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DANCE (WORK OF)

By *Serena Massimo*

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It. *Opera coreografica*; Fr. *Œuvre choréographique*; Germ. *Tanzwerk*; Span. *Trabajo coreográfico*. The term denotes on the one hand dancers' labour, i.e. dancers' training and the process of composition of a choreographic entity and, on the other, the dance work, i.e. the choreographic entity that results from dance practice and from the compositional process. The first two aspects were first made explicit by Mark Franko (2002) who, by referring to the Arendtian concept of "labor", described the "work" of dance as a process rather than a productive activity. However, he does not analyse this aspect further – he aims to show dancers' activity as an employment and dance's contribution to political struggle in the 1930s – and he is not mentioned by those involved in the debate on this concept. Moreover, some references to the labour involved in dance practice precede Franko's analysis. As regards the dance work's concept, the term "dance work" was coined in the 15th century to designate the compositions of Italian ballet masters. Since dance had long been subordinated to music and theatre, dance and its artworks were conceived as autonomous from other arts only following the 18th century productions of "pure dance" theatrical events and the creation of Romantic ballet (1830s). In the first decades of the 20th century, with the recognition of the role of modern dance choreographers like Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman and Martha Graham, the concept of a dance work as an authored, stable, repeatable, and enduring artwork became established. This conception was questioned in the 1960s, when postmodern choreographers rejected the distinction between dance and ordinary movement. This determined the beginning of the debate on the concept of dance work; today, choreographers and philosophers are increasingly more focused on the "work" of dance rather than on the notion of dance work.

THE IDENTITY OF DANCE WORK

The concept of the work of dance is mostly investigated by analytic aesthetic philosophers. At the beginning of the debate, their principal concern is the determination of the identity of dance work. The

debate begins with Nelson Goodman's (1968) exclusion of dance and musical works from "autographic" works like paintings, whose material history of production is constitutive of their identity so that their exact duplication does not count as genuine. Differently, dance and musical works are fully determined independently of their history of production by a notational system that provides dance work's constitutive features. Differently to music, dance does not have a standard notational system; however, the development of such a system is possible by providing a preceding classification of the performances of the same dance work. This view is disputed by Adine Armelagos and Mary Sirridge (1978) who conceive dance works as allographic works "in transition" because notation is still unable to enregister dance style, which is the criterion for identifying dance work. Goodman fails to grasp it because he focuses on the artistic product rather than on the elements of the process that generates it: the music, the lighting, the customing, the individual performer and/or his or her style. Dance style includes the "spatial vocabulary", i.e. positions and positions sequences, and patterns of kinaesthetic motivation, i.e. the way the movements are organised, which depends on the ability to perform the movements correctly. Since notation captures only the first aspect of dance style, it cannot be the criterion for identifying dance work. Joseph Margolis (1981) rejects both Goodman's and Armelagos and Sirridge's account. He claims for the autobiographic nature of dance works, whose identity depends on the history of human expression that no notational system can count for. Scores are "mere heuristic devices" useful for recovering the principle dance positions and movements. Today, the identification of dance works with autographic works, a denomination that fits only to improvised and unrepeatable dance works, is also disputed (Pouillaude 2017).

A declination of the investigation of identifying dance work is provided by a debate around "What makes a sequence of movements a dance?". This debate involves Monroe Beardsley, Noël Carroll and Sally Banes. Beardsley (1982) claims that a work of dance is composed of actions characterised by a superfluity of expressiveness, also interpretable as a way of performing movements with a certain intensity. Carroll and Banes (1982) reject this thesis by arguing that this does not count for postmodern "task-dances" – like Yvonne Rainer's *Room Service* – where dancers execute practical actions without any expressivity or intensity. What allows a dance work to be defined as such is the historical and the artistic context that generate it. In particular, according to Carroll's "historical narrative" theory, a dance work is such if it is possible to provide for it a narrative of an adequate historical account on which this work emerges intelligibly from already acknowledged artworks (Carroll, Banes 1998).

With Graham McFee (1992; 2011; 2018) the debate shifts on dance work's "numerical identity problem", i.e. the determination of the constraints under which two performances are performances of the same dance work. Dance works are "types", abstract entities that come into being thanks to dance works' "tokens", i.e. the performances that instantiate dance works in concrete, physical and spatial-temporal events. Since performances have no spatial-temporal and numerical limits, dance works exist as long as they are performed. However, performances of the same work differ in detail; to be sure of their correct instantiation it is necessary to go back to the constraints prescribed by the dance work to its performances. These constraints are provided by dance notation: two performances are the performances of the same dance work just in case they instantiate the "text" of a notation considered an "adequate"

notation for the dance. Such a notation provides dance work's essential features, i.e. the features whose absence would prevent the performances instantiating the dance work in question. Later, McFee (2011) acknowledging that most dance works are not scored, claims that dance works are notable in principle; their numerical identity is preserved by notating them after their staging. McFee's account is disputed because of the importance given to notation – uncommon in dance and incapable of grasping dance work's heterogeneity – and for its ontological assumptions (Carr 1997; Pouillaude 2017; Davies 2011; Pakes 2020). Another approach to dance work's numerical identity problem is provided by Julie Van Camp (2006; 2014) who interprets it as a way of talking and acting of the dance art community. Van Camp follows the American legal procedure for settling cases of copyright infringement of choreographic works, which involves the establishment of a criterion for identifying dance work and the test of "substantial similarity" to measure compliance with the fixation adopted and decide whether one work infringes another. Thus, the criterion for identifying dance work must be established by the dance world community's ways of acting and talking – e.g. the conversation between performing artists and their coaches – while the ways of talking and acting – e.g. the consideration of the testimony of experts – of a jury of lay observers test the similarity between works.

THE TYPE / TOKEN SCHEME AND PLATONIST ONTOLOGY

While the philosophers that precede McFee do not specify dance work's ontological status, McFee's use of the type/token scheme implies the identification of dance works with abstract entities. However, McFee (1999) rejects the assumption of a "Platonic fiction" of dance works, by denying their identification with ideal and eternal objects. The type/token scheme is a "way of talking" that clarifies the ontological distinction and the relationship between the dance work and its performances. Aaron Meskin (1999), who shares McFee's conception of the type/token scheme, characterises dance works differently. Following Levinson's definition of musical works (Levinson 1980), Meskin defines dance works as "indicated type action structures", underlying the artist's role in their composition. A similar account of dance work's ontology is provided by Anna Pakes (2013; 2020) who assumes that dance works are intentional structures of "action-types" realised on the basis of the consensus between dancers and choreographers about a set of choreographic norms and group collective commitment to performing in accordance with them. These structures are flexible "frame-works" that change from one production to another. Pakes also evaluates the applicability of a Platonist ontology of music to dance. Taking this view, dance works would be abstract, eternal types that are discovered rather than created and that exist independently from human language, thought and practices. Pakes, who shares the identification of dance works as abstract entities and the idea that dance works are a "discovered way of moving", rejects the other conditions, claiming dance work's dependence on the human body and on historical, contextual and intentional factors.

FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

Today, except for Pakes, the claim for dance work's abstractness is uncommon, according to postmodern and contemporary dance's rejection of the concept itself of dance work. By staging everyday sequences of movements, postmodern "task dance" and contemporary conceptual dances challenge the concept of fixed and stable works and show the processual nature of dance-making. Moreover, the term "work" itself is disappearing from choreographers' vocabulary (Blades 2016) while scholars deny dance work's abstractness. David Davies (2011) identifies dance works with the dancer's acts that generate the performance, i.e. a sequence of movements that makes available to an audience an artistic content. This content – whose ontological status is not specified by Davies – does not coincide with the acts that are shown. Differently, in improvised works, the artistic process coincides with its product: the artistic content lies in the dancers' acts performed. Frédéric Pouillaude (2017) uses the term "unworking" to designate both the dancer's failure to produce a fixed entity and the process of continuous renewal typical of dancers' labour. This process characterises contemporary dance, whose rejection of dance codes generates the necessity to improvise new rules. Thus, improvisation innervates contemporary dance, whose works depend on the coexistence between the public's idleness and the presence of dancers who "make things happen". These "things" – whose ontological status is not specified – are dance works themselves; their durability is granted by their oral transmission according to which dancers do not learn positions and steps but embody the motor principles that generate them. However, it is not explained how this process of embodiment works during rehearsals and dancers' training. A similar account to Pouillaude's is the one provided by Renée Conroy (2012), who explains the claim for dance work's ephemerality by showing dance as a bodily practice, having forever been the expression of the extension and the limits of human freedom. Conroy also introduces another issue, i.e. the kinaesthetic intensity felt by the public during the observation of a performance. The role of the body in the appreciation of dance work emerges in the comments on dance recording technologies; in fact, regrets have been expressed about an "experiential lack" due to the lack of a shared place (McFee 2018; Pakes 2020). This issue, only recently discussed, requires further investigations.

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