

IN REMEMBRANCE OF DANCE LOST¹

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Abstract

Dance as a performing art is differentiated partly by the distinctive role of the dancer: unlike the musician, whose behaviour *causes* the music, the dancer's actions *instantiate* that dance. As a result, danceworks exist concretely only at the moment of performance: as Marcia Siegel (1972) put it, dances exist "at a perpetual vanishing point". Since danceworks are performables, they depend on dancers able to perform them. This requires more than the proper training. The paper considers a description by Arlene Croce of a performance of Martha Graham's *Primitive Mysteries* which failed to realise the genius of the work. For the work as performed was not *understandable* by the contemporary audience. The traditions of performance for dances of this kind had been lost. As a result, the dancework could disappear from the artistic canon. So, while the dancers have a key role in maintaining the possibility of performance of a particular dancework, that is not the only role.

Keywords

Ephemerality, ontology of dance, Arlene Croce, Martha Graham, disappearance of dancework, traditions of performance

Given the distinctive place of dance among the performing arts, the philosophical aesthetics of dance-the-artform perhaps differs from other areas of philosophical aesthetics. Moreover, at least one basis for that difference lies in the place of *the dancer* – the precise role of the dancer makes at least a big part of the difference. (So, roughly, *dancers* do it!)

Here, three points should be stressed. First, and in common with other performing arts, typical *danceworks* are *performables*: that is, the very same dance can be re-performed on another occasion, despite the inevitable differences between such performances; and despite the dances themselves being concrete only at the "perpetual vanishing point" (Siegel, 1972, p. 1) of such performances. So the central ontology (ugh!) is of *danceworks* viewed as *performables*. This

1 Much of this paper re-cycles passages from my book *The Philosophical Aesthetics of Dance* (cited as PAD), recently published by Dance Books. Having written some of the passages as well as I could, I felt no need to change them here. My other works are cited as: McFee, 1992: UD; McFee, 1994/2004: CDE; McFee, 2010: EKT; McFee, 2011a: AJ.

is important since, for me, *dancerly* or artistic matters have priority over the claims of the very abstract metaphysics of abstract objects such as types. And this emphasis on beginning from dance *practice* is crucial to my methodological commitments.

But, by contrast with other performing arts, the specific physicality of the dancers is drawn on in a more concrete way. In this sense, *dancers* provide the distinctiveness of the artform; and in two ways.

So (second point), dancers should be contrasted with musicians. Thus, musicians do bring about “[...] those things [...] of which the witnessable work consists” (Urmson, 1976, p. 243): they *make* or *cause* the sounds that instantiate the musical work. By contrast, in typical cases dancers are the dance – their movements instantiate the artwork, rather than merely *causing* it.

But (third point) dancers also differ from typical practitioners in other performing arts, such as theatre and opera, which have commonalities: there is something to be said for the view that “[o]pera is [...] *drama per musica*” (Sharpe, 1983, p. 26), despite the stress Jim Hamilton (2007, pp. 58-59) rightly places on the variety within what might, in everyday speech, be called *acting*. And both opera and theatre should stress the place of language, or language-like understanding – they typically involve language (which must therefore be given a role in their artistic meaning); and, in those other arts, the typical behaviour of practitioners is in certain ways similar to the rest of human life: words are involved. (On the idea that our everyday lives are circumscribed by talk, see EKT, pp. 49-52.) Hence the movements of those practitioners can be understood in relation to those words, as with everyday conversations. If the relationship is not always a complementary one, that too is an everyday experience: people’s postures and gestures can conflict with their utterance. For dance, though, that meaning or intending is centrally bodily: that begins to distinguish danceworks from those with *linguistic* meaning ...setting aside, of course, any critical commentary they develop. And that is one problem for those who seek to make understanding dance more like understanding the linguistic. Certainly, something distinctive should be said about dancework-*meaning* (AJ, pp. 54-55).

Further, there seems to be an additional connection to the specific bodies of specific dancers. For many dances today are made on the bodies of particular dancers, with particular skills and mastery (to whatever degree) of particular techniques; and that fact has *some* bearing here – although perhaps less than is sometimes imagined, since those danceworks (being performables) could in *principle* be performed by a different dancer.

Moreover, it is a commonplace that dance performances are, in some sense, ephemeral: that they are only available to us as we watch them. Marcia Siegel (1972, p. 1) captured this sense in her slogan, quoted above, that danceworks “[...] exist at a perpetual vanishing point”. Yet is this limitation merely practical? Is it a *limitation* at all? Perhaps, instead, the ephemerality of dances should be celebrated, at least from the dancer’s perspective, in ways Renee Conroy (2011) has suggested. Certainly, too much *professional* ontology looks unhelpful. As Drid Williams (2004, p. 72) points out:

It is as though we are being asked, “where is, e.g. *Swan Lake*, when no one is performing it?” Otherwise sensible, rational people who would hoot at the question, “where is spoken language when it is not being spoken?” [...] do not hesitate to ask this question about dancing.

But, of course, perhaps they should. For language is typically not ephemeral: perhaps the case of dance is different. Still, the question as she raises it should reinforce my decision to stress aspects of dance *practice* as a starting point.

Here, though, I consider two other features of danceworks, by drawing on the conditions, first, for retaining artworks that might be thought lost and, second, for losing ones that might be thought retained – where both of these turn out to be *dancerly* or *artistic* matters; and hence are rightly accorded a central place in our enquiries. That is, I shall comment on retrieving seemingly lost works (Part I), before exploring another aspect of ephemerality which, in stressing the role of the dancer, depends in a rather different way on the status of dance as a performing art (Part II).

I

Typical *danceworks* are *performables*: they can be re-performed on another occasion. Does this suggest anything concerning their posterity? The parallel with other artforms (and especially music, which seems comparably ephemeral in performance) suggests that the default position here should involve, at the least, the desire to preserve dances so that later generations can see them (if they want to). This desire can be attributed (speculatively) to choreographers since, after all, it seems likely that artists would hope for the widest of audiences for their artworks.

Of course, one worry here might be precisely whether a work re-performed at some later date is indeed the very same work as that just seen. Thus, in the musical version of the film *The Producers* (2005), the central character Max Bialystock (played by Nathan Lane) is in prison, having “flash-backs” as to how he arrived in this parlous state. But the most distant “memories”, as we see them, turn out not to be his: as he says, “Somebody else’s past is flashing before my eyes”. Clearly, this situation must be avoided by anyone claiming that proper understanding of dance requires “knowing where we came from”: the past we gather in must be *our* past. Furthermore, at any time, most dances composed and performed – like most novels, plays or poems written, or paintings and sculptures produced – are, frankly, *bad*. So much in the past of any artform is not worth the effort of “re-finding”.

For analytic purposes at least, two occasions for concerns of this sort should be distinguished. In the first, the work passed out of the repertoire some time ago, so dancers, staggers, and choreographers of today have comparatively little on which to base a performance of that past work – call that *reconstruction of the dance* in question. For the other case, imagine a choreographer hoping that his or her work will be viewed by posterity; or an audience that hopes the work will be available to later generations. Here, then, the concern is with the preservation of *danceworks*. It might seem that danceworks cannot be preserved, at least beyond the memories

of those involved in creating and performing them. Minimally, their preservation seems hampered when relying simply on the memories of dancers, choreographers, and those involved. Both positions – *reconstruction* and *preservation* – have been urged for danceworks, but my concern in this paper is with *preservation*.

On this conception, the task I have called the *preservation* of the dance simply involves putting that dancework back into the repertoire. Others – such as companies, staggers, and the like – could then add that dance to their repertoires, should they want to. Here the parallel with plays is fairly exact: not all plays that could be performed at a particular time actually are. For instance, the plays of Jack B. Yeats (W. B.'s smarter brother) have disappeared from the active repertoire; and this seems a judgement of them, perhaps reflecting a kind of "test of time" which they failed. Of course, that conclusion may be premature: a new director might find an exciting new way to stage one of these plays (or what he *took* to be exciting and new). Then that play would return to the repertoire, and its fate – its artistic merit, as then determined – would rest with appreciators. That only happens when the work is still somehow extant. So a broadly reconstructive process could be justified as preserving works. And, again on a parallel with plays, this form of reconstructive *preservation* might involve collecting scores, notes, photographs, videos and such like, so that – should anyone want to stage that dance – he/she would be able to do so.

Of course, that justification for retaining the works would not, of itself, justify the *performance* of the works thus preserved. For these are not being offered as *worthwhile* works of the period; but only as works of that period. The dance then resembles a play-script on a shelf: the possibility (but not the actuality) of a performance. That would (or certainly might) preserve a work in a performing art. Yet, then, some *purpose* to a performance of the dancework is still required to justify *actually* performing it: and that purpose, although requiring clarity, need not always reside in the dancework's artistic appreciation. Thus, for visual art, and very roughly, preserving what is *live* in art (in an art gallery) is contrasted with preserving what is of merely historical importance (in a museum) – that some galleries, such as MOMA, are *called* "museums" confuses this point in practice. Relatedly, a concern with the *history* of dance – of the kind dance scholars might embrace – might also speak for the preservation of dances. Doing so, however, still requires considering exactly what dances of the past have to offer; and why the students of the present (and future) should want access to these danceworks. Further, and relatedly, we should reflect on the nature of that access – what will the student of the future need to be able to see and/or to do?

As with music, a notated score for a work might offer just such a way to preserve that work, although *notationality* (rather than an extant notated score) must be stressed. Or a complex video recording might offer another route to preservation. Exploring that topic requires considering precisely what such recordings of the work might offer. In particular, more must be said about the logic of *notationality* for performing arts. This will involve positive accounts of the value of notated scores for danceworks (were they to be got), as well as the rejection of apparent contenders for a similar role in securing the authenticity of dance performance.

The *reality* of danceworks in this sense might also be denied – for a typical critic’s commitment to an ontology might draw on parallels in literary theory whereby the dance exists only at the moment of performance to suggest that “[t]here is no original work to which subsequent instantiations [...] must necessarily conform” (as notes Sarah Rubridge, 2000, p. 207). Yet even such theorists treat danceworks as performables:² they compare this performance of the *work* with another performance (or one by another company); they regard rehearsals as *for* performances, and those performances as of the work at issue; further, that is what the notators are notating. All this reiterates the traditional ontology of *the performable*.

Since a dancework which *remains* in the repertoire is not a set of indistinguishable performances, it asks too much of our historical case to insist that repeating the work requires indistinguishability from some past performance. (Which?) Here, our goal in preserving a work for posterity is simply to keep that work in the repertoire. Then doing so draws on the underdetermination of performance by dancework; the continuity of that very dancework allows for difference. And a notated score will be a suitable way for forward recording that dance itself (and especially what, if anything, is crucial to that dance). For the comparison with music suggests beginning from the score.

A key distinction here is between the score as a *record* of a particular performance – which seems to follow from its being notated “after the fact”, perhaps by a notator – and the score as a *recipe*, such that one can use the score (as instantiating constraints from the type?) to differentiate appropriate from inappropriate performances, and good from less good ones too! That is, the score can function *normatively*. Of course, the second of these – score as recipe – draws on the fact that (in principle) one can make dances by writing the score; but it also recognises how the score can be used, however it was generated.

So why is the notated score (of whatever form) for a dance *important*? Notation systems such as Labanotation are essentially movement notations (see CDE, p. 13): they can be used to record bodily movements in lots of contexts. As Blacking (1985, p. 66) accurately writes, like films and videos:

[...] various notations such as Laban and Benesh are [...] useful tools for referring to the object of study [of the anthropologist], but they cannot describe or explain what is happening as human experience [...].

For these notations, and so on, record *movement*, not (human) action. And this is a strength of such notation systems, since (by recording movement) they allow comparison of movement

2 For instance, Franko (1989, p. 58) writes of the reconstructors as aiming “[...] to evoke what no longer is, with the means of what is present”: this does not seem to reject, to the same degree, the ontology of danceworks as existent at a particular time.

patterns across different actions: thus, the dance can be compared with the ritual or with the exercise routine. But (to repeat) if scores in a notation system are used to provide the *constraints* from the *type*, those scores are treated as *normative* – as saying what one *should* do in order that one's movement instantiate the particular dancework. That, in turn, treats the score as a recipe – even when one actually arrives at the score by notating what was done: that is, as a recording of a particular performance.

Moreover, having a score of this kind enables works to remain in the repertoire just as long as there were performance traditions among dancers which permitted the following of that “recipe”. So there is a connection here with the posterity of dances; or, what may come to the same thing, with the place of the history of dance in our understanding of works of the present; or even works in the repertoire. This discussion also allows consideration of the preservation or permanence of dances. For the fragility of this connection for dances has already been noted.

II

So there is a good reason in principle why danceworks – as performables – should not simply be *dismissed* as existing only “at a perpetual vanishing point” (Siegel, 1972, p. 1). For the possibility of an artform of performing instances or performables – that is, a performing art – necessarily has an extant past to which contemporary practitioners could refer, in one of the many ways such references occur. So that, were there reasons, in principle, for choreographers to retain their works in the repertoire, this could be achieved. Or, those works that disappeared from the contemporary repertoire could be re-introduced through some history-based process collectively called “reconstructive preservation”. And since danceworks from the part of dance must provide us with “temporary paradigms” to allow us to learn to see and learn to value (art-type) dance, it seems to me there are such reasons. Further, performances too require such “temporary paradigms” to show choreographers some of the possibilities for making dances; and dancers some of the possibilities of performing them.

But sometimes, it seems to me, my enthusiasm to retain dance of the past, and to find it a role in the creation and performance of dance, as well as in its criticism, has been misunderstood.³ So here I would like to comment briefly on a case which runs in the opposite direction, on which works lose their audience but without the kind of disappearance suggested by Siegel's “vanishing point” expression. This kind of case is well-exemplified in a comment by Arlene Croce (1982, pp. 28-29⁴):

I watched Martha Graham's *Primitive Mysteries* (1931) die this season in what seemed, for the most part, scrupulous performances. The twelve girls looked carefully rehearsed. Sophie Maslow, who had

3 I would insist that I said this clearly in McFee, 2003; and in PAD, Chapter Ten.

4 My thanks to Renee Conroy for reminding me of this passage.

supervised the previous revival, in the season of 1964-65, was again in charge. Everybody danced with devotion. Yet a piece that I would have ranked as a landmark in American dance was reduced to a tendentious outline, the power I had remembered was no longer there. [...] Perhaps there's a statute of limitations on how long a work can be depended upon to force itself through the bodies who dance it.

Of course, the example does not matter: but here is a description of a phenomenon all too familiar to those of us who have been watching dance for a long time – and, moreover, this description sets aside some of the explanations familiarly offered. So that it is not that the dancers lacked rehearsal, nor that those rehearsals failed to be scrupulously conducted. (After all, we can imagine that a similar pattern of rehearsal preceded that “previous revival” referred to here; and it was a success.) Moreover, as described, the problem was not strictly one of *memory* of the previously-successful sequence of movements (and so on), since this unsuccessful version shares at least the “supervisor” – someone involved in transmission of the movement-sequences (and so on). Croce here offers only two hints in explanation: first, perhaps “devotion” is not the right attitude for performance; second, she refers to some kind of transition in “the bodies who dance it”. Let us consider each in turn.

The first of these (if I read it correctly) is a criticism of how the dance was presented, presumably by those who supervised rehearsal: to present a dancework of the past in its artistic greatness, one must approach it as one would a current work – the term “devotion” suggests the wrong attitude to the possibility of the current performances differing from those of the past. Since that possibility exists in all cases where performing arts are at issue, it must be acknowledged here – that does not mean that one lacks proper regard for the dancework itself. On the contrary, the work is respected as *in a performing art* – as a performable – precisely by thinking carefully about how much deviation from past performances can retain same-work identity.⁵ My point, then, is only that one treat works from the past like any other work – after all, the works from last year's repertoire are, in one clear sense, works from the past now: they were not choreographed specially for this season. And, to repeat, the term “devotion” suggests to me that the dance company's attitude to the past of this work was unduly reverential. While we see how this can come about, it is clearly something we would hope to avoid. In that sense, if true, this is a criticism of the company's activities.

Croce's second point (as I read it) recognises differences in “the bodies who dance it”. This criticism should separate, for analytical purposes at least, into two aspects. One is broadly technical: the typical dancer of today has been trained in a number of techniques (since “regular” employment requires this), and probably trained to a higher pitch – thus, justifying Judith

5 And, of course, I would urge that a notated score, adequate in my sense (PAD, Chapter Three), might be an asset here.

Mackrell's reference to today's dancers as "Olympic-standard" (Mackrell, 1997, p. 7⁶): they usually have physical conditioning beyond what was common in, say, the 1930s (when *Primitive Mysteries* was choreographed). The powers and capacities of such bodies differ from those on which the choreography was initially composed: these bodies may have greater flexibility; and sometimes their movements reflect their mastery of different dance-styles; say, of Bharata Natyam. The other point, though related, is more directly aesthetic; that is, *dance techniques* (such as Graham technique) also involve the learning (or, at least, acquisition) of a "vocabulary" of movements appropriate for dances created using those techniques: such that for (say) Graham, "[...] emotion molded the whole body into a heightened gesture" (Jowitt, 2004, p. 208). This comment applies to the technique, although also the dancer's mastery of it. In this sense, then, Marcia Siegel (1972, p. 107) is right to speak of "technique-as-aesthetic". Thus, mastery of even one technical resource (such as ballet) typically involves mastery also of a "vocabulary" of movements appropriate to the dances deploying that technique. And many techniques, originating in the requirements of specific dances for the companies concerned (UD, p. 205), reflect this connection between technique and dance-character. As I put it elsewhere (McFee, 2003, p. 137):

On this model, [...] dancers undergo a kind of apprenticeship, in which they learn two (or two-and-a-half) crafts: they undergo the bodily training and are inducted into the understanding of the movements (and the dances) that result – and they may in this way gain insight into choreographic processes (although they need not [so this is the "half"]).

Further, expectations can change: thus, Deborah Jowitt (2004, p. 45) claims that:

Today's ballet dancer tries to show straight knees and pointed toes as much of the time as the choreography permits – that is, on descending from a jump, the toes stay pointed until the last second; the standing leg is arrow-straight in pirouettes.

And she comments that "Ballet Theatre dancers of the 40s cared less about these issues [...] the shape of a phrase seems to matter more than the pictorial beauty of each individual movement" (Jowitt, 2004, p. 45). All this I call a *performance tradition*: dancers learn to perform dances, and to understand them in a dancerly way. And, typically at least, both that learning and that understanding took place in the context of a *company* whose members were trained in that manner of delivering the choreography. That tradition, of course, allows the performances of dances of the past in what might be called a "reasoned" way: that is, in new performers' interpretations (UD, pp. 100-101). For any changes can then be explained by reference, first, to the tradition and then, second, to the kinds of deviation that tradition licensed. For the tradition

6 Although Mackrell was writing specifically about male dancers, the point still holds for today's female dancers.

has a *normative* dimension. Without such a tradition, no one would be capable of performing certain dances; dancers would not understand how such movements should be performed. And so, even if the dances were “preserved” (say, in notated form), they could not be danced.

So, does the performance tradition for, say, the current Royal Ballet dancers overlap sufficiently with those of (say) Paul Taylor or Frederick Ashton to permit those dancers to perform these choreographers’ works? Suppose that it does not (see Challis, 1999). In that case, perhaps the *performance tradition* required for these works either never was part of the training regime for these dancers (Taylor) or has ceased to be (Ashton) – because, say, a British style of ballet performance, with its “emotional depth”, has been replaced by a Russian style, with its “formal precision” (both quoted in Challis, 1999, p. 147). In the most extreme case, of course, the performances (and hence the works) would be rendered unintelligible to a knowledgeable audience: in the less extreme case, this audience would just struggle to understand. Certainly, such a possibility illustrates what it would be for *performance traditions* to cease to be available.

But another aspect of performance needs to be ensured (although, again, contrasted only for analytical purposes), which highlights the importance of another aspect of “skill” here, different from that identified by Croce: there are not only *performance traditions* for dancers as sketched above, but also *traditions of performance*, such that an audience of “competent judges” (McFee, 2001, pp. 104-108; AJ, pp. 45-47) for danceworks is required. And such an audience must understand these works through experience of them as *performed*, since that is how such an audience comes to understand such works.⁷

These *traditions of performance* amount partly to understanding the narrative of dance history; but they also embody contemporary understanding of how these danceworks should (typically) be performed – an understanding that later staggers might contest profitably in making new versions of particular (extant) dances, and one to which choreographers could respond. (As Mats Ek does, in his comic traducings of the typical expectations of classical ballet: say, in his *Swan Lake* [1987].) It permits both the audience to distinguish interesting and valuable difference from mere mistake, and the impact of “posterity” to lead to a revision of that judgement. For a “knowledgeable audience” just is one that can distinguish originality from mere novelty (is Matthew Bourne’s *Swan Lake* [1995] really doing anything new at the level of artistic meaning?); and can find the continuity within trivial changes. Hence the audience also needs to be able to recognise (at least) when dancers fail to instantiate a particular choreography. All-in-all, such traditions form a background here (part of what Noël Carroll [2001, p. 91] calls “the lay of the artworld”) which permits the choices made to be *reasoned* choices, defensible (in principle) in discussion. Without such a tradition, “however small and special” (Cavell, 1969, p. xxvii), choices here could only be arbitrary.

7 So these difficulties have a direct bearing on dance experience, for identifying *dance meaning* through such experience remains problematic.

With the disappearance (from the background) of these features required for intelligibility, one would expect exactly the sort of disappearance of danceworks from the realm of *understandability* by audiences that Croce describes as the “death” of Graham’s *Primitive Mysteries* (whatever one makes of the example); as well as its connection to the failure by the rest of the danceworld to grasp such works any longer. So, in this concrete case too, failure to maintain either *performance traditions* (among dancers) or *traditions of performance* (in the audience) generates one kind of failure of a dancework of the past. And this failure might well constitute the disappearance of the dancework in question from the artistic canon, since it will no longer be experienced as expressive.

The upshot here: the *experience* of dance has such traditions implicit within it. I do not mean, of course, that these traditions must be part of what the audience must know, if that means that all audience members must be able to recite the history, and so on, to us. Rather, the knowledge might well be acquired *other* than as a kind of book-learning (it will almost always be for dancers), and be manifest in action and in intelligent attention.⁸

Of course, on this picture one kind of failure of a dancework of the past – of the kind Croce assigned to *Primitive Mysteries* (above) – is a failure to maintain either *performance traditions* of the dancers or *traditions of performance* in the audience. So that the very tools which, elsewhere, explain the persistence of dance of the past and its centrality for understanding and performing dance today can also explain cases where even established works disappear from the canon.

In one sense, then, it is because the work can no longer be seen as it was that explains its disappearance from the possibility of appreciation. Two points should be noted, though, by way of qualification: first, this work “dies” because it loses both its audience and those able to instantiate it – in that fashion, its demise results from its losing an audience that responds to it: that we can no longer see it as it was seen. But, second, Croce describes an extreme version. For the kinds of response that would have kept the dancework alive need not be very positive. As we might say, one kind of “life-support” involves simply being in the repertoire (or not far out of it, so that the work could be re-staged relatively easily). For such works might continue to be staged, but without an excess of enthusiasm. Works can remain in the canon, even functioning as temporary paradigms, even though they are now regarded as pretty weak – they are still clearly works of a certain kind, at least. So they might limp by, without dying but without immense enthusiasm. And, of course, as noted (again!), *most* of the works currently produced in any artform are pretty weak!

My conclusion has been that a “live” artwork must be (a) performable, and (b) open to appreciation – these two conditions together sound *just* like a truism. But complexities within each mean that, instead, this just points to the beginning of the discussion. Thus, to be *performable* here as a particular artwork in a multiple artform requires at least meeting the

8 Still, similar difficulties might arise outside of the understanding of *performing* arts.

constraints from *the type*; any performance must reflect those constraints to be a candidate for a performance of that work. For instance, the artwork must not be forgotten, or otherwise lost. Hence, in the simplest case, there would be an authoritative score. Further, as the discussion of Graham's *Primitive Mysteries* (1931) above shows, the capacities of the dancers must be appropriate – and these can be lost; and lost, in the contemporary danceworld, partly because today's dancers must typically have some mastery of numerous dance techniques: that can break the connection that once existed between the company and the choreographer (and especially her choreographic style as reflected in the technique used). Likewise, openness to *appreciation* too has a connection to the dancers as well as the audience. Thus, Croce's discussion seems to be highlighting simply a collapse on the part of the audience: the work was no longer available to that audience. But, in fact, the collapse in respect of that work was more total: the work as *performed* lacked something; but that reflected defects in the dancers' ability to *instantiate* that work, given both their training and their understanding. That is, this became a work that standardly-trained dancers could not perform.

Of course, the requirements for an audience able to appreciate this work applies in other artforms, as well as in dance. So what is the new ephemerality here? How does this case differ from (say) painting? The discussion of Arlene Croce illustrates the additional need to retain traditions of performance and performance traditions: for these are prerequisites for the training and experience of the dancers; and – since those dancers will be performing – of the audience for dance also.

III

Croce's conclusion (above) was that "[p]erhaps there's a statute of limitations on how long a work can be depended upon to force itself through the bodies who dance it" – her implication is that, at the least, there ought to be! We have seen one sense in which she is right: in practice, either or both of what I have called the *performance traditions* of dancers and *traditions of performance* in the audience (but not excluding the dancers) required for the intelligible performance of a dancework may be lost. And this is likely to happen, given the passage of time. Yet, of course, there is no real necessity here: we might confidently predict such changes – and we might be right – but that simply reflects the contingent history of dance. We might even highlight features of experiences common among dance audiences (the hunt for novelty, in particular) that might encourage such changes. Still, not all novelties tend in this direction. As I wrote elsewhere (CDE, pp 271-272), choreography might be thought *safe* if it drew extensively on the forms (and so on) of the past, *radical but intelligible* if my work is a challenge to a past aesthetic in recognisable ways, or *powerfully challenging* if, say, a whole genre is contested. Certainly the first two options would draw directly on established *performance traditions* (to permit the dancers to learn to perform my dance, and to understand it in a dancerly way) and *traditions of performance* (to permit the audience to locate this dancework in a narrative of the history of recent dance). And, if the third option challenged some of this – as perhaps Isadora Duncan's work might be

thought to –, the possibility of her success (of the implicit “argument” being accepted) requires a particular, appropriate “lay of the artworld” (Carroll, 2001, p. 91) at that time. So, while the dancers have a key role in maintaining the possibility of performance of a particular dancework, that is not the only role.

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