

# Dance as (a Metaphor for) Thought, Part Two: A Reconfiguration of the Badiouian Conception of Dance

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Abstract: Badiou's texts on dance are remarkable insofar as they mark the long-overdue recognition of the discipline as a legitimate object of philosophical-aesthetic examination; however, these texts betray the spirit of Badiou's overarching project and are hence arguably not Badiouian enough. Despite his recognition of dance, his treatment of it ultimately relegates it to the same marginal position it occupies throughout the rest of philosophical-aesthetic history. In this study, I put Badiou's commentaries on dance into conversation with his more systematic philosophy and demonstrate how his conception of dance falls within the domain of what he vehemently rejects: "democratic materialism." I argue that if his conception of the dancing body were congruent with what he designates the "subjectivizable body," then dance would garner status as a legitimate artform in his corpus.

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Badiou's texts on dance are remarkable insofar as they mark the long-overdue recognition of dance as a legitimate object of philosophical-aesthetic examination. Although dance was not entirely absent within twentieth century thought—it is loosely treated by Bergson, Langer, Deleuze, Valéry, and Mallarmé—but after Nietzsche, dance largely lives on the margins of continental aesthetic thought.<sup>1</sup> Even for Nietzsche, who would "only believe in a God that would know how to dance,"<sup>2</sup> dance functions more as a metaphorical "operator" than as an object of his project, which is to say that it serves as a way of communicating a discourse rather than being explicitly taken up itself.<sup>3</sup> Prior to Nietzsche, in modern philosophy, the situation is even worse: one encounters the systematic exclusion of dance from Hegel's *Aesthetics* and Schelling's *Philosophy of Art*, and Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. Indeed, dance was not authoritatively deemed worthy of rigorous, primary philosophical treatment in modernity until Badiou, who has now dedicated three texts to it: the landmark "Dance as a Metaphor for Thought" in his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, and two chapters in *The Century* and *In Praise of Theater*.

Despite the momentousness of Badiou's commentaries, they have garnered little attention from scholars working in continental aesthetics.<sup>4</sup> Even in Dance/Performance Studies, the work has nourished little scholarship, save for the salient contributions of Botha<sup>5</sup>, Brannigan<sup>6</sup>, Clark<sup>7</sup>, and Pouillaude.<sup>8</sup> Badiou's writings on dance serve as valiant contributions to Dance Studies and continental aesthetics and have implications not only for the latter domains, but also vis-à-vis philosophy in a broader sense, particularly since Badiou regards dance as a metaphor for thought and thus as intimately linked with his overarching philosophical itinerary. Notwithstanding, Badiou's commentaries are problematic from a Badiouian perspective—that is, they are not Badiouian enough. Badiou, a fierce critic

of what he calls “democratic materialism” falls into tendencies in these texts which betray the spirit of his own project. The task of this paper is to highlight these inconsistencies, rectify them, and suggest a revised version of Badiou’s position on dance, which will illuminate it as a critical site for exploring truth and embodied subjectivity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I suggest that the dancing body is not the body endowed with given capacities. Rather the body only truly Dances once it has encountered a fundamental incapacity, or impossibility, in itself.

### Badiou’s Conception of Dance

Badiou’s *Dance as a Metaphor for Thought* is his earliest, most comprehensive treatment of the subject. He begins by soliciting Nietzsche, for whom “[d]ance is innocence, because it is a body before the body. It is forgetting, because it is a body that forgets its fetters, its weight. It is a new beginning, because the dancing gesture must always be something like the invention of its own beginning”.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, dance is play insofar as it is absolved of the mimetic duty, and it is affirmation insofar as it does away with the shameful body of Christianity. Dance relies on nothing transcendent but is rather the source of its own effectuation. The dancing body in the true sense is not the body “subjected” to choreography, which Nietzsche cannot see as anything other than an external restraint imposed from without, but rather that which exemplifies “the capacity of bodily impulse,” albeit an impulse capable of self-restraint.<sup>10</sup>

Badiou accepts most of the framework laid out by Nietzsche and develops it further to realize his own position (although it is worth mentioning that one would have a difficult time describing any of the rest of his project as Nietzschean, making this a curious move on Badiou’s part). It is useful to quote Badiou in full on what he takes his Nietzschean exegesis to suggest<sup>11</sup>:

Dance would provide the metaphor for the fact that every genuine thought depends upon an event. An event is precisely what remains undecided between the taking place and the non-place—in the guise of an emergence that is indiscernible from its own disappearance. The event adds itself onto what there is, but as soon as this supplement is pointed out, the “there is” reclaims its rights, laying hold of everything. Obviously, the only way of fixing an event is to give it a name, to inscribe it within the “there is” as a supernumerary name. The event “itself” is never anything besides its own disappearance. Nevertheless, an inscription may detain the event, as if at the gilded edge of loss. The name is what decides upon the having taken place. Dance would then point toward thought as event, but *before this thought has received a name*—at the extreme edge of its veritable

disappearance; in its vanishing, without the shelter of the name. Dance would mimic a thought that had remained undecided, something like a native (or unfixed) thought. Yes, in dance, we would find the metaphor for the unfixed.<sup>12</sup>

It is outside the scope of this paper to delimit Badiou's concept of the Event in full philosophical detail<sup>13</sup>; however, put in general terms for those unfamiliar with his work, an Event is an emergence of radical novelty in the form of a new possibility into a "world" (a closed, purportedly self-identical historical situation) which thereby inaugurates a "truth"—the unfolding, by a subject, of the Event's consequences vis-à-vis the world, which, because of the Event's fundamental universality, or "genericity," are themselves of universal import. Truth is radically heterogeneous to the knowledge of the world in which it takes place. It destabilizes a world's horizon of possibility—namely in the domains of politics, science, art, and love—by virtue of the fact that it discloses a possibility hitherto excluded or unknown. Because of its heterogeneity—in one sense, its resistance to discursive predication—it cannot be comprehended using the world's conceptual resources, and thus is ephemeral, hence Badiou's above description of it as "its own disappearance." Only by according it a super-numerary name can the Event be somehow inscribed into, or potentially revolutionize, the coordinates of that world and its consequences subsequently unfolded. In the case of art, for example, the aesthetic Event "is the incorporation into the artistic truth procedure's resources of forms that could not please before because they were regarded as formless".<sup>14</sup> The truth-procedure formalizes what has hitherto been excluded from the notion of form. Understood in the context of the above-quoted passage, dance, a purely ephemeral art, serves as a metaphor for the irruption of formlessness into a world without being minimally formalized by the supernumerary name, reinforcing the common-sense assumption that dance is absolutely non-discursive. Badiou uncritically imports the latter assumption which will have implications for how dance factors into his larger project.

Important to note for what follows, however, is that an Event always takes place in or on the edge of a world, as an exception to it. The Event and the truth-procedure to which it gives rise are subtracted from the world's nexus of relations, but nonetheless function as a supplement to the latter and are in a sense negatively related without being wholly external. An Event marks not a pure beginning in the sense of being an erasure of the old and the inception of something entirely new, but a destabilization of the world's ontological, epistemological, and normative coordinates, and thus of its order of time.<sup>15</sup> It is a break with the world, with no continuity between the world and the post-evental truth procedure, but one which happens within the world. The consequences of the introduction of a new possibility are unfolded within that world one "point" at

a time by a subject—a subject which is brought into being precisely by its fidelity to the Event, which amounts to not allowing it to vanish as a worthless aleatoric contingency and faithfully unfolding its implications for that world. The Event is indeed contingent, but inasmuch as its consequences are unfolded and supplement the world, one can say of it that it *will have been necessary*. The procedure of which it is the impetus involves the retroactive determination of the contingent Event as necessary. As Ruda puts it, the Event is “that which creates the conditions of possibility for a voluntary and free subjective affirmation ... An event is thus the creation of the conditions of the possibility of the consequences of an event—that is, of the event itself.”<sup>16</sup> The event retroactively creates its own possibility. It cannot be deduced from the world in which it irrupts given its heterogeneity to that world and thus the *capacity* for the “free subjective affirmation” cannot be said to antedate the Event as something given. In a sort of short circuit, the Event creates a capacity (of the subject), which is the Event’s condition of possibility without being a condition that exists prior to its occurrence.

Returning to Badiou’s long passage quoted above, if dance is identified with the Event, it must be non-worldly and thus heterogeneous to worlds as such. Because of this, Badiou understands it to be purely spatial and non-representational since it is, understood this way, pre-discursive (it will become discursive one point at a time as its consequences are unfolded, but at this point, it will no longer be dance, but rather theatre, cinema, or poetry) and prior to time (only with the attribution of a proper name will it become temporal). Badiou concludes the text with a radical argument he claims to be supported by Mallarmé’s position on dance (a reading with which Pouillaude justifiably takes issue<sup>17</sup>): “Dance is not an art, because it is the sign of the possibility of art as inscribed in the body.”<sup>18,19</sup> Dance exhibits the (thought-)body which is *capable* of art, but which does not itself define or exemplify a singular art, since art proper is not outside of time; however, given his insistence that dance is prior to the introduction of the name, and hence also to the subject which does the naming, one can only conclude that Badiou is intimating a capacity which antedates the Event and the subsequent emergence of a subject, making it something *given*.

If one turns to Badiou’s brief treatment of dance in *The Century*, his position does not differ drastically from *Dance as a Metaphor for Thought*. Here, he reiterates his understanding of dance as ephemeral: “it is only act. The paradigm of a vanishing art, dance does not produce works in the ordinary sense of the term.”<sup>20</sup> While here Badiou ambiguously points to the act as that which enables formalization—the task of all subjects of truth—Badiou elsewhere deems problematic those aesthetic trends of the twentieth century which subordinate the work to the ephemeral act (for example, the privileging of performance over theater). “The idea of the ephemeral,” he states “is believed to be new, but it is only the alignment of art with the

circulation of consumable commodities and with the usury of products, which is the material basis of Empire. To resist Empire is to affirm *the work*, all the while avoiding the pompous praise of its power.”<sup>2122</sup> Indeed, the work, a finite instantiation of the infinite, plays an integral role in the production of truth, and has utility vis-à-vis our atonal historical moment by serving as a point of orientation for the subject by arresting the endless flux of interchangeability encouraged by the “democratic materialist” regime of Capital. Despite the clearly reproachful sentiment of the latter quotation, Badiou claims that dance is invariably synonymous with ephemerality (namely because, according to Badiou, it cannot be notated, a claim which has been criticized by authors such as Pakes<sup>23</sup> and Pouillaude<sup>24</sup>), which forces us to question the status of his apparent reverence for it.

On this note, one should highlight that it is difficult, based on these texts, to get a sense of what kind of dance Badiou is specifically referring to. While he admits that his work on dance is not meant to take dance on its own terms but rather in those “such as it is given welcome and shelter by philosophy,” he surely has some idea of what dance is in order to have drawn such a metaphor in the first place, or to have felt that such a metaphor ought to be drawn at all.<sup>25</sup> He cites Isadora Duncan and Merce Cunningham<sup>26</sup>; however, neither of these artists exhibit the degree of purity (i.e. its subtraction from knowledge/grammar, representation, and the self) that Badiou demands of dance. Even an improvising body does not fit the bill—in fact, it may end up reinforcing exactly what the Event is meant to undo, which is to say an ego-driven attachment of the self to itself and the encyclopedia of the world which authorizes its self-understanding. As Pouillaude claims, “[s]tarting from oneself, as both point of departure and horizon, runs the risk precisely of never going beyond oneself and remaining entrenched there ... If the body’s return to itself is really to herald liberation, then a supplementary determination is needed.”<sup>27</sup> Read in relation to Badiou, such a supplementary determination could be understood as the Event—that which destabilizes the closed coordinates of the dancing body and its personal self-understanding. On the flipside, however, if we point to a body performing a choreography based on a codified vocabulary set to music, then Badiou, following Nietzsche, would charge it with being “subjected.”<sup>28</sup> I claim, as I will continue to demonstrate below, that this aporia is a fault of Badiou’s own understanding of dance. If dance is a metaphor for the Event, which is an exception, then dance must have something of a negative relation to that which it is not, without being determined by the latter *per se*.

We can now turn to the final text, the chapter “Between Dance and Cinema” in *In Praise of Theater*. Here Badiou argues that “dance tries to show what a body is capable of. It is the experimental field not only of the body’s expressive powers, but its ontological powers as well.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, dance serves as an answer to Spinoza’s famous statement that we know nothing about a body until we know what it can do (which amounts

to a denial of certainty, given that we will not, at least on the terms of his project, ever exhaustively know all that a body can do, leaving us only with an idea of an ever-becoming body). While here it reads as a statement of reverence, Badiou elsewhere condemns the postmodern art circuit for its reactionary anti-classicism, “whose single resource is Spinoza’s phrase: ‘We do not know what a body can do.’”<sup>30</sup> I will return to the underpinnings of this claim below, but for now it is worth pointing out that Badiou’s problem with this amounts to a problem with the assumption that anything, such as a truth, which would arrest the immanent becoming of purely natural bodies (and thus the endless deployment of their immediate sensuous potential, though a deployment which will only produce more of the same rather than facilitate the body’s transcendence of its own immediacy) by giving us a clear idea of what a body can in fact do, even if what it can do is retroactively authorized. What is more, it also amounts to a problem with the presumption that there is a given transcendental condition for truth. Spinoza’s comment that we know nothing until we know what a body can do implies that since the body is endlessly becoming, we will never have full knowledge of what a body can do, and thus we will never arrive at truth. Were we to have decisive knowledge of the body, then we could obtain truth; however, for Badiou, as I have shown, truth is without a transcendental condition, insofar as it shatters the very transcendental from which it emerges. Why, then, considering all of this, does Badiou claim that art has a transcendental condition, viz. the body which is “capable of art”? And why does he claim that there is something useful about the body functioning as an “experimental field” for its own “powers”? The problems with this claim will become clear below in the explanation of “democratic materialism.”

Building upon this, Badiou proceeds to argue that dance is “the representation of that which the body is capable of *without reference to the Idea*. Dance is sufficient on its own as an allegory of immanence, pure celebration of the body’s resources.”<sup>31</sup> To clarify, regarding the Idea—a central, albeit somewhat polysemous concept in Badiou’s project<sup>32</sup>—he states that it is “the conviction that a possibility, other than what there is, can come about ... An Idea is associated with an event because the event is the creation of a possibility and the Idea is the general name of this new possibility.”<sup>33</sup> The Idea is a “is a precondition for producing new knowledge; as such, it always takes a form, but its task is also to propose new form.”<sup>34</sup> It is both immanent and transcendent in the sense that it is heterogeneous to the world’s coordinates but must be embodied by the subject and give rise to finite works that are but localizations of the truth. As such, it is a schematic site of thought, enabling a move beyond the worldly needs of human(-animal)ity. As Badiou elsewhere claims, however, that which does not herald the Idea is condemned to democratic materialism—the most pejorative designation in his lexicon. An Event is irrelevant (and cannot even be said to have taken place) if it does not give rise to a subject which un-

folds the Idea, so dance being a metaphor for the Event becomes banal. In other words, while Badiou's gesture toward dance is commendable, he has ultimately only further denigrated it in his own language. What the body is capable of without reference to the Idea is purely human-animal functionality (a functionality amenable to commodification, as he often stresses<sup>35</sup>), which is of no interest from the perspective of truth.

To summarize, dance for Badiou points to a *capacity* of the human body. It points to the body's *capacity* for art. In other words, it points to a pre-evental givenness of the body as a set of resources or a schema of the possible, reminiscent of the Aristotelian or Merleau-Pontian body. As I will show below, there are two conceptions of the body in Badiou's work: the polemical conception of the vulgar body of the human-animal and the conception of the body of a subject—a "new body" or a "subjectivizable body"—capable of making a truth appear within a world insofar as it is the latter's material support, but which only emerges as such a body after the Event and *with* reference to the Idea. It is the former conception which forces one to draw the conclusion that it is this to which Badiou chalks up the dancing body, which not only is problematic in terms of its implications for understanding dance but is also inadequate vis-à-vis Badiou's own philosophy, at least if we believe we can put forth a properly Badiouian, affirmative conception of dance. Put simply, Badiou's existing conception of dance is founded upon the assumption that dance only relies upon the resources of the finite human body and not the subjectivizable body. I suggest that there is another position to be posited when one thinks the dancing body as synonymous with the second conception. This will force us to overturn Badiou's position which deems the dancing body a set of resources to be endlessly deployed—as the body of possibility—and make the case for dancing body as a site of *breakdown* (within the closed coordinates of a world), or *impossibility*. Such a body will indeed be "capable," but this capability will only emerge retroactively, which is to say, the Event will have created its own conditions of possibility, and thus, the dancing body, and dance itself, cannot be without reference to the Idea. This not only opens up a new understanding of the dancing body, but also undermines the assumption that dance is fully subtracted from language (even if its imbrication with language will be minimal, particularly in relation to theater or poetry) and hence utterly ephemeral. To make this case, we must first turn to Badiou's account of the body.

### Which Badiouian Body?

One of Badiou's fundamental gestures, which encapsulates the stakes of his entire project, is a move away from what he terms "democratic materialism"—the rampant belief that "there are only bodies and languages," that bodies alone can be said to have "objective existence"<sup>36</sup>—toward what he terms the "materialist dialectic," which asserts that "[t]here are only

bodies and languages, *except that there are truths.*"<sup>37</sup> It is the introduction of this exception—a third term which does not negate the first two, but which destabilizes the dualism's authority—which enables a move beyond the nihilism of our relativistic, postmodern moment insofar as it demonstrates that, to paraphrase Hegel, the Absolute is indeed *still* with us, even if it has been "worked-through," to paraphrase Freud.

*Logics of Worlds* opens with a preface in which the above-mentioned move is introduced and underpinned by a polemical account of the body. Badiou reproaches Antonio Negri—a thinker emblematic of the "postmodern," a framework synonymous with democratic materialism—for whom "the body is the only concrete instance for productive individuals aspiring to enjoyment."<sup>38</sup> Badiou claims that contemporary *doxa*, whose foundation is the latter axiom, "reduce[s] humanity to an overstretched vision of animality." In this framework, "[m]an, under the sway of the 'power of life', is an animal convinced that the law of the body harbours the secret of his hope."<sup>39</sup> Put in more properly philosophical terms, bodies are of the realm of substance, of the worldly "there is" (and in terms of humans, are typically marked by a narcissistic hedonism, which is to say, an inability to transcend their immediacy); however, truths, supplements to the body/language dualism, are exceptions to "what is." That is, they cannot be located within a particular epistemological framework (a "world") which authorizes the saying of the "there is." They are rather heterogeneous to knowledge, to the realm of objectivity, and thus also to the body qua given organic entity. Nonetheless, if truths are not to be reduced to mythical moments of transience or instances of theological grace, they must enter the realm of appearing by being materialized in a work. Subjectivizable bodies materialize truths by creating works.

Important to note here is Badiou's distinction between body and subject. Badiou, of course, does not propose a wholesale negation of the biological body, but seeks to contain it, such that it is not regarded as the focal-point or apex of human experience, such that it is not condemned to being "the living institution of a marketable enjoyment and/or a spectacular suffering."<sup>40</sup> The body is significant only to the extent that it supersedes the task of merely managing or optimizing its affects. Badiou begins the systematic component of *Logics of Worlds* by asking a question the answer to which will only become fully intelligible by the book's conclusion: What is a singular subject? He argues that "[i]t is the active (corporeal, or organic) bearer of the dialectical overcoming of simple materialism."<sup>41</sup> If a body, he states, "averts itself capable of producing effects that exceed the bodies-languages system (and such effects are called truths), this body will be said to be subjectivated."<sup>42</sup> Although his conception of the subject is not "bio-subjective," for "a subjectivizable body can equally well be the army of Spartacus, the semantics of a poem, the historical state of an algebraic problem...", there are exceptional cases in which "subjectivizable body" indeed refers to the form of an (human-)animal body, but in this

case not as simply another thing among things, as it is when it is *just* a human-animal body, but as something not reducible to the objective.<sup>43</sup>

The subject is the very “except that”—that which has no “place” in the world in which it arises—of the materialist dialectic’s central axiom. The subject must emerge from a world and exist on the boundary separating a world from its outside. The subject is not an absolute beginning but an exception, and it persists in its being by treating “points” within the world. Points are nodes of the existing world, “whose structures [the subject] stretches and opens,” which face the subject with a yes or no decision as to whether they are amenable to the truth it is unfolding or not. In some cases, the points can be totally affirmed, in some cases they can be negotiated, reformed, or adapted, and sometimes they must be negated entirely.<sup>44</sup> The subject cannot be reduced to what it was prior to the Event, for the *subject is the world’s very impossibility*. The subject does not solicit a set of pre-existing capacities to do its work. The subject is indeed “capable” of unfolding a truth, but its capability only emerges with the Event, which is to say, emerges in and through, or rather *as*, an impossibility which corresponds to nothing objective or given in the world. It is this impossibility that will authorize it to do its work of making truth appear. What does this mean for dance?

### ***Dance As a Metaphor for Thought, Part Two***

Before merging the claims of the above sections together, one more detail is required. Badiou’s project is overtly atheist and thus there is no substantial “big Other” which can be said to preside over what “actually happens.” While a world typically presupposes such a big Other in order to retain its stability, the Event is precisely what shatters the possibility of such an entity. There is no big Other who authorizes the happening of an Event from a distance—an Event can only be said to have taken place insofar as there is a subject which claims that it has. Badiou, in claiming that dance is a metaphor for the Event, but before it has been named and thus before subjectivization, inadvertently assumes the position of a “third-party,” by claiming a sort of objectivity of the Event’s ephemerality that can be pointed to without the “engaged gaze” that is the subject. There is no Event without a subject, and thus dance is either irrelevant from the standpoint of truth, or else dance is not simply a metaphor for the Event, but involves a subject and thus must be included in the realm of art itself, rather than functioning as a mere transcendental, which, as mentioned above, is incommensurable with the notion of art qua truth insofar as truth has no transcendental condition, other than the one it retroactively creates.

To bring my argument to a close, I propose a more generous reading which will deliver us a revised Badiouian conception of dance. If one retains the basic thesis that dance is a metaphor for the Event (even if its status as a metaphor will shortly be undermined), and one remembers

that the Event is predicated of more than just ephemerality in the temporal sense, then one will be able to claim that dance qua Event must also be an exception to what is. If we also retain the basic claim that dance is of the order of the human body as such, then we can claim that dance, qua Event, emerges as a breakdown of the body's horizon of possibilities (or of a certain codified movement language's coordinates). Rather than celebrating what the finite human-animal body is immanently capable of, in the sense of sensuous capacities and functions, dance will engender *an incapacity* (of the finite)—one cannot stop here lest we fall into the democratic-materialist valorization of passivity—in order to give rise to a capacity of a different order, namely of the infinite.<sup>45</sup> Such a claim allows us to circumvent the antinomy into which Badiou falls and think not of a particular *style* of dance in line with the criteria he lays out, but rather to think about dance as a site not just for metaphorizing the Event, but rather of the Event itself. The claim necessarily entails the introduction of a distinction between *dance*—understood as mere athleticism, social dance, or catharsis/self-expression—and *Dance*.<sup>46</sup>

In this vein, Dance may indeed involve human-animal bodies—often moving, often to music, often in a highly-coordinated way that is not reducible to everyday-locomotion nor sport, whose bodies may quantitatively exceed themselves, but never qualitatively other themselves, at least within the framework of each particular game—but these bodies have the potential to become alienated from their own capacity to endlessly self-deploy (or at least do so without a distance from themselves or in a way that is mediated by the Idea) and the concomitant narcissistic attachment to self.<sup>47</sup> To provide a schema for how exactly this breakdown occurs or what it in fact means would be antithetical to the spirit of Badiou's work, insofar as it would put me in the position of the “big Other,” the non-existence of which I just stressed. One can say, nonetheless, that insofar as the dancing body “breaks down”—in other words, gains distance from the contingency of the movement language it has inherited, or the “self” it purports to be satisfying or expressing—it is opened to the possibility of treating what that movement language has hitherto excluded. The subjectivized Dancing body is not simply capable of more vocabulary, or of moving differently, for this would be a simply quantitative (or qualitative, in the weakest of senses) difference in relation to what the body was prior to the Event, but rather is endowed with the capacity to treat points in its world of movement, in a way which is decidedly *with* reference to the Idea.<sup>48</sup> When it does Dance, it may employ similar techniques or follow similar impetuses as it did prior to the Event; however, it will do so in a way that is exemplary of thought, by virtue of its involvement with the Idea. In other words, it may appear similar (from the standpoint of the world's transcendental) to the pre-evental body, but it will now rely on a truth which has endowed it with an “infinite capacity” that is not reducible to any pre-evental given capacity of the body. The Event will not obviate

the organic body's capacity to execute certain steps or sequences; however, only with the Event will the dancer have the capacity to *Dance*—or, what is the same: *to think*—rather than simply move in a coordinated, musical, often visually pleasing way. Before continuing, I should note that such Dancing is not a representation of the “content” of the Idea, for the latter is a pure schema that enables the unfolding of the Event's consequences. Dance remains non-representational, but rather as an emergent production of itself, commensurate with the core of the six principles Badiou initially posits in “Dance as a Metaphor for Thought.”

With all this in mind, Clark is indeed onto something when he cautiously suggests that there may be something like “a Badiouian ‘Cunningham Event,’” to the extent that Merce Cunningham's dances, for example, “absent themselves from predetermined emotive response, and re-orientate the dancer's body through a rethinking of the role of weight and balance” which, I might add, is counter to codified ballet but which uses much vocabulary from the latter as its point of departure.<sup>49</sup> Clark also points out that while Cunningham is not working with a movement code in the traditional sense, there is a weak grammar undergirding his choreographic procedures and the schemata he creates for performing those works.

### The Siegal Event

Despite the merits of Clark's contribution, I would like to very briefly conclude with another example. Richard Siegal—an American choreographer who danced as a soloist in William Forsythe's Ballet Frankfurt, and whose choreographic works can be found in the repertoires of many of the world's foremost ballet companies—has embarked on a trajectory that I claim exemplifies the thesis I have laid out in this paper. Siegal's company, Ballet of Difference<sup>50</sup>, takes as its mission an interrogation of ballet's relevance in the twenty-first century—a time in which ballet is lampooned from every corner, namely for being a relic of a bygone era and for not having risen to the long overdue occasion of sloughing off its historical (viz. racist and sexist) baggage. For Siegal, ballet indeed represents a relic on multiple fronts; however, there remains both a real aesthetic, as well as an emancipatory potential hibernating within ballet—not only in its technical form, but also in its “Idea,” or lack thereof rather, especially vis-à-vis the current historical moment—that ought to be brought to bear on both our context and on itself.<sup>51</sup> Siegal's work, responding to Jennifer Homan's overarching claim that ballet is dead<sup>52</sup>, questions whether this is really so. He does this in a way that is not reducible to Cunningham's “democratization” of movement “from the rigid strictures of ballet,” in that he remains faithful to the potential of ballet itself.<sup>53</sup>

On the institutional front, Ballet of Difference fosters a working climate for its artists fundamentally different from most European ballet companies.<sup>54</sup> Dancers' verbal and physical contributions are not only

welcomed but encouraged in both dialogues about the work and the creations of the works themselves, thereby subverting Badiou's Nietzschean reduction of choreography to "subjection."<sup>55</sup> The company celebrates difference in terms of cultural identity but also in a more fundamental sense, in that it takes difference as such for the ground from which it creates form and unity, rather than presupposing an originary sameness as ballet has historically been guilty of. One can draw a parallel here to Badiou's insistence on being qua being as "indifferent multiplicity" rather than a self-same ground immanently imbued with truth to be revealed. From such indifferent multiplicity, truths are created through a process of formalization. Form, for Siegal, is not imposed from on high, but is developed immanently, often by emphasizing balletic form as a psychosomatic process rather than the imposition of antiquated poses, patterns, and modes of comportment once connotative of power and royalty.

Siegal's mission is manifest in each of his works, but the 2022 evening, *Xerox Vol. II*, is perhaps most emblematic in this regard. The creation—an evening length work set to the electronic music of Alva Noto—began with a discussion with the ensemble centered around questions such as "How, if at all, is ballet relevant today, or is it dead like Jennifer Homans argues?"; "What do we mean when we talk about ballet?"; and, "Is ballet as a formal vocabulary separable from its oppressive history?" Together, we deliberated on these questions verbally on a few occasions, but we also interacted with them physically as we collaboratively created the piece together. These questions were embedded in us and informed the physicality of the work from start to finish, such that one could claim that it was demonstrative of exactly what Badiou terms a truth-procedure. The creation consisted of "treating points" in the world of ballet, sifting out what did and did not belong in ballet today. Beyond the incorporation of different body-types and the subversion of traditional gender roles, we scrutinized details such as the placement of the arms, the amount of tension held in the body, the relationship to music, and the general sense of comportment toward the audience and between fellow dancers. Siegal's staging, set design, and musical selections also performed this interrogative labour vis-à-vis the canon to which it was responding. This process brought many of us to an impasse, albeit a productive one: no longer were we capable of simply regurgitating vocabulary and proceeding unreflexively with business as usual, but rather, the physicality developed out of this set of ideas and became simply that which harboured those ideas, or made them appear. This is precisely what I refer to when I claim that dance can bring a dancer (or choreographer, or spectator) face-to-face with a fundamental impossibility in which her work has until now been grounded, both in terms of the natural body and the world out of which it emerges. This also undermines the assumption, of which Badiou is guilty, that dance is entirely subtracted from discourse. While the introduction of the Idea does not necessarily solve the analytic problem of dance's inabil-

ity to be notated and thus easily reconstructed, it does enable us to emancipate dance from democratic materialism and thus authorize its association with truth and subjectivity. Given that the issue of notation, beyond the enabling of a work's persistence through time (or rather, of its capacity to be subtracted from the corrosive power of time), is fundamentally an issue of a discipline's legitimacy as a real artform, this alternative solution enables us to reveal dance's philosophical legitimacy via an alternative route. On the point of reconstruction, the lack of notation (besides a video recording) makes this a still problematic task; however, as Bleeker points out, reconstruction is also a matter of *reenactment*, for example, of "the artistic thought embodied in the creations of others."<sup>56</sup> Reenacting these thoughts, which I take to be crucial to reconstruction but not the entire task, "is not a matter of (or an attempt at) redoing the thinking process of the choreographers who created these dances, but rather of grasping the logic of thought embodied in the dance."<sup>57</sup> The trace of the Idea enables the reactivation of the spirit of the work in the future, which is arguably a more rewarding discovery than dealing with notation.

The final product of *Xerrox* ultimately laid out a set of coordinates for future works to situate themselves within, or rather, in its own truth-procedure, it became part of a broader truth-procedure that transcended its singularity.<sup>58</sup> *Xerrox* as a work is an exception to the world (of ballet) from which it emerges and itself treats points within that world. In dancing this work, I (and I was not alone in this) was emancipated from the immediacy of my organic body, given that I was dancing a set of ideas rather than simply repeating choreography, participating in something which transcended the immediacy of my body. The movement of dance and the movement of thought were indistinguishable, collapsing the distinction between the mind and body in a novel way. *Xerrox* confronted us and our public with an impossibility. This impossibility thwarted the continuation of *ballet's* uncritical deployment; however, in so doing, it gave rise to *Ballet*. Our finite, sensuous capacity to dance was undermined. In exchange, we generated an in(finite)capacity to d/Dance.

1 I am speaking solely of continental aesthetics here. I acknowledge the analytic contributions of Sparshott (1995) and McFee (1992) which appear prior to Badiou's landmark text.

2 Nietzsche 1917, p. 40

3 Pouillaude 2017: 12n15

4 I note the exception of Rancière who has incorporated dance into his work on aesthetics in the last two decades, even entering into dialogue with Badiou's chapter on dance in *Modern Times* (2022) and *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (2009).

5 Botha 2013

6 Brannigan 2019

7 Clark 2011

8 Pouillaude 2017

9 Badiou 2005a, pp. 57-58

10 Badiou 2005, p. 59

11 Botha (2013) has critiqued Badiou's interpretation of Nietzsche, which has implications for the further development of Badiou's own position, by claiming that Nietzsche does not just use dance as a metaphor, but also finds it to be an instrumental practice in the development of the embodied self. Her text then reconsiders Badiou's ultimate claim that dance is not an art; however, she has a different agenda than I do here, in that she does not identify Badiou's own inconsistency in relation to his overarching project.

12 Badiou 2005a, p. 61.

13 I have outlined this previously in, for example, *Supple* (2025). For a comprehensive outline of Badiou's philosophy of the Event, refer readers to Badiou's *Being and Event* trilogy itself, as well as to the introduction of *Infinite Thought* (Clemens & Feltham 2006).

14 Badiou 2022, p. 474

15 While the Event functions as an exception in Badiou's *Being and Event*, it is not until the second book in his system, *Logics of Worlds*, that he begins to use this term regularly. Without this language from the second book, it is understandable why one might interpret the Event in more quasi-theological terms, as something more like a miracle coming from without, rather than as the disclosure of a world's constitutive contradiction, or exclusion, which enables it to maintain its self-identity, illusory as the latter may be. Nonetheless, it is crucial for the purposes of this text, that one gives heed to the Event's exceptionality, which not only exfoliates its theological connotations, but which allows us to avoid thinking of the Event as something utterly pure, rather than as illuminating a breakdown in the world on the edge of which it takes place.

16 Ruda 2015, pp. 107-108

17 Pouillaude 2017, p. 91

18 Badiou 2005a, p. 69

19 One should note here that in the final book of his *Being and Event* system, *Immanence of Truths*, Badiou includes dance within his

catalogue of the arts without any mention of its status as a non-art or as art's transcendental condition (Badiou 2022, pp. 472-473).

20 Badiou 2007, 159

21 Badiou 2005b, n.p., italics added

22 A sentiment closely aligned with Adorno's critique of modern art insofar as 'art' in modernity takes precedence over *artworks*, and for this reason, the latter are condemned to remaining merely "work[s] in progress" (Adorno 2022, p. 36).

23 Pakes 2020

24 Pouillaude 2017

25 Badiou 2005a, p. 63

26 Clark (2011) makes the case that Cunningham may indeed represent a properly Badiouian style of dance, though because I reject the premises of Badiou's existing schema for identifying "true" dance (i.e. which actually functions as a metaphor for thought), I cannot agree with this, at least not quite yet.

27 Pouillaude 2017, p. 276

28 The fact that Badiou is one of the first continental thinkers to re-insist on order, form, and discipline—albeit in a way that is distanced from an arbitrary, "non-truthful" (viz. the militaristic preservation of the authority of a world)—makes his Nietzschean aversion to choreography rather puzzling.

29 Badiou 2015, p. 48

30 Badiou 2005b, n.p.

31 Badiou 2015, p. 62, italics mine

32 For an in-depth exploration of the Idea in Badiou, see Klepec 2019.

33 Badiou 2013, p. 14

34 Klepec 2019, p. 287

35 Ruda perspicaciously addresses this in the Epilogue to *Indifference and Repetition* (Ruda 2024).

36 Badiou 2019, p. xvii

37 Badiou 2019, xx, italics added.

38 Badiou 2019, p. xviii

39 Badiou 2019, xviii

40 Badiou 2019, p. 25

41 Badiou 2019, p. 3

42 Badiou 2019, p. 3

43 Badiou 2019, p. 25

44 Badiou 2015, p. 39

45 It may be useful to further clarify what's at stake for Badiou here by distinguishing his position from Agamben's. Agamben claims that there is an operation of power—more "insidious" than that which works to separate humans from what they can do—which "does not immediately affect what humans can do—their potentiality—but rather their 'impotentiality,' that is, what they cannot do, or better, can not do" (Agamben 2011, p. 43). Impotentiality here connotes the negativity that enables resistance; however, this amounts to an embrace of finitude for Agamben, given that nothing positive is borne from this impotentiality. For Badiou, on the other hand, incapacity is

precisely the condition for transcending the order of finitude and becoming subject.

46 While this distinction may appear to rely on an antiquated metaphysical distinguishing tool, I claim that it is entirely plausible within Badiou's project to do so. He differentiates between, for example, the political and politics. While the latter is a truth-procedure, it emerges out of the political situation of a world.

47 One could also bring in André Lepecki's claims regarding the "still-act" in dance, which is to say, the incorporation of stasis into dancing itself (similar to what John Cage has done by incorporating silence and indeterminacy into music)—a gesture which undoes "the unquestioned alignment of dance with movement" (Lepecki 2006, pp. 14-15).

48 This resembles the approach of "questioning" described by Burrows & Ritsema (2003), which is a process of questioning movement through movement, without being directed by a pre-existing mental image. Where the Badiouian approach I am laying out diverges from Burrows & Ritsema's is its eventual nature, which it enables it to treat points in a specific world/grammar, and in so doing, transcend the democratic materialist paradigm.

49 Clark 2011: 58

50 In which I had the privilege of spending the final four seasons of my own ballet career. Here, I will add that while this may, to some, indicate an over-proximity to the object on which I am about to write, I choose to give heed to Badiou, for whom it is fruitful to have such proximity, both aesthetically and philosophically, given that one is rarely graced with the chance to work alongside an artist still living.

51 Although space prohibits me from elaborating on this claim too much, it is nonetheless worth drawing a parallel between Siegal's project and the way Frank Ruda has characterized Badiou's project as an "idealism without idealism" (Ruda 2015). In a sense, Siegal could be responsible for what one might term "ballet without ballet", which is to say, a worked-through ballet that is faithful to its fundamentals, while also rigorously divesting it of what it is not actual. Put otherwise, much like Badiou's project is somewhat of a negation of the negation, in the sense of being a (materialist) return to idealism in a way that is mediated by post-idealist criticism, Siegal represents a return to ballet in a way that is mediated by its various negations and offshoots (i.e. post/modern dance, performance art [often improvisation-based], street and ballroom dancing, and non-Western movement languages), but which is not reducible to an example of mere hybridizing.

52 Homans 2010

53 Clark 2011, p. 57

54 Badiou is rather mute about how art institutions function beyond his criticisms of

'academicism' (Badiou 2019, p. 30); however, I find it to be in alignment with his position to claim that institutional reforms can be an element of a truth-procedure, given that institutions and their norms are typically reflected in the work they produce, particularly when it comes to performance art.

55 I acknowledge that this is not necessarily new within concert dance as a whole; however, such reforms have often occurred at the expense of ballet. I believe that the novelty of Ballet of Difference lies in its capacity to transform the field itself without a wholesale negation.

56 Bleeker 2017, p. 221

57 Bleeker 2017, p. 221

58 For Badiou, a single work is not a truth-procedure, but rather one localized "instance" of a truth-procedure which encompasses that work, even if the latter begins through a single work or small cluster of works (Badiou 2005a, p. 12). The work itself is the subject and one could say that, in the case of a collectively-created and performed work, the members of that collective compose the subject.

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