nineteenth century, Eadweard Muybridge captured the first moment
of movement on film. Through a commission by former California governor Leland
Stanford to determine whether the four hooves of a horse simultaneously leave the
ground in a run, Muybridge set a battery of fifteen cameras along a race track, the
shutters of which were tripped by horses running over the threads connected to them.
As a result the capture of movement on film became fashionable. This capturing of
movement occurred in both fashion and sports photography, and also in dance
photography.

While there are many supporters of dance photography, in terms of its
advantages in capturing performance moments and preserving dance history,
opponents of dance photography say that dance is an ephemeral art form, the essence
of which cannot be caught on film. Numerous successes in dance documentation and
in dance photography as its own art form, as well as new questions as to whether
capturing dance movement on film negates its movement capacity, have ensued in the
discipline of dance photography. A paradox commonly discussed in dance
photography writing is that of capturing a dance performance which may evoke
emotion and which exists in the life-sized four dimensions of height, width, depth, and
time, and compressing it into a smaller-proportioned two-dimensional image. This
paradox extends to include a notion of freezing a dance moment in a photograph, and in effect removing the motion that is at the core of dance itself.

Photographer Lois Greenfield's work lives in the nondescript, no-man's-land of capturing movement. While she creates two-dimensional pictures, her goal is to portray motion in her work. Greenfield's photographs of dancers are characteristically square, with a black border defining the white space in which the subjects dance. The square image is generated by a Hasselblad square format camera. I use the term "photographs of dancers" instead of "dance photographs" because Greenfield has clearly stated in her writing and interviews that she does not consider herself a dance photographer, but rather a photographer who photographs dancers as her medium. Unlike traditional dance photography, oftentimes taken in a theater, Greenfield works in a studio where she controls the lighting and other elements. As a photographer who works in the medium of postmodern dance, Greenfield says she does not document the work of choreographers, but rather she uses dancers to create new scenes in her photographs through a variety of methods involving dancers dancing and improvising in her studio.

In this thesis I investigate the work of photographer Lois Greenfield in the context of the history of dance and dance photography. Although she does not closely document choreography, Lois Greenfield is important to dance history. She photographs dancers. Since she is the photographer to whom many contemporary postmodern choreographers go for publicity photographs, she captures late twentieth century dancers in motion. Greenfield, who is not a dancer, was influenced by figures involved with dance, and her history intersects with important events in dance history.
Greenfield was influenced by prominent dance photographers, and in the mid-1970s her involvement in photographing for The Village Voice columns of prominent dance critic, writer, and historian Deborah Jowitt wove her into the fabric of postmodern dance. In addition to her importance to dance history, I ask the following questions about Greenfield's work: Greenfield often works with the choreographers and dancers in compiling her images, but is her photography an accurate representation of the companies’ works? What, if any, documentary data remain in Greenfield's photographs of specific dancers? How does she capture a living, four-dimensional art form in two dimensions? Do her images stand on their own as individual artworks? I conducted this study by closely examining four Greenfield images of the Bebe Miller Company, together with interviews with both Miller and Greenfield about their individual creative processes and about the representation of their work.

In this research I used both historical and hermeneutic research methodologies. I drew upon historical and contemporary sources in relating Greenfield's work to dance photography history, and I placed her culturally in contemporary American society and the world of postmodern dance. I used Joann McNamara's definition of hermeneutics as it appears in her article "Dance in the Hermeneutic Circle": "Hermeneutics is a tradition, an approach used to examine the meaning of a text and how its meaning is constructed." McNamara, who builds on the hermeneutical work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, differentiates between "objective" positivistic hermeneutics, which finds meaning solely in the text, and "anti-objective" phenomenological hermeneutics, which allows a researcher to use outside sources in addition to the text for her interpretation.
In my examination of Greenfield’s photographs of the Bebe Miller Company, informed by interviews with both Greenfield and Miller, I employed phenomenological hermeneutics to read those photographs as texts, to decipher their meanings within the late twentieth century time period, and to draw conclusions about them based on the interpretive material available to me. I also built upon the research that Lynn Matluck Brooks describes in her article “Dance History and Method: A Return to Meaning.” Here Brooks adds to the work of Gadamer and McNamara, and says that a researcher must allow a text to speak for itself, within its own historical context. These ideas aided me in analyzing the Bebe Miller Company photographs by allowing me to examine them both as autonomous images, and within the context of their histories.

Dance photography has the potential to offer a tool for dance documentation, but this is not Greenfield’s interest. Instead, she uses dancers as the medium with which to create new art: “I’ve rebelled against the notion of dance photographer as handmaiden to the dance, that is, charged with providing either a literal or an idealized transcription. Instead, I see myself as a photographer whose subject matter happens to be the dance…. The root of my interest is movement, or rather how movement can be interpreted photographically.”

Instead of reproducing choreographers’ works, she creates her own. Greenfield becomes the choreographer by directing the dancers in space and creating spatial compositions. William Ewing and Daniel Girardin term the photographic results of Greenfield’s direction her “photochoreography.” Where more traditional dance photographers capture the climax of a movement phrase, Greenfield finds transitional moments in movement phrases not necessarily noticed in performance. When taken
out of context, these frames can both portray motion and allow the dancer and choreographer to see new parts of the dance work that they did not see before.

The square frame in Greenfield’s images eliminates the viewer’s automatic understanding of gravity, as all four sides hold equal tension. Spatial tension, however, is characteristic of a Greenfield image. She creates tension in her dynamic photographs through the diverse positioning of her dancers in various depths and diagonals through the image (see Figure 3, Chapter 5). The illusion of movement in the images is created by the spatial tension between the performers, the positioning of the dancers in mid-air, and the dancers’ flying hair and rippling costume fabric. By orchestrating her photography in this manner, Greenfield creates new dance moments and new works of art through her camera: “You could argue that I’m encapsulating an entire dance in a split second…. Except that it’s a photographic event that can’t be seen on a stage.”

The Formalist aspects of Greenfield’s work are the most important to her: for Greenfield, the form equals the content. She arrives at the form through various photographic techniques attributed to photographers who influenced her. These influences include art photographers Diane Arbus and Duane Michals, and dance photographers Barbara Morgan and Max Waldman. Using Arbus’s idea of a photograph as a theater unto itself, and Michal’s concept that the event in the photograph would not exist without his actions, Greenfield creates forms in space that have never been seen onstage, and would not exist without her direction. From Morgan, Greenfield learned of collaboration between a choreographer and a photographer in portraying moments of choreographed repertory on film. Greenfield
has been innovative in not photographing choreographic climaxes, but in capturing transitional or off-peak moments. Greenfield also photographs dancers improvising within a choreographic structure, altering choreography to work with the camera, and improvising without any choreographic structure. This innovative collaboration with dancers in her studio is central to Greenfield’s process.

I became interested in Greenfield’s work while I was a junior in college and wrote a paper on dance photography for a dance history class. I focused on the historical work of Barbara Morgan, Carl Van Vechten, Fred Fehl, and Lois Greenfield. I was fascinated by Greenfield’s process and taken by her images. The following year, in a philosophy aesthetics class, I investigated the questions of representational accuracy in Greenfield’s work, drawing from Kantian aesthetics. This research followed me to a class in postmodern dance and theory in the spring of 2002 at The Ohio State University. Having already decided that I would focus on dance photography for my Master’s research topic, I again wrote about dance photography and Greenfield’s work, this time steeping myself in the postmodern aesthetics of Roland Barthes. Upon returning to my thesis this past fall, I decided to turn my focus back to the history of dance photography and Greenfield’s work to see how she fits into this history. Through discussions with Dr. Karen Eliot and after generous offers from choreographer Bebe Miller and Lois Greenfield, I came to using Greenfield’s original images of Miller’s company as subjects of my research.

This thesis is organized in six chapters. Chapter 2: “Review of Literature,” identifies major sources I use and where my research is situated in relation to them. Chapter 3: “Photography, Dance History, and Lois Greenfield,” grounds this thesis in
photography history and criticism, and gives an historical base in which to contextualize Lois Greenfield and her work. Chapter 4: “Lois Greenfield: Process and Product,” delves into the history and evolution of Greenfield’s work. Chapter 5: “Lois Greenfield Under Investigation: Bebe Miller Company,” focuses on a discussion of four photographs of the Bebe Miller Company: “Standing Trio” and “Dancing Quartet” from the Tiny Sisters in the Enormous Land series, and “Nothing Can Happen Only Once” and “Memory 1993” from the Nothing Can Happen Only Once series. An interview with Bebe Miller about her collaborations with Greenfield, and about how she feels her work is represented by Greenfield’s photographs complements the discussion of these photographs. Chapter 6: “Conclusion,” examines the question of where Greenfield’s work will stand in relation to dance history in the future, after her innovation not only with photography but also with dance imagery.
Notes


4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.


8 Ewing, *Fugitive* 27.


10 Bebe Miller, personal interview, 18 March 2003.


12 Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The focus of this thesis is to examine Lois Greenfield’s work as an important contribution to the history of dance photography. Further questions I address in this study investigate the documentary nature, or lack thereof, in Lois Greenfield’s work, and the aesthetic quality of motion in a Greenfield image. Although Greenfield’s photographs are not necessarily a documentation of a choreographer’s work per se, her images do document movement, and according to William Ewing and Daniel Girardin, they also portray the spirit of a work or a dancer.¹

Greenfield’s work exemplifies the paradox to which Ewing and other writers refer, namely, capturing a living, breathing, four-dimensional art form in two dimensions. That illusion initially drew me to her work. Many writers and critics agree that Greenfield’s images successfully portray motion, but there are some who disagree and write that she, instead, unnaturally freezes dancers in her black-framed, nondescript white landscapes. Therefore, I argue that Greenfield holds a place in dance history and her photographs are successful translations of motion from the dance medium to the photographic medium.
Although I employed historical methods while conducting this research, this photographic investigation of Lois Greenfield’s work is based in phenomenological hermeneutics as defined by JoAnn McNamara in her article “Dance in the Hermeneutic Circle,” and in the historical contextualization of such investigation as furthered by Lynn Matluck Brooks in her article “Dance History and Method: A Return to Meaning.” Furthermore, Terry Barrett’s *Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images* provides a framework for discussing photography, and his *Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary* provides solid definitions of modernism and postmodernism in art and society. Additional sources grounding this study give detailed histories of Greenfield, her process, and her work, and address aesthetic and documentary issues in Greenfield’s images. These additional references include: Ewing’s *The Fugitive Gesture: Masterpieces of Dance Photography*; the PBS *Eye on Dance* series; Jack Mitchell’s “Capturing Emotion in Motion;” *Breaking Bounds: The Dance Photography of Lois Greenfield* by William A. Ewing; *Airborne: The New Dance Photography of Lois Greenfield*, by Greenfield with an article entitled “Lois Greenfield’s Photochoreography” by William A. Ewing and Daniel Girardin; “Freezing Forever the Motions of Dancers Dancing,” a Sarah Boxer photography review from a 1996 *New York Times* edition; “Translations,” a 1993 Marcia Siegel *Dance Ink* article; and “More than Just the Dance: An interview with Lois Greenfield” in the 1979 volume of *Dance Life*.

The concepts set forth in McNamara’s and Matlack Brooks’ articles inform my examination of Greenfield’s photographs of the Bebe Miller Company. In her article, McNamara defines and discusses branches of hermeneutic research. I find her
phenomenological hermeneutics, based in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, relevant
to my research due to its grounding in a variety of sources and the freedom it allows in
analyzing and interpreting texts using a variety of sources in addition to the text.
Positivistic hermeneutics is an “objective analysis of the text”\textsuperscript{2} where “meaning resides
within the text itself,”\textsuperscript{3} but in anti-objective phenomenological hermeneutics “the
interchanges among one’s own pre-understandings, the text, as well as the traditions
and cultural context of the text, combine to construct the meaning of any particular
text.”\textsuperscript{4} The allowance of exterior sources to influence the analysis of the photographs
is useful here.

My examination of the Bebe Miller Company photographs employed
phenomenological hermeneutics by drawing upon more than one aspect of
interpretation. In addition to conducting a merely positivistic hermeneutical inquiry of
reading and examining the photographs themselves, I compared Greenfield’s
photographs to videotaped performances of Miller’s works. I related Greenfield’s
*Nothing Can Happen Only Once* images to the videotape of the actual work. I also
used information gathered from interviews with both Greenfield and Bebe Miller to
inform my research. Questions I pursued include: How true to either the letter or the
spirit of the dance is this Greenfield image? How did this image come about through
improvising in the photography studio? What are both artists’ viewpoints about how
the image may be analyzed? By drawing upon outside sources, I conduct
phenomenological hermeneutical research as defined by McNamara. The photographs
of the Bebe Miller Company for examination are “Standing Trio” and “Dancing
"Quartet" from *Tiny Sisters in the Enormous Land*,5 "Nothing Can Happen Only Once" and "Memory 1993" from *Nothing Can Happen Only Once*.6

I chose these particular images because they are either aesthetically pleasing or intriguing to me. McNamara states, "Aesthetic issues and dance phenomena in general lend themselves particularly well to hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry."7 Phenomenological hermeneutics also seemed the most conducive method for my research, due to its adaptability, since "By constructing an understanding of meaning, rather than adhering to an exacting method, hermeneutics allows for the transient and mobile features of dance and its connected areas of inquiry to be more finely discerned."8 This freedom was helpful for me in devising a system in which to analyze the Greenfield/Miller photographs.

In his essay "Looking at Photographs," Victor Burgin offers a definition of reading a photograph as a text which I found helpful in defining my methodology. He writes,

The intelligibility of the photograph is no simple thing; photographs are *texts* inscribed in terms of what we may call 'photographic discourse', but this discourse, like any other, engages discourses beyond itself, the 'photographic text', like any other, is the site of a complex 'intertextuality', an overlapping series of previous texts 'taken for granted' at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture.9

The "conjuncture" here is Greenfield's work, and the "previous texts" are the historical and contemporary influences on it.

In addition to the foundation built by McNamara's research, I used Brooks' historiography. Lynn Matluck Brooks begins "Dance History and Method: A Return to
Meaning" by stating that current dance scholars must strip their language of jargon and stop apologizing for not encompassing all aspects of everything relating to their topic in their research. As she delves further into historiography in her article, Brooks draws upon Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Brooks cautions the researcher to allow both her voice and that of the text to be heard equally: “Here is the crux of the matter: the concept of a dialogue between the researcher and the text necessitates that both voices be heard with clarity—not only the researcher’s voice, loud with knowledge, training, and personal agenda, but also the voice of that text, initially so distant, so puzzling, so piecemeal.”

Here I used my impressions of an image, or information gathered from Greenfield or Miller to draw conclusions from a photograph. By allowing it to speak for itself, however, I remained true to the spirit of Greenfield’s work, where her images are artworks unto themselves without necessarily carrying attached meaning.

Brooks discusses Gadamer’s notion that the researcher serves as an interpreter for a text. In her research, Brooks did “as Gadamer suggests, to place myself in the direction of the text, of the subject, so that I could serve as a transmitter of its voice into the present.” This concept prevents me from reading too far into Greenfield’s images, because I know that she does not layer her photographs with meaning. She instead reflects the sentiment of early postmodern dance that the form is the content.

I drew upon the writing of philosophers Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin to aid me in analyzing Greenfield’s photographs of Miller’s company. Both men wrote extensively on the paradox inherent in photography and issues of authorship. I found that many of their ideas complement the dance photography literature and my investigation of Greenfield’s work (see Chapter 5). Specific books and essays I drew
from are Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, "The Death of the Author," "The Rhetoric of the Image," and Benjamin's "The Author as Producer" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." I also found Susan Sontag's *On Photography* helpful, as it provides a brief historiography on photographic philosophy.

In addition to these historiographic research methods, I examined a text in the photography field to build my argument. Terry Barrett's *Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images* is a textbook focused on viewing, sorting, writing about, and criticizing photographs. In developing this thesis I focused on a narrow selection of photographs and one photographer. Barrett's book provides a theoretical framework for viewing and reading images. Barrett sets forth various considerations for viewing photographs. His ideas include: descriptive, explanatory, interpretive, ethically evaluative, aesthetically evaluative, and theoretical photograph categories; internal, original, and external contexts; criteria for judging including Realism, Expressionism, Formalism, and Instrumentalism; and an overview of theoretical positions including realism, conventionalism, modernism, postmodernism, Marxist theory, and feminist theory. In this research I used Barrett's aesthetically evaluative category to read Greenfield's work.

Barrett makes it clear that his categories "are for sorting photographs, not photographers,"\(^{12}\) to prevent confusion in how the categories function. In addition to the aesthetically evaluative category, discussed below in relation to Greenfield's work, there are five additional categories which I include here for context and clarification. All the categories overlap. According to Barrett, descriptive photographs, such as ID pictures and surveillance photographs, offer a surface-level, objective descriptive
reproduction of the subject and are not intended for deeper meaning. Explanatory photographs, such as those in Eadweard Muybridge’s Animal Locomotion (see Chapter 3), explain phenomena in a scientific fashion. Barrett also places press photographs in this category, with a caveat that “some [press photographs] go beyond explaining and also evaluate, condemning or praising aspects of society, and thus would better fit in the ethically evaluative category.”

Interpretive photographs subjectively explain phenomena. They are often situations contrived by the photographer, which Barrett terms “more like poetry than a scientific report.” Ethically evaluative photographs “make ethical judgments. They praise or condemn society.” Photographs in this category include images of refugee children from a humanitarian sensibility, which is how some photojournalistic images may also be ethically evaluative. Theoretical photographs are “photographs about photography,” which “comment on issues about art and art making.”

Barrett defines aesthetically evaluative photographs as “usually about the wonder of visual form in all its variety and how it can be rendered photographically. Photographs in this category are usually of beautiful things photographed in beautiful ways. The subject matters are infinite... [and feature] the nude, the landscape, and the still life.” This concept relates to Greenfield’s work for many reasons. First, in Greenfield’s work the form is the content, so her work does encapsulate the “wonder of visual form.” The aspect of “beautiful things photographed in beautiful ways” is a modernist idea and may seem at times subjective. I find beauty and intrigue in Greenfield’s work, and assume she must also find some beauty in her produced prints, as there are many sections of contact sheets that undoubtedly go unprinted. Finally,
while Greenfield’s photographs are not traditional landscapes of such pleasing scenes as a meadow or mountain range, Greenfield emphasizes that dance is indeed her “landscape.” In this way, her pictures are landscapes—of dance—and can be considered aesthetically evaluative photographs.

Barrett also defines three “contexts” contained in a photograph, which may be considered about any photograph. The internal context of a photograph is “what is descriptively evident” without any subjective interpretation required. The researcher allows herself to be purely an observer for the image, as Brooks advocates in her historiography. The original context of a photograph defines where the photograph came from, for example whether an image is an original print; what situation a journalist was in when he took the picture; or what theories a photographer used or referred to when making a theoretical photograph. The external context of a photograph “is the situation in which a photograph is presented or found,” for example, on a billboard or carelessly dropped on the street, in a mainstream newspaper, or in a museum. In Greenfield’s work, the internal context is the composition of the photograph and the forms the dancers’ bodies make in space; the original context is the nature of the photo session, whether it was purely improvisational or partially structured, the postmodern dance world, dance theory, other dance photography, and current art; and the external context of the four Bebe Miller photographs used in this study is of prints chosen for their aesthetic attributes from an archive series.

Barrett also provides an overview of photography theory. His modern and postmodern lenses and definitions introduced in both Criticizing Photographs and in Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary are valuable to my work. Barrett
introduces the work of German theorist Walter Benjamin, who, through writing about
the limitless reproducibility of a photographic negative, raised questions about art
versus production. These questions pose an intriguing tension that I explored in this
research. Through my discussion of Greenfield's work as an autonomous art form, I
applied a modernist reading of her photographs. This modernist analysis was deepened
by the association of Formalist elements in Greenfield's work. In Criticizing Art,
Barrett cites the 1920s work of British critics Clive Bell and Roger Fry, stating,
"Formalism and modernism are inextricably linked." The following quote about
Formalism reflects many of Greenfield's anti-narrative, form-equals-content sentiments
about her work: "Form was paramount, and attention to other aspects of the
work—such as its subject matter or narrative content or uses in rituals or references to
the ordinary world—were considered distractions and, worse, detriments to a proper
consideration of the art." Furthermore, in examining Greenfield's images I drew
upon not only my aesthetic observations, but also on videotaped choreography and the
experience of Greenfield, Miller, and the dancers in creating the photographs, and
historical influences on Greenfield evident in her work.

Other materials dealing with dance photography have aided my research. In
The Fugitive Gesture: Masterpieces of Dance Photography, prominent dance
photography writer William A. Ewing presents a comprehensive overview of the
history of dance photography, followed by a collection of dance photographs that were
originally part of an exhibition Ewing organized at the International Center of
Photography in 1978. This source has helped me construct my history of dance
photography, making it possible to place Greenfield among other photographers of the
dance genre. Ewing includes contextualizing captions under some of the prints in his collection. This solidifies my understanding of the history as I view the images. While the large portfolio that makes up most of the book allows me visual references, Ewing’s introduction to this collection, “The Twin Arts,” grounds my research in dance photography history.

In his introduction, Ewing spans dance iconography from lithographs, daguerreotypes, and *cartes-de-visite* through genres of pictorialism, modernism, and postmodernism in photography. Ewing focuses on dance photography as an autonomous art form. Ewing presents the paradox of capturing a breathing art form in a two-dimensional medium, and questions if what is presented in a photograph is entirely real. Ewing states, “Dance envelops us; it enters through the eye and the ear. Photography imprisons in two dimensions.” 28 This translation of a four-dimensional art form—height, width, depth, and time—into a two-dimensional medium is the paradox of dance photography to which Ewing refers in all his dance photography writing. This paradox holds true for most dance photography, especially that of a documentary nature. It may not, however, be as much of an issue for Greenfield’s work, as the photograph itself is her product, not the scene within the photograph. Instead of capturing dance meant for four-dimensional performance, Greenfield creates her images specifically for the two-dimensional photograph.

The photography paradox is furthered by photographic manipulation. While she does not “doctor” her photographs as Anna Pavlova did, 29 Greenfield has dancers jump off stools or hang from a ceiling bar to construct illusions when she snaps the shutter. Ewing concludes that a solution to the paradox of capturing reality is to give
the illusion of motion, a tenet important in still photography. Greenfield certainly
upholds this idea in her work, as she aims for her dancers to appear in motion and
photographs them while they move.

The 1987 *Eye on Dance* series produced by Celia Ipiotis and Jeff Bush with
WNED/New York generated three programs on dance photography, each one
interviewing prominent dance photographers about their work and issues in the field.
In the first videotape in this series, *Eye on Dance 235*, Ipiotis interviews Steven Caras
and Costas Cacaroukas, two dance photographers working with the New York City
Ballet, and Tom Brazil, who has worked mostly in postmodern dance. The panel
members discuss technical challenges to photographing dance, touching up
photographs, adjusting to theatrical lighting, and in borrowing Greenfield's term,
whether they feel they are "handmaidens" to the dance. *Eye on Dance 236* is an
interview with Lois Greenfield and William Ewing, where they discuss collaboration in
dance photography, issues pertaining to manipulation and documentation, and
characteristics of Greenfield's work.

In the third program, *Eye on Dance 237*, Ipiotis discusses "the controversial and
aesthetic aspects of dance photography" with Jack Vartoogian and Herbert Migdoll,
two prominent dance photographers. Topics here range from copyright issues in a
theater to manipulation techniques on a photograph. These videotapes are valuable
sources in my research because, despite some inconsistent interview questions, they
provide a range of information about dance photography history and techniques from
dance photographers themselves. While the Greenfield/Ewing program repeats
information from some of my other sources, it is exciting to view two of the prominent figures in my research “live” and see their mannerisms.

Another strong source on general dance photography history is Jack Mitchell’s 1999 Dance Magazine article “Capturing Emotion in Motion.” Mitchell, a dance and celebrity photographer and dance photography writer, gives an overview of documentary dance photography history in this article, which provides a complementary text to Ewing’s writing. Mitchell also identifies three categories of dance photography: studio photography, production photography, and performance photography. Studio photography is portraiture or posed shots taken in a photography studio; production photography is used for publicity and may be taken either in a studio or onstage; and performance photography is taken live during a dance performance or dress rehearsal. I found Mitchell’s categories useful in my discussion of documentary dance photography.

Breaking Bounds: The Dance Photography of Lois Greenfield is Ewing’s first collaboration with Greenfield. This book was a cornerstone of my research, as it is not only filled with Greenfield’s images, but it also features an introduction by Ewing and an interview with Greenfield. Ewing’s introduction builds on information laid out in The Fugitive Gesture, but in Breaking Bounds he discusses how “photography is inherently the least suited medium to do the dance justice.” While dance photography in general may distort the life of a dance image, this is not so with Greenfield’s images: “It is a further paradox that a brilliant resolution should be devised by a photographer for whom the dance itself is decidedly of secondary importance. But such is the achievement of Lois Greenfield.” Ewing’s praise of Greenfield’s work, while at
times overwhelming and subjective, is nevertheless clear concerning Greenfield’s strengths as an artist, and this information aids me in discussing her work.

In her interview with William Ewing printed in *Breaking Bounds*, Greenfield discusses all aspects of her work, including her personal and artistic history, process, influences, reasons behind choices she makes in her work, and her definition of herself not as a dance photographer, but as a photographer who uses dance as her medium.33 Using trained dancers and dance movement, Greenfield fashions a moment in time to generate a dynamic image.

In his introduction to *Breaking Bounds*, Ewing briefly recounts Greenfield’s history, her first experimentations with David Parsons and Daniel Ezralow, and the collaborative aspect of her work. Ewing cites Deborah Jowitt’s point about Greenfield’s use of movement to make her images. Ewing writes, “she gets her dancers dancing, and, as dance critic Deborah Jowitt puts it, ‘snatches the image out of a field of motion.’”34 Where some, such as critic Sarah Boxer, may view Greenfield as posing her dancers in frozen planes, Jowitt sees a captured sliver of movement.

*Airborne: The New Dance Photography of Lois Greenfield*, another collaboration between Ewing and Greenfield, is a newer collection of Greenfield’s work. This book features a preface by Ewing and an article, “Lois Greenfield’s Photochoreography,” by Ewing and Daniel Girardin. In this article, Ewing and Girardin discuss Greenfield’s work as it has evolved, and how she relates to the larger field of dance photography. The Ewing/Girardin article contributed to my view of Greenfield in the context of the progression of dance photography.
Another significant feature of this source is the short text that Greenfield provides to accompany each photograph. An example is an image of Andrea Weber in *Diana and the Moon* (1991), choreographed by Suzie Scherr. Here, Weber balances on an inflated plastic ball easily three-quarters her height. Her chest, head, and hair relax down the ball’s left side as her torso and legs balance in a precariously vertical position with her right leg in a two-degree bend at the knee. Weber’s right arm, secured in place over the top surface of the ball by what appears to be someone else’s disembodied right hand, forms a soft angle in line with her defined cheekbone. Greenfield writes about this photograph in its accompanying paragraph, “It wasn’t easy to get Andrea to stay balanced, with most of her weight over on one side of the ball. She is actually being supported by her brother, who is clasping her hand and crouching behind the ball.” In this book Greenfield exposes her process to her audience. Insights such as this aided me in reading Greenfield’s photographs, and in understanding how Greenfield manipulates reality with off-camera props to achieve a desired image.

Not all sources offer unqualified praise for Greenfield. A *New York Times* review by photography critic Sarah Boxer offers a counterpoint to my argument that Greenfield successfully portrays motion in her work. The article reviews “Dance in America,” a 1996 exhibit including the work of Greenfield, Gjon Mili, and Barbara Morgan. Boxer rejects the sentiment that Greenfield successfully portrays vivid motion in her work. In her article “Freezing Forever the Motions of Dancers Dancing,” Boxer reviews the dance photography show in light of Henri Bergson’s definition of
Zeno’s paradox, “...that movement is made of immobilities.” Boxer terms Greenfield’s images “15-by-15-inch squares of eerie lifelessness.”

Boxer is also unconvinced about the reality of Greenfield’s images: “Her pictures are of dancers caught in midair in improbable positions and with empty looks on their faces. In some, Ms. Greenfield has even erased the look of gravity.... But despite the dancers’ idiosyncratic attitudes, they look as if they are immobile, floating in a strange medium.” While I do not use this source as evidence to support my thesis, it offers a viewpoint against which I offer my counterargument. It also represents one contemporary audience member’s reaction to Greenfield’s work.

Most sources, however, support or offer more neutral observation of the images. In her 1993 Dance Ink article “Translations” comparing the work of Lois Greenfield and dance photographer Philip Trager, dance critic Marcia Siegel argues for the validity of dance media, such as photographs or films, to stand as individual artworks. This is a relevant point, as Greenfield’s work is dance photography as an autonomous art form. Siegel’s final comment epitomizes this sentiment: “Who’s to say that any of these is not a dance?” This comment reverses Greenfield’s statements about being a photographer with dance as her medium: could her images instead be dances through which photography is the medium instead of the proscenium arch? This notion was manifested in the Barbara Morgan and Martha Graham collaboration of War Theme (1941), a dance made for the still camera. Siegel suggests Greenfield’s images also fit this mode, as they “do their own dance.” Can the images be both photography and dance? While Greenfield specifically states the goals of her work, this Siegel observation encourages another view of it.
In discussing Greenfield’s work, Siegel’s descriptions seem to mirror Boxer’s, but Siegel’s statements are observations instead of negative criticism.

The subjects float inside the frame…. They seem weightless, because you don’t see the ground or how they got off the ground. The Hasselblad’s ultrafast shutter speed stops any kind of motion dead in its tracks. The dancers are sculpted in the smallest detail, not a hair moves, no bit of cloth blurs on a current of air. They seem pinned against the page, defying rationality as well as gravity.44

Siegel’s article interests me for her poignant, articulate reactions to Greenfield’s work. But I question Siegel’s discussion of the narrative structure inherent in Greenfield’s images: “The allure of Greenfield’s dancers is not kinesthetic but narrative. Though I may or may not know who the dancers are in real life, I’m irresistibly persuaded to make up stories about them.”45 Reading narrative into the work strikes me as inaccurate since Greenfield does not create narrative in her photographs.

A 1979 Dance Life interview with Greenfield further provided me material for thought. “More than Just the Dance: An Interview with Lois Greenfield” quotes Greenfield extensively. This article appears in a Dance Life issue devoted entirely to dance photography. Greenfield discusses not only her work and process, but also more philosophical inquiries into her definition of her product and what types of movement succeed, for her, as photogenic.46 She also discusses advantages she believes photography has over watching dance live, in that pictures can catch moments too quick for the eye.47 Furthermore, in the years since this interview was published over twenty years ago, Greenfield has made the switch from performance photography to
her studio-style photography. The interview describes her efforts before she began
shooting with a Hasselblad square-format camera, and portrays the development of
Greenfield’s earlier ideals. Many of these, such as capturing successful photogenic
movement, remain in her goals today.

I set about this research using a framework involving JoAnn McNamara’s and
Hans-Georg Gadamer’s phenomenological hermeneutics, Lynn Matluck Brooks’
historiography, and Terry Barrett’s conceptual framework for critiquing photographs. I
built upon these sources to read Greenfield’s Bebe Miller Company images. The
various dance photography history and Lois Greenfield sources place my research in
the context of this field and provide historical support for my study. The positions of
critics Sarah Boxer and Marcia Siegel offer opposing viewpoints against which to build
a case and to represent more than one side. These sources lead me, through my
research questions, to draw conclusions both about Greenfield’s work in the present
and implications for it in the future.
Notes


3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.


6 Ibid.

7 McNamara 164.

8 McNamara 171.


11 Brooks 48.


14 Barrett, Photographs 61-2.

15 Barrett, Photographs 64.

16 Barrett, Photographs 70.

17 Barrett, Photographs 76.

18 Barrett, Photographs 91.
19 Barrett, Photographs 82.


21 Barrett, Photographs 96.

22 Barrett, Photographs 97.

23 Barrett, Photographs 99.

24 Barrett, Photographs 161.


26 Ibid.

27 Later republished as Dance and Photography.


29 Ewing, Fugitive 13-14.


31 Ewing, Bounds 8.

32 Ewing, Bounds 13.

33 Ewing, Bounds 99.

34 Ewing, Bounds 14.

35 Greenfield, Airborne 24.

36 Two degrees as defined by Rudolph Laban and Ann Hutchinson Guest in the Labanotation dance notation system.

37 Greenfield, Airborne 45.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.


42 Ewing, Fugitive 152.

43 Siegel 23.

44 Siegel 23.

45 Siegel 23.


47 Ibid.
CHAPTER 3

PHOTOGRAPHY, DANCE HISTORY, AND LOIS GREENFIELD

*fugitive: n. something elusive or hard to find
fugitive: adj. likely to vanish suddenly: not fixed or lasting
The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary¹

Many dance writers and photographers, including William A. Ewing and Barbara Morgan, refer to dance and dance photography as a "fugitive art." Dance itself is ephemeral, with movements disappearing as soon as they are performed. Dance photography is a paradox, as it creates a lasting image of an ephemeral moment. It also translates a four-dimensional art form into a two-dimensional medium. Dance photography is a nebulous entity, as it exists as a crossover between the genres of dance and photography. Two categories of dance photography are documentation and dance photography as its own art entity. Three aspects of dance photography I discuss in this chapter are the paradox of dance photography; the role collaboration plays in dance photography; and the documentary aspects of dance photography. Documentary dance photographs portray dance in context, through studio portrait photography of posed dance figures, and through performance photographs taken during live performances or dress rehearsals. Dance photographs as autonomous art works use the vocabulary of dance movement and the vocabulary of art photography to form the
content and composition of a photograph, sometimes creating dance movement never seen onstage. While Lois Greenfield fights the term “dance photographer,” her work is an evolution and a re-evaluation of the possibilities of this art form.

Dance photography may be used for publicity, for documentation, or as an art form unto itself. Dance photographs are invaluable to the study of dance history because they show body postures of a particular dancer, time period, genre, or work. Some of the prominent photographers through dance history include Baron Adolph de Meyer, Fred Fehl, George Platt Lynes, Barbara Morgan, and Jack Mitchell. Through making photographic art, these photographers documented the dance and enhanced the way audiences perceived it. Although Lois Greenfield does not strive to document dance, but rather to create new images from the movement of dancers, she was inspired by some of these earlier photographers who did document.

Photographs may be intended for documentation purposes, or they may be images posed or otherwise created for the camera, through improvisation or capture during performance. In his article “Capturing Emotion in Motion,” dance photographer Jack Mitchell defines studio photography, production photography, and performance photography as three categories of dance photography. Studio photography, posed in a photographer’s studio, features dancers, either in portraiture or in a held movement; production photography generates publicity for the company, and usually includes staged motion shots; and performance photography shots are taken during a live performance or dress rehearsal.²

Studio and performance photography are documentary because they are fairly objective, literally documenting what is before the camera’s lens. While the
photographer may choose the angle and the timing at which to shoot, he has little or no control over the dance unfolding in front of him. Studio portraiture may be posed, but it may also serve documentary purposes. Production photography may either document choreography or use improvisation to create photogenic images. The choreographer may desire original choreography in the photographs, or he or she may instead choose what forms will make exciting publicity. For dance photography as its own art form, the movement is created specifically for the camera.

Dance photography is a blending of two art forms: dance and photography. Not only do technological and aesthetic developments in photography influence the manner in which dance photographs are taken, but innovations in the movement photographed do as well. This merging of two art forms to make a hybrid third generates a need for collaboration between the dancer and photographer. This blending of forms also questions the reflexive effect of this two-dimensional translation of dance. The dance photography paradox becomes slippery due to the fact that a photograph establishes an ephemeral moment in time in static form. Dance photography has a myriad functions, although there are arguments surrounding the nature of this art form: such as that dance stagnates when it is frozen, or that dance may not be properly portrayed due to technological shortcomings, or that historians distrust altered photographs.

The science of photography improved alongside technical and expressive developments in dance and mirrored its popularity, although the technology of photography slightly lagged behind the pace of dance developments. Incipient experimentations with photographic science coincided with the era of the Romantic Ballet in mid-nineteenth century France. In his book, *The Fugitive Gesture*:
Masterpieces of Dance Photography, dance photographer and writer William A. Ewing aligns photographic achievements with landmarks in the Romantic ballet. Amidst the swirls of balletomania, Joseph Niépce and L. J. M. Daguerre’s daguerreotype emerged, although lithographs were preferred to the daguerreotype’s slow, bulky process and its use of dangerous chemicals. Ewing cites a daguerreotype of a ballerina, one of the only known existing in the world. Held at the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, this image, dated c. 1849, displays a costumed dancer leaning her weight into her right leg, touching her left forward, holding her skirt out with her right hand and looking in profile over her left arm which is akimbo. Due to the long exposure time of daguerreotypes, virtuostic movements were not a possibility. From this picture we can see the dress of an American Romantic-era ballerina, a pose she may have taken, the contemporary hairstyle, and the size and shape of her body type.

While it would take years before dance movement could be captured by a still camera, balletomanes were all too happy to covet and obtain André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri’s 1854 cheaper wet plate adaptations, cartes-de-visite, of a posing Fanny Cerrito to place next to their lithographs of Marie Taglioni and other ethereal sylphs hovering in treetops. A carte-de-visite was a card separated “into eight or ten rectangles which were exposed simultaneously... or in a series,” whereby a dancer stood in either a pedestrian or simple ballet pose in front of a Renaissance- or Baroque-styled background. These cartes, along with the larger cabinet cards they developed into, became a fad that mirrored the popularity of the ballet.
Another photographic development during this time was the stereograph, two images next to each other on a card. Stacks of these images “could be privately examined through a portable viewer or mounted in a machine that would flip through a number at a sitting.” According to Ewing, this type of photograph outlived the carte-de-visite and even lasted into the twentieth century.

It was through stereographs that Eadweard Muybridge, considered to be one of the first to capture motion in a still photograph, became known as a photographer. His stereographs of San Francisco landscapes brought him recognition for their composition. It was Muybridge’s 1870s-1880s experiments in capturing motion, however, that make his work relevant to dance photography. After a commission from California Governor Leland Stanford, Muybridge made various attempts until he successfully photographed Stanford’s prized horse Occident in mid-canter with all four legs off the ground. Muybridge took this invention one step further and invented what he termed a zoopraxiscope, a device that was able to show many pictures in quick succession to give the illusion of a moving image. From his discoveries with animal movement and with the zoopraxiscope, Muybridge put together his Human Locomotion, hundreds of plates that show the human body—men, women, alone, in pairs—in various stages of motion.

The scientist Etienne-Jules Marey, a contemporary of Muybridge working in France, also experimented with capturing motion in photography. While Marey, like Muybridge, experimented with human and animal movement, he developed chronophotography. In chronophotography, “sequential images in a trajectory are recorded in a single frame.” A repeated ray of light, captured as it makes its way
through space, characterizes these images. Viewers with eyes for dance photography are often attracted to these images because of the apparent motion in the streaming bars of light. Marey’s work also contained an element of the paradox inherent in dance photography: “The picture offers the illusion of movement depicted in its continuity but obviously (and contrarily) stopped in time: seized and preserved for posterity to scrutinize.” These photographic developments of Muybridge and Marey influenced the photographer’s growing ability to capture movement on film.

The craze for dance photography continued from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth century, and this is the time that dance critic Clive Barnes believes solidified dance photography’s place in history: “it was only in this century that the photographer really left his mark in dance. There were Arnold Genthe’s famous photos of Isadora Duncan…and, finally, setting the first seal on the validity of dance photographs, the photos of the Diaghilev Ballet, particularly those of Vaslav Nijinsky and Tamara Karsavina.” Early in the century photographers such as Baron Adolph de Meyer flocked to record Vaslav Nijinsky, and Genthe the Hellenistic images of Isadora Duncan. Mid-century Barbara Morgan made the powerful, defining image of Martha Graham pitching forward under a billowing skirt, followed by Lois Greenfield’s contemporary photographs, highlighted in books and calendars, of strong, toned dancers flipping and flying in seemingly impossible combinations of movement sequences. Whether it is the exhilaration of captured motion or a culture’s fascination with a dance personality, dance photography has been integral to dance history for the past two centuries.
THE PARADOX

Susan Sontag wrote, “Photographs may be more memorable than moving images, because they are a neat slice of time, not a flow.” Unfortunately, it is the “flow” of dance we want to remember. This is the problem. The paradox of dance photography is the capturing of a four dimensional performing art in a static, two-dimensional medium. It also reflects the concept of the “fugitive art” of dance photography, of making aspects of an elusive, ephemeral art form somehow permanent. In The Fugitive Gesture, Ewing recognizes this dichotomy between living, breathing dance and otherwise cold, flat photography:

Dance is the movement of bodies through space and time. Dance is fluidity and continuity. Dance connects, dance unfolds. Dance envelops us; it enters through the eye and the ear. Photography imprisons in two dimensions. Photography flattens and shrinks. Photography tells the ear nothing. It fragments time and fractures space. Yet movement is the goal, ultimately the *sine qua non* of true dance photography. Elizabeth McCausland voiced the paradox when she called for “an image which though it cannot move and never can hope to move, yet will seem about to move.”

It is through this defining characteristic that the worlds of dance and photography weave. By understanding this basic struggle of the form, we can begin to comprehend the frustration of choreographers at capturing their work, and the impetus for some choreographers to break from performance photography and seek out photographers like Lois Greenfield who instead work to capture the spirit of the dance.

One potential argument against the dance photography that presents images apparently about to move, is that it is a reproduction of an artwork instead of a work unto itself. Does such movement captured in a still image reduce photography to a
reproduction of the dance art form? While traditional dance photography may be a reproduction of another art form, there is a craft to the photography, in knowing how fast to set the shutter speed, the distance and angle at which to take the photograph, and finally, the choice of the moment at which to take the photograph. This choice moment lends artistry to the photography and renders the photographer a craftsman and an artist. She or he has learned when to snap the shutter to get the best result. The dance photographer is the vehicle through whom dance moments are not only preserved but released to a wider audience. The still image may not, however, be a successful reproduction of a moving moment. Dance photographer Herbert Migdoll told Celia Ipiotis on Eye on Dance, “When a dancer is in a jeté... you’re experiencing them in flight, in motion; you don’t see them suddenly frozen. And I thought the frozen image is so untrue to the moment.”

As he gained more dance photography experience, however, Migdoll began, instead, to seek out and appreciate these frozen moments.

A solution to this paradox seems to be to allow the spirit of the dance to come through the image. This approach harkens back to the lithographs of the Romantic ballet, which were able to “portray the ethereal spirit of the ballet (for example, ballerinas were shown floating among the clouds),” while the 1850s photography, in the form of portrait cartes-de-visite, was unable to show this kind of motion. Barbara Morgan believed that there had to be motion in the photograph in order to portray any spirit: “Using still pictures, it is impossible to convey the emotion of thematic motion in literal sequence. The dance photograph must therefore select the most pregnant moments.”

37
Manipulated dance images can be used to portray superhuman traits of dancers to audiences. Like lithographs during the Romantic era, manipulated dance photographs are often used to perpetuate the illusion created by a dancer. Today, many commercial dance photographers touch up their images for aesthetic reasons before they go to press. Dance photographer Steven Caras told Celia Ipiotis on *Eye on Dance* that if a vein sticks out in a ballerina’s neck or if flesh bulges over a costume, he will touch it up for cosmetic reasons and for the satisfaction of the ballerina and the dance company. Also in contemporary photography, photographers will have dancers jump off trampolines and then catch their mid-air shapes, so as to make them appear to jump to a superhuman part of the stratosphere.

Historically, dancers and photographers used photographic manipulation to compensate for the fact that the technology of photography had not yet caught up with the reality seen onstage and could not yet sharply capture a moving image. Photographers accomplished manipulation through using wires, strings, and even hidden hands to hold up dancers and their costumes. In many of Ruth St. Denis’s photographs, thin wires hold up the ends of her skirts to give a swirling effect.

Anna Pavlova was an avid doctorer of her photographs. Even in the *Trailblazers of Modern Dance* film, two tiny black-gloved hands support her on arabesque against the black curtain. Pavlova’s photographic manipulation was to further her image as a great ballerina: her fans “were conditioned to expect from a photograph both what they had seen on the stage, and what they expected to see in a picture.” In addition to having supports hold her in place during photographic exposures which her photographers later retouched out, Pavlova often penciled in
additions to her photographs, such as making the toe of her ballet slipper look more sharply en pointe, to make herself appear more ethereal and to give the audience more of a sense of wonderment.³⁰

Lois Greenfield’s work is the apotheosis of the paradox of dance photography: her moving dancers only exist in this two-dimensional world. The shapes in Greenfield’s compositions have not appeared onstage, so they were not translated to these two dimensions, but were born into them. Nothing has been lost in the translation because there is no translation. Greenfield uses dance movement as a means to an end in her photographic composition. She is therefore not concerned with capturing the essence of the movement before the camera: “I am not chiefly interested in stating what the essence of the dance is. What interests me is something which is going to have a photographic life beyond its origins as raw subject matter, i.e. the dance.”³¹ She is interested in having the movement create the essence of the photographic work.

In order to create her dance compositions in the photographic space, Greenfield employs in-studio manipulation techniques. These manipulations are not designed to further mystify dancers in the way that Pavolva and St. Denis used props, but to further the spirit of the movement composition, such as that seen in Romantic lithographs. Greenfield does not employ darkroom manipulation, but off-camera props for support or launch in the studio. An example of this manipulation occurs in a series of photographs taken of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, entitled Freedom of Information (see Chapter 4). In this photograph there are dancers at varying levels of jumps: one on the floor, one flying in from the side, one jumping up from the center,
and one that has apparently jumped so high out of the frame that we can only see his bent legs. One part of the manipulation here is that the dancer who seemingly jumped out of the frame is not jumping at all; he is holding onto a handhold attached to the ceiling. Greenfield portrays neither a moment that occurred in a performance context nor one that could happen in an average human context; she has created an image to portray the spirit of this particular dance moment.

COLLABORATION

The history of dance photography follows collaborations between photographer and dancer, photographer and choreographer. Collaboration occurs in a studio-type situation so there may be an interchange between the dancer/choreographer and the photographer. This situation may either be in an actual studio or on a stage with theatrical lighting in a non-performance situation. The varying nature of the collaborations spans from the choreographers and photographers deciding together how best to represent a dance moment, to both the dancers and the photographer improvising with and in front of the camera.

In an interview with Celia Ipiotis on Eye on Dance, William Ewing cites the collaboration between photographer Baron Adolph de Meyer and dancer/choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky of the Ballets Russes as the first great collaboration in dance photography. Other dance photography collaborations that followed included Arnold Genthe and Isadora Duncan; George Platt Lynes and George Balanchine; Barbara Morgan and Martha Graham; and Lois Greenfield, initially with David Parsons and Daniel Ezralow.
Baron Adolph de Meyer photographed the images of Vaslav Nijinsky and accompanying Ballets Russes nymph corps in *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1911) in 1914. Many scholars point to this ballet as one of the first works in the modernist vein. It is likewise a first in the dance photography world for being the experimental site of one of the first collaborations between choreographer and photographer. Ewing said of de Meyer,

He was the first photographer with a commanding sense of his own field and a sense of its rightness as means of artistic expression...he meets Nijinsky on equal ground and together they form these magical and wonderful series of pictures *[Faune]*...photography had come of age and could match all the wonderful new ideas that Nijinsky was using himself.  

This project was not simply a collection of posed studio shots of *Faune*, but a series of thirty-three images in which the story of the Faune unfolds. These poses of Nijinsky and the Nymphs, which emphasize the then-shocking angularity at the dancers' elbow and wrist joints in triangular gestures against their flat, frieze-like bodies, portray the spirit of the work, as they were "rechoreographed specifically for the camera." This was the beginning of a dance photography trend to choreograph moments for the camera alone, which would branch into whole sections of this field. In further portraying the spirit of the work, "The figures are bathed in the soft, radiant luminosity of a long summer afternoon which distances us psychologically and contributes to a dreamlike, mythical aura."  

De Meyer drew from the pictorialist art movement in photography, a goal of which "was to print photographs in ways that resembled as closely as possible the fine (that is, respectable) arts... [and] highbrow subjects." One of these "highbrow
subjects” was dance. Terry Barrett identifies pictorialism as photography’s parallel to expressionism in art. Pictorialists upheld photography to be art and strove to have it as honored as painting. In their struggle, they often mimicked the subject matter and stylistic conventions of the paintings of their day.... Pictorialist images often utilized soft-focus, textured paper, hand-touching with brushes, allegorical stories.” The Faune series told an allegorical story, and de Meyer even touched up many of the images by hand before rephotographing the touched-up image to achieve the final product.

Pictorialism, according to Ewing, was soon replaced by modernism. Faune was one of the first works of ballet modernism. It is ironic, as Ewing notes, that de Meyer used his pictorialism to capture Nijinsky’s choreographic modernism, since “as they had been throughout the nineteenth century, dance and photography were still out-of-step.” This pre-flashbulb photographic technology was not yet advanced enough to clearly capture a moving image. Due to the expressionist influence of pictorialism on dance photography, “Now the focus was on the spirit of the dance rather than on its celebrated performers, and this goal demanded elegant and convincing illusions of movement.” These ideas started a new way to look at dance photography and photography in general: not simply to document, but to make an independent work of art as well. The spirit of the ethereal lithographs combined with photographic technology to make a spirited photograph. While dance photography would still see many photographers and technical advancements in documentary photography, other artists preferred to capture the spirit of a dance or dancer in the photography.
A dance photography collaboration that served both the dance and the legacy of the choreographer was that between New York City Ballet founder George Balanchine and photographer George Platt Lynes. Lynes photographed Balanchine’s work in the 1930s and 1940s, under Balanchine’s close attention. Balanchine recognized the importance of documenting his work, and he worked closely with Lynes to that end. Like many other dance photographers, in his work Lynes captured the spirit of the ballets instead of their specific choreography. According to writer Jonathan Weinberg, Lynes’s photographs “suggested what might be called the ambience of a particular dance, its ‘echo’ or perfume.” It seems the purpose of Lynes’s photographs were to mark Balanchine’s work in history and to keep it alive beyond its performative years. They were also used as publicity on New York City Ballet posters and programs.

Lynes’s signature style of presenting Balanchine’s dancers as epic characters in his ballets depended on his lighting. He was not only able to separate the vast expanse of background with a horizon in the early Greek epics, but his background lighting made the dancers pop out against any background and appear larger than life, as if they were movie stars.

A pillar of twentieth century dance photography was Barbara Morgan. While Morgan photographed many modern dancers including Pearl Primus, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Anna Sokolow, Merce Cunningham, and José Limón, she is known for her groundbreaking collaboration with Martha Graham. Morgan began her artistic life as a painter and came to photography when her photographer husband, Willard Morgan, gave her a Leica camera for experimentation. At first Morgan was appalled and did not believe that photographs were works of art but instead mere scientific
replications of the world. She wrote that her views were turned around by a now-legendary American photographer, when “miraculously a day came when I helped a then unknown photographer, Edward Weston, hang his first exhibit at the U.C.L.A. Art Gallery. I saw for the first time photographs that were ‘realist records’—yes, but also essentialized symbols.”\textsuperscript{51} As Morgan learned both the science and craft of photography, she accepted it as an art form and made her own “essentialized symbols” of dance work. The exhilaration of motion had been with Morgan since childhood, as her father told her that everything in the world was made of dancing atoms. She carried this idea throughout her artwork and photography before she even photographed dance. Morgan brought to photography her fascination with light, intuition for spatial composition, and a yearning to portray motion.

While she was a painting student at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the early 1920s, Morgan continued her explorations of light, color, and movement in painting. Several years later as an art teacher at UCLA, Morgan brought her class out to the campus fields with the Duncan-style dance teacher to draw bodies in motion.\textsuperscript{52} When she was still a student, however, Morgan gained an appreciation for the inclusion of energy in an holistic artwork. She was inspired by the concepts of ‘rhythmic vitality’ from the Chinese \textit{Six Canons of Painting} and the Japanese notion of \textit{esoragoto}, which means emptying the mind and becoming one with the subject of the art…. [She wrote about Rhythmic Vitality in her work], ‘It doesn’t matter if it is dance or montage of people or nature. There always has to be the presence of energy.’\textsuperscript{53}

This idea of energy shone through in her dance photography, into which life and rhythm breathe.
This connection with Eastern ideas, in conjunction with her spiritual identification with the people, ritual, and nature of the American Southwest, created a bond between her work and that of Martha Graham. Morgan moved to New York at the beginning of the Depression and instantly identified with the emerging modern dance. "Disturbed by the emotional apathy generated by the Great Depression, she gratefully found the energy that she was always seeking in the struggling modern dancers, whose philosophy of life and art was affirmative, like her own." She also found the "galvanizing protest" of Martha Graham and her contemporaries "heartening."  

Graham and Morgan began a collaboration that lasted sixty years. In Morgan’s photographs of Graham and her company we can see the angularity, motion as a result of contraction and release, and the Louis Horst-influenced arrangements of groups onstage. In the 1980 reprint to Morgan’s portfolio *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs* (originally published in 1941), Graham wrote:

> It is rare that even an inspired photographer possesses the demonic eye which can capture the instant of a dance and transform it into a timeless gesture. In Barbara Morgan I found this person. In looking at these photographs today, I feel, as I felt when I first saw them, privileged to have been a part of this collaboration. For to me, Barbara Morgan through her art reveals the inner landscape that is a dancer’s world.  

This collaboration, highly valued by both women, is one of the most significant in both the histories of dance and photography.

Morgan photographed Graham’s company onstage, creating a studio setting, and also set up theatrical lighting for the shoots. These shoots occurred “in her studio, in Columbia University’s McMillan Theatre, and in the Henry Street Settlement
Playhouse.” Morgan both captured the spirit of Graham’s dances as well as the choreography and narrative; some of the work was restaged for the camera, dictated by Morgan. After watching a work numerous times, Morgan envisioned how she wanted to photograph it. Although Morgan decided how to set up the photographs, she did not do so completely separate of Graham: “Martha and I would always discuss the philosophical meaning of the dance before I would ever start on it.” Morgan also depicted the psychological throes of the characters by superimposing one character over the group in a double exposure image, such as overlapping Graham’s tortured countenance over a group dancing in Deaths and Entrances to show the psychological torment in that story of the Brontë sisters.

Morgan worked to capture the spirit and meaning of the dances in her photographs. “In order to convey the meaning and form of each dance, I have worked for pictures which contain the essential emotion of that dance. Such work is a kind of translation.” One such image conveying the essence of the work is from the “Now” section of American Document, in the Graham portfolio. Across the bottom of the page run the phrases, “We are three women...we are three million women.... We are the mothers of the hungry dead.... We are the mothers of the hungry living.” In this double exposure photograph, the three dancers contract forward, backward, and to the side, with their torsos at varying angles, weight thrown into opposite hips, heads flung, hair flying. The translucent double-exposed image bleeds from the side of each dancer like a ghost, extending the original static image in time, space, motion, and Depression desperation.
Graham and Morgan collaborated through an exchange of ideas and interests. In her commemorative article on Morgan, Doris Hering wrote, "How did she and Miss Graham work? Very simply and harmoniously.... Before starting the shooting session, they would sit on the floor and meditate. After a while, one or the other would say, ‘I’m ready. How about you?’ It was usually a mutual signal to begin." The two seemed to have a spiritual bond. According to Ewing, "it was the inner life of the dancer which appealed to the poet in Morgan. Graham has learned to use her body to give voice to her innermost conflicts and yearnings." 

One experimental collaborative effort of Morgan and Graham that did not involve Graham’s repertory was the 1941 War Theme. This was a dance composed specifically for the camera at the request of poet William Carlos Williams to create an accompanying image to a poem he wrote on the Spanish Civil War. Ewing and Girardin consider this work a “milestone” because at this juncture “the two art forms [were] on a truly equal footing for the first time.” This image shows Graham in a long black dress with the skirt circling out into a spiraling disc. Her back arches over her left side, and her hair falls straight from her thrown-back head. Her legs are not visible, but must be hidden within the skirt’s folds. “After a number of attempts, both [Graham and Morgan] were satisfied with one image in particular, in which the body seemed caught in the very instant of its annihilation. In a graphic tonal language of stark black and white...the life-force yields to destruction.” This type of dance photography, in which the photographer uses dance as the photographic subject medium, was a predecessor to Lois Greenfield’s work in the late twentieth century.
Lois Greenfield is a recent incarnation of this experimentation with movement and still camera. She works with her dancers in the studio to create her images instead of going to the theater. She rarely photographs straight repertory of choreographers, and instead either improvises within the choreography or drops it altogether and improvises in the studio (see Chapter 4). In The Fugitive Gesture, William Ewing lists Greenfield alongside other collaborating dance photographers, and states, “Some of the finest photographs of the dance have resulted from sustained collaboration.... In each case, a forceful, committed dancer or choreographer... has met with an equally assured image maker. Each of these photographers accepted the dancer’s vision, yet refused to relinquish his or her own.” By not giving up on their own wishes for the photographic work, these photographers make a new art by fusing photography with dance, by setting their scene with dance movement.

DOCUMENTATION

Writing on dance photography, Robert Greskovic states, “Like flash cards of math or reading practice, dance pictures may not advance the process, but they can serve to sharpen our recognition of the facts.” In addition to film and videotape, dance photography is this art form’s documentation. According to David Lindner, however, dance photography as documentation is a new concept: “Photography as a record of the dance was, like dance criticism, not a serious thing until quite recently.” It is what museum-goers find on the walls as dance artifacts in dance museums. It is an integral part of dance history. Barbara Morgan, writing in her portfolio of Graham’s early work, seems to think that photography is a way to prevent the loss of dance to
time: “I realized that we have lost the best of Isadora, Nijinsky and Pavlova, but that we need not lose the great dancing of our time through lack of recording. Today the increased scope of photography makes possible the fuller portrayal of the dancer’s fugitive art.” Morgan’s work documents while purveying the spirit of dance through its life as its own art form.

While Morgan recognizes one side of the dance photograph as an important documentary tool, William Ewing seems to feel that by purely documenting a dance, the spirits of both the dance and the photography are lost in the translation. In the context of a discussion of dance photography and Lois Greenfield’s work with Celia Ipiotis on *Eye on Dance*, Ewing states, “There are photographers who understand that [documentation] is their role and they do a very good job of it. My feeling is that much of that material, however, does not transcend that role of straight documentation. They can be important, because after all it’s our only record of something.” For Ewing, a dance photograph must also have life as an art object in addition to its documentary value. It is the extra life that a photographer breathes into photographs through composition or instruction to dancers that infuses an image with vitality beyond a static documentation.

Labanotation, a movement notation system created by Rudolph Laban in the early part of the twentieth century conceptually similar to music notation, documents and preserves dance through symbols. This form of documentation can benefit from the information available in documentary dance photographs. People trained to read Labanotation can direct works from these scores and recreate them, but no matter how true they stay to the work and history, some part of the original context is often lost due
to the fact that dancers with different bodies perform the work anew in a later time period. Reconstructors often refer to available photographs of the original dance, to other work by the choreographer, or to the choreographer herself to get an idea of the flavor of the work. Ultimately photography and notation can work together, but photographs remain a crucial part of dance documentation.

Three major dance photographers working in documentary dance photography according to Jack Mitchell’s definition are Fred Fehl, Max Waldman, and Mitchell himself. Fehl’s work was groundbreaking in performance photography; Waldman experimented with a grainy photographic quality in his studio photography; and Mitchell, working mainly in studio photography, captured countless celebrities and dancers on film.

Austrian-born Fred Fehl is credited as one of the first photographers to photograph dance in performance. In addition to photographing Broadway, opera, and orchestral productions, he photographed ballet and modern dance companies in America during the mid-twentieth century. Apparently, Fehl preferred photographing dance to all the other performing arts. His black-and-white photographs are characterized by his capture of the peak performance moments. Capturing a peak moment works especially well in photographing ballet, where such movements generally match musical crescendos: Fehl told Robert Greskovic, “In classical ballet, I usually follow the music. I can hear when the high point comes, and I shoot.” This “high point” is evident in his photographs of ballet dancers at the peak of a jump, extending a fully-stretched arabesque, expressing an emotional moment through an
extended gesture series, or a seemingly psychologically theatrical moment in Martha Graham’s work.

Fehl photographed live performances or dress rehearsals instead of posing dancers in a studio: “Only in performance, he says, can the camera catch the flow of movement, as well as the emotional expression of the dancers.” In performance, Fehl watched for the climaxes that make up his images. From Fehl’s work we not only have documentation of what dancers physically looked like, but how their bodies moved. We can see a breath of fresh air passing across Rudolph Nureyev’s soft face as he stretches and leaps through Le Corsaire or in partnering Margot Fonteyn as Swan Lake’s White Swan; the powerful choreography of José Limón’s A Choreographic Offering; the captured psychological tension and emotion in facial expressions and body postures of Martha Graham’s work; and the shapes made in space by proscenium-length elastics in Alwin Nikolais’s Tensile Involvement or body-altering Imago costumes in motion. He also captures the theatricality of the ballet and modern dance he photographs, through showing action in onstage groups and the presentational nature of these dance forms.

Fehl’s contribution to both dance history and photography is as a performance photographer. Due to technological advances of brighter lights and faster film speeds of the 1950s Fehl made many discoveries and advancements in dance photography; specifically, he was able to capture a dancer in mid-leap. Today, many people recall an image such as this when they think of dance or dance photography. According to Greskovic, “Many photographers working today express their debt to Fehl and his work, and those who do not probably should.” These images contain the spirit of
dance that simply cannot be conveyed in notation or written description alone, and they are crucial to keeping dance history alive. This is the recording to which Morgan spoke, of not losing dance to time due to a lack of documentation.

Studio photographer Max Waldman photographed posed and movement shots in his studio during the mid-1900s. A balanced composition and an intentional grainy quality characterize his work, along with a use of light influenced by the paintings of Rembrandt. Members of the dance community were fond of his work for his ability to portray dance while giving the images their own lives. Gelsey Kirkland called Waldman’s eye for movement “uncanny” and wrote that “he caught the poignant nuances of dramatic gesture—the inward shades of meaning called to mind by a particular moment.” While Waldman photographed moments of repertory, such as Judith Jamison performing Alvin Ailey’s Cry, his goal was to create a new artwork from the image. Waldman felt a sense of wonderment about dance. He knew he could not control or predict the movement of dancers in his studio, so he once said he hoped that “a happy accident will occur.” Waldman’s photographs combined the idea of form with that of capturing emotion, as “he spurned the modern trend of abstract shapes and colors. In an age that glorifies both the incomprehensible and the banal, he pursued style and meaning.”

DANCE PHOTOGRAPHY AS AN AUTONOMOUS ART FORM

When dance photography stands as an independent art form, it is usually due to collaboration between the photographer and the dancer or choreographer, to make a new work outside of a documentation or a performance photograph. Here, in addition
to the contributions of the photographed dancers, the spirit of the photographer radiates through their work. An autonomous photograph can be appreciated for its use of photographic techniques, performed either within the camera while taking the picture or in the darkroom while developing and printing it. Barbara Morgan, Herbert Migdoll, and Lois Greenfield create photographs of dancers that have aesthetic value beyond their thematic content: Morgan used light drawing and montage to enhance her images; Migdoll uses similar manipulation and montage to swirl color and image together in his photographs; Greenfield uses similar techniques in the photographs themselves, not in technical aftermaths.

Additionally, Philip Trager and Howard Schatz, contemporaries to Greenfield, also compose movement for the camera. Trager works similarly to Greenfield, photographing postmodern dance companies' repertory and dancers improvising or moving with his direction. Instead of a studio environment, Trager photographs his dancers outdoors, using natural sunlight and grassy fields such as those outside Jacob's Pillow. In one collection of his work, Schatz photographed ballet dancers underwater entwined with diaphanous fabric.

Morgan's background as a painter is evident in her photographic work through the effective composition of the photographs and the ability of many of them to stand on their own, out of the context of Graham's repertory. One reason for the sound composition of Morgan's work is that she insisted that a photograph be as compositionally strong upside-down as right side-up. Her montage photographs piece images together to create something new. Peter Bunnell writes, "she sees the photomontage as more nearly approximating imagination itself." It was in her
montage that she used images of dancers, buildings, leaves, and other objects to create "visual metaphors." This goal of creating a visual metaphor, instead of a photographic record, distinguishes this aspect of Morgan's work as autonomous.

Morgan also added light to her work, in the form of light drawings painted directly onto the photographic paper in the darkroom. Referring to this technique Morgan gave herself the title of "kinetic light-sculptor." Not only did Morgan's light sculptures grace dance photographs as an extra layer such as in a print of an airborne Merce Cunningham in Totem Ancestor, but she also sculpted spirals of light to stand with their own rhythmic vitality. Morgan's light sculptures "parallel the geometry in dance and movement of contour lines." These extra-movement techniques allow Morgan's work the freedom of autonomy.

Like Morgan, Herbert Migdoll uses montage and manipulation techniques to bring an image beyond a performance dance photograph. An aspect of Migdoll's work that differs from the other photographers discussed here is that he photographs in color; Jack Mitchell cites Migdoll as the first successful dance photographer to shoot in color. The techniques that Migdoll employs to manipulate his photographs involve spreading his spectra of colors in a photograph, which distorts the reality of the image therein. Manipulations that Migdoll applies to photographs include solarization, time lapse, and montage. Migdoll defines his use of solarization as, "when you change the colors within the photograph based upon exposure during the processing of the image, so that something which may have had a black background in its original state ends up with either a magenta or a very bright yellow." These photographs show the outlines
of the dancers or figures in the images and due to the color changes, seem to be artificially painted.

Migdoll’s time lapse, which he refers to as time exposure, “is a photograph in which the lens of the camera has been allowed to stay open for a longer period of time than that which would freeze the image, so that you're getting the image passing through space recorded, either as an extended blur or as a stroboscopic continuity.”

One such time lapse image where the movement is only slightly blurred is in a section of Limón’s *A Choreographic Offering*, where the orange- and gold-clad dancers are horizontal to the ground with their weight on their hands and bent right leg, with the left leg extended toward stage right. In another time exposure of many dancers close together in the frame, possibly wearing tutus and spinning, the colors have blurred to make the figures look like pastel waterlilies. Originally, Migdoll’s photography may have called attention to a leaping or spinning dancer. After the solarization and time exposure manipulations, the attention is called instead to the altered colors and the resulting photographic composition.

Greenfield’s work is an example of autonomous dance photography (see Chapter 4), as she uses techniques similar to those of Morgan and Migdoll, but she applies them in the studio rather than in the darkroom. Greenfield’s montage is in the composition of her photographs, in the manner she juxtaposes bodies in space, creating spatial tension. Solarization is not in her repertoire and she does not utilize time lapse, as one of the characteristics of her work is a clean, sharp image. She does give the illusion of a time lapse, however, by seeming to suspend dancers in air amid poles, flowing fabric, or rubber balls. Greenfield’s work is autonomous because she crafts
her images from dancers' bodies, using them as much as the photographic medium itself.

These various methods of photographing dance share a common goal: to keep dance alive. Perhaps many choreographers and dance photographers prefer photographing movement in the spirit of a dance piece instead of movement from a work itself. In this way, they use movement that is photogenic and will continue creating dance moments for future generations instead of stagnating them in history. A photograph's realistic qualities give the images an immediate sense of the present, and by capturing that spirit, ephemeral dance has a better chance of perpetuating through time. Greenfield's absorption of the techniques of various photographers into her own hybrid style allows her the possibility to capture and portray this spirit.
Notes


3 Later republished as Dance and Photography.

4 See Ewing, Fugitive 14-26.

5 Ewing, Fugitive 15.

6 Ewing, Fugitive plate 1.

7 Ewing, Fugitive 15-6.

8 Ewing, Fugitive 16.

9 Ibid.

10 Ewing, Fugitive 17.

11 Ibid.


13 Hill 12-3.

14 Hill 13.


17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

21 Ewing, Fugitive 27-8.


23 Ibid.


25 Ibid.


29 Ewing, Fugitive 13.

30 Ibid.


34 Ibid.

35 Ewing, Fugitive 20.

36 Ewing, Fugitive 21.

37 Ibid.

38 Ewing and Girardin 105.


41 Ewing, *Fugitive* 21.


43 Ewing, *Fugitive* 22.

44 Ewing and Girardin 105.

45 Ewing, *Fugitive* plate 148.


47 Ibid.

48 Weinberg 134.


50 Weinberg 134.


55 Hering 56.

56 Morgan, *Graham* 8.

57 Patnaik 7.

In a double exposure, the photographer takes the first picture, advances then rewinds the film back to the beginning of that image, and takes the second picture. A double exposure results in two images superimposed on the same negative.

Ewing, Fugitive 25.

Morgan, Graham 12.

Morgan, Graham 139.

Hering 56.

Ewing, Fugitive 25.

Ibid.

Ewing and Girardin 107.

Ewing, Fugitive plate 152.

Ewing, Fugitive 25.

Ewing, Fugitive 31.


Morgan, Graham 12.

Ewing on Eye on Dance 236.


Greskovic, “Selective” 26

Ibid.


79 Fehl 11.

80 Fehl 25.

81 Fehl, various.

82 Fehl 111.

83 Fehl 112-3.


85 Greskovic, "Selective" 29.


87 Kirkland with Lawrence 12.


89 Kirkland with Lawrence 13.


94 Bunnell 10 and Patnaik 8.

95 Patnaik 8.

96 Ibid.

97 Mitchell 74.

98 Herbert Migdoll on *Eye on Dance* 237.
99 Ibid.

100 As shown on Eye on Dance 237.

101 Ibid.
CHAPTER 4

LOIS GREENFIELD: PROCESS AND PRODUCT

Absolutely fundamental to her way of working is collaboration, no matter how brief the encounter with the dancer. Through mutually respectful collaboration in which both parties risk abandoning their set notions, dancer and photographer are able to push the limits of their understanding and the boundaries of their respective arts.¹

Greenfield’s work is the epitome of collaboration in dance photography. Her photojournalistic dance images from the 1970s gave way to her experimentations and the creation of her signature style in the early 1980s. Greenfield’s process involves collaboration between herself and the dancers. The collaboration Greenfield employs is what differentiates her from other dance photographers. Dancers improvise in Greenfield’s studio, sometimes to Greenfield’s directions, and Greenfield uses her instinct as to when to snap the camera’s shutter while the dancers are in her frame. In this way Greenfield is not a “handmaiden to the dance”²; her work depicts dance, and is a work of art unto itself rather than a mere documentation or reproduction of choreography.

On one level, her work may serve to document because she extensively photographs specific works, such as images of the Bebe Miller Company’s Tiny Sisters in the Enormous Land and Nothing Can Happen Only Once (see Chapter 5). However,
it is not Miller’s choreography that she records, but phrases from and improvisations in 
the vein of her work. Greenfield also, however, is one who manipulates the form of 
dance to create her own art. While Greenfield does not claim to reproduce 
choreographers’ works in her photographs, hers are the most widespread and popular 
images we have of contemporary postmodern dance. Greenfield’s collaborative studio 
improvisations may be the images associated with postmodern dance from the mid-
1980s through the early twenty-first century.

While Greenfield’s work coincides with what is generally termed “postmodern 
dance,” it does not share the ideals of postmodernism in photography. The label 
“postmodern” in dance does not correspond to similar genre labels in art or film, but 
refers to a specific time period in dance history. Dance critic John Martin generated 
the term “modern dance” in the 1930s in discussing the work of Martha Graham as 
modern and contemporary, although her work aligned more closely with 
expressionism. Similarly, Martin had argued with critic and impresario Lincoln 
Kirstein over which was the modernist choreographer: German expressionist Mary 
Wigman or Ballets Russes experimentalist Vaslav Nijinsky.³ In the early 1960s 
Yvonne Rainer coined the term “postmodern dance” to differentiate what she and the 
Judson Dance Theater artists were doing as both chronologically after⁴ and as a 
rebellion against modern dance. The terms stuck, and dance is slow to pick up trends 
in the other art genres.

Dance writers Susan Manning and Sally Banes have debated in print the 
definition of postmodernism in dance.⁵ In her article “Modernist Dogma and Post-
Modern Rhetoric: A Response to Sally Banes’ Terpsichore in Sneakers” (Banes
hyphenates post-modern in the book), Manning argues postmodernism in dance as an aesthetic characteristic that “collaps[es] the distinction between modern dance and 20th-century ballet.”6 She also relates postmodernism to other historical “post-”s, in that it rejects modern dance, namely that of Martha Graham and her contemporaries. Manning identifies postmodern dance as beginning in the early 1980s. In her response to Manning, “Terpsichore in Combat Boots,” Banes, conversely, uses postmodern dance as an historical term, “because it was already in currency to categorize the group [she] wrote about [the Judson Dance Theater].”7 Additionally, within her response to Banes’s response, Manning acknowledges the relationship of Formalism to modernism.8

Photography critic Terry Barrett asserts that postmodernism in art is made visible through the work of the artists themselves: “they are aware of and make reference to the previously hidden agendas of the art market and its relation to art museums, dealers, and critics; they are willing to borrow widely from the past; they have returned to the figurative in art; they embrace content over form, and they represent a plurality of styles.”9 This definition does not appear to coincide with Greenfield’s ideas, most clearly because she does not associate narrative or any other externally-imposed meaning on her work, while postmodernism emphasizes the ideas behind the product.

Greenfield clearly states that in her work the form is the content. This Formalist view coincides more with Neo-Classicism, which emphasizes non-narrative forms and movement in space as in the work of choreographers George Balanchine and Merce Cunningham. It also coincides with modernism as defined by Barrett: “The
predominant characteristics of modernism are... belief in the uniqueness of the
individual, creativity, originality, and the masterpiece; a favoring of modes of
expression over narrative, historical, or political content in art; a disdain for kitch in
culture... and an awareness of the art market." It was also, however, the focus of the
postmodern dance that Greenfield began photographing in the mid-1970s. In this way
Greenfield's photography developed alongside postmodern dance.

EARLY HISTORY

Lois Greenfield's interest in photography began during her late 1960s
undergraduate education at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, when she
also studied photography at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her "dream
was to be a National Geographic photographer sparked by [her] travels and community
projects [she] did during [her] summers in college." At Brandeis, Greenfield
complemented her anthropology major with film classes and thought that she would
produce ethnographic films. Instead, her interest in photography led her into
photojournalism. "She started by shooting riots, demonstrations, and poor housing
conditions for such alternative newspapers as the Boston Phoenix and The Real
Paper," before she ever photographed dance. Greenfield told William Ewing that
during this time she "was heavily involved in photojournalism... covering what
seemed to be a quintessentially early seventies' circus of rock stars, demonstrations and
riots. I found that I liked working on my own and I decided to pursue photography
instead of film for this reason."
When Greenfield moved to New York in 1973, she was active in both the photography and dance photography communities. While her images accompanied Deborah Jowitt’s reviews in *The Village Voice*, Greenfield also wrote *Voice* reviews of her own. One such review, “Can Polaroids Make Art?”¹⁵ about a 1975 International Center of Photography exhibition of Polaroids, examines the impact of this new popular technology on the field of photography. This experimental medium developed the image on the individual photograph inside the automatic-focus camera right before the device spat the picture out its front. The photograph emerged bland and then “developed” in less than a minute. This instant gratification of the snapshot-quality image contrasted the time photographers spent processing film in a darkroom.

While reviewing the Polaroid images in the show taken by prominent and prolific photographers in the field such as Walker Evans, Ansel Adams, and Marie Cosindas, Greenfield seemed in support of the experimental new medium: “The Polaroid breakthrough is the photographic revolution of the century, and its consequences are only beginning to be understood and explored.”¹⁶ Greenfield was always on the cutting edge, first aligning herself with avant-garde movements in photography and then in dance, through which she created her own experimental and revolutionary form.

After working in photojournalism, Greenfield discovered that she disliked capturing events. “In photojournalism, it always bothered me that the most important thing was the content…. A successful shot had a lot of information in it, but it wasn’t graphically pleasing to me.”¹⁷ Greenfield instead preferred images with aesthetically pleasing forms. Greenfield, it seems, was drawn more to images that Barrett places in
his aesthetically evaluative category, which is concerned with the form in the photograph. It was the Formalist quality in the dance she discovered that drew Greenfield to make her aesthetically evaluative photographs: “But in dance, form equaled content. If it made a pretty picture, it also conveyed the right information.”

It was the very “high modernist” nature of 1970s postmodern dance that attracted Greenfield to dance photography. Choreographers of the 1970s continued to develop and move beyond their playful questioning of performance boundaries launched during the revolutionary 1960s Judson Dance Theater. They instead examined Formalist aspects of choreography. Trisha Brown explored alternative dance surfaces, such as walls and rooftops in *Walking on Walls* (1971) and *Roof Piece* (1971). She also developed numerous choreographic devices to manipulate movement sequences, such as accumulation, decumulation, splicing, retrograding, and assigning numerical and alphabetical values to points in a cube of space. Lucinda Childs used a minimal vocabulary of dance steps to make intricately-patterned pathways onstage, such as in *Dance* (1979). Twyla Tharp, also emergent during this time, used some narrative thematic material in her pop-culture-infused work, but her choreography still emphasized her athletic movement for movement’s sake.

Greenfield’s excitement about the form equaling the content in dance photography coincidentally coalesced during 1970s postmodern dance, when many choreographers explored form as content. It was through this Formalism that Greenfield found freedom as a dance photographer. Terming it “experimental” instead of “postmodern” dance, Greenfield said she discovered “that it [the dance] was composed of equally valid moments…. I’d often find [big differences] in comparing
contact sheets with a colleague.... [I learned] how much creative latitude a photographer really had with postmodern and experimental dance and I was heartened to realize that I could be more than a mere recordmaker.”

Greenfield’s early dance photographs, taken in the mid to late 1970s, look like most other photographic, somewhat documentary, dance images. Although the images are cropped in various rectangular shapes to fit on book pages, they were produced from 35mm negatives, the popular format for picture-taking then and now that produces rectangular-shaped images. Greenfield later switched to a camera that produces square images. Greenfield shot many of her early photographs on location, either onstage or in a dance studio, and not in a photographic studio. She photographed dancers performing choreographers’ set work. Her photographs grace the pages of books such as Deborah Jowitt’s dance history text *Time and the Dancing Image* (1988) and Jowitt’s *The Dance in Mind: Profiles and Reviews 1976-83*, a compilation of *Village Voice* reviews and accompanying photographs. Two of these images of early postmodern dance in *Time and the Dancing Image*, “Trisha Brown’s *Planes* in a 1975 revival,” and “Judy Padow, Susan Brody, and David Woodberry in Lucinda Childs’s *Reclining Rondo* (1975),” exemplify Greenfield’s early work of performance photography.

In “*Planes*,” two silhouetted dancers float vertically from handhold to circular handhold on a square wall grid. The image of *Reclining Rondo* foregrounds three dancers, two facing downstage and one facing upstage, in a line ascending in perspective toward the camera. The dancers recline on one hip, legs extended,
supporting themselves on their hands with the top arm bent and held close to their bodies; their focus is on the opposite arm, held long and straight, forward of their hips.

Another example of Greenfield's early work is a collection of photographs of Twyla Tharp's *Eight Jelly Rolls*, performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in March, 1976, and held in the Twyla Tharp Archives in the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute at The Ohio State University. While looking at these 35mm performance photographs, the differences between Greenfield's early and contemporary work become apparent. These Tharp photographs were taken in the theater with stage lighting. They are dimly lit, largely due to the stage lighting, dark floor and background, and are even more striking when considered in relationship to more recent examples of Greenfield's now bright, white cyclorama studio environment. In the Tharp images Greenfield documented Tharp's work, which she has said is not photogenic: "There are fascinating types of movement such as Twyla Tharp's which just don't slice up so easily into coherent split seconds." This elusive capture is due to the constantly undulating torso against rotating limbs, athletic turns and spins prominent in Tharp's work of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

During her days of photographing performances, Greenfield described her process as one of trusting herself as to when to snap the shutter; she could not second-guess herself or the repetition of the choreography or she would miss the shot. In a 1979 *Dance Life* interview, Greenfield said, "I work best cold. For me it's an instinctive thing and I believe now that I am looking less and just feeling it more.... I have to keep myself naïve and innocent so that I can just be amazed by whatever it is they are doing." Greenfield addressed the issue of translation when accurately
documenting a performance for a photographer: “You’re going from one art form, one medium, to another medium and each has different requisites for making it work.”26 Greenfield noted that what may be a powerful climax in a live performance context due to a musical crescendo complemented by a dramatic lighting cue may not necessarily translate to a dynamic photograph because the captured movement may be fairly minimal.27

While working mainly in performance photography, Greenfield became interested in instances of dance that could only be seen in a stop-motion photograph. In 1979 she told Dance Life, “I’m most interested in the uniquely photographic dance event.”28 She described a series of images she took of Andrew de Groat’s Rope Dance Translations (1974), a few of which are included with the article. In these photographs, the rope and its residual pathways are visible as thick, solid lines in space instead of the blur available in live performance. In the performance, “four people spin with rope and then he does a solo…. It is impossible to see him still while the ropes are spinning. This image can only exist as a photograph.”29 This interest in the “uniquely photographic dance event” led to the development of her signature style, which focuses on dance photography as the very event, moments captured in time that never danced across a proscenium or alternative space.

TRANSITION FROM STAGE TO STUDIO: DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW STYLE

At the end of the 1970s, Greenfield became disenchanted with performance photography: “She realized that such photographs could at best be only pale documents of onstage reality.”30 Greenfield also felt that performance photography was more of
“target practice” to capture the proper moment than an opportunity to make her own art. Greenfield produced most of the performance photographs of Mikhail Baryshnikov in Alan LeMond’s 1978 biography *Bravo Baryshnikov*! In referring to photographs of Baryshnikov in which she records the dancer at the peak of his jump, Greenfield said, “I realized that they were really complimenting Baryshnikov, and maybe my ability to capture that moment, but it had little value to me because I wasn’t putting anything of myself into it; I was just merely recording something which the eye could see in performance.” Greenfield “didn’t want to be limited to trying to snatch a moment from a distance at a dress rehearsal.” She wanted to do more than getting the right moment, a feeling similar to her dissatisfaction with photojournalism. Greenfield began to define what she wanted to portray with a dance photograph, and it was more than a reproduction of someone else’s dance work.

During the late 1970s, Greenfield yearned to use dance and photography to create a new medium. She told *Dance Life*, “I have enough respect for the dance to feel the photograph is a poor substitute. At the same time I value the unique qualities of my medium…. If that’s all the photograph is, i.e. a great moment captured, then for me it’s a mediocre photograph.” She realized that if she continued to take on as many commercial jobs as she had in the late 1970s, she said, “I couldn’t continue to meet demand and still develop my personal approach. I suppose I had just had enough of catering to the market.” Greenfield shifted her focus to her newly emerging style.

Greenfield acquired her own studio in 1980. Here she developed a lighting system more conducive to photographing her dancers than the stage lighting of the theatres she left behind. In her studio she wanted “the directional light I like, sweeping
across a 20-foot space, *without* shadowing the bodies of the dancers."\textsuperscript{39} Greenfield employed a cyclorama, a backdrop to set a uniform scene. In an article about Greenfield’s first experimentations along these lines, photography writer Charles McLaughlin described the setup: “Sometimes they use Greenfield’s gray cyclorama set, with a linoleum dancing floor, but more often they work on the standard 12-foot-wide seamless white paper (lit with a pair of 2400-watt/second strobes and two more as sidelights), the everyday fashion photography set.”\textsuperscript{40} The constraints of this set forced Greenfield to view her picture-taking in new ways, which influenced her developing style: “So it forced me to compress the dancers, and sometimes to crop them. And I realized that I liked those constraints and could work with them. I had to fight to make the dancers fit, and that limitation helped me go beyond the traditional esthetics of dance photography.”\textsuperscript{41}

As she moved away from performance photography, Greenfield concentrated less on capturing a choreographer’s work, and more on using dancers to create completely new images. “That’s what was getting me down about shooting in the theater…. I felt I was photographing someone else’s art. I wanted to personalize my experience. I wanted to create pictures which created interest without knowing who that dancer was, without being awed by the subject matter.”\textsuperscript{42} Greenfield supplemented her dance photography sessions with fashion photography shoots.

It was during a fashion photography session that Greenfield discovered the 2 1/4 square format Hasselblad camera, and it became her trademark. The “2 1/4 square format” refers to the negative size of this camera: the negative is square, instead of rectangular, as is a 35mm negative, and it also has an area of 2 1/4” by 2 1/4”.\textsuperscript{43} The
larger negative allows for greater image detail, and the square shape gives a square positive image. Instead of holding the camera up to one's face to take the picture as with a 35mm camera, the photographer holds it in front of herself and looks down into the viewfinder, much like with old Brownie cameras. The thin crank to advance the film runs the height of the camera box and must be scrolled, similar to an early movie camera. Because of the detail of the larger negative, this camera is popular among fashion photographers.44

In the Ewing interview in Breaking Bounds, Greenfield recalled that she "borrowed a Hasselblad because I needed it for some bread-and-butter fashion assignments."45 She experimented with it in a 1982 Village Voice photography studio session with then-Taylor dancers David Parsons and Daniel Ezralow.46 This was her second session with Parsons; a few months prior she had photographed a solo session with him as "one of the Voice's ten best dancers of that year,"47 using a 35mm camera. During this first improvisatory shoot, Greenfield "asked Parsons neither to recreate any of his roles in Taylor dances nor to pose for a conventional dancer's portrait. Instead, she put on some pop music and he began to jump and 'hit shapes' for the camera."48

In the second experiment, with Parsons, Ezralow, and the Hasselblad, Greenfield uncovered a new way of working, so much so that Ewing termed her "discovery"49 in the session as a "watershed, marking the start of [her] mature personal work."50 Greenfield describes the experience:

Now the camera had a slightly telephoto lens on it, which in effect propelled me forward and savagely limited the field of view. You're looking down into the viewfinder and everything you see is reversed, so bodies actually moving from left to right travel across the screen right to left.... But when I made prints the results were startling—those cropped or severed bodies hurtling through

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space. I knew I was on to something but to tell you the truth I didn’t know what.... It [the Hasselblad] could sync at a shutter speed of 1/500th of a second, meaning that I had more control over that flash of light, with the result that my pictures were sharper.... After this, my 35mm material seemed like junk to me... 

The improvisatory nature of the session put both Greenfield and the dancers at ease. There was no pressure to hit peak performance or to capture the perfect moment. Greenfield said about this first of many extemporaneous sessions, ""We felt free to take risks.... There was no fear of failure. They could give me anything I wanted."" Greenfield’s account of this session is worth quoting at length:

The next time, Dave came with Danny, and the two of them started jumping around, and I had to admire their tremendous energy, their try-anything spirit. In a sense we were very unlikely collaborators. Dave, as I’ve said, was a Paul Taylor dancer, and Taylor’s choreography didn’t develop those transitional movements I gravitated towards. And Danny was soon to leave Paul Taylor and join Momix, an offshoot of Pilobolus, and, like Pilobolus, acrobatic and gymnastic. So we were coming from different worlds in a way. Dan and Dave were just starting to discover how their bodies moved independently of choreography. And I felt like an amateur behind this new camera I had borrowed. Danny described himself as a piece of clay which he would throw up in the air to make a different shape each time. The dancer was being liberated from the dance! They had no preconceptions as to how they should look. We trusted each other and were free to fail.

Greenfield soon added a third body to the mix, MOMIX dancer Ashley Roland. Although she hesitated at first to include Roland in the experimentation, interestingly enough, for narrative possibilities, Greenfield found that the addition worked better than she had expected:

At first I was reluctant to have Ashley [Roland] alter the chemistry, as I feared she well might. I thought that two heterosexual men as partners was a dynamite idea. I’ve always believed the traditional male/female relationships in dance to be very played out, very sentimental. A non-erotic relationship,
more on the lines of a sibling rivalry, seemed to me to be just what the world
needed! When I added Ashley I worried that we'd somehow end up with a
conventional love story implied, a love triangle. But my fears immediately
proved groundless. Ashley was a female equivalent of Danny.\textsuperscript{54}

The discoveries of these early experiences were the crux of the collaborative
beginnings of Greenfield's work. David Parsons and his company, in effect, were the
seeds of collaboration for Greenfield that Martha Graham and her company had been
for Barbara Morgan.\textsuperscript{55}

CHARACTERISTICS OF GREENFIELD'S PHOTOGRAPHS

A post-1982 Greenfield photograph is characterized by a black square line
framing a seemingly endless white space, in which dancers appear juxtaposed, showing
varying levels of effort and the influence of gravity. This outline is not simply the edge
of the negative, but a purposeful part of the image: "And I'm asking you to take my
square \textit{literally} as a boundary, not just as an arbitrary window on infinity. So now
you've got the dancers butting their heads and brushing limbs against it, or hanging
onto it, or being pulled off it. There's a force, as it were, that surrounds the frame
that's affecting them, and it's something other than the usual conception of gravity."\textsuperscript{56}

This square further acts almost as the limits of a stage or performance space, hinting at
what lies beyond it: "Cropping into the dancers' bodies, the frame creates unexpected
entrances and exits. The viewer begins to consider 'off screen' space in relation to
depicted space."\textsuperscript{57} The theatricality of the images is an aspect that makes them the
"uniquely photographic dance event" Greenfield strove for in the late 1970s.
Another characteristic of a Greenfield photograph is the spatial tension between the dancers. “It is tension, or rather tensions, between various opposing forces which empower a Greenfield image.” It is not only spatial tension between the dancers, but also the equal tension—or lack thereof—of gravity, erased by both the equal pull of the four sides, and the lack of shadows on the floor from airborne dancers. These various forces are aptly seen in the dancers’ bodies, but are sometimes pulled by a prop, such as a wooden black frame or a bent mirror. The composition of Greenfield’s images creates this tension, which offers a balance to the pictures. For example, in a photograph of Bebe Miller’s Nothing Can Happen Only Once (see Figure 3, Chapter 5), the organization of the three dancers, engaged in various movements while complementing the positive and negative space of each other, in an ascending diagonal toward the camera, introduces a tension between these dancers in terms of their spatial distance from each other and the shape of the space they inhabit.

This tension and juxtaposition of bodies may go so far as to suggest plotlines and relationships between the characters. In her Dance Ink article “Translations,” Marcia Siegel discusses how she is “irresistibly persuaded to make up stories about them.” She continues, “Greenfield substitutes the mystery of identity and agency… for the hot breath of sexuality, transformation, and presence that engages us in live performances.” Greenfield emphasizes the non-narrative nature of her work, but this could perhaps parallel Merce Cunningham’s concept of the non-narrative in his work. Although his work is not narrative, he recognizes that by relating bodies in space, people may be inclined to draw narratives from it.
Another characteristic of Greenfield’s photographs is her use of manipulation to get the images she wants. She does not alter the print itself, as ballet legend Anna Pavlova was wont to do. “There is no studio or darkroom sleight-of-hand, no cables, no hidden supports, no dancers lying on the floor in attitudes of motion with the camera directly above, no printing-in of bodies after the fact.” Instead, Greenfield exercises her control over the environment and thus arranges what she wants her viewers to see. While she does not use “hidden supports” to prop up a dancer in an impressive arabesque, Greenfield may have a dancer hang onto an off-camera handhold so that only part of his or her body appears in the photograph. An example of Greenfield’s manipulation occurs in a series of photographs taken of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company entitled Freedom of Information. In this photograph, which, incidentally, Greenfield says is not typical of her way of working, there are dancers in varying levels of jumps: one on the floor, one flying in from the side, one jumping up from the center, and one that has apparently jumped so high out of the frame that we can only see his legs. Greenfield describes the process of this manipulation to Ewing, and stresses that it was successful because Jones and Zane were good collaborators. This session was also a turning point in how Greenfield worked with dancers in her studio:

We began with one dancer who is just out of frame. He was holding on to a sprinkler on the ceiling and standing on a ladder. An assistant you don’t see was holding up another dancer’s legs. And Bill T. was set to jump off a stool. So, when I gave the signal, the ladder was yanked out, the assistant let go of the legs, Bill T. jumped with his body in that arc-like shape, the girl flung herself across the cyclorama. And we did it twelve times before I felt confident that all the elements had come together—their movements and my timing, though you never know until you’ve seen the contact sheets. The paradoxical fact is that
when you’re looking through the camera you see everything but the instant when you actually click the shutter—in that instant the viewfinder is perfectly blank. More generally, they were the first company to come to me with choreography that they were willing to abandon. That’s when I realized that from here on, when I wasn’t forced to work to the choreographer’s agenda, I would ask my dancers to leave their choreography at the door. At times Greenfield’s work provokes us to question what is real, but manipulations such as this one add to the theatricality of her work.

Greenfield’s photographs are not only still images: each one is a two-dimensional theater. Motion is an inherent quality in a Greenfield photograph. Traditional dance photographs capture a split-second sliver of a dance moment, comparatively equal to a single note in a musical score. Instead of giving in to this characteristic of a trapped moment, the very paradoxical “fugitive” nature of dance photography, Greenfield wants to create an expanded moment to exist in time and space: “You see, I didn’t want to capture the thin slice of the split second, but to play with the elastic notion of the stretched moment.” This concept of a lengthened splice of time seems similar to the “B” shutter speed on a 35mm camera: when the camera is in the “B” mode, the photographer has control over how long the shutter remains open for a given picture. This technique can capture a series of motions, in one image, although the movement is usually blurred. Greenfield seems to be getting at this idea while having her dancers in sharp focus.

The physicality of movement is also a characteristic of Greenfield’s photographs. Through the angles, positions, tensions between, and stages of landing of the dancers, as well as the swirling of costumes and hair, Greenfield portrays motion through the halted action of her camera shutter. Marcia Siegel recognizes that dance
photographs do not have to be only documentary, but “can, in fact, do their own dance.” Greenfield’s images are dances unto themselves.

Greenfield’s photographs portray dancers in thought-provoking, gravity-defying situations. These situations do not necessarily appear realistic in their nature, but because photographs have credibility, they have an aura of realistic truth and accuracy. Her photographs often catch dancers in different levels of the air, seemingly floating or caught at the peak of a jump. The juxtaposition of movement also adds an element of time into Greenfield’s work, of the time and space in which the dancers exist: “And one of the areas I wanted to explore had to do with time and timelessness. In most photographs one luxuriates in the moment presented. You don’t look at a Diane Arbus or a Walker Evans and say, ‘I wonder what was happening a second or a split second earlier?’” In 1998 Deborah Jowitt wrote about the flexible time in Greenfield’s images: “The dancers in her compositions float, isolated from any implications of past or future. We know a leap must come down, but Greenfield makes us believe otherwise.”

It is her style of crafting her photographs that has brought praise and criticism to Greenfield’s work. Critics tend to respond to Greenfield’s photographs in terms of the dance photography paradox of portraying the moving art in static form, and whether she is aesthetically successful to that end. New York Times photography critic Charles Hagen praises Greenfield by saying that she has “perfected a singularly dramatic style.” In a metaphoric description, Hagen writes about the images, “Distilled to absolute gesture, they resemble calligraphic forms across the photographic frame.” Hagen sets Greenfield’s work apart by comparing it to another autonomous
art and referring to the Formalist aspects of the work. Hagen does find Greenfield’s dancers, which he describes as “rare and wonderful creatures,” frozen in space, but it does not appear to bother him: “But for all the tremendous sense of movement in the gestures of the dancers, the photographs are essentially static…. Because they so consistently appear in midair, they seem utterly weightless, pure idea.”

Conversely, Sarah Boxer, also a reviewer for the New York Times, criticizes Greenfield’s work for their static quality. Instead of life and motion, Boxer sees Greenfield’s photographs as “15-by-15 inch squares of eerie lifelessness.” Boxer does not seem to find ingenuity in these images, nor does she think Greenfield creates an autonomous form. She continues to say about Greenfield’s work: “Her pictures are of dancers caught in midair in improbable positions and with empty looks on their faces. In some, Ms. Greenfield has even erased the look of gravity…[taking] away the logical end of a gesture.”

Design Week’s Melanie Holman praises the aesthetic aspects of the work in Airborne: The New Dance Photography of Lois Greenfield while voicing a desire to know more about the dancers in the images: she seems to view Greenfield’s work in light of traditional dance photography instead of her own methods. Holman recognizes that Greenfield composes her images for the camera, and writes, “On the one hand, this gives the photographs an amazing clarity and a sense of people frozen in time, but on the other, the book focuses on the photographer’s creative expression, rather than that of the dancers.” Ironically, Holman is correct: Greenfield’s own work, as opposed to that commissioned by choreographers, is about her own creative expression because
she uses the forms of dancers’ bodies in space as her art media. She is not
photographing the dancers; the dancers compose her photographs.

AIMS AND PROCESS

As Greenfield’s work has become prominent in the postmodern dance field, it
has expanded to include more than improvisatory sessions in her studio. While
Greenfield still uses this technique to make work, she has expanded her working
repertoire to also photograph choreography or to capture the spirit of a choreographer’s
work. In their essay “Lois Greenfield’s Photochoreography,” William Ewing and
Benjamin Girardin define six categories of Greenfield’s photographs.

First, there are photographs in which Greenfield attempts to capture the essence
or spirit of a particular dance rather than depict a specific movement or gesture
visible in the stage performance.... Second, there are efforts to seize a literal
choreographic moment from a specific dance—that is, something very similar
to what would actually be seen in the theatre.... Then there are photographs in
which Greenfield attempts to capture the essence of a choreographer’s style
rather than represent a specific dance.... Fourth, there are photographs in which
Greenfield tries to portray the unique attributes, or style, of a particular
dancer.... Fifth, there are situations in which Greenfield herself starts out with
a preconceived idea in her mind.... Finally, there are experimental sessions in
which both Greenfield and her dancers improvise, allowing their imaginations
completely free rein. With some of these sessions lasting as long as eight
hours, there is enough time for both parties to fully investigate the potential of
new movements, gestures or group dynamics.76

By expanding her palette, Greenfield has added depth to her work in dance
photography as an autonomous art form.

Postmodern choreographer Bebe Miller has gone to Greenfield’s studio over
the past ten years, where Greenfield created publicity photographs for her company.

During these shoots, Miller and her company members improvised in front of the
camera, performed phrases from the Bebe Miller Company repertory, and altered choreographic phrases under Greenfield’s direction to create what Miller feels are effective images. What sets Greenfield apart from other photographers is that she photographs dancers in motion, instead of in poses: “You’re there moving,” Miller said. “You’ll do little bits of seven seconds or four seconds or twelve seconds…. She’s about motion. And you feel that.” In my interview with her, Miller stressed that Greenfield was not a documenter, but a photographer using bodies in space to create images either from particular points of a piece or from improvisation. Since the sessions occur in a studio setting without music, audience, or the continuous flow of a choreographic work, the context of a dance performance is absent.

In 1979, Greenfield spoke about her goals when working in a publicity capacity: “I try to come up with some middle ground between what I think makes a good picture, regardless of subject matter—and what represents the choreographer, what makes him unique.” She still holds these tenets today. Miller finds that Greenfield’s photographs of her company work as publicity because they are consistent and clear. “She really catches the height of a moment. It’s a simple thing, and it’s tricky,” Miller said about working with Greenfield. It is through Greenfield’s system of improvisation that she is able to get inside the work and represent a dancer or choreographer realistically and organically.

Miller contrasted Greenfield’s work to that of dance photographer Martha Swope, who once photographed the Bebe Miller Company. The Martha Swope photograph, obtained by posing Miller’s company onstage during a dress rehearsal, was static and unsuccessful. In recalling the experience, Miller said, “We just stood
there. She didn’t know the work. It’s not that Lois knew the work, but you go to [her] studio in order to dance.” The Bebe Miller Company photographs are the result of successful collaboration. Greenfield’s way of working in the studio by photographing movement is a good match for Miller’s constantly spiraling, partnering, moving choreography. Greenfield is also interested and inspired by Miller’s innovative movement, spontaneous energy, and intelligent choreography—which needs the luxury of unfolding in space in order to be captured well.

Greenfield’s process in the studio is of improvisation, structured improvisation, and making choices to create specific images in space. Her environment, although experimental and improvisational, is controlled by a structure. Miller described the experience of a photo shoot, which may last a full day: “You go in, and you chat, and you get your makeup on and you get comfortable. She doesn’t say, ‘Show me this piece.’ So it’s up to you to go in with an idea of where you want to go. And then she says, ‘What else? Try this. Smaller.’... She’s got a lot of control, and inside of that, there’s a lot of freedom.”

INFLUENCES

Lois Greenfield was influenced by a handful of photographers, from both the dance and art photography worlds. Greenfield considers herself to be working in both the worlds of photography and dance photography, and her influences reflect this. Dance photography influences include Barbara Morgan and Max Waldman; Greenfield cites Man Ray, Duane Michals, and Diane Arbus as influences from the art photography world. She takes inspiration from these other photographers such as
specific ways of using movement in a still photograph, and allowing the unassuming photograph to capture the form of its subject, which then becomes the content of the image. We can trace Greenfield’s photographic characteristics from the work of her predecessors through her own images and place her in dance photography history.

While Greenfield has developed her own photographic art form, her roots trace back to performance photography, and her work and spirit display the influence of Morgan and Waldman. From Morgan, Greenfield gleaned the possibility of working in a collaborative situation under controlled circumstances. She also saw Morgan’s montage as “her own choreography,” which in turn inspired Greenfield to choreograph specifically for the camera. Waldman had personal and professional influence on Greenfield. She felt the grainy quality of his pictures “was very effective as a dramatic element.” Waldman gave Greenfield confidence and showed her that photographs of the performing arts could be personalized visions unique to the photographer. He also allowed Greenfield into his private working space: “He rarely opened his studio to other photographers, fearing his secrets might be stolen, but he did to me, which was very trusting.” Waldman also encouraged Greenfield to experiment on her own to develop her style beyond photographing other people’s work for newspapers.

Diane Arbus began her career as a fashion photographer, but in her own work she wanted to photograph “things nobody would see unless she photographed them.” Her work, characterized by what Patricia Bosworth calls “unsettling photographs of freaks and eccentrics,” intrigued Greenfield. For Arbus, “the beauty of the photograph originated in the thing itself.” Arbus’s *Untitled* series features residents
of institutions for the mentally handicapped. Greenfield saw a collection of Arbus’s work as “a theater, with her subjects the actors,” and the influence of this theatrical camera work is apparent in Greenfield’s square-theatrical images. Greenfield was also drawn to the precise detail in Arbus’s prints, which “seemed to lend an unreality to the image, which is the reverse of what one would expect.” The informal quality of the composition of Arbus’s photographs influenced Greenfield as well: “Sometimes a picture’s ‘wrongness’ made it right.” There is an “unreality” to many of Greenfield’s photographs due to the way she captures bodies and objects intertwined in mid-air, but they somehow make sense.

Duane Michals inspired Greenfield by emphasizing the importance of creating photographic events that would not have existed without the photographer setting them up. Michals uses double exposures in his work, as well as a series of images to create an unfolding story—a theater. Interestingly, he has also taken pictures of dancers, both children and adults in various settings, from the New York City Ballet. Barrett places most of Michals’s work in his interpretive category (see Chapter 2) due to Michals’s staging of scenes in his images. Michals’s photographs have a sense of time about them, similar to Greenfield’s notion of the stretched moment: they are not static in time, but appear to exist in multiple moments at once. This time manipulation is another aspect of his work that attracted Greenfield: “He didn’t rely on the fixed moment—he would integrate the present with the past, juxtapose the dream with the reality and speculate on the future at the same time.” She was also inspired by a lecture Michals gave in which he said, “I want to create something that would not have existed without me.” This sentiment is evident in Greenfield’s work, as she
captures dance moments in time, like the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane *Freedom of Information* series, that would not have existed without her vision, their collaboration, her studio setup, or her manipulation of the bodies in space.

In addition to photographic influences, and although Greenfield does not cite her directly, Deborah Jowitt was most likely a mentor for Greenfield, if not also an influence on her work. Accompanying Jowitt’s *Village Voice* column was Greenfield’s initiation into dance photography, and through that partnership Greenfield learned about postmodern dance and formulated her ideas about capturing and portraying movement.

Through Greenfield’s history and influences, we can trace her roots to her current position in dance. Deborah Jowitt retrospectively wrote about Greenfield, “During the golden years when Greenfield’s photos regularly accompanied this column, I came to realize that she didn’t just record dance moments, she created them.” Even during the time when Greenfield was capturing others’ choreography in a seemingly documentary fashion, she worked to create moments on film that would not have existed without her, as influenced by Duane Michals. Her model of collaboration, inspired by that of Barbara Morgan with Martha Graham, is an evolution in dance photography of creating dance for the camera to make an autonomous art. Greenfield’s work is a hybrid: layers come together from art and dance photography, and from the dance world of choreography to make a new form that is more than the sum of its parts.

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Notes


2. Ewing, Bounds 99.


16. Ibid.

17. Greenfield in Kirschbaum 44

18. Greenfield in Kirschbaum 44.
19 Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 103-4.


21 Jowitt 337.


25 Ibid.

26 Greenfield, “More” 23

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.


33 Greenfield on Eye on Dance 236.

34 Greenfield, “About Lois”

35 Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 106.


37 Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 106.

38 Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 102.
39 Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 105.

41 Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 105.
42 Greenfield in Kirschenbaum 44.
44 Ibid.
45 Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 105.
46 Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 105-6.
47 McLaughlin 73.
48 Ibid.
49 Ewing, Bounds 106.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 McLaughlin 73, 75.
53 Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 110.
54 Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 111.
55 Lois Greenfield, e-mail to the author, 20 March 2003.
56 Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 116.
57 Greenfield, “About Lois”
58 Ewing, Bounds 14.
59 Greenfield, “About Lois”
61 Ibid.

63 Greenfield in Ewing, *Bounds* 111.

64 Greenfield in Ewing, *Bounds* 112.


66 Siegel 23.


70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.


74 Ibid.


76 Ewing and Girardin 108, 110.

77 Miller.

78 Ibid.


80 Bebe Miller, personal interview, 18 March 2003.

81 Ibid.

82 Greenfield, e-mail.
Miller.

Lois Greenfield, e-mail.


Ibid.


Greenfield, e-mail.


Ibid.


Arbus.

Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 107.

Greenfield in Ewing, Bounds 108.

Ibid.

Greenfield, e-mail.


Barrett, Photographs 70.


Ibid.

Jowitt, "In-Flight," 153.
CHAPTER 5

LOIS GREENFIELD UNDER INVESTIGATION: BEBE MILLER COMPANY

A human body in dance is not simply an object positioned in space, but an object in flux, moving from one place to another according to a specific plan. Relations between dance and photography are therefore necessarily problematic, because the dancer’s movements, charged with this larger meaning (the choreography), must nonetheless be distilled into a single image (or a few such images) at the expense of the whole. On the other hand, this process of distillation can also be the source of inspired imagemaking, as Greenfield’s work makes clear.¹

Greenfield’s photographs are not documentary, but they are successful and aesthetically pleasing images of dance through their use of spatial tension and composition, and the movement of dancers she creates in the frame, a two-dimensional black-bordered square proscenium. Greenfield is proud that she has freed dance photography from the poses and peak moments historically inherent in the form, and has instead encouraged improvisation and the dancers’ self-expression.² While Greenfield’s photographs do not necessarily portray specific choreographies, they do depict dance movement. She uses bodies to paint pictures. Choreographers like Bebe Miller find Greenfield’s images successful because of the consistent quality of her work and her ability to make the dancers look good. What initially excited and appealed to me about Lois Greenfield’s work, aside from the aesthetically pleasing
nature of strong, crafted bodies beautifully juxtaposed in space, were two questions: What is this? and How does this relate to dance history? There is something captivating about these photographs that lies at the intersection of these questions.

In her book Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance, Susan Foster finds meaning in a dance through its choreographic structure. She writes, "'Reading dancing' is the name I have given to this active interpretation of dance as a system of meaning." Foster uses the theories of postmodern philosophers Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Hayden White to construct her "theory of representation in dance." In examining Greenfield's photographs, I employed a similar system of reading by drawing on the writing of Barthes, and also on that of Walter Benjamin. Each image can be seen as an intertextual Barthesian tissue: the personal and professional influences on Greenfield's work compose the layers, or the threads, of this intertext. Using McNamara's anti-objectivist phenomenological hermeneutics and Brooks's concept of the scholar as text interpreter (see Chapter 2), I used these outside sources as a grounding basis incorporated into my modernist interpretation of the images. The layers of the photographs in terms of influence place Greenfield in history as a product of dance photography history. Her innovations are a new development, evolution, and furthering of the field.

THE APPLIED THEORY

Many theorists have written on the subject of photography, and have questioned its nature of capturing life, truth, and points in time. Defending the truth portrayed through photography, Susan Sontag states that "the camera record justifies. A
photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture.\textsuperscript{5} This truth is one of the aspects of Greenfield's work that makes it captivating: there are real bodies making shapes in what appears to be real time and space, but the process of achieving these images is undisclosed. The images develop into something beyond a dance photograph to become an autonomous work of art through which dancers' bodies are compositionally manipulated in the space.

The writings of modernist Walter Benjamin and postmodernist Roland Barthes draw parallels with the questions I ask about the movement-capturing nature of Greenfield's photographs. They also question the nature of authorship in a work, which resonates with the improvisational structure Greenfield uses in her work. Another emerging question is, What is captured in a photograph? In Greenfield's work, the form is the content. But does the form remain the content when a photographer captures the content of another artist's work? Greenfield challenges the notion that dance photography necessarily reproduces the performance work of a choreographer.

Greenfield stopped practicing performance photography because she believed viewers equated a dancer's impressive leap with a good photograph, even if the photograph itself was poorly composed; the purpose of that type of photograph seemed to be to reproduce brilliant dance moments instead of creating them (see Chapter 4). In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin relates the fate of art in the face of mechanical modernity as reduced only to reproductions instead of
experiencing the original artwork. He wrote, “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.” In dance photographs such as those that perfectly capture an endless saut de chat, the context and “presence in time and space” will always be lacking because it is only a slice of the longer dance work, even if it makes a convincing and even aesthetically pleasing photograph.

While Greenfield may capture various facets of a choreographer’s work in her photographs, she gets farther into the movement either through improvisation or through zooming in on transitional, instead of peak, choreographic moments. She still chooses what to snatch in the frame, which was in existence in her studio at the time of the photo shoot. There may be narrative and emotional layering in the content of the choreography when it is in the context of onstage performance. When the choreography or improvised movement sequences are executed in Greenfield’s studio, however, there is no thematic overlay and she only looks at the present form. Greenfield’s images do not reproduce choreography, but capture newly generated movement that lend themselves to the Formalist nature of her work.

In his essay “The Author as Producer,” Benjamin writes from a literary position, and he refers to photography in terms of press photography, or photojournalism. Press photography and performance photography are both seemingly objective, as they capture events unfolding before the lens. They may carry a subjective side, however, as they aim to portray an event from the photographer’s vantage point. In writing about photojournalism, Benjamin challenges his reader to insist on the revolutionary value of technical progress as the basis of one’s “political”
or creative process: "the barriers of competence must be broken down by each of the
productive forces they were created to separate, acting in concert." We can relate
these "barriers of competence" to the three producing authors of a performance
photograph: the photographer, the choreographer, and the dancer. Greenfield has
broken these barriers through her structure of improvisation without relying on
choreography. This revolutionary innovation is at the heart of Greenfield's technical
progress as an author, a photographer of dance.

Greenfield has fashioned a new form; her working structure stands alone as a
method for others to use as a model. Benjamin wrote, "A writer who does not teach
other writers teaches nobody. The crucial point, therefore, is that a writer's production
must have the character of a model: it must be able to instruct other writers in their
production and, second, it must be able to place an improved apparatus at their
disposal." Greenfield's improved apparatus is her collaboration through
improvisation, which leads to a single-author structure. It could be argued that the
dancers also add an authoritative element to Greenfield's work because they are
contributing their ideas through their improvisation. However, since Greenfield makes
the decisions about placing dancers in space and printing specific photographs from the
many shots on a roll of film, she is the primary author. Her work has characteristics of
a model: she was the first and remains one of the only dance photographers to generate
an image through movement improvisation. Greenfield has fashioned a hallmark form:
the black square border framing a white horizonless landscape marks a photograph
with her signature.
In his essay “The Death of the Author,” Barthes discusses the absence of an author altogether. It is not only a death, but a birth that Barthes relates. Barthes states that when there is an established author to a text, that author is seen as the text’s parent, having a nourishing position of authority over the text. In contemporary work this is not the case, as no longer does Barthes see the author as an established figure but rather as one as young as the product: “the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now.”

As Deborah Jowitt has said, Greenfield “snatches the image out of a field of motion.” Since Greenfield generates many of her images through improvisation there is no other place for her to be except in the “here and now,” as improvisation occurs in the moment. Furthermore, while she has trained her eye to snap the shutter at moments she believes will create an effective image, she nonetheless relies on her instinct when she is in the moment. Due to the conditions under which she works, and since she works from movement instead of from static poses, there is little opportunity to fully plan a photographic shot. Greenfield as “scriptor” is “born” with her text, her photographs, as she makes new discoveries with the inception of new images.

In his essay “The Rhetoric of the Image,” Barthes returns to this notion of a shared reality; this time it is in the form of a *having-been-there*. The evolution of this theory within the passage is worth quoting at length:

The type of consciousness the photograph involves is indeed truly unprecedented, since it establishes not a consciousness of the *being-there* of the thing (which any copy could provoke) but an awareness of its *having-been-
there. What we have is a new space-time category: special immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the here-now and the there-then. It is thus at the level of this denoted message or message without code that the real unreality of the photograph can be fully understood: its unreality is that of the here-now, for the photograph is never experienced as illusion, is in no way a presence (claims as to the magical character of the photographic image must be deflated); its reality that of the having-been-there, for in every photograph there is the always stupefying evidence of this is how it was, giving us, by a precious miracle, a reality from which we are sheltered.12

Performance photography has a having-been-there feeling because it was, in effect, there: the performance happened. While Greenfield’s photographs are not taken of a performance in a theater and only allow the few in the studio the luxury of having-been-there, they hold a tangible yet somehow unreachable reality to those not present at the shooting. In “Memory 1993,” (Figure 4) it is curious how Nikki Castro caught Earnie Stephenson’s head on his way up (or down?) from a jump. It is just this type of “stupefying evidence” that excites Greenfield in her work: “But because of the seeming impossibility of what my dancers are doing you can’t help asking yourself, ’Where are they coming from? Where are they going?’ Or even, ‘How is he going to land without breaking his neck?’ It intrigues me that in 1/500th of a second I can allude to past and future moments even if these are only imagined.”13

In his book Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, Barthes sets forth his theories surrounding photography in forty-eight short chapters. Many of the ideas contained therein reflect the function of photography, the presence of death in a photograph, Barthes’s desire for photographs to speak to their viewers, and the characteristic that photographs contain an aura of mystery. In a further developed idea in Camera Lucida, Barthes refers to the paradoxical intangibility similar to that in
Greenfield’s work: “Here the Photograph’s platitude becomes more painful, for it can correspond to my fond desire only by something inexpressible: evident (this is the law of the Photograph) yet improbable (I cannot prove it). This something is what I call the air (the expression, the look).” Greenfield’s work has evidence, as photography truthfully portrays what is before the lens, although she may use off-camera props to produce—conjure—a certain look. Greenfield’s work is the air that Barthes mentions in this passage—it has an expression and a look, but many of her images cannot be deconstructed outside the context of the photograph frame. Two examples of this in *Breaking Bounds* are the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company *Freedom of Information* series (see Chapter 4) with dancers flying in from various sides of the image with help from off-camera props, and an image of Elizabeth Streb/Ringside in which Streb’s dancers float in space among airborne rubber balls.

One paradox of Greenfield’s work is that of translation. Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida*, “By nature, the photograph... has something tautological about it: a pipe, here, is always intractably a pipe. It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself.” A dance photograph, however, is not always a dance performance: the viewing of a live art form gets lost in the translation to a still image. Greenfield’s work is not a reproduction, and it is not redundant because it is new. Therefore, Greenfield’s photographs do not have this translation to lose, as Greenfield uses movement as the means to the end of a still image portraying motion. She does not, in effect, translate anything. The dance captured in her frame is the first of its kind. Since Greenfield does not capture another choreographer’s work previously unfolded onstage, she does not translate stage to page. She translates spherical, three-
dimensional bodies in space to a planar, two dimensional page, but due to her use of lighting techniques and photographic composition, the dancers appear to retain their three-dimensionality.

In an article discussing the work of Greenfield and that of Greenfield's contemporary Philip Trager, appropriately titled "Translations," dance critic Marcia Siegel says, "Trager and Greenfield fix dancers in webs of inference, turn them into emblems of continuities to be imagined only by the viewer." Here, by creating "emblems of continuities," Greenfield suggests a representative beginning rather than a static end.

ANALYZING THE PHOTOGRAPHIC TEXTS

Four Greenfield images of the Bebe Miller Company I analyze and read here are "Standing Trio" and "Dancing Quartet" from the Tiny Sisters in the Enormous Land series, and two images from the Nothing Can Happen Only Once series, one sharing the title of the work and the other entitled "Memory 1993." While these photographs share their titles with Miller works, the connection seems only to resonate in the costumes: the improvisation employed to get these images has grown beyond the choreography.

In "Standing Trio" (Figure 1), Sarah Gamblin, Bebe Miller, and Rebecca Wortman look as if they are scared of what is above them. They stand on relevé, their feet varying widths apart, their heads tipped backward with eyeballs darting to the ceiling. Light shines off their collarbones, cheekbones, and chins. All elbows are bent. Gamblin's hands drip off her wrists, dangling at her waist. Miller's hands clasp at her
Figure 1. “Standing Trio” *Tiny Sisters in the Enormous Land*. From the Bebe Miller Collection, courtesy of the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, the Ohio State University Libraries.
ribcage. Wortman gathers her skirt in her ribcage-level clenched fists; her shoulders rise in the effort. The form here is simple, the movement arrested. The trio is placed slightly right of the photograph’s center. It is one of the few Greenfield images that seems to show emotional narrative—namely, fear and uncertainty.

Formalist composition, however, is Greenfield’s interest in this image. Greenfield does not strive for narrative in her photography, but for irrationality; she is not interested in an image in which a viewer can find a concrete narrative. The arrangement of the dancers in this image, furthermore, does not appear in the dance *Tiny Sisters*, but was a result of the photography session. When I asked Miller if this movement was from the *Tiny Sisters* choreography, she demonstrated part of a movement phrase and said, “Actually, no, there is a moment... we do something, we [go up] and down, and [Greenfield] said, ‘Oh, that’s good.’ It’s always hard to figure out what to show her, because it’s out of the longer phrase, so which part of the longer phrase, and why is that captivating?”

Another photograph in the *Tiny Sisters* series, “Sarah Solo,” shows Sarah Gamblin with her weight thrown into her supporting leg, with her twisted torso flung back and free leg dangling. She is improvising; Miller said Greenfield was looking at Gamblin to use for movement creations in her own work, not necessarily for Miller’s publicity. Yet this was the image on the poster advertising the *Tiny Sisters* performance. “She’s a photographer, and she’s looking at images,” Miller said. “She’s not going to be [a documenter].”

In the “Dancing Quartet” from *Tiny Sisters* (Figure 2), the dancers wear dark and light shades of what look like thick panniers, sleeveless with lace-up bodices and
Figure 2. “Dancing Quartet” *Tiny Sisters in the Enormous Land*. From the Bebe Miller Collection, courtesy of the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, the Ohio State University Libraries.
full skirts intermittently gathered by a knot. Heidi Henderson is foregrounded, framed by Frances Craig, Rebecca Wortman, and Sarah Gamblin. There is depth between Henderson and the dancers in the background, creating a spherical environment. The Tiny Sisters images portray a large amount of movement. Perhaps it is due to the motion shown by the swirling skirts.

Henderson has just landed on her bent left leg; her right leg, in a two-degree flexion, points low behind her with a pointed foot. Her right arm strikes the air above and in front of her forehead, with her flat palm pushing forward. The spiral resulting across her back pulls her left elbow toward her right heel; the elbow is bent and the wrist cocks to rest the fingers on the biceps. Her head is thrown back, and she focuses on something above her. Henderson’s skirt billows behind her.

Craig and Wortman look as if they have been spinning. Their torsos face flat to the front and their heads profile to the left. Their bent legs are apart on the floor; Wortman slightly lifts her flexed foot off the floor. Craig’s straight arms extend from her back, curved as if she were holding a bucket, while Wortman’s hands are amongst the sides of her billowing skirt. Gamblin, having just landed on her right leg with her left crossed in front, seems ready to take off again to the left. Her torso bends slightly forward, hinged from her waist, and she tilts her pelvis back. Gamblin’s left arm and skirt swing backwards. Her mouth gently hangs open and her eyes dart to focus on something diagonally in front of her.

Both Tiny Sisters images show a sense of wonderment, uncertainty, and fear, largely due to the dancers’ rigid torsos and bewildered facial expressions. In the original version of this piece, which Miller has nicknamed “Little Tiny” due to its
smaller-scale version in relation to the larger, revised work, the four dancers cower
together, quickly shout out orders and fears at each other, and stomp their booted feet
in rhythmic patterns, interspersed with larger phrases of full-body movement. These
photographs do convey the spirit of the work: this ability to capture the overall spirit of
a work is something Greenfield may have inherited from Barbara Morgan. Another
Morgan influence is in the use of the skirts in “Dancing Quartet.” Miller noted that
Greenfield has a talent for organizing photographic accessories such as fabric, props,
and other costume articles while weaving them into her images.

In her interview with William Ewing, Greenfield cites Morgan’s influence on
this aspect of her work: “I liked the way she was able to work with costume so as to
reveal movement—Letter to the World is a good example, with the skirt’s swirl making
manifest the preceding movements of the leg…”25 The air billowing under Craig’s and
Wortman’s skirts adds to the sense of spinning movement, adding to their seeming
confusion and disorientation.

In “Nothing Can Happen Only Once” from Nothing Can Happen Only Once
(Figure 3), the three dancers form an upstage to downstage diagonal over a bleached
wooden floor that fades into the white background at its horizon line. Due to their
placement on the diagonal, the dancers appear in perspective, with Renée Lemieux
seemingly smallest at the back left-hand side, growing through Phillip Adams to Nikki
Castro as the largest down front on the right.

Lemieux is airborne. Her legs bend at their tightest flexion as her knees poke
out from under her thigh-length pleated white skirt. Her feet flex perpendicularly to
her shins; her toes point down, away from the outline of her body. From her squared
Figure 3. “Nothing Can Happen Only Once” Nothing Can Happen Only Once. From the Bebe Miller Collection, courtesy of the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, the Ohio State University Libraries.
shoulders Lemieux holds her arms straight down her sides with her hands hidden behind her spread skirt. Her curly dark hair has blown straight upwards from the jump, and her sternocleidomastoid protrudes with the effort of profiling her head over her left shoulder. There is no shadow on the floor under Lemieux’s figure, making her appear to float or seem further disattached from Adams and Castro than she already is.26

Adams, apparently returning from a jump, inclines his torso slightly forward to balance the bend in his knees. There is air under his right foot, and his left toe has just contacted the floor. His arms sway backwards to counterbalance his landing. Facing left, Adams occupies the negative space left by Lemieux. They could have a conversation if the depth of space between them was not so great.

Castro’s body, while the farthest downstage, is not the most prominent. Her knees are thrown forward and her torso hinges backwards over her arched feet. The force of the hinge has thrown Castro’s arms back and her head forward in space. Her dress clings to the shape of her body; the skirt gently billows. Castro’s hands visually overlap with the left side of Adams’s body. The angles of the dancers’ bodies thrust away from each other form a lopsided triangle with the floor.

The placement of the dancers in this image gives the photograph a sense of depth into the boundless white space. They also inhabit three levels in space: Lemieux is in midair; Adams returns from midair; and Castro throws her weight off the ground. The dancers seemingly represent these three positions at once, a montage of one dancer’s descent. The cascade of space from the top of Lemieux’s head to the flare of Castro’s skirt is aesthetically pleasing to me, and the space between the dancers is tangible, as if everything fits together like building blocks. Greenfield employs a
compositional device in this photograph reflecting Morgan’s use of montage
techniques. Greenfield interpreted these as compositional devices: “I saw her double
exposures, or montages, which showed different aspects of the dance in the same
frame, as, in effect, her own choreography.”

In “Memory 1993” from Nothing Can Happen Only Once (Figure 4), Nikki
Castro looks as if she has picked Earnie Stephenson up by the nape of his neck with
both of her hands. He is suspended in her hands, his body in a table-top position
transposed to mid-air. By the look on her face, Castro seems to enjoy this.
Stephenson’s short dreadlocks radiate around his head, straight up. He must be coming
down from a jump, because it does not seem that Castro could have obtained such a
strong hold on his head on the way up. Furthermore, his hair flying upward indicates
gravity pulling his head in the opposite direction. Stephenson’s limbs hang helplessly
from his hip and shoulder joints. Because of her hasty, sudden weight shift onto her
right leg with hair slightly breezing behind, Castro seems to have stepped into
Stephenson’s figure to grab him.

This image presents an awkwardly enticing position for two people to find
themselves in. It seems as though Castro is active and Stephenson is passive—but
Stephenson must have added to this power play initially, as he needed to be somewhat
active to launch himself into the air. The title of the photograph lends to its
interpretation, but a memory of what? It may be an inside joke, perhaps, or a pet name
for a section of an established movement phrase. The positioning of the dancers in the
right side of the photograph draws the viewer’s eye straight to them, but also
Figure 4. “Memory 1993” *Nothing Can Happen Only Once*. From the Bebe Miller Collection, courtesy of the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, the Ohio State University Libraries.
acknowledges the space in the back left corner of the image that the dancers leave uninhabited.

Neither of these two *Nothing Can Happen Only Once* images appear in the evening-length work. Furthermore, in this dance, books flood the stage for most of the piece, periodically moved around by the dancers. There are no books or prop bookcases in the photographs associated with this work as there were onstage. These two images seem to be the result of improvising in costumes. However, some photographs of this work in the series of contact sheets do portray a moment from the performance: one dancer dives, horizontally and headfirst, into the arms of a handful of fellow performers. These contact sheet images, except for the airborne dancer, are not as exciting to view as the others discussed in this chapter. The stationary dancers positioned to catch the headlong dancer are not so dynamically exhilarating.

While Miller's movement is visually stimulating, through its dynamic weight shifts and limbs using a variety of reach depths in their kinespheres, it is a technique that emphasizes releasing weight into the floor rather than jumping. Airborne dancers, however, create an understanding of movement because there had to be movement in order for them to get into the air in the first place, and there will be movement again when they come down for a landing. In order to remain within Greenfield's consistent aesthetic, in studio photography shoots Miller's dancers take to the air to add level variety and motion to the images.

What differentiates Greenfield's work from that of other dance photographers is that she crafts moments in space, demonstrated in the way Lemieux, Adams, and Castro relate to each other on the ascending diagonal in Figure 3. The contact sheet
containing this image shows a variety of “takes” to arrive at this particular one carved in space. In the other attempts, Lemieux’s facing alternates, her legs are at different stages of flexion, and in one she has landed with her pelvis tilted awkwardly backward like a graceful duck. Adams and Castro are in varying stages of their jump and thrust, which skews their spatial relationship to each other. The dancers truly are Greenfield’s media, as she molds and manipulates their positioning on her canvas.

Greenfield’s photographs are, according to Terry Barrett’s categorization, aesthetically evaluable (see Chapters 2 and 4), due to their Formalist composition that lends to aesthetic evaluation. Greenfield chooses images to print that she finds have dynamic configurations of dancers with calm expressions on their faces, caught in movements with gestures in seemingly perfect relationships to each other.30 Miller finds Greenfield’s photographs aesthetically pleasing and successful, both as pictures and as publicity. She said, “They’re really well done, easy to use, and they all look good…. She’s incredibly consistent. It’s consistent for very clear reasons. She works in her studio, the lighting design is fairly consistent, the floor, …the square format, how she edges the body. She knows what she’s looking for.”31

These images of Bebe Miller’s company capture the spirit of Miller’s work, reflecting the influence of Barbara Morgan’s techniques on Greenfield. “We give her the spirit,” Miller said.32 In the composition of Greenfield’s images, influence of Morgan’s montage techniques comes through, especially in the cascade of “Nothing Can Happen Only Once” (Figure 3). Furthermore, the images were made through a model similar to Morgan’s collaboration, but one that went beyond Morgan’s staging of the works and featured Greenfield’s authored innovation of using collaborative
improvisation to arrive at composite images. These photographs are Greenfield’s
visions, as she worked with Miller’s company to place the dancers where she wanted
them compositionally in space. Creating photographs of dance unique to the
photographer’s visions reflects Max Waldman’s influence on Greenfield.

We can find layers of history and historical influence in the visual display of
Greenfield’s images: Barbara Morgan, Max Waldman, even Fred Fehl and the
experience of accompanying Deborah Jowitt’s columns with performance photographs.
Additional layers include the dancers’ training, the structure of Miller’s choreography
abandoned at the shoot, and the spirit of it instead left in its wake. While Greenfield
holds a multi-layered, multi-influenced, and influential place in dance history, her
photographs need only to be “read” for how they appear at face value: dynamic, tonal,
aesthetically pleasing images of dancers’ bodies and costumes in space.
Notes


2 Lois Greenfield, e-mail to the author, 20 March 2003.


4 Foster xx.


8 Benjamin, “Author” 27.


10 Ibid.


13 Ewing, Bounds 116.


15 Ewing, Bounds 53.

16 Barthes, Lucida 5.


19 Heretofore referred to as *Tiny Sisters*.

20 Bebe Miller Collection, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute.

21 Heretofore referred to as *NCHOO*.

22 Greenfield, e-mail.

23 Bebe Miller, personal interview, 18 March 2003.

24 Ibid.


26 Thank you to Professor of Art Charles Massey at The Ohio State University for helping me see this.


28 Bebe Miller Collection, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute.

29 Miller.

30 Greenfield, e-mail.

31 Miller.

32 Ibid.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Greenfield’s work as an autonomous photographer has brought her attention in the dance world and public sphere. Her innovative work is part of the rich history of dance and dance photography. She has expanded the art of capturing dance and uses that method to create new dances. Ewing and Girardin wrote about her role in the New York dance scene, “It was her métier to produce dramatic and original imagery for myriad dance companies.... Week after week, for more than twenty years, dancers and choreographers of every stripe have stopped by her Lower Manhattan studio to leave a permanent visual record of their otherwise ephemeral art.”¹ Greenfield is clearly a photographer and not a dance documenter, but does she have a documentary responsibility to the dance community?

Although Greenfield does not document the work of choreographers she photographs, hers are the prominent images of late-twentieth century postmodern dance. What record will her images leave for audiences thirty and fifty years from now? When I posed this inquiry to Bebe Miller, she answered: “This is exactly why she doesn’t call herself a documenter. What [you’ll] see over time is not about the work. It’s about images of dance. It’s not about images of repertory... it’s all about
light and shadow and movement... it also points out that dance is there, it’s a live art form and [you won’t necessarily] have a record.”

Greenfield’s work is a re-evaluation of the discipline of dance photography. She has taken the traditional methods of photography, dance photography, and the choreographic structure of composing dances, and has created a hybrid form that accomplishes all three tasks. Greenfield feels that she has opened the field to allow people to appreciate dance photographs for their compositional dynamics, and not just for the choreography they portray. Despite some reviewers’ criticism that the dancers in Greenfield’s images are statically frozen in the square-frame-enclosed white space instead of caught in a moment of motion, Greenfield succeeds in creating dances in her images. These are dances in another set of dimensions, dances of stillness that portray motion and that occur in one second but last forever. As Marcia Siegel wrote about Greenfield’s work, “Who’s to say that any of these is not a dance?”

In fifty years, these Greenfield images may not tell audiences what certain specific choreographic moments looked like. They will portray, however, the physical appearances of the dancers and the costumes used in the work. Since she works mostly with improvisation, Greenfield captures the organic movement of the dancers she photographs. Future audiences will have that as their record, to add to the genre of portraiture. Furthermore, since improvisation and dancer individuality within a group dance has been an important part of making work in the late twentieth century, Greenfield’s images will carry forth that idea as representing this span of dance history.

Greenfield mostly photographs choreographers who align themselves with postmodern dance. While Greenfield’s photographs are of seemingly postmodernist
subjects, the images themselves are modernist in Greenfield's Formalist concern that the form equals the content. Greenfield's images also reflect ideas of postmodernism in that each one has no set beginning or end, and the nature of improvising in front of the camera makes something and then throws it away. As illustrations of this idea, the Judson artists created dance upon dance that were performed once, not documented, and never seen again. The Judson choreographers believed dance should be as disposable as tissues. Although the work they created may be seen Formally as high modernism, they shared postmodern views behind the work. While these ideas in Greenfield's work exemplify capturing the spirit of this postmodern genre of dance, her photographs remain modernist.

Greenfield's photographs also stand as artworks unto themselves, and reflect advancements in photography. Some of these progressions include the electric power of the flash bulbs and other lights in her fashion photography set, which were developments throughout the century but are not specific to Greenfield. Greenfield brings to the process a photographer's specific consideration for her subjects, exemplified in the sprung wood floor that is part of her studio set so her subjects are able to dance fully. "She's sensitive to what a dancer needs," Miller said.5

While she sees herself as having a foot in the camps of both photography and dance photography,6 Greenfield's work is part of dance photography history. What Greenfield has done, however, is allowed the two art forms of dance and photography to meet on equal ground. For much of their histories the technologies of dance and photography were not quite lined up to be useful or truly collaborative for either side. Dance and photography came together for the first time in a successfully equal
collaborative effort in Barbara Morgan’s *War Theme* (1941), the style of which inspired Greenfield to experiment with movement and camera. Greenfield found “a synthesis of dance and photography which put the two arts on an equal footing. It is within this ambitious enterprise that the photographer has obtained her greatest pleasure and her finest results.”

Through the collaboration between dance and photography, Greenfield found her collaborative structure with her dancers and generated the form that is now an established part of the postmodern dance culture: “She’s a cultural phenomenon,” said Miller. Greenfield follows in the line and spirit of modern/postmodern dance by breaking the canon and innovating upon it. She is part of dance photography history, because she was influenced by pioneers and major figures in the field; she innovates upon their work to further the art of dance photography. Her work is a true hybrid form, as her photographs are neither straight dance nor straight photography, but a solution that blends both. Through photographing prominent postmodern companies and creating signature dance works with them, Greenfield has created for herself a place in dance and dance photography history.
Notes


2 Bebe Miller, personal interview, 18 March 2003.

3 Lois Greenfield, e-mail to the author, 20 March 2003.


5 Miller.

6 Greenfield, e-mail.

7 Ewing and Girardin 110.

8 Miller.
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