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# Embodied Cognition as Refutation to Langer's "Illusory Powers": "I Move, therefore, I Know"

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EMBODIED COGNITION AS REFUTATION OF LANGER'S

"ILLUSORY POWERS": "I MOVE,  
THEREFORE I KNOW"

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by

Ruby A. Montana

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Sylvia and Samuel Montana, for all their love and support, to my grandfather, Matias Montana, for being my first dance teacher and the most loving person I will know, and to Dr. Bob Wren, aka Doc, for being the best friend and biggest inspiration over these last two years.

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"ILLUSORY POWERS: "I MOVE,  
THEREFORE I KNOW"

by

RUBY A. MONTANA, BA

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Like any art form, dance is a representation of human emotion, conflict, representation itself, and the very experience of human life. Dance is used to convey non-conceptual content, ranging from social, cultural, ceremonial, competitive or erotic. Dance can be participatory, social or performed for an audience. Dance can embody or express ideas, emotions, or tell a story, and of all the arts, dance is the most primordial. Yet, the area of philosophy of dance is quite underdeveloped, especially in comparison with other areas of Aesthetics. Having only established a visible presence since the 1970s, it can be said that dance is a relative newcomer to contemporary academic frameworks.

Renowned American philosopher Susanne Langer is one of the most distinctive thinkers of her time, and her work has offered an abundance within Aesthetics, and philosophy of dance. She was influenced, but yet not entirely a part of the American classic philosophical movement prevalent during her time. Throughout her philosophical career she aimed to investigate how human life must be thought of as a continuous process of meaning-making affected through processes of symbolic transformation of experience. In her first published book, *The Practice of Philosophy*, Langer establishes a thesis which she will defend in her later work. She maintains that the role of philosophy is to “see possibilities of interpretation” rather than to engage in the demolishing of “literal propositions” (x).

For Langer, a philosophical problem consists of the significance of an idea (PP 37) as well as, and more importantly for my work, the significance of the very idea of art. She states in PP that the guiding principle of philosophy is “to establish full the meaning of a concept”(38). Specifically, Langer upheld the importance of art in discovering the essential nature of human mentality. This is the central theme in her later work, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*. In this later work, Langer does try and reconcile the problematic dilemma that stems from *Feeling and Form* and her other earlier works. This

problem involves how we are to reconcile intelligence, operative in artistic creativity, with “feeling,” somehow involved in artistic expression.

Under the influence of Alfred North Whitehead, her logic teacher, as well as Ernst Cassirer, Langer contended that the study of meanings had to be rooted in a precise and comprehensive account of the “logic of signs and symbols” and of the “symbolic forms” which this logic both structured and made possible. I am especially interested in Langer’s theory of meaning within the area of dance. Using her own notion that philosophy should build upon rather than demolish literal propositions, I aim to first refute, and then build upon a specific thesis within Langer’s *Feeling and Form*.

Langer contends in this 1953 work that dance is able to express emotions as an external force, while creating what she calls a “primary illusion”. Langer attributes gesture as the basic element whereby the dance illusion is made and organized. Furthermore, she asserts that dance is governed by “imagined feeling” and not real emotional conditions.

I argue that Langer’s view rests upon an implausible philosophical assumption which entirely neglects the epistemology of the dancer, who is very much able to experience “real” emotions while dancing. I Here I emphasize that I am arguing for the “authenticity of these emotions felt, only within the realm of the dance performance. Once it is ended, a new consciousness then takes over. Recent advancements in the neurosciences, especially within the last ten years, have introduced concepts that were not available during the time Langer wrote *Feeling and Form*. Yet, her thesis has stood without any opposition.

My experiences as a dancer have shown that dance synthesizes the body as both moving and thinking. There is a real and conscious awareness of not only the bodily movements, but of the emotional expression that is to be embodied as well. However, my stance is not entirely phenomenological. Rather, my work is akin to the more recent project of naturalizing phenomenology in which phenomenologists utilize the results of psychology and cognitive science.

I will base my arguments on the concept of Embodied Cognition, or EC, as I may refer to it for the duration of this paper. EC is a growing research program in cognitive science that emphasizes the formative role the environment plays in the development of cognitive processes. The general theory contends that cognitive processes develop when a tightly coupled system emerges from real-time, goal-directed interactions between organisms and their environment; the nature of these interactions influences the formation and further specifies the nature of the developing cognitive capacities. EC may be seen as a response to the cognitivist/classicist view of the mind which conceptualizes cognitive functions in terms of a computer metaphor which characterizes thought processes as parallel to an input/output model. This view neglects the role of external factors, and the body's relation to them. Langer's view of dance similarly neglects the role of the body and its sensorimotor capacities in cognitive processes within dance, when she maintains that the dancer fails to distinguish between what is actual and what is virtual; dancers are incapable of portraying "real" emotions, because they are not actually feeling them.

Additionally, Langer states that "All forces which cannot be scientifically established and measured must be regarded, from the philosophical standpoint, as illusory". In consideration of the recent work within Embodied Cognition, I aim to show philosophically and scientifically that Langer's hypothesis is wrong. Yet I am not attempting to discredit her work, as such a task is one I would not endeavor given my respect for her profound contributions in Aesthetics. Rather I aim to expand upon her theory as contemporary advancements in neuroscience allow me to do so. As a whole, philosophical aesthetics tends to focus on dance as witnessed by some detached observer, or audience, as a pure art form which completely disregards the dancer's thought process. Therefore, I contend that the standard philosophy of dance is incomplete and thus inadequate for a full understanding of dance as an art form.

Furthermore, I aim to emphasize the significance of the making of meanings within representational art forms, specifically dance. I argue that although non-verbal, dance can be a language declared through movement, stillness, and expressions of the body. This non-conceptual content is a means for showing specific ideas, emotions, and symbols as visible thought.

For the extent of this paper, I am focused primarily on dance forms that are classified as representational. By this I mean that bodily movements and motions contribute to expressing a specific sentiment, emotion, feeling, message, etc. While I acknowledge the existence of non-expressiveness in dance, such as Rainer's Trio A, or within the realm of the abstract for example, my work is reliant upon Sandra Fraleigh's definition of representational dance, which I will expand upon in Chapters 3 and 4. Whether the ideas presented here could have viability or applicability to other dance forms is a task I will not attend to now.

Lastly, I will employ Langer's view that the "essence of dance is musical: The dancer expresses in gesture what he feels as the emotional content of the music which is the efficient and supporting cause of his dance. He reacts as we all would if we were not inhibited; his dance is self-expression, and is beautiful because the stimulus is beautiful". I will also uphold that the dancer is thus "dancing the music". Music then is essential to my definition and theory of dance, and I maintain that it has a precise role in affecting emotional processes.

## CHAPTER 2: LANGER'S "ILLUSORY POWERS"

Although it is my intention to refute Langer's theory of "Illusory Powers", I firmly believe that the research I have conducted on this matter is in full accordance with Langer's very idea and definition of what philosophy is. Furthermore, based on her philosophical principles, I am practicing what she deemed as "Philosophy in a New Key". This is the very title of her most well-known and referenced work wherein she says that symbolism was the 'new key' to understanding how the human mind transformed the primal need to express oneself.

Langer was greatly influenced by Alfred North Whitehead, Ernst Cassirer, and Henry Sheffer, her logic teacher. She upheld that the distinctiveness of philosophy as a discipline is in its descriptive and critical analysis of meanings, and not, like the sciences, with the discovery of facts. In a seeming nod to William James, she wanted to determine how to make our ideas clear about meaning, which has a deeply Pragmatist tone. And like the Pragmatists, she proposed a "new key" to how philosophy should be practiced. This practice is one which I most employ within this thesis. It entails the recognition that all meanings are "embodied in forms" that have a distinctive kind of "logic" and history, both "ideal" and "real". Throughout her philosophical career she aimed to investigate how human life must be thought of as a continuous process of meaning-making affected through processes of symbolic transformation of experience.

For Langer, a philosophical problem consists of the significance of an idea (PP 37) as well as, and more importantly for my work, the significance of the very idea of art. Specifically, Langer upheld the importance of art in discovering the essential nature of human mentality. This is the central theme in her later work, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*. She states in PP that the guiding principle of philosophy is "to establish full the meaning of a concept" (38).

So what is Langer's conception of dance as work of art? Through the "translation of kinesthetic experience into visual and audible elements...The dancer, or dancers, must transform the stage for the audience as well as for themselves into an autonomous, complete, virtual realm, and all motions into a play of visible forces in unbroken, virtual time, without effecting either a work of plastic art or of 'melos'" (FF 204).

Langer's phenomenological perspicuity is evident in her description of what it is dance and, thus, dancers do. She says that the actual movement in a dance is controlled by "an actual body-feeling, akin to that of which controls the production of tones in musical performance—the final articulation of imagined feeling in its appropriate physical form. The conception of feeling disposes the dancer's body to symbolize it" (FF 181). The performance arts of music and dance are engrained in the lived body, which phenomenological aesthetics has foregrounded. Hence, Langer contends that:

Virtual gesture may create the semblance of self-expression without anchoring in it the actual personality, which, as the source only of the actual (non-spontaneous) gestures disappears as they do in the dance. In its place is the created personality, a dance element which figures simply as a psychical, human or superhuman Being. It is this that is expressing simply as a physical, human or superhuman Being. It is this that is expressing itself (FF 181).

So to Langer, the formulation of feeling in a perceptible symbol creates an imagined feeling or emotion. It is not the expression of an actually felt emotion on the part of the performer (in this case, the dancer). Dance creates a "true artistic illusion, a realm of 'Powers', wherein purely imaginary beings from whom the vital force emanates shape a whole world of dynamic forms by their magnet-like, psycho-physical actions" (FF 184).

Langer goes on to show that all the major arts can be classified according to the virtual fields that they occupy. As painting presents virtual space, so music presents virtual time. She divides verbal art, or what she calls poesis, into literature proper and drama. The former is a semblance of the past, or virtual

memory, the latter a semblance of the future, virtual act or destiny. Sculpture is the semblance of organic form; architecture gives her more trouble, but is finally called an "ethnic domain".

Langer's analysis of dance is reliant upon the notion and act of gesture, which I will discuss in Chapter 4. I will say now, however, that to Langer, the dance gesture is a symbol that expresses a vital import. This import is not illusory. It is "something actual that is revealed, articulated, made manifest by the symbol" (FF 182). So the symbolic form that is dance, must be supported by every imagined factor, but "the feeling of the whole work is the 'meaning' of the symbol, the reality which the artist has found in the world and of which he wants to give his fellow man a clear conception" (FF 182).

This symbol, according to Langer, does not belong to the actual; it is not part of reality as such. "The basic abstraction of dance, the basic abstraction of all the arts in Langer's view, entails a Scheingefühl, or the semblance of a feeling. The essential gesture that dance consists of is not a real gesture, expressing "real" feeling, but the appearance of a gesture" (FF 183). She furthers this division by saying that a philosophical analysis of dance, and not just dance, must, in spite of its intrinsic difficulty, "keep virtual elements and actual materials separate" (FF 181). Langer finds the lack of distinction between the "actual" and the "virtual" a great flaw within aesthetic theory. She relies upon Ernst Cassirer's mythical consciousness here, which I will expand upon in Chapter 5.

My initial impression of discontent upon reading this stemmed from my experiences as a dancer, and this introspection led to my main opposition to Langer's philosophy of dance. I contend that these gestures can be based on "real" feeling, and are thus able to *express* "real" feeling. Langer's distinction between "real" and "illusory" is not as clear cut as she maintains.

Langer offers the following to illustrate her contention:

"No one, to my knowledge, has ever maintained that Anna Pavlova's rendering of slowly ebbing life in "The Dying Swan" was most successful when she actually felt faint and sick, or proposed

To put Mary Wigman into the proper mood for her tragic “Evening Dances” by giving her a piece of terrible news” just before taking the stage (FF\*\*). These examples demonstrate a limited perspective on Langer’s part on what the thought process and emotional expressions of a dancer entail.

Let me first clarify first by saying that I undoubtedly agree with Langer’s examples; to expect such emotional expressions to stem from physical illness or manipulation would be nonsensical, and even sadistic. Where I diverge from Langer’s theory is specifically her interpretation of what the epistemological process of a dancer is. Langer states that “the dance movement only *seems* to spring from feeling” (FF 183). The dancer is as a vessel for which a power passes. Thus Langer draws a distinct line between what she emphasizes as the “real” and the “virtual” powers that a dancer is feeling and exuding. But Langer does not address the role of kinesthetic learning of a dance. Nor does Langer hold the first-person perspective of how it feels to perform a dance choreography. Surely I do not mean that Langer never danced, but it cannot be argued that she did not have first-hand experience as a trained performer. Therefore, as I stated previously, as a philosopher and dancer, I offer a differing, and empirical perspective. Furthermore Langer did not have access to current findings within cognitive science in relation to the dance. Arthur Danto noted in the Foreword to the abridged edition of Langer’s *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, Langer’s commitment to survey all the relevant science, “...resulted in an unwieldy book and one, moreover, in hostage to its empirical materials, which in the nature of scientific advance went out of date...”

It is for these inadequacies that I am refuting, and expanding upon Langer’s notion of gestures and their expressiveness within dance for a more robust philosophy of dance. The classification of the nature of these expressive representations as “illusory” is completely disregarding the thought process that is characteristic and unique to dancers when dancing, performing, and even rehearsing. I say unique because representational dance is not equivalent to mimesis, pantomime or acting, although there are some shared characteristics. I will expand upon this in the proceeding chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: MIMESIS

As previously stated, within the context of my thesis I am classifying dance as belonging to the realm of representational art. However, this is not to say that dance is only dance if and when it falls into this category. The role of mimesis, here is highly significant and is central to my work.

If there is any aesthetic concept that has been constantly reiterated as well as repudiated it is mimesis. The relationship between art and nature has been a constant preoccupation of both practicing artists and art theorists. This relationship is broadly categorized in terms of mimesis--a term that has a wide range of meanings that vary between literal imitation and representation. The variation of meanings is also due to the variety of art media and the different trends in the art traditions of the world. In his article, "Mimesis re-examined in the light of Aristotle and Abhinavagupta", professor of philosophy Rekha Jhanji states that "It is well known that nature has been a great inspiration for artists and that is the major reason of the significance of mimesis as an aesthetic concept. However, those who want to highlight the creative uniqueness of art reject the idea of mimesis" (2007). I reject the idea of mimesis on this basis because of the unique expressive nature of dance.

In the Greek tradition, from where this term originated, mimesis has different overtones of meaning. In its original sense mimesis referred to dance and music, it was only later applied to the visual arts. This shows that in its original sense it did not refer to the copying of the outward manifestation of things but to their inherent character (The Sanskrit terms associated with mimesis are anukarana and sadrsya which are translated as imitation and similitude, Jhanji 2007).

Dance can be classified extrinsically or intrinsically. Extrinsic elements are dependent upon the contexts they are referred to, and intrinsic elements are the movements of which they consist and the manner in which they are put together (Sparshott, p 61). Francis Sparshott points out that although this contrast is straightforward, it is not as sharp as it seems. He argues that contexts are imputed rather than

observed—it is not just the what, but rather the how in relation to other things. So to explain the movements anyone, in this case a dancer, makes is always to say what the person is doing and thus refer the movement to a context of meaning, so that the original seeming dichotomy is compromised.

Sparshott maintains that this is the case, but that we

“must not let us bamboozle us into forgetting the difference between what one knows and what one is actually doing, together with the movements one is making, and the significance of one’s doing it, or between what one can see someone else doing, together with the way they move in doing it, and what they are doing it for” (62).

Sparshott’s definition of mimesis includes the notion that all dancers are called dancers because they are all doing the same thing: they are dancing. Their movements all belong to the same class of action; dance movements. Now, if they belong to actions aside from dancing, Sparshott contends that they do so “by simulation, or by quotation, or by reenactment, or by referring to them in some way. All such movements we may term mimetic”(62).

Here Sparshott offers a footnote stating that the term mimetic has only been recently used within the realm of dance studies. The words ‘imitative’ and ‘representational’ had been commonly used because, Sparshott argues, the term mimetic as used in the Platonic and Aristotelian sense, was too vague, ambiguous and even misleading. He adds that today the term is used in a quasi-technical way, devoid of both misleading connotations and definable meaning. Although Sparshott does not delve further into the reasons the term may seem misleading today, I contend that it gives a false representation, similar to that of Langer’s notion of “illusory powers”, as to what dance can show, and how dancers do so. Here I feel it indispensable to point out the Aristotelian and Platonic notions of the word.

## Aristotle's Mimesis

Aristotle defined mimesis as the perfection and imitation of nature. Art is not only imitation but also the use of mathematical ideas and symmetry in the search for the perfect, the timeless, and contrasting being with becoming. Nature is full of change, decay, and cycles, but art can also search for what is everlasting and the first causes of natural phenomena.

Aristotle wrote about the idea of four causes in nature. The first formal cause is like a proposal, or an immortal idea. The second cause is the material, or what a thing is made out of. The third cause is the process and the agent, in which the artist or creator makes the thing. The fourth cause is the good, or the purpose and end of a thing, known as telos.

Aristotle's *Poetics* is his treatise on the subject of mimesis. Aristotle was not against literature as such. Rather, he stated that human beings are mimetic beings, feeling an urge to create texts and art that reflect and represent reality.

Aristotle considered it important that there be a certain distance between the work of art on the one hand and life on the other; we draw knowledge and consolation from tragedies only because they do not happen to us. Without this distance, tragedy could not give rise to catharsis. However, it is equally important that the text causes the audience to identify with the characters and the events in the text, and unless this identification occurs, it does not touch us as an audience. Aristotle holds that it is through simulated representation, mimesis, that we respond to the acting on the stage which is conveying to us what the characters feel, so that we may empathize with them in this way through the mimetic form of dramatic roleplay. It is the task of the dramatist to produce the tragic enactment in order to accomplish this empathy by means of what is taking place on stage.

In short, Aristotle's view is that catharsis can only be achieved if we see something that is both recognizable and distant. Maintaining this view, dance offers this catharsis because of the portrayal of emotions from dancers. However, the word 'mimetic' does not mean 'having the nature of mime'.

Dance is one practice; mime is a different practice. Sparshott maintains that both are defined by the differences from one another, but that much dance is mimetic. The rendering of mimesis of nature also varies according to the art medium. It is only in drama, painting and sculpture that mimesis is taken as an imitation of apparent forms, in dance, music and poetry it can only be understood as an attempt to capture the inherent nature of the phenomena represented.

### Plato on Mimesis

Within the works of Plato, there exists a distrust of the sentiments of performance art. The Greek word “mimēsis” is translated by our “imitation,” but neither word is sufficient to convey what Plato has in mind. Plato himself realizes that his meaning is difficult to convey in general terms, so he begins with an illustrative example of the worrisome form. Plato’s example is given by his spokesperson, Socrates and comes from the *Iliad*. Near the beginning of the poem, Socrates says, Homer tells us that the priest Chryses begs Agamemnon to free his daughter. Agamemnon gets angry and Chryses, having failed in his object, prays to Apollo to take his side against the Achaeans. Until Homer reaches the lines, and he begged all the Achaeans, but especially the two sons of Atreus, commanders of the host, he speaks in his own voice and does not, as Socrates puts it, attempt to turn his hearer’s attention elsewhere as if he were someone other than himself. Yet after this he speaks as if he were Chryses and tries as far as possible to make us think that he is not Homer but the priest, an old man (392e, 393a). What Homer does here is impersonate Chryses; *he acts as if he were the old priest*.

Impersonation of this sort is not peculiar to Homer’s epic poetry; it can be found in tragedy and comedy, and is present in literature--in novels, short poems, even many biographies-- and such things as movies and soap operas. In all these instances, language heard as in movies or read as in novels, is understood as utterances or words by people who do not actually utter them. Plato’s calls such words, be they uttered by someone or only read or recalled by us, “imitations” (mimēmata) because they are,

as we understand them, not real utterances of real people but imitations or semblances of such utterances.

More than two thousand years later, Langer argues that dance does something similar. As I previously stated, the basic abstraction of dance, the basic abstraction of all the arts in Langer's view, entails a *Scheingefühl*, or the semblance of a feeling. The essential gesture that dance consists of is not a real gesture, expressing "real" feeling, but the appearance of a gesture".

So, through Socrates, Plato argued that the theater was a harmful institution in that it stimulated emotions within the audience and deviated irresponsibly from a true depiction of reality. Langer's stance is similar in that she claims the depictions of emotions are not real, are "illusory" and are thus deviating from a true depiction of reality. Just as Plato calls the seduction of mimesis a sort of "bewitching", Langer likens the realm of a dance performance to a "Magic Circle", which I will expand upon in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 4: GESTURE

Gestures are not insignificant movements done by chance or at random. A gesture is laden with meaning; it is sometimes what defines a person's legacy. W.C. Fields is just as remembered for his attire and presence in accordance with his gesture as he is for his humorous words. Even the Christian concept of love relies heavily on the way Christ 'moved' among the people, the way he gestured to others, and the sort of rhythm that was his walk—"a man of love does not have a military stride" (Mooney 38). In the prologue to Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, a man recognizes Zarathustra from his movement, because he "walks like a dancer"(39). I argue that the gestures of a dancer then, have ample importance, as each gesture is a deliberate movement of personal expression.

The whole of Susanne Langer's aesthetic theory is greatly extended by her definition of what dance is. She aims to define just what dancing is by asking "what it expresses, what it creates, and how it is related to the other arts, to the artist, and to the actual world" (FF 169). She goes on to say that it is these very questions that give dance its own philosophical significance. The concept of gesture is crucial to Langer's definition of dance and is the basis for the following statement which I refute:

The spontaneously gestic character of dance motions is illusory, and the vital force they express is illusory; the "powers" (i.e. centers of vital force) in dance are created beings—created by the semblance gesture. The primary illusion of dance is a virtual realm of Power—not actual, physically exerted power, but appearances of influence and agency created by virtual gesture (FF 175).

Gesture then holds great significance to this assessment as it is the basic abstraction by which the dance 'illusion' is made and organized: "the dancer expresses in gesture what he feels as the emotional content of the music which is the efficient and supporting cause of his dance"(FF 169).

Langer also defines gesture as vital movement with "subjective and objective, personal and public, willed (or evoked), and perceived" dimensions (FF 174). The performer of a gesture accesses it

directly as a kinetic experience and as an effect, as well. It is both acted out and perceived. To the observer, the gesture is “seen and understood as vital movement” and not as some random “motion of things, sliding or waving or rolling around” (FF 174). However, it is the very form of the gesture that Langer contends holds responsibility for that gesture being always spontaneously expressive. Her classification of form here, includes all the qualities of being “free and big, or nervous and tight, quick or leisurely, etc., according to the psychological condition of the person who makes it”(FF 175). She likens this with tone of voice in speech.

In dance, however, it is controlled. In his 2009 book *Susanne Langer in Focus*, Robert Innis sums Langer’s position up when he says:

In the case of dance—indeed in the case of the “dance” of human life—gestures that in actual life would function in life as signals or symptoms are transformed into symbols, a system composed of assigned and combinable elements and units. A dance gesture is not gesticulation. Gesture in art, on Langer’s part, is something imagined apart from the situation or mentality in which it was first rooted (SLIF 133).

Langer then asserts that a gesture becomes “a free symbolic form, which may be used to convey ideas of emotion, of awareness and premonition, or may be combined with or incorporated in other virtual gestures, to express other physical and mental tensions”(FF 175).

Innis clarifies that to Langer, tensions and the “logic” behind them can also be expressed through the dance but although they are rooted in the body of the dancer, they are still as Langer calls them, “abstract” (FF 133). Virtual gestures are what constitute a dance and “are not signals, they are elements of will” (FF 175). This brings us again to Langer’s theses of illusory powers in dance. Natural gestures performed by non-dancers are actual centers of vital force, whereas virtual gestures created by dancers are creating illusions. Thus, Langer maintains that the primary illusion of dance is a virtual realm of power created by virtual gesture (FF 175).

Innis claims that the great sin of aesthetic theory is and remains that Langer fails to distinguish between the actual and the virtual and between the virtual symbol and its significance “which refers us back to reality”(FF 136). The influence of Ernst Cassirer is highly evident in this aesthetic “sin” in two ways: First, in that Langer’s assessment is reliant upon the semiotic distinctions between symbols and signs, and between what is virtual and what is actual. Secondly, in that she refers to Cassirer’s notion of mythical consciousness, which I will further discuss in the proceeding section.

## CHAPTER 5: SYMBOLIC (NON-CONCEPTUAL) VS. TEXTUAL FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE

My primary aim in this chapter is not to say that all non-conceptual content is superior to the textual, but rather, to elucidate how autobiography, authentic emotions, and thus knowledge can be relayed through dance. Case in point is offered in a quote by Albert Einstein:

The words or the language, as they are spoken or written, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The physical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be voluntarily reproduced or combined...The above-mentioned elements are, in my case, of visual and some of muscular type (<http://www.usask.ca/education/coursework/802papers/Bonnycastle/Bonnycastle>).

Sandra Fraleigh says “The self known in dance moves beyond the limits of our mental cogito. We dance to become acquainted with that which cannot be known by any other means—to find out what can be known through the body as a mental, physical, spiritual whole. Thus, we acquire a kind of knowledge we might designate as experiential” (26). Such entrapment in the particularities of the verbal/written languages has been thoroughly examined in post-colonial/world literature studies. In particular, feminist linguists have mounted similar arguments focusing on the patriarchal yoke of language.

Feminist writer Nancy Miller tackles the issue of “truth” in her book “Writing Fictions: Women’s Autobiography in France”. She does so by proposing a new means of reading, a strategy which she calls “double reading”. This double reading proposes an “intratextual practice of interpretation which...would privilege neither the autobiography nor the fiction, but take the two writings together in their status as text” (60). In the context of my thesis I am asking what happens if the author is a dancer? Or if the signature to be deciphered is one that is relayed through movement? Thus, I am taking my cue from Miller’s intratextual notion, and pointing to a “double reading” in the

expression of dance as well. The dancer's thought process in addition to the content of the dance offers a more robust understanding of the emotional expression relayed.

This implication is one that is not new to the philosophical realm. I have found throughout my research that Friedrich Nietzsche is often referred to as the "Philosopher of the Dancer", as several of his key ideas hold an emphasis on the body, the emotions, and of course, the Dionysian. It can be said that dance and music are the most Dionysian of the arts, since they appeal directly to man's instinctive, chaotic emotions and not to his formally reasoning mind. Nietzsche differentiates between "little reason", or what we commonly refer to as "thinking" from "big reason", or the body's ability to think. To Nietzsche, the epistemological significance of information that is relayed without words is not of lesser import than dialectic. In *The Gay Science*, he says that "the problem of consciousness...first confronts us when we begin to realize how much we can do without it" (354).

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche again asserts this position by stating that "First, one must convince the body" (47). The body is essential to who we are, and holds a vital role in our convictions. Therefore, any change we might hope for in ourselves is dependent not only in our rationale, but in our very bodies as well. He also argues that the great fault of the philosopher is excluding music from thought. Nietzsche spends a great deal in *The Birth of Tragedy* criticizing Socrates for having "wax in the ear". He offers:

They [ancient philosophers] thought that the senses might lure them away from their own world, from the cold realm of ideas to some dangerous southern island where they feared that their philosopher's virtues might melt away like snow in the sun. Having "wax in one's ears" was then almost a condition of philosophizing; a real philosopher no longer listened to life insofar as life is music; he denied the music of life (GS 372).

Music becomes a means of surpassing that which we can know solely through logic or philosophy. Thinking as normally defined misses what life is all about, which is the basis for a new way

of thinking that Nietzsche is calling for. I ask if Langer, like Socrates, perhaps has “wax in the ear” when she dismisses the authenticity of emotional expression.

Of vital import to understanding Langer’s distinction between the “actual” and the “virtual” is the influence of Ernst Cassirer’s concept of mythical consciousness. Langer describes Cassirer’s mythical consciousness as being marked by a “telescoping of symbols and meanings, word and world, into one metaphysical entity (FF 186). She also equates mythical consciousness with artistic consciousness, in that both are metaphorical throughout.

In the chapter proceeding “Virtual Powers”, Langer devotes her focus to what she calls “The Magic Circle”. This is, in her own words, “the idea of the Spirit World” which cannot be studied via scientific means. Here, she is relying on Cassirer’s mythical consciousness. She says, “Dancing creates an image of nameless and even bodiless Powers filling a complete autonomous realm, a ‘world’. It is the first presentation of the world as a realm of mystic forces” (FF 190). It is clear here that if Langer had access to Embodied Cognition, and its revelations based on empirical evidence, this “Magic Circle” would not be so magic after all, and the “Spirit World” could be replaced with the ‘Effort’ life within Laban Movement Analysis, which I will describe in Chapter 7.

In his three-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer explores the conception of human beings as most fundamentally “symbolic animals,” interposing systems of signs or systems of expression between themselves and the world. Whereas animals perceive their world through instincts and direct sensory perception, humans create (PSF 30-31).

The most basic type of symbolic meaning is *expressive* meaning, the product of what Cassirer calls the expressive function (*Ausdrucksfunktion*) of thought, which focuses on the experience of events in the world around us as charged with affective and emotional significance. These can range from desirable or hateful, comforting or threatening, etc. It is this type of meaning that underlies mythical

consciousness, for Cassirer, and which explains its most distinctive feature: its total disregard for the distinction between appearance and reality.

What Cassirer calls *representative* symbolic meaning, a product of the representative function (*Darstellungsfunktion*) of thought, stems out of the original mythical flux of “physiognomic” characters a world of stable and enduring substances, distinguishable and re-identifiable. Working together with the fundamentally pragmatic orientation towards the world exhibited in the technical and instrumental use of tools and artifacts, it is in natural language, according to Cassirer, that the representative function of thought is then most clearly visible.

The third and final function of symbolic meaning is the *significant* function (*Bedeutungsfunktion*), which is exhibited most clearly, according to Cassirer, in the “pure category of relation.” Langer’s concept of “illusory powers” is in direct continuity with Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms as it was developed with no systematic aesthetics in mind, as Langer pointed out (Innis 117). Innis declares that “The peculiarity of Langer’s model is the wedding of expression with an objective symbol such that the symbol does not reflect or mirror the actual experience of the artist or creator but formulates an objective idea in the non-discursive mode” (117). He goes on to say that while Cassirer “hewed the keystone” of such a structurally rich aesthetic theory, Langer described her role as putting that stone in place.

In their paper “The Cognisant Body”, Kathie and Pat Debenham show that the symbol Langer refers to can reflect the actual experience of the artist by investigating the meaning of a truly cognisant dancer. Their research stems from their belief in the notion that the body holds intrinsic knowledge. The following passage corroborates my claim that a dancer’s thought process is misinterpreted:

As the body seeks sensation it comes in contact with the world; it desires to make sense of its encounters. In Western thought, all too often thinking, reasoning, imagining, remembering, cognition, understanding and ‘sense-making’ are associated primarily with mental functions. Ironically, even dancers whose primary form of expression is physical, fall prey to

mentally biased cultural paradigms (2).

In “The Embodied Thesis” Maggi Phillips reinforces this by commenting that ‘[i]ntra and inter disciplinary approaches to dance suggest that the physical body may be situated at the centre of ‘knowing,’ thereby challenging the privileged position of the word in Western scholarship...’ (2003, p. 1).

Turning again to Plato, he makes his strongest argument against the dangers of mimetic arts in Chapter 10 of his *Republic*. The symbolic target of his attack is Homer, the author (or supposed author) of the epics that have been called “the bible of the Greeks.” Although, according to Plato, many of his contemporaries thought that Homer knew all technical skills, all human affairs concerned with good and bad and all about the gods as well (598d,e), Plato argued that Homer was a mere imitator of human behavior and did not possess, at least as far as one can tell from his poetry, *any* expert knowledge. Unrefined people, hearing Homer’s poetry recited, think that he is imparting knowledge “because they believe anything said with meter, rhyme, and tune, be it on cobbling or generalship or anything else whatever, is right--so great is the natural charm of poetry....” (601a,b). This natural charm of poetic language deludes us into thinking that we are being instructed rather than merely entertained.

He offers the example within representational art and says that making such does not require the knowledge of the things made to make real examples of them. When carpenters make furniture, for example, they look to certain “Forms,” as Plato called them; the carpenters don’t create the Forms, he said: they exist in nature or are created by a god. Carpenters create instances of Forms, and the examples they create, like any human product, are never perfect. The beds painters “create” are semblances of carpenter’s beds, and they too are imperfect in their own way. The carpenter imitates in wood the ideal bed, the Form; the painter imitates on canvas or some other surface a carpenter’s bed; so the painter’s bed is the imitation of an imitation, and it is, Socrates says, “far removed from the truth” and does not

embody the knowledge of reality that the philosopher seeks. To obtain such knowledge, it is a mistake to consult the mimetic poet, the maker of imitations.

So Plato's stance is that mimetic artists, *qua* artists, do not supply knowledge; as mimetic makers, they create imitations--semblances of real people speaking (such as in theater, movies, novels), and real people stressed, feeling emotions (music and dance). But why does Plato go so far as to say such artists be expelled from an ideal community? Plato's answer, which bares resemblance to Langer's on the authenticity of a dancer's emotions, is that mimetic artists do not recognize their limitations, their lack of real knowledge. They feel compelled to speak out on matters important to us, and they seduce us with the charm of their words. Their influence on our thinking is therefore far greater than it deserves to be. Gaining real knowledge is a difficult process, one that requires serious labor and devotion. It is much easier to listen to the poets and absorb their convictions--much easier than learning mathematics and struggling through dusty, difficult books, and spending years in the process.

Langer says something very similar again to Plato when she contends that "Even the most thoughtful of dancers" are confused in what it is they are expressing. I find these notions as a direct challenge for my philosophical endeavor here, as I am conjoining my experiences as a dancer, with my academic pursuits. These problematic ideals by both Plato and Langer neglect the great significance of the making of meanings within these representational art forms, specifically dance. The non-verbal "language" communicated is more than mere semblances; it is visible thought.

Philosophy of dance scholar Francis Sparshott offers this argument on the of non-conceptual content:

As humans, we respond to human gesture, movement, and expression directly, without reducing them to what can be caught in words. Just as, in language itself, metaphor goes beyond literal meaning and reveals possibilities of reality that are no more reducible to what can be literally described than dreams are, and yet belongs to the substance of waking life as dreams do not, so the development of meaningful movement into the disciplines of dance enhances directly the possibilities of our lives in ways that are actual

but not reducible to prose. A new form of dance, like a new form of music, is itself a new reality; we live in its light, and cannot know whether or how it affects our lives...(112)

Additionally, Kathie and Pat Debenham corroborate my point in their paper *The Cognisant Body*. They argue that we are living in times where the mind, verbal language, and linear processing are valued over intuitive, sensory memory. This means that “considering our very existence privileges the mind as ‘knowing entity’ and places the body as subservient to it. As dancers, choreographers, and artist educators we know that moving bodies are cognisant bodies...we recognize that the body is the very basis of, not a precondition for thinking [and knowing] (8).

Since dancers and choreographers utilize music to aid in portraying this inner knowledge, I turn now to the role music holds in expressing non-conceptual content through its accompaniment with dance.

## CHAPTER 6: EMOTIONS AND MUSIC

In order to establish what the roles of emotions are to a dancer, I will first address how emotions are precisely affected by music. As I previously stated, my definition as well as Langer's (in *Feeling and Form*) is reliant upon musical accompaniment.

In *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion*, Jesse J. Prinz states that emotions are perceptions of certain kinds of body states, but not necessarily representations of such. These body states are ones that reliably track certain kinds of conditions in the environment of the agent. In dance, insight would be necessarily embodied. One's philosophical or spiritual being, one's vision, feelings and beliefs would become public and enacted through the gesture of dance, and after the body tracks the musical 'condition' in the environment.

Rather than assuming that emotions represent bodily states, I want to explore the possibility that they represent things that are external to us. After all, emotions rarely begin from the inside. They are ordinarily elicited by some external situation. In order for emotions to represent external conditions, it would have to be the case that emotions are reliably caused by bodily states...(60).

Using this theory of emotions, a dancer can thus feel real emotions the instant the external condition is changed; in this case when the music begins.

Langer states that the most commonly held view is that "the essence of dance is musical: The dancer expresses in gesture what he feels as the emotional content of the music which is the efficient and supporting cause of his dance. He reacts as we all would if we were not inhibited; his dance is self-expression, and is beautiful because the stimulus is beautiful". She adds that the dancer is thus "dancing the music" (FF 169).

Langer offers the example of Alexander Sakharoff who, in his *Reflexions sur la musique et sure le danse*, carried the musical creed to its full length: "We—Clotilde Sakharoff and I—do not dance to music, or with musical accompaniment, we dance the music". He attributes this to Isadora Duncan.

Laird Addis, a composer, bass player, and professor of philosophy, employed a similar task to that which I am undertaking in this paper in his 1999 book, *Of Mind and Music*. Addis extends Langer's approach to musical expression, excluding dance, by retracing Langer's notion of music as an unconsummated symbol while linking it to his own theory of consciousness. Addis defines Langer's theory of music as symbolizing the emotions by capturing their logical form. He asks what exactly does Langer's "logical form" mean and how is it that music can achieve this? Addis then replaces Langer's "logical form" with his thesis that music can represent emotional states. He offers that "Passages of music are isomorphic with certain possible states of consciousness" (72).

More exact, Addis says that "Music is a quasi-natural representation of possible states of consciousness to human beings such that, at some level of awareness that is not ordinarily that of what one is attending to, we are presented with those possible states of consciousness by music; that is, music brings them to mind" (72).

Since emotional states are part of "possible states of consciousness to human beings", Addis's approach to emotional expression is also addressing the "how" previously mentioned. Passages of music are isomorphic with emotional states of consciousness and by virtue of this isomorphism, are thus able to accurately represent emotions. Likewise, I argue that this isomorphism applies to dance as well. Since choreography and performance can convey emotional states of consciousness, the emotional expression from the dancer can also be authentic, in the sense of where the emotion stems from. Music itself is able to move us emotionally, and choreography set to music only furthers the particular emotion or idea invoked by the composer.

Turning again to the "dancer's philosopher", Nietzsche scholar Robert C. Solomon states that for Nietzsche, emotions were not disruptions or disturbances in life. Rather, they constituted its very meaning (*Living with Nietzsche* 63). In "Nietzsche's Musical *Askesis* for Resisting Decadence" Bruce E. Benson offers that the term 'decadence', in the literal sense means "falling down", metaphorically as a

decline from a previous superior state, but to Nietzsche it is also a falling out of rhythm with life.

“Decadence is essentially ‘no-saying’ to life (which in effect, means that one says no to oneself) and is thus characterized by a reactionary and negating logic...the more one reacts to it, the greater the danger that one’s reaction will turn into just another manifestation of decadence”(Benson, 29).

In his recently translated book, Georges Liébert notes that "Nietzsche's repeated avowal is often cited: 'Without music, life would be an error,' but almost as though it were a quip. Rarely is the decisive importance music, in fact, had for the economy of his thought recognized." Liébert wonders whether Nietzsche means that music is a way of evading life or whether life can be understood "only through music." I again uphold that Nietzsche is a "musical philosopher" who—like life—can be properly understood "only through music," that is, when the centrality of music to his thinking is recognized. Nietzsche goes so far to say that whatever "cannot be understood in relation to music" fills him with "disgust and aversion" (*KSB* 3:257). To Nietzsche, music allows us to face the tragedy of human existence without words. It should be of no surprise then that through Zarathustra, Nietzsche says, “I would believe only in a God that knows how to dance.”

## CHAPTER 7: EMBODIED COGNITION: “I MOVE, THEREFORE, I KNOW”

Although many would claim that the mind is the governing force of our being, I am arguing that mental functions, emotions and bodily experience are in a constant, delicate and nuanced dance of relationship and mutual influence. It is through the front line of the body, though, that knowledge is created and confirmed. The body knows. It is aware, it perceives, it processes, sorts through incoming stimuli, filters it and makes judgments on what course of action it should take. ‘We do not simply inhabit our bodies; we literally use them to think with’ (Seitz, 2000, p. 23).

In her later work, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, Susanne Langer faces the dilemma that springs from *Feeling and Form* and *Philosophy in a New Key*: how are we to reconcile intelligence, operative in artistic creativity, with the “feeling” involved in artistic expression? In *Mind*, we see Langer’s deeply held assumptions concerning the nature of human knowing. Basically, in her view ‘knowing’ is a bipolar activity in which the “concepts” of scientific or philosophical thinking are the subjective pole, “matter” is the objective pole, and some type of vision or “looking” is the mediating activity.

Every example of mind Langer uses is of undifferentiated consciousness, that is, mythical, metaphorical and symbolic understanding. It is in these activities of feeling and imagination where a merging into the pronouncements of knowledge occurs. It is on the basis of her assumptions regarding scientific knowing, therefore, that Langer arrives at the hypothesis that feeling, globally including all subjective, conscious, mental activity, is merely a heightened form of biological activity, itself a complexus reducible to electro-chemical events. Feeling is matter at its most complex. It is not another “thing,” “entity” or separate “substance,” but rather a phase of biological process which passes above a certain threshold of intensity so that the living tissue “feels” its own activity. To clarify the assertion that feeling is not a “thing,” she notes that it is similar to the reflection of a tree in a pool of water; just

as the reflection is not another “thing,” but the tree’s appearance, so feeling is merely the appearance which organic functions have for the organism in which they occur.

An observation by Philosopher Richard M. Liddy who wrote his doctoral dissertation on Langer’s notion of mind corroborates my thesis when he says that, “By defining “feeling” as “appearance,” she apparently believes that she has “solved” the problem of consciousness. My own conviction is that rather than solving the “problem” of consciousness, she has merely (by a bit of conceptual legerdemain) “defined” it away!” (<http://www.anthonyflood.com/liddylangerphilmind.htm>)

Furthermore, Liddy offers that “As Langer reaches the end of her three-volume work, she seems to be aware that she has left something out—a dimension that because of age and failing eyesight she is not able to treat”. Therefore I take my cue from this incompleteness, and offer Embodied Cognition as the means to better elucidate the epistemological process of a dancer.

The central claim of embodied cognition is that an organism’s sensorimotor capacities, body and environment not only play an important role in cognition, but the manner in which these elements interact enables particular cognitive capacities to develop and determines the precise nature of those capacities. Developmental psychologist Esther Thelen further clarifies the central claim of this field in the following passage:

To say that cognition is embodied means that it arises from bodily interactions with the world. From this point of view, cognition depends on the kinds of experiences that come from having a body with particular perceptual and motor capacities that are inseparably linked and that together form the matrix within which memory, emotion, language, and all other aspects of life are meshed. The contemporary notion of embodied cognition stands in contrast to the prevailing cognitivist stance which sees the mind as a device to manipulate symbols and is thus concerned with the formal rules and processes by which the symbols appropriately represent the world (2001 xx).

The reason that EC serves my purpose in calling for a new means to understand the epistemological processes of a dancer, is the very aspect that separates dance from the other arts. In

*Dance and the Lived Body: An Aesthetic Experience*, Sondra H. Fraleigh says:

To experience the dance is to experience our own living substance in an aesthetic (affective) transformation. To express the dance is to express the lived body in an aesthetic form. The body, understood in its lived totality, is the source of the dance aesthetic. It is not simply the physical instrument of dance, nor is it an aesthetic object as other objects of art are. The essential reduction and significance of dance lies in this distinction: I am embodied in my dance, I am not embodied in my painting...my dance cannot exist without me: I exist my dance (DLB xvi).

Thus the art of the dance cannot be separated from neither the mind nor the body. Although Immanuel Kant established what can be called an embodied view of the mind-body problem in his *Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven* in 1755, it has only recently made its most remarkable advancements within the past decade. In fact, study in this area has only recently given emotions a new status in philosophy of mind as an indispensable constituent, not a non-essential addition to rational intellectual thought. EC holds that all aspects of cognition, such as ideas, thoughts, concepts and categories are shaped by aspects of the body. These aspects include the perceptual system, the intuitions that underlie the ability to move, activities and interactions with our environment and the naive understanding of the world that is built into the body and the brain. In “*Bodies of Knowledge: Beyond Cartesian Views of Person, Selves and Mind*”, Ian Burkitt states that “Thinking involves a body engaged in spatial and temporal activity... a body that is always thinking in the sense that it is aware of its location, its movements, and the things it is seeing or hearing’ (1998, p. 74).

Kathie and Pat Debenham, dancers and dance theorists push for a fuller understanding of what it means to be a cognizant dancer in their 2009 paper, *The Cognizant Body*. They offer that to be cognizant is to be aware, and it is to have, or show a knowledge of something through understanding, recognition or perception. However, this awareness is not just mental. Rather, it is “marked by comprehension through sentient attentiveness and comes when we honor the lived experience of the body as the primary ground for knowing. Through sentient awareness, through a dancing, cognizant body where awareness emanates from the inside out, we become fully informed and conscious” (1).

They maintain that there are ways of knowing and understanding the world and our relation to it that are not automatically processed through the brain. ‘The boundaries between perception, action, and cognition are porous’ says Seitz (2000, p. 35). They also reference Ian Burkitt, who builds a case for this using the work of Merleau-Ponty, when he says that it is through bodily actions, through context, through what he says are ‘non-cognitive forms of categorization’ that thought is made possible (1998, p. 68). ‘Knowledge’, Burkitt says, and awareness ‘is embodied and situated and the product of having an active body.’ It is bodily actions or habits which make thought possible (Seitz, p. 2000). The Debenhams then suggest that Burkitt’s phrase ‘non-cognitive forms of categorization’ might be rearticulated as ‘super-cognitive forms of categorization’ if indeed cognition and being cognisant are connected and thinking is ‘embodied and situated.’

In *Wisdom of the Body Moving*, Linda Hartley considers a Body Mind Centering perspective. Within her work, she reinforces this when she makes the distinction between ‘mind’ as information gained through mental and cognitive processes and ‘mind’ as a ‘...function of awareness that can move among, encompass, and pervade all processes and contents of cognition’ (Debenham, Debenham 4). So, if the body ‘knows’ then, it is not required to wait for cognitive thinking to confirm what is already felt and understood kinaesthetically before we can act on our awareness (Debenham, Debenham 4).

When Fraleigh states that, ‘our body thinks, and it thinks as it moves’, she means that our moving, living body is intelligent, and our thinking arises through material physical sources as surely as it may seem to move beyond them (2000, p. 57). When we trust our innate intelligence (here Fraleigh is referring to our kinaesthetic intelligence), it speaks, or brings us images and feelings in unpredictable ways. If dancers truly focused, as Phillips (2003, p. 1) suggests, on the ‘imaginative flesh of complex physical thought’, dances and dancing then become elaborate and full beyond words (Debenham, Debenham 4).

An example of when the possibility for meaning-making becomes apparent is when dancers investigate concepts that are established in what is called Laban Movement Analysis, or LMA. LMA is a means and language for interpreting, describing, visualizing and notating all ways of movement. Created by Rudolf Laban, LMA draws on his theories of *effort* and *shape* to describe, interpret and document human movement. Used as a tool by dancers, athletes, physical and occupational therapists, it is one of the most widely used systems of human movement analysis. This meaning-making becomes possible specifically within the LMA notion of Patterns of Total Body Connectivity (PTBC). These hardwired developmental patterns function without conscious awareness while underlying all human movement (Debenham, Debenham 4).

However, Kathie and Pat Debenham assert that when dancers consciously attend to the presence and power of these patterns of body connectivity they [dancers] are able to simultaneously experience and perceive sensation and find meaning within their movement. This embodied knowledge can then increase both technical abilities and performance capabilities. For instance, they offer that knowing that breathing is about wholeness and unity allows the dancer to fully embrace the completeness of his own sensation and to trust his sense of being. This wholeness then supports the individual voice of artistic ability:

The pattern of core/distal functions, whether the mover is aware of it or not, is a ground for understanding his relationship with the world. Magnify through awareness the feeling of reaching out and coming back in, tracking the sensation of this action, and it becomes apparent that the body knows, without having to verify through conscious thought, the alive and ongoing desire of the body to reach to find connection and to ground for stability.

Within the bodily experience of core/distal, one can feel and simultaneously know what mobility and stability are about; we fly, we fall, we recuperate, we stretch outward and draw inward. These concepts don't have to be processed through the mind for understanding; the body is, to rephrase Phillips, the manifestation of 'complex physical thought' (Debenham 2002).

The Debenhams also share how the framework of LMA has opened many avenues for helping their students of dance connect inner sensation with outward expression. LMA teaches how to sense,

see, and be aware of the parts and pieces of a dance within the context of the whole choreography. And the theory is mediated through practicing, through deep attention to the connection between inner sensation and outward expression. To demonstrate the way in which LMA/BF moves theory in to practice while acknowledging kinaesthetic knowing, they offer the example within the concept of “grounding”, which they state is an essential principle in the study of dance technique.

The dance teacher might approach it from the ‘body’ aspect by exploring the upper-lower pattern of Total Body Connectivity including the foot-to-pelvis connection and kinetic chains that make possible a feeling of connectedness to the ground. Psychological allusions of ‘taking a stand’, or ‘standing on one’s feet’ also come into play. Furthermore, exploring notions such as ‘strong weight effort’ and ‘free flow’, supports moving through space with effortlessness and control. Investigating ‘spatial intent’ informs the clarity of both ‘vertical throughness’ for standing and propulsion in traveling. They maintain that considering how the body accommodates and adapts its ‘shape’ in the process of traveling clarifies the shaping of the body and the relationship to self and or the environment. So, within the Laban Movement Analysis framework, all of these investigations are interposed “through a felt sense, trusting inner sensation as a primary means of knowing and understanding” (Debenham, Debenham 6).

Kathie and Pat Debenham also explain how incorporating LMA aids in instructing dancers on how to truly feel, and thus express the emotional aspect within a dance:

To encourage a fuller intentionality in performance, we encourage dancers to attend to not only what they are doing, but to how they are doing it. Through an awareness of how something is done, dancers learn to focus on the dynamics of the movement. How the action is accomplished colours the dance with an emotional quality that is undeniable. By engaging in the qualitative aspects of the movement, or the ‘inner attitude’ with which they accomplish the action, dancers develop highly nuanced awareness of how they use weight, time, flow and space. In doing so dancers capture the emotional essence of the choreography. In our experience the clearer the dynamics – in LMA terminology, the ‘Effort’ life of a dancer – the more expressive, and emotionally charged their performance. For example in coaching a dancer for an awareness of how they activate their weight to achieve impact, do they use power and strength or does the impression reside

in withholding their weight, creating a feeling of delicacy, of not wanting to disturb anyone. Relative to time, do they move with the quickness of lightning, or do they create suspended time and create a sense of timelessness? Helping our dancers to track the 'feeling-full' sensation of the movement will move them beyond what is being done (the action itself), and closer to performance that transcends the action. By way of an inner knowing and so somatosensory processing, dancers will fully embody the intent of the movement.

This 'Effort' life is something that within my own experience, has been the most effective means by which I have relayed emotions as a dancer. At a particular tribute show to Agustin Lara in 2005, I was playing the role of Maria Felix, mourning his death through the dance Seguiriyas. The Effort I put into this dance consisted of slow and heavy movement, deep and heavy facial expressions, and an inner sadness that sprang from something very real, and very personal. Another illustration is when I dance what I call my signature dance, the Farruca. Previously only allowed to be danced by males, this dance has a long history of exuding power and mystique. This dance stirs up emotions within me every time I perform it, and my Effort is impossible to ignore. The footwork is harder, louder in very specific parts, my movements are more sensual, seductive in others. Whether sadness, or power, I embody my emotions through flamenco.

In "*Thinking in Action: Thought made visible in contemporary dance*", Catherine Stevens and Shirley McKechnie explore the possibility of language communicated through the body. Within their article, The Quantum Leap Youth Choreographic Ensemble at the Australian Choreographic Centre in Canberra offers an example of the emotional and kinaesthetic preparation during one of the most basic elements of dance: rehearsal. In 2004, the Quantum Leap group focused on an exhibition called Eternity at the National Museum of Australia. The exhibition provided a basis for the themes that were to inspire the development of the year's work and performance. "Eternity" is based on a single dance work consisting of many parts and sections. And like a book, it has chapters, pages, and paragraphs consisting of ten poems. The choreographers of the Quantum Leap group took into consideration the ten emotions that give structure to the Eternity exhibition. Francesca Rendle-Short, the author of the poems "The poems that accompany each emotion offer a profound basis for the imaginative journey of

contemplating and owning our own intimate experiences of these states of being”, (Stevens, McKechnie 244). She goes on to say that the “mystery of these states of being” weaves itself through the choreographic journey, maybe never to be fully revealed.

The dancers in the Quantum Leap talk about the emotions of the poems in the dance studio, they listen to each other’s stories, and they “improvise to find movement ideas while the stories still grip the imagination” (Stevens 244). These are the strategies used by actors too but the dancers at this stage have only words and images in the mind; now their bodies must find images powerful enough to convey all this without words. Stevens relays that

the choreographer demonstrates a slow sustained crawl across the floor; he encourages young dancer to find a similar quality; ‘disembodied tortoise fluid’ he says earnestly as he concentrates on the young dancer’s effort. Nobody finds this funny. The absorption in the group is intense as this particular dancer, now the subject of their entire focus, melts his body into the floor, slows the pace of the backwards motion, mysteriously finds a quality of creepiness and fluidity. ‘That’s great’ says the choreographer. Everyone relaxes. They have all learned something, just by observing the process. It is repeated many times. They build a pyramid of bodies: bigger stronger bodies supporting the younger, lighter ones. ‘Wider and longer’ urges the choreographer as a group advances menacingly, ‘keep it muscular, keep it tense’. And then, when the boys are encouraged to recall what it is like to be truly intimidated he asks them to find the postures of intimidation in their own bodies. ‘What does it look like? Show me.’ Two 14-year-olds struggle to find it. We observe that this is difficult; shoulders lift and chins jut, small chests struggle to expand. No words can easily convey the endearing quality of the effort to find the threatening stance they have often observed in the schoolyard (see Healey 2005). We suggest that the boys experience an unspoken, felt, bodily knowledge—possibly a precursor to an embodiment that can be observed, and ‘felt’ by others (Stevens, McKechnie 244-245).

Stevens and McKechnie argue that some aspects of dance draw on procedural, implicit knowledge but dance is also intentionally communicative and expressive; feelings and personal experience of dancers and choreographers brought to the work in the studio imbue the work in performance. The examples they provide, such as that of the Quantum Leap choreographic ensemble corroborate my thesis that creating and performing dance involves both procedural and declarative knowledge. Although non-verbal, contemporary dance can be a language declared not in words but

through movement of the body. The inspiration for phrases of dance material may be a concept, feeling(s), a space, texture, rhythm, lilt or sound. Declared through movement, the idea becomes a visible thought.

Turning to cognitive psychology again, the James-Lange theory put forth by philosopher and psychologist William James and psychologist Carl Lange is in accordance with how dancers experience and portray emotions. According to the James-Lange theory, emotions are only felt after physiological changes within our bodies have been detected. For example, we experience physiological changes in our bodies that were brought about by an event. Only after these physiological changes occur (ie. increase in heart rate), will we know the emotion we are feeling (fear). So, when a dancer is about to give a performance in front of an audience or even alone in a studio, this event gets processed by the brain and stimulates physiological changes in the body, such as an increased heart rate. These changes in the body get sent back up to the brain (eventually somatosensory cortex of the parietal lobe) and enable the dancer to "feel" these changes within the body. This information then gets sent to the front of the brain (the ventromedial prefrontal cortex) where it is associated with similar memories (for example, sadness if the dancer is conveying the emotions related to death or heart ache). Therefore, by combining our physiological experiences with memories of similar events, a dancer is able to determine the actual emotions he is feeling (<http://www.science.ca/.../scientistprofile.php?pID=273>).

Thus I feel the need to reframe the idea that, as Kathie and Pat Debenham point out, has directed Western thought and ideals for centuries. They offer "I move, therefore I know" as an alternative to the prevailing Cartesian worldview that permeates our culture, and I could not consent more.

## CHAPTER 8: CLOSING THOUGHTS

If philosophical studies intend to develop and accumulate expert knowledge across the myriad facets of human understanding, then consideration needs to be given to the varying forms of intelligence through which that knowledge is explored and made manifest. In “The Embodied Thesis”, Maggi Phillips offers that:

Personally, I am inclined to compare artists with mathematicians who are expected to convey their knowledge in the language of numbers as well as in an explanatory, lucid English. These two skills may be diametrically opposed, requiring the person with a brilliant grasp of the movement of figures to articulate the same coherence in the mathematically impoverished language of English. Dancers and musicians face the same problem, needing to be well and truly bi-lingual to emphasise their critically reflective and ‘verbal’ articulation even when the words may appear superfluous. The logical conclusion of asserting *different* forms of intelligence suggests that the corresponding knowledges will be conveyed via *different* channels of communication, be they mathematical or choreographic (5).

Prompted by Susanne Langer’s argument that a dancer’s emotional portrayals are based on something “illusory, I have argued that this view rests upon an implausible philosophical assumption which entirely neglects the epistemology of the dancer. Dancers are very much able to experience “real” emotions while dancing, and are thus able to communicate these authentic emotions via the non-conceptual medium of dance. Recent advancements in the neurosciences, especially within the last ten years, have introduced concepts that were not available during the time Langer wrote *Feeling and Form*. Yet, her thesis stood without any opposition, as I have found no other arguments against it.

My experiences as a dancer have shown that dance synthesizes the body as both moving and thinking. There is a real and conscious awareness of not only the bodily movements, but of the emotional expression that is to be embodied as well. My research does not end here. I aim to continue my intra-disciplinary investigations, with the continued aim of bridging the sciences and the arts.

Increased knowledge of internal bodily states complements and makes visible the dimensions of science by elucidating the complex physical thought of a body in motion, or, a dancer dancing.

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## VITA

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