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Nature and Notation: Steps Towards a New Dance Ontology

By Madelyn Sher

B.A. Philosophy, B.A. Dance

Thesis Advisor:

James Mahon

Chair, Department of Philosophy

City University of New York at Lehman College

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Dance theory is a newly treated area of study within the broader field of aesthetics, and a rather enigmatic one at that. The relative scarcity of philosophical scholarship on dance, when compared to the philosophy of other forms of art, could be and has been attributed to historical circumstances that affect society's exposure to artistic dance. Francis Sparshott claims that dance has not traditionally held a culturally significant status as an art form, thus limiting the attention that writers give it; lack of an efficient notational system prevents us from maintaining an archival record of dances of the past; the prevalence of Puritan values has shaped a mistrust and fear of the body, the prime ingredient in dance; and even the stereotype of dance as a feminine practice has dissuaded aestheticians from seriously engaging with the philosophy of dance.[1] Sparshott importantly adds, however, that none of these allegations singly give us a sufficient explanation for the neglect of the philosophy of dance: they could not have "prevailed against the universally recognized ubiquity and centrality of dance in the domain of art."[2] Dance is widely and easily recognized as a form of art. Why then, have philosophers skipped over dance in their aesthetic inquiries?

The unique nature of artistic dance gives us an idea of why it has been given less attention in aesthetics.[3] Though it would seem intuitive to orient dance within the

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[1] Sparshott, Francis. *Off The Ground: First Steps to a Philosophical Consideration of the Dance.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988. Print. 7-23.
[2] Ibid., 23.
[3] In this paper, I am primarily concerned with "artistic dance", or dance as a form of art, which I mean to contrast with dance as a social practice. Dance *qua art* is an instance of

parameters set by inherited theories of art, the art of dance indeed possesses certain traits that prevent an easy integration of it into established aesthetic theory: notably the prevailing theory of type/token analysis that is common in performing arts philosophy. Dance is "essentially embodied" and "essentially ephemeral", to use the words of Renee Conroy; dance artworks are real-time events that rely on the dancer's absorption of the movement material developed by or with a choreographer.[4] We will see that the type/token analysis fails to capture the unique ephemerality of dance because the dance artwork cannot exist independently of its performance.

In this paper, which addresses dance ontology, I will argue that dance is deserving of philosophical attention precisely because of its uniqueness as an art form. That we cannot seem to fit dance into dominant aesthetic theories leads us in the direction of a separate aesthetic theory of dance. Challenging the dominant view - supported by popular theories of art - that the dance artwork is a metaphysical entity that is separate from the dance performance, I argue that the dance performance *is* the dance artwork. First I will offer an overview of some major aesthetic theories, showing the inadequacy of each to wholly account for dance. Next, drawing on principles of John Dewey's pragmatic aesthetic theory, I will present a broad definition of dance that enables us to qualify different experiences of dance; subjective experiences of dance, I argue, form the very

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human dancing wherein the dancers are a part of an ordered series of movements that are aimed at a perceiving audience. Social dancing is a practice that is engaged in often casually, without being perceived as a work of art (i.e. the dancing that happens at a wedding reception).

[4] Conroy, Renee M. "Dance." *The Continuum Companion to Aesthetics*. London: Continuum, 2012. Print. 168.

identity of dance artworks. Finally, testing this definition against possible objections, I will explore the philosophical demands and complexities of dance notation, a discussion I believe to be closely intertwined with our discussion of dance ontology. For if we claim to know what essentially distinguishes a dance work from other things, does this knowledge grant us the ability to store and transmit information about the nature of a dance work, for future restaging of this same work? I will argue that the definition of dance *qua art* that we have constructed limits the accuracy of a working notational system and, further, the real possibility of recreating any work of dance.

I. Ontology

When speaking casually, it seems quite uncontroversial to label something as a "dance" or "dancing". Perhaps you saw a dance performed by the New York City Ballet last week, you went out dancing at a Tango club last night, or you noticed leaves dancing in the wind this afternoon. There are some elements that we take to be common among these referents: movement, time, rhythm, and space. However, the clarity with which language illustrates the concept of dance does not give us a sufficient account of dance as an art form: what is dance *qua art*? It seems that "patterned, rhythmic movement in space and time" [5] is far too broad a definition for the human artistic practice that we call dance. Even if we specify that this type of movement must involve human beings, and "leaves dancing in the wind" becomes only an instance of the metaphorical usage of "dance", we

[5] Copeland, Roger, and Marshall Cohen. *What Is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983. Print. 1.

are still left to distinguish dance from the many patterned ways in which human beings move: military marches, daily commutes to work, and even the routine that is getting ready for bed. In order to arrive at a complete, sufficient, and clearly constrained definition of the art of dance, it would be prudent to orient dance practices within an existing theory of art. In this section, we will examine the following questions concerning ontology: How do we define dance? How does dance ontology fit into the discourse of traditional theories of art and how does this way of talking about dance uphold the common rhetoric surrounding dance ontology?

As Roger Copeland and Marshal Cohen present in their anthology *What is Dance?,* we can separate theories of art into the categories of imitation, expression, and form, and use these theories to orient dance within the broader field of artistic practice. Of course, this list of theories is not exhaustive; there are other conceptions of art that we presently exclude, such as the institutional theory of art and the "cluster concept" account of art.

I.a. Extant Theories of Dance

Imitation

The conception of art as imitation is attributable to Plato and Aristotle, notably in Aristotle's *Poetics,* in which he discusses the concept of mimesis, or a perfected imitation of nature. In Book I, he states that dance "imitates character, emotion, and action, by rhythmical movement"[6]. The nature-imitation theory of art was upheld for centuries, and

[6] Aristotle. *Poetics.* Indianapolis: Hackett pub., 1987. Print.

is perhaps still a popular way of thinking about art. According to this theory, art is a reflected image of reality: not reality itself, but a copy that represents events of the world. As applied to dance, the imitation of human character, which is arrived at through the embodiment of human action and gesture, generates a narrative that contains these characters. Selma Jeanne Cohen states, "Dance's sphere of imitation is that of men's characters as well as what they do and suffer"[7]; otherwise said, that dance is representational of humans and their experiences in the world. John-Georges Noverre argues that dance is actually most beautiful when its imitation of life is as close to depicting reality as possible.[8] The measure of attractiveness in art, for him, lies in its capacity to closely resemble life. Noverre also idealizes art that "conceals the composer's labours from the eyes of the spectator"[9]. He means here that art at its best is such a striking imitation of reality that the medium of the art is hardly visible; it is the imitated situation, or what is being represented, that is of interest to the viewer. When viewing a dance performance, then, the narrative content of the dance is more prevalent than is the fact of dancing.

While Noverre and Cohen's descriptions of dance are compelling, they do not offer a precise nor complete ontological account of dance. If dance were meant to imitate reality, we would expect to see merely pantomimic gesture on stage, something that resembled theatre. Are not the physical surprises of dance, the astonishing leaps, spins,

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[7] Cohen, Selma Jeanne. "Dance as an Art of Imitation." *What Is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983. Print. 20.
[8] Noverre, Jean-Georges. "Letters on Dancing and Ballets: Letter I." *What Is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983. Print.14.
[9] Ibid.

and other feats, integral in identifying it as something other than pantomime? More often than not, dance does not mimic the physical reality of human beings, but stretches our imagination and expectations of how human beings *could* move. The medium of dance is apparent even when a story is being told. The choreographed ballet version of *The Nutcracker* offers an entirely different aesthetic experience to the spectator than does E.T.A. Hoffman's story; it is not just the telling of a story that one gains when attending a dance performance, but also an experience that is unique of dance. Choreographers, certainly in the post-modern age, often do not even work with storylines or characters. The dancers are not representative of events outside of the realm of the stage, but move through space according to the abstract spatial and rhythmic ideas of the choreographer. A theory that conceives of dance as an art of imitation thus cannot account for all instances of dance, such as works wherein the medium is conspicuous, and those in which dancers and movements are not representative of external content.

Expression

Though the theory of art as imitation prevailed for centuries, the expressionist theory of art, originating in the Romantic era, saw some popularity in the late 18th and early 19th century. This theory holds that art is a vehicle for self-expression or the expression of human emotion. John Martin states that bodily movement naturally expresses an emotional state, and that onlookers are able to sympathize with the physical expression of this state because of "the inherent contagion of bodily movement"; that is,

our capacity for kinesthetic empathy[10]. Martin viewed modern dance as an ideal example of his idea of expressive movement, as the agents of this genre seek to create the "communication of emotional experiences – intuitive perceptions, elusive truths – which cannot be communicated in reasoned terms or reduced to mere statement of fact."[11] Metakinesis, or the idea that movement expresses some emotional or psychical state, is perhaps the most succinct way of putting what Martin means. Rather than each dancer representing a character within a narrative, as was the norm in classical balletic repertoire, dancers' movements in modern dance communicate complex feelings or emotions. Martin argues that the innovations of modern dance allow for a wider extension of choreographic possibilities. Imitative or pantomimic dance grows stale as it becomes codified in form, and "stereotyped movements can only express stereotyped concepts of emotion"[12]; if we allow the emotional integrity of gesture to flourish, which modern dance seems to have done, then we will have creative works that directly express emotional experiences. According to this perspective, the movement created in modern dance does not put forward a narrative, but is instead intrinsically expressive of the emotional reality that is established by selected gestures.

My objection to this view is similar to that which I stated in the previous section. The idea that dance must express some internal state or emotion is not far from suggesting that dance is representational or imitative of human character; the idea in both cases is that there is always something other than movement that is communicated by the

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[10] Martin, John. "Dance as a Means of Communication." *What Is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983. Print. 22.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., p. 25.

dance. A look at Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* is an example of a dance artwork that has not been endowed with any emotional quality by the choreographer. It is a collection of simple, sometimes pedestrian movements that are performed by a single dancer with an equal distribution of energy and a neutral disposition. This piece delivers movement, in the barest, purest sense, without representing or emoting anything else. Of course, as Rainer choreographed this piece intending to follow her broader artistic investigations which included ridding dance of style and emotion, one might say that this piece is expressive in a different sense: expressive of Rainer's choice to reject the style of modern dance and to choreograph in a way that challenges a certain lineage of choreographers. I will address this point later on. For the moment, it will suffice to say that the conception of dance as a necessarily expressive art form – self-expressive, or expressive of an internal emotional state – is not sufficient to account for examples of dance artworks that are purposely emotionless.

Formalism

In contrast with expressionist and imitative accounts of art, Andre Levinson holds that dances are neither expressive nor imitative by nature. Focusing on classical ballet, he instead claims that dance follows the rules of its own logical system or form. He calls expressive or imitative theories of dance "an attempt to base the dance upon a rational or psychological foundation", an attaching of emotional motivation to something that does

not inherently possess it.[13] We ought to rigorously differentiate pantomimic dance and ballet, he insists, for ballet is itself a non-expressive technique that follows ideals of balance, line, and levity; pantomime, on the other hand, is clearly an imitative art. According to Levinson, in fact, ballet ought to monopolize the future of dance. With the implementation of a false equilibrium (the flattened toe of the pointe shoe), ballet is a hub for unlimited combinations of movements that fit its formal aesthetic demands. Levinson believes that dance can be enjoyed (by the cultured eye) simply for the combination of mechanical movements that it presents; any attempt to endow it with meaning, emotional or narrative, beyond its existence as a form is an empty and fruitless effort.

Similarly to Levinson, Marshall Cohen argues that dance is not inherently expressive or illusory. Dance ought not to be confused with the arts of speech; its communicative power is limited by its medium as a non-verbal art. Cohen criticizes the perspective of primitivism, which idealizes Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk,* or a consummate work of art (an art of the future) that integrates all or most of the arts. According to the primitivist perspective, this integration of the arts could be ideal in its expression of fundamental human experiences. It is thought by some primitivist philosophers that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is achieved in dance, which often incorporates elements of music, theater, and even architecture. However, Cohen cites instances where dance is performed without any of these elements, reminding us that dance is an aesthetically distinct art form that communicates something entirely unique to itself.

[13] Levinson, Andre. "The Significance of the Dance." *Broom: An International Magazine of the Arts Published by Harold A. Loeb.* December 1922: 17.

Additionally, Cohen criticizes Susanne Langer's position: that performed dance generates a virtual world of interacting forces in which gesture is an aesthetic tool, which upholds an illusion of external powers that control the movements of the dancers. This view traces back to what Langer describes as our primitive or mythic consciousness's interaction with dance, when it was a practical procedure used to contact spiritual forces. In these times, dance was used to communicate with gods or other divine beings, or to accomplish other energy work. In a modern-day context, gesture is an aesthetic symbol, not a practical reality, and thus the gestures within a dance collectively contribute to a forged space of illusion. The gestures of a dance, being illusory, are therefore expressive; they refer to something beyond just the movement itself. However, though they appear to be self-expressive, in that they seem to spring from the feelings of the dancer as a typical gesture might, they are actually - by virtue of their existence within the illusion of the dance - only symbolically or logically expressive, or *virtually* self-expressive.[14]

Cohen disagrees that dance creates an illusion of forces that uplift or move the dancers. He points out the importance of gravity and three-dimensionality in modern dance, which seems to affirm the spatial reality of the dancers rather than deny it. Of course, there are often moments in dance where it does seem that a gesture has been instigated or is sustained by something other than the dancer: she spins like an uncontrolled top whose motion has been triggered by some extraordinary being, he hangs in the air far longer than seems humanly possible, they simultaneously emerge from the

[14] Langer, Susanne K. "Virtual Powers." *What Is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983. Print. 32.

floor as though they've been gently raised by the napes of their necks, etc. Cohen recognizes the incredulity of moments like these but does not find them essential to a dance work. In fact, he claims that a large part of the aesthetic pleasure of ballet lies in the spectator's recognition of the virtuosity of the dancer; rather than illusion, the dance gives us a firm reminder that the present dancer is moving through real time and in real space with his or her own real strength. This means that watching dance is not purely visual; it also requires the spectator's ability to recognize the physical and mental efforts of the dancer on stage.

II. Towards a Definition of Dance

How we ought to define dance depends critically upon locating an account of art that is both theoretically sound and supported by ordinary speech. The practice of discussing dance, in criticism as well as in less formal conversation, is marked by an ability to refer to a particular dance piece and to name both structural and emotional qualities without enormous trouble. The degree to which one focuses on either of these aspects of the dance may change according to how much prior dance experience one has had, among other factors. A trained dancer, for example, will perhaps be more inclined to remark on the cleanness of the performers' *fouetté* turns, or the unusual arrangement of *petit allegro* steps in a certain *enchaînement;* someone new to dance might comment on the story that he gleaned from the sequence of staged events; and still someone else may notice a quality of delight or celebration that seemed to buzz through the moving bodies. As aesthetic taste is variable, liable to change among and within individuals, and

dependent on history, culture, emotional state, prior experiences, etc., it is in our best interest to consider all aesthetic experiences of art if we want to fully understand the effect that art has on human beings. It is then imperative that an account of dance does not invalidate any one of the above-mentioned reactions to a dance work, but instead views the subjective experience of the spectator as important and even formative to the identity of the artwork itself. Because a dance performance is limited in time, its lifespan as an art object is similarly limited, and the experience an audience has with the performance at a given time is, in fact, essential to its identity as a dance. That which is observed in a dance is indeed the represented story, the expressed emotion, and the pure form, *as well as* the absorption of these qualities in a single whole.

I argue that expression is not dissociable from the art of dance, when "expression" is understood in a broad sense. If we were to reduce a work of dance to its pure physicality – as the formalist perspective seems to advocate – this leaves us with little to no distinction between movement as it is ordered in the art of dance and movement that is otherwise ordered. There would be no difference between dance and sports, or dance and martial arts, for example, as both of these forms include bodies that athletically move through a given space in a particular fashion. The expressive capacity of dance movement is unmissable if a spectator adopts an aesthetic perspective, knowing already that he is witnessing a work of art unraveling before him. Denying the expression present in dance is like denying the content symbolized by words in a language; and as in language, the understanding of this content depends to a great extent on the experience of the individual who encounters the symbols. Even if there is not a clear emotion or story present in

movement, dance is always oriented in the context of some tradition that gives it meaning. Ballet movement of the kind that Levinson claims is pure form, is in fact *expressive* of the decision to combine movements that spring from a certain vocabulary, in agreement with the established balletic lineage. Postmodern dances, such as those of Yvonne Rainer, might be called "non-expressive"; but even such dances are expressive of an active refusal to include referential gestures in their choreography, locating this work historically in the rejection of modern dance values. Thus dance is essentially expressive, not only of emotion, story, or illusion, but expressive of its placement within a lineage of dance artists.

As was already implied, another essential feature of dance is an interaction between the performed work and the spectator. In order to arrive at a more complete understanding of dance's ontological status, we must include the subjective viewer's experience as an integral component of the identity of a dance artwork. The performance, for the spectator, serves as a stimulus that provokes a subjective reaction; a dance work, then, is essentially expressive. In his book *Art as Experience,* John Dewey writes that a work of art is a work of art insofar as "it lives in some individualized experience"[15]. That is to say, the art object is the mere arrangement of its formative materials until it is encountered; when an individual with an aesthetic sensibility interacts with it, the work's meaning is created. If this understanding of art is applied to dance, we can account for the plurality of reactions provoked by a work in this medium. A dance is an event consisting

[15] Dewey, John. "Substance and Form." *Art As Experience.* 1934. New York: Penguin Group, 2005. Print. 113.

of an expressive, ordered pattern of human movement that is performed for a perceiving audience.[16]

III. Notation

When we speak about notation in the performing arts, we are describing the process by which an artwork can be recorded in such a way that it may be reproduced in the future. In music, composers write a score that serves as a template for musicians to follow. In theatre, actors have a script that gives them the words and sometimes actions that they will perform. In dance, by contrast, choreographers typically do not write a score prior to creating their works. When approaching the creative process, a choreographer might write down some structural ideas, gestural patterns, or a number of musical counts that they are trying to fill; but these methods vary widely and are more for the choreographer's personal use rather than for the dancers. The choreographer does not teach dancers the movement by giving them a score or a script; she demonstrates the movement either with her own or with another's body, and she verbally describes the images and qualities that she seeks from her dancers. After the piece is completed, a choreographer rarely produces a written documentation of her work. Video recording, however, is common today as a device for documenting a dance performance; such

[16] The last part of this definition, "perceiving audience," is not meant to imply that a dance would disappear from the world if the entire audience, for example, shut their eyes and covered their ears during a performance. A dance artwork, like all works of art, does possess some material existence; in the case of dance, that takes the form of ordered moving bodies in a given space and time. In addition to this feature, however, a perceiving individual or group of individuals, whom I refer to as the "audience", must encounter the dance in order for it to enter the realm of artworks.

recordings also serve choreographers in applications for jobs, grants, and other opportunities. With access to video, judges have a chance to assess the choreographer's creative abilities even if they have not seen a live performance of the choreographer's work.

Recently some written notation techniques have been developed for the purpose of memorializing a dance artwork, for future replication. In this section, I will address the question of notation in dance: Do we or can we possess a dance-notation system that sufficiently captures the essential qualities of a dance work? How do we characterize the practice of dance notation, and what purposes does or should it serve? I show that discrepancies among philosophers are centered on the issue of what constitutes an essential property of a dance work. For some, like Nelson Goodman and Graham McFee, spatial arrangement and choreography suffice as the primary components of a dance "score"; for others, like Adina Armelagos and Mary Sirridge, the very attempt at ascertaining the repeatable identifiable components of a work for the purposes of retrieval or identification is a complicated and perhaps impossible task. Finally, I will discuss how modern access to recording devices provides a unique platform for thinking about kinesthetic memory and dance identity.

Problems of Notation

Nelson Goodman asks whether it is theoretically possible to develop a notational system for dance. He distinguishes between autographic and allographic art in order to address this question. Autographic art is that of which the history of production is

essential in determining the work's genuineness: if a duplication is made, (say a painting for instance) it will be considered a forgery or copy, distinct from (and inferior to) the original. Allographic art is that of which the genuineness of a version (the performance of a play, for instance) can be determined by a score, a measure that is independent from the history of its production; the "original" version of an allographic art work is not different in genuineness from a later version. Goodman points out that dance is difficult to classify; it is visual, like painting (an autographic art that has no score), but temporal, like music (an allographic art that does have a score). If it is allographic, he says, then it is capable of being notated. Certainly, that a performance of a dance work can be notated does not mean that its notation will capture all of the interpretive subtleties of a performance. Goodman's main concern is to use the essential properties of the choreographed work as the substance of the notation. Goodman identifies the movement, or choreography, as the essential feature of dance. It is this sequence of arranged events that offers us the opportunity to create a dance "score", to which we can refer for identifying a dance work and even re-producing it. He thus concludes that dance is closer to being an allographic rather than autographic art. Modern efforts to notate dance are widely successful, Goodman asserts, as in the case of Labanotation, Rudolf Laban's system of tracking spatial arrangements, movement sequences, and dynamic qualities in dance. "All in all, Labanotation passes the theoretical tests very well – about as well as does ordinary musical notation, and perhaps as well as is compatible with practicality,"[17]

[17] Goodman, Nelson. "The Role of Notations." *What Is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983. Print. 407.

Goodman writes. If we rely on choreography as the identifier of a dance work, then we are able to capture the nature of a dance work with a score. [18]

To contrast Goodman's view, Armelagos and Sirridge claim that choreography is neither a sufficient nor always necessary condition in determining the identity of a dance work. Factors like music, choreography, and lighting are often integral to the identity of a piece of dance. Without the expanse of purple piece of fabric wrapped around the dancer's body, Martha Graham's *Lamentations* would likely be unrecognizable; the same perhaps goes for a number of George Balanchine's ballets, were they performed in silence; and David Parsons' piece *Caught,* in which a dancer seemingly floats through the air as the lights flash on only when he is suspended, would hardly be the same without this effect. Another important factor that Armelagos and Sirridge consider integral to a dance work, and that Goodman seems to have ruled out as incidental, is the *style* that a piece of dance work reflects. Style refers to the domain of movement vocabulary, kinesthetic motivation, and expressive qualities attributed to a choreographer or a dancer, often following an established lineage of dance artists. Goodman does not mention style

[18] A quick note about Laban and Labanotation: Rudolf Laban (1879 – 1958) was a choreographer, dance teacher, and dance theorist who developed Laban Movement Analysis and Labanotation. Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is a system that tracks the kinesthetic qualities and directions of movement. Labanotation, which Goodman is referring to in his essay, is a notational system that translates movement (parts of the body, direction, timing, and levels) into visual symbols that are organized on a chart that should be read not unlike a musical staff. As Labanotation is not commonly taught in most dance schools (although LMA is a bit more widely discussed), there are some independent organizations (such as the Dance Notation Bureau (DNB)) that create dance scores based on Labonotation for choreographers. On DNB's website, it says, "Dance scores function for dance the same way music scores function for music." The DNB website is available at: http://dancenotation.org/lnbasics/frame0.html.

in his description of what a sufficient dance notational system would look like; Armelagos and Sirridge claim that this is a detrimental shortcoming of his analysis. Choreographers recognize that the style of their dancers greatly impacts the identity of their works; a ballet performed by a group of modern dancers would not resemble a ballet at all, even if the steps were structurally identical. The failure to mention style leaves the status of dance notation described by Goodman too weak to fully capture the identity of a dance artwork.

Armelagos and Sirridge also note the tendency in contemporary and postmodern dance to leave certain portions of their dance works un-choreographed. It is not uncommon today to see a dance piece that incorporates improvisation on the part of the dancers, musicians, lighting designers, or other involved artists, making each performance of the dance work quite different. It is difficult to see how a theory that considers *choreography* to be the identifying feature of a dance could account for a work that is not wholly choreographed. Any single performance of a work of this sort is non-reproducible; without more information about the structure and points of movement initiation, choreography alone could not translate the work's identity to a complete notational system.

An important part of Armelagos and Sirridge's argument is their emphasis on a theoretical account of art as a "process", rejecting the view that art is a static object limited by its presentation in a culminating final product. The process of creation in dance is essential in developing a movement vocabulary: the very material of the work.

Choreographers are influenced by the artistry, capabilities, and limits of their dancers, and these dancers' identities are often strongly intertwined with the identity of the work in which they appear; the duration and particularity of the time in which this process takes place is also likely to influence the choreographer's sensibilities. Denied engagement in this process, the dancers of a re-staged version of this piece may not have the same understanding of the physical and mental motivations for the movement, which may result in an entirely different piece. A group of performer's energetic nuance and its "tightness" as an ensemble are some effects of an involved process that do affect the quality of the culminating performance. Dance notation, of the kind that Goodman praises, that spotlights only the choreography, fails to recognize the process that led to the performance of the work because it leaves us no record of the choreographic procedure.

Implicit in Armelagos and Sirridge's argument is a rejection of the type/token analysis presented by McFee in *Was that Swan Lake I Saw You at Last Night?* This manner of thinking about dance stems from a recognition of dance as a "multiple" performing art, that is, an art form that can have several manifestations of the "work". There can be multiple performances of the same dance work, and this is supported by the way in which we talk about dance: "When are you going to see *The Nutcracker* this season?" is referring to one dance work that is being performed on several different dates within a given season. Given the way in which the identity of a dance work remains even on different presentational occasions, McFee claims that there is an abstract, unexpressed form of the dance work, which we can call the "type", as well as manifestations of this work (performances) which are called "tokens". McFee's application of the type/token

analysis is a popular, even deeply entrenched view within the philosophy of the performing arts. The distinction between type and token would explain the maintenance of a dance work's identity through its different performances; it could even account for slight differences from one performance to another. As in music, where there is a physical score that needs to be musically expressed in order for the piece to be experienced, the dance's choreography needs to be interpreted by dancers in order to make the work visible. Like Goodman, McFee believes that choreography is the measure by which one can ascertain the identity of the dance work. He believes that a choreographic score written in advance of movement development would greatly help the dance world, providing an easier method of documentation and preservation of dance works, emboldening the presence of the dance as a fine art.

There are several issues to address in McFee's argument. Firstly, it seems that he is unwilling to admit the unique creative process of dance, wherein it is not keys on a piano, nor tubes of paint, but real live human bodies and personalities that one has available as her artistic medium. This means that a discourse between choreographer and dancer is possible, and even essential, to the development of choreographed work. Choreographers experiment, change their minds, push boundaries, and look to their dancers for inspiration; to claim that a choreographer ought to conduct her process in a way that will make her work reproducible in the future is an unqualified normative statement that projects a consumerist sentiment, a desire to own the fruits of her labor outside of their original context. Additionally, as humans are constantly changing, the craft must change as well, to keep up with the capabilities and power of its expressive

tools. The changeable nature of human beings is not something to repress by anticipating how they will behave in a given work of choreography; deciding on choreography in advance of interacting with bodies, by creating a diagram of symbols, is a stifling step in an otherwise free-flowing artistic creative process.

Armelagos and Sirridge conclude their paper with the provocative claim that the identity of dance is found in the performance of the dance:

> In dance, it is the performance which is the primary work. Grouping performances together into compliance classes which are then labeled 'the work' is a harmless abstraction – so long as one is not overly strict about the nature and the extent of compliance required and does not take common choreography as an absolute determinant of class membership.[19]

Armelagos and Sirridge thus take up a view of dance that is not far from Dewey's conception of art as an experienced object. Though we can organize a collection of performances together under a shared title, this is merely a practical linguistic move: an "abstraction". The dance's identity is regenerated through each performance, each lived experience of the dance work. As a result, the possibility of pure notation in dance is a near impossibility. How can we trace the identity of a dance work if its content is recreated every time it is performed?

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[19] Armelagos, Adina. "The Identity Crisis in Dance." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 37.2 (1978): 137. *JSTOR*. Web. 23 Feb. 2016.

Recording Dance

The introduction and rise in ubiquity of recording devices has been a great aid to dancers and choreographers alike. In rehearsals, dancers often record themselves or someone else executing a portion of the choreography, so that they can later go over it to refresh their memory. Choreographers record rehearsals to keep track of the material they have so far created, or to have a visual reference point when giving notes to dancers. Choreographers and dancers alike can use footage of live performances to strengthen a dance video portfolio, which is an increasingly important asset today for job, residency, and grant applications. However, relying on film to preserve a piece of choreography does not seem to be sufficient for the needs of future dancers; that is, having footage of a work does not mean that the piece has been immortalized. First, practically speaking there are numerous difficulties in translating two-dimensional moving images to a three-dimensional space. Film eliminates the nuance of live performance; both spatially and emotionally, it is more difficult to understand the depth of the piece and the electricity of performance when it is seen on screen. Additionally, learning choreography involves not only being visually exposed to the movement, but also engaging in a discourse with the teacher of the movement. Some individual movements, notably in ballet, have known names that indicate a certain sequence of steps that constitute a style, as discussed earlier. If a dancer recognizes the name of this movement from her training or a separate choreography, she can better embody the movement in the present context. An unfamiliar *pirouette* with a quick leg movement may be difficult to kinesthetically absorb at first glance, but a verbal indication ("*rond de jambes en l'air!"*) in addition to the

demonstration may help the dancer to process the foreign movement using her known dance vocabulary. In addition to referring to existing moves, a choreographer may include an explanation of the mechanics, dynamics, emotions, or intentions of any number of movements within a set piece choreography. This verbally communicated information helps a dancer to generate particular qualities of movement that might be lost if one were to learn the choreography without an understanding of its underlying motivations.

IV. Final Remarks

I have chosen to examine ontology alongside notation because of the inevitable overlap of these topics of discussion in dance philosophy. The lens through which we view dance permits us to identify what we take to be essential to the nature of this art. In viewing a dance performance as the dance artwork itself, and not a manifestation or expressed version (token) of the artwork, we see that placing dance in the category of *event* rather than *object* gives us the ability to more accurately understand this elusive form. The plurality of reactions provoked by a dance performance is constitutive of the work itself; this claim contrasts the dominant conception of the dance artwork as something separate from its performance, i.e. the type vs. token analysis that we examined earlier. The consequences of viewing a dance artwork as the performance itself, rather than as an abstract work that consists of a dancer-independent choreography, include a need to confront the issue of notation; for if a dance artwork *is* the performance,

how can we give the same name to separate performances of a work? Can we re-mount that same dance artwork when the conditions of performance have changed, and give it the same name as the original?

My response to these questions follows Armelagos and Sirridge's lead. Dance artists title a group of performances, referring to them as the same work, for the sake of efficiency and simplicity. There will always be variations from one performance to another – in some instances, such as dance works that incorporate improvisation, these variations are more exaggerated – because the dance artwork is essentially reborn each time it is performed and encountered; but the fact that the title of the piece stays constant does not contradict the claim that the dance work is recreated at each show of a performance series. The title given to a group of dance pieces is a linguistic abstraction that that permits a common ground for understanding this artist's creation, but though these performances share a title, they are still separate artworks.

As for the efficiency of dance notation in restaging a work, I will say this: we cannot ever expect notation of any kind to give us an absolutely perfect recording of an event in time, and dance notation is no exception. Just as in theatre, there is a difference between the script of a play and a performance of that same play; the script exists as a literary artwork when it is read, independent of its performance; and a performed play offers a new aesthetic experience to that same reader. Dance is unique in that there cannot be an aesthetic experience of the dance artwork outside of viewing the dance in performance; there is no movement without a mover. Because dance work and the dance

performance are inextricably intertwined, attempting to translate movement into symbols (as Labanotation does) reduces the work to a two-dimensional visual language that does not communicate the same thing as a live body. Perhaps someday Labanotation can be refined in such a way that kinesthetic nuance is recorded with impressive accuracy; or perhaps multiple camera angles and zooming technologies will one day be able to give us a more complete view of a dance than can today's recordings. These accomplishments still would not affect the status of the actual dance artwork as a metaphysically unrepeatable, aesthetically experienced event that is the result of a specific process in time.

Though this may sound like a negative view on dance notation as a realistic means of preserving dance works, I do in fact believe that dance notation serves the dance world in an important way, contributing to a canon of knowledge that is useful for future dance artists. An example that I think is of use here is found in the study of history. The documentation of historical events is never to be taken as a substitution of the actual event in question; there is a huge difference between a lived reality and a recorded version of this reality. Of course, that is not to say that each newspaper article, letter, or journal entry about a historical event ought to be discredited because of its inadequacy in telling the complete story. Instead, historians use all of these documents in tandem with one another to create a network of information about the event in question, giving them a more complete – though never perfect – understanding of an event in time. Similarly, dance artists who are looking to reconstruct a dance of the past must be versed in the technique, style, history, and special kinesthetic points of initiation *in addition to* the

sequence of choreographed steps that one can access via Labanotation or a video recording; and even then, there will be some interpretation inevitably involved in this adaptation, and the experiences provoked by this process will be different in nature than those provoked by the original performance simply given the temporal difference between the original and the adapted work. That an adaptation can never be perfect, can never deliver the exact experience of the original work, is not a defect of the art form of dance, but is instead a testament to the way that bodies inevitably carry the history that bore them.

As Renee Conroy writes, "Ask any dancer what she thinks is special about her art, and she is likely to respond without pause: dance is an art of the moment."[20] Rephrasing this popular mantra of the dance community, Conroy quotes Marcia Siegel when she says that dance exists as "a perpetual vanishing point."[21] A practitioner of dance myself, I find that Conroy's point strikes a personal, poetic chord; honestly, I am rather attached to the notion that dance is an ephemeral art, an event of the moment, and that its ephemeral nature distinguishes it from the other arts. Happily, in this philosophical exploration of dance ontology, I have concluded that in fact the instant of the performance *is* what matters in dance. Among the definitive qualities of dance qua art is an inability to exactly preserve dance artworks in their original form, since these works have a lifespan determined by the process of their creation, their union with moving bodies, as well as their localization within an individual's aesthetic experience. In this way, the dance

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[20] Conroy, Renee M. "Dance." *The Continuum Companion to Aesthetics*. London: Continuum, 2012. Print. 157.
[21] Ibid., 156.

medium fundamentally accepts and even celebrates the changeable features of human life, the impermanence of everything in the universe, and as a consequence, the importance of the present moment.

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