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Table of Contents

iv

v

vi

Dancing Metaphors; Creative Thinking within Bodily Movements

Einav Katan-Schmid[1]
Humboldt University of Berlin

ABSTRACT. This paper fosters the term *Dancing Metaphors* in order to illuminate embodied cognitive processes within dancing. *Dancing Metaphors* suggests that processes of realizing new bodily movements in dance are metaphorically constructed. Thus, using the medium of bodily movements, dancers actually establish, create, and generate movements, which follow the rule of 'as if'. The argument here builds on the experience of dancing and the methodology and terminology follow from the cognitive account in metaphors studies, from enactive approaches in aesthetics and in philosophy of perception, and from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body-schema. Following from Merleau-Ponty, I demonstrate that dance movements do not have an already existing situated purpose. For that reason, I claim, dancing always embodies an imaginary score. Building on Lakoff and Johnson, I discuss movement capacities in dance as metaphorical interplays, which bring the score of the dance to life. Following from enactivism, as well as from the experience of dancing, I deal with the dancing metaphor as an act of embodied thinking. While dancing, dancers recall and invoke sensory-information and thereby bring the metaphor into current effect. This process, I finally claim, is enactive and involves a comprehensive engagement of body and mind.

1. Introduction

Float, imagine the floor is getting very hot, move as if the floor is burning, feel like you are kneading dough with your hands, have a thick moving ball in your floating flesh, imagine little explosions going off inside your body. These are only a few of the sensual instructions being used in Gaga classes, the dance training which developed by the choreographer Ohad Naharin and

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[1] Email: Einav.katan@gmail.com

practiced by the dancers of the *Batsheva Dance Company* in Israel. These instructions are metaphors since they push the dancers from the concrete situation, here and now, into an imaginary realm of another setting that does not yet exist. Being requested to float in the studio, it is clear that the body is not upon water. Thus, dancers deploy the bodily situation and physically activate bodily sensations according to information that is not currently present.

The metaphoric instructions in Gaga have led me to consider the role of metaphors in dancing (Katan-Schmid, 2016, pp. 65-76). Accordingly, physical forces, that are related 'as if,' are physically embodied. In the instruction to float, for example, the dancers cannot activate a procedural movement of floating upon water. 'As if' is not 'as is'. The body in the studio, or on stage, cannot act within similar movement patterns to the body upon water. For the purpose of "floating" in the studio, the lifting dynamics of the water have to be embodied within a new bodily procedure. The metaphor "float" influences a comprehensive perceptual activity; the instruction supports the dancers in generating innovative sensuality and a new pattern of physical movement. Now, although the metaphoric instructions in Gaga are being used within this specific movement research, I would like to extend here the term *dancing metaphors* by suggesting that it may designate the perceptual process within dancing movements in general. Thus, broadly speaking, using the medium of bodily movements, dancers actually establish, create, and generate movements, which follow the rule 'as-if.'

In this paper, I employ the term *dancing metaphor* in order to explore and describe the embodied cognitive role of metaphorical interplays in bodily movements. My argument goes as follows:

1. *Dancing Metaphors* designate the process of establishing a movement in terms of an imaginary case.
2. Since dance movements do not have a situated reason within the world, all dance movements are established by means of make-believe.

3. The dancing metaphors are enactive procedures. The body doesn't follow a metaphorical instruction, but rather enacts and realizes its comprehensive possibilities within a full engagement of body and mind.

4. The metaphorical interplay of dancing brings about familiar movement patterns within a new assemblage.

The terminology I use here follows from cognitive semantics, as well as from Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of the Body, and from the enactive approach in philosophies of embodied cognition. My understanding of metaphorical interplays in dance stands in line with the work of Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999). Accordingly, metaphors are indispensable for generating any cognitive activity and thinking. Extending from Lakoff and Johnson, I argue that metaphorical interplays occur in the case of bodily thinking, as well as in the case of dancing. Following from Merleau-Ponty's account on the body schema, I deal with dancing as a case study for the virtuosic process of thinking while moving. In the process of the dancing metaphors, the body schema realizes the score of the dance and its images and regulates them as movements and as innovative bodily feeling. Positioning Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology with Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive semantics, while contemplating dance as my case study, I aim to demonstrate the perceptual process within dance as an activity, which is, altogether, thoughtful and sensitive, physical, imaginative, and intelligent. In this regard, my work on dancing shares main arguments and comprehensions with enactive accounts in philosophies of embodied cognition (Rosch, Thompson, and Varela, 1991, Noë, 2004, 2009, Gallagher, 2005).

2. Conceptual Metaphor

The concept of a metaphor derives its sense from linguistics and what I define as *dancing metaphor* does not refer to an interplay within words, but rather denotes an innovative physical behavior. *Dancing metaphor* asks to indicate the metaphorical interplay within the situation of the dance. Therefore, the modification of the linguistic term *'metaphor'* into a *'dancing*

metaphor' is a subject for methodological clarification.

David Hills defines metaphors as one of the most controversial figures of speech: "Metaphor is a poetically or rhetorically ambitious use of words, a figurative as opposed to literal use" (Hills, 2011; 2016, p. 1). In his account on *metaphor* in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, he categorizes the linguistic usage of metaphors as a semantic or a pragmatic twist, by linking one thing to another by means of words (Ibid). Nevertheless, although metaphors are mostly used in linguistics, the controversy regarding them paves a way to consider metaphorical interplays in other communicative and perceptual media. Trevor Whittock, Julie Van Camp, and Judith Lynne Hanna, for instance, shared similar perspectives on metaphors in dance as non-verbal acts (Whittock, 1992, Van Camp, 1996, Hanna, 1983). Whittock emphasizes that metaphorical interplay brings about a change of conception. For that reason, metaphors are not exclusive to the linguistic medium; "It is not simply a matter of words and their associations at issue here. The changes implicate our categories and how we form them" (Whittock, 1992, 242).

Embodied cognitive explanations in both metaphor studies and philosophy lead off the comprehension of metaphors as embodied interplays. Those accounts insist on the deep dependency of human cognition upon bodily comprehension. Beginning with their *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) and continuing with their *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999) Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphors cannot be studied merely in the domain of cognition. For Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors are conceptual rather than linguistic, while the conceptual is based on the perceptual. Namely, transgressing from the common definition, as it is represented here by Hills' analytic account (2011), for Lakoff and Johnson metaphors are not restricted to using words. Instead, metaphors are abstract interplays with ideas. Their theory emphasizes metaphorical interplays as a perceptual change in conception and as something we cognitively and physically grasp and enact. Similar to philosophical approaches of embodied cognition (Rosch et al, 1991, Noë, 2004, Gallahghr, 2005), Lakoff and Johnson, advance a unity of perceiving and thinking. Following from Rudolf Arnheim, Lakoff and Johnson comprehend perception as gestalt. Perception

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is enactive apprehension of patterns and structures. As a consequence, thinking is something we do within any available medium (Arnheim, 1974, Lakoff in Turner, 2006, 170).

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson developed their groundbreaking theory of embodied meaning, using primary metaphors of embodied experience as the thoughtful units within any abstract reasoning. In *Philosophy in the Flesh* they argue that metaphors play an essential role in subjective experience and judgment since they add sensorimotor inferential structure (1999, 57). Practically, we are capable of understanding abstract concepts, because of a built-up on our own physical experience. The work of Lakoff and Johnson furthered enactive interpretations on metaphors as learning through full body engagements (Gallagher and Lindgern, 2015). All of those developments facilitate the argument here on *dancing metaphors* as an abstract game of corporeal memories and movement patterns, which generates new physical ideas and bodily imagination.

3. Moving As If

Within many dance classes, imageries are crucial for explaining how to embody and absorb new physical tasks into their comportment and movement capacity. One example for teaching dance is the tutorial videos in the YouTube channel of the American media artist, scholar, and dancer, Albert Hwang. In many tutoring videos Hwang teaches how to dance liquid. In liquid style, bodily parts are thought to be as-if they were made out of a thick silk ribbon (Hwang et al., 2006, 166). In one of the videos, Hwang explains how to embody a rail movement (Hwang, May 24, 2012). At a certain moment Hwang demonstrates how to incorporate a movement of French drop, by using a real pin for the drop, and then applying the same movement after laying the pin aside:

> What I suggest, if you actually want to learn how to do the French drop, is to actually do it [a] couple of times. You actually grab the object and remember what it feels like, that muscle memory. The imagination of 'oh, there is an object here, I am thinking about it, my

hand thinks about it, sort of, and it moves across, and I am keeping my focus there and that is actually that.' And if you can keep all these pieces together: your attention, the physical action of your hand, and the intention of where your hand is, you can kind of (…) begin to fool yourself, right?! I mean, you obviously need to learn the mechanic of how to drop that pin properly. (…) The first step of fooling other people is fooling yourself. When you do this stuff (*demonstrates a rail movement*), the best way to be really convincing to other people that there is architecture here is to be clear about all the details of the architecture. (…) There are all these different details, and the more reach you can get these details to yourself the more you can feel what you got, like how this things work (*does the rail movement again*) (Hwang, May 24, 2012, minutes: 9:14- 11:30).

Hwang's explanation reveals a typical process of how and why dancers use imagery while dancing. He demonstrates the need to acquire muscle memory and stresses the necessity to keep focus of attention both on the hands and on the imaginary details of the rail architecture. His explanation reveals a common foundation in dancing to concentrate on integration of imagery within the actual process of the movement. The task of dancing deals with directing attention to a current physical situation and being engaged with a precise image of an absent situation at the same time. Relying on muscle memory is not enough, but rather the procedural movement is guided by living through the situation as-if it happened here and now. The instructions of the dance, as he analyzes and decomposes them, bring about the concrete position of his hands and the imaginary guidance. In this process, the body reproduces a somatic feeling, which is similar to the imaginary case, as-if the image were for real.

   The notion of 'as-if' is crucial in the dancing metaphor because it designates the mimetic aspect of movements in dance. Dance movements are always built upon former bodily knowledge, which is activated within the currently lived-through moment. Movements in dance intentionally refer to other experiences, while trying to imitate, or even recall, their feelings. The rail movement is established by means of 'as if' the hands 'really' perceive and 'truly' feel the material and the constructive edges of the

architecture. The example of dropping the pin clarifies the significance of comprehending a real feeling within a concrete physical engagement with an image. When Hwang trains his physical memory to drop a pin, he teaches the body what the movement feels like. The body has to recall its muscle memory and to reproduce sensory-motor reminiscences. The physical memories enable one to reproduce similar sensuality and to enact a genuine mode of moving, as-if the image of the movement were for real. For that reason, as Hwang tutors, a physical familiarity with how the referred movement feels helps the body to figure out how the movement performs. Moving from the example of the French drop to the example of the rail movement, Hwang's training implies that the movement of the dance must designate an actual feeling. The dance movement 'rail' displays sensual similarity to the touch of moving the hand upon a railway.

4. The Dancing Imagery

It might be easier to demonstrate how dance movements act metaphorically within dance styles like Gaga and liquid since their approaches instruct the dancers to configure movements in terms of other situations (Katan-Schmid, 2016, Hwang et al., 2013). However, in addition to dance styles that use 'as-if instructions' deliberately in their teachings, there are dance methods that do not involve intended metaphorical guidance in the vocabulary of their training. Nevertheless, the act of dancing integrates imagery and physical memories and therefore dancing is always metaphorically constructed. Dancers might not relate vocabularies like 'spiral,' 'plié,' 'grand jeté,' and so forth as metaphors. Yet, those dancing terms are, at least, metonymic concepts, which stand for the imagery of how the movements they designate should be designed.

Whether dance movements are improvised or choreographed, they always follow a score or an imaginary task. The score of the dance implies that dancers follow a visualization of the dance. Vocabularies of dance movements indicate that dancers direct their movements consciously, in relation to an imaginary vision of where and how to move. A well-known example, which reveals the vision of the dance, is William Forsythe's CD-

ROM publication *Improvisation Technologies; A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye*. In Forsythe's method of improvisation technologies, the imaginary instructions for dancing are geometric patterns within his body and his kinesphere (Forsythe, 2012, May 24, 2008). In the CD-ROM publication his imagination is animated and takes a visible graphic shape. When Forsythe draws imaginary lines, his explanations are as accurate as the graphic lines of the animation (Forsythe, May 24, 2008). Forsythe's example helps to illustrate how dance movements are produced in relation to a made-up trigger for choice making, which is clear and immediately available for the dancer.

All dance movements act 'as-if' they had a clear motivating source. Dancers must integrate their imagination because dance movements do not have actual initiative reasons. Paul Valéry, for example, defines the activity of dancing as useless to our vital functioning:

> We can perform a multitude of acts that have no chance of being utilized in the dispensable, or important, operations of life. We can trace a circle, give play to our facial muscles, walk in cadence; all these actions, which made it possible to create geometry, the drama, and the military art, are in themselves useless, useless to our vital functioning (Valéry, 1936; 1983, p. 55).

Dance movements have neither pragmatic nor existential purpose for their happening. For that reason, their existence is due to the process of designing them.

The existence for its own sake is an aesthetic feature, which define dance movements as perceptually complex. According to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, the body is situated within the world and our motility signifies our understanding and our interest within. Broadly, motility must have a motivating source of energy. However, unlike mechanical objects, the stimuli, which generate human motility, are complex psychophysical phenomena. Human motility expresses the unification of the body and the soul, and the meaning we give to our existence (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 2007, pp. 84-102). Merleau-Ponty defines the human motor-intentionality as a psychophysical expression of our

interest in taking hold:

> We perform our movements in a space which is not "empty" or unrelated to them, but which on the contrary, bears a highly determinate relation to them: movement and background are, in fact, only artificially separated stages of a unique totality. In the action of hand which is raised towards an object is contained a reference to the object, not as an object represented, but as that highly specific thing towards which we project ourselves, near which we are, in anticipation, and which we hunt. Consciousness is being-towards-the-thing through the intermediary of the body. (…) In order that we may be able to move our body towards an object, the object must first exist for it, our body must not belong to the realm of the 'in-itself' (Merleau-Ponty, ibid, pp. 159-161).

According to Merleau-Ponty, we know where we are and how we can move according to sensing our spatiality and the world our body inhabits. In dance, spatiality is designed rather than given. For that reason, the act of dancing demands a conscious layer of physical engagement with an image, in which the body takes part in the world of make-believe. The act of projecting movements, "being-towards-the-thing," as Merleau-Ponty writes, integrates imagery within the physical level of motor-intentionality.

5. Embodying an Invisible Vision

In many places in his writings, Merleau-Ponty integrates motor-intentionality and vision. In *Eye and Mind,* for example, he writes:

> All my changes of place figure on principle in a corner of my landscape; they are carried over onto the map of the visible. Everything I see is on principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight, and is marked upon the map of the "I can." (…) The visible world and the world of my motor projects are both total parts of the same Being (Merleau-Ponty, 1964; 1993, p. 123).

The capacity to see enables one to project and foresee where to go and

realize spatial relations. Vision also directs the body on how to invest one's effort. The precision of handling physical forces is dynamically enveloped in the sensual comprehension of a given spatiality. In dance, however, the motivating vision is imaginary, rather than given. For that reason, the body, seemingly, lacks precise points of reference and a clear feedback loop. In Forsythe's Improvisation Technologies, for example, the imaginary vision might cause a perceptual challenge, unless the dancers deal metaphorically with the instruction. Dancers, who attempt to follow real points within the space while moving, could not preserve the image of the dance and move with as much precision and agile as Forsythe dances. The body schema must comprehend the spatial relations, rather than following an empty image in the void. The image has to be resonant with physical understanding of motility and spatiality.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of motility and spatiality neglects the dualistic image of the pilot and a ship (Descartes, 1641; 2008, p. 46). For Merleau-Ponty, the mind is not a controller, which moves the body. Rather, the human physicality is unified within the totality of our experiential and environmental existence. Thus, sensing the world and taking hold within the body replaces holding a conscious thought about 'how to move.' As he stresses it: "the fact that bodily space may be given to me in an intention to take hold without given in an intention to know" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 2007, p. 119). The experience of dancing makes it evident as well that the movement is not successive to the image of the dance, but rather the vision is enveloped and developed within motion. Since the dance designs its 'situatedness,' the challenge of the dancers is to be immersed within the score of the dance, rather than following it. Moving according to a score should feel as if the score were motivating the body, rather than as if the body was executing the score.

Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between what he methodologically designates as "concrete movement" and as "abstract movement," following a case of a patient who suffers from a mental blindness and cannot move in relation to an invisible task:

(…) for the normal person every movement is, indissolubly,

movement and consciousness of movement. This can be expressed by saying that for the normal person every movement has a *background*, and that the background are 'moments of a unique totality'. The background to the movement is not a representation associated or linked externally with the movement itself, but is immanent in the movement inspiring and sustaining it at every moment. The plunge into action is, from the subject's point of view, an original way of relating himself to the object, and is on the same footing as perception. Light is thus thrown upon the distinction between abstract and concrete movement: the background to concrete movement is the world as given, whereas the background to abstract movement is built up (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 2007, p. 127).

Merleau-Ponty's analysis differs between movements that take hold (*greifen*) and mean to integrate within the world as given, to movements that enact the meaning for their existence within themselves (*zeigen*). The physical competence of generating an abstract movement is due to a process of realization that does not follow one category of action. As Merleau-Ponty defines this complexity, the stimuli for action cannot be deductive per se (Ibid, p. 125). While concrete movements are directed towards a task, like the act of grasping a glass, abstract movements are movements that articulate their motivating meaning both physically and psychologically. The capacity of the body schema to realize a psychological meaning demonstrates the complex psychophysical aspects of motility, in which "every movement is, indissolubly, movement and consciousness of movement."

The two layers of movement and the consciousness of movement are characteristic for the dancing metaphors. The body-schema must handle a clear intention rather than empty space. For that reason, the dancers concentrate on producing the feeling of the dance and following their bodily feelings as they develop them. The projection-towards-the-thing becomes, therefore, self-referential and it involves the score of the dance as a metaphor, which involves a full body engagement in bringing the lines of the dance into life.

6. **Embodied Interplays**

The imageries of dancing metaphors are developed within a full body engagement. For that reason the notion of *dancing metaphors* stands in line with Gallagher and Lindgern definition of enactive metaphors:

> The term enactive here signifies not a different kind of metaphor per se but a different kind of engagement with metaphor. Specifically, we can say that an enactive metaphor is one that we enact—that is, one that we put into action or one that we bring into existence through our action. The fact that we are enacting a metaphor (rather than, for example, a plan or a design or a solution) means that the action involved can be a kind of play-acting or pretense (the kind of acting one finds in a theater or in the pretend play of a child). To enact a metaphor means to act it out. As in acting, this is an embodied process. (Gallagher et al., 2015, p. 392)

Enactive metaphors are metaphors that perceivers bring into existence through action. Similarly, the dancing metaphor is first and foremost a mode of engagement, rather than executing an instruction.

In the coexistence of movement and consciousness for movement, the dancers refer, first and foremost, to their own bodily feelings. In order to move, the dancers foresee and induce the sensation of the movement. Thus, bodily feelings enact the score and rewrite it as a dance. This process continues as long as the movement proceeds. The sensations of the body are produced by the imagery and direct the imagery further at the same time. Rotations and lines are both felt and fashioned as sensations of pulling the bones out, squeezing the muscles and rotating the bones in the joints, and so forth. As a result, the dancers do not have to hold the imagery of the dance in their mind. They do not follow external images of lines or rotations, to which the body must conform. Rather, the dancers follow rotations and lines as the sensations of stretches, as other nuances of touch, which they produce. The movement is the medium where the dancing metaphor, as actuality and as the semblance of the imagery, is being negotiated and developed.

The intentionality of movement refers to the spatiality and the knowledge of the body, which are internal to the dancer. The image of the dancing metaphor is integrated with a feeling, rather than merely with how the dance should look like as an appearance. Following from Gallagher and Lindgern, 'seeing as' is, first and foremost, a physical affordance for innovative possibilities of movement. Gallagher and Lindgern stress that engaging with enactive metaphors does not have to involve "higher-order cognitive or recreative imaginings" (ibid, 397). Thus, seeing-as does not demand a conscious representation, but rather the exercise of a basic motoric skill (ibid). Within dancing metaphors, the consciousness of movement is not a consciousness about movement as an external outlook on what the dancer has done and then is imagining what can be done further. Rather, there is an immediacy of seeing the movement as possibilities of the body from within. Somatic feelings are interlocked with how and where those feelings can be developed. Thus, feelings are integral to the image of the dance. What appears to be a precise line follows a precise feeling of extending the muscles.

Like with other conceptual metaphors, the metaphorical interplays in dancing metaphors further extend self-knowledge. Dancing metaphors are self-referential because the movement projects towards itself. As a result, bodily feelings direct the movement's potential for growth and therefore bodily feelings compose and direct further possibilities of the dance. Lakoff and Johnson describe metaphors as imaginative rationality structured by natural dimensions of experience:

> Metaphor permits an understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another, creating coherence by virtue of imposing gestalts that are structured by natural dimensions of experience. New metaphors are capable of creating new understandings and, therefore, new realities. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; 2003, p.235)

According to Lakoff and Johnson, any new understanding must follow an experiential familiarity. Lakoff and Johnson deal with metaphors as image schema. The image schema is a continuous systematizing activity of imagination that orders and unifies perceptions, motor programs, time

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sequences and spatial orientation. The image schema is the imaginative extension of embodied experiences that enable us to comprehend abstract concepts (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.1999).

Lakoff and Johnson's explanation corresponds with Merleau-Ponty's account on abstract movement as built up. Integrating these recognitions from Lakoff and Johnson and Merleau-Ponty, dancing is always a metaphorical interplay with bodily knowledge, and therefore the act of dancing deals with physical ideas. In the dancing metaphors, the body schema is within a playful mode of integrating dynamic connections between patterns of movements that are already clear to the body and regulating physical knowledge. While consulting the knowledge of the body, dancers start to explore the ranges of their movements. By means of that, they extend their own capacities. In this process, already familiar patterns of moving direct the flow of the body, while being constantly deconstructed and reconstructed. As a result, innovative physical expressions are designed and manifested.

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