

The Speed Of Queer: La La La Human Steps and Queer Perceptions of the Body

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In this article, Stephen Low argues that Edouard Lock's choreography for La La La Human Steps embodies temporalities that expose how the normative experience of time determines and limits our visual and theoretical perceptions of the gendered body. Focusing on movement executed at hyper-fast virtuosic speeds seen in La La La Human Steps' recent work *Untitled*, Lock's choreography demonstrates possibilities of corporeal transformations through the way the body is perceived in time through movement. The analysis of Lock's choreography expands the theories of queer time elucidated by Judith Halberstam in her book *In A Queer Time and Place* beyond temporalities defined by non-normative life schedules to include non-normative temporalities determined by how subjects move in and through time. Furthermore, the examination of the effects of hyper-fast movement exposes how Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity remains contingent on normative temporalities that allow the body *to be seen* as gendered in a stable and coherent manner. The aesthetic of speed embodied by Lock's choreography is acknowledged to be both simultaneously destructive, in that it undoes the stability and coherency of gender as ascertainable by the act of seeing the body, and generative, in that it offers modes of challenging gender norms that do not require medical technologies. In other words, through an aesthetic that employs virtuosic speed, Lock offers a concept of queer temporality that allows a subject to embody the *trans* in "transgender."

Dans cet article, Stephen Low soutient que les chorégraphies d'Edouard Lock pour La La La Human Steps incarnent des temporalités qui font voir comment l'expérience normative du temps détermine et limite nos perceptions visuelles et théoriques du corps genré. Les chorégraphies de Lock reposent sur des mouvements exécutés à des vitesses vertigineuses et virtuoses telles qu'illustrées dans *Untitled*, une production récente de La La La Human Steps qui montre des possibilités de transformation corporelle par la façon dont le corps est perçu dans le temps à travers le mouvement. L'analyse de la chorégraphie de Lock prolonge les théories de « temps *queer* » proposées par Judith Halberstam dans *In A Queer Time and Place* au-delà des temporalités définies par des horaires de vie non normatifs pour inclure des temporalités non normatives déterminées par la façon dont les sujets se déplacent dans et à travers le temps. Qui plus est, l'examen des effets du mouvement hyperrapide démontre à quel point la théorie de la performativité du genre de Judith Butler demeure tributaire des temporalités normatives qui permettent au corps d'être vu comme genré de manière stable et cohérente. L'esthétique de la vitesse incarnée par la chorégraphie de Lock est reconnue comme étant à la fois destructrice, en ce qu'elle mine la stabilité et la cohérence du genre vérifiables par la seule action de voir le corps, et génératrice, en ce qu'elle propose des moyens de contester les normes liées au genre sans recourir à des technologies médicales. Autrement dit, Lock propose, au moyen d'une esthétique qui emploie une vitesse virtuose, une perception de la temporalité *queer* qui permet au sujet d'incarner le *trans-* dans « transgenre ».



As we were walking out of the theatre and into the busy and frantic downtown late Saturday night, my boyfriend turned to me and said, “It feels like I’m moving so slowly.” Upon hearing his astute and intuitive comment, I realized that he had put into words the effect La La La Human Steps’ most recent dance concert, *Untitled*, had on me as well. And what a *queer* effect it was! To expose us to the sensation of time itself. To feel ourselves, our bodies, our moving bodies, in, or more accurately in this case, out of, time. The performance did not particularly move us emotionally, but rather it drew our attention to how we move in space and time, and specifically to how we experience our own bodies through time and movement. Though we were walking down the street at an “average” pace, spending the last ninety minutes watching a cast of dancers move so quickly made us feel like we were moving slowly in contrast.

From the groundbreaking *Velázquez’s Little Museum* to their thirtieth anniversary milestone work *Untitled*, along with collaborations with iconic institutions such as the Opera de Paris and pop superstars like Frank Zappa, Quebec-based La La La Human Steps has become a world-renowned contemporary dance company. La La La Human Steps choreographs movement that is difficult in its own right, but performed at such an intense velocity that the quality of movement that distinguishes their work is best characterized as “virtuosic speed.” This term does not just describe the temporal quality of movement, but rather refers to a combination of daring and technically difficult movement *and* intensely fast velocities that exacerbate the level of difficulty and precision required to execute such choreography. In much of their work, and in *Untitled* specifically, Artistic Director and Founder Edouard Lock choreographs movement that embodies an aesthetic of virtuosic speed in order to “create a sense of perpetual distortion and renewal, encouraging audiences to both reinvent and rediscover the body and its dance” (“Press Kit”). The program for *Untitled* describes Lock’s style as “an arresting fusion of speed, complicated combinations of gestures and footwork, the ability to propel bodies through the air at astonishing angles, and the integration of live musicians and film with dance” (*Untitled* Program). In much of Lock’s choreography for La La La Human Steps, and in *Untitled* in particular, the dancers’ limbs move so quickly that the edges of their arms and legs appear blurred, leaving the audience unable to define the dancers’ bodies as solid flesh. To understand the speed and effect of the fast movement that dominates the choreography of Lock for La La La Human Steps take your hand and wave it in front of your face: the space between your fingers that visually separates one from the other is filled by the blur of flesh. Like this blur, Lock’s choreography often includes permutations of flicking arms and legs, spinning bodies, twitching appendages, flailing limbs, heads looking one direction then snapping to look the other: gestures and movements that capitalize on the body’s ability to move quickly. The movement in Lock’s choreography oscillates between a series of quick gestures—turns, whipping arms, and kicking legs—and pauses when the dancers remain completely still, a juxtaposition that augments the sheer virtuosic speed of their movement. If their movements did not reveal order through repetition, the dance could be mistaken as hyper-fast, uncontrolled flailing. Stage lighting casts shadows on the dancers, which further obscure and distort their bodies.²

Often, a dancer is partnered by another, who spins them *en pointe* in one direction, then abruptly to the other direction, so quickly that their whole form appears as a blur, a twister of shadowy flesh. What Lock and La La La Human Steps achieve with their work, dominated by this quality of virtuosic speed, is a performance of queer temporality. The characteristic of speed that shapes their work challenges the appearance of the finite limits of the materiality of flesh, and consequently opens the possibility of challenging the coherence and stability of the (gendered) body.

The following analysis of Edouard Lock's choreography for La La La Human Steps draws attention to conceptions of gender that assume that the body is a phenomenon that can be determined, or apprehended,³ by the senses, especially sight. Extending queer theoretical considerations of gender beyond such binaries as male/female, masculine/feminine, or queer/normative, this article offers a conception of gender that highlights how movement executed at non-normative (speedy) temporalities situates the body as a phenomenon that can refuse being apprehended by sight as material and coherent, which consequently can make the gender of a body impossible to determine. I begin with an appeal to theoretical elucidations of "queer time." Specifically, I engage with Judith Halberstam's consideration of how queer subjects living non-normative lives both produce, and are produced by, non-normative temporalities, as well as Elizabeth Freeman's notion of "chrononormativity," which situates time as a regulatory force that shapes and controls subjects and provides a complementary theoretical framework to highlight how time shapes and determines quotidian phenomena such as gender. My analysis deviates from both Halberstam and Freeman insofar as it focuses on how the *quality* of time measured from moment to moment itself can be manipulated through movement to challenge the coherence of the gendered body. I further discuss the relationship between (queer) temporality and gender by appealing to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. I draw attention to how the theoretical conception of gender Butler offers assumes that the gendered body can be apprehended as material and coherent, even if non-normative.⁴

As well as noting how normative temporality is assumed in conceptions of gender in most queer theory, this article also appeals to Lock's choreography for La La La Human Steps to highlight how the consideration of gender in theatre and performance scholarship privileges gender as that which is inevitably represented, and through representation, as that which is always coherent and stable, whether or not the gender represented is normative. Specifically, I examine Lock's choreography in *Untitled*, as well as other pieces he has choreographed since the departure of his muse Louise Lecavalier, in order to highlight a shift in his investment in the gendered body in contemporary dance. Beyond queering conventional ballet by disturbing standard techniques and narratives over the course of his career, Lock's more recent work not only subverts gender norms by confusing the masculine/feminine binary, but also subverts the regulatory regime of gender by revealing that through movement at non-normative temporalities the body can refuse coherent and stable gendering and occupy, if momentarily, a radical indeterminacy.

By attending to temporality and movement as constitutive factors in the determination of gender, Lock's choreography can be understood as embodying the *trans* of transgender. Via an aesthetic of speed, Lock's choreography offers conceptions of corporeal transformation that contrast standard sartorial, surgical, and psychological modes of

conceiving of transgenderism. Considering that the prefix “trans” implies movement (transport, transit, transpose, transatlantic), Lock’s work embodies the possibility of transness *in movement itself* and subsequently suggests possibilities of corporeal transformation that do not require technological or surgical alterations to the body. Employing movement and speed as modes of conceiving of corporeal transformation, Lock and La La La Human Steps expose the fluidity, instability, and impermanence of gender, and meanings of the body itself. The dancing body in Lock’s choreography oscillates between hyper-fast mobility and stillness to embody coherent and perceivable gender identities, and incoherent and unintelligible *trans* gender identities. Yet, because it would be impossible to exist at either extreme end of this continuum, Lock’s choreography does not, and cannot, offer strategies of living as trans, but rather, his work suggests alternate methods in which we *conceive* of trans. The possibilities of trans-ness as expressed through movement that marks non-normative temporalities contrast understandings of trans in the popular imagination as a stable, though not necessarily normative, change in gender identity. Through speedy movement, trans-ness no longer requires a shift from one coherent gender category to another, but can exist on a spectrum of determinate and indeterminate.

The embodiment of trans in the work of La La La Human Steps is essentially “queer,” insofar as queer, like trans, refers to a disruption of normative social regimes. Much of the queer scholarship that attempts to define “queer” does so by positioning queer in opposition to (hetero)normativity. Queer is defined by Carla Freccero in her essay “Queer Time” as a set of practices that “name [. . .] a certain unsettling in relation to heteronormativity” (1); Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant in their essay “Sex In Public” elucidate queer as “social practices like sex and theory [that] try to unsettle the garbled but powerful norms supporting [heterosexual] privilege—including the normalization that has made heterosexuality hegemonic” (188). Queer, like trans, requires normative social regimes as a point of reference in order to define itself in opposition to heteronormativity. Trans, like queer, is seen against what trans theorist Sandy Stone describes as the “gendered body which is itself a medically constituted textual violence” that “writes” normative and stable maleness or femaleness on the body (231). And like queer, trans is defined by a deviation from normative gender/sex identities. Yet, unlike the conception of trans offered by Stone, the embodiment of trans in the work of La La La Human Steps does not just refuse normative gender categories, but rejects gender as necessarily apprehensible by the senses. Trans in the work of Lock’s choreography is queerer than the queerness of standard conceptions of trans: it not only locates a space between normative gender categories, but also challenges the limits of intelligibility itself.

The virtuosic speed that characterizes Lock’s choreography presents a paradoxically destructive yet generative power. Lock’s choreography is destructive in that the quality of speed disrupts the boundary of the body as stable and coherent and consequently challenges normative conceptions of the stability of gender and the body in general. In *Untitled*, Lock choreographs quick spins and flailing limbs to distort the dancing body in such a way that gender is difficult, if not impossible, to determine, which consequently establishes movement in time as a site in which normative conceptions of gender can be challenged. Yet Lock’s choreography is generative in that it undoes normative conceptions of the stability of the body, which consequently threaten the oppressive power of gender norms.

Time For Queer Theory

Queer theorist Judith Halberstam turns her attention to temporality and its impact on understandings of gender and non-normative bodies in her seminal work *In a Queer Time and Place*. Halberstam's examination of the transgendered body as both a product of, and producing, queer temporalities is largely built upon the definition of queer time as temporalities that oppose heteronormative life schedules, such as the standard schedules demanded by family, child rearing, and inheritance. Halberstam's examination of queer temporality as non-normative life structures contrasts the possibility of queer temporalities on a micro level presented in *Untitled* and in the works of La La La Human Steps in general. That is to say, *Untitled* and the choreography of La La La Human Steps consider queer temporalities in terms of the quality of speed in which we experience quotidian life. Consequently, *Untitled* and La La La Human Steps deviate from the explicit definition of queer time that Halberstam offers when she states that, "Queer time is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety and inheritance" (6).

Despite her focus on macro-level temporalities determined by life schedules, Halberstam offers conceptions and perceptions of micro-level temporalities via the characteristic of speed that she attributes to queer time. She describes queer temporalities as "compressed" or sped up when she writes: "And yet queer time, as it emerges from the AIDS crisis, is [...] about *compression* and annihilation" (2). Halberstam evokes the quality of speed when she mentions that compression is a characteristic of a queer temporality insofar as action must be sped up in order to compress more action into a smaller amount of time. Later she writes, "In the works of queer postmodern writers like Lynn Breedlove (*Godspeed*), Eileen Myles (*Chelsea Girls*), and others, speed itself (the drug as well as the motion) becomes the motor of an alternative history as their queer heroes rewrite complete narratives of female rebellion" (5). Here, Halberstam explicitly identifies speed as a characteristic of queer temporality that allows for alternate modes of being.

Though Halberstam looks to visual and literary texts for evidence to expound her theory of queer temporality, she hints at movement in time as a factor that determines the embodiment of queerness, and subsequently gestures toward dance as evidence of how temporality influences conceptions and perceptions of the gendered body.⁵ When Halberstam writes "'queer' refers to non-normative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, *embodiment and activity in space in time*" (6, emphasis added), she hints at an analytics of temporality that incorporates how movement determines the experience of time on a micro level. She also gestures toward movement as an influential mode of the experience of time when she claims that queer temporalities "develop according to other logics of location, *movement*, and identification" (1, emphasis added). Characteristics such as "compression" and "speed," used to describe queer time in Halberstam's scholarship and which also saturate *Untitled* and the work of La La La Human Steps more broadly, offer a productive perspective from which to consider the effects of temporality on the conceptions and perceptions of the (gendered) body as expressed through dance.

La La La Human Steps disrupts the disciplinary force of normative temporality elucidated in the theoretical formation of *chrononormativity* in Elizabeth Freeman's *Time*

Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories. Unlike Halberstam, who views “compression” and speed as a characteristic of queer temporality, Freeman charts the regulating force of the pressures of having little time: “By ‘time binds,’ I mean something beyond the obvious point that people find themselves with less time than they need. Instead, I mean that naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation” (3). Freeman builds upon Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus*, which claims that “institutionally and culturally enforced rhythms, or timings, shape flesh into legible, acceptable embodiment” (4). La La La Human Steps’ virtuosic speed draws attention to Freeman’s concept of chrononormativity by unbinding or reshaping the flesh from normative speeds that demand that the (gendered) body be apprehended by sight, not by slowing down but by increasing the speed of life. By situating the body in an alternate temporal framework where seeing fails to capture figuration, La La La Human Steps’ choreography exposes the framework, and the limits, of chrononormativity to determine gender as a visually apprehended phenomenon.

La La La Human Steps and *Untitled* illustrate the potential for queer time—a time that is characteristically compressed and/or sped up—to challenge the visual limits of the body and open it up to perceptual shifts that situate it as a site of potential transformation. In other words, La La La Human Steps enact Halberstam’s claim that “queer” time challenges the stability of the body by allowing for “considerations of life, location, and *transformation*” (4, emphasis added). In works such as *Untitled*, La La La Human Steps embody queerness on a micro level through locating movement as “activity in space and time,” which allows for alternate, “non-normative” conceptions and perceptions of the body.

Queer Ballet: Blurring the Lines of Gender and Body

Edouard Lock and his choreography for La La La Human Steps disturb the coherence and stability of the body by queering the conventions and techniques of classical ballet, conventions and techniques that capitalize on the aesthetics of the contours, form, and line of the body. Classical ballet aims to exploit the stable boundaries of the body in order to allow for an aesthetic of line and form produced by that body. Turn out, the technique at the heart of classical ballet practice, demands that dancers rotate their legs out from the centre of the body in order to show the arch of their foot to the audience in conventional proscenium theatre spaces, thus exposing the line of the leg and the foot. Tutus further highlight the line of the female body by exposing more of the dancer’s leg. The pointe shoe allows for the ballerina to seem as if she is floating through space, while continuing the straight line of the body from the top of the leg through to the tip of the toe. Almost all of the positions that dominate classical ballet choreography, are executed with the aim of showing off the sleek, clean contours of the dancer’s body.

In her essay “The Balanchine Women,” feminist dance scholar Ann Daly argues that George Balanchine, the influential twentieth-century dance maker, choreographed work that is exemplary of the patriarchal representations of women in classical ballet. In her analysis of the role of the ballerina in Balanchine’s *The Four Temperaments*, Daly draws attention to the recurring motif of the arabesque, which “serve[s] the traditional purpose of focusing on the dancer’s leg” and consequently “[d]isplay[s] the line of her body,” which is “the goal of the venture” (10). Positioning the woman and her body as merely an object to be

seen, Daly concludes that “All this is not to single out Balanchine; rather, it is to show that, despite the ‘ballet is woman’ rhetoric, the representational form in which Balanchine worked is rooted in an ideology which denies women their own agency” (17). Furthermore, Daly notes that the ideology that subtends the “representational form” of ballet situates women not as agential subjects, but rather as “‘Woman’ as object of male desire” (17). Daly’s feminist critique draws attention to how women function as passive objects that are acted upon and presented for the scopophilic pleasure of the male gaze in most classical dance.

By contrast, Lock’s choreography and the work of La La La Human Steps employ ballet technique and conventions in order to subvert the core aesthetics of classical ballet. Specifically, Lock uses the pointe shoe, and consequently the classical ballet technique that is demanded of dancers who dance *en pointe*, in most of his recent choreography. Yet to call Lock’s work feminist would be to miss its political potential. Indeed, while I share many of the same goals as feminist scholars, my analysis departs from previous work in several key ways. Most importantly, while feminist scholarship⁶ relies on stable gender categories that can be visually apprehended, my analysis of La La La Human Steps exposes how Lock’s choreography challenges the potential to ascertain the gender of a dancer through the act of watching in the first place by using classical ballet technique and the pointe shoe in particular.

In order to facilitate spinning the body quickly in space, Lock uses conventional partnering techniques, but once again subverts the standard gendered power dynamics found in classical ballet. As dance critic Caroline Lamb has noted about the use of partnering in Lock’s choreography, “The deliberately slippery dynamic foregrounds the asymmetrical power relations of classical dance, while suggesting new positions for female and male bodies to assume within the performance” (Lamb). Standard gendered power dynamics generally include the man as “leader” and the woman as “follower”: the man “presents” the woman for the audience’s pleasure, the man does the “hard” labor of lifting while the women are presented as delicate and fragile. In Lock’s choreography, the women are most often lifted or spun by the men but they are not controlled and manipulated by men for fetishistic scopophilic pleasure. Rather, the context in which the men partner the women renders the men more as appendages or tools that the women employ and manipulate to achieve virtuosic speeds. Lamb draws attention to the agency of Lock’s female dancers in an analysis of former La La La Human Steps’ principal dancer Louise Lecavalier: “Rather than being a balletic ‘plaything’ that acts as an aesthetic accessory or a malleable object, she is a tangible force demanding recognition as an autonomous, rather than subordinate, component of the dance” (Lamb).

Lock’s choreography often employs short but speedy movement phrases that are broken up by dancers changing the space on stage where they perform these phrases. In most cases, a duo will perform in one space that is demarcated by a spotlight from above, complete a phrase of moment, then briskly, and with purpose, move to another space on the stage, which becomes illuminated by another spotlight, and perform identical or similar phrases of movement in the new space. Lock strategically places the woman as the force that instigates the movement from one area of the stage to another, locating her in the position of power: The female dancer decides where she and her male partner will dance and how long they will dance there. The men in Lock’s partnering follow the women as they move from place to

place in space with strong intention. Often, a woman will begin to dance with vigorous initial energy before her male partner has even arrived in the space, marked out by a spotlight. Dance scholar Ruby Ireland identifies these subversive partnering techniques: “Lock presents significant challenges to the notion of ballerina as dependent. Taking one key example, in the opening scene of [*Amelia*] there is a still image of a female dancer balancing *en pointe* with her legs wide and strong. She then runs towards her male partner and leaps at him, ending up in his arms, from which position their *pas de deux* begins” (56). Ireland goes on to describe this partnering dynamic as “undermining traditional associations of the female dancer as passive by introducing an active, athletic quality” (56). As Ireland identifies in *Amelia*, and is the also case in other pieces in their repertoire such as *Untitled* and *Amjad*, men are rendered as merely tools,⁷ like the pointe shoe, to be used as a part of the women’s virtuosic quick dancing in Lock’s choreography.

In other work, Lock has put men *en pointe* with the express purposes of challenging the strict gender roles in classical ballet partner work. In *Amjad*, for example, he choreographs a duet for two men, one of whom wears pointe shoes. This stunt of having two men perform techniques reserved for women in classical ballet is particularly subversive considering that the inspiration for the piece are the two popular classical ballets *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty* (BAM.org). When the website for the Brooklyn Academy of Music describes *Amjad* as a “a shape-shifting prince becomes a glorious swan, dancing full-out on pointe” (BAM.org), it encourages the audience to contemplate whether the Prince has transformed into a *female* Swan, or whether this male dancer is supposed to be perceived as a man capable of maintaining his masculinity while performing *en pointe*. In the context of these two classical ballets, the male duet also prompts us to consider whether the men occupy roles within the standard *pas de deux* because the women are either animals (Swans) or asleep, or whether the *pas de deux* is between a man and a ballerina, albeit a ballerina played by a man? Considering that *Amjad* is a gender ambiguous Arabic name, are we to consider that we treat the genders of all those dancing in *Amjad* as gender ambiguous as well (Gilbert, UK Guardian). In any case, the choreography that literally puts a man into the shoes of a woman opens up questions that challenge the coherence and stability of gender within the realm of classical ballet and in the wider world as well.

Lock’s appeal to body types that exhibit normative gender identities after gender-queer, androgynous Lecavalier left the company as a dancer may suggest that his choreography is no longer invested in challenging the power dynamics of classical dance.⁸ In fact, Lock’s choreography over the past decade merely illustrates a shift in investment in gender in dance. Casting lithe and lean female dancers whose bodies contrast sharply with the short, stout, and muscular body of Lecavalier does not necessarily mean that Lock completely abandoned investments in the power dynamics of gendered bodies. Rather, because he still explores hyper-virtuosic speeds, Lock’s choreography continues to position the stable and coherent female gendered body against the blurry, virtuosically speedy body that cannot be a site of gendered scopofetishistic pleasure. To focus on Lecavalier in this article would shift the conception of trans-ness that privileges discussing gender styling that can be apprehended by sight over a conception of gender in which any form of gendered being is apparent only under normative temporalities. That is to say that earlier criticism and scholarship during Lecavalier’s tenure focused on her body as stable and coherent, even though it was presented

as gender-queer, while my analysis considers the dancing body in Lock's more recent choreography as, at times, unable to be apprehended as material and coherent.

Critiques of Lock's subversion of classical ballet narratives and technique after the departure of Lecavalier in 1999, specifically by dance critic Carolyn Lamb, fail because they rely on reestablishing misogynist power dynamics. Lamb equates the masculine muscularity of Lecavalier with power, and renders the femininity of the petit and lithe female body as powerless, writing:

Lecavalier and Lock's revival of the corporeality denied to the ballerina is significant because it attributes agency to the female dancer and promotes a healthy physique. The strong, athletic female body in *La La La Human Steps* enacts dynamism of its own, and pulls its own weight (so to speak). While the ballerina aspires to be gossamer-like so that she may be lifted, tossed, spun, and carried by the physically dominant male dancer, Lecavalier's body allows her to assume an integral role in the work, as she lifts, drops, and often overpowers her male partner. Rather than being a balletic "plaything" that acts as an aesthetic accessory or a malleable object, she is a tangible force demanding recognition as an autonomous, rather than subordinate, component of the dance.

Even though Lock continues to employ conventional partnering dynamics in his choreography post-Lecavalier, Lock's gender normative partnering upsets patriarchal power dynamics by positioning the woman as the impetus of the movement, rather than presenting her body as at the mercy of her male companion. Though Lock now employs female dancers who do not possess Lecavalier's "weighty" corporeality, the female dancers enact their material presence by instigating the movement sequences. Because they provide the corporeal force for the movement sequence itself, the female dancers in Lock's choreography maintain their status as "a tangible force demanding recognition as an autonomous, rather than subordinate, component of the dance," while inhabiting feminine body types.

Furthermore, Lamb's criticism of Lock's failure to subvert gender norms and power relations since Lecavalier's departure assumes that any subversion of gender norms maintains gender as being stable and coherent, even if that gender is queer. Lamb writes:

Frequently costuming her muscular, angular physique in a tutu—the trademark of the classical ballerina—paired with running shoes and kneepads, Lock and Lecavalier create an onstage body which scrambles the masculine/feminine duality ballet holds dear. Gone are the stable gender-based categories defining the *pas-de-deux* as a dance between a man and a woman. In their place we find a re-configured dyad between two functionally and physically androgynous dancers, liberating a plurality of possible subject positions that do not read easily within the tradition.

Because Lamb assumes that Lock was only able to challenge gender norms in representing an androgynous, gender-queer Lecavalier, she implies that Lecavalier's subversive power was found precisely in her body as visually coherent in its queerness: an audience was meant to identify the contradictory symbols, the masculine muscularity and the feminine tutu, in

order to register the subversive gender dynamics. In the case of *Untitled* and other pieces Lock choreographed after Lecavalier's departure, the gender normative petite and lithe female bodies gesture toward the "ideological baggage" of gender dynamics in ballet only to subvert the misogynist power dynamics of classical dance from the position of a cis-gendered⁹ feminine dancer. Furthermore, the gender normative female bodies challenge such power dynamics by illustrating that they are predicated on movement in normative temporalities that render the body coherent and stable in the first place.

By explicitly declaring the inspiration for his full-length concert dance works as rooted in classical ballet and opera, Lock queers the conventional mythic narrative forms. Though he declares that he is basing his work on a combination of *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty* in *Amjad*, or *Dido and Aeneas* and *Orpheus and Eurydice* in *Untitled*, he abandons any notion of intelligible plot or coherent character. He dismisses narrative and character as finite and determined, and instead offers the audience the opportunity to "connect the dots" by leaving such conventional techniques ambiguous and open-ended. Those who attend *Untitled*, looking for a new but comprehensible retelling of either *Dido and Aeneas* or *Orpheus and Eurydice*¹⁰ are left with an experience that is informed by yet defies expectations (Program). The incoherence of narrative and character parallel the incoherence of gender and subject embodied by the dancers performing his work at the virtuosic speeds demanded of them.

By employing the techniques of ballet to challenge the aesthetics and gender roles of classical ballet, Lock accesses the potential for such acts of "queering" classical dance forms to queering the body itself. Speed, subversive use of technique, and non-normative partnering relations all contribute to challenging the coherence and stability of the gendered body in queer dance.

Temporalities of Gender

Queer temporalities, in the case of the virtuosic speed enacted by La La La Human Steps, offer a potential for physical transformation that challenges normative gender constraints by dissolving the perceived visual material boundaries of the body. In addition to embodying Halberstam's notion of queer time and challenging the concept of "chrononormativity" elucidated by Freeman, La La La Human Steps enacts Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity while simultaneously confounding the materiality necessary for any particular gendered subject position to be apparent. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler contends, "The subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects" (145). Underlying Butler's theory of performativity is an assumption that even a transgender body is perceived and conceived materially through repeated actions, and that this materiality (or "substantialization"), even if it subverts and challenges normative binary gender categories, is necessarily captured through the act of seeing a body as stable and coherent. In other words, Butler's theory of performativity allows for transgenderism, but the "trans" in such transgenderism is forced to find a static place at any given moment in order to be seen and apprehended, even if this means their gendered is determined to be intelligible or not.

Lock choreographs repetition and thus situates his choreography as performative; in other words, he renders it intelligible through repetition and citation. In *Untitled*, Lock choreographs different dancers performing different speedy movement phrases that at first appear chaotic and random. In these phrases, Lock does not seem to take gender into consideration when deciding which dancer performs which sequence. But after these phrases are repeated, Lock establishes them performatively, through “stylized repetition,” as not mere flailing or improvisation, but as a series of choreographed dance. In other words, by repeating phrases, Lock establishes each movement phrase as recognizable as choreography, rather than spontaneous movement. In contrast, by constituting through repetition itself as intelligible choreography, the speedy movement phrases performatively undo the coherence and stability of the materiality of the body. As such, the virtuosic speed of Lock’s choreography for *La La La Human Steps* eludes determining gender at any moment, as either normative, trans, intelligible, or unintelligible.

Lock also undoes the materiality of the body through moments of solo performance. This is exemplified in moments when a dancer waves their arms at their sides mimicking a bird in flight, or when a male dancer spins a female dancer *en pointe* as quickly as possible, wherein the body appears blurry and therefore visually incoherent. Consequently, Lock’s choreography challenges the ability to determine the materiality of the body as being stable by the act of seeing, countering Butler’s claim that “to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where ‘to matter’ means at once ‘to materialize’ and ‘to mean’” (7). Via hyper-fast movement, Lock challenges the coherence and stability of the body, or in other words what the body *means*, by disrupting how the body *is seen* to be material. By doing so, Lock’s choreography locates both normative categories of time and ocularity as essential foundations in which the body is conceived both to be matter and to have meaning.

Lock’s choreography highlights the contingency of *perception* in the determination of gender, and further demonstrates how gender is bound by particular normative temporalities. In the final moments of *Gender Trouble*, Butler declares that, “Gender [. . .] is an identity tenuously constituted in *time*, instituted in an exterior space through a styled repetition of acts” (191, emphasis mine). Butler contends that gender is not substantial, that is to say gender is not evident on the material body itself, but rather, a social construction that requires acts repeated *over time* to produce the illusion of stability and coherence. Lock’s work enacts Butler’s theory by obfuscating the surface where gender significations are to be read by manipulating how the body is perceived over time through choreographing hyper-fast gestures and turns that leave the dancer’s gender indeterminable.

Butler’s conception of gender as performatively constituted differs from Freeman’s chrononormativity and Halberstam’s notion of queer time. Butler positions the body as a surface upon which gender is inscribed *from the moment to moment flow of time* and consequently contrasts Freeman’s notion of chrononormativity and Halberstam’s queer time which examine how the *organization* of time regulates bodies. Unlike temporality in Butler’s theory of performativity, Freeman’s chrononormativity is anchored to “[s]chedules, calendars, times zones, and [. . .] wristwatches” (3) and Halberstam’s theory focuses on life schedules. Furthermore, Freeman’s appeal to speed and compression as forces that regulate bodies contrast Butler’s theory, which allows for speed to become a temporal quality that can free the body from normative social regimes such as gender. When Halberstam

references speed as a drug that alters the users perception of the world, she echoes the potential for speed in movement to disrupt the moment-to-moment construction of gender permitted in Butler's theory, even though most of Halberstam's theory concerns life schedules and macro temporal structures. Butler's theory of the performativity of gender, supported by details of Halberstam's work on queer time, situates the gendered body as constituted *from moment to moment*, which makes it well suited to an analysis of live performance, especially the choreography of *La La La Human Steps*, which manipulates the flow of time through movement.

In her follow up to *Gender Trouble, Bodies that Matter*, Butler clarifies her position on the materiality of the body, but her theory of the performativity of gender remains contingent on normative temporalities. When Butler contends, "sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time," she assumes normative temporalities which would leave the body as apparently stable and coherent at a particular point in time (xii). Despite how Butler proposes that the body is "not [a] site or surface, but [. . .] a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (xviii), this matter still must be conceivable by being *perceivable* under normative temporal conditions. Yet, as the work of *La La La Human Steps* destabilizes the visual coherence of the body by blurring the limits of the body through quick spins, flapping arms, and kicking legs, the temporality in which Butler situates the reiteration of norms must be a normative temporality. In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, Butler's project is more invested in the lived experience of gender rather than the pure conceptions of gender, but, that being said, the more normative conceptions of gender are complicated, the more the regulatory forces that pressure subjects to behave in certain ways in order to attain intelligibility on the social landscape are challenged.¹¹

Totally Shifting: Trans Bodies and the Speed of Queer

Lock's choreography, as it enacts and highlights the contingencies of Butler's theory on normative temporality, offers alternate frameworks for conceiving trans-ness. Much of the science and technology that has been developed to open up opportunities for trans people, transsexuals in particular, to construct and inhabit gendered bodies that deviate from the bodies they are socially and medically demanded to accept as their own demands a *permanent* transformation that is either definitively male or female. In *Second Skins*, his study of transsexual narratives, Jay Prosser examines, and rejects, the conventional understandings of trans-ness that are authorized by the medical establishment and demand that an individual undergo the kind of transformation in which the assumed telos is a stable, *fixed*, normative gender identity.¹² Much scholarship in recent decades on transsexuality and transgenderism has also refused the totalizing demands of the medical establishment and advocated for gender identities that are in constant flux or that are neither "totally" male nor "totally" female (Bornstien; Prosser; Stone; Stryker). Understanding how normative temporalities underlie Butler's theory of the performative construction of gender offers another mode of resistance against the totalizing demands of *permanent* transformation demanded of trans bodies by the medical and scientific methods of constructing and inhabiting non-cys gendered bodies.

La La La Human Steps and their use of speed expose the instability and fluidity of gender by challenging the possibility that the gendered body can always be determined, in a seemingly totalizing way, by merely *seeing* it. In her groundbreaking essay “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” Sandy Stone points out that the dominant rhetoric of transsexuality in current debates on the issue of gender and identity is one of “relentless totalization” (232). This totalization often is apparent in how many transsexuals, and much of the rhetoric employed around transsexuality, demands an erasure of the pre-sex reassignment surgery or pre-trans identification personal history. Stone challenges the necessity for transsexuals to erase the period in one’s personal history when a transperson occupied a former gender position when she writes: “To deconstruct the necessity for passing implies that transsexuals must take responsibility for *all* their history, to begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures” (232). Stone also argues for “physicalities of constantly shifting figures and grounds that exceed the frame of any possible representation” (232). The virtuosic speed of La La La Human Steps enacts Stone’s “constantly shifting figure... that exceeds any possibility of representation” by confounding the audience’s ability to determine the gender of a dancer at a particular moment in time, making “relentless totalization” impossible. The impermanence of transformation through speed in queer dance evident in Lock’s work challenges the “totalization” of standard trans narratives.

The impermanence of transformation through speed in queer dance evident in *Untitled* also challenges the “totalization” of standard trans life narratives. Briefly before I conclude, let me perform the queer act of returning to a beginning at the end to confound the temporality of this essay: the experience of viewing a video projection of a young woman simultaneously alongside her aged self, the startling first image of La La La Human Steps’ *Untitled*, similarly destabilizes normative progressive structures of time. When the audience enters the theater to see *Untitled*, they immediately see two large screens hanging from the proscenium arch of the stage. The screen on the audience’s left shows a black and white video of a young adult woman sitting facing the camera, wearing a loose-fitting collared white shirt. She is sitting, seen from the waist up, occasionally adjusting her posture or touching her face. The screen on the right shows what seems to be that same adult woman, but aged and wrinkled, wearing an identical collared white shirt, also facing the camera. The left image could be the young adult woman’s grandmother or the young adult woman at age eighty or older. The audience is left to consider the uncanny experience of seeing an almost-but-not-quite double; a woman impossibly divided between herself in the present/past and herself in the present/future. Because of how she is dressed, and because she is not named or identified as a dancer, the audience is meant to consider her as an average person, an everywoman. Each audience member, who sits staring at this everywoman who in turn stares back at them, is positioned between a “Before” and “After,” making them acutely aware of their own past, present, and/or future in a confounded present moment. Along with the employment of virtuosic speed in queer dance that allows for continual oscillation, and not merely oscillation between the poles of normative masculinity and normative femininity, but between gender coherence and incoherence, stability and confusion, intelligible and unintelligible, the projection of the woman impossibly divided between her present/past and present/future self challenges the “Before and After” narrative structure of trans lives.

Transphobia often stems from demanding that an individual identify as male or female (and most often this demand requires identifying with the gender determined by the physiological make up of the genitalia present on/in the individual's body at the moment of birth). Within the queer community, identifying as trans has become a third possible gender category that is often acceptable within LGBTQ cultures. (After all, the acronym for trans is now included in the laundry list of letters that inclusively tries to accommodate the diverse identities of the non-hetero community.) Through virtuosic speed, Lock's choreography opposes anchoring gender identity in the possibility of "being," in a determinable sense. By avoiding being captured by the gaze, the technique of speed in queer dance practices also conceives that the gender, be it male, female, or trans, isn't always necessarily ascertainable. Speed destroys the possibility for such declarations by destroying perceivable and conceivable limits to the body itself.

The use of speed in Lock's work with *La La La Human Steps* breaks down the boundaries of the body, but only temporarily. Lock's work does not suggest that transgendered or transsexual lives are possible by merely literally moving through life at virtuosic speeds: that would be impossible. Yet Lock's work with *La La La Human Steps* offers the potential that the body can escape from intelligible and perceivable gender styles that are neither static nor permanent. Unlike most prominent gender theory, Lock's work with *La La La Human Steps* does not require that the body be present at each and every moment in time as a perceivable and conceivable gender, be it normative or intelligible or queer. His employment of virtuosic speed in queer dance allows for continual indeterminate oscillation, and not merely oscillation between the poles of normative masculinity and normative femininity, but between gender coherence and incoherence, stability and confusion, intelligibility and unintelligibility. Yet this embodiment of *indeterminacy* is not meant as a model for a subject to use in living a trans life, but rather, is presented as an alternate framework for conceiving of trans-ness in particular, and gender and the body more broadly. As we continue to theorize gender and the body in/as performance, I suggest that when we think about these matters, we don't just think, but we think quickly.

Notes

- ¹ Because *Untitled* and Lock's body of work in general eschews conventional narrative structures that support a coherent story, the opportunity for an audience to "reinvent and rediscover the body and dance" is further encouraged.
- ² This article focuses solely on *La La La Human Steps*' work in the theatre. Film pieces such as *Valequez's Little Museum* and *Amelia* also exemplify the aesthetic of speed that dominates Lock's choreography for *La La La Human Steps*, but the medium of film in these instances is employed to capture the body, rather than to obscure and distort it. Ruby Ireland's essay "Choreographing Theory" (cited later in this article) provides an excellent analysis of the film *Amelia* that comes to similar conclusions as I do, but via alternate theoretical points of departure.
- ³ I use the verb "apprehend" throughout the analysis to specifically denote "to seize (a person) in name of law; to arrest" and "to understand (a thing to be *so and so*); to conceive." ("Apprehend"). When one person "apprehends" another person's gender, they metaphorically "arrest" that

person's gender in order to determine it to be male or female, or normative or queer, and through the process of arresting their gender as such, they understand what it means in a larger social context. The analysis that follows relies on the verb "to apprehend" in order to evoke the temporality of "arrest," which means to stop both in time and space, to highlight how most conceptions of gender situate gender as being stopped at a particular moment in time and space. Because the body in Edouard Lock's choreography for *La La La Human Steps* resists apprehension, photos that would render the body apprehensible by sight are not incorporated into the publication of this article.

- 4 In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler argues that the body appears as matter "as the effect of a dynamic power, such that the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects" (xii). When Butler suggests that matter is "not [. . .] site or surface, but [a] process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface" (xviii), she relies on assumptions of normative temporalities in which the body, and its boundaries, fixities, and surfaces, can be apprehended as matter. This article highlights normative temporalities as one of the "normative processes" that Butler mentions here.
- 5 Halberstam's scholarship is paradigmatic of how queer theory has privileged visual and literary texts, and missed the generative sites of dance as embodiment to examine gender and the body.
- 6 Though over the course of this analysis I point out that the need for gender, normative or not, to be a phenomenon apprehended by the senses (mostly sight) is overlooked in Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, her point of departure, as stated in the 1990 preface to *Gender Trouble*, mentions the need for feminist theorists to rely on a stable category of "woman." Butler begins the preface to *Gender Trouble*: "Contemporary feminist debates over the meanings of gender lead time and time again to a certain sense of trouble, as if the indeterminacy of gender might eventually culminate in the failure of feminism" (xix). Both my analysis and Butler's theory of gender expose that "troubling" gender categories deviates from the "contemporary feminist debates" that rely on stable identity categories.
- 7 Feminist dance scholarship has also drawn attention to the way that George Balanchine used men as "tools" for presenting women in ballet. Yet insofar as Balanchine identifies "Woman" as merely an "object of beauty and desire" who is rendered as material to be manipulated by her male counterpart, Balanchine's misogyny reifies rather than challenges conventional gender dynamics (Daly 279).
- 8 Lecavalier retired as a dancer for *La La La Human Steps* in 1999, after appearing in all of the company's major works since its inception. She remained on the board of directors for the company before beginning a solo career.
- 9 Cis-gendered refers to gender identities for whom the social construction of gender is congruous to the biological sexed body of that individual.
- 10 In his program notes, Canadian Stage Artistic Director Matthew Jocelyn introduced *Untitled* by writing that "Lock invites audiences to draw on their experiences with two well-known Baroque Operas, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice*." The ambiguity of "drawing on [our] experiences" of these two opera encourages the audience to "connect the dots" on their own terms (Jocelyn).
- 11 Furthermore, in our digital age, when the necessity of the materiality of the body is challenged in new and innovative ways, it is important to turn attention to the pre/non-digital body as offering

the potential to disrupt the coherence and stability of the body as the site in which gender becomes intelligible. This is to say that as we conceive of the body in new and innovative ways via digital technologies such as *Second Life*, the pre/non digital body still has much to offer in regards to conceptions and perceptions of gender and the body in general.

- ¹² Prosser appeals to the work of Leslie Feinberg to note an emerging phenomenon in which the space on the continuum between “man” and “woman” becomes a site where an individual can live. Prosser writes: “If transsexual has been conceived conventionally as a transitional phase to pass through once the transsexual can pass and assimilate as nontranssexual —one begins as female, one becomes transsexual, one is man—under the aegis of transgender, transsexuals, now refusing to pass *through* transsexuality, are speaking en masse as transsexuals” (11). Again, this conception of trans-ness relies on the body being a stable entity capable of being apprehended by sight.

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