



*Simone Forti with a lion cub at the Giardino Zoologico di Roma, 1968.
Courtesy Simone Forti and The Box, LA.*

Simone Forti Goes to the Zoo*

JULIA BRYAN-WILSON

In the photograph, a young woman in a short skirt and sandals sits on a bench. With her crooked elbow, she braces her handbag to her body, tucking her large sketchpad into her armpit. She is petting a lion cub, and as she gazes down to witness the small but extraordinary fact of her hand on its fur, the animal's face turns towards the camera lens with closed eyes. This is dancer and choreographer Simone Forti on one of her many visits to the zoo during the brief time she lived in Rome in the late 1960s. Far from today's "wildlife sanctuaries" where animals can ostensibly wander freely, as the photo of this uncaged cub might suggest, the Giardino Zoologico di Roma offered a highly controlled environment in which animals lived within tight enclosures; Forti was here indulging in a staged, paid encounter, one that she characterized as "irresistible."¹ Irresistible because she was consistently moved by the creatures she drew and studied—moved as in stirred, or touched, as well as in shifted, or altered. As I argue, her dance practice changed dramatically as a result of the time she spent in Rome observing animal motions and interacting with other, animate forms of art.

Petting a lion cub: irresistible, but still melancholy. Designed in part by German collector and merchant Carl Hagenbeck and built in 1911, the Roman zoo is an example of the turn-of-the-century "Hagenbeck revolution" in zoo architecture, which attempted to provide more naturalistic-appearing, open-air surroundings that were landscaped with artificial rocks and featured moats instead of bars, often creating tableaux of animals from different taxonomic

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1. Between 2013 and 2015, I conducted several interviews with Forti by phone, email, and in person; unattributed quotes are from these conversations.

groups in close proximity.² Despite offering a more aesthetically comforting experience for the human viewer, such zoos still limited the animals to cramped, fenced quarters. “One thing which obviously distinguishes animals in general from other forms of life is a power they have of moving themselves from place to place,” observes James Gray in the opening sentence to his influential book *How Animals Move*.³ Yet in zoos, this power of locomotion is severely constrained. When in Rome, Forti gravitated not only to the abundant feral cats that roamed its streets (she took a number of color photographs of them in her 1968 series *Large Argentina, aka Rome Cats*) but also to confined animals, and her motion studies were frequently dedicated to understanding gestures of captivity.

In 1968, Forti moved to Italy from New York. It might be more precise to say she moved *back* to Italy: She was born in Florence, but had left at a young age with her Jewish family after Mussolini’s Fascist government passed crushing anti-Semitic laws in 1938 that stripped Jews of their citizenship. She grew up in Los Angeles, and studied with Ann Halprin in Northern California for four years, during which time she learned new models of corporeal awareness, including ones that embraced improvisation, encouraged openness to external sensation, and did not demand the typically lithe, flexible dancing body (which she did not possess). As Forti recalls of her time with Halprin, “As a base, we had the understanding that dance is not a form which we learn. The attitude that it gave me is that my body is mine.”⁴ Forti absorbed from Halprin an ideology of dance that sees it as a state of mindfulness to be tapped into, rather than a discipline to be mastered.

Forti went from her time in California to an explosive career in New York. After relocating in 1959, she took classes with both Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham, but found them both too rigid in their adherence to technique, too unyielding about isolating elements of the body and demonstrating dancerly skill. About her incompatibility with Graham’s approach, she recounted: “I could not hold my stomach in. I *would not* hold my stomach in.”⁵ As one of the founders of Minimalist dance who nonetheless followed her own trajectory, she promoted in her work a range of bodies whose energy expenditures were transparent to the audience, in opposition to trained, specialized physiques performing expert moves while concealing their exertions.⁶ Forti also studied with Robert Dunn and refined her

2. As part of his wider production of imperial spectacle, Hagenbeck was also a pioneer of exhibiting humans alongside animals; Eric Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck’s Empire of Entertainments* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009). By the 1930s, Hagenbeck’s “artificial reproductions” were falling out of favor, and some zoos adopted more modernist styles. See for instance the celebration of “a hygienic organic setting” in László Moholy-Nagy’s film *The New Architecture and the London Zoo*, 1936.

3. James Gray, *How Animals Move* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 13.

4. Simone Forti, “Danze Costruzioni,” in *Simone Forti, Galleria L’Attico* (Rome: L’Attico, 1968), n.p. Translated by the artist.

5. Simone Forti, *Handbook in Motion* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), p. 34.

6. For a discussion of the formative yet under-recognized role that Forti played in the development of Minimalism, see Virginia Spivey, “The Minimal Presence of Simone Forti,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 3, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2009), pp. 11–18.

sense of chance operations and indeterminacy through a close consideration of John Cage's musical scores.

Seeking space to reflect and reinvent her practice after a decade of performing and working in New York, Forti spent about a year in Rome in the late 1960s. Soon after arriving, she met the art dealer Fabio Sargentini, an advocate of Arte Povera artists whose Galleria L'Attico became a crucial venue for experimental work in Italy when it was founded in 1966.⁷ L'Attico was originally housed, as its name suggests, in an attic, but later relocated to a more expansive site in a garage; in both venues, whole-gallery gestures challenged definitions of art that prioritized conventional media and discrete objects. Such gestures included Sargentini turning his space into a functional gym, as he did in *Ginnastica mentale* from 1968; one photograph captures Forti in motion—a blurred figure in the foreground—as others clamber on equipment and strike the punching bag dangling from the ceiling.

L'Attico's inaugural show in 1966 featured an installation called *Il Mare* by Pino Pascali, and later the gallery presented his fragmented biomorphic forms made of canvas stretched over wooden frames to evoke animal shapes. Before his untimely death in 1968 and just prior to Forti's arrival, Pascali also exhibited his work *Trap* at L'Attico, made of interlaced steel wool and suggestive of a net for large game (or, as in an installation shot that shows the artist's hands stretching out through the sculpture's



Fabio Sargentini. Ginnastica mentale at L'Attico di piazza di Spagna, Rome, with Forti in foreground, 1968. Courtesy L'Attico Archives.

holes, a permeable container for the human body). As Luca Massimo Barbero has written, in works like *Trap* Pascali is “no longer bringing nature into an art gallery, but, on the contrary, he is emphasizing the synthetic and problematic nature of industrial materials with regard to nature.”⁸ The tension between pristine manufactured supplies and dirty or visceral form suggests a generative ambivalence about the

7. Luca Massimo Barbero and Francesca Pola, *L'Attico di Fabio Sargentini, 1966–1978* (Rome: Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma, 2010); and Fabio Sargentini, *Album 9/68–2/71* (Rome: L'Attico, 1971). According to Sargentini, he met Forti through Claudio Cintoli; email correspondence with the author, March 2014.

8. Luca Massimo Barbero, “Rome: Borderlands, Fabio Sargentini's L'Attico,” in Barbero and Pola, *L'Attico*, p. 34.

construction of the so-called natural world, one shared by many others in the loose confederation of artists that came to be known as Arte Povera.

L'Attico was the location of Eliseo Mattiacci's *Action with Steamroller* (1969), in which—in a droll rejoinder to Abstract Expressionism—the artist steam-rolled a long pile of dirt on the gallery floor, creating a thick, almost fecal smearing of mud. Sargentini also commissioned a number of site-specific works from non-Italian artists, including Robert Smithson's *Asphalt Rundown* (1969), an earthwork in which a dump truck released asphalt down the side of a quarry, a piece that foregrounded masculine labor and modern technology's ability to aggressively mark and stain landscapes. Upon meeting Forti and hearing about the inter-media relationships between artists and performers in New York, Sargentini realized that he wanted to expand L'Attico “to become suitable not only for steady objects but also for bodies, dancers, animals.”⁹ He invited Forti to use L'Attico as her private studio space before it opened to the public in the mornings, and the choreographer spent her time there making dances in and among the sculptures the gallery was showing—with their confrontation of “poor” or humble materials, industrial procedures, and suggestive shapes—including work by Pascali, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and Mario Merz. Con-
figuring mass-manufactured every-



Top: Pino Pascali enclosed in his Trap, L'Attico di piazza di Spagna, Rome, 1968. Photograph by Andrea Taverna. Courtesy L'Attico Archives.

Bottom: Eliseo Mattiacci. Action with Steamroller, L'Attico di via Beccaria, Rome. 1969. Photograph by Claudio Abate. Courtesy L'Attico Archives.

9. Sargentini, correspondence with the author, March 2014.

day objects into organic forms, the Arte Povera artists, according to Germano Celant, the critic who named the emerging movement, were undertaking “an experiment with contingent existence.”¹⁰

By providing a platform for Forti’s dance research, L’Attico and its Arte Povera exhibits functioned as a sharp yet productive counterpoint to her own engagements with questions of nature, confinement, and animality. For Forti, bodily gesture develops from a matrix of improvisation and formal composition. Because it is constituted within and against cultural structures of “normal” human movement, dance contests definitions of the “natural”; she used her work in Rome as a proving ground to test this presumption again and again. As Italian theorist Giorgio Agamben states, “The division of life into vegetal and relational, organic and animal, animal and human . . . passes first of all as a mobile border within living man, and without this caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible.”¹¹ Charged divisions between human and animal would come for Agamben, no less than for Forti, to have greater meaning as an occasion for remapping those boundaries.



Mario Merz. *Che fare? Installation view, L’Attico di via Beccaria, 1969.*
 Courtesy L’Attico Archives.

Artists in Rome were forging their work and experimenting with different types of exhibitions within the wider context of the protests that were rocking Italy, and indeed much of the world, at this moment. The volatile political situation included the student occupation of universities in Turin, Rome, and elsewhere starting in 1967 and a militant worker-student solidarity that crossed class lines and led to millions going on a general strike in 1969, during what is known as Italy’s *autunno caldo* or “hot autumn.” L’Attico fomented new forms of art alongside but not always in direct dialogue with this social turmoil. As Sargentini reflected, “I saw the garage as a sort of aesthetic revolution running parallel to what was going on in politics.”¹² Though L’Attico’s political aims were not always explicit,

10. Germano Celant, *Arte Povera* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 226.

11. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 15.

12. Sargentini, quoted in Francesca Pola, “Spaces and Actions of Nimble Creativity,” in Barbero and Pola, *L’Attico*, p. 104.



Yvonne Rainer and Philip Glass at the Music and Dance USA Festival, L'Attico di via Beccaria, 1972. Courtesy L'Attico Archives.

many felt that what happened in the gallery to reframe art, materials, process, and audience had implicit, if not fully elaborated, affinities with the demonstrations in the streets. As with the larger, inchoate formation of *Arte Povera*, its radicalism was unevenly articulated.¹³

Forti landed at a specific moment in Rome amidst these political eruptions, one filled with tension and promise. She was at the center of conversations regarding changing methods of artistic labor that were emerging as boundaries between media were dissolved. Fluent in Italian, her first language, Forti became a significant cultural connector and was essential to the introduction of American Minimal dance and avant-garde music to Italy. Starting in the late 1960s, she helped Sargentini coordinate events at L'Attico featuring experimental music and dance by American artists, and she continued to visit Italy and organize gatherings there after she returned to the United States. In a series of festivals that stretched into the 1970s, the gallery

showed work by Trisha Brown, Philip Glass, Deborah Hay, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, La Monte Young, and many others, forming a vibrant, collaborative art scene enlivened by international traffic that blurred the lines between dance, music, and sculpture.

A series of photos show Forti in the midst of a performance from February 1969 at L'Attico, on a night billed as a group evening that also featured experimental music and works by Steve Lacy and Carlo Colnaghi, entitled “Serata di Violoncello . . . Saxofono . . . Batteria . . . Voce . . . Recita . . . Danza . . .” Forti is seen performing amid objects in the gallery, such as a radiator, a ladder, and a trombone, with a pile of dirt resting off to the side. Accustomed to improvising with the things at hand, Forti worked with the objects preexisting in the space and created a structure permissive enough that viewers felt free to walk across the performance arena. The rather diffuse attention of some of the spectators suggests that she was just one player in a multi-person configuration where several

13. The anti-capitalist class politics—and later disavowals—of Celant in particular are explored in Jacopo Galimberti, “A Third-Worldist Art? Germano Celant’s Invention of *Arte Povera*,” *Art History* 36 (April 2013), pp. 418–41.

performers might have been coexisting spatially but were involved in their own acts. The materials in the space are the detritus from a disassembled piece by Mario Merz—who had an exhibition at L’Attico that same month—and Forti chose to engage with the remains of his artworks, reusing and activating some of Merz’s elements to transform them from sculptures into dance elements.¹⁴

In other shots, she is seen enacting a dance as she participates in an oblique bodily conversation with a pair of long, thin wooden rods, handling them in a dynamic yet vernacular manner—crossing and uncrossing them, tapping them on the ground as if she were dowsing, bending her knees to squat down, creating extensions of her own limbs as she uses the rods as levers or as implements of perception. Measure the distance between Forti at work and Mattiacci with his steamroller or Smithson and the dump truck. Here we have a female body, vulnerable in the center of a space as she manipulates materials in an intimate, hands-on manner.

Forti rejected simplistic equations connecting femininity with the organic; the sticks she danced with were not tree branches but manufactured matter purchased at a store. Her method in such dances, which responded site-specifically to their environments, was one of gathering and discarding, annexing, gauging, and tool-finding: *How will this serve me? What about this?* Forti utilized materials that were on display in her workspace at L’Attico, suggesting a relationship or, to be more forceful, a partnership or *duet* with these Arte Povera components. In this

14. Sargentini, e-mail correspondence with the author, March 2014.



Forti. Performance at “Serata di violoncello . . . Saxofono . . . Batteria . . . Voce . . . Recita . . . Danza . . .,” L’Attico di via Beccaria. February, 1969. Photo by Claudio Abate. Courtesy Simone Forti and The Box, LA.

piece, she danced with Merz by proxy as she danced with his disassembled sculpture. Forti's early collaborator Robert Morris has been taken as an oppositional figure for many Arte Povera artists, as they sought to counteract the clean geometries of Morris's distinctly American brand of Minimalism with more unruly, artisanal, or "anti-technological" forms, to use Benjamin Buchloh's phrase.¹⁵ Forti's special brand of inter-medial work, however, with its merging of structured motion and primal sound, might have found unusual resonance among the Arte Povera artists, as when Forti performed her *Throat Dance*, a sonic, nonlinguistic vocalization based on chanting as well as Dada theater. Though the late 1960s were marked by surges of anti-American sentiment, Roman audiences embraced Forti's loosely Minimal performances; Achille Bonito Oliva, reviewing the *Danza Volo Musica Dinamite* festival sponsored by L'Attico in 1969, praised Forti's "effective transition of human energy" between herself and the spectators.¹⁶

Forti's ephemeral, improvised conversation with Arte Povera components adds another chapter to the story of Italian/American exchange in this moment; her self-identification as an American was filtered through and complicated by the fact that she was an exiled Italian.¹⁷ While Forti has by now been integrated into art-historical



Forti. Performance with Steve Lacy at "Serata di violoncello . . .," L'Attico di via Beccaria. February, 1969. Courtesy Simone Forti and The Box, LA.

15. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Forward," in *Arte Povera: Selections from the Sonnabend Collection* (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, 2001), p. 7.

16. Achille Bonito Oliva, "Primeval Breath, July 1969," reprinted in Barbero and Pola, *L'Attico*, p. 170.

17. For more on the anti-American impulses of Arte Povera, see Nicholas Cullinan, "From Vietnam to Fiat-nam: The Politics of Arte Povera," *October* 124 (Spring 2008), pp. 8–30.



Top: Forti. Throat Dance. Performance view, Danza Volo Musica Dinamite Festival, L'Attico di via Beccaria, July 1969. Photograph by Claudio Abate. Courtesy Simone Forti and The Box, LA.
Bottom: Forti. Sea Lions Slow Sinuous Play (Animal Study). 1968. Courtesy Simone Forti and The Box, LA.

accounts of postwar art, this aspect of her process, with its investigations of mass production and its interaction with Arte Povera, has never been fully explored. Forti's encounters in Rome with new methods of movement and materials became central to her procedures of constructing dance, as she proposed models of collaboration between animate subjects and inanimate objects. These concerns about qualities of animateness were also ignited by her growing interest in animality.

While in Rome, Forti immersed herself in observing animals at the zoo, using her drawings of them walking, pivoting, rolling, rocking, eating, and swaying as source material for her own investigations about anatomy, ritual movement, gravitational forces, and limberness. Her animal drawings, with their lively lines, show her attempt to transcribe in graphite and ink the pliability of animal bodies, to capture how the relationships among their parts can fluidly change with every gesture, sometimes making indications (as in the circular arrow that traces the "sinuous" flip of a sea lion) of their vectors of activity. As the animals interacted with each other and with their surroundings, Forti would often scribble notes to herself, describing the behaviors, relationships, and bodies she observed, and making marks such as lines that curve around an ox's torso to indicate how breathing expands the animal's chest. The durational and physical medium of drawing was crucial to this project, as it allowed her hand and arm to enact movements similar to those she was recording (she never considered using a camera for these studies).

Forti writes, "I gradually became aware that every time I went to the zoo, at some

point during the day, I would catch sight of an animal doing a dance. It wouldn't be the beauty of movement that would make me say that I was watching dancing, but rather the inner attitude of the animal. . . . The sea lions were having great fun. They were really doing movement play, which as far as I'm concerned is one of the roots of dance."¹⁸ So important was this research that Forti appropriated a postcard of sea lions for the cover of a catalogue produced by L'Attico in 1968. The promotional postcard from the Roman zoo depicts several marine mammals in their enclosure, two perched on a concrete island and two in the aquamarine water, facing the direction of the barred fence visible on the right—and, presumably, the human spectators or zoo employees there to watch or tend to them. (A different postcard was used for the back of the catalogue, as the text printed there identifies the animals on the front as brown bears.)

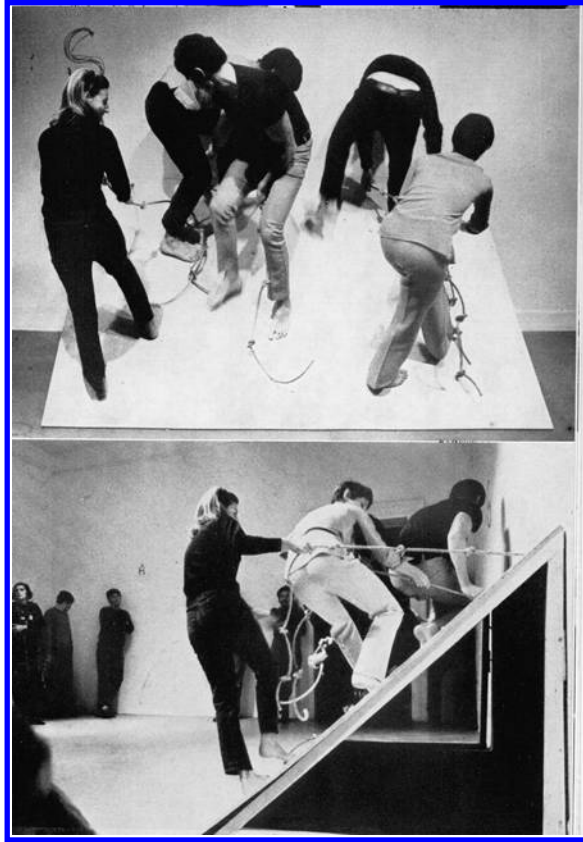
The catalogue documents an event that was divided between two nights; the first featured Minimalist Dance Constructions that Forti originally performed at Yoko Ono's New York loft in 1961 (and continues to perform), including *Slant Board*—in which dancers traverse an inclined wooden plane using knotted ropes and making free figurations with their bodies. In the L'Attico catalogue, both she and Sargentini are pictured performing *Slant Board*, though she often trains others to execute her dances and oversees the performance in the manner of a traditional choreographer. Participants performed *Hangers*, in which they were suspended in U-shaped ropes that dangled from the ceiling, and she debuted a work called *Song*, a superimposition of an Italian folk tune sung by the artist over the Beatles song "The Fool on the Hill" as it played on a turntable. She also per-



Top: Forti. Breathing and Chewing Ox (Animal Study). C. 1968–69. Courtesy Simone Forti and The Box, LA.

Bottom: Cover to Simone Forti: Dance Constructions, featuring appropriated zoo postcard. 1968. Courtesy L'Attico Archives.

18. Simone Forti, "Full Moves: Thoughts on Dance Behaviors," *Contact Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Fall 1984), p. 7.



*Forti. Slant Board. (1961) 1968,
L'Attico, Rome, Italy. Courtesy of
the artist and The Box, LA.*

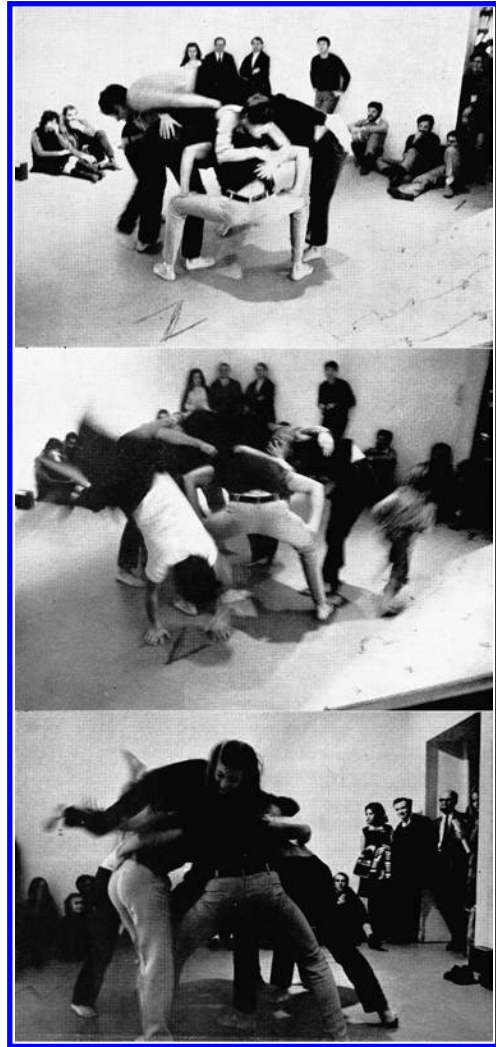
formed what has become one of her most well-known dances, *Huddle*. Demonstrating Forti's interest in transgressing the boundary between object and subject, *Huddle* involves around five to eight performers clustering together with their arms around each other's shoulders, knitted together, as she describes it, "like a small mountain."¹⁹ During the performance, each dancer decides to detach from the group and clammers over the others, scrambling over bent backs, then resumes her place in the huddle.

Noting that "huddle" is both a verb and a noun, art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty compellingly argues that the piece occupies terrain "like a sculpture in a gallery space" and encapsulates how Minimal dance emphasizes a "curious *conver-*

19. Simone Forti, "Reflections on the Early Days," *Movement Research Performance Journal* 14 (Spring 1997), n.p.

gence of actions and things.”²⁰ It is a convergence of animate and inanimate, a sculpture of many bodies that is at once a mountain and a beast. *Huddle* usually unfolds over about ten minutes as various performers organize and reorganize themselves, separating and recombining. The work’s careful and deliberate pace calls to mind a slow-motion depiction of teeming insects, like swarming bees, a fulminating energy knot that has been decelerated as if for the viewer to inspect it. It is also a metaphor for group relations and sociality, as it literalizes interdependency while its gesture of climbing over and across other bodies also evokes instrumentality, stability despite change, indifference, replacement, and the conflict between collectivity and individuality.

On the second evening of her 1968 solo event at L’Attico, Forti presented a selection of newer works, including a piece based on her animal studies. *Sleepwalkers* (sometimes referred to as *Zoo Mantras*) is a meditation on animal comportment in several parts.²¹ Reproduced in her catalog is a brief essay handwritten in Italian in which



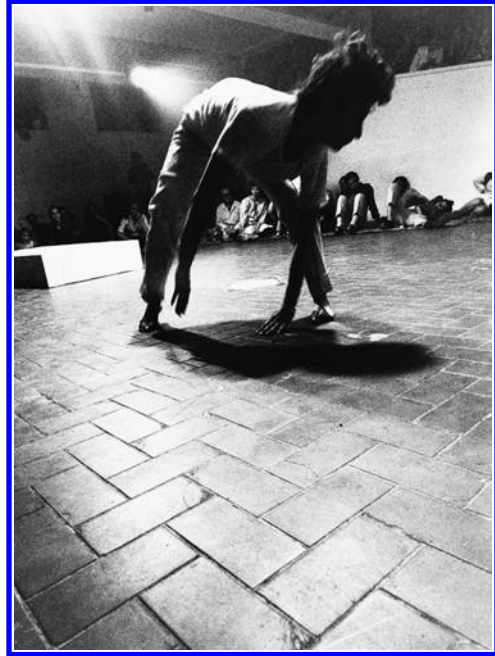
Forti. *Huddle*. (1961), 1968, L’Attico, Rome, Italy. Courtesy of the artist and The Box, LA.

20. Carrie Lambert-Beatty, “More or Less Minimal: Six Notes on Performance and Visual Art in the 1960s,” in *A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958–1968*, ed. Ann Goldstein and Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), p. 105.

21. Forti has a relaxed relationship to titling; similar sequences of movement often reappear under different names as they evolve over the years.

she explains, “*Sleepwalkers* is a return to the sensibility that I harvested when I was studying with Ann Halprin; that is, the immersion in the kinesthetic sense. A return to movement as a means of enchantment, as in somersaulting down a hill, as a polar bear. In fact, the inspiration for this last piece I had while passing many afternoons in the zoo here in Rome.”²² The shift in title is telling: What connects a sleepwalker to a mantra? Both are indications of altered states, but as a sacred utterance a mantra points to a realm of communication somewhat outside of normative language, one that, with repetition, leads to greater insight. But who reiterates the “zoo mantra” to achieve inner calm—the dancer, or the animal?

This solo dance consists of Forti performing a series of repetitive motions that are like discrete grammatical units in her movement vocabulary or “body syntax.” Such units can be combined in various ways to produce various effects. Each of these movements takes place in a different spot in the performance space. For one action, Forti bends at the waist, “with my lower back as a fulcrum,” swinging her head in an arc while swaying from side to side like a polar bear, sometimes stopping at the top of an arc to “try to smell the air.”²³ As she writes in her 1974 *Handbook in Motion*, “It seems to me that when a polar bear swings his head, he is in a dance state. He is in a state of establishing measure, and of communion with the forces of which he is part.”²⁴ Other movement-units in *Sleepwalkers* include trying to sleep standing up like a flamingo, and rolling from one side of the space to another slowly, like “seaweed caught in a surf.”²⁵ Another action involved Forti’s balancing in a plank position on her hands and toes, hopping periodically and then being



Forti. *Sleepwalkers* (aka Zoo Mantras). Performance view, *Danza Volo Musica Dinamite Festival, L'Attico di via Beccaria, 1969*. Photograph by Claudio Abate. Courtesy L'Attico Archives.

22. Forti, “Danze Costruzioni,” n.p.

23. Quoted in Patrick Steffen, “Forti on All Fours: A Talk with Simone Forti,” *Contact Quarterly Online Journal*, January 9, 2012, <https://community.contactquarterly.com/journal/view/onallfours>.

24. Forti, *Handbook*, p. 119.

25. Forti in conversation with the author, November 2013.

still again, alternating between activity and inertness.²⁶ More than wild abandon, these small, even modest movements call to mind play as well as entrapment (as in seaweed “caught” by the waves); what is more, they do not aim to be mimetic, as if Forti were a conveyer of straightforward information about how animals or seaweed “are.” Rather, they evoke qualities of animateness, as Forti distills the bodily pleasures often found in these motions as well as the habitual behaviors developed under duress.



*Forti. Sleepwalkers (aka Zoo Mantras).
Performance view, Danza Volo Musica
Dinamite Festival, L'Attico di via Beccaria,
1969. Photograph by Claudio Abate.
Courtesy L'Attico Archives.*

Regarding a movement in *Sleepwalkers* that was inspired by an elephant's walk, she writes, “I saw an elephant who had perfected a movement with which he passed the time of day. It was a walking backwards and forwards, six or seven steps each way, with at either end a slight kick which served to absorb the momentum and to reverse the direction of travel of that great and finely balanced bulk.”²⁷ With subtle shifts in gravity that ebb and flow as she walks first forward and then back, and a percussive kick that punctuates the end of the short journey and signals a change in direction, Forti illustrates how she is a serious student of gait. *Sleepwalkers* does not present the elephant in a mythic and illusory “natural” state; rather, Forti tunes in to its nervous habits. With her drawings and her dances, she not only explores exuberance and dance-play but also thematizes how animal motions are structured, if not actively produced, by an environment of confinement. She puts herself through the animal's paces with full awareness of her own human envelope; that is, she appropriates its ritual of “passing the time of day” not to perfect an imitation but to reframe and re-perceive the organization of her own body. By segmenting and then repeating limited passages of movement, for instance by isolating a few steps out of the elephant's many other motions, she creates an almost musical sense of pause, interval, and tempo. The actions are not necessarily strenuous in the sense of muscular exertion, but they require a highly refined kinesthetic awareness and an acceptance of a routine that is interrupted by hesitations and abrupt ends.

26. Forti performed a similar action in Robert Whitman's theater piece *American Moon* (1960).

27. Simone Forti, “Animal Stories,” in Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), p. 79.

What is striking about Forti's *Sleepwalkers*, a.k.a. *Zoo Mantras*, is that, unlike other Minimal dancers such as Yvonne Rainer, she does not, in the main, take her cues from the world of human work, such as the assembly line or the stylized regimentations indebted to Taylorist factories, but rather from the verve, lability, strain, and occasional joy of animals who develop their own patterns, patterns they settle into and continually replicate within the fenced-in arena of a zoo.²⁸ At the same time, her dances around 1968 are also *consonant* with task-based movements in that they are concerned with capitalist de-habituation and re-habituation, insofar as Taylorism reprograms workers' movements in the service of greater productivity and zoos reprogram animals' movements in the service of passive incarceration.²⁹ And animals have been persistently recruited as instruments of labor, agrarian and otherwise. Forti's motions self-consciously capture modified actions and adjusted, habitual movement; they simultaneously express the plasticity and predictability of an animal's own "dance behavior."³⁰

In fact, Forti began performing her *Zoo Mantras*, with their exploration of creaturely conduct, during a time when prominent philosophers and scientists battled publicly in heated debates about animal behavior and its applicability to human "nature." Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression*, which examined animals' ritual actions that function to control destructive urges towards violence, was published in 1963 and translated into English in 1966.³¹ (Forti was familiar with Lorenz and cited his work on deciphering birdsong in her own writings about animal patterning, as well as in her performance *Jackdaw Songs*.³²) In addition, Jane Goodall's first primate studies from the Gombe, which controversially recorded not only all manner of complex social relationships in chimps but also a far wider range of aggressive activity than had previously been ascribed to them, appeared in print in 1968.³³ Punctuating her text with careful line drawings that depict the chimps grooming, eating, resting, and engaging in what she called "maintenance activities" and "locomotor play," Goodall declares of such play, "The only goal was the actual performance of the pattern itself."³⁴ Though her study was considered unrigorous and unscientific by many, Goodall actively pursued a kind of critical anthropomor-

28. Lambert-Beatty elucidates how Rainer enacts a nuanced dialogue with task-based time and the rationalizations of Taylor in her *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008).

29. For one elaboration of behaviorist discourse within the arts, see Morse Peckham, *Man's Rage for Chaos: Biology, Behavior, and the Arts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967). My gratitude goes to Alistair Rider for his perceptive thoughts about habituation vis-à-vis Forti.

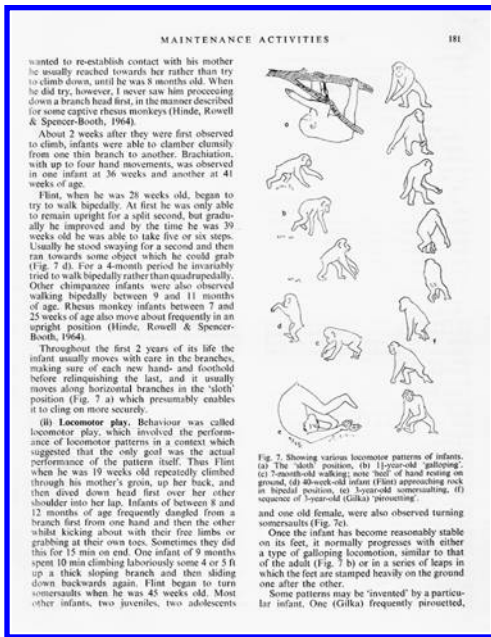
30. Forti uses this phrase in her article "Animate Dancing: A Practice in Dance Improvisation," *Contact Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2001), p. 35.

31. Konrad Lorenz, *Das sogenannte Böse: zur Naturgeschichte der Aggression* (Vienna: Borotha-Schoeler, 1963); translated as *On Aggression* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966).

32. Forti, "Animate Dancing," pp. 12–13. See also "The Workshop Process: Sabine Breitwieser in Conversation with Simone Forti," *Simone Forti: Thinking with the Body* (Salzburg: Museum der Moderne, 2014), p. 31.

33. Jane van Lawick-Goodall, *The Behavior of Free-Living Chimpanzees in the Gombe Stream Reserve* (London: Baillière, Tindall & Cassel, 1968).

34. Goodall, p. 181.



Jane van Lawick-Goodall. Page with illustration from *The Behavior of Free-Living Chimpanzees*. 1968.

Arendt, recourse to “instinct” to explain the eruption of global violence in the 1960s in particular was not the answer. Against Lorenz and his biological justification of rage and aggression as “natural,” Arendt argues that “violence is neither beastly nor irrational. . . . It is no doubt possible to create conditions under which men are dehumanized—such as concentration camps, torture, famine—but this does not mean that they become animal-like; and under such conditions, not rage and violence, but their conspicuous absence is the clearest sign of dehumanization.”³⁵

Though Forti was unique within the Minimal dance world for her animal research, she was participating in a much wider surge of interest in animals within art, and in other realms of cultural production, in the late 1960s.³⁷ In retrospect, it is astonishing how many animals were marshaled into service at the time by artists,

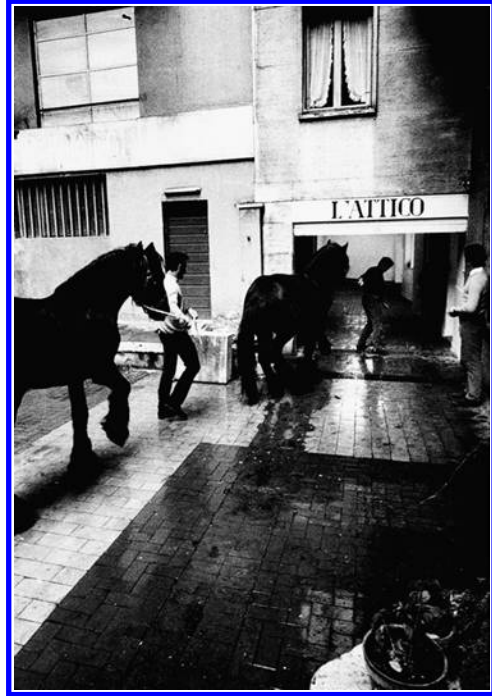
35. Forti, *Handbook*, p. 91.

36. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), p. 63.

37. The animal as a central figure in modern Italian thought and writing is addressed in Deborah Amberson and Elena Past, eds., *Thinking Italian Animals: Human and Posthuman in Modern Italian Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

in Rome and elsewhere.³⁸ In 1965–66, Richard Serra, for his first solo exhibition, installed *Animal Habitats, Live and Stuffed* at Galleria La Salita in Rome, creating an environment featuring taxidermied and living rabbits, hens, turtles, and quail. Pascali's early metaphoric critters gave way to many works involving live animals that were shown at L'Attico around the time Forti was using the gallery as her studio space—though she was not always in Rome to witness them—including the most well-known example, Jannis Kounellis's 1969 installation *Untitled (12 Horses)*, which consisted of a dozen horses tethered around the periphery of the gallery like cars in a showroom. (Kounellis also made work at L'Attico that utilized live birds.) L'Attico hosted Mimmo Germana's caged owls; Vettor Pisani's turtles bearing weights on their backs; and Gino de Dominicis's living diorama of the twelve zodiac signs, including fish, a ram, a goat, and a lion (all three works, 1970). The fact that the artists were able to procure such a range of live animals for their work points to a steady trade in which animals both domesticated and undomesticated could be inserted into spaces where they are not usually found.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, many artists deployed animals in their work for a range of affective and formal effects, including Joseph Beuys, VALIE EXPORT, Ana Mendieta, and Robert



Top: Fabio Sargentini watching Jannis Kounellis's horses entering L'Attico di via Beccaria, 1969. Photograph by Claudio Abate. Courtesy L'Attico Archives.
Bottom: Gino di Dominicis. Zodiac. 1970, L'Attico, Rome. Photograph by Claudio Abate. Courtesy L'Attico Archive.

38. In 1969, for example, Betty Parsons Gallery in New York organized a group show called "The World of the Zoo."

Rauschenberg.³⁹ Animals are a pervasive focus of interest throughout the history of art; indeed, Deleuze and Guattari have commented that “art is continually haunted by the animal.”⁴⁰ Although the appearance of animals cannot be generalized across the work of such diverse artists, their inclusion in gallery spaces in the late 1960s had the potential to register as politically inflected, for it was at this moment that animal rights as a concern for the state were emerging both in the U.S. and in Europe. In the U.S., the Animal Welfare Act was signed into law in 1966, spurred in part by an article about animal experimentation, titled “Concentration Camps for Dogs,” published that year in *Life* magazine.⁴¹ *Life*’s language of “concentration camps,” with its resonance with the Holocaust, made an explicit, if sensationalized, parallel between the genocide of Jews (and others) and ongoing abuses of animals. The European Convention for the Protection of Animals during International Transport was signed in 1968, declaring that “every person has a moral obligation to respect all animals and to have due consideration for their capacity for suffering.” For a Jewish artist like Forti, the language of the *Life* article would have been particularly fraught. Agamben’s work on animalization, too, puts pressure on the figure of the racialized other, particularly what he calls the “Jew, that is the non-man produced within the man.”⁴² If, under Fascism, the basic humanity of Jewish people was denied, Forti’s refiguration of (presumably degraded) animal actions as a resource affirmed such animals’ fundamental self-possession. Working far outside the classically codified physical formations of, say, ballet, Forti’s dances, with their intentional “inhumanity,” conjure a whole host of non-normative bodies—for instance, those that are disabled—that were also despised under Fascism.

Animals in art are often cast in a positive light, as a source of primitive energy unfettered by human sociality or as a stand-in for uninhibited freedom. They can also, however, be shadowed by negative connotations, serving to represent that which is outside dignity and beneath the realm of rights, or to encapsulate a natural order now destroyed, memorialized in a state of perpetual loss. Forti’s consideration of animals was far from simplistic, but it was partly tinged with grief. She felt enormous tenderness and empathy for the creatures she witnessed in zoos, and while in Italy she turned with special attention to their anxious behaviors. In one moment of *Sleepwalkers*, she hangs her head low, bending over at the waist with her hands touching the ground, rhythmically rocking side to side, in a gesture that indicates both frenzy and collapse. As she has written, “There was a time when my improvising was anchored in observations of animals, mainly in zoos. And what finally stopped me

39. For a wide overview, see Petra Lange-Berndt, *Animal Art: Präparierte Tiere in der Kunst 1850–2000* (Munich: Verlag Silke Schreiber, 2009). See also Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000); and Ron Broglio, *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

40. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 184.

41. Michael Silva, “Concentration Camps for Dogs,” *Life* 60, no. 5 (February 4, 1966), pp. 22–29.

42. Agamben, *The Open*, p. 37.

was the sadness of captivity.”⁴³ She was interested in the zoo as a constraint, or field, one that might be analogized to the stage or performance space, and in exploring how dancing bodies—both human and animal—might convey solitude and agitation, but also steadying purpose.

Forti has described feeling “uneasy” about watching bears whose fur has been “worn away,” perhaps from malnutrition or mistreatment or from rubbing against something in their claustrophobic pens.⁴⁴ Her 1974 article in *Avalanche*, “Dancing at the Fence,” discusses the “limited space” and boredom of zoo animals and focuses on their methods of self-soothing.⁴⁵ In another text, she describes how the polar bear swinging its head is “taking care of itself in a way I could understand. . . . That bear, whose genetic makeup keeps it ranging at great distances over frozen lands, was in a small enclosure in the Rome zoo. Why did my heart identify with its heart? It just did. . . . Often, when the situation in which I live out my human patterns has been disrupted, it’s through movement that I still know myself.”⁴⁶ Reinventing herself into an organism among other organisms, in the animal dances Forti goes beyond primitivizing regression or atavism to acknowledge a deeply felt affinity.

Rather than turning to animals for a model of “natural” liberation, Forti came to them out of despair, a shared sense of dislocation, loneliness, and isolation. At the same time, she did not neglect their adaptability, attending closely to their moments of connection and collective recreation. She was constantly aware that their movements were shaped not only by their state of captivity but also by their inner reserves of strength. She mentions, for instance, “the big cats’ compulsive pacing at the



Forti. Sleepwalkers (aka Zoo Mantras). Performance view, *Danza Volo Musica Dinamite Festival, L'Attico di via Beccaria, 1969*. Photograph by Claudio Abate. Courtesy L'Attico Archives.

43. Forti, “Animate Dancing,” p. 35.

44. Forti, “Full Moves,” p. 10.

45. Forti, “Dancing at the Fence,” *Avalanche* 10 (December 1974), pp. 20–23.

46. Forti, “Full Moves,” p. 10.

fence, which seemed to provide a modicum of relief,” and writes that it gave her “a new view of what it was that I was doing when I was dancing.”⁴⁷ Movement is, for the animals as well as for her, a method of control and redirected awareness: “At times I’ve escaped an oppressive sense of fragmentation by plunging my consciousness into cyclical momentum.”⁴⁸

In one of her texts about watching captive animals, Forti describes her observation of the patterns of activity created by demonstrators chanting and walking collectively in circles, describing how a group of marchers would change directions and velocities in recognizable configurations, “without which their energy would drop and their long vigil become languorous and ineffectual.”⁴⁹ In this, Forti connects animal movements, protesting bodies, and dance. Dance theorist Bojana Kunst has noted, “What bodies do in daily life (how do they walk, move, stand, stop, sit, etc.) opens an insight into the complex relationality between the movement of bodies and the materiality of the world.”⁵⁰ Human bodies are disciplined to move in ways that are impacted by gender, age, ability, race, sexuality, and class, and to relate without words to other bodies in social space; this is one of the reasons dance as a form has historically been utilized to summon the tidal swells of mass movement like street protests. Dance has also lent insight into the choreographed circulation of bodies as they are subject to policing and the state’s management of motion, such as the crowd control of kettling. This is in part why dance theorists hold out the hope that the activation of the body—the bodies of both the performer and the spectator—might trigger new ways of being active in the world.

Forti’s dances based on animal studies, then, present the body as a site of confinement as well as potential. Unlike Kounellis, who brought live horses into the gallery, thus reinscribing conditions of powerlessness and capture, Forti takes animal sensations into her own body, embodying animality rather than replicating a situation of captivity. In her work, animals are not idealized and romanticized—or rather, they are not *only* idealized and romanticized (for there is surely some of that, too)—as emblems of freedom and base urges, but are recognized as beings forced into circumstances beyond their control, constantly mediated by human intervention. She writes, “I watched them salvage, in their cages, whatever they could of their consciousness.”⁵¹ Far from being outside sociality, animals, especially within the laboratory conditions of a zoo, mirror human civilization’s harshest tendencies. As performed at L’Attico, the *Zoo Mantras* offered Forti an opportuni-

47. Forti, “Animate Dancing,” p. 35.

48. Forti, “Dancing at the Fence,” p. 23.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

50. Bojana Kunst, “Working Out Contemporaneity Dance and Post-Fordism,” in *Dance, Politics, and Co-Immunity*, ed. Gerald Siegmund and Stefan Hölscher (Zurich/Berlin: diaphanes, 2013), p. 62.

51. Forti, *Handbook*, p. 91.

ty to consider our own complicity in and blindness to situations of imprisonment, and it seems no accident that she developed this dance within the context of her own return to Italy, whose recent Fascist past directly impacted her life.

In 1974, Forti further visualized her interest in the zoo-as-constraint in a twenty-minute video produced as part of her show at New York's Sonnabend Gallery. Shot by artist Elaine Hartnett, the video continuously tracks three grizzly bears at New York's Central Park Zoo as they walk from one end to the other end of their small cage, whirling around and rearing up on hind legs to change direc-

tion. Forti called the video *Three Grizzlies*, commenting that bears pace as a "functional ritual" of survival.⁵² The sense of incarceration is palpable, as the bears are shown in their tiny artificial enclosure, and the gridded layers of the fence, with its profusion of bars and mesh, compromises any clear view of the animals' figures. The diegetic soundtrack reveals the screams and queries of schoolkids on an outing, as a teacher explains, "It's a grizzly bear, children." In this relentless, graphic depiction of confinement and the derangement it generates, Forti draws our attention to the spectacle of zoos, our simultaneous proximity to and distance from these bears, and the conditions by which they are segregated from us and displayed for our benefit. In a drawing made in preparation for the video, the diagonal lines that compose the cage delimit much of the surface of the picture plane, imposing their geometry onto the hulking forms of the bears. This drawing stands in contrast to some of her earlier animal studies, such as the breathing ox, in which she placed the figure against a blank background, isolated from its surroundings. Instead of floating in undifferentiated white space, the grizzlies are pinned down by a schema of crossed lines.



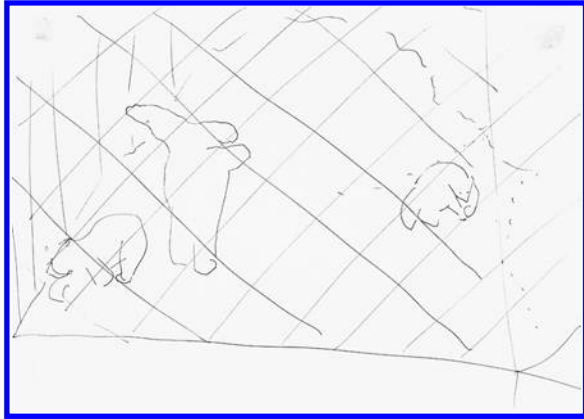
Forti. *Three Grizzlies*. 1974. Courtesy Simone Forti and *The Box*, LA.

In addition to closely observing animals in zoos and practicing during the off-hours at L'Attico, Forti spent her Italian winter in Turin, where she was involved with a different "zoo": Michelangelo Pistoletto's collaborative theater troupe Lo Zoo, which performed satirical plays on the streets of fishing villages and elsewhere in Europe.⁵³ Modeled in part on Jerzy Grotowski's "poor theater"

52. Forti, "Animate Dancing," p. 35.

53. Forti, "Teatro," undated unpublished text. One account of Lo Zoo is found in Pan Wendt, "Social Fabric," in *Institutions by Artists* vol. 1, ed. Jeff Khonsary and Kristina Lee Podesva (Vancouver: Fillip Editions, 2012), pp. 81–92.

and the Living Theatre, both of which were known to Pistoletto, Lo Zoo was an attempt to reinvigorate working-class and vernacular forms of public storytelling. Pistoletto wrote that the name reflected the fact that “so-called civilization had relegated every animal to its cage. The less dangerous, more docile and submissive had been placed in large common fenced-in areas: factories, housing projects, sport stadiums.”⁵⁴ Forti served as the choreographer



Forti. Three Grizzlies (Animal Study).
Courtesy Simone Forti and The Box, LA.

for Lo Zoo’s version of *Caligula*, which was never performed, and which ended with everyone “getting looped on red wine, celebrating how well, though we had never touched a stage, the theatrics had gone.”⁵⁵ Though animals in their cages for Pistoletto became a way to metaphorize class strictures—and animality was a troublesome stand-in for “docile” workers—for Forti they were also models of resourcefulness, of ingenuity, of managing stress, and of endurance. Political friction erupted when she tried to teach dance to students at a city-run academy and was told by a Lo Zoo writer that it was “immoral for me to be teaching through the State Theater . . . the streets being the only place where anything honorable can be learned. There were many other stormy periods.”⁵⁶ Within the chaos of Lo Zoo, she felt not like an Italian returning to her country of origin but rather like “the confused American.”⁵⁷

It bears repeating that Forti’s work in Rome unfurled within the context of Italy’s *autunno caldo*, even though she claims to have been only peripherally, if at all, aware of such developments as the rise of *Operaismo* or the worker-student strikes. Though Merz and others in Arte Povera vocally articulated widespread disgust with the US war in Vietnam, Forti’s own countercultural artistic circuit was not necessarily integrated into an ever-fracturing but still strident political Left. In fact, she felt moments of disconnection with the advanced art scene surrounding her, particularly as some U.S. artists produced pieces that to her glorified destruction, death, and military weaponry. In 1969, she returned to Italy

54. Michelangelo Pistoletto, “Lo Zoo,” *Teatro 1* (1969), p. 16, quoted in “Open Studio—Manifesto of Collaboration—The Zoo,” <http://www.pistoletto.it/eng/crono07.htm>.

55. Forti, “Teatro”; see also her account in *Handbook*, p. 93.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Forti, *Handbook*, p. 93.

from the U.S. to help organize, with Sargentini, the Danza Volo Musica Dinamite festival. For his piece, David Bradshaw created an explosion in a pond, and she describes the horror she felt watching the blast and then seeing dead fish float up to the surface of the water. “Radial victims of a linear intent. I was there, but I was not in Rome. I was with the ants.”⁵⁸ In this statement, Forti professes a far-reaching empathy, one so powerful that she becomes insect, disassociating from her human self. She started to suspect, after Bradshaw’s piece, “a common world view between aesthetic research coming out of New York and the foreign policy coming out of Washington.”⁵⁹



Promotional materials for Festival Danza Volo Musica Dinamite, L'Attico. 1969. Courtesy L'Attico Archives.

“All sites of enforced marginalization—ghettos, shanty-towns, prisons, mad-houses, concentration camps—have something in common with zoos. But it is both too easy and too evasive to use the zoo as a symbol,” writes John Berger in his 1977 essay “Why Look at Animals.”⁶⁰ For Berger the zoo is a catastrophe that runs parallel to capitalism itself, in which the “marginalization of animals is followed by the marginalization and disposal of the only class who, throughout history, has remained familiar with animals and maintained the wisdom which accompanies that familiarity: the middle and small peasant.”⁶¹ Berger’s cogent commentary interlaces the rise of industrialized labor with a fierce hunger for animal spectacle. The subsumption of farm work by the factory means that meaningful contact with animals has faded, giving way to supervised spaces where such contact exists mostly as fantasy. Berger notes: “The zoo to which people go to meet animals, to observe them, to see them, is, in fact, a monument to the impossibility of such encounters.”⁶²

Forti, however, acknowledged the uneasiness fostered by the zoo. She approached it as a multifaceted system—not a symbol, but a *system*—that offered up, in addition to its sorrows, an unexpected, if fleeting, surplus of affective non-verbal exchange, of catalyzing bodily sensations, and of compassion among denigrated subjects in the aftermath of Fascism. Feminist post-humanisms, including work by Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, and Donna Haraway, have furnished one

58. Ibid., p. 100.

59. Ibid., p. 103.

60. John Berger, “Why Look at Animals,” in *About Looking* (London: Writers and Riders, 1980), p. 24.

61. Ibid., pp. 24, 26.

62. Berger, p. 19.

helpful route to thinking about the shared constraints produced by discursive and regulatory systems of gender and speciesism, as well as the possibility of surprising alliances across the human/nonhuman divide.⁶³ Forti's animal dances, which focus on repetitive, contained motions and enact a resistance to the formulation that the animal equals the untamed equals the feminine (equals the Jew, one might add), are prescient examples of such post-human thought. They disarticulate the conjunctions made between women and animalistic behaviors, as they do not perform instinct, or wildness, or "nature," or any gender-specific embodiment—they are danced fully clothed, for one thing.

Forti continued to make work relating to animal motions for decades. Back in New York in the early 1970s, she spent time at the American Museum of Natural History examining reptile skeletons, studying the way their legs attach to their pelvises, how the bones changed from the low, horizontal axis—what Rosalind Krauss, after Bataille, calls an orientation of anality, scatology, sex, and excretion—to the erect primate.⁶⁴ Crawling has recurred throughout Forti's practice, sometimes as part of a dance and sometimes as an exercise or one component of her larger movement vocabulary. In *Striding Crawling* (1974), a piece that was an outgrowth of *Sleepwalkers/Zoo Mantra*, she begins by walking, then gradually transitions to the floor, shifting between bipedal motion and locomoting on all fours, using non-stylized, direct actions to flow between upright movement and snakelike slithering. Probing the transition between horizontal and vertical in an accelerated rhythm, she was interested in the different angles of orientation of the spine and the position of the head as well as the continuities or ability to "melt," as she says, between these forms of contralateral activity.⁶⁵

Here she tests the limits between one spatial arrangement and another, from standing face forward, limbs at her side, to activating her hands to grasp the floor and propel her forward along the ground. Alternating between these actions in a circular ambulation, Forti looks to animals to find ways of disentangling narratives of progress, evolution, and development, countering teleological accounts that separate animals as "inferior," lower, or lesser than humans. As Forti has grown older, she has herself continued to perform both *Sleepwalkers* and *Striding Crawling*—and though a loss of functionality due to aging is often associated with animality, when she dances now, she challenges presumptions of frailty in elderly bodies with her nimbleness as well as in her embrace of moments of stiffness. While an older woman crawling on all fours might recall helplessness and vulnerability, it is also testament to her resilience and vitality.

Forti's animal dances, no less than the frequently rustic materials of Arte

63. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013); Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2007).

64. Rosalind Krauss, "Modernist Myths," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p. 80.

65. Quoted in Steffen, "Forti on all Fours," p. 3.



Simone Forti. Performance, International Performances Festival, Vienna Austria, 1978. Photograph by Robert Fleck. Courtesy Simone Forti and the Box, LA.

Povera, index a jagged transition from an agricultural economic model to one of increasing industrialization. Fueled by her zoo observations, as well as her collaborations with the objects of Arte Povera and the theatrics of Lo Zoo, Forti's brief time in Italy proved pivotal to her practice, as she embarked on work that negotiated the co-construction of human and animal in its exploration of play and pathos, restriction and release, motion and confinement. Arte Povera processes helped underscore for her the imbrication of animate and inanimate, and her fluid traffic between choreography, composition, and performance also was galvanizing for L'Attico as she created connections between New York and Rome. Forti took cues from the flexibility and dynamism of animals as she thematized both imprisonment and self-generated rituals of pleasure and coping, dancing at the edge of the fence as well as within the gallery walls.