

Joie noire

Jimmy Robert

Bibliography and resource list

Bibliography

Cynthia Acevedo, Marion Banzhaf with Tracey Morgan and Karen Ramspacher, Yannick Durand, Zoe Leonard, Rachel Lurie, Maxine Wolfe, in **Eds. ACT UP New York Women and AIDS Book Group, Women, AIDS, and activism, South End Press. Boston, MA: 1990**

‘Untitled: Disco Deconstructed’ is the first in a long-term series of remixes featuring dance tunes that have played an important part in my sonic biography. Throughout my DJ career they have been and continue to be my go to songs for the dance floor.

– **Ain Bailey, ‘Untitled: Disco Deconstructed’, 2013-2019**

AIDS. How did AIDS enter into language? The first acronym used to describe the disease was GRID – Gay Related Immune Deficiency. That acronym was abandoned when it became clear that AIDS did not exclusively affect gay people. Groups identified as high risk for AIDS in the earliest days of the epidemic included injection-drug users, poor people, some racial minorities and Haitians. medical surveillance established the high-risk groups among some of the most vulnerable minorities in society, people who suffered tremendously from prejudice and stigma. Perhaps that is the reason why, whatever the medical name, AIDS was for many an unspeakable disease until it proliferated into a massive, visible crisis. To start this enquiry I must ask a fundamental question: what exactly is AIDS? I should be able to tell you, as I have been living with AIDS for over twenty years. But I can’t.

– **Gregg Bordowitz, *General Idea: Imagevirus, Afterall.* London: 2010**

“...He just bops around. He’s hot. You discoed good, babe. It was real good disco. Disss-co.” Steven’s conversation continues like that for at least a whole day after Saturday-night disco. A running analysis of the night before, the night that’s really morning, beginning around 1am and lasting until 7 or 8. Of course, that’s not counting the preparation, which begins early Saturday. Getting your disco act together. Finding a member to go with. Eating lots of protein, but early in the day. Resting up. Deciding what drugs to take and what clothes to wear. The clothes are particularly important because, apart from wanting the right look, you have to figure out how much you can comfortably shed or allow to get drenched in sweat without its bringing you down. At least until about 5.30, when nothing can bring you down. At that point, the music is always good, there’s plenty of room on the dance floor, and only the serious discourse are left. But best of all your body has quit resisting. It has unstoppable momentum. That is the one thing about disco comparable to any other experience. It’s like what happens in distance running or swimming. You pass a point where you’re beyond tired, beyond pain, beyond even thinking about stopping, thinking only that this could go on forever and you’d love it. It’s pure ecstasy. Nothing matters but disco, and nothing—not sex, not food, not sleep, nothing—is better.

[...]

He worked as an illustrator for Butterick Patterns, and I was teaching at the School of Visual Arts and struggling to find my voice as a critic. We rarely saw each other during the week and had little in common beyond our disco companionship, but to that we were extremely faithful. Having a dance partner who wasn’t a boyfriend worked well for disco: it kept the emotional experience musical and communal, uncomplicated by the petty jealousies that come with lovers who are just as attracted as you are to the guys dancing nearby. If Steven said, “Let’s go dance next to Bobby – he’s hot,” I thought, Sure, with lovers who are just as attracted as you are to the guys dancing nearby. If Steven said,

“Let’s go dance next to Bobby – he’s hot,” I thought, Sure, let’s. And Steven or I could wander off and dance with whomever we pleased, knowing that we’d find our way back to each other soon enough and always be there at the end of the night to leave together. I don’t think there was ever a time when either of us went home with someone else. “Dance partner” doesn’t mean the same thing for disco as it does for, say, Fred and Ginger. With disco at its best, dancing is both individual and collective. You might connect with the stranger dancing next to you at a given moment, but it’s not a couples thing; it’s boogie intimacy, which can be very intense and sexy, but it’s usually limited to dancing together for a while before you each dissolve back into the crowd or return to your “partner.” In this respect, the innovations of disco mirrored the ethos of gay liberation regarding the expansion of affectional possibility. Coupling was newly seen not as a “happily-ever-after” compact but as an in-the-moment union for sharing pleasure.

– **Douglas Crimp, ‘Disss-Co (A Fragment)’, Before Pictures, University of Chicago: 2016**

To my mind, the most telling assessment of Farrell is that of Diana Adams, interviewed about Farrell by David Daniel for Ballet Review. It was Adams who discovered Farrell in Cincinnati when scouting for young dancers to bring to the School of American Ballet on scholarships paid for by a Ford Foundation grant. In the interview, Adams fiercely defends Farrell as someone possessed of both an extraordinary talent and an iron will. “The only real answer to the question of ‘Why Suzanne?’ was, and still is, right there before your eyes, in her dancing.”

[...]

About Farrell’s work in Balanchine’s notoriously difficult company classes:

“If Balanchine said to do something, she never bothered to consider its difficulty or impossibility. She assumed it was

possible, and did it. If he made a suggestion to her she applied it immediately and without question... The intensity of her concentration was almost terrifying to watch. He'd give her one of his paralyzing combinations; you'd be exhausted even before the music started. But Suzanne would zip through it without batting an eye. She didn't even sweat.

[...]

For anyone to work as hard as she does, some part of it has to be for herself alone. And I think it's a remarkable act of grace and dignity that she doesn't involve the audience in these personal considerations. She withholds nothing physically from her dancing, and what she seems to withhold personally isn't the absence of anything so much as it is the presence of a personal mystery.

[...]

New York Times dance critic Alastair Macaulay's definition is succinct: "What is balletomanie? Someone who thinks dancers matter more than choreography." Both distinctions—between spiritual and carnal desire, between choreography and dancers—seem unsustainable. Indeed, Balanchine accused Volynsky of balletomania using Bolynsky's very own terms of reproach: "There was a famous critic in Petersburg, his name was Akin Volynsky, I knew him well. He was drawn to ballerinas and created a whole ballet theory out of it: that in ballet, eroticism is the most important thing, and so on. In his reviews he described how big the thighs of his favourites were, things like that." Balanchine has a point about Volynsky, but what of Balanchine's own theory of ballet, aphoristically stated: "Ballet is a woman"? Certainly, choreography comes to life in performances by dancers. Balanchine again: "The choreography, the steps—those don't mean a thing. Steps are made by a person. It's the person

dancing the steps—that's what choreography is, not the steps by themselves.”

– Douglas Crimp, 'Agon', *Before Pictures*, University of Chicago: 2016

David Hammons, *Concerto in Black and Blue*, 2002

Grace Jones, 'Libertango (I have seen that face before)', 1981; 'La vie en rose', 1977; 'Pars', 1980

Jessica Mitford, 'Behind the Formaldehyde Curtain', *The American Way of Death*, Simon and Schuster. New York: 1963. Read aloud by Ian White.

The Smiths, 'Death of a Disco Dancer', 1987

Sylvester, 'I Need Somebody To Love Tonight', 1979

Resource List

Rainbow Youth

Rainbow Youth works with young people, their whānau and their wider communities to provide safe and respectful support.

<https://ry.org.nz/>

OUTLine NZ

OutLine is an all-ages rainbow mental health organisation providing support to the rainbow community, their friends, whānau, and those questioning.

<https://outline.org.nz/>

InsideOUT

InsideOUT is a national organisation with the vision for all rainbow young people in Aotearoa New Zealand to have a sense of safety and belonging in their schools and communities.

<http://insideout.org.nz/>

Gender Minorities Aotearoa

Gender Minorities Aotearoa is the nationwide transgender organisation in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is run by and for transgender people, including non-binary, intersex, and irawhiti takatāpui people. GMA offers information, advocacy, and wrap around support for transgender people of all ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

<https://genderminorities.com/>

Body Positive

Body Positive provides a broad range of services for people living with HIV in New Zealand in an attempt to break down the sense of isolation HIV+ people often experience and to build a sense of community and well-being.

<https://www.bodypositive.org.nz/>