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How Do I Know When I Am Dancing?

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► **To cite this version:**

Romain Bigé. How Do I Know When I Am Dancing?. Perception, Cognition and Aesthetics, Routledge, pp.319-332, 2019. hal-03251198

HAL Id: hal-03251198

<https://hal.science/hal-03251198>

Submitted on 25 Jun 2021

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Taylor & Francis
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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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16 How Do I Know When I Am Dancing?

Romain Bigé

BECKY EDMUNDS

So the first question is: Are you dancing now?

STEVE PAXTON

No.

(A pause.)

Would you like to see me dance?

BECKY EDMUNDS

I would love to see you dance.

STEVE PAXTON

Okay.

(A pause, still not moving.)

Okay. I'm dancing now.

Audience members are standing in a New York apartment. A tape-recorder turns on and a voice invites them to look out the windows: Down in the street, dancers mingle with the busy crowd. From time to time, in synchrony, they point to certain parts of their surroundings. The dance doesn't last more than six minutes, and those six minutes are like a parenthesis, or a frame placed on the city life. All of a sudden, thanks to that frame, the city looks like a complex choreography. The spectator, unsure about what they are here to witness (the dancers are not always distinguishable from the passersby), looks at the pedestrians as if their walks had been choreographed, as if their gestures of hailing a cab, buying a newspaper and waiting at the crosswalk had been written like dance gestures.

Street Dance, which is the name of this performance designed by American choreographer Lucinda Childs in 1964, belongs to the family of modern and postmodern dances (Banes, 1987) that have sought to stage ordinary gestures: Walking, running, waiting and playing sports. With their "pedestrian dances" (Dempster, 2008), those choreographers have put light on the pre-artistic or pre-aesthetic part of human movement: They offered us the joy of rediscovering that which probably we hadn't entirely forgotten—the simple beauty found in the meanders of a

passerby, in the jog of a morning runner, in the deep sleep of an afternoon napper and in the infinite variation of styles through which we perform these gestures.

These “ordinary dances” (to paraphrase the title of a performance by Yvonne Rainer in 1962), sometimes danced by “ordinary people” (whatever this may mean, to be “ordinary”), pose the question: Where does dance begin?

Indeed, with works like Lucinda Childs’s *Street Dance* (where the audience looks at the city as a choreography) or Steve Paxton’s *Satisfyin Lover* (where 42 people cross the theater by simply walking) or Yvonne Rainer’s *We Shall Run* (where 12 dancers and “non-dancers” run in the space for 12 minutes), the choreographers are defending the idea that in order to witness dance, it is not necessary to see virtuoso dancers interpreting movements inaccessible to the common. Instead, they propose that to witness dance, one (only) needs to equip oneself with a certain choreographic gaze, to position oneself or to be positioned by certain spectacular conditions to perceive movements *as if* they were danced.

But asserting that dance is in the eye of the witness (as has been said of art in general, at least since Duchamp’s ready-made technique offered the aesthetic framework to accept urinals and bicycle wheels as works of art) only solves one part of the question of what dancing is.¹ For dance is not only something that one sees: It is also something that one does. So it is one thing—and a marvelous one—to know that we are able to look at every being (animals, human or non-human, plants, meteorological phenomena) and every movement (walks, gestures, growths, winds) as if they were dances, but it is another to know what it is to *feel that we are dancing*.

Here are thus, more precisely, the series of problems I would like to ponder about: How do I know when I am dancing? How do I shift from a non-dancing to a dancing state? Is there a continuum, in my lived experience, between the movements that I do when I vacuum-clean my apartment and those that I do when I dance at a party?

When and where does my dance begin?

1. A Dancer’s Philosophy

Dance aesthetics is usually concerned with the experience of the viewer, asking essential questions such as: When does a movement start being seen as a dance movement? What is the ontological consistency of a dance piece? Where is a dance work “stored”? Who possesses the authorship on a choreographic work? What does it mean to reenact a piece?

These questions are crucial and not only for philosophers and aestheticians: They raise sociopolitical questions (who gets paid most and whose social status is most valued, between dancers and choreographers?) as well as artistic issues that viewers and dancers alike may encounter (if

I want to reenact a piece or to see a reenactment, I might need a more or less tacit theory of what “a dance piece” is in the first place).

These questions, however, will not be the concerns of this chapter. Rather, I want to propose a displacement of the usual focus of dance aesthetics: From the viewer’s experience to the dancer’s. My intention is not to argue that the dancer’s experience should specifically be taken into account to explain the viewer’s experience. Although some forms of relations between audience and movers emerge during a performance, there is no reason for the subjective experience of the dancer to serve as a model for understanding that of the viewer—they might be correlated in some cases, but they also might be opposed to each other, sometimes as a result of an intention on the part of the choreographer. In fact, my intention is to not talk about performance or theater or stage dance at all. I want to bring the aesthetic focus on the experience of the dancers in the studio and consider dancing not specifically as art-making but as an aesthetic activity, that is: A practice aimed at taking aesthetic pleasure (and not, or not only, a practice aimed at giving or sharing this pleasure with others that are not practicing).

Why speak of this experience of the dancer in the studio as an aesthetic experience? After all, isn’t aesthetics concerned with detached, separated modes of experiencing beauty, where the subject of those feelings is a mere spectator, seeing the landscape or the painting at a distance, listening to music comfortably seated in their chair? It will be my contention in this chapter that it shouldn’t be.

If we take aesthetics in the broadest sense, as the study of feelings or sensations (*aisthesis*) of beauty/ugliness/sublime, levity/grace/gravity, harmony/order/chaos, then there is no reason to limit aesthetics to a contemplative activity. Indeed, I can experience beauty, for instance, in my own gestures, in my own ideas, or in my own choices, and this not only considering them “from the outside” as if I were their spectator, but also “from the inside.” The sources for this aesthetic experience from inside the activity are multiple: Dance philosopher Barbara Montero talked of “proprioception as an aesthetic sense” (Montero, 2006 and Montero, 2016); game philosopher Thi Nguyen of an “aesthetics of agency” (Nguyen, forthcoming); I spoke, in previous works, of an “aesthetic experience of togetherness” to describe the experience of collective improvisations (Himberg, 2018), and the list can and should be completed. Common language recognizes this aesthetic value of games and sports, speaking, for instance, of beautiful moves (in chess), or harmonious jumps (in basketball), or elegant choices (in climbing) (see Nguyen, 2017).

In other words, I am arguing, in alignment with Shusterman’s somaesthetics (Shusterman, 2012) that aesthetics should not only be concerned with the aesthetic properties of artistic products or objects of perception: They should also deal with artistic activities as well as with everyday

activities, such as cooking a meal, enjoying a soccer game or hiking a mountain trail, that can provide aesthetic experiences as much as looking at a painting, witnessing a landscape or watching a film. Furthermore, we can add, as pointed out by dancing philosopher Eric Mullis, that

a somaesthetic practice can be philosophical if it leads the practitioner to engage in self-reflection about general characteristics of his or her embodied experience. When this occurs, he or she begins to consider personal and cultural factors that fostered the development of his particular mode of embodiment which in turn allows him to consider alternatives.

(Mullis, 2016)

The activities considered in somaesthetics can be activities that are leading to the art products that are the object of what is considered classically to be an aesthetic experience: Painting, molding, composing music, creating a choreography. But they could also be activities with no other aim than the practice itself, which is often the case for activities such as drawing, playing music, playing a game and of course dancing.

Countless people, everywhere in the world, practice dance for its own sake, without any intention to produce it onstage. From amateur ballet dancers going to their weekly morning training, to ballroom dancers going to their favorite tango milongas or jams, to social dancers going to nightclubs or more traditional balls or celebrations, people dance to experience the pleasure of moving, alone or with each other.

In some instances, this pleasure of moving is coupled with the pleasure of being seen moving. For instance, in the drag ball culture (one of the origins of the queer dance practice of voguing), being witnessed and evaluated by one's peers is a crucial aspect of the pleasure of dancing (Livingston, 1990; hooks, 1992). Similarly, in social dancing, the cruising intention that often accompanies the dancing involves a desire to be seen that provides erotic pleasures. But even in those cases, I argue that there is still an intrinsic, kinesthetic and aesthetic pleasure that surfaces from the dancing itself. Being witnessed, far from taking away from the genuine experience of moving, even reinforces that experience: It augments self-perception and the pleasure taken in moving and couples the proprioceptive experience with an intersubjective and exhibitionist joy.

Theories of the aesthetic experience of making art are rare. In a way, it should be surprising: Many philosophers have an art practice, usually music (Nietzsche, Jankélévitch, Sartre, to name only a few)—even if they rarely would consider themselves as artists—and maybe rightfully so, if we are to believe Rudolf Carnap, who defined metaphysicians as “misplaced poets” and “musicians without musical ability” (Carnap, 1963). And yet, in spite of their art practices, philosophers seldom write

about their own experience as artists, although they document extensively their own activities as writers, as is the case at least since Plato's *Phaedrus*.

This tells us of the social division of labor between art and non-art or pseudo-art and of the myth of the genius artist: It points to the fact that only people who are making art professionally (which subtly implies: People who make money from art or whose products are now valued by the art market) are considered to be artists worthy of being discussed in philosophy. The implicit capitalist hierarchy that focuses on "professional" artists is detrimental to the philosophical analysis: Why should market-successful artists be our models to understand art when we know that countless parallel practices of art exist, most of the time blissfully ignorant of those "great" artists? Obviously, it is useful to think through Michelangelo Caravaggio, Bach, Annette Messager, or Madonna, for their success is informing us of fundamental tendencies of the Western taste and ideas of art. But why should we disregard our own everyday artistic practices to understand what art is for us? If we were petty accountants, we could even argue by numbers: Aren't there more people dancing in nightclubs or in ballrooms than people going to see ballets at the opera? Isn't a piano enthusiast spending more time playing for themselves than going to concerts?

Interestingly, dance philosophers were among the first philosophers to point to the aesthetic value of art practices. A simple reason for this might be the fact that a lot of dance philosophers were and still are, dancers or dance pedagogues themselves who do not dissociate the practice and teaching of dance from that of philosophy. To name only three instances: Maxine Sheets-Johnstone has taught dance improvisation for the greater part of her academic career, and Erin Manning is a dance and visual artist as well as a prolific philosopher, and more recently, Barbara Montero had a career as a ballet dancer. These dancer-philosophers thus naturally turned their gazes to their own practice as a resource for thinking, because they were experiencing the studio as the very place where thought was elaborated.

But this is not the only reason, for others have had a more dilettante approach to practice, or even no practice at all, as was the case with philosopher Michel Bernard, who founded France's first dance department and yet never danced, although he was an avid dance- and theater-goer. But even in those cases, the strong proximity with artists, the regular attendance of dance studios and personal curiosity for artistic processes led most dance philosophers to elaborate philosophies of dance making and dancing more than philosophies of dance viewing.

For those reasons, being a dance improviser myself, I articulate my philosophical approach to dance as a philosophy of dancing rather than as a philosophy of dance.

In this chapter, I thus intend to propose an aesthetics of dancing, which will displace the usual questions of dance aesthetics posed to the dance viewer (Is it dance? If it is not dance, what is it? If it is, are those movements improvised or choreographed? Who is the author of those gestures?). The questions will be posed to the dancers themselves: Are you dancing now? How do you know you are dancing? How do you know you are not dancing? Are you improvising those gestures, or were they choreographed for you? Who choreographed those gestures for you, yourself or someone else?

I intend to pose those philosophical questions to the experience of dancing through the lens of my own dance practices, which belong to the field of what Aili Bresnahan has rightly called “somatic improvisation,” that is: Forms of improvisation regulated by the somatic feedback the dancers receive of their own aesthetic pleasure in moving or making decisions (Bresnahan, 2017; De Spain, 2014), such as Contact Improvisation, the Tuning Scores and other improvisation practices elaborated by choreographers such as João Fiadeiro, Deborah Hay and Antonija Livingstone. This situated bias could look like an impediment, but I consider those blinders to be a chance. First, it erases in me the temptation to be completely objective, which, when speaking of the aesthetic experience of dancing, could be detrimental to the project: An aesthetic experience is affecting the subject who is undergoing it; if I want to speak of it, I cannot (only) speak from a disaffected place. Second, it gives me a clear reason for writing: I write because writing helps me refine my practice of dance. I am not writing to say the truth of dance, or improvisation, but to change my own experience of improvising dance.²

Of course, I am also writing for “scientific reasons” that are: (1) my desire to contribute to the betterment of the knowledge on dance, and (2) my fear of the publish or perish implicit law of academia. But there is also a pragmatic drive for me: Writing on dance is helping me to dance, and hopefully, it can help others.

2. Beginning to Dance

I ask: How do I know when I am dancing?

And I argue that this question gives a unique frame for investigating the somesthetic experience of the dancer. Indeed, it places us at a turning point, a moment of indecision between two states that precisely are the object of a dancer’s experience: How do I feel when I am dancing? And how is that different from the moments I am not dancing? Is the difference between the two states what we precisely call an “aesthetic feeling”? Is this aesthetic feeling simply “added” to the non-dancing state, in the same way you add sugar to a drink? Or is it affecting the experience in such a way that this experience can no longer be said to be the same?

Try this experiment: Put on some music in your living room and, standing, maybe eyes closed, try to detect the moment when the sounds start to move you.

In the beginning, the music is just a noise: Localized in the speakers, mechanically produced, at a distance. But soon, the sound changes status: It becomes melody. I can even perceive it as a flow, with its inflexions, sinuosities, percussions: A rhythm. Rhythm, from the Geek *rhuo*, flowing, means exactly this: A shape taken by a flow. (Maldiney, 1994)

And this flow begins to carry me away. At first, I feel it is a bit forced: I vaguely nod my head and get my shoulders and arms moving. It looks like those clumsy moments in a nightclub when I try to join an already constituted circle of dancers: I don't quite know what to do with my body, I imitate the others' movements without conviction, I mimic a sympathy with their rhythms, but the truth is that the rhythm is not in my articulations I only pretend to "be in." At that precise moment, am I dancing? That seems excessive. At best, I could say that I am readying myself to dance: I am "getting dressed" to dance, I am training myself to dance more than I am dancing.

But from one moment to another, I am approaching an entirely different experience, in which far from pacing myself to the music, everything is as if I was about to let myself be moved by its sounds rather than moving "on" them. In a nightclub, in a crowd at a concert, this experience is magnified by the presence of other movers, whose movements are also carrying me, in the same way a wave takes a swimmer away. It is the feeling of a swell that lifts me up, but here is its oddity: It is an ocean wave without an ocean, a swelling with no water, a swelling only made of the movements of the swimmers.

It is as if it was not I who was dancing and rather as if the dancing was taking shape through my body, as if it was danced through me and the other movers.

It is not easy, in the English language, to articulate those sensations without sounding slightly delusional: Being carried away, being lifted up by an invisible force, ceasing to be the subject of one's own movements, all these ideas seem to connote an extraordinary mode of experience that sounds more like a mystical trance than our everyday experiences. This is probably one of the reasons such a relation exists, attested everywhere in the world, between dance and rituals of communication with "non-conventional" entities (Massumi, 2014), animals, gods or spirits: Dancing, for numerous peoples, is to let oneself be inhabited by extra-human forces and can only be practiced in magical places (at the edge of a wood, in a clearing, at the top of a mountain or in a temple) where dancers can be visited (Midol, 2010).

And yet, what the mystical experience is naming here is actually a very ordinary experience—which is probably a sign that the mystical is very ordinary, but that is another question.³

One can think, for instance, of the experience we have of falling asleep.

Lying down, I close my eyes, I quiet my breathing and begin to place myself mentally in the land of dreams: I am readying myself to sleep. Yes, but soon the roles are shifting, soon, I “surrender” to sleep: It is not I who tend to the dreamland, it is the dreamland that is swooping down on me, that is seizing me. And here, all of a sudden, like in the nightclub, I am no longer the one who is moving: I am not breathing, I am not thinking, I am not dreaming; I am breathed, I am thought, I am dreamed by the dream.

I am dissolved and absorbed by my bed.

Merleau-Ponty gave a unique description of this phenomenon in his *Phenomenology of Perception*:

Sleep comes when a certain voluntary attitude suddenly receives from outside the confirmation for which it was waiting. I am breathing deeply and slowly in order to summon sleep, and suddenly it is as if my mouth were connected to some great lung outside myself which alternately calls forth and forces back my breath. A certain rhythm of respiration, which a moment ago I voluntarily maintained, now becomes my very being, and sleep, until now aimed at as a significance, suddenly becomes a situation.

(Merleau-Ponty, 2013: 246)

Interestingly, this description intervenes at a moment when Merleau-Ponty is trying to describe what happens in general in our aesthetic experience of the world:

In the same way I give ear, or look, in the expectation of a sensation, and suddenly the sensible takes possession of my ear or my gaze, and I surrender a part of my body, even my whole body, to this particular manner of vibrating and filling space known as blue or red.

(idem)

In other words, the aesthetic involvement with the world, the receiving of sensory information from the outside, already contains, *in nucleo*, this experience of dispossession that we observed in dancing and in sleeping.

3. The Middle Voice

In Greek grammar, there exists a verbal mode to express this experience: The middle voice or “median diathesis”⁴ (Benvéniste, 1966; Allan, 2002). While English only possesses two voices—active and passive—ancient Greek had an intermediary mode that points toward the experience we are speaking of: That of an activity which turns into passivity, an activity whose subject is at the same time agent and patient.

In English, it can only be one of two things: Either I am active, in which case I am the subject of the activity, which means that what I do emanates from me and lands into the world (for instance: I speak, I carry, I push, I pull, I eat), or I am passive, in which case I am the object of the activity, which means someone or something does something to me (for instance: I am carried, I am pulled, I am eaten). It is clear that we can easily go from one to the other through the simple grafting of the auxiliary, but we cannot say with one verb and in one movement: I carry *and* I am carried, I pull *and* I am pulled, I eat *and* I am eaten. It is either one or the other.

And yet, there are activities where it is one and the other, where what I do is affecting me in return. Touch, for instance. Touching is a beautiful and strange activity, where in a way, you don't have a choice: To touch (active), you have to be touched (passive). You hold a book in your hands: You are touching it, it is certain. But in the same time and inevitably, in return, you are touched by it. In English, the verb for touch is in the active diathesis, which produces the illusion that touch is a uni-directional event: As if touching was only a movement that was emanating from us toward the object that we touch. Greek is finer on this grammatical point: It says *haptomai* (with the flexional ending -omai, which indicates the medial) and not *hapto* (with the flexional ending -o, which indicates the active) which means "putting in contact" or eventually "tying a knot." Why *haptomai*? Because touch is never a pure action, because to touch, I cannot be satisfied with only reaching the object, I have to let it reach to me, I have to let myself be affected by the event of encountering it. That is what the verb *haptomai* is teaching us: I cannot touch without being touched in return.

There are many other verbs that are said in Greek only with the medial diathesis: Being born, dying, following, deciding, growing, enjoying, flying. Taking a look at those activities, we can find a common point: In the medial way, the subject *of* the activity is at the same time subject *to* the activity. And sometimes, it goes to the point that in the medial, the activity is not only happening to me: It is what makes me happen, it makes me. It is, obviously, the case for "being born": In a way, no one else than "I" can be born in my stead, but at the same time, this "I" is not exactly responsible for the birth, nor is it passively receiving the birth; it is constituted by and constituting the event of being born (Dastur, 2000; Jacquet, 2016).

A similar thing could be said, although in a less radical way, for the activity of following a movement: In a way, no one else than I is doing those movements that I do (it is I who follows the wave when I swim, it is I who follows the sinuosity of the road when I bike) and yet it is not I who decides, because the form of the movement is given by the wave or the road and I surrender to them. This is what the middle voice indicates: Being born, dying, deciding, flying, following, point to activities where I am not the site of movements that yet are mine.

As Jean-Philippe Narboux remarked, the medial is thus not so much between active and passive; rather, it points to the ecological “milieu” we are enmeshed with and that contributes to constitute us. The mediality of the middle voice

points to a medium in the chemical sense: a medium in which and not only by which something takes place. It directs one’s attention away from the subject/object distinction between “doer” and “done to” and shifts it toward the relation between the process of the verb and the subject.

(Narboux, 2014: 231)

Of course, it will not be surprising to know that the verb used in Greek to express dancing is said through the middle voice (*orcheomai*) and not the active (*orcheo*, which means: “I make (things) dance” and which is used for puppeteers). Dance is an activity where the subjects are not only producing movements: They are the site of those movements. Dancers do not transcend their dances: They are immanent to them.

This confirms what obscurely we were naming with our experience of being moved by music: Dancing is an activity that places the dancer in a liminal, in-between state. Cause and mover, they are at the same time effect and moved by movements that are not theirs. Moving-moved: This is where dance places us, in movements that we make and that we are made of.

4. Musical Listening

Let us now come back to our previous example, when we were trying to sense this tenuous moment when, listening to music, we were transported into a dance, and let us ask a simple question: Why does it seem that music helps us dance?

Indeed, nothing forces us to dance to music. After all, there are dances that are done in silence: Dances of children moving their bodies to no apparent musical cues, dances of adults, too, that notably multiplied on stages in Europe and the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, when choreographers decided to free themselves from their ancillary relationship to music and opera to offer “absolute” dances in silence. So, we can ask, if there is no correlation of essence between dance and music, why is music still one of the favorite pretexts of dancers, on stage, between friends, in the streets or in nightclubs, to start moving?

We can argue that it is probably because listening to music, more than any other activity, implies this being-carried-away-by that we uncovered in the medial way (Quignard, 2014). Indeed, even if I don’t move, even if I am sutured to my seat in a concert hall or lying on my bed at home, listening to music implies a form of transport that not only brings me

“elsewhere” (in the strange utopian or imaginary space of the sounds) but also “on place” (in the most inner, in the cave of my skull and my body, where the storm of sounds bursts).

All aesthetic experience of listening implies a form of being carried away. Philosopher and psychologist Erwin Straus testifies of this in remarkable pages of his *Phenomenological Psychology: Musical experience*, he says, is the experience of “a tone which has an activity of its own”: It detaches itself from its source and “approaches us, penetrating, filling and homogenizing space” (Straus, 1966: 7). Paradigmatically in music, the way we let ourselves be gone through by the sound. The way it moves us and our organs, the way it vibrates in our eardrums, in our bones, on our skin, would be enough to prove it: Listening to music is already being danced.

But this is not enough: After all, I can be directed by sounds (marching to the beats of a drum in military exercises, doing aerobics to counts) without even beginning to think that I am dancing. The problem will remain insoluble as long as we will keep trying to know where *in us* dance is starting, as if dance was something that was happening “inside” the dancers, as if dancing could be a sort of private or internal invent.

This is an illusion.

For, even though I enter into a certain state of body and mind in order to dance, this state does not only concern me—it is more exactly the state of relation, a relation that binds me to other movements than mine: Movements of the music, but also in a nightclub, movements of the other dancers, of the lights, of the ground that is trembling beneath us.

Dancing is not an individual, private event: It is “transindividual” (Manning, 2013; Simondon, 2005): “I” is never the sole site of it; it is always a collective that is dancing, at least constituted of me-and-the-music or me-and-the-air or me-and-my-fellow-dancers. The two words that we dispose of to speak about dance in English are powerfully expressing this transindividuality: *Dancing*, for one, comes from the Indo-European **tan* which points to the action of tensing or binding (**tan* giving *dance* as well as *tension*, *attention* and also *tone*); *choreography*, for the other, comes from the Greek *choros*, that is the chorus of dancers in Greek theater, which were, always, a collective of dancers.

Dance does not begin in us: It begins between us—between movers, lights, sounds. It is not in me, or in the music, or in my partners that dance happens, but in the relation that we have to each other. Dance is an atmospheric phenomenon in the sense that it is not attributable to one single being but to the relation that weaves beings together. Again, it is difficult to think of such an event because Greek- and Latin-derived languages and ontologies have that irresistible slope of attributing actions to subjects and enclosing potentials in beings, rather than in-between-beings. The persistence of that scheme, as many have shown, impedes dramatically the possibilities of thinking about living movements, that

are, by essence, woven (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011; Ingold, 2011; Manning, 2017).

American dancer and choreographer Steve Paxton says it with his characteristic bluntness: “[S]olo dancing does not exist” (Paxton, 1977). By that, he means that beginning to dance is beginning to enter in relation with another. That may be another human being, but it may also be all those other non-human or nonconventional entities that surround us—the ground, the air, the light, the other living beings, their sounds and their movements.

To say “I dance” is thus always a sort of grammatical mistake, for really, I am not dancing: We dance, together.

5. What Do Dancers Teach Us About Politics?

How do I know that I dance? Thus was our opening question.

Going through the figures of sleep, the medial voice and music, we get to a sort of indirect answer: I know that I dance precisely when I sense that it is not only I that moves, that is, when I sense that others than I are, *along with me*, the subjects of my movement. Moving-moved: Dance begins in the hyphen, when my movements are weaved with others, when they lose the mark of what I believe to be *my* property, *my* action, to become *commons*.

What are we learning from the investigation of that question? I would argue that we are learning that dancing is an ethical-political practice. Indeed, what have we seen? We have seen that dancing is an opportunity. It brings us together with others beyond socio-habitual frontiers that articulate our bodies in the public space. This is why it is so profoundly linked to erotics: At balls, at parties, at carnivals, in nightclubs. But this possibility of encountering is also a political possibility: In dance, I can unite or join beings other than human, I can form new “us” constituted of livings and non-livings, humans and non-humans, with whom I become the co-subject of shared movements.

Each time I dance with someone, each time I dance alone in a place, it is a new opportunity to create a temporary autonomous zone (Bey, 2007), a micro-utopia or a micro-society where I invent with my partners new gestures, new rhythms, new ways of inhabiting the space. Of course, these inventions are micrological and they do not last longer than the time of the dance and they sometimes only consist in a smile that we exchange, or a very small variation of a gesture that I have repeated a thousand times. But if I am given the opportunity to observe my experience of dancing close enough, I can use those micrological negotiations as a laboratory for political questions: Can we move together without our self-centered egotistical desires to direct each other? Where is the presence of the other affecting my gestures? Can I move without constantly thinking about what the other is going to make of what I am doing? Can

I accept that most of my movements are not mine, that they are borrowed and that they prolong others'? That I am a passenger of the movements that I do?

Dancing opens a space for those questions.
Maybe it ceases when that space is closed.

Notes

1. Marcel Duchamp, who decided to turn a urinal into a *Fountain* in 1914, did not assert that the artwork is *only* in the eye of the spectator. In a famous interview with Georges Charbonnier, he clearly states for instance, that “the painting is made by the looker [regardeur] *as much as* it is made by the artist” (Duchamp, 2014).
2. French anthropologist Jeanne Favret-Saada, concerning her study of witches in the West of France, articulated this necessity of “letting oneself be affected” as part of the anthropological inquiry: A scholar cannot consider as false beliefs, even at the back of their minds, their object of study if they are to discover all of its facets; they have to become the site of those beliefs (Favret-Saada, 2009).
3. The tendency to consider as supernatural and extraordinary experiences of invasion or collusion with non-conventional entities is bound to what French anthropologist Philippe Descola (Descola, 2013) has called the (Western/modern) “naturalist ontology,” which postulates a strict separation between human (cultural) and non-human (natural) modes of existence. But as soon as we recognize that this separation is an ethnocentric prejudice, there is no longer any reason to see in those trances a “supernatural” or “inexplicable” event.
4. By the term diathesis (literally, “position” [thesis] “towards” [dia]: disposition), grammarians refer to the way in which the subject of a sentence stands to (“is disposed toward”) its verb. Greek grammarians distinguished between three diatheses: active, passive and middle. It is Emile Benveniste’s contention that the median diathesis, in spite of its name, is more originary than the passive diathesis, which means that at some stage of Greek language, there were only two voices, active or medial, and only later on the passive voice was used (see Benveniste, 1966).

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