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Projects, Precarity, and the Ontology of Dance Works

Hetty Blades

This article considers the relationship between the precarious working conditions of dance artists and the ontology of choreographic "works." I draw on observations and interviews with nineteen "independent" dance artists, based in the UK and the USA (London, Coventry, New York, and Philadelphia),[1] describing how their labor is often directed toward temporary projects that result in various forms of events, physical objects, and exchanges that do not align with conventional understandings of dance or choreographic works. In many cases, it is solely via these entities and events that the artist's labor and knowledge are shared, thus troubling the notion that a work, exhibited via performance, is the primary way that dance is communicated and transacted. Drawing on Frédéric Pouillaude's conception of choreographic works as both public and resistant (2017), I consider the production and ontology of these entities, which—borrowing a term from choreographer Hamish MacPherson—I label "work-sketches" and argue that they are forms of work, despite not aligning exactly with Pouillaude's characterization.

Given the scarcity of resources for contemporary dance and limited opportunity for stable funding, a large proportion of dance that is produced in the UK and the USA is done so through short-term projects, thus consideration of the implications of this structure on the ontology of dance is important. Many scholars discussing precarity in performance making have drawn attention to the role of project-based work (Laermans 2015; Puar 2012; Van Assche 2017). Here, I ask what kind of entities are produced during projects and explore the commodity form and (im)materiality of these outputs, probing the relationship between the ontology of dance and the socioeconomic context within which it is produced.

The association of dance as art, and the appropriateness of the concept of the work to dance, has been challenged by some recent literature (Cvejić 2015), and some practitioners prefer to adopt terms such as "performances," "productions," or "dances" (Blades 2016; Pakes 2015). However, in my interviews, the work-concept remained strong, functioning for many as an ideal form, on which they focus their ambitions, or which they critically interrogate through practice. Therefore, I argue that the concept of the work functions strongly in choreographic practices, despite few artists regularly producing outputs that align with Pouillaude's conception of the work. For this reason, I suggest that the concept of the work is a useful one, but that examining

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work-sketches demonstrates how a broader conception of the concept is needed to fully reflect the range of entities produced by choreographic practices in precarious contexts.

Dance, Precarity, and Projects

Precarious working and living conditions, characterized by economic and social insecurity, are a far-reaching phenomenon, which can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s. Arianna Bove, Annalisa Murgia, and Emiliana Armano (2017, 1) suggest that the concept can be seen to have been in use since the birth of critical political economy and that traces of it can be found in Karl Marx's *Capital* (1867) and Max Weber's *Science as a Vocation* (1917). They go on to suggest that "[f]rom the early 1960s precariousness became the object of conversations in social movements and academia" (Bove, Murgia, and Armano 2017, 1) and that it became a key word for social movements in the 1970s. Katharina Pewny describes how "[t]he economic shift from Fordism to post-Fordism from the 1970s onwards set a destabilization of living and working conditions in motion" (2011, 43). Bove, Murgia, and Armano suggest that the term had a resurgence in academic discourses the 1990s (2017, 1).

The term is used to describe instability, in particular in relation to contexts in which people do not have control over the conditions they live and work within. As Pewny points out, "The term 'precarious,' as it has been developed in activist and sociological discourses, includes several aspects. It embraces human vulnerability. A person living under precarious conditions is subject to changes within her working and living conditions she does not have power over" (Pewny 2011, 43). The sociopolitical contexts and precarious working conditions of dance and performance artists have been the subject of much attention in recent scholarship in dance and performance studies (Burt 2017; Kunst 2015; Laermans 2015; Ridout and Schneider 2012). Pewny points to Judith Butler's book *Precarious Life* (2004) as influential in the development of discourses on precarity in performance (2011, 43). Several scholars have suggested that there are features of dance artists' modes of working that draw the conditions of precarity into sharp focus (Kunst 2015; Lepecki 2016). Furthermore, the situation for dance artists seems especially precarious owing to particularly low wages, as Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović point out, "performance workers are certainly low on the social-economic scale of precarization, when compared to other independent, freelance, or self-employed workers" (2010, 4).

A key facet of precarity is the shift from full-time employment to project-based work. As Isabell Lorey notes: "Short-term, insecure, and low-wage jobs, often named 'projects' are becoming normal for the bigger part of society: precarization is in a process of normalization" (Puar 2012, 164). In relation to dance artists working in Brussels, Rudi Laermans describes a working pattern comprised of a combination of "short-term contracts or occasional grants with unemployment benefits and perhaps revenue from secondary jobs" (2015, 290).

In the UK, contemporary dance relies heavily on funding from the government through their "arms-length" organizations, namely the Arts Councils of England, Wales, and Scotland (now Creative Scotland). Money is scarce and usually issued in temporary awards, leading to short-term projects and economic insecurity. The global financial crisis of 2007–2008 and subsequent period of austerity in the UK resulted in reductions to art funding (Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2011), further limiting opportunities for artists. In 2014, British online contemporary dance magazine *Article 19* estimated that there were approximately 195 employed dance positions in the UK, which included contracts that did not last for a full twelve-month period. This low number of employed positions results in a high number of independent dancers, who generally work freelance and are not employed full-time by one single company or supported financially on a permanent basis. Such dancers often cultivate "portfolio" careers, fluctuating between performing, choreographing, teaching, and working in non-dance-related jobs. This multiplicity in terms of the role

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performed at any one time perhaps points to the reason that in the UK, the term dance "artist" or "dance artist" is often used, rather than "choreographer," "dancer," or "teacher," reflecting a multiplicity of skills, positions, and forms of creativity.

State support for dance in the USA is issued through the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Funds are very limited, and dance companies who choose not to register as non-profit, tax exempt 501(c)(3) organizations are ineligible to apply to the NEA. Rather, many artists choose to operate independently, often registering with organizations such as Fractured Atlas and The Field, who offer fiscal sponsorship and allow artists to receive tax-deductible donations and grants. Philanthropy plays a more significant role in the funding of dance in the USA than in the UK, with many of my interviewees citing philanthropy as a primary source of funding.

The term "independent" denotes a distinction between those who are employed full-time by companies or institutions and those who are not. However, within the current context, the concept of the independent artist requires some consideration. It is possible to suggest that, owing to the temporary nature of most contracts and an increasingly casual workforce within dance, hard distinctions between those in companies and those who work freelance do not exist. Even company artists often have long breaks, often unpaid, during which they might teach, choreograph, or work with other choreographers. Furthermore, as UK-based choreographer Rosemary Lee notes in an interview, there is a question about what/who independent artists are independent from. While the term indicates a way of working that is not company-focused, she points out that UK-based independent artists are deeply dependent on subsidies and the competitive systems of gaining funding (Lee 2018). Therefore, independent artists, though not tied permanently to individual companies or institutions, are nevertheless entrenched in the socioeconomic systems within which they work.

Works and Practices: Being Resistant

The interviews I conducted revealed a lot about the labor involved in being a dance artist. There were many similarities in the experiences of artists between the two geographical contexts, including the lack of stable income, prominence of project-based funding, and the amount of time and energy spent on work other than choreographing, rehearsing, and performing, such as fundraising and administration. Many artists work on multiple projects at any one time. These might include developing their own choreography, performing for another artist, working on a funding or residency application, teaching, or undertaking research. Each of these roles are usually temporary. Juggling many forms of work at once and constantly seeking new opportunities requires artists to be self-promoting as well as creative and flexible, reflecting Pewny's point that, "[m]any temporary work situations demand skills traditionally important for work in the arts, such as creativity, excellent self-performativity and flexibility" (2011, 43–44). These projects result in outputs such as performances, workshops, films, and the sharing of works in progress. However, only a small number of projects allow for a work to be started and finished within the time and resources allocated.

The ontology of dance works has been addressed by a number of scholars working in dance studies and philosophy (Conroy 2013; Davies 2011; Louppe 2010; McFee 1992, 2011; Pakes 2013; Pouillaude 2017; Rubidge 2000). In order to explain the relationship between works and their performances, many analytic philosophers adopt the type-token schema, under which a work is an abstract type, made present via performance tokens,[2] a framework challenged by some scholars, including Bojana Cvejić (2016) and myself (Blades 2011). Laurence Louppe (2010) and Sarah Rubidge (2000) offer specific criteria by which an output can qualify as a dance work, with Louppe citing an authorial signature, context, and originality as central to the concept of the work (2010, 203) and Rubidge suggesting endurance, authorship, and consistent structural features across multiple instances as central (2000, 206). In his characterization, Pouillaude articulates two

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dimensions of the work: "(1) The work as a public and sharable object, offered to the judgment of the other; and (2) the work as a resistant object, capable of surviving the death of its initial protagonists" (Pouillaude 2017, 54). He suggests that the first dimension refers to the public character of the object, which is "no longer an intimate sensation but an object given in the form of otherness and displayed to a multiplicity point of view" (Pouillaude 2017, 54), and goes on to suggest that it is only through "intentional address and explicit sharing between agents and viewers does a third object emerge, opening the possibility of a *work*" (Pouillaude 2017, 291). The second dimension of resistance "posits the survival of the object itself beyond the experience or process" (Pouillaude 2017, 54), thus suggesting that an entity must continue through time in order to qualify as a work. In Pouillaude's view, works have both of these features. I suggest that these dual characteristics are useful in helping us to think through what it is that distinguishes works from other kinds of entities, but that these characteristics are problematized by some outputs produced in precarious working contexts.

The difficulty of producing a "full" work was articulated by many of my interviewees. Multiple US-based artists, in particular, articulated a desire to produce an "evening-length" work and described the difficulties they faced doing this, instead producing multiple residency "sharings" or works in progress, which do not always develop beyond a single performance opportunity. Just a few days before her sharing at Judson Church, as part of an initiative set up by Movement Research for showing works in process, New York–based dance artist Tori Lawrence described how the significance of this opportunity to present her piece *Junkspace*, as part of a well-known series in the "home" of Judson Dance Theater, meant that the sharing needed to be polished and rigorously rehearsed (Lawrence 2018). What was presented was not a complete work, but at the same time, it was not necessarily a work in progress, as its development was suspended directly after the sharing and on hold until Lawrence found another opportunity to work on the piece. The process was directed specifically toward the sharing at Judson Church, rather than this event being a glimpse into a longer process. For Lawrence, and many others, the next opportunity shapes what gets produced, rather than the more privileged position of a long-term artistic inquiry resulting in a final product.[3] There are many artists who focus on process over "product" and choose to share processes or work in progress, rather than developing works, as a way of challenging the production driven dance market, and/or drawing attention to the value of process, and some scholars suggest that there has been a shift in dance production toward the sharing and valorizing of making processes over performance products (Cvejić and Vujanović 2010; Njaradi 2014). However, artists do

Photo 1. Junkspace. *Photo by Tori Lawrence. Dancer: Jungwoong Kim.*

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not always have a choice about whether or not to develop a work and for some, the work's status as "in process" is based solely on the available funding.

New York-based artist Laura Peterson described in an interview how she developed a performance called *Failure* in response to the election of Donald Trump in November 2016. She detailed the motivations and labor of producing this evening-length performance, which premiered at Judson Church in June 2017 and was performed twice during the run. Peterson describes her decision to fundraise for the production of the work, rather than produce it through a venue, as "liberating" as she "didn't owe anyone anything" and had artistic freedom (Peterson 2018), echoing the previous point about the value articulated by artists of operating independently from institutions.

While *Failure* was a finished work at the time of our interview, Peterson remained unclear whether it would ever be re-performed. When we spoke in March 2018, she was trying to book the piece, which costs $5,000 to stage, owing to the centrality of six large sculptures, and described how she had just turned down a potential performance of the work as the venue did not offer the full cost of putting on the show. The difficulties that arts venues have in being able to afford to commission and stage works is not a new phenomenon and also impacts on the potential of larger companies to tour works. However, this example highlights the difficulties artists face in staging and repeating works. Under Pouillaude's view, not re-performing the piece perhaps means it is suspended between a performance event and a work. The suspension of *Failure* means that it does not currently align with Pouillaude's description of the work as "resistant" and his suggestion that a performance becomes a work through its persistence through time. Although it was performed twice when it premiered, it is not clear whether the work will continue to circulate.

Importantly, these examples both have the *potential* to persist beyond their makers and therefore to become resistant. *Failure*, for example, is a finished work which has the potential to be re-performed at any time. However, the disjuncture between the requirements of the work and the socioeconomic context means it has not yet been repeated. The concept of the work as a stable, abstract entity, which is re-performed through multiple performance events, as implied in the type-token schema, seems to align more easily with modes of production associated with companies and the development of repertoires of work than with independent artists who rarely have the resources to develop full-scale works and/or keep them in circulation.

Works and Practices: Being Public

UK-based Hamish MacPherson's choreographic ventures manifest through entities of many different forms. His activities include workshops, exhibitions, and games, which are either played during live events or via his website. His site includes the following description:

> I am a London-based artist who uses ideas and methods from choreography and dance to think about politics. I make workshops, non-digital games, performances, writings, images and other things in artistic, academic and community contexts. My works tends to be clusters of many smaller things rather than working up to something like a big show. (MacPherson n.d.a)

An example of one of his games is *A dance history game* (2015), which can be accessed via his website (MacPherson 2015). This game invites the player to select a continent from a choice of six by rolling a dice. For example, rolling a five allocates the player to Asia. Players are then instructed to roll a ten-sided dice to determine a century, decade, and year in the period between 100 CE and 1999 CE. The next instruction is to "[w]rite a history of dance centred on the year and place selected. It is recommended that you pick a specific country within the continent. Follow what was happening then and there backwards and forwards in time" (MacPherson 2015). Players are

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allowed to use the Internet and are encouraged to share their histories via an online communal notebook. When I interviewed MacPherson, however, the notebook was still empty, leading him to describe it as a work without an audience (MacPherson 2018). He describes *A dance history game* as a way to semi-randomly construct a dance history that is not centered around Anglo-American, twentieth-century perspectives and suggests it might be a statement—although he is not sure for whom—or perhaps a comment for himself about how dance history follows a particular tradition. He describes it as a "sketch of a work" (MacPherson 2018), thus giving rise to my construction of the notion of work-sketches.

In some ways this game appears to be both resistant and public, aligning with Pouillaude's characterization of a work. However, the game has a curious form of publicness, as it is freely available online and offered for a public audience, yet requires playing to come into being in physical form. It is an "object given in the form of otherness and displayed to a multiplicity point of view" (Pouillaude 2017, 54), yet does not fully align with Pouillaude's account, which suggests that a third object (the work) emerges through the perspectives of its receivers. A game un-enacted has arguably not been fully received and therefore has perhaps not emerged as a work in Pouillaude's terms. However, as MacPherson points out, this form of making is common in various art practices, in which art exists as an idea or proposition to be discussed, rather than necessarily experienced firsthand. MacPherson further explains that he intends this game to be a work, whether or not it is manifested by players (MacPherson, e-mail exchange with the author, August 2, 2018). So, while Pouillaude's characterization of the work does not neatly align with MacPherson's game, the game is complete in the eyes of the artist who made it, highlighting a disjuncture between views in theory and practice about what the work is.

Other games by MacPherson have a different form of liveness and are enacted in more conventionally performative contexts. For example, he makes live-action role-plays or LARPs, during which participants take on particular characters. An example is *Let's Play PMQs*, which is played by a group of people in a shared space, facilitated by MacPherson and the work's co-authors, Sarah Jury and Rosalie Schweiker. The participants take on roles assigned to them before the event, and they enact an imaginary future scenario after the UK's exit from the European Union. MacPherson describes how he sees a connection between games and choreography, both of which are underpinned by scores or rules (MacPherson n.d.b). MacPherson also produces physical games and other objects that can be bought via his website.

MacPherson's website is organized in a way that gives equal status to "smaller things" such as *A dance history game* and more conventionally performative outputs, such as the LARPs (MacPherson 2018a). Each output is illustrated by an image on the homepage, all of which have equal amounts of space. The nonhierarchical presentation suggests that there is no reason to distinguish between the ontological status of each output. MacPherson describes how he is influenced by Manuel DeLanda's discussion of "flat ontology" (MacPherson, e-mail exchange with the author, August 2, 2018).

Another example of an entity that complicates Pouillaude's conception of the status of the work can be found on London-based choreographic duo Marquez & Zangs's Vimeo site. The artists created a series of short tutorials on topics such as "How to Get Funding" and "How to Interview Dancers," often dressed in white lab coats, signifying their position as experts in the field. The videos are humorous, in particular to those knowledgeable in the tropes of contemporary dance. For example, in tutorial number two, "How to Be a Choreographer" (Marquez & Zangs 2012), Marquez silently directs Zangs in response to a series of instructions that appear on the screen in text. The first is "Style," during which Marquez dresses Zangs in multiple variations, trying to find the most appropriate look for a choreographer. She settles on a layered outfit, complete with obligatory scarf and stripy socks—regular features in contemporary dance studios. Marquez starts to hand Zangs multiple books, as the second instruction appears on the screen: "Get the latest titles in performance

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research." Instruction three, "Be ready to spend hours in front of a fruity computer," is accompanied by the arrival of a MacBook. The first recognizable "dance" movement comes as Zangs repeatedly extends one leg as she sits on a chair reading multiple books and looking at the computer. The text reads, "Work on your problem areas." As Marquez starts to rotate Zangs's head, the text reads, "Don't forget your head-tail connection: Perfection is possible," and so it continues. In response to each instruction, Zangs accumulates another prop or movement until she is left reading, using the computer, holding a phone, extending her leg, and rotating her head. The complex composition on Zangs's body highlights the multi-faceted nature of her choreographic labor.

In "How to Get Funding" the duo discusses the emotional and practical difficulties of completing funding applications (Marquez & Zangs 2013). At first, they stand behind a table in their recognizable white coats, using objects to illustrate their conversation. A half-empty bottle of wine demonstrates their suggestion that one should relax when approaching a funding application. A crash helmet signifies their suggestion that one needs protection during the process. In the second part of the video, they perform a rap, critiquing the conditions and requirements of funding systems and encouraging viewers to rethink their relationship to the artist-funder hierarchy, thus commenting on working contexts for UK-based artists and indirectly responding to Lee's point regarding the dependence of independent artists on competitive funding systems. Both of these "tutorials" echo Pewny's discussion of artists whose work "performs the precarious" through its aesthetics (2011), and draw to mind Annelies Van Assche's description of the "performance of precarity," during which "artists perform their own working and living conditions as their way of broaching the topic of the pressing situation of socio-economic insecurity in which they are forced to live" (2017, 238). The content comments humorously on what it takes to make dance in precarious working contexts.

It is possible to think of these tutorials as screen-dance works, meaning each film might be considered a type and each playing a token. However, their serial nature implies that they occupy a different ontological position, as all the films are related to one another and therefore are arguably all parts of the same thing, rather than individual types. They also don't appear to have been created as works of art per se. Marquez & Zangs refer to them as an "artistic project" (Marquez & Zangs 2016), rather than a work. Furthermore, these videos parody "how to" videos found on YouTube (Marquez & Zangs 2016) and therefore are in a directorial relationship to the spectator. Instructing the audience is not uncommon in participatory performance practices, but here the artists are guiding an unknown audience who are displaced from their instructions, thus the relationship between the artists and their public is fragmented through space and time. The publicness of these tutorials therefore takes an interesting form. While the third object (Pouillaude 2017, 291) appears to emerge between the artists and audience through the playing of the films online, they could be considered incomplete until the directions and advice are embodied or enacted by the viewer. As with MacPherson's games, there is arguably a further stage of audience response required for the work to emerge.

The difference between the live performances by Lawrence and Peterson and the digital outputs produced by MacPherson and Marquez & Zangs correlate with Pouillaude's distinction between the "arts of movement" and the "arts of trace." He writes, "In the 'arts of movement,' the first and necessary stage is one of making-public (publicity), while techniques of inscription (durability) are the proper medium of the 'arts of trace'" (Poulliaude 2017, 308). Lawrence's and Peterson's pieces emerge through being made public, but their resistance is more precarious. On the other hand, MacPherson's and Marquez & Zangs's outputs are generated through the more resistant form of digital media, but their publicness as enacted experiences is less clearly determined.

Work-Sketches

These four examples are each different in their relationship to the concept of the "work." Despite these differences, I suggest all four of these examples can be understood in relation to the broad

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concept of "work-sketch." I initially conceived of work-sketches as "non-works," implying a refusal or resistance to the work which might recall concepts such as "non-dance" (Cvejić 2016) or "non-performance" (Moten 2015). However, non-work implies an active refusal to produce a work, whereas work-sketches are on the way to becoming a work, and/or are works which have not yet been fully received or repeated; positions which are shaped by the socio-economic context of the artists who produce them. While MacPherson's use of the term "sketch" implies an outline, or perhaps something unfinished or not yet un-enacted, the work-sketches produced by Peterson, MacPherson, and Marquez & Zangs are finished in that the choreographic labor is complete and the work is fully formed, however, following Pouillaude's view they occupy a suspended position between performance and work. Furthermore, while Lawrence's performance was billed as a "work in progress," implying something ongoing, the performance was constructed for that particular event, and was therefore 'finished' for the showing, and yet it is also 'unfinished' in that she intends to develop the piece when the right opportunity arises. When considered in relation to Pouillaude's conception of the work, each of these examples can therefore be considered ontologically suspended, albeit in different ways. It should be noted that Peterson does not agree with the use of the term sketch to describe her work (Peterson, e-mail exchange with the author, December 7, 2018), and like MacPherson, she views her work as complete, thus further highlighting the potential disjuncture between ways of thinking about the work arising from philosophical ideas and the perspectives of artists.

There is a precariousness to my argument, as each of these examples' status as a work-sketch is arguably temporary. If they are repeated, even in a different form, they could be seen to develop the characteristic of being resistant. Furthermore, MacPherson's *A dance history game*, for example, is resistant in structure, but its publicness is questioned because of its status of not being played; however, this could change at any time. It might be that my reading of Pouillaude is too literal and that it is the *potential* of an entity to be repeated that is important in its categorization as a work. Nevertheless, I suggest that thinking about this framework is useful for helping us to understand work-sketches. Furthermore, their prevalence in the public domain suggests that an interrogation of their nature is important for our understanding of the way dance currently exists. While not having the means to complete and/or tour works is not a new phenomenon, the temporary nature of project-based working within precarious contexts has an impact on the ontology of what is produced, which itself takes a precarious form. The concept of the work, from the type-token perspective in particular, appears to imply a stable, albeit abstract, entity, but these work-sketches are in flux and will either be enacted or repeated over time or remain in suspended and/or singular form. Although work-sketches do not align with Pouillaude's characterization of the work and raise questions about their relationship to the type/token schema, I suggest that they are forms of work and that their instability highlights the complexity and precarity of choreographic works.

Commodities and Gifts

The four work-sketches discussed demonstrate how projects give rise to many different forms of output, some of which are on the way to becoming a work, whereas others are complete but do not circulate owing to economic constraints. How then do these entities relate to discussions about the nature of dance labor and the commodities it produces?

There are multiple perspectives that describe links between dance making and immateriality, drawing on the concept of immaterial labor, introduced by Maurizio Lazzarato ([1996] n.d.) and discussed in depth by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) and others. Lazzarato defines immaterial labor as "the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" ([1996] n.d.). Thus, immaterial labor is that which produces intangible outputs such as ideas, services, or cultural products. As Mark Franko and André Lepecki suggest,

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> It may very well be that in our post-Fordist era of affective or virtuosic labor, the dancer becomes the figure through which a new formation of capital's relationship to both bodies and ephemerality becomes apparent—and thus her presence is required in and desired by this new volatility of capital's relation to the aesthetic commodity. It is here that the art object becomes implicated in the phenomenon of immaterial labor, and that dance becomes the figure par excellence of immaterial labor itself. (Franko and Lepecki 2014, 2)

The claim that dance labor is immaterial appears rooted in an ontological position that sees dance works as abstract entities, which manifest physically only temporarily, aligning with a type-token construct, or else a position that sees dance as not producing works at all, but existing as a series of one-off events. As Pouillaude suggests, "From certain points of view, the movements of labor share with dance a constitutive lack of productivity: caught in the eternal cycle of consumption and renewal of needs, inscribed in an unending process of life continuously reproducing and dying" (2017, 60).

Following Hannah Arendt's distinction between work and labor, Pouillaude points out that "[t]he vital determination of labor requires that it be clearly dissociated from the permanence of objects in the human world" (2017, 60). Thus, the association of dance with immaterial labor challenges the construct of the work, in particular those perspectives that conceptualize works as abstract types. Also drawing on Arendt, Franko states: "Work is conventionally thought of as a productive activity, whereas labor, therefore, is the force that accomplishes it" (2002, 2). The implication of adopting the concept of immaterial labor, therefore, is that dance making is not directed toward the production of stable commodities, but rather is an "eternal cycle" of action.

However, others have pointed out that dance does produce commodities. According to Louppe, the work is a "negotiable entity" and a form of "goods" (2010, 21). James Leach points out that performances are bought, sold, and consumed. He suggests that "the conventional form for the transaction of the 'thing' that is Contemporary dance is the performance. Performances are a kind of 'commodity form' for dance to take. An audience member buys a ticket, watches a performance and leaves. Transaction complete" (Leach 2013, 468). Furthermore, Cvejić and Vujanović argue against "misrecognising the ontological immateriality of performance, its ephemerality and disappearance, and superficially associating them with (immaterial) resistance to commodification" (2010, 4), highlighting how performance can be seen as a form of a commodity.

So, can we think of work-sketches as commodities? Significantly, all four of the work-sketches that I have described here were or are available to audiences for free. Peterson describes how her decision to fundraise to put on the performance—rather than being produced by a venue—meant that she was able to make the event free (Peterson 2018). The series that Lawrence's piece was performed in was also free, although audiences to both events could leave donations. The labor that constructed these work-sketches then is of a particular kind, as it is focused toward an output that will not be exchanged with audiences in return for money. This could be read as a way of resisting dominant capitalist structures, which is hinted at by Peterson when she describes the extortionate costs often associated with attending art events (Peterson 2018). At the same time, the giving away of one's labor can also be seen as a form of "self-precarization" (Lorey 2006) which refers to the choice that some people make to accept and work within precarious conditions. Adopting this term from Lorey, Laermans suggests that dance artists often undertake self-precarization in exchange for the opportunity to develop artistic subjectivities (2015, 290–293).

Perhaps we can understand the free circulation of work-sketches in relation to the anthropological concept of the "gift," following the framework put forward by Franko (2004), Bench (2016), and Leach (2013). Referring to Franko's description of movement being handed down or gifted from person to person through face-to-face teaching and physical instruction, Bench suggests that

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"[d]ance cannot be transmitted without the performer or teacher giving of him/herself in the process, and to give of oneself is to offer one's labor (or one's very being) as voluntary contribution rather than in exchange for monetary compensation" (2016, 163). Bench goes on to suggest that a similar principle operates in the online sharing of choreography, particularly in popular contexts, in which dancers share dances without expecting financial return (2016, 161).

Leach outlines a distinction between gifts and commodity forms:

> The gift in classical anthropological theory is a form of transaction that creates and maintains ongoing relationships between the transactors. At the other end of the (simplified and highly abstracted) continuum lies the commodity form, a transactional form that implies no future relation between the transacting parties but an overarching set of laws that govern such decontextualised transactions. (Leach 2013, 467–468)

While Franko and Bench discuss the possibilities of nonreciprocation, Leach draws attention to the centrality of ongoing relations as a form of exchange facilitated via the gift. In gifting these work-sketches, Lawrence, Peterson, MacPherson, and Marquez & Zangs are offering something to their audience that is not contingent on financial return but has different motivations. The expected return might include discussion, recognition, or exchanges from/with audiences, contemporaries, institutions, programmers, or funders; therefore, the giving of the gift can be understood as a moment in a longer, ongoing process of production that potentially leads to future paid opportunities.

Being given without financial reciprocation is not necessarily a crucial feature of a work-sketch. However, considering the notion of the gift and the free distribution of these work-sketches helps us to further understand the way they exist and circulate, and highlights the ways in which artists often share the outputs of their work or labor for free, in the hope of cultivating non-financial forms of exchange and/or opportunities for paid work in the future. This is by no means a new phenomenon, and contemporary dance has a history of being performed in public places and without financial exchange. However, free exchange is worth drawing attention to in the context of this discussion about precarious working contexts as it highlights that interplay between immaterial labor, ontology, and self-precarization.

Concluding Comments

Considering the nature of work-sketches highlights the fluidity of dance works, as each of the examples I have discussed may be enacted, developed, and/or repeated in the future, therefore changing their current status as a work-sketch. Thinking of work-sketches as gifts might imply that they resist commodification; however, their giving is not without an expected return. The type of work or labor that produces work-sketches is directed toward the production of an output. Therefore, I suggest they further demonstrate the relevance of the concept of the work and are forms of work. However, considering the dual features of publicness and resistance outlined by Pouillaude demonstrates the particular ontology of work-sketches and shows that a broader understanding of the nature of works is needed, one that allows for works suspended between privacy and publicness and between singularity and resistance.

I have drawn together four quite different examples in this study, some of which are more clearly "in progress" than others. In doing so, I hope to have drawn attention to some of the multiple forms of practice being developed in current choreographic contexts which do not align neatly with Pouillaude's characterization of choreographic works. The production of this type of entity is by no means a new phenomenon, and work-sketches are not exclusive to dance or choreography

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and the concept could be applied in various contexts. However, the dominance of project-based working in precarious contexts means that dance artists often find it difficult to develop and circulate full works, thus work-sketches are increasingly common ways of experiencing dance. This study has raised questions that remain to be explored, including what it means for a work to be finished, and at what point something becomes a sketch—questions I hope to return to in the future. For now, I hope I have demonstrated how the socioeconomic contexts of dance artists and ontology of dance are intrinsically linked and have drawn attention to the evolving shape of choreographic work and works.

Notes

1. The nineteen interviews were conducted during two different projects which took place in 2016 (funded by EPSRC/Digital Catapult) and 2018 (funded by Coventry University). I interviewed artists who are primarily makers, although some people also perform for other choreographers. I recruited people who work on a small-medium scale, within the field of contemporary dance and primarily outside of company and institutional structures. The interviewees represented a range of artistic approaches and career stages. Ten of the interviewees are based in the UK and nine are based in the United States. The artists whose work features in this paper were all interviewed during these projects, with the exception of Hamish MacPherson. He and I spoke over the phone and exchanged over e-mail after the projects had ended. For more information about Tori Lawrence's work please see: https://www.torilawrence.org/. For more information about Laura Peterson's work please see: http://lpchoreography.com/. For more information about Hamish MacPherson's work please see: https://hamishmacpherson.co.uk/. Marquez and Zangs's tutorials can be found here: https://vimeo.com/marquezandzangs.

2. This schema was introduced by linguist Charles Sanders Peirce (1906) and developed for art by Joseph Margolis (1959) and Richard Wollheim (1975).

3. In a follow-up e-mail exchange with Tori Lawrence five months after we met, she told me that she was due to show the work as a work in progress once again as part of a residency at Jonah Bokaer Arts Foundation (Chez Bushwick) in Brooklyn. She described how she is sharing what she shared at Judson but on a smaller scale as the space is smaller, so that it felt in some ways like going backward (Lawrence, e-mail exchange with the author, August 2, 2018).

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