

Contact Philosophy; Dance as Embodied Ethics of Comprehension and Understanding.

panel

The panel “Contact Philosophy” is motivated by three perspectives of dance theorists with practical experience that see in cases of dance and dancing great exemplars for examining and learning communication. Relating acts of dancing, performing, and dance as social engagement, this panel reflects features that make dance not just a good metaphor for a well-balanced and harmonic way of arguing (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), but as an actual cultural practice of an attuned process of thinking and listening that embodies the ethics of understanding. The three perspectives are scored as interweaving contact points within a mutual movement of no-paper presentation.

Aili Bresnahan:

Aili Bresnahan will discuss the embodied and ethical nature of the dance performer who is performing for or with an audience. As a point of “contact” with Katan-Schmid, Bresnahan will use John Dewey’s philosophy but will use it to fund her concept of the dancer as a live creature who is situated in an environment that requires her response, effort, interaction, and problem-solving skills. This interaction uses what cognitive scientist and philosopher Andy Clark calls “feedback loops” that can include both influences from other performers and the audience. It can thus increase our sense of compassion, community, and awareness of others through this interaction and dancing both for and with others in a mindful way. Contact improvisation with persons who are different from us, for example, includes bodily, cultural, and ability differences, putting my perspective in “contact,” with Houston’s work with dancers with Parkinson’s disease.

Einav Katan-Schmid:

Einav Katan-Schmid deals with the comprehensive effort of dancers while leading movements and will analyze the roles of somatic attention and motor-intentionality within. Motor-intentionality in dance is mostly imaginary and therefore it is, firstly, not situated within the (actual) world. Thus, a designed intentionality in dance has to be embodied within movement. In line with Dewey’s aesthetics, Katan-Schmid will argue that attentive dancers know how to keep balance between direction and sensitivity for new information. Thus, the work of embodying intentionality expresses both the intelligence and the sensitivity of the performer. This perspective shares with Houston the contact points of negotiating sensuality with mental images for overcoming challenges for movement’s fluidity (as in the case of Parkinson’s). Her perspective meets Bresnahan’s argumentations within the discussions concerning attentiveness and problem solving, as we learn them from pragmatism, embodied cognition and dancing.

Sara Houston:

Dance is a non-verbal negotiation of sensations, ideas, images. When dancing together, in contact with each other, there begins an act of engagement: of sensing through touch, sight, smell, hearing, breath, quality of movement and hesitation.

Dancing is an act of engagement that requires acute sensitivity to the other in order to respond, to suggest, to witness, to move with them. It is an act where each dancer has to pay attention to the other and to work with them, rather than against them, or for their own sake. In the presentation Houston will explore how community dance groups negotiate movement together, which is non-confrontational, productive and which may create a sense of empathy. The particular groups chosen are marginalized in mainstream social circles; for instance, those with Parkinson’s, mental health issues, or those within the criminal justice system. This empirical observation is underscored by ethical implications for action and communication within and beyond these populations.

Bio:

Aili Bresnahan is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Dayton, Ohio. Her areas of specialization are in contemporary aesthetics and philosophy of art, the philosophy of dance, and in the philosophy of law. Her work appears in the *Dance Research Journal*, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology*, in *Philosophy Compass*, and in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, and she has chapters in books on the aesthetics of rhythm, the philosophy of temporal experience, and dance and quality of life forthcoming. She is also the founder of the DancePhilosophers Google group, an interdisciplinary networking group for dance philosophers.

Einav Katan-Schmid is a research associate at the Cluster of Excellence “An Interdisciplinary Laboratory,” at Humboldt University of Berlin. Having a background as a dancer, her main focus of research is philosophy of dance. Her book “Embodied Philosophy in Dance; Gaga and Ohad Naharin’s Movement Research” was published with Palgrave Macmillan (2016). Katan-Schmid’s work is in the intersection of practice with theory and deals with questions that have both artistic and philosophical implications. She was a lecturer at the College for Arts, “Hamidrasha” Beit Berl, Israel, at the Faculty of Arts, Tel-Aviv University, and a guest professor at the program for MA in Choreography, HZT Berlin.

Sara Houston is Principal Lecturer in the Department of Dance, University of Roehampton, London. Her research interest is in community dance for people who are marginalized or excluded. Since 2010, she has led a research project on the experience of dancing with Parkinson’s in conjunction with English National Ballet. The work won her the BUPA Foundation Vitality for Life Prize in 2011 and she was a Finalist in the National Public Engagement Awards in 2014 for how she engaged the general public in the research. Her book, *Dancing with Parkinson’s*, will be out soon with Intellect Books. Houston won a prestigious National Teaching Fellowship in 2014 and is Chair of People Dancing, the UK’s professional and strategic support organization for community dance.