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Review: 'Embodied Philosophy in Dance: Gaga and Ohad Naharin's Movement Research'

Aili W. Bresnahan

University of Dayton, abresnahan1@udayton.edu

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KATAN, EINAIV. *Embodied Philosophy in Dance: Gaga and Ohad Naharin's Movement Research*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016, xviii + 228 pp., 10 color illus., \$ 99.99 (cloth).

This book is an original and complex philosophy of dance that Katan (now Katan-Schmid) has extrapolated from a close examination of and studio-based engagement with *Gaga*, Ohad Naharin's style of contemporary dance movement. It is culled from Katan's first-hand experience as a participant in the training and as a researcher in conversation with Naharin and *Gaga*-engaged dancers. *Gaga* is both practiced alone as somatic movement research (one which studies internal, bodily perception and experience) and exhibited in dances that are choreographed by Naharin and other collaborators for the *Batsheva Dance Company* of Tel-Aviv, Israel. The philosophy provided here is organic and closely tied to *Gaga*, although the relevancy and resonance of this philosophic achievement for dance and other types of movement philosophy is indisputable. The reader can make extensions from Katan's theory to the aesthetic, felt, and understood qualities of other types of dance movement research practices, as well as to other kinds of dance events offered for appreciation as theatre or concert art, but these extensions are not Katan's main focus.

Katan's methodology is multi-lingual, inter-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary, and in moments of movement description both literary and metaphorical. *Embodied Philosophy in Dance* begins and ends with *Gaga* as it is *embodied, in progress, practiced, lived, perceived, felt, understood, and expressed*. As such it has deep phenomenological, pragmatic, and enactivist ties. It draws on and interweaves historical insights from Aristotle, Kant, Descartes, Schopenhauer, and Hume, for example, with hermeneutical theories of Husserl, Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, while also folding in process-oriented and pragmatic perspectives from philosophers such as C.S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, Susanne Langer, and Pierre Bourdieu. In addition, Katan engages with contemporary philosophers of mind such as George Lakoff with Mark Johnson, Shaun Gallagher, Alva Noë, Barbara Montero, and Jesse Prinz. Finally, Katan makes use of work by psychologists, cognitive scientists, and cultural theorists, as well as dance philosophies from the fields of dance history, dance criticism, and dance studies. Despite this wide breadth of approach, the book exhibits its own soul as Aristotle might say, or displays Katan's unity of the self, as Dewey might say, in refusing to confine itself within the customary discourses of one or even two traditions.

The book is comprised of five parts: 1) an introduction to Katan's theory of *Gaga* as a somatic and embodied philosophy of dance with connections to *habitus*, embodied knowledge, and physical intelligence; 2) a discussion of *Gaga*'s sensual emphasis, including a discussion of physical instructions in *Gaga* such as "float!" as well as how perception is enacted and extended through the use of embodied metaphor and phenomenological reflection; 3) an exploration of the mental emphasis in *Gaga*, with "connect effort into pleasure!" creating a perceptual gap to be overcome between mind and body, psychology and physicality, understanding emotions and directing moods, and intentionality and the aesthetic will; 4) *Gaga* as the "physical practice of intelligence," including discussion of multitasking, decision-making, intelligible form (this is where the possibility of *Gaga* as the creation of dance artistic forms for the *Batsheva Company* comes in), and rhythm as synchronization of body and mind; and 5) *Gaga* as the creation of "moving forms," starting with the piece *Bellus* (the first part of Ohad Naharin's three-part choreographed dance, *Three* (2005)), and then extrapolating a theory of dance art and expression in *Gaga* and how such expression is understood.

Each section begins with Gaga as its orienting point, cementing Katan's method as one that leads with dance, the what philosophy of dance is "of," and with theoretical analysis following. Her work then engages the challenge of accurately characterizing, describing, and at times explaining what has taken place in philosophical and other conceptual and words-based terms. Part I leads with an in-depth discussion of *Mamootot* (2003), choreographed by Naharin, discussing the dance movement elements first and then moving into an analysis of how to translate or interpret these movements into words. Part II begins with "Float!" (a Gaga technique direction), moving from there to a discussion of what is required on the part of the dancer to perceive and enact this direction. In similar vein Part III begins with the direction, "Connect effort into pleasure!" with a discussion of the intentionality and agency needed for the dancer to make this translation. Part IV begins with "multitasking inquiries" that arise in Gaga practice, demonstrating further the challenges for the dancer in making the sort of concrete, artistic planning decisions required by form-making in addition to the perceptual and physical challenges of the movement quality itself. Finally, Part V (as mentioned above) begins with *Bellus*, using this part of *Three* as the case study from which to show how it is properly seen and understood as expression.

Thus the book focuses squarely on not just the dance movement of Gaga itself but on the site and relevancy of the dancer as an embodied, thinking entity for perceiving, understanding, processing, enacting, and expressing that dance movement. The meaning is contained therein, as part of the movement's simultaneous perception, understanding, and expressive articulation. Gaga is embodied philosophy in dance, then, with the *dancer* featured as the crucial processing, moving, doing, and thinking artist-philosopher whose task it is to negotiate incoming directions and instructions. The dancer then produces the aesthetic results that they feel, perceive, understand, and communicate to within the world, which includes at least themselves as witnessing audience. This approach gets something deeply right not just about Gaga but about dance overall; what it is, how it works, and how it is made and performed.

This results in one particular strength of this book; its careful observation and insights into what, exactly, Gaga is and does as it is filtered through, uttered, and articulated by its dancers. For example, Katan handles the difficulty of characterizing the symbolic aspect of theatre dance that earlier dance philosopher Susanne Langer grappled with by noting that a dancer's action "is not a presentation of meaning He does not show, he lives through" (p. 12). In this way Katan points out that even when performed for a theatre audience the forms that Gaga creates are not symbolic ones that exist at a virtual remove from reality or from the dancer's bodily repertoire and trained schemas for movement. Instead Gaga creates *living* forms, dynamic images made by the dancers and choreographer, which the dancers enact through careful perception, attunement, and intentional effort. The form itself is not the meaning, it is the moving structure from which the expressive meaning, such as vulnerability for example, emerges (see p. 16). This marks one difference between Gaga and the training found in classical ballet. Katan shows how for the most part Gaga focuses on the qualitative meaning of the movement that comes through the images (often based on descriptive metaphors) rather than on bodily positions (such as a 180-degree penché in ballet) that contain classical or mathematical beauty in their geometric proportion or in their linear perfection. Thus Katan's insight into the motivations and functions of Gaga provides a resource for comparative analysis with other forms of dance and movement.

Overall, *Embodied Philosophy in Dance* is an extremely rich, complex, and challenging book; its groundings are to be found not just in the discourse of one or more branches of philosophy but in the subject and process philosophized itself. Thus the reader leaves with a surprisingly well-fleshed-out sense of what Gaga is (the best one can do without watching it or practicing it oneself), along with many possible philosophical routes from which to access its meaning that also give the reader the tools to imagine what it is like to watch or move within Gaga. The book thus has relevance for both readers who specialize in one of the philosophical discourse methods and traditions incorporated as well as for dancers, dance-makers, critics, and other readers who are used to describing and capturing a moving process and form like dance in words. It also provides a comprehensive resource for all philosophers of art who focus on artistic practice, performance, and stage- or studio-outwards aspects of the art of which we are philosophizing. It thus has relevance for those who are studying performance art, music, theatre, and performed poetry, among other art forms. Its discussion of embodied perception, thinking, agency, intentionality, expression and understanding also has relevance for philosophy of sports and other particularly embodied and performative practices. One can and should therefore make a “Peircean abduction,” a concept upon which Katan relies in her book (see p. 37), from understanding this philosophy as Gaga-specific and mining it for all the philosophic relevancies and insights it provides. It is well worth the effort to do so, since Katan has done the lion’s share of the work of laying this bold and strong foundation.

BRESNAHAN, AILI
Department of Philosophy
University of Dayton