

Dance as Art: A Studio-Based Account

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This dissertation is an attempt to articulate the conviction, born of ten years of intensive experience in learning and practicing to be a dance performer, that the dance performer, through collaboration with the choreographer, makes an important contribution to how we can and do understand artistic dance performance. Further, this contribution involves on-the-fly-thinking-while-doing in which the movement of the dancer's body is run through by consciousness. Some of this activity of "consciousness" in movement may not be part of the deliberative mentality of which the agent is aware; it may instead be something that is part of his or her body's natural and acquired plan for how to move in the world that is shaped by years of artistic and cultural training and practice. The result is a qualitative and visceral performance that can, although need not, be a representation of some deliberative thought or intention that a dancer can articulate beforehand. It is also the sort of thinking movement that can constitute expression: an utterance of dance artists that is not limited to the communication of emotion that can be appreciated and understood, at least in principle, by a public or audience. What this means for the philosophy of dance as art includes the following: 1) there may not always be a stable, fixed "work" of dance art that can be identified, going forward, as the relevant work on which critical and philosophical attention should be focused because of variable, contingent, and irreducibly individual features of live dance performances, attributable in large part to the individual efforts, style, and improvisation of particular dance performers; 2) the experience of dance artists is relevant to understanding dance as art because experiential evidence of practice can supplement and ground the appreciable properties that we can detect in artistic dance performances; 3) artistic dance performance can constitute expression without being expressive of either an artist's felt emotion or of human emotion in general — no particular content is needed as long as there is a content; 4) artistic dance performance conceived of as expression can, but need not, function as representation in both the strong (imitative) and weak (referential) sense; and 5) artistic dance performance is real, not illusory, and not necessarily either a transformation or transfiguration of the real. Dance as art, like theatre, like music, and even, perhaps, like painting, sculpture, and architecture, is, although in less clearly artist-present, extemporaneous and embodied ways, human-constructed, human-understood, human-driven, and a full, rich, interactive, and meaningful part of human life.

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