



## Why Is There Always Energy for Dancing?

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**A**s a response to Randy Martin's work, I want to locate this essay in the flux between two economies, one that is premised on the notion of scarcity and the other that is fed by a certainty of abundance. Martin was keenly attuned to these differences and analyzed most persuasively how dance responds to them with alacrity, inventiveness, and bold moves. During the culture wars of the 1980s and 90s, for example, Martin found in Bill T. Jones's *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's/The Promised Land* a deft and defiant morphing of allegations of scarcity into a proclamation of plenty (Martin 1996). More recently, he saw the nonvertical adeptness developed in b-boying and skateboarding as both a survival strategy and a political critique of our current conditions of precarity (Martin 2012). Always eager to connect dancing to diverse forms of social and economic exchange, Martin expanded enormously our understanding of dance's functions and significance.

Here I will focus on a different but, I believe, central aspect of Martin's overall concerns: the ability of dance to make manifest people's capacity to mobilize. Martin found in his own experiences of dancing and watching dance a unique experience of empowerment. Most persuasively described in an early essay of his entitled "Dance as Social Movement" (1985) this sense of empowerment was collective, evolving slowly over the creation of a new dance work and involving a transfer of authority from choreographer to dancers as they collaborated on its making. This sense of empowerment could subsequently be conveyed to viewers as they watched the dancers realize their potential to act and their ability to work cohesively in performance. For Martin this coming together of people, actions, and purpose provided a palpable demonstration of what in Marxist social theory was referred to as "mobilization," the process through which people collectively determine their own future and move decisively toward it.

In what follows I will locate this capacity of dance to mobilize within a larger framework of answers to the question, "why is there always energy for dancing?" I will argue that because of its exceptional capacity to impart a sense of mobilizing, the invitation to dance most often elicits a positive response. Not only is dancing something in which people most often willingly engage, but dancing also produces the energy to sustain itself as an activity. That is, dancing forges a kind of

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inexhaustible energy, an energy that far surpasses the amount of physical strength and endurance one would typically have to expend on any given task or activity. Dancing fuels the body more than it exhausts it, thereby defying the logic of thermodynamics and even calling into question the use of metaphors such as “fueling” and “exhausting,” the ones I have just invoked.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, there are times when one is too tired to dance (dance marathons, for example), and there are dances that feel like drudgery or menial labor (stripping in clubs, perhaps, or performing standard routines in Las Vegas). There are also times when dancing becomes a form of defilement, degradation, and even torture, as when it was coerced by nineteenth-century slave owners in order to display the physical strength and vigor of slaves for sale on the auction block (Hartman 1997). Dancing, like any other activity, can be placed in the service of all manner of political and social agendas.

What if for the moment, however, we consider the ways that people seem energized by the prospect of dancing, responding to the invitation to dance by lighting up, expanding outward, and generally taking pleasure in being drawn into moving? They might be exhausted from working all day, distracted by worries about money, health, or friends. They might want to look cool and disinterested on the dance floor, but they do keep dancing, and at some point they really get into it. What if we focus on these ways that dancing makes people smile, perk up, and chuckle? How it channels peoples’ concentration and transforms their attentiveness? What if we look at dancing as an invitation to simply enjoy the moment? And what if this is not just something we see at the movies, some way that dancing is stereotypically depicted within the narrative as a moment of joy or vulnerability or sexual interest (although dancing often serves those functions in narrative and in film)? What if there is something that is rather unique to dancing, something that is inherently pleasurable about it, about the moments of participating in it, about doing it, and also sometimes about watching it?

Moving further into this line of inquiry, if dance arouses or contributes to a sense of abundant energy, what explanations have been put forward to account for this capacity? Here I will survey five distinct theories of why dance kindles this sense of enthusiasm, why it so often provokes a response of “yes.” These theories have largely been advanced independently of each other, developing as they have in separate disciplinary fields; yet, they connect and overlap with one another in various ways. Simply labeled, these theories could be characterized as follows: dance as play; dance as moving in relation; dance as a bodily becoming; dance as virtual power; and dance as mobilization. My purpose in conducting this survey is not to advocate for any one theory or even a composite of several, but simply to suggest that there is something about dancing that, if given greater attention, could assist us in analyzing and responding to the unjust distribution of energies and resources in our world today.

## Dance as Play

Play as an activity engaged in by both humans and many species of animals has itself been variously theorized and investigated.<sup>2</sup> Summarizing in order to reject many of these theories, Johan Huizinga chronicles proposals of play, according to Anchor, as the “discharge of excess energy, need for relaxation or distraction, preparation for life, desire to imitate, desire to compete in order to show superiority, or the sublimation of instincts forbidden by society” (Anchor 1978, 78). These hypotheses, he argues, serve as explanations that might shed light on the motivation to enter into play, but they do not address what play is. Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*, one of the most comprehensive and influential treatments of the subject in modern cultural history, argues instead for play as something that is fun and hence forming a category of experience that defies “all logical interpretation” (Huizinga 1949). Nonetheless, play can be characterized in terms of several features that distinguish it, including the fact that it is simply different from ordinary life. For Huizinga play is voluntary; it can be

deferred or suspended at any time, and it is superfluous, the need for it only arising from the desire for fun. Play is contained and secluded from daily life, marked off temporally and spatially, and it is often a secret, excluding some from knowledge of its existence. Play is both tense and intense and often very serious. Play entails a form of performance and of representation with rules, and it is utterly absorbing for those who are engaged in it. Finally, play is unconnected to material interest and can yield no profit (Huizinga 1949).

For Huizinga play is a state of being in which one is completely absorbed while at the same time knowing that one is engaged in it. Like art, it derives from an exercise in imagination, and there exists a strong connection between play and the literary and performing arts. When play manifests in language through the creation of metaphor, for example, the result is poetry. Similarly, music creates a time and space apart from daily life, the enjoyment of which is an end in itself. Intriguingly, for Huizinga,

The connections between playing and dancing are so close that they hardly need illustrating. It is not that dancing has something of play in it or about it, rather that it is an integral part of play: the relationship is one of direct participation, almost of essential identity. Dancing is a particular and particularly perfect form of playing. (Huizinga 1949, 164–165)

Because Huizinga finds no need to explicate the connection between dance and play since it is so self-evident, it is unclear exactly why dancing is a perfect form of playing. However, he does emphasize that dancing, like music, establishes a rhythmic integrity apart from quotidian actions, and it absorbs participants into it while at the same time they comprehend that they are partaking in it.

In his efforts to conduct both a sociological and phenomenological study of play, Huizinga affirms play as of central importance in human life and as contributing a unique value to that life. Its only goal and function is its pleasurability and the mesmerizing immersion that people experience from engaging in it. In contrast, Jean Piaget, whose research on childhood development focused on the biological and psychological aspects of play, finds a clear purpose for it in the integration of cognitive and motor skills that play develops. Like Huizinga, Piaget found to be inadequate all hypotheses about play as disinterested, as nonserious, as purely spontaneous, as disorganized, or as a pastime lacking in conflicts (Piaget 1962, 147–50). Unlike Huizinga, Piaget located play as central to the development of cognitive abilities. Although he never makes direct reference to dance, it is worthwhile looking more closely at his theory of play since it focuses so intensively on bodily movement.

According to Piaget, play starts with the assimilation into the child's repertoire of sensory-motor actions, such as reaching, grabbing, and throwing, through which the child learns those actions themselves as well as the consequences of those actions. Piaget hypothesized that all cognitive development is a product of two fundamental processes, assimilation and accommodation, that are inextricably related and are often seen as two facets of a single process of developing an understanding of the world. Assimilation involves the acquisition of new information into the self's world, whereas accommodation entails the alignment of the inner world to fit the evidence of what one is experiencing in the social and physical world. Play, as a set of actions, evidences a particular "tonality" in which there is a "preeminence of assimilation" (1962, 150). Play thus consists in "a vast network of devices which allow the ego to assimilate the whole of reality, i.e. to integrate it in order to re-live it, to dominate it or to compensate for it" (154).

The first appearance of play coincides with the child's ability to dissociate assimilation from accommodation. After learning a particular skill, which involves both an effort to accommodate to the new context and the opportunity to repeat, reproduce, and generalize the action,

the child sooner or later (often even during the learning period) grasps for the pleasure of grasping, swings for the sake of swinging, etc. In a word, he repeats his behavior not in any further effort to learn or to investigate, but for the mere joy of mastering it and of showing off to himself his own power of subduing reality. (162)

In this passage the connection between play and pleasure is evident. Much as in Huizinga's analysis of play, play for Piaget is an activity done for the pleasure and mere joy of doing it; yet, it does perform a specific function, namely, that of assimilating an action and its consequences into the child's world.

As the child develops, new modes of play become possible, but in many cases these still involve a physical component. For example, when a child moves a shell with his or her hand along a cardboard box and refers to it as a cat walking on a wall,

there is the shell representing the cat and the box representing the wall; then there is the imitation through gesture, i.e. the movement of the hand representing the cat walking; finally there is presumably the mental image of the cat on the wall, an image which may be vague and undifferentiated since it is supported by motor imitation and the symbol-object. (Piaget 1962, 164)

In this example, Piaget characteristically includes a consideration of the ways that movement can function as symbol and serve an integral role in producing the play situation. Play is thus pleasurable for all kinds of reasons: it manifests mastery over physical skills; it evidences clear relationships between cause and effect in the physical world, and it allows the child to practice all manner of possible relationships between the self and the world. Throughout, play is comprised of both physical and mental actions. It is fundamentally a way of discovering the world and one's place in it.

If one were to extrapolate from this theory of play a sense of how Piaget might define dance, it would likely be not that different from Huizinga's identification of dance with play. For both, dance movement is something that one is completely immersed in while at the same time knowing that one is performing it. And it is intensely pleasurable. For Huizinga this pleasure is an end in itself, generating no worth except the experience of dwelling outside the pedestrian world, whereas for Piaget the pleasure is a product of satisfaction at having apprehended and mastered some aspect of one's engagement with the world. In each case, however, the pleasure of the activity infuses the doing of it with the energy to do it and keep doing it. There is always energy for dancing because it is so fun.

## Dance as Relation

Where Huizinga and Piaget locate the energizing capacity of dance in the pleasure caused by its playfulness, a vast amount of research and anecdotal accounts about dance note the willing responsiveness of the body to the experience of being in relation, whether with the music, with another person, with the environment, or even with one's whole self. There is something stimulating about coming into synchrony with other bodies and/or events. This phenomenon has been studied variously in disciplines ranging from neurobiology to social psychology and anthropology, primarily with the goal of understanding what is uniquely human about it and why this capacity to move in synchrony with something or with others might have evolved.

One group of scientists, focusing specifically on the body's responsiveness to music's beat, names the phenomenon "entrainment,"<sup>3</sup> while others name it synchrony or resonance (Burger et al. 2012; Yun et al. 2012). Entrainment can occur individually, as when someone begins moving in

synchrony with the rhythm or pulse of a piece of music, interpersonally, when two people bring their bodies into rhythmic relation with one another, or collectively, when multiple bodies are moving in some form of unison, usually sharing the beat. Parsing entrainment into the various cognitive functions that work together to bring it about, scientists note the complexity of first hearing and registering the pattern of the music's beat and then coordinating and executing a physical response to it (Fitch 2012, 4). Using various brain scanning technologies while subjects listen and respond physically to music, scientists have detected significant activity in parts of the caudate nucleus and basal ganglia, portions of the brain that integrate auditory and motor functions (Trost et al. 2014).

Although such studies frequently begin the presentation of their findings with observations about the ubiquity of entrainment and the seeming naturalness of its occurrence, only a few explanations have been proposed as to why it occurs or why people persist in it. One argument, focusing on an evolutionary perspective, compares human entrainment to that of other species, such as cicadas or birds, noting that human entrainment is far more complex and wide-ranging and that it may have developed to enhance sexual selection, social bonding and group cohesion, or coalition signaling, and territorial advertisement (Philips-Silver, Aktipis, Bryant 2010, 10). A second argument pursues the relationship between music and emotional stimulation, noting that music activates portions of the brain directly associated with the production of emotions as well as affecting respiration and cardiac activity (Trost 2014, 217–18). Music thus produces, according to neurobiologist Wiebke Trost, “a state of activity ‘as-if’ a real emotion would be processed in response to other biologically or motivationally significant events” (217). By extension, people moving together and to the music may feel closer to one another and collectively share emotional experience.<sup>4</sup>

In surveying a range of investigations concerning the effects of music on brain activity and emotional arousal, Trost notes that researchers have also focused on two adjacent ways of conceptualizing the relationship between music and movement: “groove” and “flow” (Trost 2014, 216–17). “Groove,” a concept originating in musicology, can refer to “the urge to move” to the music (Madison 2006, 201). However, it has also variously been conceptualized as associated with a particular genre of music, such as funk, soul, or electronic dance music, or as an alternative and non-verbal manner of articulating thought developed within African-American communities, or simply as the most pronounced example of how people feel inspired by music to move in synchronous response to it.<sup>5</sup> Flow, in contrast, focuses on the merging of action and attention, whether in composing, listening to, or dancing with the music. Flow, like play, is experienced as nonordinary and totally absorbing autotelic action. Yet, whereas play often explores hypothetical worlds, flow's uniqueness resides in the melding of intention and result such that the activity is doing the person as much as the person is doing the activity.

This merging of person and action is often reported as a loss of self, but as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi observes, what is lost in flow is not self-awareness, which in fact is often heightened, but instead “the self *construct*” that “one learns to interpose between stimulus and response” (Csikszentmihalyi 2013, 154). Thus climbers report a strong increase in their awareness of kinesthetic sensations, just as chess players track the way their minds are reckoning with the game. Referring to these moments as “flow episodes,” Csikszentmihalyi notes that they share the qualities of limited focus and noncontradictory requirements for response, and they offer precise feedback on one's status (156).

As with the study of entrainment, there is little conjecture in the literature on flow and groove as to why they occur beyond the pleasure and pleasantness they seem to provide. They are marked by an absence of anxiety and by a strong sense of mastery or control in the situation. They are enjoyable states of being that people often describe afterward as exceptional moments in their lives. Csikszentmihalyi, however, suggests that flow can occur along a continuum of activities ranging from acts that are relatively automatic, such as doodling, to activities that demand enormous physical and intellectual engagement therefore seeming remarkable.

It is this highly demanding form of flow that seems to constitute yet a fourth category of investigation, that of the zone.<sup>6</sup> Like flow, the zone or “being in the zone” is oriented around the quality of attention and engagement with which any activity is accomplished; however, it is generally researched through analysis of personal interviews and reflections, most especially of athletes who look back on moments of peak performance. With remarkable consistency, they describe being in the zone as an experience of total concentration, with a unity of body and mind that is simultaneously energized, relaxed, in control, and without fear or anxiety (Young and Pain 1999). In these moments, the experience of time itself is altered, with time seeming to stand still or to unfold in a different way than in one’s daily life.<sup>7</sup>

All of these studies, whether of entrainment, groove, flow, or zone, convoke a kind of relationality in that one is moving with something, someone, or with many others. They offer glimpses into certain ways we experience the body charged with a special kind of energy. They intimate the satisfaction achieved from synchronizing one’s actions with a rhythm or with another’s movements and from merging into a larger entity or organism. For example, there exists a double pleasure in dancing to music with someone because of the demands of successfully coordinating oneself with another and then working with that person to move in time with the music. Partner dancing produces a sense of common purpose, a sense of merging with someone to become a larger organism, and a sense of physically accomplishing a complex task.

As in play, these occasions of moving into relation take place within clearly delimited contexts that typically set forth clear structures or guidelines according to which one’s actions are coordinated. As in Piaget’s concept of play, these structures often provide the occasion for experiencing mastery over a physical coordination or skill. Especially in dance, this coordination can entail an integration of various specific movement patterns that have been learned discretely over time. Taking just one example from the system of positioning in ballet known as *épaulement*, William Forsythe has observed, “The perceptually gratifying state of balletic *épaulement* synthesizes discrete parts of the body with multiple layers of torqued sensation that leads to the specific sense of a unified but counter-rotated whole.”<sup>8</sup> This kind of integration might be occurring in one moment of dancing while another, such as the sensation of movement’s precise timing in relation with musical meter, might emerge in subsequent moments, leading to a profusely complex experience of kinesthetic connections.

Is it the pleasantness of this experience that continually renews bodily energy, as many scientists have presumed or is it, perhaps, the delight that results from realizing one’s capacities to coordinate with others in all these ways? Delight, as contrasted with pleasure, emphasizes discovery and the possibility of creating the new and creating anew.<sup>9</sup> Dance, in particular, offers the opportunity to discover new patterns of movement, new physical capacities, and new ways of coordinating and coming into relation. There is always energy for dancing because it is so delightful.

## Dance as Bodily Becoming

Whereas many of the accounts of the zone or flow include mention of the singular way in which body and mind come into relation or are experienced as entirely fused in the moment, a phenomenological approach to explaining the vitality of dancing, according to Sondra Fraleigh, assumes “the indivisible unity of body and soul” or what she calls the “body-subject” (Fraleigh 1996, 4). For Fraleigh, dance both originates in and must be apprehended in terms of this wholeness. Dancing allows us to access this wholeness and “to speak, and to listen, out of a pre-reflective wholistic [*sic*] state” (15). What might energize the dance, however, is not simply the fact of this indivisibility but rather the opportunity that dance provides to experience will in its purest form.

Fraleigh finds in dance the opportunity to experience this pure form of will because, as in Huizinga’s notion of play, it is not being exercised for any practical or useful purpose. She equates

this sense of will as it manifests in the body-subject with freedom: “We dance to enact the bodily lived basis of our freedom in an aesthetic form. We experience freedom when we merge fully with our intentions and fulfill the aesthetic purpose of the dance” (19). While many, including myself, would take issue with Fraleigh’s uninterrogated uses of “freedom” and of moving “freely,” her consideration of the opportunity that dance affords to chose to move or not to move is worth examination. Under a variety of, although certainly not all conditions, dance can entail a choice about whether and how to move.

Fraleigh focuses on dance as an occasion when the body-subject can be fully sensed, whereas Drew Leder complicates the ways in which we become conscious of bodily presence by arguing that much of the time we are not particularly aware of our bodies since we are oriented toward the accomplishment of some task or are interested in what we are looking at, not in how our eyes are doing the looking.

To illustrate this, Leder uses an example from Polyani who observes that if the pianist were suddenly to start paying attention to how his fingers were moving, he might well become confused and unable to continue playing (Leder 1990, 85). It is unclear how this example might amend or contradict reports on the experience of being in the zone, for example, when the rock climber is fully aware of what many parts of the body are doing. Does it suggest that there are degrees of awareness of bodily activation of which we may become conscious at any given time? Would being in the zone constitute a state in which a certain kind of attunement between task and bodily awareness is achieved?

Like Leder, Philipa Rothfield also observes that our everyday habits of moving are so effective in serving our purposes that they are indistinguishable from the projects they accomplish (Rothfield 2015, 101). In contrast to Fraleigh, she finds that dance is full of activities that simply reiterate those habits, thereby frequently failing to call attention to the body in any of the energizing ways that Fraleigh suggests. Using the example of the Alexander technique, a form of physical training that enables awareness of those habits, she probes the degree to which consciousness can serve to inhibit routinized movement patterns in order to make space for some other kind of physical responsiveness. Rothfield finds in Deleuze a possible way of conceptualizing this “corporeal creativity” as a kind of action that moves beyond what the body already knows. She thereby envisions a body that “becomes more powerful by way of its own activity, through what a body does or rather becomes” once the constraints of habit have been, even temporarily, inhibited (106–107).

Leder is primarily concerned with how the body emerges into our consciousness of it or, as he says, “presences” itself through two kinds of absences: the skills we lack when we are learning new physical coordination and the pain or other forms of discomfort and disorientation we feel from disturbances to our health, perception, homeostatic, and vital functioning. He does not consider the kinds of presencing that Rothfield or Fraleigh are investigating. Presencing, however, could entail the onset of awareness of the body in its capacity to create patterns of movement, or so Kimmerer LaMothe argues.

Where Fraleigh identifies in the will to move one aspect of dance’s uniqueness, and Rothfield imagines a space beyond will in which the body could articulate its own alternative way of being, LaMothe proposes a third possible way of understanding dance:

To dance, then at a most basic level, whether improvising in silence or disciplining oneself to a codified form, is to exercise this capacity of a human bodily self in *creating and becoming patterns of sensation and response*. It is to participate in what I call a *rhythm of bodily becoming*. . . . To dance is to do so [creating patterns of sensation and response] in ways that *cultivate a sensory awareness* of our participation in it. (LaMothe 2015, 5)

Like Fraleigh, LaMothe presumes the fundamental existence of a body-self, and like Rothfield, LaMothe argues that this body-self can become aware of the patterns it creates. For LaMothe these do not necessarily reduce to a repertoire of habits because dancing entails a second layer or level of sensory awareness that is tracking how we are creating the patterns. Dancing is thus not composed of merely habitual ways of moving, and it also differs from the act of learning any new task or movement coordination in that it alone cultivates an awareness of how movement feels as it is being created.

It could well be that Rothfield and LaMothe seem to be presenting contrasting views only because they are focusing on different levels of bodily sensation, since Rothfield's inquiry investigates the apprehension of minute neuromuscular sequences of movement that is cultivated through practicing the Alexander technique, and LaMothe primarily draws from her experiences in improvisation and her training in several modern and postmodern techniques. However, both scholars also seem to point to different aspects of consciousness that are activated through dancing. Rothfield wants to make space for a kind of bodily thinking that could emerge once habitual training is inhibited, whereas LaMothe argues for our ability to be aware of the movements we are making. Fraleigh and Leder point to still other aspects of consciousness concerned with the experience of will and of bodily presence itself. While none of these scholars directly addresses the question of dance's capacity to energize, they might come together around the proposition that there is always energy for dancing because it alerts us to our capacity to create movement.

## Dance as Virtual Power

Adjacent to these phenomenological inquiries into dance and with resonances to both Fraleigh's and LaMothe's arguments, the work of Susanne Langer locates dance along with the other arts as a form of symbolic transformation. Like Fraleigh, Langer focuses on the relationship between gesture and will, asserting that gesture is a sign of a being's vital force and is interpreted by those who see it as an indication of its will (Langer 1953, 175). However, for Langer the experience of will is not a defining feature of dance as it is for Fraleigh, but rather the matter from which dance is made.

Langer argues that each art creates a symbolic version of human feeling through the use of what she calls a primary illusion. The primary illusion transforms the daily stuff of experience into an abstracted version of that experience, enabling one to feel and reflect on the matter of life itself. For example, the primary illusion of music is what Langer calls "virtual time"; music creates the opportunity to access temporality as lived experience, as felt temporalness, as opposed to the way that time is measured with a clock. Visual art's primary illusion is virtual space, iterated differently in painting where it becomes virtual scene, and sculpture, where it becomes virtual kinetic volume, and architecture where it becomes virtual environment. Dance's primary illusion is something Langer calls "virtual power."

In order to lay the groundwork for her argument about virtual power, Langer first focuses on the role of gesture in daily life. Gesture, she posits, is the basic abstraction through which dance's illusion is accomplished. Much like Huizinga's and Piaget's conceptions of the process of abstraction involved in play, Langer's notion of abstraction focuses on quotidian gestures as signs or symbols of all manner of thoughts and desires, intentions and expectations:

To the one who performs it, it is known very precisely as a kinetic experience, i.e. as action, and somewhat more vaguely by sight, as an effect. To others it appears as a visible motion, but not a motion of things, sliding or rolling around—it is *seen and understood* as vital movement. So it is always at once subjective and objective, personal and public, willed (or evoked) and perceived. (1953, 174)

Not all daily movement qualifies as gesture because many habitual ways of moving lack the vitality of intentional movement described above. Because they are intentional and controlled, gestures can even function as a language system through which extensive communication can occur.

The vitality that is felt and expressed in these daily gestures is not dancing, but once gesture is imagined, then it can become a symbolic form that can be incorporated into dance. It can become virtual gesture. For Langer dancing is this transformation of quotidian sensations of intentional movement into a different realm of experience and communication. As this occurs we become aware, both as dancers and viewers, of the dance as

the subjective experience of volition and free agency, and of reluctance to alien, competing wills. The consciousness of life, the sense of vital power, even of the power to receive impressions, apprehend the environment, and meet changes, is our most immediate self-consciousness. This is the feeling of power; and the play of such “felt” energies is as different from any system of physical force as psychological time is from clock-time, and psychological space from the space of geometry. (1953, 176)

The dance is both felt and seen as commanding a kind of ability, not so much to defy gravity or lassitude, but instead to activate a relationship with gravity and vigor that in the very fact of that relationship makes the body feel forceful. Similar to Fraleigh’s notion of a pure will that is discovered and exhibited in dancing, Langer finds that in dancing, we activate and see activated the appearance of influence and agency. Virtual gestures, the substance of dance, are not signals of will but symbols of it. They represent a psychological sense of feeling empowered.

Much like LaMothe, who asserts our ability in dancing to witness our own creative making of movement, Langer finds in dancing our capacity to exert influence by moving. The fact that there is nothing material that results from this making only foregrounds further everyone’s creative capacity. Unlike LaMothe, however, who remains secular in her vision of the creative, Langer traces the virtual power that is felt and exhibited in dancing back to more “primitive” times when it was associated with mystical, spiritual, supernatural, or otherwise inexplicable forces that prompt responses of faith. This sacred or magical past for dance endures in the strong connection to inexplicable forces that dancers sometimes feel or evoke. Even in its contemporary incarnations onstage or in social arenas, dance holds out the promise to impart a “new body-feeling, in which every muscular tension registers itself as something kinesthetically new” (203). In this process of activating movement for the purpose of performing movement, whether it is abstract, musically coordinated, erotic, or dramatic, the dancer and potentially the viewer feel the dynamism in the act of moving. There is always energy for dancing because it makes us feel powerful.

## Dance as Mobilization

I come now to Martin’s theory of dance, which I placed at the end of this essay because although Martin’s interdisciplinary orientation did not reckon with them, preferring to examine dance in relation to other kinds of social theory, the explanations of dance that have been presented thus far may be useful in understanding his arguments. Some of the theories considered here have focused on individual pleasure (Piaget’s notion of play or LaMotte’s and Rothfield’s sense of bodily becoming or the idea of the zone). Others have privileged social connections (Huizinga’s ideas about play or investigations of social entrainment). Many, and most notably Langer, have underscored the “as-if” framework in which dance occurs, noting how dance movement, like play, takes place in a symbolic or conjectural realm of possibility. In terms of disciplinary orientation, the first two justifications for dance discussed were primarily psychosocial or neurobiological

and the second two were phenomenological and philosophical. Only Martin's theory of mobilization is sociopolitical, defining dance as an occasion when social agency becomes palpable.

Martin begins to build what would become his theory of mobilization in "Dance as a Social Movement" (1985), mentioned earlier in this essay, which I now examine in more detail. Basing his argument on his own experience as a dancer performing in someone else's work, he undertakes an investigation of what it means to be motivated to act politically and to explain how political activity can be entered into and sustained. Dance movement, he asserts, communicates through its kinetic effects. And the particular dance he discusses serves as an important example because "its movements carry no meaning per se" and so permit the analysis of the performance of movement itself (Martin 1985, 56).

Martin traces the evolution of the making of a dance from the first moment that choreographer and dancers meet until the presentation of the dance in performance and notes how authority is transformed through several mechanisms enacted in rehearsal: the incorporation of metric structure, the imposing of a shared governance structure on the group, the choreographer's request to have all dancers contribute phrases of movement to the dance as it is being made, the discussion of movement quality and the concomitant sense of intention that a focus on quality of execution inculcates, and the inclusion of sections that are improvised within the performance. Subsequently, Martin notes the dancers' augmenting control over the dance as evidenced in their willingness and ability to make decisions about spacing and timing and the coordination of individual dancers' simultaneous performances. Throughout this process, dancers forge an identity based in actions that are social rather than individual, and they increasingly assume an authoritative agency over the dance as both enacting and purveying its meaning (69). Yet, what the dance means most centrally is nothing more or less than people moving together.

Thus, the choreographer, under whose auspices the group convened, progressively relinquishes control over the dance as the dancers inhabit more and more fully their identity as a group that is acting in and upon the world. The dancers are not merely illustrating or conveying the choreographer's ideas and intentions, but are instead constructing a new social world in which their moving manifests first and foremost the human capacity to move. And this potential for moving extends to the audience as well: "By stimulating the kinetic life of the audience, by privileging their bodies' possibility for action, the dance lives on beyond the stage" (66). Bodily energy is thus transferred and disseminated as the capacity to act socially and purposefully.

Martin's thesis about dance as social movement could be seen as connecting with, if not building upon, several of the lines of inquiry discussed thus far. He emphasizes relationality, though he does so more within a social context than other authors who examine entrainment, he nonetheless grounds his notion of desire in the coming into relation of all the bodies engaged in the process of dance making. His conception of the activation of agency likewise bears some similarity to phenomenological accounts of how because one can choose to move or not to move, one becomes aware of one's potential to create movement. Martin's view also carries echoes of Langer's theory of the empowerment that is experienced and witnessed in dancing.

Martin's analysis of the development of a dance also resonates strongly with the notion of unalienated labor as a process in which the creation of an object, in this case the dance, is not separated from its maker and placed into circulation under conditions beyond the maker's control.<sup>10</sup> As sketched out by Marx, unalienated labor would include a double affirmation of one's humanity insofar as the individual would enjoy the activity of expressing himself or herself in the form of the object being made while at the same time meeting the needs of another person, the recipient of the object. The fact of having willingly exchanged this object would, in turn, confirm the mutual connection on the part of maker and receiver to the larger social world.<sup>11</sup> Martin's description of the many ways in which dancers become the makers of the dance highlights the opportunity to

discover and express the self and also to affirm one's connections to other dancers and to the audience. Thus, his analysis might well serve as exemplary of the potential for labor to take place under the conditions, only speculatively theorized, of unalienation.

Martin, however, resists developing his concept of mobilization along these utopian lines and instead focuses on the relation between individual agency and on the way bodies gather together socially. In his book *Critical Moves* (1998), he makes claims for both dance as a social practice and dance studies as a scholarly field of inquiry concerning the ability of dance to foreground the means through which bodies gather together.<sup>12</sup> Martin is careful to locate his arguments concerning dance within a given sociopolitical moment, responding in particular to political theories that focus on the hegemonic and the concomitant capacity to resist such control. Those theories, he asserts, cede too much power to dominating forces and identify in resistance the only fleeting and relatively inconsequential option for critical response. Instead, Martin proposes the concept of mobilization as a way of theorizing politics from within, rather than considering power as an external force that moves people (Martin 1998, 10–12). Mobilization is thus both offensive and capable of preserving a space where new formations of the social can germinate (13).

In organizing his formulation of mobilization beyond the limits set by the resistance/hegemony opposition, Martin hopes to uncover the “fragile link between agency and history” and to be able to contemplate the “negotiation of coercion and consent that takes place outside the formal apparatus of the state” (24). This link between agency and history, unlike Fraleigh's focus on will or Langer's idea of virtual power, is necessarily situated within a specific set of social circumstances. Mobilization, as Martin's studies of various dance practices demonstrate, is the capacity to experience one's identity as empowered to inaugurate change within a given historical moment. Dance, he asserts, is one activity that foregrounds this capacity, and this is why and how it connects to the political.

Martin also finds in mobilization the opportunity to imagine underlying connections that may exist among communities with highly diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (24). Because mobilization is “the means through which bodies gather and are assembled and the materialization of identity that is accomplished in the process,” any given dance practice will embody different principles of mobilization (208). At the same time, diverse dance or movement practices might also share certain principles out of which a common orientation within the world takes shape. Subsequent to *Critical Moves* (1998), Martin began to call this shared orientation a kinestheme. Skateboarders and hip-hop dancers, for example, share the kinestheme of nonverticality, a preference for being in a dynamic yet precarious relationship to gravity. As I mentioned earlier, Martin proposed that this defiantly off-center modus operandi articulated both a critique of the normative and a way of surviving within it (Martin 2012).

Mobilization, however, does not imply any particular political critique. As Gerald Siegmund observes elsewhere in this volume, mobilization is simply a capacity to move, a dynamic potential inherent in bodies.

It [mobilization] becomes a vector of energy that stimulates bodies and their movements to take a certain direction. As such, it is the potential for action that, in principle, may take any direction. It is ongoing and hard to contain. Directing and containing it is the task of the dynamics between production and product of the dance. (Siegmund 2016, 28)

Because mobilization is a capacity, what is produced through it can have all manner of consequences. Dancing, for Martin, taps into and directs this potential for action, a potential that is inexhaustible.

Martin's mandate for the field of dance studies, therefore, is to examine the many ways that dance as a practice directs the energy of mobilization (Martin 1998, 208) and also to analyze the fact of mobilization itself, to assess, as he describes it, "the motional dynamics of gathering together physical presence (mobilization), the incessant change of bodies moving in space" (35). Dance studies must also reckon with the surplus of energy that is inherent within mobilization, a capacity that the political Right seeks to police and repress (199). I have taken up this charge in my formulation of the question, "why is there always energy for dancing?"— a question to which Martin's response might well be that there is always energy for dancing because in its practice we feel mobilized.

So, why is there always energy for dancing? My intention here has not been to advocate for one theory of dance's energizing capacity over another nor am I attempting to synthesize these theories into one overarching hypothesis concerning dance's function. Instead, I am attempting to focus on how each theory accounts for something that is generative in and about dancing. As a result, I have not probed the occlusions maintained within each hypothesis about dancing nor have I excavated their epistemological premises concerning how we know what dancing is. A more full-bodied inquiry would necessarily include consideration of how each hypothesis forges a subject position from which to make claims about dancing as well as how discipline-based orientations toward the nature of knowledge permeate each approach.

Instead, I have emphasized the generative aspects of these theories—how they embrace what is non-purposeful and delightful, how they invite the interactive and the social, how they privilege a sense of empowerment or discovery—in order to follow Martin's suggestion to think from within an economy of plenty about what dance has to offer. By locating dance's energy as a sign of plenty, even abundance, and not as a means to accomplishing some other objective—but as Huizinga emphasizes, simply for and in the doing of it—we are able to contemplate a kind of richness that we are often encouraged to ignore. Indeed, dance may provide an exceptional example of just how generous people are and how willing they might be to enter into a more general dance of the social.

## Notes

1. For an illuminating discussion of the relevance of thermodynamics to conceptions of the body in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western culture, see Rabinbach (1992).

2. For a good summary of the literature in the field of psychology on play, see Cohen (1987, 14–36). See also Ellis (1973). And for a deeper assessment of the claims made in various theories of play, see Sutton-Smith (1997).

3. See, for example, Trost et al. (2014); Brown, Martinez, and Parsons (2006); Merker, Madison, and Eckerdel (2009); and Phillips-Silver, Aktipis, and Bryant (2010).

4. This is the more general argument made by Wiebke Trost in "Time Flow and Musical Emotions: The Role of Rhythmic Entrainment" (2014).

5. See, for example, Bolden (2013). Tricia Rose (2013) complicates this idea of flow as continuous by examining flow as one of three generating principles that, along with rupture and layering, work synergistically to create the aesthetic foundation upon which graffiti, breakdancing, and rapping are constructed. Flow provides a sinuous continuity, which is then broken through various strategies of rupture, only to be reincorporated into the flow in order to produce a layering of materials. For Rose flow and rupture together recreate the social conditions in which inner-city black youth were living when breakdancing and graffiti were forged as tools to assist in managing the affects of social dislocation. She describes breakdancing as creating sustaining narratives that can be accumulated, layered, embellished, and transformed. "However, be prepared for rupture, find pleasure in it, in fact, *plan on* social rupture" (2013, 184).

6. See, for example Kamata, Tenenbaum, and Hanin (2002); Payne, Jackson, Rim Noh, and Stine-Morrow (2011); Dillon and Tait (2000); and Young and Pain (1999).

7. As Locke (2008) points out, accounts of the zone and also the framework within which research on the zone is conducted depend upon a body-mind dualism in which mind and body are separate but closely linked. It is when one is in the zone that body and mind merge. Looking closely at athletes' accounts of being in the zone, she argues that explaining one's actions through reference to the zone can be rhetorically advantageous in one of two ways: it can make athletes appear humble, as though unaware of the extraordinary feats they accomplished; or it can provide mediation for failure in cases where the athlete would have succeeded because of being in the zone except for bodily injury that occurred in the process.

8. Forsythe, personal communication, February 22, 2015.

9. I am indebted to Mary Ann O'Connor for this observation.

10. As succinctly summarized by Michael Goddard (2000,142), alienation occurs through the creation of objects that are then separated from the human who made them. They can be separated (alienated) in one of two ways: (1) the object is taken away or given away and placed into circulation in circumstances where it is not recognized as connected to its maker; (2) the object is alienated when objectification is not under control of the maker. Capitalism combines these two, thus leading to circumstances in which subjects become alienated from each other as individuated and in competition.

11. In "Marx's View of Unalienated Society," David McClellan (1969) argues that the early and partial thoughts that Marx recorded in a journal from 1844 serve as an important guide to his enduring values. He quotes Marx's lengthy description of the "ideal relationship to objects" as one in which:

I would have (1) objectified in my production my individuality and its peculiarity and thus both in my activity enjoyed an individual expression of my life and also in looking at the object have had the individual pleasure of realizing that my personality was objective, visible to the senses, and thus a power raised beyond all doubt. (2) In your enjoyment or use of my product, I would have had the pure enjoyment of realizing that I had both satisfied a human need by my work and also objectified the human essence and therefore fashioned for another human being the object that had met his need. (3) I would have been for you the mediator between you and the species and thus been acknowledged and felt by you as a completion of your own essence and a necessary part of yourself, and have thus realized that I am confirmed both in your thought and in your love. (4) In my expression of my life I would have fashioned your expression of your life, and thus in my own activity have realized my own essence, my human, my communal essence. In that case our products would be like so many mirrors, out of which our essence shone. (McClellan 1969, 464–65)

12. Martin (1998, 6) writes : "Dance can be treated as the reflexive mobilization of the body—that is as a social process that foregrounds the very means through which bodies gather"

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