

DANCE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION: A FRAMEWORK FOR THE AESTHETICS OF DANCE

by Graham McFee. 2018. Binsted, UK: Dance Books. 342 pp. \$39.95 paper. ISBN-13: 978-1852731786. doi:10.1017/S0149767720000236

Graham McFee has made a significant contribution to the analytic philosophy of dance, spanning almost three decades. His most recent book *Dance and the Philosophy of Action: A Framework for the Aesthetics of Dance* addresses questions that are central to dance scholarship regarding how dance is made, performed, and appreciated. The text offers a continuation of some of the discussions started in his previous monographs on dance: *Understanding Dance* (1992) and *The Philosophical Aesthetics of Dance: Identity, Performance and Understanding* (2011). McFee revisits and elaborates earlier arguments, including his thesis of notationality; his claim about the intention of the choreographer as embodied in the work; his commitment to contextualism; his rebuttal of the role of a kinesthetic sense in the appreciation of dance; his view that dance works are not accessible via recordings; and his argument that dancers are not artists. However, this book includes a more substantial focus on action, intention, and the role of human agents in dance than his previous works. Throughout the text, McFee stresses the humanistic nature of dance making, performance, and spectatorship, urging therefore for normative understandings of these areas, as opposed to the purely causal, as exemplified by scientific approaches, for example.

The book is composed of three parts, with a preamble and chapter 1 preceding part 1. Chapter 1 sets out McFee's view regarding the intentional actions of people as agents and argues that such actions should be understood normatively. Part 1, "Persons as Agents," continues this account of action and intention, dealing with identity questions in relation to both people and dance works and offering a detailed account of causality, including identifying the limitations of causal inexorability when accounting for human actions. Part 1 lays the foundations for parts 2 and 3 by introducing core theoretical concepts. As McFee acknowledges, this section is the least accessible to a reader unfamiliar

with the concepts and philosophers concerned. The publication is intended primarily "for those with a developed interest in dance" as well as aestheticians and philosophers of action (xi), but McFee suggests that part 1 is "less focused on dance than one would like" and "those chiefly interested in dance might skim-read it, returning to elaborate issues as they are raised later in the text" (xviii). This suggestion is helpful for readers whose concern is not primarily with the philosophical underpinning of McFee's arguments. *Dance and the Philosophy of Action* is easy to navigate if readers want to explore a particular theme without reading the book in its entirety. McFee suggests that many chapters are "broadly independent discussions of loosely associated topics" (xviii), meaning that, although it is intended as a single text, it can be used in a more "piece-meal" manner (xviii). Furthermore, although speaking directly to his previous books, McFee's detailed setting out of his position means it also stands alone and offers a comprehensive account of his views.

Part 2, "Persons in Dance Making," addresses the role and responsibilities of dancers and choreographers, the preservation of dance (understood as keeping the work in the repertoire), and dance work ontology and identity. McFee's discussion of the contributions of the dancer is fleshed out through a case study that examines Twyla Tharp's accounts of her practice. He elaborates his position regarding the dancer's role, articulated in his previous work, and in particular his suggestion that dancers are not artists due to the way that they are not responsible for the work in the way that the choreographer is (although he acknowledges one person can assume both roles). At first glance, this proposition might appear to be a value judgement regarding the importance of dancers. The idea that dancers are not artists seems to undermine the creativity involved in the interpretation and performance of works, and the often essential role dancers play in the creative process, while rubbing up against how those within the danceworld refer to dancers. However, McFee does not intend to make a value judgment, rather his position is more concerned with how responsibility for the work is attributed. I suggest perhaps the issue resides in his use of the term "artist" which has an implicit value. His suggestion seems to be a claim about authorship, rather than a reflection

on the value and/or creativity of dancers. Nevertheless, the suggestion is controversial, and many choreographers and dancers work in a way that is more collaborative in terms of responsibility for the work than McFee's proposition arguably recognizes.

Part 3, "Persons Appreciating Dance," focuses on appreciation and ontology. Chapters 9 and 10 are concerned with what McFee terms "crossing the footlights," which he deploys as "a figurative way to introduce the encounter between the audience and the dancework" (213). He continues a debate started in a symposium on dance art and science in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* in 2013 regarding what scientific approaches can offer our understanding of dance appreciation. McFee's position is that meaning should be recognized via human (the choreographer's) intentions as embodied in the performed work. He stresses the need for answerability to the artwork so that claims made about the work must answer to its features (209). In particular, he argues against the role of a kinesthetic sense in appreciation, on the basis that such a sense could not be projective and therefore would fail to "cross the footlights" (209).

This section includes an interesting "redrafting" of John Martin's oft-cited work on metakinesis, with McFee concluding that "*metakinesis* is clearly a complicated name for the capacity that humans have (once they have learned to do it) to recognize the bodily or embodied character of the movement of (pre-eminently) early modern dances" (227) and that therefore there is no distinctive sensory modality involved. He also critiques Barbara Montero's claims about the significance of dance training for the appreciation of dance and challenges the use of neuroscience to explain the appreciation of dance. His criticism of neuroscientific views arises from his commitment to humanistic understandings. Furthermore, throughout the book, McFee stresses the significance of context, suggesting this is overlooked in purely scientific accounts. He does not dispute the science of perception, but argues that it is not relevant to our understanding of appreciation, proposing a convincing and helpful account of the problems with drawing on causal methodologies to explain matters which are, according to McFee, essentially normative. The rigor and detail with which he sets out his position and responds to previous

criticism of his stance makes this a compelling and stimulating part of the text, which stands to make an important contribution to discourses on dance appreciation, in particular those that draw on scientific studies.

Despite McFee's repeated skepticism in all three books toward ontology as an area of enquiry, his contribution to understanding the nature of dance works is comprehensive. In chapter 11, he elaborates his position regarding dance work ontology in relation to recordings. He argues that if we have seen only a recording of a dance, we cannot claim to have seen the work. This seems to contradict the way we think and talk about our access to dance works. It is hard to imagine how one could analyze a work, or even learn its choreography, without having seen it. Furthermore, although common parlance distinguishes between two ways of accessing a work, live or recorded, the assertion that the latter is not the work at all is contentious. However, his proposition is helpful for encouraging us to ask questions of the different modalities through which we see dance. For example, if we are to argue contra-McFee that recordings allow access to the work, does that include all recordings, such as excerpts and edited trailers? We might also ask whether the viewing platform, such as a smartphone or cinema screen, has an impact on whether we can say we've accessed the work.

Screendance is an area that poses a particular challenge to McFee's proposition. He acknowledges that "some dances are made on film," but suggests that screendances are not central (272). This seems to challenge his commitment to danceworld practices, given that screendance is a substantial field of practice. McFee admits that there will be exceptions, and his commitment to "occasion sensitivity" (after Charles Travis) "precludes expecting a single answer (applicable everywhere)" (xix). However, I propose that screendance is better considered a danceworld norm than an exception.

With this book, McFee has achieved another important contribution to analytic philosophical aesthetics and dance studies. Although analytic philosophy is not currently drawn on in dance studies, McFee's clear articulation of pertinent philosophical problems and reference to other analytic philosophers helps to demonstrate the relevance of this field of thinking to dance scholarship. McFee's negotiation between not taking

for granted what is said about dance and intending to stay close to the practices of the dance-world is present throughout the text, raising pertinent questions about the relationship between the construction of concepts, argument building, and danceworld practices, which will be useful for both students and academics wishing to interrogate their own modes and methods of scholarship. The rigor of McFee's approach makes this a compelling text and means that any critique of his claims requires equal depth. This text is therefore valuable for provoking thought, debate, concept construction, and argument building in both education and scholarship.

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DO YOU REMEMBER HOUSE? CHICAGO'S QUEER OF COLOR UNDERGROUNDS

by Micah Salkind. 2019. New York: Oxford University Press. 334 pp., 35 illustrations, notes, index. \$99.00 cloth. \$35.00 paper. Cloth ISBN: 9780190698416. Paper ISBN: 9780190698423. doi: 10.1093/oso/9780190698416.001.0001
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How do people "remember house?" Micah Salkind asks (19). *Do You Remember House? Chicago's Queer of Color Undergrounds* continuously poses this question within house culture, a queer black and Latinx musical and dance

subculture that emerged in Chicago in the late 1970s. Throughout the book, Salkind resists directly answering this question and insists on engaging the multitude of ways people sonically and kinesthetically remember house, arguing "Chicago's house music audiences fashion an expansive, shared Chicago house history by telling, and re-telling, personal and collective stories of the music's emergence and repeated resurgence in the city of its birth" (5).

Salkind foregrounds house's queer of color origins in response to people who are "blissfully unaware of where house had come from, and who it was first made for" (3). Since the culture's beginnings, it has circulated widely. As house spread globally, its black and gay roots were often obscured. This book honors house's history by demonstrating how people in Chicago remember house, again and again. Following Richard Schechner, it suggests that if "performance is behavior twice-behaved, then communal memories derive from stories twice-believed" (7). Indeed, house is about people, across communities and generations, collectively recalling, over and over, the culture's origins. As people gather together to remember, Salkind reveals how house lovers move across lines of racial, gender, sexual, and class difference. In this deviant movement, house culture becomes "reservoirs of affective information that can help artists, scholars, and fans alike better understand how to make and sustain loving cultures across innumerable axes of difference" (8).

People moving across difference inspires what Salkind calls "crossover communities." Engaging Nelson George's notion of "crossover," which draws attention to how black music is diluted and reduced when circulated to white consumers, Salkind reconfigures crossover, theorizing house culture as a crossover community that does not eliminate but maintains racial difference. Influenced by José Muñoz's concept of ephemera, *Do You Remember House?* "argues that sexual and racial alterity are the ghosts in house music's machine soul; the beautiful stains that won't be washed out no matter how many times the music crosses over to the mainstream" (10).

In addition to crossover communities, another key phrase this book presents is "repertoire in motion." Expanding Diana Taylor's notion of the repertoire, which refers to performances, gestures, and dances rather than documentary archives, Salkind claims that house