

The Sway or the Shudder? Hegel and Adorno on the Philosophical Status of Dance

Evan Supple

Abstract: Dance often figures as art's transcendental condition in modern European aesthetics. In this paper, I demonstrate how Hegel's early philosophy of art is guilty of rendering dance into such a condition. I then elucidate how Adorno, who adopts several of the key tenets of Hegel's philosophy of art, takes Hegel beyond himself and offers us resources for thinking about how dance may not fit within the realm of the aesthetic *per se*, but how it might serve as a *supplement* to the latter. So conceived, we can understand dance as a mode of philosophical inquiry, rather than a transcendental condition of art or purely artistic activity which does not sediment itself into a work.

Transcendental Absenting

It is not uncommon for dance to figure as art's transcendental condition in modern European thought. Badiou, Barbaras, Strauss, and Valéry, to name a few, have all published accounts substantiating this thesis, upon which I elaborate below. Despite its prevalence, this thesis has been criticized from numerous angles, with Pouillaude's critique being the most comprehensive.¹ On one hand, the act of what

Evan Supple is a PhD candidate at the European Graduate School, under the supervision of Frank Ruda. His research focuses on Hegel's complicated relationship to dance, as it pertains to both aesthetics and speculative philosophy. He holds a Master's in Interdisciplinary Studies from Athabasca University. Additionally, Evan serves as the associate artistic director of Staatstheater Nürnberg Ballet of Difference.

¹ Franko, for example, reveals how deeply embedded in particular material, ideological circumstances dance has historically been located, even if dance can also serve as a point of resistance to those circumstances (See: Franko, *Dance as Text*, 1-14). Judith Butler, while not writing about dance *per se*, problematizes the conception of the body as pre-discursive and thus external to all socio-political formations (a thesis on which the conception of dance as art's transcendental condition relies) (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 1-23).

Pouillaude terms ‘transcendental absenting’ amounts to a marginalization of dance vis-à-vis the other arts, to the extent that this act committed by philosophical aestheticians refuses dance ‘the trappings that ground the empirical reality of every other art: artists’ names, titles of works, places and dates, and, more generally, a history.’² On the other hand, such absenting inappropriately valorizes dance to the extent that it gets elevated to the status of a universal practice ‘present prior to any division of domains and art objects,’ and thus serves as the transcendental moment of all art, ‘by virtue of its *infra*-artistic character’ (UC, 5). Dance does not meet the standards of those disciplines whose status as art is incontestable (i.e. music, poetry, and painting), but it serves as the artistic ground from which they are drawn.

Pouillaude traces the initial absenting of dance in modern aesthetic thought back to Kant’s distinction between play and shape introduced in the *Critique of Judgement*. For Kant, sensuous artistic forms are either shape, and thus spatial, or play, and thus temporal. Dance, however, upsets this distinction to the extent that it is a ‘play of shapes’ and thus articulates space and time, or rather space-time, which Kant cannot admit (UC, 5).³ Dance ends up functioning as an original unity into which art, to become what it does, introduces a diremption. Or rather, art *is* this diremptive act itself. Pouillaude suggests that Kant’s ignoring of dance could be explained by dance’s inextricability from ritual-festivity and mere entertainment at the time he wrote the *Critique of Judgement*. Given that art serves as the bridge from the natural to the realm of freedom for Kant, inherited traditions and mundane entertainment need not be considered part of a philosophical-aesthetic itinerary. Pouillaude also points to philosophical aesthetics’ general disinterest in performance beyond it being the activation of a pre-existing text or score, not to mention aesthetics’ insistence on the enduring nature of the artwork, which makes it impossible to legitimize dance within this framework given its constitutive evanescence and entanglement with the embodied process of its creation and

² Pouillaude, *Unworking Choreography*, 5 (hereafter cited as UC)

³ It is worth noting that Pouillaude traces this distinction back solely to Kant, but he neglects to further flesh out the historical context informing this distinction. In fact, Lessing, in the 1766 *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, in which he critically engages with Horace’s famous dictum *ut pictura poesis*, makes the case that spatial and temporal arts are to be so distinguished and placed within a dichotomy because of the different modes of intuition they require to be experienced. Kant’s distinction on its own appears rather arbitrarily posited. Bringing the reader’s attention to Lessing’s argument would at least show that Kant’s distinction is not wholly arbitrary; however, this still would not fundamentally undermine the foundation of the argument Pouillaude subsequently makes.

transmission (UC, 6). The only place dance is permitted to appear *within* philosophical aesthetics is in the space of the *divertissement* in dramatic works, being nothing more than an ornament decorating the dramatic text's live performance.

Once dance's fundamental absence is established in modern thought (by Kant and subsequently reinforced by Hegel and Schelling), dance—whenever it is even mentioned, aside from as a *divertissement*—begins to be 'conceptualized as prior to all *techné*, prior to all training, and even prior to the domain of the empirical. In short, dance preexisted the yoking of art to technique, occupying what might be called its negative space' (UC, 8). Its subtraction from the matrix of legitimate artforms winds up forcing it to become the *condition* of those forms. Any treatment of it must first carry out or presuppose the act of transcendental absenting. Pouillaude cites several accounts from prominent twentieth-century thinkers who do just this. The first is Alain Badiou's, the core thesis of which is that 'dance is not an art, because it is the sign of the possibility of art, as inscribed in the body,' which means that dance is a transcendental condition of art—albeit a thoroughly historical condition—testifying to art's emergence as an exception to the mundane world.⁴ In other words, dance attests to the sensuous, organic body's capacity to supersede its brute immediacy and produce art (i.e. that which transcends the finite), but it is not itself art because it does not result in a *work*. This is because, as Badiou writes elsewhere, dance is 'only act.'⁵ It is sheer formal-creative activity of the subject, which is constitutively *vanishing*, making it *artistic* but not art.

Pouillaude also invokes Barbaras who claims—echoing Paul Valéry's central thesis in *Philosophy of the Dance* that all the arts are particular cases of a general type of art (dance)⁶—that dance is 'the essence of art' and that, following Strauss, it is 'located where the spontaneous creations of sensibility and artistic creation intersect, thereby bringing to light the continuity between them' (Barbaras in UC, 11). Pouillaude illustrates how, for these thinkers, dance becomes the *essence* of art to the extent that it 'manifests an originary unity' and in its 'spontaneous link to sound, dance articulates in a manner anterior to all convention and training. Dance displays the link between sensory receptivity and creative activity in its purest and most general form, a connection on which the whole collection of recognized art forms depends as each renders it specific' (UC, 11). Dance, again, points to the original non-separation of form and content, of the active and

⁴ Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 69.

⁵ Badiou, *The Century*, 159.

⁶ Valéry, *Philosophy of the Dance*.

passive, wherein the two poles of these distinctions are not yet antithetical to one another, and certainly not *reconciled* after their distinction is asserted in art (and subsequently reinforced by modernist aesthetics). For the latter thinkers, more than Badiou, dance serves as a concrete stand-in for the abstract universality that is (the singular) *Art as such*. The particular forms of art are ways of dealing with this *Ur-ground*, but which cannot *present* this ground insofar as their particular existences come about in response to the ground's diremption.

In this paper, I argue that to this list of thinkers who perform transcendental absenting also belongs Hegel—a conclusion which no one has previously drawn to my knowledge. In Hegel's early philosophy of art, as I will elucidate, dance is akin to the movement of art as such. It is not a wholly pre-artistic transcendental like it is for the above-mentioned thinkers, but, since art as a realm of Absolute Spirit, overcomes itself, dance accompanies art throughout its entire trajectory and simply is its own—or rather, art's own—self-transcendence. In this way, art is less of a pre-modern, originary unity than it is an artistic force which dynamizes art as such, but which cannot itself be presented as a particular form of art, like sculpture or music. I then turn to Adorno, who I argue provides us with resources, albeit implicitly, for taking Hegel beyond himself and according dance a legitimate status that may not be aesthetic *per se* but which does not condemn dance to being a mere transcendental condition. Whereas for Hegel dance—the 'sway' of art—must be left behind in order for spirit to progress to a more advanced shape of self-understanding, for Adorno dance is what emerges after, in response to, art as a means for spirit's advancement.

Before proceeding with the primary argument, it is worth noting that while I am in fundamental agreement with Pouillaude about the very *existence* of transcendental absenting, my aversion to it stems from reasons different from his. Pouillaude claims that the absenting of dance 'is simply a historical constraint born of the system of the fine arts' (UC, 12). In response, he sets out to undermine the logic of this system entirely (namely the logic of the work which is its very crux), but he is guided by the philosophically unfounded assumption that dance is marginalized vis-à-vis the standard arts and that this is problematic, rather than questioning whether dance should in fact garner the status of an art and not perhaps something else. While there may be merit to immanently critiquing Kant's highly influential foundation of aesthetics (the distinction between shape and play, inherited from Lessing), it is not obvious what is normatively problematic with ascribing to dance a status for which aesthetics cannot account, without then inadvertently relegating it to the sociological realm of the everyday, superfluous to

the philosophical itinerary. There is no question that dance occupies a marginal status vis-à-vis the other fine and performing arts in empirical reality—one need only cast a desultory glance toward the funding dance receives in comparison to opera, theater, music, architecture, etc. in the West to understand its dearth of political recognition and institutional disenfranchisement—but this cannot be considered simply an effect of philosophical aesthetics' transcendental absencing. I sympathize with Pouillaude's distaste for the conceptualization of dance as an original unity, given that it reduces dance to a lost (usually pre-modern) origin waiting to be retrieved; however, Pouillaude neglects to acknowledge that its extra-aesthetic, perhaps transcendental status, may not amount to it being a static, pre-historical unity.

Addressing the root of dance's philosophical de-legitimization is laudable; however, it seems that this could also be achieved by taking dance on immanently gathered terms, rather than insisting that it be crammed into the modern philosophical aesthetic framework or insisting that because the latter is in fact not possible, this framework should be subverted entirely. In what follows, I illustrate how dance may fall outside of the aesthetic sphere, but I argue that this need not imply its disenfranchisement. On the contrary, it implies that dance is more closely aligned with philosophical labor than it is with strictly artistic labor and thus has broader import than the other arts that fall squarely within the realm of the aesthetic.

The Sway

Prior to publishing the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807, Hegel gives a series of lectures on the philosophy of nature and spirit in Jena in 1805-06. In several respects, what he presents in this period differs dramatically from what he later articulates in the *Encyclopedia* (despite that the *Encyclopedia*, too, is a transcript of Hegel's lectures and not a book, strictly speaking), which appears after the publication of Hegel's two systematic works, the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*. Nonetheless, Hegel makes some crucial comments in this earlier period which bear fruit in terms of the present discussion, and which grant access to more nuanced understandings of his later thought, particularly with regard to his *Aesthetics*, without being in fundamental contradiction with the latter.

In Jena, art serves as Absolute Spirit's first tier like it does in Hegel's later work.⁷ Here, Absolute Spirit 'having taken its determinations back into itself, now generates another world. It is a world which has the form of spirit itself, where spirit's work is completed in itself and the spirit attains a view [*Anschauung*] of what is spirit itself, as itself.'⁸ After having passed through the previous stages of recognition, morality, and government, where it begins as mere form and ends by having made itself into its content while still being the *power over* the content, its final task is now to 'create this content as such, as self-knowing' (HHS, 173). It need not stand over itself as a separate power, but will fashion itself to be adequate to itself, in the sense that it will make its form and content speculatively identical. Until this point in Spirit's development, form and content have functioned oppositionally, but spirit's final task will be to reconcile the two, ensuring that neither stands over and against the other. In this realm, spirit is no longer limited to its personal or national locale, but extends beyond the latter to the extent that it is infinite.

At the first, immediate level, Absolute Spirit is art which is itself immediately form, indifferent to the content, without being a repetition of the merely external, indifferent form presented in the previous stages of recognition and morality found earlier in Objective Spirit. It is form which attempts to make itself its own content, but in so doing, only produces content (finite artworks) that is external to and thus not adequate to itself. In one regard, art conceived as it is here is proximal to the Kantian genius, insofar as it is a formal-creative power which can cast itself into any content and bring the latter into view as something infinite, emancipated from its mundane objectivity, albeit still in the form of a finite work. Hegel also adopts Kant's shape/play distinction, but he liquifies the distinction and in so doing, introduces a third term—the very *movement* of art itself. Hegel writes that art 'sways between form and the pure self of form—and thus between plastic and musical art' (HHS, 173). Art sways between two poles, between shape and play, without being reducible to one or the other. In a sense, this movement

⁷ The system, after passing from logic to nature, reaches the third realm, which is spirit (*Geist*). Spirit progresses from Subjective Spirit, which is the realm of individual consciousness and personal (embodied) experience, to Objective Spirit, which is the realm of morality and socio-political institutions, culminating with the State, and then finally, to Absolute Spirit. Absolute Spirit, the culmination of the entire system, is the domain within which spirit becomes adequate to itself as it progresses from art to religion and, finally, to speculative philosophy, wherein spirit's form and content become one and the same and thus reconciled.

⁸ Hegel, *Hegel and the Human Spirit*, 173 (hereafter referenced as HHS).

exemplifies the movement of the dialectic itself—as the tension between movement and stasis, becoming and being.

Hegel proceeds to clarify that in music ‘the formative element brings nothing into being but the transitory sound ... It is formless motion—the dance of this motion itself as the invisible presentation, belonging to time’ (HHS, 173-4). It is thus akin to what Badiou terms pure ‘act.’ Without thinking of its score (which Hegel does not do here, but does in his mature *Aesthetics*) music is a mode of appearing that is coincident with its own vanishing, reminiscent of how dance tends to be characterized in contemporary theory (though dance takes this character to its extreme, because while music can eternalize itself in a score, dance cannot even accomplish this given its inability to be captured by written notation).⁹ At the other extreme, Hegel writes, is sculpture, which is the ‘quiescent presentation of the divine’ (HHS, 174). This is the stable, enduring work severed from the process of its creation. Between the two poles are painting and poetry (ironically the two arts on which Lessing’s entire argument is based), but Hegel does not elaborate on them here. As Frank Ruda perspicaciously summarizes,

the swaying that is art is thus itself neither musical nor poetic. It is what moves art, i.e. spirit’s own attempt to view itself, but – and this is crucial – this motion can for the Hegel in Jena never be articulated within any form (or work) of art. Art is a swaying that art cannot present. It is a form of spirit where spirit is absolutely free, but it does not really know what it is.¹⁰

⁹ A tradition exemplified by Marcia Siegel’s famous claim that dance ‘exists at a perpetual vanishing point ... It is an event that disappears in the very act of materializing’ (Siegel, *At the Vanishing Point*, 1). Similarly, Peggy Phelan, speaking of performance more broadly, refers to it as the production of pure presence, as that which ‘becomes itself through disappearance’ (Phelan, *Unmarked*, 145). For Phelan, the fact that it cannot be reproduced makes it heterogeneous to the logic of consumption and hence renders it a line of flight from capitalist society. Badiou has also claimed dance to be ‘a pure instant, forever effaced’ (Badiou, *The Century*, 160). This claim is not without contestation. Pakes, for example, makes the case that there is an identity—even if not in the standard sense of identity that other artforms lay claim to—of a dance work, which means that there is something enduring about dance (Pakes, *Choreography Invisible*). Schneider argues (in my opinion unsuccessfully) that such claims regarding dance’s ephemerality are informed by Western, patriarchal, ‘ocular’ logic and work to preserve the hegemony of the archive (as opposed to embodied forms of transmission) and suggests that we give heed to dance’s status as the ‘*saving*’ of something which would disappear *only if it were not performed* (Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 99).

¹⁰ Ruda, “The End of Aesthetics”, 14 (hereafter referenced as EA).

It is worth rehearsing Ruda's broader argument in detail. Because Absolute Spirit is, at this level, only an *Anschauung* (sensuous intuition of itself, the lowest form of [self-]knowledge), 'it only sees that it is, but because it does not understand what it does, it cannot really see what it is' (EA, 14). Its being is nothing apart from its activity. Because it has not yet reached the level of representation (*Vorstellung*) or reason (*Vernunft*), its seeing is marked by an essential deficiency, namely the ephemerality of its self-understanding. Spirit thus *feels* that, at this stage, it is not enough, but it cannot articulate this in the form of propositional or speculative knowledge. Spirit only *feels* its own deficiency, not because it has false knowledge of itself, but because the realm of art is simply not the realm in which knowing proper is possible. In order to attain (self-)knowledge, it must move beyond the realm of *Anschauung* into that of *Vorstellung* and *Vernunft*, which are constitutionally incompatible with art.

According to Ruda, art sways because 'it always and in every particular *Gestalt* misses what its form is supposed to be the form of,' precisely because it is a formless sway (EA, 15). The sway is the form which feeling takes, which is precisely to be formless. It is not yet the form of knowledge. Spirit [*Geist*] is driven, animated—*be-geist-ert*—by what moves it, which is itself, but it is a self which is not fully known and is thus not fully itself. Since spirit here *is* art, and spirit's task is to comprehend itself, it must get a grasp on itself as its own object—though not an alien object since at this stage spirit is not creating a world which will come to have autonomy over and against itself, but is creating its own object, *itself as object*—however, it cannot but fail insofar as it is not yet a formed object, but merely an indeterminate sway. It is 'a form of a swaying that originates in the perpetually missed encounter with itself' (EA, 15). Because of this, spirit necessarily undoes what it just did, because it feels that this is never 'it', and in this sense, it is 'its own undoing, its own unworking. A grasp of itself that never lasts ... [I]t fails to grasp and present its own failure to itself' (EA, 15). Spirit's self-comprehension at this level is thus, insofar as it fails to endure, ephemeral, though not purely in the temporal sense, since it occurs in the sway *between* the temporal and the plastic. The ephemerality is rather *spatio-temporal*.

Later in his mature *Aesthetics*, Hegel will insist that art's primary purpose is to make 'spiritual inspiration conspicuous' by bringing it into the realm of external existence, conferring upon it the quality of permanence, thereby making it superior to nature, the appearance of which is merely transient.¹¹ And while the

¹¹ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 29.

movement of art in his mature *Aesthetics* is underpinned by the structure of the Absolute Idea rather than indeterminate swaying, and rather than swaying between the plastic and the musical, art will *progress* from the plastic to the musical to the dramatic as spirit inwardizes itself (*erinnert sich*), Hegel will nonetheless not have done away with the problem of art's inability to grasp itself *as itself*, at least in Western modernity when this becomes a sweeping imperative. The various forms and particular works into which it makes itself will continually fail to concretize its own essentially dynamic nature, hence why, despite its efforts to make itself permanent and enduring, it will have no choice but to overcome the domain of art entirely. In other words, art remains a 'grasp of itself that never lasts' and ephemerality returns with a vengeance. Hegel's infamous announcement of art's end (which is implicit in his Jena lectures since art negates itself into religion) in the *Aesthetics* is, among other points, an announcement of its failure to grasp itself and, what is the same, its failure to be able to grasp (*Be-griff-en*) *per se*. In attempting to grasp its constitutively infinite self by making itself permanent in the form of sensuous particularity (i.e. single artworks), it only re-finitizes itself, but in so doing, fails, given that it is not adequate to itself (the self which eventually realizes itself fully in the form of the Absolute Idea) in these particular forms and the works to which they give rise. Moving beyond art will enable Absolute Spirit to (re)discover its infinity. The ephemerality which emerges in art, or after art—different from the vulgar ephemerality of nature—reveals the infinity which art's finitizing agenda cannot wholly encapsulate. Art, despite being an expression of Absolute Spirit, falls short of giving the Absolute Idea finite form, precisely because the Absolute Idea cannot be adequately presented in finite form.

By announcing the end of art (or rather revealing its necessary self-overcoming), Hegel deduces the necessity of proceeding to religion, the second tier of Absolute Spirit which is characterized by representation, or picture-thinking (*Vorstellung*), which is a more advanced form of self-understanding than the mere *Anschauung* in art. Religion will also overcome itself and bring Spirit's journey to an end in the form of speculative philosophy. In the latter realm, wherein the *philosophy* of art becomes possible, it can make its earlier phases explicit by retroactively conceptualizing what it could not during those prior phases. Only in philosophy can the sway of art be recognized as such; however, merely as a *memory*.¹² As Ruda again suggests, 'the truth of art is that the truth of art is to be found in another

¹² Jay Bernstein makes a case for art's status as a memorial act in his *The Fate of Art*, along these lines.

discourse, in another form of spirit. Art's structure as such demonstrates that it is superseded, because it is internally, structurally nothing but its own self-supersession from the beginning ... Art is its own self-supersession, as this is art's structure, its sway' (EA, 17). As such, art's movement is simply self-transcendence, and it must be left behind for spirit to progress to a more advanced self-understanding. Art's movement begins as a transcendental condition underlying art (i.e. art as such is prior to its particular forms, while also being a movement between those forms, thereby presupposing them), but this transcendental is dynamic, insofar as it pushes art to overcome itself and give way to a new realm. Because spirit in art only understands itself in terms of *Anschauung*, it cannot actually grasp itself. By the time it can (retrospectively) understand what it was in the realm of art, it will be constitutively lost, unable to be reactivated in its *artistic* state. Once spirit becomes retrospectively aware of what it *was*, spirit is no longer swaying. The sway, or what I will substitute with the *dance* of art, cannot be philosophically legitimized other than as an artifact of its self-overcoming. Put otherwise, dance cannot be brought to presence, and thus philosophically legitimized, because once spirit becomes (retrospectively) aware of it, it is no longer swaying (which is not to say it reaches stasis, but rather, its movement is no longer that of a sway), and thus it remains something eternally past. It becomes precisely the type of lost origin that Pouillaude, as mentioned above, condemns. Perhaps this is not the end of the story; however, to understand whether it is or not, we must move to Adorno to get his account first.

The Shudder

Adorno never provides a list of the forms he does and does not consider art, for such an attempt was 'dared only by those all-disposing philosophical systems that reserved a niche for every phenomenon'¹³; however, he does make clear that he remains within the modern aesthetic paradigm insofar as his consideration of painting, music, and literature as art is unequivocal, whereas other forms which have not historically factored into aesthetic systems are barely mentioned (save for cinema, of course, which he repudiates for being an ideological arm of the culture industry). By other forms I mean, of course, dance, but also performance art more broadly. In a passing comment, implicitly directed against Antonin Artaud, Adorno denies the merit of the then-emerging (anti-)tradition of

¹³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 245 (hereafter referenced as AT).

performance art (i.e. 'art' which rebels against semblance). Adorno states that in an artwork 'a process of development is objectivated and brought to an equilibrium, [and] this objectivation thereby negates the process and reduces it to a mere as-if' (AT, 375). This is why, he claims, that in the wake of the rebellion of art against semblance, 'the forms of aesthetic objectivation have been rejected and the attempt was made to replace a merely simulated process of development with an immediate, improvisational process of becoming, even though the power of art, its dynamic element, could not exist without such fixation and thus without its semblance' (AT, 375). Adorno thus retrenches the point made in most modern aesthetic thought and incessantly reinforced by contemporary analytic aesthetics, that art requires an enduring object. Much like Hegel, for whom art is an inadequate but necessary form of Absolute Spirit, we need this detour—in Adorno's case the detour is semblance—in order to move beyond it. However, for Adorno, in contrast to Hegel, this is not due to an allergy to ephemerality but is a requirement that he believes will in fact do justice to the ephemeral (which he sometimes terms the nonexistent or the nonidentical, designating the particularity which escapes the subsumptive regime of the concept), and in fact enable the disclosure of ephemerality's emancipatory value. Adorno argues at several junctures that one of Hegel's greatest failures in his aesthetic thought was his failure to grasp that 'art's substance could be its transitoriness' (AT, 4). Adorno writes that

fixation through print or scores is not external to the work; only through them does the work become autonomous from its genesis. That explains the primacy of the text over its performance. What is not fixated in art is—for the most part only illusorily—closer to the mimetic impulse but usually below—not above—the fixated, a vestige of an obsolete and usually regressive practice (AT, 137).

In other words, 'quasi-artistic practices' such as dance, which are unable to congeal into an enduring artifact, can only be seen as 'regressive' when we read Adorno to the letter. The necessity for a work to sever itself from its genesis points to the claim that only once emancipated from its process of creation can art fulfill its purpose and become of more-than-particular, even universal, emancipatory import. For thinkers such as Artaud and artists working in the tradition he inaugurates, the congealment of art into semblance divorces art from the real, reinforces the repressive regime of representation, and makes art, insofar as it becomes a

thing, complicit with the forces of social reification.¹⁴ For Adorno, in contrast, art indeed ‘suffer[s] from its immanent condition as a thing’ but circumvention of its thing-like nature from the outset will obviate its emancipatory impact. On the contrary, it forces art into a pre-modern condition. Art ‘gains no power over semblance by its abolition’ (AT, 149).

Semblance, according to Adorno, which makes art into a thing, but which is not directly synonymous with its fixation (i.e. its notation), is responsible for ensuring art’s autonomy and ensuring that it appears as more than a mere reflection of empirical reality or functions as more than direct, pragmatic communication. Only once the movement of artworks comes to a standstill by becoming objectified can artworks become ‘force-fields of their antagonisms’ and make them visible (AT, 242). As Sakoparnig articulates, ‘a non-reflective and non-transparent semblance merely replicates and reduplicates the deceptive semblance in society, without enabling critical reflection on it and its eventual defeat.’¹⁵ Rüdiger Bubner protests that this conceptualization renders Adorno’s theory ‘outdated’ because it fails recognize the potential of performance art which disrupts this understanding.¹⁶ Bubner is not entirely wrong, but as I hope to make clear in what follows, we can still extract resources from *Aesthetic Theory* which enable us to champion performance, or more specifically, dance, despite Adorno’s explicit comments which are in tension with such a claim.

All of the above characterizations may be true of particular works of art for Adorno, which is much the same for Hegel; however, we can also discern a certain *movement* of art in Adorno, similar to what we find in Hegel, which art does not itself make explicit, but which becomes explicit in aesthetic *experience*. Adorno points toward art as something distinct from artworks but which underpins them, when he writes, for example, that ‘artists are always also at work on art and not only on artworks. Art as such is independent even of the artworks’ consciousness’ (AT, 249). What is such ‘art’ if not the mosaic of individual works that make up its domain? Elsewhere, Adorno writes that artworks ‘are neither pure [mimetic] impulse nor its form, but rather the congealed process that transpires between them’ (AT, 179). In other words, artworks are coagulations of a process, of the sway that is art, we might say in Hegelian terms. While, for Hegel, artworks are produced out of the sway, they are not embodiments of the sway itself, but for

¹⁴ See Artaud, *Theatre and Its Double*.

¹⁵ Sakoparnig, “Performatization and the Rescue of Aesthetic Semblance,” 63.

¹⁶ Bubner, “Bedingungen,” 30.

Adorno, the sway is congealed in the work, but still not explicitly presented. The movement remains something which ‘takes place unconsciously in artworks’ (AT, 247). Only *philosophy* is able to make this explicit, for ‘[a]esthetic experience is not genuine experience unless it becomes philosophy’ (AT, 179).

What is the role of philosophy vis-à-vis art and aesthetic experience? For Adorno, without critical engagement with the work of art, it remains consigned to its status as a mere thing. Critical philosophical engagement with the work, which he sometimes equates to interpretation, is the movement which activates the immanent antagonisms sedimented in the work, without following the rationalist logic of subsumption or performing the work of hermeneutics. Philosophical labor must give heed to the non-identical without submitting it to the logic of identity, but it must not concern itself with exfoliating its sensuousness. It must harness the non-identical in art and bring it to grasp without making it *discursive*. As Bowie argues, Adorno’s ‘positive relationship to “what cannot be fully grasped” puts him at odds with philosophical positions, like Hegel’s in the *Aesthetics*, for which the lack of full determinacy and the fleeting nature of things in art are precisely what philosophy is supposed to overcome’ (AT, 155). Philosophical engagement with art, which is necessarily negative (vis-à-vis the artwork’s fixation) makes semblance *move*.

The negative moment is indeed crucial; one could not gain access to the critical potential of this movement if it were directly perceived and if the creation of semblance was passed over. The detour that is semblance is necessary, as the very *act* of activation—which one might conceive as a negation of negation—is crucial to coming into contact with art’s truth-content, namely by producing a distance from the work qua thing. The activation of art’s antagonisms does not simply enable a return to their pre-formalized state, but rather *produces* them anew. On this note, Adorno writes that

[w]hat is specific to artworks—their form—can never, as the sedimentation of content fully disown its origin. Aesthetic success is essentially measured by whether the formed object is able to awake the content sedimented in the form. In general, then, the hermeneutics of artworks is the translation of their formal elements into content. This content does not, however, fall directly to art, as if this content only needed to be gleaned from reality. Rather, it is constituted by way of a countermovement. Content makes its mark in those works that distance themselves from it (AT, 192).

Elsewhere, on this note, which will be important for the following argument, Adorno claims in passing that '[w]hat are taken to be the purest forms (e.g., traditional musical forms) can be traced back even in the smallest idiomatic detail to content such as dance' (AT, 6). This is the only time Adorno mentions dance in *Aesthetic Theory*. While one may charge him with Pouillaude's critique—that dance is synonymous with the origin, the pure content prior to artistic form, rather than itself being a legitimate art—one can also dispel this by pointing to Adorno's criticism of the notion of the origin. Art's very character prohibits its historical reduction 'to its prehistorical or early origins' since this character itself is 'the result of historical development' (AT, 429). The concept of origin is but a denial of art's historicity. Art emerges in and through history, as a response to it, and thus has no need to be grounded in an originary, non-dirempted locus.

Returning to Adorno's above comment, if interpretation is the translation of formal elements into content, or rather *back into content* (but in a way that is not simply a return to its original state, if one can even speak of such originality), since form is sedimented content, and also since the undoing of form (i.e. activation of the antagonisms it houses) means the undoing of the work's status *as a work*—as something self-identical and transhistorically durable—then aesthetic engagement is itself an unworking. Aesthetic engagement does not merely externally reflect on the artwork and unwork it from a secure subjective distance. Aesthetic comportment, inasmuch as it is defined by a comportment toward the object and a weakening of the subject's dominance, is the immanent unworking of the object itself. An artwork's own development is the same as the 'process of [its] collapse' and hence the artwork is itself its own unworking (AT, 245). As Alain Badiou observes, the type of aesthetics Adorno privileges gives an account of 'a process of formal "doing" that is simultaneously a disintegration of form, a form that is simultaneously the undoing of form.'¹⁷ Only by forming what is averse to form and hence will disintegrate this form from within can the latter be made intelligible, even if not discursively so.

Aesthetic comportment, in terms of critical engagement with art, much as it has to do with finite individual works, is also a subjective capacity: 'the capacity to shudder' (AT, 437). The latter figures as an integral concept in *Aesthetic Theory* and it is worth spelling out its parameters. The shudder speaks to both the moment of transience, the nonexistent, which factors into art as its indeterminable object, and to the moment of 'shock' which is aroused in true aesthetic experience. This

¹⁷ Badiou, *Wagner*, 50.

shock 'is not employed to trigger personal, otherwise repressed emotions. Rather, this shock is the moment in which recipients forget themselves and disappear into the work; it is the moment of being shaken' (AT, 332). Although subtly echoing the experience of the Kantian sublime, the shudder nevertheless differs from the latter insofar as it does not produce the I's experience of itself as superior to what stands before it, but rather is 'a memento of the liquidation of the I' (AT, 333). In the shudder, the I becomes aware of 'the possibility of letting self-preservation [and thus the logic of capitalist exchange society] fall away ... The I is seized by the unmetaphorical, semblance-shattering consciousness' (AT, 333). The shudder shatters the semblance of the work, but insofar as the subject at this moment becomes defined as the intrusion of objectivity into the confines of itself, the shattering of the work's semblance and the shattering of the semblance that is the I are (speculatively) identical. The I, insofar as it is a semblance, must see itself reflected in an external semblance and the latter's subsequent negation in order for the I (and its subsumptive, reified character) to catch a glimpse beyond itself.

To Shudder or To Sway?

To summarize the argument that has developed thus far, aesthetic comportment for both Hegel and Adorno equates to a weakening of the self or of spirit and this weakening amounts to a move toward philosophy. For Adorno, the weakening of the self enables the subject to grasp, even if for a fleeting moment, an alternative world, a reconciled, non-reified world which does not yet exist. For Hegel in Jena, in contrast, the self-*unawareness* constitutive of art points to the necessity of moving beyond art, of weakening its aesthetic being in favor of a more conceptually adequate, enduring self, commensurate with the other two tiers of Absolute Spirit. This necessity is not an externally imposed telos but, since art is nothing but its own self-supersession, simply the result of art's immanent itinerary. Even in the mature *Aesthetics*, which ends with the ironic subject shut up within itself, the subject's *inability* to lose itself becomes precisely the impetus for it to do so and proceed toward the higher echelons of religion and philosophy.

For the Hegel in Jena, dance figures very much like the type of transcendental condition that Pouillaude critiques. Dance is simply the sway (*Schwank*) which eludes every artwork but which is each work's condition of possibility. It is the singular Art-as-such which Absolute Spirit *qua* art cannot recognize other than in retrospect. In this sense, Hegel is close to Heidegger and Agamben, and the Ancient Greeks by proxy, on the status of art. It is not a *praxis* (for praxis only becomes possible with the development of the modern will), but a *poesis*, a pro-

duction, a bringing forth of being from non-being, in the Ancient Greek sense. Pro-duction has its limit ‘outside itself: that is, it is pro-ductive, it is the original principle of something other than itself.’¹⁸ The way that the Greeks thought of art is different from the way modern aesthetics conceives of it. Ancient Greek poesis ‘does not bring itself into presence in the work, as acting brings itself into presence in the act; the work of art is not the result of a doing’ (although Hegel does indicate that artistic action consists in imbuing any content with infinity, aligning him somewhat Kant’s modernist framework), ‘but something substantially other than the principle that has pro-duced it into presence.’¹⁹ Art for the Hegel in Jena is not yet modern. If art is not-yet-modern and art as such is that which sways, then swaying, or dancing, cannot be something commensurate with, or relevant to, modernity, other than as an artifact.

Once it has moved beyond art—and when it moves beyond art, it does not just simply jettison its sensuousness, but this pro-ductive dimension itself, supplanting it with the *practical* dimension, commensurate with the modern will—Absolute Spirit *may* give body to this prior moment again, the sway, in a conscious way. However, once *conceptualized* it is no longer what it was prior because of the mediation enforced upon it, making it but a memorial act, a taking up of the *trace* of this prior dimension, but which is now superfluous to spirit’s itinerary given that it is now decisively modern. The will, which enables the retrospective apprehension of the sway, is also that which precludes the latter’s return. Should it be given body as a memory, the swaying self of Absolute Spirit (much like the return of ephemerality at the end of the mature *Aesthetics*) would be mimicking its own demise, as something like the undead moment of Absolute Spirit. However, there is no immanent necessity for such a movement to be given body. Spirit has no need for such nostalgia in religion or philosophy. Dance, by this account, is a superfluity, both more than the individual art forms such as sculpture and music, but also less insofar as it eludes artistic presentation and is sublated along with art’s sublation. So much for the possibility of doing justice to dance with the Hegel in Jena.

Adorno, on the other hand, offers us a path forward. For Adorno, ‘the sway’—dance—also emerges *after* art but as an immanent necessity for engaging with art. In his language, the shudder, which is part and parcel of philosophy itself is something which is seated in the aesthetic but waiting to escape it. Indeed, following

¹⁸ Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 76.

¹⁹ Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 73.

Adorno's logic, a direct presentation of the shudder would be but a vulgar, ideological imitation of vulgar, ideological subjective experience. It would be congruent with desire and thus remain confined within the coordinates of the social reality in which it emerges. Hence why dance—the 'art' (I deliberately put this in quotations for the moment given that its status as an art proper has been thrown into question by what has preceded) that is without object and is not objectively severed from its genesis—cannot figure into the realm of aesthetics as such for Adorno.

Dance, however, occupies a crucial position if we consider it a supplement to art, as that *into which art turns* insofar as it turns into philosophy. Performance for Adorno, broadly speaking, as clarified by Sakoparnig, 'is a general term for mimetic activity that revitalizes the mediation processes that constitute the artwork. In this sense, performance is an essential operation for bringing the artwork to life, showing that it is more than a mere thing.'²⁰ In a related sense, Martinson suggests that immanent critique is itself 'philosophical performance.'²¹ With a simple inversion, his formula would be correct according to my reading: (*philosophical*) *performance is itself immanent critique*. What is philosophy for Adorno? It certainly carries out conceptual labor, differentiating it from the sensuous work art carries out; however, this conceptual labor is not synonymous with what he (pejoratively) designates 'identity thinking.' That is, thought which subsumes particularities under the identificatory regime of the universal. Philosophy for Adorno is more critical than this, instead working to locate (or produce, or rather, produce) the non-identical, which, if it is to preserve its integrity and not be lost to the operation of subsumption, remains necessarily ephemeral. Because of the non-identical's heterogeneity to discursivity, it cannot be integrated into a temporal order which would enable it to endure thanks to conceptual support. Following Bowie, one ought to bear in mind that 'the participation in art [Adorno] talks of is inherently "ephemeral."²² That is, it is not only the non-identical which is ephemeral, but also the philosophical labor which works alongside it. If the object with which it interacts is itself intelligible without being discursively so, then so must philosophy. On this point, philosophy becomes a discipline the contours of which are similar to, or speculatively identical with, dance. Dance's lack of a clear definition, even by analytic philosophical accounts²³, has plagued both dance

²⁰ Sakoparnig, "Performatization and the Rescue of Aesthetic Semblance," 62.

²¹ Martinson, "What Is Adorno Doing?", 171.

²² Bowie, *Adorno*, 155.

²³ For example, see McFee's *Understanding Dance* and Pakes' *Choreography Invisible*.

artists and dance theorists for decades; however, seen in this light, this becomes its redeeming quality. For Hegel, on the one hand, the sway, or dance, must be overcome for spirit's advancement. For Adorno, on the other hand, it is what art must *give rise to* in order for the emancipatory potential of art, as a negation of modern capitalist society and a (glimpse of a) promise of an alternative, to be gleaned.

Indeed, in the concrete sense, one might claim that dance is a response to, an activation of, for example, a piece of music or a text that elicits an impulse to move, at least for narrative ballets such as *Swan Lake* or *Giselle* or other more abstract works created in direct response to musical inspiration. However, given that working alongside Adorno permits one to speak with a certain degree of abstraction, one would not be out of line to claim that dance gives body to such activity *as such, in-itself*. *Dance is philosophy* insofar as the latter *appears*. Dance is the subject *doing philosophy*, and whether this appears like dance as we (think we) know it, is not of much concern here. Dance designates primarily the work carried out; the contours of its sensuous appearance are of secondary relevance. Philosophy is dance, and art, if it is to be more than a collection of sensuous thing-like works devoid of critical potential, *needs dance*. In contrast to Hegel, where one *could* give body to the sway after art's sublation, for Adorno, this becomes a necessity. Dance *enables* art's self-unworking such that it can reveal its truth-content. Rather than being unable to itself become a work, being unable to rise up to the standards of philosophical aesthetics, this ultimately serves to demonstrate dance's necessity. Dance emerges after the culmination of the logic of the work, qua something enduring, generative of meaning, and extricated from the process of its creation and transmission. It need not be seen as falling short of aesthetic standards insofar as it gives body to aesthetic standards' self-supersession. Dance is not—or is not *only*—the pure art, in the singular sense, the pure artistic activity which need not give rise to actuality, which precedes the superior forms which are able to resolve into works. Dance *follows* art. Returning to Pouillaude, he states in an interpretation of Valéry, that

Dance models not the entirety of each art but only its *actuality* or *present*. This actuality is not that of the completed work but resides rather in its margins ... this actuality resides in both the action that produces the work and the action that manifests it. In each case, if the various arts derive from Dance, this is because activating the work obliges one to step beyond the fixity of its substance, dance around it in order to make it stand up. The *work* is only possible in virtue of that which is most

foreign to it, the action which *unworks* it. There is, then, necessary recourse to *the act*, a necessary detour via actualization of that thing that would otherwise remain merely virtual, dispersed in dreams of a future work or in half-dead traces of a past one. And this leads us to see in dance the *living present* of every art' (UC, 24-25).

While Pouillaude takes issue with dance being conceived as art's transcendental unity on the grounds that this marginalizes and infantilizes dance, and thus enjoins the demolition of aesthetics, one can now respond that one need not dissolve aesthetics—it is an illusion necessary for its overcoming, singularized in individual works of art. Pouillaude himself provides resources for thinking about dance not as a mere transcendental, nor as a determinate element of aesthetics, but as a *supplement*; however, he fails to make this explicit himself. By virtue of dance's appearance after art, dance is the 'art' which survives art's self-sublation.

Conclusion

To recapitulate, I began by demonstrating how Hegel's early account of art falls squarely within the paradigm that Pouillaude critiques. That is to say, it figures as a transcendental condition of art that cannot be presented within art itself, for it is a formless sway between form and formlessness. As I have claimed here, despite that Hegel does not explicitly treat dance himself, the sway of art is analogous to dance and, so conceived, enables us to see how it might figure within the Hegelian text, even if only negatively. I then proceeded to demonstrate how Adorno adopts several of the tenets of Hegel's aesthetic framework, with the notable exception of Hegel's allergy to ephemerality. Whereas the latter for Hegel ostensibly prevents spirit from attaining an adequate self-understanding, it points toward emancipation for Adorno. Adorno admits of a movement of art, but rather than arguing that it remains a transcendental condition as Hegel does, he transplants this movement directly into works of art themselves and demonstrates how philosophical interpretation can access this movement and its emancipatory potential vis-à-vis modern capitalist society. Although Adorno, like Hegel, does not explicitly address dance, his conception of philosophy—which also serves as an immanent definition of dance—enables us to position dance as a mode of philosophical inquiry in its own right. It is a practice which resists reification and activates the immanent potential of what has been reified insofar as it attunes itself to the non-identical and is itself the non-identical to which it is drawn. Philosophy for Adorno, insofar as it negates reification, is not simply a resuscitation of the

pre-modern, but rather points beyond rationalist society and offers us a glimpse of an immanent beyond. Dance qua philosophy serves not as a quasi-artistic practice that is inadequate relative to the major art forms, such as poetry and painting, but rather as a *supplement* to art. In the ephemeral movement of dance, we see the fulfillment of philosophy's promise: to reveal the infinite where it otherwise seems to have been foreclosed.

Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. New York: Bloomsbury Revelations, 2013.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Man Without Content*. Translated by Georgia Albert. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Artaud, Antonin. *Theatre and Its Double*. Translated by Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1958.
- Badiou, Alain. *Five Lessons on Wagner*. Translated by Susan Spitzer. New York: Verso, 2010.
- Badiou, Alain. *The Century*. Translated by Alberto Toscano. Cambridge: Polity, 2007.
- Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Translated by Alberto Toscano. Stanford: Stanford University, 2005.
- Bernstein, Jay M. *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*. University Park: Pennsylvania State, 1992.
- Bowie, Andrew. *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Polity, 2013.
- Bubner, Rüdiger. "Über einige Bedingungen gegenwärtiger Ästhetik." *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* vol. 5 (1973): 38–73. Rpt. in *Ästhetische Erfahrung*. Ed. Rüdiger Bubner. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989. 9–51.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Franko, Mark. *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2015.
- Hegel, Georg W.F. *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Translated by T.M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University, 1975.
- Hegel, Georg W.F. & Leo Rausch. *Hegel and the Human Spirit: A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-06)*. Translated by Leo Rausch. Detroit: Wayne State University, 1983.

- Martinson, Mattias. "What Is Adorno Doing? Immanent Critique as Philosophical Performance." In *Adorno and Performance*. Edited by Will Daddario and Karoline Gritzner. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. pp. 171-189.
- McFee, Graham. *Understanding Dance*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Pakes, Anna. *Choreography Invisible*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2020.
- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Pouillaude, Frédéric. *Unworking Choreography: The Notion of the Work in Dance*. Translated by Anna Pakes. Oxford: Oxford University, 2017.
- Ruda, Frank. "The End of Aesthetics." In *Future Perfect: Catastrophe and Redemption in the Contemporary*. Edited by Rohit Goel. Beirut: Kaph Books, 2023.
- Sakoparnig, Andrea. "Performatization and the Rescue of Aesthetic Semblance." In *Adorno and Performance*. Edited by Will Daddario and Karoline Gritzner. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. pp. 53-66.
- Schneider, Rebecca. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Siegel, Marcia. *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance*. New York: Saturday Review Press, 1968.
- Valéry, Paul. "Philosophy of the Dance" in *Salmagundi*, 33/34. 1976: pp. 65-75.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike International 4.0 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>; or, (b) send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 2nd Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA