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Interpretation in Dance Performing¹

Most aesthetics philosophers in the analytic tradition discuss interpretation from what will here be called the critical-philosophical perspective – they consider interpretation of art as part of the function of an evaluating appreciator who is seeking to both identify and to understand a static art object, such as a painting, sculpture, text, or structure, whether real or abstract. This essay, however, is on the role and function of the dance performer, the person who is dancing in a kind of dance-as-art event that is designed for and performed for an audience that perceives, witnesses, experiences, and appreciates the dance in various ways. As such this chapter focuses on a component of dance practice that diverges from critical-philosophical practice in two ways: 1) it is from the point of view of an embodied person engaged in a dynamic process, and 2) the dance as art on which this perspective focuses is itself treated as a process or event that need is neither static nor necessarily enduring – it could be ephemeral in the sense that it may not have identical features from performance to performance. My particular focus within this framework will be to consider to what extent is the dance performer an *interpreter*, and if she is an interpreter, in what sense, and what does she interpret? This paper thus seeks to better

understand the nature of dance performance in practice by analyzing the role of the dance performer's contribution in light of any interpretive function she might have.

To begin, I will survey some leading theories on the interpretation of art, from Susan Sontag, Arthur Danto, and Joseph Margolis, and from there construct a working and open definition of interpretation in art that can be applied to dance-as-art, by which I mean the kind of concert dance that is offered for experience, appreciation, and understanding as art. From there this definition will be used to identify two dance-performance-related practices that I think do count as *interpretation* in this sense, and I will demonstrate how the dance performer might meet these conditions. Finally, I will consider briefly, and as a promissory note for a more all-encompassing theory of the dancer's role in dance performance, what the dance performer might be doing that is not best understood as interpretation.

In her famous 1961 essay, 'Against Interpretation', Susan Sontag says:

...I don't mean interpretation in the broadest sense, the sense in which Nietzsche (rightly) says, "There are no facts, only interpretations". By interpretation, I mean a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain "rules" of interpretation.

Directed to art, interpretation means plucking a set of elements (the X, the Y, the Z, and so forth) from the whole work. The task of interpretation is virtually one of translation.

The interpreter says, Look, don't you see that X is really—or, really means—A? That Y is really B? That Z is really C? (S. Sontag 1961, p. 5).

According to Sontag, this is classical interpretation, and it re-writes and alters the artwork, even though the interpreter claims to be identifying the work's true meaning. She says that the modern style of interpretation is even worse because it “excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs ‘behind’ the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one” (S. Sontag 1961, p. 6). She then uses Marxist and Freudian analyses as examples of this kind of destructive interpretation.

Sontag believes that one ought to be sensitive to one's response to art (the paradigm example for her is literary art, a static art form) and to be alive to it in all the ways that it is there to be responded to without doing violence to the artwork by finding or inventing meanings for the work that are not available in the experience of the work (see Sontag 1961, pp. 9-10). Thus she prefers what she calls a “formalist” theory of interpretation above a “content-based” one in which the interpreter hunts for the *true* meaning behind what is actually there (Sontag 1961, pp. 12-14). Further, Sontag doesn't think that the artist's intention that their work be either interpreted or not matters because she thinks that artists are sometimes guilty of seeing their own work through a work-altering interpretive lens (Sontag 1961, p. 9).

In his essay, ‘Deep Interpretation’, Arthur Danto notes that responding to a work via sensory experience or passions alone (a theory he

attributes to Schopenhauer) offers no way to understand the sort of conceptual art in which the artwork is perceptually indiscernible from its material counterpart (Danto 2005, pp. 37-39). Here Danto's paradigm artwork is a painting or sculpture. He thinks this kind of perception is biologically basic and does not include enhancement by cultural resources. In addition, Danto interprets Sontag's criticism of interpretation as not being against interpretation altogether but against the kind of interpretation that overdetermines the work of art. He does not think, for example, that she would be against the sort of interpretation that he calls *surface interpretation* – that just consists of identifying the text as the work of art it claims to be in historical context along with some surrounding identifications that are roughly in line with some basic and apparent artistic purposes (such as the title of the piece for example). He that thinks what Sontag objects to is *deep interpretation* – which he says involves a *kledon*, a Greek term for the situation where “a speaker makes utterances ‘that are more than the speaker realizes’...” (Danto 2005, p. 54). Here an artist or author is in no better position than anyone else to say what the artwork means, since meanings are abstracted that may not have even been available to the author (see Danto 2005, p. 51). An example of this would be to say that artwork X represents Freud's view of sexual repression when that theory did not exist when the artwork was created.

Danto agrees with Sontag that deep interpretation can “over-determine” the work (Danto 2005, p. 66). And yet, in his essay, ‘The Appreciation and Interpretation of Works of Art’, he says the following:

My view, historically, is that interpretations are discovered and that interpretive statements are true or false. My view, philosophically, is that interpretations constitute works of art [as works of art], so that you do not, as it were, have the artwork on one side and the interpretation on the other.

(Danto 2005, p. 23, bracketed material mine).

Thus, it seems that Danto holds both that interpretive statements about an artwork are true or false, and that it is the process of interpretation itself that determines an artwork’s meaning as a work of art – it *constitutes* it. Here he says, “Interpretation is in effect the level with which an object is lifted out of the real world and into the artworld, where it becomes vested in often unexpected raiment” (Danto 2005, p. 39). We know from his “artworld” paper and from his subsequent work following it that Danto’s view is that the person qualified to make this interpretation is an expert in the artworld to which the work of art belongs (Danto 1964 and Danto 1981). But this “unexpected raiment” calls to mind the children’s story, ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’, where it takes a child to point out that all the adults are claiming to see something that simply isn’t there.

Joseph Margolis identifies two modes of interpretation for artworks:

1) interpretation for purposes of historical identification, and 2)

interpretation that counts as part of understanding the nature of a particular work of art. In short, Margolis acknowledges that one has to treat an artwork as stable for purposes of historical identification but he does not believe that this means that the meaning of that artwork is ever singular or determinate, and therefore it cannot lend itself to one true interpretation (Margolis 2001, pp. 105-106). Instead, Margolis has a pluralist and relativist view of artwork interpretation, one in which changes in culture can create multiple “truth-like” interpretations of any given artwork at various points of time due to the artwork’s nature as an evolving cultural artifact that has meanings that change due to changes in culture (Margolis 2001, p. 127; 1995, p. 28; and 1999, pp. 84-85). Margolis uses the term “Intentional properties”, with an upper-case “I”, to refer to those features of artworks that are put into an artwork by an artist and that have semiotic meaning to both the artist and to his interpreting culture (Margolis 1999, pp. 60-62, and p. 73). On Margolis’ view, for example, it would be “truth-like” to say that a painting depicting Christ was depicting both the sense of who Christ was that existed at the time and place of the artwork’s creation *and* the person who Christ was as understood by historically later or different cultural interpretations of Christ. He calls this sort of interpretation “truth-like” rather than true because he does not think that artworks as cultural artifacts have discoverable properties that can have true interpretations that last for all time and that are not true-for-x, with x being the interpreting culture. Thus, an artist on

Margolis' view does not have full control over the meaning of the work that he creates.

To sum up, on Margolis' view an artwork's meaning lies in its properties or features that are perceivable in the artwork by an interpreting culture. Margolis' theory too, primarily focuses on literary texts, paintings, and sculptures, although Margolis also holds that intentional properties exist in music, dance, and in all other art forms and activities that he construes as lingual utterances. Since this perception varies by culture it is not tied to human biology alone, such as in the limited sort of biological sensory experience that Danto attributes to Schopenhauer. Indeed, for Margolis perception of an artwork would accommodate conceptual art by apprehending its meaning through whatever clues are available to aid that comprehension that are given to them by the artist – such as the artwork's title or other direction for viewing the piece provided by the artist. For example, if one can see that a poem is a haiku, one could at least make use of any culturally-available interpretive practices for haikus. It might be a haiku even if the artist didn't intend that to be the case – if it happened to be in haiku form in a coincidental way. Sontag would probably say that it would be wrong for a Margolian interpreter to call the poem a haiku but not wrong to point out the perceptual, formal features of that haiku. And Danto would probably say its haiku-ness was true under a philosophical (deep) but not historical (surface) interpretation.

In light of these views on artwork interpretation I will now construct an open and working definition of interpretation to use in connection with dance performance that shares some continuity with the standard theories of artwork interpretation mentioned earlier. This has the advantage of not departing too greatly from how interpretation in art is known and understood in Western cultural scholarship, although as we shall see the fact that dance involves a moving, thinking, embodied dancer may change the suitability of a theory of interpretation culled from those that have primarily static art forms in mind. Bracketing for now – we will return to this later – the question of what qualifies as interpretanda (by which is meant properly interpretable material) for the performer’s interpretation in dance performance this paper holds that interpretation in art is at least (but not only) this:

- The process by which an interpreter evaluates and uses customary artworld interpretanda in order to identify the meaning of the art product at issue.

This is a view of interpretation of art that gives credence to Danto’s view of artworld expertise. For dance purposes the relevant artworld would be the danceworld, in which expert interpretative ability would be acknowledged in qualified dance critics as well as in other kinds of danceworld scholars. The “art product at issue” refers to the dance performance. The term “art product” is used instead of “artwork” in order to escape any explicit or

implied commitment to an ontological view that holds that a dance artwork must be a textual or abstract structure.

This working definition (by which I mean that it is provisional only) is broad enough to accommodate all three of the views on interpretation in art mentioned earlier. Formalist, surface, deep, and culturally relative and pluralistic interpretations of art are all customary kinds of interpretation in art, including dance. This definition is also an open one so that it can allow for newly emergent interpretive practices to develop out of or in reaction to customary ones.

We turn now to a discussion of what kinds of interpretive activities and roles exist in the practices of creating and performing dance in order to identify what, precisely, the performing dancer might do that is in line with the working definition of interpretation now provided.

This section will evaluate two activities a dancer may engage in during preparation for dance performance. They are as follows:

- 1) Evaluation and use of any pre-existing choreographic notes or directions (which may not rise to the level of a notated “score” in the technical sense); and
- 2) Evaluation and use of any notes or guidelines from a director (the director may or may not also be the choreographer).

1) is a situation in which the dance performer independently evaluates any pre-existing choreographic notes or directions. She analyzes the detailed libretto and notes on verbal indicators from Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot’s

original choreography for *Giselle*, for example, which took place in Paris in 1841, in preparation for performing the title role.

In 2), interpretation of any notes or guidelines from a director, let us imagine the case where the dance performer does not use any independent interpretation of original choreographic guidelines for *Giselle*, or that if she does so it is only with the express or tacit approval of the performance director. This situation is one where:

- 1) The structure and format of the dance performances is created by the performance director, who may or may not be the choreographer (he may, for example, be either restaging the Coralli and Perrot choreography or, like Marius Petipa did for The Imperial Ballet of Russia, he may provide new choreography for *Giselle* altogether);
- 2) The plan or framework for the dance performance is set in advance by the director. Here there is a continuum between dances where:
 - a. The dance has fully set directions, where all or nearly all of the steps and stylistic and expressive nuances are determined ahead of time and executed as closely as possible; and
 - b. Some themes or ideas for where to begin are available to the dance performer but the rest of the dance performance features are left up to the discretion or improvisation.

Now let us apply the working definition of interpretation provided earlier.

That definition, remember, was the following. Interpretation in art is:

- The process by which an interpreter evaluates and uses customary artworld interpretanda in order to identify the meaning of the art product at issue.

Applying this definition to interpretation by the dance performer, and inserting the kind of dance performer roles provided above, we get this:

- *The process by which the dancer [interpreter] evaluates and uses a pre-existing score or plan from a choreographer and/or director [both customary interpretanda in danceworld practice] in order to identify the meaning of the dance performance.*

In practice, dance performers do sometimes directly interpret pre-existing scores or choreographic plans. Dance anthropologist Anya Peterson Royce, for example, points out that ballet dancers at the Kirov school were trained in acting so that they could interpret roles directly from texts or choreographic plans without necessarily relying on directions from directors (Royce 1984, p. 127).

In addition, dancers do often follow director's plans rather than the original choreographers'. This is true in the case, for example, where a director restages a dance for contemporary audiences, as has been seen in many different versions of *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*, with the new versions identified with the new choreographer's name in most cases (for example, Mats Eks' *Swan Lake*, or Akram Khan's *Giselle*).

If we think that dance performers are interpreters in these ways then the performance an audience sees has already been through one interpretive process before they get to interpret it. But IS this what's going on?

Graham McFee holds that one broad usage of the term "interpretation" in the performing arts refers to the performer's interpretation of the piece performed, such as in Pollini's interpretation of Schoenberg's *Six Little Piano Pieces Opus 19* or in Nureyev's interpretation of *Sleeping Beauty* (McFee 1992, p. 100 and p. 103). "Here", McFee says, "the interpretation typically consists in some set of actions performed, or, as we might say, in producing that object in which the witnessable work consists" (McFee 1992, p. 100). In both music and dance McFee thinks that the job of the performer is to perform the work of art, which for McFee, is the abstract structure as evidenced by an at-least-in-principle notation (McFee 2011, 168-171). He acknowledges that different performer's interpretations can bring out or highlight different features of the underlying work, and that by doing so they can create a distinctive performance and even contribute to the properties of performances, via what he calls their "craft-mastery" (McFee 1992, p. 123; 2013, p. 29 and p. 35; see also 2011, p. 155). But McFee also thinks that constraints on the role of the performer are "actually provided either by the notation or some notation-equivalent," clarifying later that the object for interpretation is the structure but that the notation makes this explicit and that the constraints on performance will change "as notation systems change or different ones are employed" (McFee 1992, 102, 104, and 106). He

categorically denies that this “interpretation” is creative in any way, and this means that the dance performer is not an artist and not someone who can be credited with co-authorship of dances (McFee 1992, 104; 2011, 168-173; 2013, p. 29). McFee also says that “the performer’s interpretation does not really constitute a level of interpretation at all” (by which he presumably means critical interpretation in a formal sense) because he sees the performer as just the necessary vehicle for making the dance work of art available for criticism (McFee 1992, p. 124). The choreographer creates the dance structure, the dance performer makes it visible to a critic, and the critic determines its meaning (McFee 1992, pp. 152-154).

McFee holds further that if the dance performer does more than just provide notation-acceptable embellishments on the abstract structure, then this is “a case where a new work of art is brought into being...” (McFee 1992, 108).

According to McFee, this can happen in the case of a virtuoso performance that McFee says is a “poor performance” when it distracts the spectator from the structure of the dance (McFee 2011, p. 180). Or it can be a case where improvisational activity by the dance performer does not fall within the acceptable structure of the work. This creates a new performable (and ostensibly re-performable) work of art (McFee 2011, p. 156 and p. 163).

McFee denies that “a one-off work with a performing character” is a work of art – calling it instead a “happening” (McFee 2011, p. 156 and pp. 160-161; 2013, footnote 2; c.f. Davies 2011, pp. 143-148).

If McFee thinks that dance performers can create new artworks through embellishments or other improvisational activity, then it is hard to see how he can simultaneously claim that they are not creative or artists. Presumably McFee would answer that they are not artists when they stick to their role of performing, which he limits to instantiating the structure. Doing more than this turns performers into composers or choreographers of a new work of art. (McFee gives no guidance, however, on how we are to view that new work of art as a work of art, or identify it as that new work going forward.)

One difficulty here, as noted, is that dancers don't always plan their performances ahead of time. But even when they do it's not clear that they do so with either the original choreographer or a subsequent choreographer's or director's plan in mind. Ruth Eshel, a dance philosopher, choreographer, and dance critic, says that the process of performing includes working out both the technical and artistic aspects of a role in a two-part process:

The first is a systematic, logical and cognitive grappling with the challenges that the steps pose. The second an individual artistic interpretation of the part, stemming from the private world of imagination, emotion, energy and associations of the individual artist. (Eshel 1995, p. 87).

If imagination and associations of the individual artist are involved, and if it comes from a private world, it's not clear to what extent this complies with McFee's view of performing as instantiating a structure.

Let us consider, now, the possibility that there are other sorts of things that the dance performer is doing that falls outside of making the dance visible to the critics. Some dance theorists hold, as I do, that dance performers are often creative, are often artists accordingly, and as such are often co-authors of dances, rather than merely “craft-masters” (cf. McFee 2011, p. 181 and p. 184, and 2013, p. 28). *New York Times* dance critic Anna Kisselgoff has noted that 19th-century ballet was designed around the personalities of its lead dancers. She does say that in contemporary dance roles are more important than the performers in it, that performers are “instruments” of choreographers, but she also notes that “unless the dancer ‘performs’ rather than merely executes the steps, the choreography will fail” (Kisselgoff 1978, p. D17). Kisselgoff also says that in the case of Balanchine ballet, the work of the dance performer, such as adding stylistic nuances “does require its own kind of artistry” (Kisselgoff 1978, p. D17). Dance scholar and choreography professor Larry Lavender also points out that “even in cases in which an artist has a specific meaning or message in mind [he thinks that in many cases they do not], a work of art, as it takes shape, tends to take on a life and character of its own as the artist engages with his or her materials ... be they colors, musical tones, words, or movements” (Lavender 1995, p. 27, bracketed material mine). Choreographers often use the dancers’ created movements, steps or stylistic nuances as part of the building blocks for what will be the eventual dance, in many cases making dancers’ contributions highly visible, rather than “relatively invisible”, as McFee says that they are

(McFee 2011, p. 180). Shirley McKechnie and Catherine Stevens point out, for example, that dancers and choreographers in contemporary dance often improvise together in order to create and select the materials out of which a dance is formed (McKechnie and Stevens 2009, p. 40). Further, they note that such dance ensemble collaborations can create what they call “evolving dynamical systems” and that it is these that often result in a self-organizing form of a dance (McKechnie and Stevens 2009, pp. 41-43). The ensemble as a unit, rather than any individual within it, is therefore the true author of the dance.

There is also evidence to show that most performances are not constrained by notations, even notations-in-principle. The one exception is the performances for which a choice has been made to be historically faithful to a given structure but this situation happens in just a fraction of actual cases. McFee does acknowledge the weakness of notation in dance practice but then suggests that this shows a weakness in the notational systems themselves rather than a weakness in a philosophic system that construes the abstract structure, as evidenced by notation, as the only possible candidate for evaluation of dance-as-art (see McFee 2013, pp. 35-41). Perhaps one reason why better notation has not been created is because there is a critical mass of dance choreographers and performers who do not recognize the need or value of such a notation; indeed, they have been getting along just fine without it. Indeed, any pre-existent elements that might be used as the springboard for a dance is more commonly

communicated through “multimodal recording and archives of dance works” and via the dancers’ bodies, which are themselves “repositories of the dance works that they have composed and/or performed” (McKechnie and Stevens 2009, p. 45; see also Eshel 1995, particularly at 84, for examples of dancers who use other dancers’ performances, including stylistic and other performer-contributed elements, rather than the structures of scores whether real or in principle, as the model for their performances).

Another consideration is that sometimes dance performers do not always fully cognize or understand how they will perform a role ahead of time, as in the case of many of the dancers who were trained in the neo-classical style of New York City Ballet director, choreographer, and teacher George Balanchine. Dance anthropologist and comparative literature scholar Anya Peterson Royce, in her book *Movement and Meaning: Creativity and Interpretation in Ballet and Mime*, points to dance critic Arlene Croce’s observation (substantiated in the autobiographies of Suzanne Farrell, Merrill Ashley, Edward Villella and others) that Balanchine often encouraged both individual style in his dancers and gave them the room to spontaneously add their own stylistic flourishes during performance (Royce 1984, p. 121, citing Croce 1979; see also Eshel 1995, p. 86, and Kisselgoff, 1978, D17, for more on this). Royce refers to this as “spontaneous in-the-performance interpretation” (Royce 1984, p. 121).

Our working definition of interpretation, however, includes the phrase “...in order to identify the meaning of the performance” which is there

to capture the sense from the art interpretation theorists earlier that interpretation is about identification of meaning. Thus, on the traditional accounts of interpretation of art canvassed earlier the interpreter can say to herself or to someone else, “The meaning of X is Y”. But is a Balanchine dancer doing that? Is she providing an account of the meaning of X and saying, through their dancing, that it is Y? This marks one of the difficulties of treating interpretation in dance performing as an extension of critical interpretation.

Perhaps what would help here is an account of meaning identification in which meaning is intuited, identified and conveyed in bodily and felt rather than in consciously decided ways. One where the “thinking” involved is embodied and not necessarily the kind of meaning that can be put into words. To capture the moving-while-doing aspect of dance performing we’d also need a kind of thinking that is live and online rather than reflective and contemplative. This chapter cannot, for space and time reasons, make and defend adequately the case for such an expanded view of the thinking-while-doing nature of a dancer’s agency, although I have done so elsewhere (see Bresnahan 2014). Suffice it to say now that if the term understanding were expanded in such a way then we might call performing Balanchine ballet interpretation.

We have now come to a crossroads where a decision must be made as to whether to push this line of thinking and so subsume the Balanchine neo-classical process described above under the term interpretation. What might be the costs

and benefits of calling this “interpretation”? On the benefit side would be that dancers are credited with understanding what they are doing and are not treated as merely non-thinking puppets. This seems dancer-friendly and gives credit to the difficulties of dance performance that are minded and not mechanical. Another point on the benefit side is that this sort of activity is commonly referred to as “interpretation” in dance practice and it’s helpful for interdisciplinary work when terms are kept constant between disciplines. (For usage of the term “interpretation” in this way see Acocella 2005 and Barnes 1975). On the cost side is that an embodied thinking-while-doing process that dance performers are involved in gets subsumed (and possibly lost) under the term “interpretation” when it may in fact be the case that it is a separate process worthy of exploration and consideration.

Suppose now that a significant part of what a dancer does in performance is not the conveying of understanding after an interpretive effort, but a performance that is just the output of how the dancer finds herself moving through it. What if the dancer is merely adding her own artistically trained and natural instinctual and embodied sense of how to move within any frameworks provided for the piece? And what if this is a vital, ineliminable, and non-contingent aspect of dance performance, without which its full meaning cannot be identified or understood by an audience? If what we think that what matters most to understanding the nature of dance is the pre-existing plan or structure then it makes sense to hold, as McFee does, that if the dancer adds too much of their own contribution then

they are performing the given structure poorly and creating a new structure. Indeed, viewed in this way then the dance performer would be guilty of the kind of altering interpretation that Sontag decries, that Danto calls the sort of “deep interpretation” that overdetermines the artwork, and that Margolis might say either does or does not go beyond the meaning that is understandable to the audience as the interpreting culture. If we think, however, that what matters most in many cases *is* the dancers’ contribution to a distinctive artistic experience for the audience, then we would be better off viewing the dancer in these cases as a co-author and co-creative artist rather than either a poor interpreter or someone who has hijacked one dance in order to turn it into another. Sondra Fraleigh, for example, describes dance as “a special case of voluntary motion, imbued with the aesthetic intentions of performers and the larger intentionality (purposes) of each particular dance” (Fraleigh 1999, p. 196). Fraleigh thus treats the voluntary motion and aesthetic intentions of the dancers together with “the larger intentionality of the dance”, which she has specifically not reduced to pre-existing intentions or structures of a choreographer or director. Further, dance performance styles are often so unique and individual that they cannot be copied by other dancers, even when they try their best to do so. Dancer and teacher Maria Fay attributes this individuality to “a particular dancer’s individual approach, charisma, physique and talent” (Fay 1996). She cites an example of a highly trained ballet dancer who tried to copy another performer’s style but who was able to copy only the images created by the other dancer but not her

movement personality. In addition, some particular dances have hinged heavily on a particular individual dance performer or set of performers. Dancer, director, and choreographer Robert Helpmann, for example, has noted that some of Frederick Ashton's ballets were so influenced by particular dancers that the ballets would lose something if the dancer left (see Royce 1984, pp. 124-125, quoting Helpmann 1971, p. 96). Dance critic Marcia Siegel has also observed that the continuous adagio in Twyla Tharp's *As Time Goes By* was "an achievement due in large part to Larry Grenier, who created the role...", adding that "Grenier was indulgent in space, letting his motion slide easily into its own fluctuating rhythms" (Krasnow 1994, pp. 17-18, quoting Siegel 1979, pp. 356-357). And there are many other examples of this phenomenon – one need only to think of any outstanding singular dancers who made singular contributions to the roles they initiated (such as Nijinsky in *La Spectre de la Rose*, Judith Jamison in "Cry" from Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*, or Martha Graham as *Medea* for starters).

What all this means is that the term *interpretation* as used in traditional aesthetics philosophy with paradigm instances of art objects that were static, non-moving, and non-embodied in a human performer – painting, sculpture, literary texts and the like -- might be too narrow to adequately capture the full scope of the practice of dance performing.

In conclusion, in practice dance performing is not just interpretive. Some of dance performing practice is not pre-planned, is not conceptually understood, and is better characterized as the trained and expressive output

of a dancer who moves in the particular embodied, creative and agentive way that includes customary additions to and alterations of a dance as it comes into being and as it is performed. If one thinks that this can and does affect the understanding, experience, and appreciation the audience has in ways that typically contribute to rather than detract from a dance performance then the idea that these sorts of departures from structure make the performance “bad” is inapt. Indeed, dancers are in an important number of cases valued for a creative, expressive contribution to *what the dance performance is*. Dancers are certainly sometimes executors, and sometimes interpreters, but they also often do produce something that is individual, new, trained, and skilled, and in this sense, they are artists.

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