Core Aspects of Dance: Condillac and Mead on Gesture

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This essay—part of a larger project of constructing a new, historically informed philosophy of dance, built on four phenomenological constructs that I call "Moves"—concerns the second Move, "gesture," the etymology of which reveals its close connection to the Greek word "metaphor." More specifically, I examine the treatments of gesture by the philosophers George Herbert Mead and Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, both of whom view it as the foundation of language. I conclude by showing how gesture can be used in analyzing various types of dance, which in turn suggests transformational potential for philosophy, dance, and society as a whole.

This essay is part of a larger project in which I create a historically informed philosophy of dance, called "Figuration," built around four central concepts, or "Moves." This new philosophy of dance has two major parts, comprising (a) four basic concepts, or "Moves"[*]—"positure,"[†] "gesture," "grace," and

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[*]   It might be helpful, at this point, to say a few words about the Moves in general. Although I initially generated them through a phenomenological analysis of my own dance experience, in an attempt to isolate a small cluster of concepts or constructs that could be considered as central aspects of dance, I find it meaningful that they align nicely (without any premeditation on my part) with Rudolf Laban's Movement Analysis. (My point of reference here is Jean Newlove, *Laban for Actors and Dancers* [New York: Routledge, 1993].) More specifically, and to give a general sense of the meaning of the other Moves, they correspond closely to what Laban called the four effort dimensions: weight, space, flow, and time. *Positure*, like weight, involves the muscular tension of the body. *Gesture*, like space, involves different degrees of direction and indirection in moving through space to accomplish a given task. *Grace*, like flow, has to do with whether a motion is executed freely, as in a perfect conduit-relation to the environment, or with the expectation of sudden interruption. And *resilience*, like time, involves a distinction between sudden action and sustained movement.

[†]   The OED defines the word "positure" as an archaic form of the word "posture." It is particularly useful in showing the links between the positing of poetry and the posing of dance because (a) "positing" is linked to poetry via the Greek word for poetry, *poïesis*, which is the word Aristotle uses to describe how various philosophers posit different phenomena

"resilience"—and (b) seven types, or "families" of dance—"concert," "folk," "societal," "agonistic," "animal," "astronomical," and "discursive." This essay is devoted to the second of these four Moves, as illustrated by both its importance for two important thinkers in the history of philosophy, Mead and Condillac, and also its applicability to these seven families of dance. In the larger project, I define gesture as "border-organizing, sympathy-manipulating, funding/founding language," but in this essay (for reasons of space) I have focused only on the latter two phrases in this definition.[*]

The reason that I analyze historical texts here is that these Moves (including gesture) were initially generated by phenomenological analysis of my own dance experience, and finding them treated in diverse thinkers across the history of philosophy both buttresses the scope of applicability of the Moves and increases their subtlety and sophistication. As for the title of the larger project, the word "Figuration" derives from "figure," which comes via Latin from the Greek word *schema* ($\sigma\chi\hat{\eta}\mu\alpha$). The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) offers twenty-six numbered definitions of "figure," the meanings of which include bodily shape, attitude, posture, mathematical form, conspicuous appearance, a diagram of the heavens, a move or set of moves in a dance, a musical phrase, and a metaphor. "Figuration" thus encapsulates, via its etymological root, almost my entire project in one word. My rationale for constructing a historically informed philosophy of dance is that I am convinced of the value of considering the contributions of major historical figures in philosophy vis-à-vis dance, because most panoramic efforts in the philosophy of dance thus far have been content to try to construct a comprehensive account of dance in the present, in other words, guided by one or several contemporary theoretical frameworks. One fringe benefit of my approach, moreover, is that trends that recur in the analyses of thinkers from across the history of Western philosophy would seem to be significant for any philosopher of dance to consider today.

It is also worth noting that discussion of families of dance amounts to an *extensional* definition of dance, or a list of types of things in the world to which the word "dance" refers. By contrast, an *intensional* definition of dance would attempt to describe the essential qualities that something would have to possess in order to count as dance. One might define dance as the art of movement for its own sake as an example of the latter. This definition would be unacceptable to many contemporary thinkers because it would exclude many forms of dance, such as ritual, that function efficaciously. In other words, it would mean that a dance that also served some instrumental purpose would be disqualified. The infamous inadequacy (or at least

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(such as fire and love) as the basic material of the cosmos, and (b) "posture" is linked to "poses" which can be understood as the building blocks of a dance.

[*] Joshua M. Hall, *Figuration: A Philosophy of Dance* (doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses 2012 (3534442).

controversial status) of intensional definitions is the main reason why I prefer to emphasize the extensional approach. Although there is a certain degree of arbitrariness to the seven particular "families" I have constructed, each reflects a "natural kind" of phenomenon commonly described with the rhetoric of dance.

By "dance," I mean the following seven clusters, or "families" (to use twentieth-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's term), of meanings: concert dance, folk dance, societal dance, agonistic dance, animal dance, astronomical dance, and discursive dance.* These "families," then, are my own rough attempt to get at the different kind of phenomena that are termed "dances" in contemporary Western culture. Examples of each of the seven are ballet, clogging, salsa, tae kwon do, the pollen dance, "falling stars," and Pablo Neruda's poetry, respectively. At the end of this essay I will return to an analysis of each of these specific dance forms (as an exemplar of its family), with regard to how it is integrally linked with gesture, as illuminated by Condillac and Mead. One potential objection to this larger project might be that these seven "families" seem too radically different to belong together at all. Consider, however, that there is at least one thing which all of them have in common, namely, that each is concerned with movement for its own sake.

The etymology of "gesture," from the Latin *gerĕre*, meaning "to carry out, perform," reveals its close connection to the Greek noun $\mu\varepsilon\tau\alpha\phi\rho\alpha$, meaning "transfer" or "carrying across." A gesture, I wish to suggest, is a physical performance enabling a poetic performance, a nonverbal performance of a verbal one, a carrying out of a carrying across, a metaphor of metaphor itself. Such interconnections affirm the intimacy of poetry and dance, as well as the complementary legitimacy of deriving significance for dance from poetic/metaphorical analyses.

To explore gesture, I examine the explicit treatments of dance in the American social behaviorist and pragmatist philosopher George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), and the French empiricist psychologist and philosopher Etienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715–1780). Despite living in different ages, and despite numerous differences in their thought, Mead and Condillac agree that gesture constitutes the foundation of all language, and that this foundation is linked to the activity of dance. Moreover, these analyses afford the opportunity to devote attention to two important philosophers whose

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* Wittgenstein is widely recognized as one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century. In his early masterpiece *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, he attempted to create the perfect artificial language, and in his later work, especially *Philosophical Investigations,* he explored the irreducibly contextual and behavioral aspects of human language. For more on Wittgenstein and other philosophers in this paper, consult online resources such as *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (http://plato.stanford.edu/) and *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (http://www.iep.utm.edu/), with the caveat that their entries inevitably reflect the contributing authors' (often controversial) interpretations and personal philosophical commitments.

work (especially in the case of Condillac) is largely ignored by philosophers today. My goal is to create a historically informed philosophy of dance with important implications for dance, philosophy, and their shared worlds.

Gesture and dance are of central importance to Condillac's conception of language in his major early work, *Essay on the Origin of Human Language*.[*] The initial inspiration for choosing Condillac as one of the thinkers to consider for the third Move was dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster's fascinating reading of his *Treatise on the Sensations*, by way of which text Foster elaborates her concept of "kinesthetic empathy."[†] Foster's work, in turn, directed me to Jacques Derrida's *The Archeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac*, in light of which I was amazed to discover that Condillac's *Essay* has been so little studied by philosophers, despite the fact that it offers such an original and exciting account of the history of human language.

According to Condillac, dancing gesture carries language across to poetry, which carries language across to prose. In other words, gesture (nonverbal poetic language) creates poetry (verbal poetic language), which in turn creates prose (verbal nonpoetic language), and then prose eventually becomes functionally synonymous, in mainstream Western philosophy, with language. Thus, this sequence can be telescoped as "gesture creates poetry which creates language." Unfortunately, there has been very little work on Condillac in English, with the notable exceptions of Isabel Knight's 1968 *The Geometric Spirit*, and several essays published in the 1970s by Hans Aarsleff (the editor and translator of the text I will consider here), and neither of these two gives significant attention to dance.[‡]

There are, writes Aarsleff in his introduction, two central principles in Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, namely "the connection of ideas and the language of action" (xi). The latter of these two, Aarsleff

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[*] Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge,* trans. Hans Aarsleff (*Essai sur l'origene des connaissances humaines*) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). It is beyond the scope of this project to investigate the thorny issue of Condillac's shift in his later work (especially *Treatise on Sensations*), encapsulated in his famous June 25, 1752 letter to [Pierre-Louis Moreau de] Maupertuis claiming that the *Essay* "was mistaken and [has] given too much to signs" (quoted in Jacques Derrida, *The Archeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987], 536).

[†] Condillac's *Treatise on the Sensations* is currently out of print, unfortunately, but see Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographing Empathy," *Topoi*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2005), 81–91.

[‡] Isabel Knight, *The Geometric Spirit: The Abbé de Condillac and the French Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). Making only two brief references to dance (and even gesture in general) in her chapter on Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Language*, Knight emphasizes that the superior media of verbal language and its rational argumentation quickly replaced such primitive means of communication (157, 158n). Similarly, her chapter on Condillac's aesthetics, which is significantly shorter than the other chapters of the book, contains only one reference to dance (190). For a recent example of Hans Aarsleff's work, see "Philosophy of Language," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

continues, concerns "the spontaneous movements and gestures of both voice and body"—this is the subject terrain I intend to analyze under the simplified name "gesture" (xi). Although "the connection of ideas" dominates Part I, and it is not until Part II that gesture is treated at length, there are moments foreshadowing his theory of gesture early in Condillac's essay. For example, in the last footnote of the section introducing his conceptions of "Imagination, contemplation, and memory," Condillac claims, "The brain can work only by motion" (30n14). This comes in the context of his reference to "the shock to the fibers of the brain," which Condillac assumes to be the physical cause of mental events (and which also seems a fair, if rough, description of the neural mechanisms). My point here is that motion is not limited for Condillac to social gestures in the macro-world, but also has a fundamental place in neural communication in the micro-world.

Gesture comes up again in a footnote two sections later, in which the editor argues that, although Condillac does not explicitly use the term "sympathy," it is nevertheless central to his project. "It is sympathy," Aarsleff claims, "that enables the spontaneous language of action [i.e., gesture] to become the proto-language for the language of intentional signs. By its nature language is always interpersonal and social. Sympathy is embedded in rhetorical expressivism" (37, Condillac's note d). This concept of sympathy is obviously at work in Condillac's account of the origin of language in Part II, which opens with the following strange passage:

> Adam and Eve did not owe the operations of their soul to experience. As they came from the hands of God, they were able, by special assistance, to reflect and communicate their thoughts to each other. But I am assuming that two children, one of either sex, sometime after the deluge, had gotten lost in the desert before they would have known the use of any sign. The fact that I have just stated gives me the right to make this assumption. Who can tell whether some nation owes its origin to such an event? The question is to know how this budding nation made a language for itself. (113)

As an abbot in the Catholic Church, Condillac appears to be trying to reconcile his own, secular, account of language, with the Bible's account of Adam and Eve, which religious account would seem to contradict that secular account. Since the Bible depicts Adam and Eve, who, as the first humans created directly by God, already possess language, then why is Condillac's new secular account necessary? In fact, that account may even be blasphemous. The "fact" Condillac refers to here appears to be this special circumstance of Adam and Eve's possessing language without the use of signs as we know them today, that is, (a) we currently use verbal-linguistic signs to communicate; (b) the Bible tells us that Adam and Eve communicated without these signs, and thus presumably by some other method; therefore,

according to Condillac, (c) they must have used gestural-linguistic signs until something—such as the Flood, or two children wandering off from their community—transpired to require increasing sophistication of linguistic signs. Put another way, the Bible says there was no verbal language in the Garden of Eden, but we have it now, so there must have been some intervening event that made our possession of it necessary, and the post-Flood confusion seems as good a candidate as any.

The uncertainty expressed in the question of a nation's origin suggests the possibility of interpreting this entire passage as a philosophical thought experiment, and the articulation of the *knowable* question in the last sentence seems to support this possibility. Furthermore, Condillac places a footnote after the word "question": "If I suppose two children under the necessity of imagining even the first signs of language," he writes, it is because he feels that it is the philosopher's duty "to explain how it could have come about by natural means" (113n34). Finally, near the end of Condillac's analysis of the language of action in Part II, he expresses the following thought: "Perhaps this entire idea will be taken for a romance, but at least its plausibility cannot be denied" (194). Thus, I premise my reading of Condillac on the assumption that he poses his narrative about two children merely as a likely story, the method behind which is best judged by the results it offers.

Condillac writes of these two hypothetical children that "their mutual discourse made them connect the cries of each passion to the perceptions of which they were the natural signs. They usually accompanied the cries with some movement, gesture, or action that made the expression more striking" (114). In other words, each child observed in the other a simultaneous combination of (a) an involuntary verbal response (such as a scream), (b) a perception (such as a dangerous animal approaching), and often (c) a movement accompanying the response (such as pointing at, or perhaps recoiling from, the dangerous animal). "Moved by this display," Condillac's account continues, "the other fixed the eyes on the same object, and feeling his soul suffused with sentiments he was not yet able to account for to himself, he suffered by seeing the other suffer so miserably" (114). Here one sees the role of kinesthetic sympathy. It is the second child's innate sympathy for the first child that facilitates the connection between the verbal response (the scream) and the external stimulus (the dangerous animal). Continuing on: "The frequent repetition of the same circumstances . . . make it habitual for them to connect the cries of the passions and the different motions of the body to the perceptions which they expressed in a manner so striking to the senses" (115). In this way, "the passions" naturally produced "the language of action, a language which in its early stages . . . consisted of mere contortions and agitated bodily movements" (115).

Although for these children, the first generation of users of this new language, "the first progress of this language was very slow," when they grew up they "had a child" whose "very flexible tongue bent in extraordinary

manner and pronounced an entirely new word" (116). Note the focus here on muscularity, on the "extraordinary manner" in which the child's tongue is "bent." Once again a kind of physical motion, a kind of gesturing (this time with the tongue) facilitates the more rapid development of the new language. It is not the case that the parents lacked intelligence, but rather that their "organ of speech was so inflexible that it could articulate only very simple sounds with any ease" (115). Language fluency, Condillac thus suggests, requires a simultaneous development of both verbal and motor capacities. The point is that gesture is not just some primitive ancestor of speech in historical time, but rather coextensive with speech in the lifespan development of an individual human being.

Because the flexibility of their tongues decrease rapidly as children age, their capacity to supply new sounds to be made into words lasts for a very brief time, and the expansion of the language's vocabulary therefore still proceeds very slowly, taking "many generations" (116). Only when "the language of articulated sounds became richer" and was thus "better suited to exercise the vocal organ at an early age and to preserve its initial flexibility," did verbal language "prevail" over gestural language (116). And since this development took many generations, "there was a time when conversation was sustained by discourse that was a mixture of words and actions" (116).

This hybrid discourse, Condillac speculates, "was chiefly preserved to instruct the people in matters that most deeply concerned them, such as government and religion," because, as a result of the hybrid language's "acting with greater force on the imagination, the impression was more lasting" (118). In other words, verbal language augmented by gesture makes a more strikingly visual impression and is thereby more apt to induce sympathy, than the primarily auditory impression of verbal language alone. As a greater number of senses are stimulated, the person is more stimulated overall and therefore more likely to remember the experience and the content of the message. "The ancients called this language," Condillac notes, "by the name 'dance,' which is why it is said that David danced before the ark" (118). Condillac then goes on to give a brief history of this activity:

> As their taste improved, people gave greater variety, grace and expression to this "dance." They not only submitted the movements of the arms and the attitudes of the body to the rules, but even marked out how the feet should be moved. As a result dancing was naturally divided into two subordinate arts . . . the "dance of gestures," which was maintained for the communication of their thoughts; the other was chiefly the "dance of steps," which was used for the expression of certain states of mind, especially joy; it was used on occasions of rejoicing, pleasure being its principle aim. (118)

There are several ideas worthy of note here. First, the activity of dance evolved as a result of "taste" improving, which could only happen, as we

are reminded by Condillac's contemporary, the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776), through extensive experience with the activity in question.* Simply put, doing a lot of dancing—practicing gestures as a physical performance—was the condition for the possibility of intellectual advancement. Second, the development of two gestural systems was based on purely physical parameters, in this case a division between parts of the body, namely the arms and trunk versus the feet. Third, the end result was a functional separation between a pragmatic means of communication and an aesthetic, hedonistic, and celebratory one (i.e., the "dance of steps" is still a means of communication). Fourth, both gestural systems were still mental and intellectual activities, one being a communication of thoughts and the other being an expression of mental states. In other words, both the hands and the feet were engaged in movements of the mind.

Fifth and finally, this division does not involve two, as it were, side-by-side categories, but rather a newer category derived from an older one: "The dance of steps therefore stems from that of gestures, whose character it retains" (118). This means that the dance of the steps, of the feet, of pleasure and celebration, is still involved in the communication of thoughts, and that all dance, of whatever type, descended originally from gesture and the natural beginnings of language. Condillac goes on to talk about the "different genres of dance," organized around their expressive capacities, insofar as "the degree of their perfection increases with the variety and scope of the expression" (118).

Dancing and gesture did not simply come to an end, according to Condillac, when verbal language succeeded this first language of action. "When speech succeeded the language of action, it preserved the character of its predecessor," and more specifically, "to take the place of the violent bodily movements, the voice was raised and lowered by strongly marked intervals" (120). To make up for the loss of the rest of the body, verbal language, as it evolved beyond the language of action, became musical, and its "manner of articulation partook of the quality of chant" (121). By "chant," as a footnote clarifies, Condillac "refers to the entire range of the verbal language of action," including "music," "song," and "singing" (121, Condillac's footnote r). It is therefore "one of the two primary, natural modes for the expression of sentiment, the other being gesture" (Ibid.). Thus, all

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* Hume is regarded as one of the most important philosophers in the Western tradition, chiefly for having fatally undermined Cartesian metaphysical claims about the objective nature of the world and the purported access it provides to absolute truth. The result of Hume's critique was so influential that Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) famously wrote that Hume "awoke" him "from his dogmatic slumber" (Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Gary Hatfield [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 74). For Hume's aesthetics, see David Hume, "On the Standard of Taste," *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, vol. 3, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (London: Longman, Green, 1898) 1874–75.

expression can be classified as either gesture or chant, and the latter comes from the former. All expression, according to Condillac, begins as gesture.

In the context of chant, Condillac discusses the ancient Greeks' and Romans' "declamation," or musically marked speech (often accompanied by an instrument), whose pronunciation "in everyday conversation came so close to chant that their declamation may be called chant in the strict sense" (130). In this prosodic aspect Condillac finds the reason "the Roman orators who delivered their orations in the public forum could be heard by the entire crowd" (131). Moreover, expressiveness in the voice or a wide range of vocal inflection is closely related to expressiveness in the body or a wide range of gestures. As Condillac puts it in the next section, since "it is natural for the voice to vary its inflections in step with an increasing variety of gestures, it is also natural for a people who speak a language whose pronunciation is much like chant to have a greater variety of gestures" (132).

I would argue that the comparatively greater emphasis on, and meaningfulness of, gesture in ordinary conversation among peoples speaking comparatively more "musical" languages (such as Italian and Chinese) further supports the previous point. Condillac moves in this direction himself, quoting observations from Abbé Du Bos that "conversations of all kinds carry along with them more outward show and speak much more to the eyes, if I may be permitted that expression, in Italy than in our part of the world" (135). Condillac implies that there is a communicative gain to be had—specifically regarding the style, or affective connotations, with which the speaker presents her- or himself and the inflection s/he gives the subject matter—when the rest of the body joins the voice in expression, in a veritable dance of conversation.

Moreover, the gestures of the ancient Greeks and Romans could be "sufficiently distinct to be measured," which is, according to Condillac, the condition for the possibility of a rich heritage of pantomime—a sister art of dance. More specifically, pantomime originated in the ancient world because the Greeks and Romans "divide[d] the chant and the gestures between two actors," the latter actor eventually evolving into the mime (133). In this way, the ancients "came to imagine, as an entirely new invention, a language which had been the first mankind spoke," differing "from [that first language] only by being suitable for the expression of a much larger number of thoughts" (134).[*] This means that the ancients in effect recreated gesture, which originally gave birth to both articulate verbal language and also what I have called the hybrid language of dance, at a higher level of sophistication. Noting the immense popularity (however surprising to the

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[*] Although the word *spoke* here might suggest that Condillac is referring to the generic, mixed language rather than a purely gestural language, note that he is also, by implication, referring to the pure gesture of the mime as something *spoken*, which makes it likely that he is merely using the word *spoke* loosely or metaphorically.

contemporary reader) of this new language of pantomime, which "lasted as long as the empire," Condillac claims its great power lay, during that golden age, in "giving greater pleasure, because the imagination [was] more deeply affected by a language that [was] all action"—that is, gesture (135).

Condillac's focus on gesture ends in the section of his book entitled "The origin of poetry," in which he claims that, at the origin of each language, "the style was a virtual painting, adopting all sorts of figures and metaphors" (150). Thus, just as spoken language became musical as it evolved away from pure gesture, so written language became poetic. Again in this project, dance and poetry come together in a striking way. "These two arts" of music and poetry, Condillac concludes, "allied themselves with gesture, which is older than either and called by the name of dance" (151).

Synthesizing these conceptual analyses of gesture in Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* yields the second phrase of the amplified conception of gesture for the Figuration philosophy of dance: *gesture is funding-and-founding language*. The materialistic dimension of this phrase is inspired by the work of (erstwhile Condillac scholar) Jacques Derrida, himself inspired by the fusion of Marxist and psychoanalytic ideas leading to notions that there is a materialistic foundation for all of culture, including language. In brief, Derrida repeatedly links the phenomena of language and linguistic analysis to capital and economic analysis (using phrases such as the "economies of desire").[*] To return to the amplified conception of gesture, it both invests (or *funds*) verbal language with its force or energy—like investing capital in a business venture—and also creates (or *founds*) verbal language with its resources or material—like founding a charity by providing it with all of the supplies and personnel it needs to get started.

Having just expounded on the importance of the concept of gesture for Condillac, I can now show its complete centrality in the thought of George Herbert Mead, a contemporary of the classical pragmatists William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, and John Dewey, and sometimes labeled an early pragmatist himself. Outside the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy, Mead is most famous as a social psychologist and one of the founders of the fledgling discipline of sociology. Surprisingly, then, the secondary literature in philosophy on Mead (as with Condillac) is fairly limited, and none of it directly addresses his relevance to dance.[†]

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[*]   For an important example of his deployment of these notions in his work, see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[†]   See, for example, Mitchell Aboulafia, "Mead, Sartre: Self, Object & Reflection," *Philosophy & Social Criticism,* vol. 11 (1986): 63–86; Van Meter Ames, "Mead & Husserl on the Self," *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research,* vol. 15 (1955): 320–31; and Gary Allan Cook, "The Development of G. H. Mead's Social Psychology," *Transactions of the C.S. Peirce Society,* vol. 8 (1972): 167–86.

Mead's clearest and most concise account of gesture is found in a long footnote to an early section of *Mind, Self, and Society*: "The Behavioristic Significance of Gestures."[1] There Mead defines gesture as "the basic mechanism whereby the social process goes on" (13n9). He also defines gestures, in the context of an encounter between two organisms, as "movements of the first organism which act as specific stimuli calling for the (socially) appropriate responses of the second organism" (14n9). Paraphrasing, gestures are socially stimulating movements that generate appropriate responses. Central to this phenomenon—and to the way in which I augment the concept of gesture in the second Move—is the receptive power, or sympathy, of the second organism; gestures, according to Mead (as well as Condillac), only work because of the sympathetic connections between and among organisms. Immediately after this definition, in another sweeping statement, Mead remarks that "The field of the operations of gestures is the field within which the rise and development of human intelligence has taken place throughout the process of the symbolization of experience" (14n9). Human intelligence, which is a making-symbolic of an organism's interaction with the environment, is entirely indebted to gesture. Finally, Mead attributes to gesture even "the origin and growth of present human society and knowledge, with all the control over nature and over the human environment that science makes possible" (14n9). A more fundamental concept, and an account more consonant with that of Condillac, would be difficult to imagine.

Also worthy of note in this section, Mead uses the word "gesture" synonymously with "attitudes," having defined the latter early in the book as "the beginning of acts" (5). In the central nervous system, which Mead describes as "a whole series of neurons," an attitude corresponds to, for example, "the exact way in which the astronomer approaches the [telescope] under certain conditions" (5). Mead's point here is that every attitude of an organism has a one-to-one correspondence with a particular overall state of the central nervous system; that is, as I am engaged in a particular moment of a certain activity, my nervous system as a whole takes on a specific state that matches that moment of activity perfectly. In one of the "Supplementary Essays" at the end of the book, Mead defines "attitude" again, this time as "the adjustment of the organism involved in an impulse ready for expression" (362). For an example of an attitude in the real world, Mead notes that, "A person who is familiar with a horse approaches it as one who is going to ride it. He moves toward the proper side and is ready to swing himself into the saddle" (12). Thus, the word *attitude* can also mean posture or bearing, as does its cognate in French, from which the English word is derived. Thus, speaking only barely figuratively, one could paraphrase Mead's analysis of the nature of posture-gesture as claiming that on the stage that is the human body there are millions of dancers, called neurons, which are choreographed into various positions or attitudes, whose energy is then transferred to limbs,

torso, and head, as positioned in the environment, resulting in observable acts in the social world.

The concept of attitude comes up again in Mead's approving reference to the theory of emotion put forward by nineteenth-century psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910). Mead paraphrases James as proposing that "an attitude in the organism" is both exclusively and exhaustively that organism's so-called "emotional state" (20).* In sympathy with James's view, Mead claims that "all that takes place in the body is action," and that there is nothing in the body "that is itself simply a state, a physiological state that could be compared with a static state" (21). Summarizing James, Mead claims that the "result of [his] analysis was to carry psychology from a static to a dynamic form" (21).

In the section "Wundt and the Concept of the Gesture" of Part II of the book (entitled "Mind"), Mead begins to use a phrase that will become an important and recurrent one for him, "a conversation of gestures" (42). He is referring to the example of a dog fight, in which movements "are not, however, gestures in the sense that they are significant" (43). Rather, there is simply "an actual change in [each dog's] own position" (43). Significance is gained only when a gesture "means this idea behind it and it arouses that idea in the other individual" (45). For Mead, this is the point, as well, where "what we call 'language'" begins (46). With language, crucially, the conversation of gestures previously carried out between individuals now becomes "internal (between a given individual and himself)" (47). Mead's first example of this internal conversation is "thinking—which is simply an internalized or implicit conversation of the individual with himself by means of gestures" (47). Even something as abstract as thought, for Mead, can thus be equated with gestures, much as thought for Condillac, as noted above, can be reduced to movements in the brain.

Note further that these conversations of linguistic gestures not only rely on the sympathetic orientation of the participating organism(s), as all gestures do for Mead, but also function by the linguistic organism's intentionally taking advantage of, or manipulating, its own sympathy and/or that of another organism. Put differently, when we use language to accomplish things in our minds and in the world, we do so by consciously engaging our own sympathy to gesture. Although the negative connotations of the word *manipulating* may seem jarring and/or out of place here, I use it to suggest an important dimension of Mead's thought (as well as social behaviorism and Pragmatism in general). In short, because of his Darwinian inheritance, Mead

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* Besides being one of the founders of the field of psychology, James is most famous as a founder (along with Charles Sanders Peirce and John Dewey) of the influential school of American philosophy known as Pragmatism. The psychological theory of emotion in question is currently known as "the James-Lange theory of emotion" (see, for example, David G. Myers, *Psychology*, 10th ed. [New York: Worth, 2011]).

views all organismic activity as consisting of strategic manipulations of other organisms and environments in the interest of survival and reproductive advantage.

For his next examples of conversations of gestures, Mead refers to the sports of boxing and fencing, which are often thought of as dancelike activities. He then immediately turns to the situation of the actor, who consciously exploits the expressive potential of the gesture—a potential that is merely a byproduct for dogs, boxers, and fencers. Mead's analyses of the actor are important for this investigation not only because actors have historically sung and danced in their performances, but also because dancers are nowhere explicitly treated in the text. "The actor is in the same position as the poet: he is expressing emotions through his own attitude, his tones of voice, through his gestures, just as the poet through his poetry is expressing his emotions and arousing that emotion in others" (44). I have elaborated in this essay on the relationship between posture and attitude. In the larger (unpublished) project from which this essay derives, I have elaborated on the relationship between posture, position, poetry, and dance; here one finds all six terms coming together in a single sentence. Earlier in the book, Mead notes that, for actors, nonverbal gestures "may become definitely a language." He also emphasizes how, in the example of an angry gesture, the actor "is not expressing his own emotion, but simply conveying to the audience the evidence of anger," and sometimes doing so more successfully than "a person who is in reality angered" (17).

Although Mead claims in the next section that "It is only the actor who uses bodily expressions as a means of looking as he wants others to feel," and that this effect is achieved "by continually using a mirror," we know that dancers use such expressions similarly, through literal mirrors (in the professional studio) and/or metaphorical mirrors (other dancers engaged in the same dance) (65). "When he later makes use of the gesture," Mead continues in reference to the actor, "it is present as a mental image" (66). Dance performance, similarly, could be understood as boiling down to nothing but a series of gestures producing mental images for the audience.

Returning to the section on the concept of gesture, Mead makes another claim about gestures that has strong resonances with the practices of dance. "In the very beginning the other person's gesture means what you are going to do about it. It does not mean what he is thinking about or even his emotion" (49). Put differently, a gesture for Mead most fundamentally "means" the behavior in the other that the gesturer intends to elicit through that gesture. Even for human beings, intellectually sophisticated, masters of verbal language, gesture is fundamentally material (an economic exchange), bodily, and social. In each metaphorical dance of communication, the most important thing one gets from a partner is the cue for how to move in response. It is through this "communication by a conversation of gestures in a

social process or context of experience" that mind always "arises" (50). For Mead there is, first, sociality, then gestures, then mind.

In a later section, "Thought, Communication, and the Significant Symbol," Mead offers another analysis with connotations for dance, this time of how "our conduct" is "made up of a series of steps which follow each other," in which series "the later steps may be already started and influence the earlier ones" (71). This sounds very much like a choreographed dance routine. His summary in the following sentence also contains a core phrase that could be used to characterize dance in general: "The thing we are going to do is *playing back on what we are doing now*" (71, emphasis added). The temporality implied here is complex and interesting, and involves the future somehow erupting playfully within the present. Dance, too, seems to be a playful eruption of the moves one is about to make into one's present movement, whether the dance is improvised or systematically planned.

Finally, in "Social Attitudes and the Physical World," Mead offers a justification for the importance of internalizing "the conversation of gestures," which is that the value of this process "lies in the superior co-ordination gained for society as a whole, and in the increased efficiency of the individual as a member of the group" (179). Simply put, internalizing gestures makes the body politic dance. And it makes each "self," which Mead defines in this section as "a process in which the conversation of gestures has been internalized within an organic form," a better dancer.[*]

Synthesizing Mead's conceptual analyses of gesture, I derive the third and final phrase of the amplified conception of gesture in the Figuration philosophy of dance: *gesture is sympathy-manipulating*. To perform a gesture, for a minded organism or self, is to exploit the result of the social process that made that organism or self a self to begin with. Put differently, because we are what we are by virtue of the manipulations of our societies, we can manipulate our shared manipulations to communicate through gesture.

Synthesizing Mead's conceptual analyses of gesture from *Mind, Self, and Society* with those of Condillac from *Essay on the Origin of Human Language*, I propose that the Move called gesture can be understood, in part, as sympathy-manipulating, funding-and-founding language. To rehearse the insights elaborated above, gesture is sympathy-manipulating because it is an organism's use or exploitation of the shared manipulations that are the conditions of its being (Mead), and it is funding-and-founding language insofar as it is the historical and developmental ancestor of verbal language (Condillac).

To connect Figuration theory to other theoretical discourses on dance, the Move of gesture is, first, closely related to Laban's analytical concept

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[*] This justification also reminds one of Plato's rationale for the centrality of dance education in his curriculum in the *Laws*. See Plato, *The Laws of Plato*, trans. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

of "Space," which involves the movement of the body through personal and objective space. According to *Laban for Actors and Dancers*, a concise introduction to Laban's work written by his student Jean Newlove, Laban thought of movement as inherently linguistic, more specifically as "a two-way language process through which the human body could communicate by giving and receiving messages."[2] Newlove also claims that, for Laban, "Dance is to movement as poetry is to prose" (13), an analogy that reinforces my own claim that poetry constitutes a privileged access, among linguistic forms, to dance.

At the basis of Laban's work, Newlove explains, is the "kinesphere," the "space within our reach, our 'personal' space" (22). Within this space, she continues, "the four motion factors, Space, Time, Weight and Flow can influence the movement and attitude of an individual," and any given human "action requires . . . all four" (70). More specifically, a movement can range on a set of continua from (a) "flexible" to "direct" (in how it traverses space), (b) "sustained" to "sudden" (in how it consumes time), (c) "light" to "strong" (in its attitude toward its weight), and (d) "free" to "bound" (in how it flows) (70, 71, 73). When one combines values of three of the variables (Space, Time, and Weight), one arrives at what Laban calls the "Eight Basic Effort Actions," namely "press, wring, glide, float, thrust, slash, dab, flick" (75). Against this backdrop, one could say that Laban's specific movement quality of Space (which ranges from "direct" to "indirect"), involves, like gesture, the syntax of the linguistic communication, the material basis of what is doing the conveying. As Newlove puts it, "Space can be related to attention and the need to orient ourselves satisfactorily to whatever focal point attracts us" (114).

The Move of gesture in Figuration theory is also closely related to Suzanne Langer's concept of "virtual gesture." To understand this complex concept, it is helpful to consider, however briefly, Langer's aesthetic theory in general.* In her major early work, *Philosophy in a New Key*, Langer argues that the basis of both art and philosophy is the use of symbolization "to attain, as well as to organize belief" (26). This is because, according to Langer, human beings have a "basic need" for symbolization (41). Although, as the title of the book suggests, music is the art form whose symbolizations Langer emphasizes, she repeatedly links music to dance, asserting that for "a long age music was dependent on" dance, and "not found without" it (255).

Dance achieves greater prominence in *Feeling and Form*, the book that Langer describes as "in effect, Volume II of the study of symbolism that began with *Philosophy in a New Key*" (vii). The first of two chapters on dance begins

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* Although frequently dismissed by academic philosophers, Langer's work is highly original and continues to have an important impact on philosophy today. For more on Langer's account of "virtual gesture," see *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (1942; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

with the observation that no "art suffers more misunderstanding, sentimental judgment, and mystical interpretation than the art of dancing," leading to a confusion which "possesses a philosophical significance of its own" (169). In exploring this philosophical significance of dance, Langer first considers and then rejects two views: that "the essence of dance is musical," and "that dance is one of the plastic arts" (such as painting and sculpture) (169, 172). Instead, for Langer, dance is its own fully independent art, as evidenced by the fact that it possesses what she terms a "primary illusion," an essential aspect of any art form created by its "basic abstraction" (174). A primary illusion, then, consists of the type of imaginary effects that an art causes to appear. In dance's case, this primary illusion is complicated (involving the virtual), but the basic abstraction is simple: "*Gesture* is the basic abstraction whereby the dance illusion is made and organized" (174). It is crucial for Langer, however, that the gestures particular to dance are natural and spontaneous, amounting instead to what she calls a "free symbolic form, which may be used to convey *ideas* of emotion"—virtual gesture (175). What this means for Langer is that dance gestures are imitations of real gestures, whose imitations create the illusion that some force or forces beyond the dancers are moving them on the stage, like a puppeteer controlling his or her puppets. This constitutes dance's "primary illusion," namely the illusion of "virtual powers." Additionally, and finally, it is not the actual dancers, according to Langer, who are expressing themselves through dance, but rather the "created personality, a dance element which figures simply as a psychical, human or superhuman Being" (181). In other words, dance movement "is 'gesture' only within the dance. It is *actual* movement, but *virtual self-expression*" (178). In sum, "the primary illusion of dance and the basic abstraction—virtual spontaneous gesture"—makes dance above all "a play of Powers made visible" (187).

To contemplate these insights from Laban and Langer in a way consonant with my own theory of Figuration, the Move called gesture constitutes the "where" dimension, the places to which phenomena go from their starting places, the mechanics of communication among entities in their original positions in any practice/discourse. Figuration thus finds, in the concept of gesture, its primary activity (building on my first Move, positure), namely, the carrying out, in various senses, of communication. The critical dimension of this aspect of Figuration for philosophy is the claim that any nonspatial and immaterial communication is always already carried out/in/through/by/for spatial and material support. Put differently, whenever there appears to be a form of communication that is completely independent of, or liberated from, a concrete/material basis, that appearance is ultimately merely an illusion. All communication relies, visibly or invisibly, on materiality.

How does this critical function of gesture play out in actual analyses of the seven members of the seven families of dance mentioned at the beginning of the essay? I begin the analysis of each dance with the conventional

or commonsensical usage of the Move, then consider the two adjectival aspects and the one substantive core of the amplified philosophical construct. In consideration of gesture as a whole, the commonsense meaning is nonverbal communication, the first amplified aspect is border-organization, the second amplified aspect is sympathy-manipulation, and the substantial core is founding/funding language.[*]

For ballet, the commonsensical account of gesture leads to the role of significant gestures in ballet, the formalized "semantics" of symbolic visual elements. (Incidentally, as another example of what I call "concert dance," I could have just as easily and appropriately chosen modern dance). Examples of this semantics of ballet include arms flexed to convey strength, a hand over the mouth to signal fear, and the chin lowered to the chest, head turned to the side, to express sadness. Gesture finds ballet's border-organization in the carrying of individual bodies, with their various movement styles and capacities, across the border from the world of everyday movement into the world of the precise and exacting vocabulary of balletic poses and gestures. The sympathy-manipulation of ballet can be found in the way it taps into audiences' and performers' shared ideals of beauty, grace, strength, et cetera, which evoke various forms of admiration from the audience (including a kind of envious admiration from those who desire the dancers' physique and/or grace). And the funding/founding language of ballet lies in the fact that individual human dancers are needed in order to produce the visual images at the heart of the choreography that uses ballet's gestural, visual language. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of concert dance in general, according to Figuration theory, *the gesture of concert dance consists in dancers' bodies being reprogrammed to manipulate the ideals of an audience; in the imagistic language of ballet their full personhood is sacrificed to offer up idiosyncratic expressions.*[†]

For clogging (an example of what I term folk dance), the commonsensical gestures are the fast and complex steps executed by the feet, legs, and lower body in general. Gesture finds border-organization in the recalibration of the boundary between the upper and lower body, in which the upper body becomes a stable visual spectacle of calm and confidence, while the lower body becomes an auditory spectacle of dynamism and virtuosity. Sympathy-manipulation can be found in the fact that clogging taps into and

draws energy and approval from the urge to respond to the upbeat, percussive music accompanying the dance with a percussive music of one's own (for example, by involuntarily tapping one's feet). And funding-and-founding language in clogging lies in the fact that the series of complex sounds that communicate the Afro-Irish step-dancing traditions of the performers are clearly dependent upon the entire body of the performer. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of folk dance in general, according to Figuration theory, *the gesture of folk dance consists in its repurposing of the parts of the performers' bodies to express impulses shared and enacted vicariously for audience members and to communicate ideas of cultural heritage with material bodies.*

For salsa, the commonsensical gestures are the ways the extremities of the body move during the execution of formalized steps. Gesture finds border-organization in salsa's distillation of abstract ways of relating to a partner that can be instantiated with a large variety of specific partners. Sympathy-manipulation can be found in the fact that each move is made by attempting to imagine what would elicit a positive and energetic response from one's partner, even while being presented as something done effortlessly and for its own sake. And funding/founding language in salsa lies in the fact that, even though the most impressive moves appear as dynamically evolving, nonhuman lines and shapes, these moves are all produced by the elaborate interconnection of individual bodies. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of societal dance in general, according to Figuration, *the gesture of societal dance consists in randomized abstract relationships instantiated in each case according to the imagined responses of a particular partner in order to produce an apparently effortless display of the play of pure, dynamic visual form.*

For tae kwon do, the commonsensical gestures are its various attacks and blocks, especially when organized into what are termed "forms," or sequences of choreographed positions. Gesture finds border-organization in tae kwon do's ability to reorient the mind, moving away from abstract thought and toward the ideal execution of the body for the mind and body's shared defense. Sympathy-manipulation can be found in the fact that tae kwon do bases each movement on the ways that all human bodies share roughly the same predictable strengths and weaknesses. Unlike preparing to fight a member of another species, learning how to skillfully attack another human being makes one simultaneously better prepared to defend oneself against another human's attack. Funding/founding language in tae kwon do lies in the recognition that one's body communicates constantly and involuntarily, and may send inadvertent cues to one's opponent. Learning how to survive and flourish is a matter of reducing the unnecessary and dangerous hypercommunicability of one's body. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of agonistic dance in general, according to Figuration, *the*

gesture of agonistic dance consists in channeling all mental energy within the body in order to capitalize on the weaknesses shared with the opponent (as a fellow human being) by reducing the unnecessary, unintended, and self-endangering communication of the body.

For the pollen dance of the honeybee, the commonsensical gestures are the movements that indicate the geographical location of the source of the nectar (and thus also pollen). Gesture finds border-organization in the pollen dance's transformation of a random area of space into a stage for the communication of socially vital information, and also of various parts of the bee's body into spatial indicators. Sympathy-manipulation can be found in the fact that any worker bee can carry out the pollen dance, since all of them respond identically to the same performance; they are only performers because they can be members of the audience as well. Funding/founding language in the pollen dance lies in the fact that it requires the entire bodies of both the performer bee and the audience bees to constitute a meaningful language for survival. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of animal dance in general, according to Figuration, *the gesture of animal dance consists in the commandeering of body parts and environments into communicative functions that can be performed by various members of the same society and that require the engagement of entire bodies for any meaningfully linguistic phenomenon to arise.*

For "falling stars" or "shooting stars," the commonsensical gesture is the actual "falling" or the streak across the sky. Gesture finds border-organization in the transformation of the deepest reaches of outer space into a two-dimensional grid onto which a trajectory aimed at the viewer appears as a horizontal flash. Sympathy-manipulation can be found in the fact that falling stars, as pointed out by Charles Scott in *The Lives of Things*, can only be perceived by eyes formed out of minerals found in the remains of previous stars.[*] Funding/founding language lies in the fact that it is only because of the movements of stars, especially our sun, that human beings are able to survive on the earth and form the very languages with which they speak of, and thereby share the experiences of, falling stars. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of astronomical dance in general, according to Figuration, *the gesture of astronomical dance consists in foreshortened motions appearing to constitutionally similar beings only because of ongoing similar motions that sustain the lives of those beings.*

Finally, for Pablo Neruda's poetry, the commonsensical gestures are the words and phrases of the poems.[3] Gesture finds border-organization in Neruda's reorientation of words in the Spanish language by placing them in novel positions relative to each other. Sympathy-manipulation can be

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[*]   Charles E. Scott, *The Lives of Things* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 84.

found in the fact it is only because of various semantic, phonetic, syntactic, and other sympathies between otherwise highly dissimilar words and phrases that Neruda is able to hold them together in novel configurations. Funding/founding language lies in the fact that it is the embodied mind (or minded body) of Neruda that made such novel assemblages seem both desirable and physically possible. To paraphrase these insights at the level of the family of discursive dance in general, according to Figuration, *the gesture of discursive dance consists in novel combinations of words and phrases made possible by both their own sympathetic interrelationships and the body of the writer who both finds those combinations meaningful and physically records them.*

To recapitulate this presentation of the second Move of Figuration theory, the etymology of "gesture" from the Latin *gerĕre* (meaning "to carry out, perform") shows how closely related it is to the word "metaphor," whose etymology stems from the Greek $\mu\varepsilon\tau\alpha\phi o\rho\acute{\alpha}$ (meaning "carrying across"). On this basis of this gesture-metaphor connection, I have suggested that dance and poetry are deeply interconnected, which constitutes one good reason to think that poetry (and its metaphors) are a legitimate source of philosophical knowledge regarding dance. To adduce philosophical evidence for the linkages between poetry and dance in the Move of gesture, I have drawn upon Etienne Bonnot de Condillac and George Herbert Mead, both of whom regard dance as in some sense the foundation of all human language. For Condillac, the first human language is the language of action, or nonverbal gesture, which lends its allusive character to the highly poetic verbal languages of ancient cultures (such as those of ancient Greece and China), and which lingers even today in such practices as pantomime. For Mead, gestures are the basis of all social being, founded in our shared biology as members of the same species, and gestures give birth to verbal language when we learn to exploit this shared biology to manipulate other organisms into reacting as we wish. In concert, Condillac's and Mead's analyses of gesture suggest that it provides both the material funds and the founding action of verbal language, with the latter consisting of manipulations of the sympathies of fellow organisms. Finally, applying the Move of gesture to a series of specific instances of actual and metaphorical dances reveals this Move's versatility and efficacy in explaining dance as meaningful communication.

NOTES

1. George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

2. Jean Newlove, *Laban for Actors and Dancers* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 11.

3. For easy online access to complete poems by Neruda, see http://www.poemhunter.com/pablo-neruda/.