As you enter CounterPulse, projected words are scattered across the side and back walls of the performance space. “Water pipe” reads one under the pipe that runs just below the ceiling. “Dag” reads another, above the head of performer Dag Andersson, seated in a fold up chair upstage, deeply engaged in a conversation with his smart phone. Names of the artists involved in the piece (“Dag”, “Sheldon”…) as well as the objects that make up the space (“concrete block”, “rear”, “side”…) intermingle undifferentiated across the walls, suggesting their innate interconnectedness. Seemingly self evident, this relationship –between artist and venue– has been seriously compromised in the San Francisco art scene, where many artist-run spaces have been shut down due to the sudden frenzy of the real estate market, most notably fueled by the recent tech boom.

This situation provides one of the running threads in Jess Curtis/Gravity’s last piece *The Dance That Documents Itself*, which is in its final run at CounterPulse this week. As Curtis states in the program notes, “Twitter buying the building on the opposite corner of the block where you are now sitting enabled the landlord of this building to increase rent beyond anything that CounterPulse could ever afford,” forcing the organization to look for a new space. Thanks to the support of the Community Arts Stabilization Trust, CounterPulse will move into a newly renovated space in the Tenderloin. But most arts organizations do not have such a success story and are obliged to shut down, leading Curtis to
share his “concern that SF’s rich culture of artist-run underground spaces is on the verge of disappearing entirely.”

While unquestionably responsible for this situation, technology also provides new creative possibilities to artists, as Curtis is prompt to demonstrate. During the first section of his piece – “Saying What I’m Doing”- he transforms the current phenomenon of social media into a generator of performance material. “I am beginning,” he announces, as he stands on the floor. “I am standing,” he continues, signaling what is happening both externally and internally as he stands and moves around the room. Soon after, performer Abby Crain and Curtis exchange short imperative sentences, reminiscent of text messages, that act as choreographing prompts: “Slouch” proclaims Crain to Curtis, who executes his partner’s order. “Sit up” he responds, and Crain straightens her spine. And so their duet continues, moderated by their vocal cues to each other.

The ambivalent relationship between art and technology that Curtis’ piece tackles is most poignantly exposed during intermission, or what Curtis calls “Inner Mission.” The choreographer departs from both stage and the theater itself, for a bike tour around the Mission district. Technology allows Curtis to be here and there at the same time, interacting with the viewer from afar while biking through the rainy streets of the San Francisco night with a video camera attached to his body. Technology allows the artist to expand time and space, the two cornerstones of dance and art performance. Although with an ironic twist, technology is used here to locate former body-based arts organizations that have been forced to close because of the changing economics, such as 285 9th Street, home of the Climate Theater for 25 years before its closure in 2010, or 1519 Mission, a performance space started in 1978 by Jon Sims, which closed in 2010.

Not only comprised of inanimate parts, these spaces hold memory, build community and sustain the creative process, Curtis reminds us. When stopping his bike in front of the door of these former arts organizations, Curtis gives us a short history of the place, remembering seeing a show here or taking a class there. Back at CounterPulse, while “saying what [he] is doing,” he shares excerpts of his own history as a viewer, recalling past performances, which have incontestably influenced his trajectory and work. “Remembering a piece I saw in 1991, Steve Paxton’s improvisation on Goldberg Variations,” Curtis calls out, as he moves his arms and hips, attempting to “create the feeling in my body reminding me of that piece.” But quickly that memory leads to “remembering a reiteration of the piece I saw in Berlin in 1994,” he continues. The memories of these artists who have come before and influenced him are attached to a place and a moment in time, reaffirming that artists performing in venues are key to the reproduction and continuation of the creative cycle.
The piece poetically exposes the vulnerability of artists in a city that is prompt to push them out. There is certainly vulnerability in Crain's risky balance on Curtis shoulders. She stands tall, letting his hands go, while he walks on his toes forward. She challenges him to add a sway to his hips, rendering the balance even more precarious. Vulnerability also, when Crain and Anderson engage in a riveting series of jump flips, their bodies knit in a tight circle, slipping and falling at times. Vulnerability again, when Curtis stands naked during the last section of the piece, next to performer Rachael Dichter, dressed in tight pants, heels and a fur jacket, open enough to disclose a black brassiere.

The projected name tags at the beginning of the piece somehow bring to mind the yellow post-it stickers filled with foreign names, scribbled in handwriting, that people learning a new language might stick all around the house. These colorful flags indicated a whole linguistic world to conquer, and contained a hint of studiousness, exoticism and possibilities. In *The Dance That Documents Itself*, the projections do not point to a new and exciting world to discover, but instead one to save, with artists in mind. A world that understands that, in order to both preserve and enhance the vitality of culture, artists need access to affordable space to continue to practice, explore and shatter the boundaries of their field.

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