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Dance as Performance

Attending to Danceworks from the Perspective of David Davies' Performance Theory

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Essay C in Aesthetics, 15,0 hp

Autumn 2021

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Introduction

In this thesis I want to look at the nature of danceworks, what kind of entities these works are.[1] I am especially going to focus on how danceworks can be understood in terms of performance (including improvisational performance).[2]

The classical paradigm

One thing which makes dance performance and improvisation in dance performance in particular, interesting from a philosophical perspective, is that these in several ways are different from typical classical music works, which for some time have been a more commonly discussed type of artworks, within the performing arts. And it seems potentially problematic to use the same theoretical model to explain what works are, when the works are too different. Late modern danceworks are different from "standard" composed pieces of classical music, in that they often (not always) are spontaneous and have a high degree of unplanned, improvisational elements.[3] Danceworks are not that often authored and "fixed" by a single choreographer at a certain time, nor documented in some kind of score. Such notation systems do exist in dance, but are not at all complete or universal, as in music. Even when such a score exists and is understood, it does not, in practice, have the same formal importance as in music.[4] Improvisational dance performances are less easy to re-identify, re-perform, repeat and they are often less endurable and more ephemeral.[5]

If many danceworks are quite different from typical pieces of classical music, we need an ontological theory which can take even these varying kinds of danceworks justice.[6] Davies argues that this hegemonic paradigm of the artwork, what he calls the *classical paradigm*, needs to be challenged, since it is not adequate enough when dealing with a lot of the actual

[1] Danceworks as artworks "created within danceworld traditions or responsive to recognized danceworld practices" R. M. Conroy, 'Dances, Danceworks, and Choreographic Works: A Plea for Conceptual Clarity', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy,* vol. 44/no. 1, (2019), p. 12.

[2] Here I will use these terms action, acts and performance more or less interchangeably, even though acts or actions not always are performances, while performance always is a form of act or action. A distinction could also be done between performance as action and the performance-event of a public performance. There is performance all along the way, but the performance-event is a temporally narrower event where the performance is presented to an audience. Davies calls dance and music *performance arts*, but I will not be talking about the specific art form of *performance art* here. D. Davies, '*Art as Performance*', Volume 2 (Malden, Mass, Blackwell, 2004), pp. 207, 210, 219.

[3] There is quite a degree of improvisation within classical music as well, especially in "early" and late modern classical music.

[4] A. Bresnahan, 'The Philosophy of Dance', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 1; A. Pakes, '*Choreography Invisible: The Disappearing Work of Dance*', (New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2020).p. 136.

[5] A. Bresnahan, 'Improvisation in the Arts', *Philosophy Compass*, vol. 10/no. 9, (2015), pp. 578-579.

[6] A. Pakes, '*Choreography Invisible: The Disappearing Work of Dance*', p. 275.

performance in performing arts, such as improvisation.[7] The performance theory is an attempt to explain what kind of a thing a work of art is, as an alternative to the classical paradigm.

Instead of holding on to the classical paradigm work-concept or rejecting the work-concept altogether, Davies' strategy is to give the work-concept a new, more accurate meaning. To an ontological question whether all kinds of artworks are the same kind of things, the ideal is to give an answer which is as simple, universal and consistent as possible, but still to be able to take art's full variation into account. In the performance theory Davies offers a solution which in the main outlines is simple and universal, and which also allows for variation and change. He does so by dividing what is commonly called the artwork into two parts – the *performance*, and the *output* of this performance. The work is always of the same kind, a performance. But the output is not always of the same kind, it varies between different artworks.

Here I will use Davies' performance theory, in which an artwork is a performance, a performance that specifies a focus of appreciation in the outcome of the work, to explain danceworks in terms of performances. I will first make a brief presentation of this performance theory and then look at a couple of specific works.

Another reason for choosing to look at a performing art, is that it raises specific problems, which have been attended to mainly in the last couple of decades, and which are different from those of material artforms such as paintings.[8] As the focus of philosophical attention within the performing arts (especially within improvisation) for a long time has been music, and dance performance and improvisation within dance have come into philosophical discussion relatively recently, I am particularly looking at these latter to give some better balance to what is attended to, and understood.[9]

My aim is to get a fruitful analysis of the specific danceworks and how they can be understood in terms of performance. I intend to apply the performance theory to these, in order to show how the theory can explain these danceworks in terms of performance. My ambition is that this analysis should be based on an understanding which is as close as possible to the

[7] A. Pakes and D. Davies, 'Performance in Anglo-American Philosophy', in *'The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*', Volume 18 Ed. Cull, Laura, and Lagaay, Alice (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY, Routledge, 2020), pp. 78-79.

[8] Such as problems related to the two parts of *performance* and *output* or *focus* to use Davies terminology, or what is otherwise often discussed in terms such as *works* and *performances* or *instances* of works. D. Davies, '*Art as Performance*', pp. 144, 207, 209.

[9] A. Pakes and D. Davies, 'Performance in Anglo-American Philosophy', p. 78-80; A. Bresnahan, 'The Philosophy of Dance', Introduction; A. Bresnahan, 'The Philosophical Aesthetics of Dance: Identity, Performance, and Understanding by Graham McFee (Review)', *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 45/no. 2, (2013), p. 142.

intended, critical and appreciative practice of those who are part of the practical dance world – the dancers, choreographers, the appreciators, and the critics.

Pragmatic constraint of appreciation

An important pragmatic constraint in the performance theory is that the reflective critical and appreciative art practice, which can differ from the actual art practice, must be the basis for which properties are to be rightly ascribed to the works, and for how these works are to be individuated.[10] A consequence of this is that the philosophy of an art such as dance must make justice to the critical and appreciative art practice, and "[a]rtworks must be conceived ontologically in such a way as to accord with those features of our critical and appreciative practice upheld on rational reflection."[11] With such a constraint, the ontological question of what kind of thing a dancework is, is an example of a question raised "*through* the making, performing and reception of art", rather than "a case of pre-existing philosophy being applied uncritically to practice, nor of practice (ab)used to illustrate that philosophy for purely extra-artistic aims".[12] "[T]he idea that practitioners are experts in their domain of practice" (in this case dance practice) requires "that any theory be responsive to and applicable in danceworld practice".[13]

I think this makes it clear that the actual, appreciative and critical art practice, is of the utmost importance within the performance theory, and take this as a good reason to look at some danceworks within such a practice, from the perspective of the performance theory. Inversely if the performance theory gives a better understanding of what kind of thing the dancework is, this can help in appreciating these works. After this short introduction, and after presenting the main questions below, I will look at some of the main features of Davies' performance theory.

Questions

The broad question here, and a reason for using the performance theory, is: How can danceworks be explained in terms of performance? More specifically: How can the performance theory, where an artwork is explained in terms of performance, be applied to particular danceworks in a way that helps our understanding of the danceworks?

[10] D. Davies, 'Art as Performance', pp. 18, 143.
[11] Ibid. pp. 18, 22-23, 129.
[12] A. Pakes and D. Davies, 'Performance in Anglo-American Philosophy', p. 85.
[13] A. Bresnahan, 'The Philosophy of Dance', 3.1.

Brief presentation of David Davies Performance Theory

The theory

This performance theory, which Davies presents, is a kind of contextual theory regarding performance which is cumulative to its structure.[14] The arguments of the theory often has actual artworks and their specific features as their starting points.

The purpose of the performing arts according to the theory

"The primary purpose of performing arts [from the artist's perspective] is to prepare and present 'artistic performances"', and the performances are to "illuminate the artistic qualities of the performed work" that bear upon its appreciation and evaluation.[15] A goal of these arts from a receiver's perspective is to be able to appreciate and evaluate these performances.

Ontology in the performance theory

A good ontology of art must fit with "the ways in which works are to be judged and appreciated."[16] The performance theory tries to do this, rather than to focus on defining artworks.

Methodologically Davies tries to specify and clarify this theory not only by looking at particular artworks, but also by arguing against alternative aesthetic, ontological theoretical positions. The theory's arguments are brought forth by the examining of aesthetic empiricism (art as objects, which are to be perceptually experienced to give intrinsically valuable experiences), structuralism (artworks as structures, patterns, sounds, colours or danceworks as the execution of a choreography, excluding sets, lightning, costume, music et.c.) and not the least contextualism (which takes the historical context into account, and in many ways is closest to performance theory, but with the main difference that it identifies the work with the product of the performance). The theory's aim is to give better arguments about what kind of things artworks are, and individuate the works more finely than these alternative ontological theories.[17]

[14] D. Davies, 'Works and Performances in the Performing Arts', *Philosophy Compass,* vol. 4/no. 5, (2009), p. 754; D. Davies 'Art as Performance', p. 100.
[15] D. Davies, 'Works and Performances in the Performing Arts', pp. 744, 746.
[16] D. Davies 'Art as Performance', p. 129.
[17] Ibid. p. 25, 101; R. M. Conroy, 'Dances, Danceworks, and Choreographic Works: A Plea for Conceptual Clarity', p. 15; A. Kania, 'Review: Art as Performance', *Mind*, vol. 114/no. 453, (2005), p. 138.

Different kinds of acts and actors

In the theory there are a number of acts and actors involved in the performing arts. The acts are of two main kinds, where the generative performance is identifiable with the work and specifies the focus of appreciation, and the receiving acts are connected to the outcome of the work, the focus of appreciation.[18]

Generative acts and actors

The articulative, creative or *generative acts* of the generating actors, are needed to fulfil the primary purpose of performing arts of *preparing* and *presenting* the artistic performance, which is done in the rehearsal and in the public performance.[19] The generating actors can (often but not always) be divided into *creators* (or *makers*) such as choreographers or dancers and *performers*, such as dancers in a dancework. Dance however, has no uncontested "division of labour" between performers and creators, and a dancer can be both a creator and a performer.[20]

Receptive acts and actors.

The receptive acts Davies emphasizes are the *appreciative acts* of an engaged way of attending to the artwork, but there are also *evaluative acts* of judging, assessing or attending to the quality of the artwork.[21] The receptive actors can be divided into *appreciating audience members* who are appreciating or *critics* who are evaluating.

Context of generation & appreciation

The performance is also part of generative and appreciative contexts, both contexts here and now and historical contexts, and these are part of what makes the performance into what it is.[22] Different weight can be put on the different parts of the contexts, depending on to which degree they are relevant in specifying the focus of appreciation.

A point with identifying the artwork with the generative performance is that it makes the achievements of the work and the work's historical provenance a still active remaining part both of the focus of appreciation and of the work itself, and that the historical context cannot be reduced to just being a part of the history of the work.

[18] D. Davies, 'Art as Performance', pp. 144, 251.
[19] D. Davies, 'Works and Performances in the Performing Arts', p. 744.
[20] A. Bresnahan, 'Improvisation in the Arts', pp. 576, 578; A. Bresnahan, 'The Philosophical Aesthetics of Dance: Identity, Performance, and Understanding by Graham McFee (Review)', p. 143-144.
[21] D. Davies, 'Art as Performance', p. 23, 26.
[22] Ibid. p. 220.

The artwork as performance

According to Davies we need to specify what we are talking about when we talk about an artwork, so we know which kind of properties that bear upon the proper appreciation of a work of art.[23] An artwork is a unit of criticism and appreciation, something which can be judged and appreciated, and the actual artwork, according to this theory is brought into existence and identified with the particular generative performance or doing of the artist, rather than being the product of this performance.[24]

The artwork is a particular, creative performance, performed by an artist (or artists) that results in an outcome, in the form of an object or event. The artwork isn't any kind of object or event in itself separated from the performance. The work which can be appreciated and evaluated is the performance or doing of an artist. This performance creates an outcome, a work-focus. The performance specifies a focus of appreciation.[25]

Focus of appreciation

Through this focus, in which the manifest properties that make up the artistic content of the work are being attended to, the appreciator's attention can be drawn to the generative performance and histories of making which led to that which is captured in the focus of appreciation.[26] The properties that here are focused on are those that bear upon the appreciation of the work and determine its perceptible qualities, and this appreciation "enables the appreciator to determine a work's artistic value."[27]

This work-focus "is that which, as the *outcome* or *product* of a generative performance on the part of one or more individuals, is *relevant to the appreciation* of the artwork brought into existence through that performance".[28] So, typically the focus of appreciation initially draws the appreciator to the work via the outcome of the work, rather than through focusing directly on the performance or work itself.

The specification of the work-focus is the aim of the creative process in the performance, and it is central to our appreciation of the achievements being made in this performance.[29] The focus of appreciation, which is specified by the generating artist(s) oriented towards the

[23] Ibid. p. 23.
[24] Ibid. pp. 18, 26, 260.
[25] Ibid. pp. 146, 149, 151, 260.
[26] Ibid. pp. 26, 50.
[27] Ibid. p. 254.
[28] Ibid. p. 26.
[29] Ibid. p. 151; A. Kania, 'Review: Art as Performance', p. 139.

receiver(s), is the focus of, and requires rational reflection from, the receiving actors.[30] "[T]he focus of appreciation in our engagement with an artwork is an *artistic statement as articulated in an artistic medium realized in a vehicle*."[31] As seen here Davies talks about three parts of this focus of appreciation:

The artistic statement

The artistic statement is an important part of the artwork, a way of expressing the work's artistic purposes, and this statement is "articulated through the artist's manipulation of the vehicular medium", even though Davies doesn't "clarify what makes a statement or medium *artistic*."[32]

The vehicular medium

This is the medium, vehicle or material with which the artist has to deal or work with in her work, like the body or the bodily movements of a dancer, through which the artistic statement is articulated.[33]

The artistic medium

The artistic medium has to do with the actions of the artist, what the artist does with the vehicular medium, how this is being manipulated, handled, treated or worked upon.[34] But a second aspect of the artistic medium is that it also embodies shared understandings within an artistic community, which provide a crucial link between generators and receivers. These understandings facilitate and directly relate to the goal of articulating the artistic statement through the vehicular medium.[35] A way one can think of the artistic medium or communal understandings in improvisational dance, is the tolerant attitude to change within the work, in respect to what has previously been performed within the work.[36]

[30] D. Davies, 'Art as Performance', pp. 22, 213, 246.
[31] Ibid. p. 60.
[32] Ibid. pp. 262, 237.
[33] The body as a vehicular medium is not unique for dance, as this can be such a medium in theatre and music as well.
[34] D. Davies, 'Art as Performance', pp. 65, 81.
[35] Ibid. pp. 60, 146, 156-157, 218, 245.
[36] A. Bresnahan, 'The Philosophy of Dance', 1.2.

Different kinds of performances or works

It can be of interest to look at another rough distinction that according to Davies can be made, between two different kinds of performances. These two are work-performances or performance-works.[37]

Work-performances

Work-performances or performed works is where there is *something else*, which the public performance is a realizing performance *of*, rather than that it is the public performance itself which specifies the focus of appreciation.[38] That is, there is a clear division between work and outcome of the work. I would say that the work-performances follow logically from the distinction between performance and the performance's outcome, which Davies talks about in the performance theory. On the other hand work-performances are also possible to explain without the performance theory, as classical paradigm works and performances of these works.

Performance-works

In performance-works the public performance *itself* is the performance which specifies the focus of appreciation. The performance is central and there is no separate outcome of the performance, separated from the performance which can be the focus of appreciation, and there is no clear division between work and outcome of the work.[39] Examples of performance-works can be one-time improvised dance performances that are not intended to be re-performed, but are ephemeral performances in the moment, which typically vanish afterwards.[40]

Dance and improvisation in the performance theory

Davies lifts that it is the movements performed in a context, rather than the movements themselves which are dance (that is, he talks about not only a vehicular medium, but also about an artistic medium which is involved). Sometimes he mentions dance briefly, but he has said more directly about improvisation. Improvisational performances such as performance works are relevant to the performance theory, since they show the necessity for a theory to be able to explain performances which are not performances of some earlier work. Therefore I think it is a good idea to look at the improvisational part of dance, when looking at dance through the perspective of Davies' performance theory.

[37] D. Davies, 'Art as Performance', pp. 219-220.
[38] A. Pakes and D. Davies, 'Performance in Anglo-American Philosophy', p. 79.
[39] D. Davies, 'Works and Performances in the Performing Arts', p. 744.

Improvisation, is a spontaneous, risky and creative activity of "on-the-fly artistic innovation" in the moment, which unfolds while happening, even though it involves a lot of "skill, training, planning, limitations, and forethought" which came about during a longer period of time.[41] It is a kind of act of "making oneself ready for a range of potential situations" and of being acting in the present while being "open to the next moment's possible actions and constraints."[42] It has a sense of immediacy not only for the performers, but also for the audience, at least if they are aware that something is improvised and happening only once.[43] Just as in other artistic performance, an awareness of "the aims and parameters of the work of art or event, genre, school and style" is needed in improvisational performance in dance.[44]

Improvisations are on the less fixed and planned and more discovering side of the spectrum of performance being more or less stable, but the opposition to such fixed works is usually not total, as improvisations are not totally free in most cases. Improvisation is usually performed with some ideas, decisions or a kind of mental framework behind, and it can relate to external common references and also involve some elements of repetition and prevision or preplanning.[45] Davies discusses three kinds of improvisational performances (and performances can involve elements from more than one of these).

Improvisational interpretation

Improvisational interpretation evolves from a pre-existing work, which impose constraints that function as a framework for improvisation.

Improvisational composition

Improvisational composition does not involve performance of a pre-existing work but, it "specifies a set of performative constraints for a performed work". Here Davies mentions dance specifically "where a choreographer may leave a section open to free improvisation on the part of the dancer, yet a dancer dancing that part of the work may establish *how* that section is to be danced in future in legitimate performances of the piece".[46]

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[40] A. Bresnahan. 'The Philosophical Aesthetics of Dance: Identity, Performance, and Understanding by Graham McFee (Review)' p. 143.

[41] Improvisation can besides being the activity of improvising also be a piece which is improvised. A. Bresnahan, 'Improvisation in the Arts', p. 573-575, 577, 579.

[42] D. Goldman, '*I Want to be Ready: Improvised Dance as a Practice of Freedom*', p. 142, cited in A. Bresnahan, 'Improvisational Artistry in Live Dance Performance as Embodied and Extended Agency', *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 46/no. 1, (2014), p. 87.

[43] A. Bresnahan, 'Improvisation in the Arts', p. 579.

[44] Ibid. p. 574.

[45] Ibid. pp. 574, 576; A. Bresnahan, 'Improvisational Artistry in Live Dance Performance as Embodied and Extended Agency' p. 86.

[46] D. Davies, 'Art as Performance', p. 226-228.

Pure improvisation

The pure kind of improvisation lacks appropriate intentions, interpretation and necessary conventions, which determine an old or emerging work's performative constraints.[47]

After this previous brief introduction of Davies performance theory, I will now look at the two danceworks of my choice, and I will start with *Continuous Project – Altered Daily*.

LATEST VERSION OF

CONTINUOUS PROJECT / ***altered daily***

by YVONNE RAINER

Performed by Becky Arnold, Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, Barbara Lloyd, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer and others.

MARCH 31, APRIL 1, APRIL 2, 1970 8:00 PM

Attendance at each performance will be limited to 300 persons. Tickets for, in the case of those with passes to the Museum, entrance cards) will be available on a first-come basis at the Museum's sales desk beginning Wednesday, March 25. There is no charge other than the usual Museum admission of $1.
Cushion seating.

Films by Phill Niblock and Michael Fajans
Costumes and objects by Deborah Hollingworth
Sound supervision by Gordon Mumma

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART 945 Madison at 75th Street

Programme from *Continuous Project - Altered Daily* (https://www.seeingdance.com/continuous-project-09012017/)

[47] D. Davies, 'Art as Performance', pp. 228-229.

Dancework 1 – *Continuous Project - Altered Daily* – Yvonne Rainer/The Grand Union, 1969-1976, first public performance 1970

This collective dancework has, as we can tell from its name, a very specific non-static-character where the improvisational and changing aspects which vary from one day to another and within every session, are central parts of the work. In this work they explored a work-process of dance-making, characterized by equality and spontaneity, and tried to make this process visible, rather than trying to reach a specific end product in the performance-event.[48] The Grand Union team talked to each other, analysed, gave instructions, commented what was happening during the performances, which helped keeping some of the rehearsal character throughout the whole production. They worked a lot with a number of different contrasts in this continuous project. Contrasts like those between professional and amateur ways of performing, between non-everyday and everyday behaviour, between choreography and spontaneity.[49] There were also fragments of music, references to films, sports, and games used in different ways, as part of the performance.[50]

The work had a number of insertable modules or sections of action, which could be performed in any kind of order, in a public performance. Often manipulations of body adjuncts or bodies as objects were involved. Some of these parts were recognizable or known to the performers beforehand, others were new, non-agreed-upon and unpredictably created in the moment. So there were elements of pure improvisation, but also more of improvisational composition, where the composition had to do with combinations of communal acts in improvised ways.

As I understand the work, it was re-enacted, and re-composed at every public performance, rather than that the improvisational performance was an interpretation of something which was already there, like the performance from the day before. Therefore I think that it has the characteristics of a performance work, which is not a performance of some already existing work.

But the improvisational performance in the work did not altogether come from nowhere. There were actions and even small sections which were, if not repeated, at least partly recognizable for the performers, and for appreciative audience members who attended it at several occasions. And I would say that the Grand Union, through their discussions of how

[48] S. Banes, 'Grand Union: The Presentation of Everyday Life as Dance', *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 10/no. 2, (1978), p. 45.
[49] Ibid. p. 43.
[50] Ibid p 44.

they wanted the process to be, where things like equality where important, had come to some sort of general understanding of something framelike. This framework was probably the least changing part of the work and gave a sort of stability to the work over time, in spite of the work's constant change. So in a sense, each performance was within this framework, and could arguably also be counted as a work-performance, of the performance which was possible to perform within this frame.

Framing performance

A performance within this work which specifies the focus of appreciation, which catches what is to be evaluated and appreciated in the work, is the *framing performance*.[51] The generative action of articulating the frames, or the boundaries within which the other acts were to be situated in an evening, were probably one of the most important parts of the performance. Some things were pushed outside the frames, such as the communicating with the audience, or performing in the street, which they thought was not part of what they intended to do in this work.[52] My impression is that this kind of framing performance started early on in the rehearsals, but that it continued throughout the lifetime of the continuous process, so that the frame was a living changing thing, changed by this continuous framing performance. The framing performance made it understandable what qualities were important (the equality, spontaneity, the collectivity for example), and made it possible to evaluate whether a public performance really succeeded in performing within this frame.

In the context of the embodied art of dance I would say that this kind of performance is quite abstract, and non-embodied. The vehicular medium is primarily that of words rather than bodies, and the artistic medium of manipulating the vehicular medium has to do with communicating and with creating a common understanding with the help of words. And this understanding can be articulated in an artistic statement.

The frame, which came about through the collective framing performance in the rehearsals and public performances, is an outcome of this performance. Through the focus of appreciation on this outcome, the receiver's attention can be drawn to the framing performance, and to the work itself.

Improvisational performance

Another characteristic of this work is that of *improvisational performance*. This improvisation specifies the focus of appreciation, which in turn focuses on the qualitatively valuable parts of

[51] Ibid. p. 47.

the work, which can be appreciated. These are qualities like the in-the-moment presence, or the once-in-a-life-time experience of having to stay focused, several persons together, at a specific time. One concrete aspect of this improvisational performance was when they performed in the individual dancers' personal styles, inspired by the everyday life. Another was the deliberate non-coordination of dance movements that were known, common and agreed upon on the one hand, and the personal improvisation on the other hand.

The improvisational performance also does something with the audience who has to do some sort of attending action as receivers, not to miss what is happening.[53] The improvisational performance is a quite embodied performance, which is part of what makes it into dance rather than just a theoretical experiment. Here we have movement of bodies and body-connected objects as the vehicular medium, and all kinds of manipulating of these body movements according to a common understanding within the artistic community as an artistic medium, which articulates artistic statements that can specify qualities to be evaluated and appreciated.

The improvisational performance is a part which is present both in the work itself, and the outcome of the work. The improvisational performance is the work already in the rehearsal, and remains being so in the outcome in the form of a public improvisational performance as well. So when focusing on the improvisational performance, this is more of a performance-work than a work-performance, as it is not performing an already existing work.

Focus of appreciation specified by the framing & improvisational performance

There is a change in this work, when it becomes public, even though the Grand Union keeps on doing what they have been doing in the rehearsals. The improvisational performance keeps being similar in all its varied character, and the framing performance has still not moved the public performance into the street and they keep on performing as if there is no audience there. But the audience *is* there, at the public performance. So if both the framing performance and the improvisational performance are specifying the focus of appreciation, and the framing performance specifies that the audience is outside the frame, while the improvisational performance has to relate to the audience anyhow, these different kinds of performance go in different directions when the performance goes public. So I would say that in this particular work, there is a noticeable intensification of the tension between different aspects of the performance or work at this particular time.

[52] Ibid. pp. 45, 47.
[53] A. Bresnahan, 'Improvisation in the Arts', p. 579.

Different kind of performances involved

Framing and improvisational performance were two examples of performance which specified the focus of appreciation in this work. With a different analysis, different kinds of performance could be conceived as more central for the identity of the work. Teaching, inventing, repeating, imitating were for example different kind of activities which were part of the process in this work.[54] But everything which is done in a work, is not automatically as important. Some kind of acts can be made there, which don't specify the focus of appreciation, and they are therefore not relevant for the identity of the work.

Creators/Performers

In this work they actively challenged the clear separation between choreographers and dancers and the power structures, authorities and hierarchies of which these are a part within dance, and thus challenged the classical paradigm. They explored how they could avoid being stuck in a limitating situation where someone decides over another and make the process more democratic, for example by taking turns in being the leader. The performers individual choices were encouraged, and they could veto what the collective was doing. But the opposite was also possible, where the group could protest against an individual's actions during a performance[55]

This was a short discussion about the first of the two danceworks in this text, and I will now attend to the other dancework. Here are first two pictures from *Hidden Voices*.

Rosemary Butcher performing *Hidden Voices* at Tate Modern 2005-10-24, photographer unknown (https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/performance-at-tate/case-studies/rosemary-butcher).

Dancework 2 – *Hidden Voices* – Rosemary Butcher/Elena Gianotti, 2004

This late modern dancework is a relatively short, simple and rather repetitive dancework for a single dancer, performed by Gianotti, and made together with the choreographer Butcher. Here the dancer stays at the same place on the stage during the whole performance, and mainly "repeatedly shifts her weight from one foot to the other. As she rocks, her arms follow the momentum of her hips and torso, counterbalancing the shifts of weight." The dancer "is enveloped by a soundscape of whispering women's voices, laid over one another on the recorded soundtrack. Only snatches of what they say are audible and intelligible. It is an eerie, unsettling work - striking in its simplicity, which paradoxically seems to open a wide psychological landscape."[56]

Hidden Voices is in several ways much closer to the classical paradigm, than the *Continuous Project - Altered Daily*. And this work is of a kind that can be very well explained by alternative ontological theories. The work seems quite straightforward, in what is being performed, with a relatively fixed sequence of movements and this could relatively easy be at least partly noted in some kind of a score, which could be understood at least by some. And the same performance

[54] S. Banes, 'Grand Union: The Presentation of Everyday Life as Dance', p. 45.
[55] Ibid. p. 44.
[56] A. Pakes, '*Choreography Invisible: The Disappearing Work of Dance*', (New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 119.

is repeated over and over again, in different public performances. This is also an example where differences remain between creator and performer as "dancers and choreographers do not stand or fall together in our evaluation of dance performances – namely because each is responsible for a discrete artistic component of the performative event".[57]

Balancing weight-shifting performance

If we would like to explain the performance from the perspective of the performance theory, we need to be looking at the performance which can specify the focus of appreciation, the performance which is identical with the work according to this theory. The improvisational performance isn't clearly present, so some other kind of performance needs to be involved. Perhaps a kind of *minimal-and-repetitive-and-highly-focused performance of balancing-weight-shifting*, in which the momentum from the hips and torso are transferred into other parts of the body, performed at a certain place at a certain time.

Such a performance, with its name of almost welsh proportions, would be able to specify a focus of appreciation.[58] Such a focus of appreciation could focus on a quality like that of being able to notice what changes in a repetitiously moving body (our own as a performer or another's if we are in the audience). This work is short, but a few minutes of stillness or monotonousness can feel very long. Here we have the moving body as a vehicular medium, the intentional moving of this body back and forth commonly understood as something to pay attention to as a artistic medium, and articulating of the artistic statement that dance does not have to be very spectacular to be unsettling or eerie.

Distraction-avoiding performance

This performance was however not only a lone body moving solitarily on stage. There was another part of the performance context as well, alluded to in the work title, the recorded whispering voices which could barely be heard. These gave another input to both the performer and the audience, which disturbed the stillness just mentioned. Which meant that a distraction-avoiding performance was performed through which the focus on the repetitiously moving body during the few minutes of the performance, was being attained. The distraction-avoiding performance could specify the focus of appreciation, and the focus of appreciation captured the quality of being able to deeply focus on the repetitiously moving body, which I would say is a characteristic quality of the work.

[57] R. M. Conroy, 'Dances, Danceworks, and Choreographic Works: A Plea for Conceptual Clarity', p. 14.
[58] Llanfairpwll-gwyngyllgogerychwyrndrob-wllllantysiliogogogoch still wins.

General discussion of danceworks as performance from the two works

Interactional performance with the audience

Something unusual about these two discussed works, was that the performance of interaction between performer and audience was remarkably absent. Otherwise I would say that the interaction with the audience and other parts of the performance context is usually an important element of dance.

Improvisational performance

This was clearly present in *Continuous Project – Altering Daily* but, not as obviously present in *Hidden Voices*. But even though such performances were not so openly presented there in the second work, it could be argued that an element of improvisation was there anyhow. Even though this work was to a high degree planned and repetitive, Gianotti had to be prepared to make improvisational adjustments (artistic medium) to the unpredicted, which could vary between different performance-events, in able to fulfil the intentions of the dance (artistic statement).[59]

Pre-reflective embodied performance

When looking at these danceworks through the perspective theory, a distinction can be made between *movement* (vehicular medium) and *performance* in dance, where the latter specifies a focus of appreciation and involves a more deliberate artistic medium where this forms an artistic statement as well, in its manipulation of the movement.[60] However, performance in dance is not always very cognitive or reflective. Often performance in dance is being done in-the-moment, as in improvisation, where the performance is more of an embodied kind. The performance and the decisions required in a certain moment, to fulfil the generator's intentions with the dance, often have to be very quick and take place in the flow of what is happening, long before the dancer has been able to think anything about what is being done.

To a high degree they are pre-reflective and dependent on muscle-memory or some sort of kinaesthetic intelligence or intentionality of the body, which has been developed over a long time of dance training.[61] The embodied pre-reflectiveness of these performances can be seen as some kind of "middle voice", somewhere between deliberate choices of the brain and

[59] A. Bresnahan, 'Improvisational Artistry in Live Dance Performance as Embodied and Extended Agency', pp. 87, 91, 93.
[60] A. Pakes, 'Choreography Invisible: The Disappearing Work of Dance', p. 124.
[61] A. Bresnahan, 'Improvisational Artistry in Live Dance Performance as Embodied and Extended Agency', p. 90, 92.

passiveness of the performers.[62] This embodied performance is also a big part of the provenance of many danceworks, part of how they evolve, which is a reason, why several philosophers of dance have suggested that dance is better construed as action.[63]

So I would argue that the manipulation of the vehicular medium can't just be of a reflected cognitive kind, but it is often something very spontaneous and pre-reflective, done by the body. As I understand such performance it is not something just happening outside the work, but something performed by the generative dancers, and this kind of pre-reflective embodied performance can be part of specifying the focus of appreciation.

Problematization of my application of the performance theory to dance

As I have shown, these two works could be described as performance of a specific kind, but also as a performance of another kind. If these are performances, and not just descriptions, of different kinds, this seems problematic if one is to describe a single identifiable work. Two different things, or performances in this case, can't have the same identity if they have different properties, according to Leibniz law of the Identity of Indiscernibles.[64]

This could mean that the performances really are two different works if they are two different performances, even though they happen to have been given the same name in practice. If so the names which are given to works should be treated more as working names than definitive names, of a specific work.

Another alternative way to deal with this problem, could be to acknowledge that my description of the works is too separated and in this way simplified. Instead of describing for example *Continuous project – Altered Daily* as a work with two different kinds of performance (framing performance and improvisational performance), it would have been more precise if I described it as just one kind of performance. This performance could then still be described as if it has multiple qualities (such as being both framing and improvisational), and these qualities could be described in further detail.

Genres of dance

The two examples are from different genres of dance which each have their standard and contra-standard properties, which aren't necessarily the same for other genres within the art of

[62] A. Bresnahan, 'The Philosophy of Dance', 2.2.
[63] Ibid. 2.
[64] B. C. Look, 'Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/leibniz/, 3.5.

dance.[65] They are from different (late modern) periods and made by different constellations of generating performers and choreographers. These are not representative for all danceworks, and I haven't defined what a dancework is here and how it for example could be differentiated from a choreographic work, but by looking at the two of them it has been possible to find out how the performance theory can be applied to danceworks in practice, and to see how the theory can explain the danceworks in terms of performance. To get a fuller understanding of danceworks in general, of how these can be explained in terms of performance, and of the applicability of Davies performance theory to dance, I would suggest that one looks further at a wider range of dancework examples.

If we want to understand what kind of thing a dancework is, we need to find a focus of appreciation, which grasps the generative acts and which specifies what is being done, and what it is we are invited to appreciate.

Conclusion

I have here looked at some phenomena which have started being philosophically attended to within aesthetics relatively recently – dance and improvisation, and artworks as performance. I have looked at danceworks in terms of performance, from the cumulative theoretical perspective of David Davies' performance theory. According to this theory there are two major parts of interest when looking at a dancework:

1. First and foremost the generative performance, which is the actual dancework. This generates
2. the output of or presentation of this performance, the focus of appreciation (or work-focus).

There are two kinds of acts of interest in danceworks, when seen through the performance theory:

1. generative acts (creative or performative, where there is not always a clear distinction between these), in which the performance comes into being,
2. receptive acts (appreciative or evaluative), through which the performance is received.

Appreciation and evaluation are central in the focus of appreciation, in which manifest properties and qualities of a performance that bears upon the appreciation of the work, are

[65] K. L. Walton, 'Categories of Art', *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 79/no. 3, (1970), pp. 339.

specified. This work-focus is the easiest way for the receiver's attention to be drawn to the generative performance of the dancework. The focus of appreciation is specified through the artistic statement articulated by a generative artist in a vehicular medium, manipulated through the use of an artistic medium and three parts of the focus of appreciation are:

1. the vehicular medium – as a moving body,
2. the artistic medium – what manipulation of the vehicular medium is being done, as part of an understanding of an artistic community,
3. the artistic statement – which expresses the artistic purpose of the work.

Davies' performance theory has been developed with the pragmatic constraint that it should be fit and compatible with a reflective critical and appreciative art practice, and how such a practice ascribes properties to works. I have therefore looked at such a critical and appreciative dance practice in two cases.

Another reason to attend to danceworks or dance performances is that they often challenge what Davies calls a classical paradigm, when they lack things as a single creator, a scored prescription of a clearly defined work which the performance is a performance of, and have a degree of spontaneity and change in for example improvisation.

Davies outlines two kinds of performances:

1. Performance-works – such as improvised danceworks, where the public performance *itself* is the performance which specifies the focus of appreciation,
2. Work-performances - where there is *something else*, which the public performance is a realizing performance *of*, which specifies the focus of appreciation.

Performance theory is especially helpful to explain improvisational performances or performance-works that are not performances of something else. Improvisation has therefore been discussed here, when the performance theory has been described, with its three suggested distinguishable versions:

3. improvisational interpretation – interpreting something already existing,
4. improvisational composition – composing something new,
5. pure improvisation – neither interpreting or creating something which can be interpreted.

Improvisation has also been discussed as an important aspect of the dance examples. The improvisation was clearly manifested in the *Continuous Project – Altered Daily*, while not so clear,

but yet probably present, in the *Hidden Voices*. And another kind of performance, characteristic for a lot of dance, which has been briefly discussed, is a pre-reflective embodied performance.

The two works which have been in focus here, have challenged the classical paradigm to different degrees, but it has been possible to use a pragmatic constraint in relation to them both, where the theory needs to be looking at the critical and artistic practice within dance. And it has been possible to explain them in terms of generative performances which have specified focuses of appreciation. The focuses of appreciation, led the attention to certain qualities in the works or performances themselves.

The performance in these works can be described in different ways, but for the performance to be identifiable with the work, it needs to specify a focus of appreciation, where an artistic statement of the work is articulated through the artistic manipulation of a vehicular medium.

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Rosemary Butcher performing *Hidden Voices* at Tate Modern 2005-10-24, photographer unknown (https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/performance-at-tate/case-studies/rosemary-butcher).