

Ethical Agility in Dance

Rethinking Technique in British
Contemporary Dance

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Introduction

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Introduction

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This book relies on the idea that dance fosters both singularity and collectivity in artistic education and thereby offers invaluable techniques to operate within the immediate, interconnected and volatile contemporary professional environment. It is concerned with the potential of dance education for developing socially engaged individuals capable of forging ethical human relations for an ever-changing world; and in this sense, to frame dance as a fundamental part of human experience. It poses the question of how the concept of ‘technique’ and associated systems of training in dance can be redefined to enable the collaboration of skills and application of ideas required to face the ethical challenges of twenty-first century dancing bodies. In so doing, the volume seeks to widen our understanding of contemporary dance technique and training in view of an expanded field of dance which would include a broad range of areas, including health, community arts, performance, choreography and education.

Julia Buckroyd (2003) argued that the dance profession was, at the turn of the century, ‘at a point in its history’ where its cultural significance required the creation of code of ethics and practice. Buckroyd finds the origins of the development of such a code in the UK by highlighting the influential British dance educator Peter Brinson’s work (1991) towards improving practice in the dance world. She also highlights the Dance UK Healthier Dance Conference in 1990 and the creation of the Dancers’ Charter as notable moments for opening up debates around ethical issues in the profession.¹ A code of ethics articulates values and principles and informs the understanding of the moral qualities necessary to work in the profession. While this book is not concerned with the codification of a set of principles, the ideas formulated through the different contributors in this collection of essays, conversations and manifestos can be seen to function as a way to explore, debate and grasp the current values of contemporary dance. Examining these values in the applied field of dance reveals a complex and contrasting range of ideas, encompassing broad themes including the relationships between individuality and collectivity, rigour and creativity, and virtuosity and inclusivity. This volume points to ethical techniques as providing a way of navigating these contrasting values in dance.

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Whereas exploring the underlying ideology around the production of the contemporary dancing body is crucial for the continuing development of alternative discourses on dance education and training, the broader aims of this investigation also include the reframing of the practice of dance technique in relation to broader political and social contexts. In the UK, a growing awareness of the need for solidarity, and development of a politics of belonging based on altruism, empathy and connectivity has been widely argued within social commentary in the aftermath of the 2016 Brexit referendum (Klein, 2017; Delgado, 2018) and further intensified by the global COVID pandemic. A global call for the decolonisation of both dance education and dance discourse has challenged the status quo with regard to racism, white supremacy and injustice in the field (Banerji and Mitra, 2020).

Local and international developments with regard to environment, technology and migration have informed a politics of togetherness, whereby collective and individual socially engaged actions have become vital to reassess the ways we breathe, communicate and move. Dance can play a significant role in this reassessment. Yet its ethical value in society including in education – needs to be more widely discussed and acknowledged. American dance scholar, Susan Leigh Foster (2019), recently argued for the revaluing of dance as a social exchange which can be experienced as a commodity or as a gift. As a ‘resource’ dance can bring people together, energise and adapt to diverse range of social situations (2019: 18). To examine the potential value of dance, its ‘resource-fullness’ is to assume that value is relational and constantly in flux (2019: 19). The call for greater focus upon ethical concerns in dance technique invites readers, including dance teachers and students, to think critically about the social value of dance in society. A number of our contributors have been motivated by the paradigmatic political and decolonial discourse in dance studies. Together, their voices offer a response to the need to theorise how we learn new techniques and what is being reproduced in space of transmission (Kraut, 2020: 47). The techniques, practices and ideas shared across the different sections of the book offer lenses to approach the current position of contemporary dance training in Britain, and how it has shaped and is still shaping British dance.

Techniques for the contemporaneity of dance

The use of the term contemporary here and in the title for the volume calls for some clarification. Contemporary dance styles in formal dance education in the UK have largely drawn upon codified techniques of American modern dance, European Physical Theatres and more fluid forms of postmodern dance and somatic approaches which are broadly understood by teachers as Release Technique. However, this lineage of contemporary dance needs to be re-evaluated in light of shifting postcolonial perspectives on education. In academia, there has been a tendency to privilege Western techniques of dance as foundational principles, undermining the idea that other genres

are also contemporary (Kwan, 2017). While this might be reflecting a lack of diversity in contemporary dance more globally, the intention in using the term ‘contemporary’ is to invite contributors to problematise, reflect and resist a fixed meaning, and specifically confront its understanding with our overarching ethical concern.

As SanSan Kwan observes (2017) in her article entitled *When Is Contemporary Dance*, the meaning of the words ‘contemporary dance’ depends on the various contexts within which it is used. In the United States, Kwan distinguishes between concert, commercial and world dance (2017: 38). For some dancers, the term evokes the more process-based approach of the avant-garde aesthetics of modern and postmodern dance. For others, it represents the more lyrical and physical commercial form – as is commonly seen on television whether in advertising or popular entertainment. As Kwan concludes, in a multicultural dance context “‘contemporary dance’ can encompass a range of practices: Western contemporary dance performed by non-Western dancers, ethnic dance fused with Western contemporary vocabulary and/or compositional techniques, or innovations on a traditional non-Western form’ (2017: 48). Kwan reminds us that the signification of ‘contemporary’ as being ‘together with time’ points to the ontological nature of dance as ephemeral, performative and therefore in some contexts making it a time-based art (2017: 39). This points to the idea that all dance is contemporary while also designating the dance happening in the current time. However, she warns us that ‘opening up the field to all current practices’ might dilute its identity and not allow the mean to grasp the ‘social, cultural and political significance of a moment in history’ (2017: 48). In addition, she demonstrates that defining scholarly concepts of contemporary dance – based in specific aesthetics – could point to exclusive set of artists.² This, she argues, undermines ‘so many other forms and communities to being “not contemporary”’ (2017: 48). This problematising of the term contemporary in dance is important to reframe technique in training through an ethical lens which widens the perspective on what techniques can be seen as key skills for contemporary dance training.

In the UK, formal dance education has been focusing on contemporary dance. Most dance courses at higher education (HE) level are simply called dance, dance performance or dance studies, yet their physical training focuses on traditional contemporary techniques which are seen as foundational training. Additional styles such as ballet for contemporary dancers, commercial dance (urban/street/hip-hop) – and more rarely multicultural techniques, such as African/South Asia/Capoeira – are often seen as a marketing tool to nominally distinguish courses from each other. A recent publication by Melanie Clark (2020) entitled *The Essential Guide to Contemporary Dance Technique* evidences this dominant approach by focusing on only three forms: Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham and Released-based techniques. In this volume, we have intended to draw attention to other forms of contemporary dance which are bringing in different values to examine the link between the

practice of technique in dance and its contemporaneity. Rather than defining how contemporary dance looks, we argue that an ethical imperative in dance today might define its contemporaneity.

The etymological root of technique, *techne*, refers to the craft of doing things well. To explore the ethical aspect of techniques in dance is to ask if dancing well can be considered an action in the service of the good or, in other words, what are the techniques that develop the training of dance as an ethical action? In this introduction, I foreground agility as one of the main characteristics of the ethics that we seek to develop in dance. While this may seem familiar in terms of what could be expected in a creative environment, it is something that is not always made explicit or overtly addressed in dance education. Like other physical techniques, dance movements embody social and personal expressions (Mauss, 1973). Training can develop the embodied agency of the dancer who becomes agile in moving in between internal and external emotions. On the one hand, the term agility is used in contrast to the association of technique with virtuosity, and on the other hand, it signals a reassessment of the notion of virtuosity which draws on recent debates in dance studies (Brandstetter, 2007; Foster, 2011; Osterweiss, 2013; Burt, 2017).

The contested term ‘technique’ is itself intended as a generative provocation enabling contributors to engage with the questions we invited them to consider in relation to the future of dance in Britain, including what ethics means within dance practices, what techniques are emerging out of ethical practices in dance and are these techniques what is being taught within British dance education. A number of key themes emerged from these questions including virtuosity and inclusivity, reflective and critical practice, creativity and imagination, technology and communication, and culture and representation.

In attempting to construct a theory of ethics through which contemporary dance technique might be analysed, I propose the concept of ethical agility as an overarching idea framing many contributions in this volume. In what follows, I develop this concept in relation to the historical development of training in contemporary dance in Britain. I begin by offering a contextualisation of dance education, in which I argue for the need to re-examine the value of dance in society. I reflect on the ways that our contributors have explored the nature and role of technique in dance and its relation to contemporaneity. I then review the ways in which dance has been seen as an ethical practice. I finally discuss how the concept of ethical agility might support the development of a more humane culture in dance.

Shifting contexts

Dance as an art form and as a form of entertainment has had a rise in popularity in recent decades. This is represented by the popularisation of a larger range of styles of dance, ranging from ballroom to ballet, hip-hop, contemporary, folk or South Asian. Dance is performed in theatre venues, has a more prominent

position on national television and is found on digital social platforms on the internet. In addition, the benefit of dance for society has been evidenced more widely through community and health-related projects, including its positive affect on individuals' physical and psychological wellbeing and its potential for enhancing social cohesion. What are the implications of these developments on dance education, and especially in the context of British Contemporary Dance?

At the beginning of the 2000s, at the time that Buckroyd (2003) called for further debate around ethics in dance, the sector was starting to be considered a significant cultural asset. The contribution of dance education to prepare young people to enter one of the fastest economic growth industries is even more significant at the time of writing. Pre-pandemic, the creative industries accounted for almost 6% of the UK economy with an increase between 2010 and 2019 of 44%; meaning the economy of the creative industries was growing much faster than the UK economy as a whole (Waitzman, 2021).

However, the COVID health crisis has significantly impacted the creative sector. If the value of dance to promote positive social relations, physical and mental health during the pandemic was recognised (One Dance UK, 2021), post-COVID, the level of support and resources being afforded for dance education – particularly in England – has been curtailed. This shift in the status of dance education had started well before the pandemic. For over a decade, dance in education has been under threat. A series of governmental measures have had a deleterious effect on the quality of the training for young people. These have included both funding cuts and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate which further prioritised STEM subjects (or Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths). These changes have been accompanied by the use of language from the government and media which have sought to weaken the field by identifying dance and other creative subjects as 'low-value' and 'non-priority' subjects. Such rhetoric has a negative impact on the way that young people and their careers perceive dance as a subject of study. The sector's support organisation One Dance UK has identified that the number of those seeking a dance subject-based qualification at secondary school has plummeted with a more than 50% reduction in entries for the dance General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in less than ten years and down to only 1100 A Level entries in England in 2020 (One Dance UK, 2020). This decline has been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic due to a reduction in provision. In 2021, One Dance UK reported that 'Post pandemic, there are less dance educators and less hours allocated to dance teaching in schools' (One Dance UK, 2021: 11). Nevertheless, this does not mean that students are not interested in dance. Survey data from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Arts Council of England (ACE) continues to evidence that there is a large demand for dance for young people at both recreational and exam levels (ACE, 2017; DCMS, 2021).

Numerous research projects have demonstrated the benefit of dance activities for the development of children and young people's lives. In

particular, recent studies have highlighted the ways in which dance can increase happiness, confidence and self-esteem in people (Yorkshire Dance, 2018). The recent report of the Sport and Recreation Alliance on the social value of movement and dance in the UK underscores the positive effects of dance to create a healthier and happier society (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2021). A key problem identified by One Dance UK has been the undervaluing of the potential for dance in education by government and media, as reflected in descriptions of the field as ‘low value’, ‘non-priority’ and ‘dead-end’ (One Dance UK, 2021: 6). Teachers have also observed the ‘increasing lack of awareness of what dance can be, who it is for and how it can be used, beyond transferable skills, as a tool for social engagement, confidence, mental health and the learning of subject matter’ (One Dance UK, 2021: 16).

This undermining of the value of dance is also found in HE where a series of governmental funding cuts have been specifically targeting the performing and creative arts, and media studies. Funding for these subjects was reduced by fifty percent for the academic year 2021–2022, and a further reduction is anticipated in the future (Office for Students, 2021). Although, most contributors to this volume are writing from a higher educational context, it is important to highlight that these issues of the valuing of dance arise at earlier levels in the educational structure. In other words, deeper shifts in cultural attitudes might be required to bring about systemic change that would improve the outlook for dance. This is unlikely to take place without a significant wider reevaluation of the role of dance education as a serious academic subject which can positively impact the physical and mental health of young people and their future careers. Foregrounding the ethical value of dance for society in training might form part of such a reassessment. Examining the techniques to learn dance through an ethical lens contributes to the necessary debate about access to high-quality dance education ‘as a birth right of every child’ (Andrew Hurst in One Dance UK, 2021: 3). Access to the arts is specifically listed as a basic right in Article 27 of the United Nations of the Declaration of Human Rights; and the collection of concepts, practices, conversations and manifestos that is offered in this volume is informed by a call for the recognition of the importance for British people of all ages to enjoy access to contemporary dance as one of the arts contributing to the national culture.

The ongoing nature of technique training in contemporary dance

The end of stable funding for the arts in many Western countries towards the end of the twentieth century influenced a shift in the structure of a typical dance company. In recent years, companies are less often led by a single choreographer; and dancers are required to work alternately or simultaneously for several companies. Accordingly, dancers are more responsible for their own training, and this training must support the versatility required as a result of such instability. As Bales and Nettle-Fiol explain (2008), ‘choreographers

are no longer training dancers, at least not in the traditional sense of giving technique classes that train the dancers in their personal movement style separate from the rehearsal process. The rehearsal replaces training for many' (x). In other words, the traditional idea of technique based in systematic physical training and codified steps has been replaced by a more individualised exploratory approach to movement, whereby modern techniques, post-modern techniques, urban dance forms, ballet and somatic approaches are being mixed freely.

In this context, contemporary dance students are expected to learn an increasingly diversified range of techniques related to a wide range of performance styles and approaches in dance. Often driven by its own economy, this hybridisation of training in dance reflects an entanglement of creative and learning practices with the market of education in which a faster production of ready-to-use skills is prevailing. In 1986, the American dance scholar, Susan Foster, observed the production of what she coined 'the hired body' of the dancer as a flexible and resilient body trained to create dance quickly and economically. More recently, other scholars have defined the trained dancers' body as 'eclectic' (Bales and Nettle-Fiol, 2008). These characteristics promote a more surface approach to dancing which adopt a traditional mode of learning movement by replication and can prevent the development of creative, responsive and therefore socially aware dancers. If this book is a response to this situation, the argument for a more ethical approach to training in dance is not happening in a vacuum.

Many scholars have identified the problematic tension facing contemporary dancers between the nature of contemporary dance teaching and the eclecticism of the dancer's training demanded by dance markets (Enghausser, 2007; Bales and Nettle-Fiol, 2008; Coogan, 2016; Roche, 2016). On the one hand, the combination of techniques can create a homogenisation effect as 'a rubbery flexibility coated with impervious glossiness' (Foster in Bales and Nettle-Fiol, 2008: 63), and on the other hand, it can create a collage of styles from which a coherent aesthetics is not easy to achieve (Bales in Bales and Nettle-Fiol, 2008: 63). In choreography, this contributed to a 'bricolage' aesthetics, whereby 'something old, something new and something borrowed' would be combined to create the eclecticism which characterised American postmodern dance (Monten in Bales and Nettle-Fiol, 2008: 52). This approach is discussed in detail in a number of contributions in this volume. In particular, the extent of its potential to contribute to more inclusive and ethical relations between students and teachers is explored through action research and personal reflections from contributors who have had lifelong careers in dance.

If we turn to a wider European approach to training, we find further calls for a more meaningful approach to technique in contemporary dance. French choreographer Boris Charmatz points to the physical and academic skills necessary 'to not merely suffer contemporary techniques but instead construct meaning' (Charmatz in Charmatz and Launay, 2011: 96). He argues against

training a ‘battalion of dancers’ and instead advocates preparing ‘artists capable of creating their own employment: not all-rounders necessarily, [instead] people with some ideas of what they really want to do both on and off stage’ (Charmatz in Charmatz and Launay, 2011: 96). Training based on movement analysis of kinaesthetic principles has been at the heart of this approach in Europe. The expansion of the so-called somatic techniques encouraged dancers to be more attentive to their bodies through the practice of shared principles, such as connectivity, kinaesthetic listening, breath support and process (Brodie and Lobel, 2012). This more internal approach to training has been influenced by somatic scholars in dance education who have advocated for a paradigm shift in learning and teaching by foregrounding processes of creative exploration, reflection and awareness (Shrewsbury, 1993; Shapiro, 1998; Ross, 2000). While these values are often considered essential characteristics of a democratic transformative education in dance, they are not always associated to the practice of dance in the wider current context of education (Rouhiainen, 2008). Considering that knowledge is shaped by sociocultural experiences, the development of somatic awareness in dance training supports the exploration of how the body of the dancer intertwines with the world (Barr, 2020).

In her research on embedding a somatic approach to technique classes, Sherrie Barr (2020) argues that somatic practices can facilitate the training of more active learners. Referring to the work of somatic dance theorists, including Jenny Coogan and Jenny Roche, Barr points to the need to develop what, in my terms, represents a form of ethical agility in dance training. She states that when training, dancers need to balance their sensitivity with a social consciousness and the awareness of an ‘everchanging professional field’ (Barr, 2020: 456). The use of somatic techniques in dance training signals a shift in the teaching of dance towards challenging students to work with more internal processes of movements. Technique teachers are thereby able to balance the development of an elevated level of physical skill with the encouragement of creativity (Roche, 2016). Such an approach reveals the need to address the hierarchical structure of a traditional dance education.

From a historical perspective, one might argue that inclusive and democratic values were already introduced to dance training by postmodern choreographers. In particular, in a British context, the work of Mary Fulkerson at Dartington College of Arts rejected the competitiveness and ideals of perfection associated with modern dance and its repetitive teaching methods (Colin, 2018a,b). Ideas of accessibility and attention to personal inward qualities in training have influenced the development of the British New Dance and a whole generation of choreographers and dance educators. Yet as Charmatz and Launay recognise, movement work needs to be contextualised: ‘[t]eaching theory while neglecting to take experience and other fields of knowledge into account is no longer a viable approach’ (2011: 98). While in the UK university dance training is usually supported by lectures through the use of core theoretical material where students’ reflective skills

can be developed, this part of the curriculum is not always valued equally by dance students. The limitations to engagement can be explained partly by a limited diversity in curriculum which creates a gap between theories, practices and students' representations. As Lynn Quinn states in her book *Re-imagining Curriculum*, '[i]t is not sufficient for lecturers to simply transmit the knowledge enshrined in the canons of their disciplines to students – with little thoughts to who their students are, where they come from and what their legitimate learning needs are' (2019: 8).

In dance education studies, warnings concerning the limits of a superficial multiculturalism have been expressed for more than a decade. Susan Stinson and Doug Risner (2010) argue for the need of a nuanced conception of multiculturalism and diversity to activate genuine empathetic perspectives across a range of students' cultural and social backgrounds. They advocate for pedagogical approaches which veer away from learning 'about' the other to adopt inclusive techniques which instead prioritises learning 'from and with those unlike us or those whose dancing is different from ours' (2010: 6).

Karen Schupp, in a recent special edition of the *Dance Education Journal* on dance education and citizenship, investigates how dance education can develop kind and thoughtful citizens. Schupp and the authors of the volume discuss the capacity of dance to develop self and group responsibility, to build communities through learning, to react to shifting cultural, social and political norms and to cultivate reflective action (2018: 93). At the heart of this conception of citizenship through dance lies the practice of differences. Llana Morgan shares her experience as a teacher and researcher:

I have watched students of all ages see a person, a situation, or a problem with a new perspective after engaging with inquiry-based artistic creation and expression that involves working with people or communities different from themselves. Being able to work with and being able to understand others' perspectives is at the core of thoughtful citizenship.
(Morgan, 2018: 100)

Similarly, in our HE dance courses in the UK, it is not difficult to witness a sense of 'awakening' that students develop after being exposed to differences not only across the cultural and social realms but also involving bodily and neurological differences. The possibility of intertwining critical concerns and embodied learning is crucial to the development of ethical agility in dance training. Beyond self-reflection, approaches to learning dance technique explored in the book include processes which carry 'a character of 'jointedness' providing access to personal and social insights (Bannon, 2018: 2). Several educators and artists' contributions advocate inclusivity and decolonisation as central to a necessary shift in technique training.

In this appraisal of technique in contemporary dance, internal processes of learning are discussed in relation to the need for inclusive historical and contextual underpinnings in dance education which better reflect the wide

range of cultural backgrounds of all those that engage in learning dance. Throughout the volume, technique is approached as a way of learning from difference to be physically engaged with ‘others’ to support dancers to develop their physical, creative and civic capabilities. Contributors in this book refer to techniques of somatic attention to build an embodied knowledge grounded in an ethical awareness in dance.

The development of dance techniques as relational techniques

While embodied knowledge has always struggled to compete with the Cartesian division between mind and body, phenomenological approaches to uncovering knowledge have found currency in research and teaching. Interest in practice in fields, such as sociology, anthropology and ethnography, contributed to a shift in understanding how knowledge might be constructed and transmitted. Two specific moments in academic discourse have signified a foregrounding of embodied knowledge that underlined many of our contributors’ thinking on the role of technique in dance. Following in the tradition of Pierre Bourdieu in the 1970s, the ‘practice turn’ emerged in the mid-1990s as an interdisciplinary concern with ‘practice’. Knowledge is no longer understood as a ‘possession of minds’ but instead it is ‘mediated both by interactions between people and by arrangements in the world’ (Schatzki et al., 2001: 12). It is therefore understood as a collective process whereby techniques or practical ways of doing (including their contexts) not only represent forms of knowledge but rather knowledge ‘depends’ on these forms of knowing. If embodied practice is informed by and generative of knowledge, its transmission occurs in the form of technique through processes that take place at the individual and social levels. Accordingly, investigating the embodied knowledge of dance techniques not only reveals ways of doing dance, but it also locates dancing as a way of knowing the world through human relations. Hence, themes, such as collaborative learning and dialogical pedagogies, are central to the discussions developed in this book.

The second theoretical shift that overarched the rethinking of contemporary dance technique is what has been recognised as the ‘affective turn’ in the humanities and social sciences (La Caze and Martyn Lloyd, 2011). The term can be seen as signifying a shift away from the post-structuralist ‘linguistic turn’, which tends to underline the medium rather than its impact on others (i.e. relationality). From a sociological perspective, the affective turn ‘expresses a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter instigating a shift in thought in critical theory’ (Clough, 2007: 2). From a philosophical perspective, the term might be better understood ‘in terms of renewed and widespread scholarly interest in corporeality, in emotions and in the importance of aesthetics’ (La Caze and Martyn, 2011: 2). Within this discourse, the philosopher Brian Massumi’s theory of affect is useful for understanding the significance of the knowledge emerging from dance technique and its relation with ethical concerns. For Massumi, affect – understood as the capacity

of the body to affect and to be affected by others – allows a veering away from self-interested knowledge towards what he calls an ethics of engagement which he defines as:

[a] knowledge-practice that takes an inclusive, non-judgmental approach to tending belonging-together in an intense, affectively engaged way is an ethics [...] Ethics is a tending of coming-together, a caring for be-longing as such.

(Massumi, 2002: 255)

This ethical perspective allows us to locate technique in dance as a collective doing, whereby different techniques can be considered diverse ways of coming-together to take account for our mutual capacity to affect and be affected. As such, we can understand dance practices as relational techniques. Yet what is central to the reassessment of the notion of technique in the volume is the prioritising of creative and transformative processes in training. Contributors explore the values to be found through the way that dancers may come together in training studios and utilise dance as a dialogical tool to forge discovery, transformation and creative cooperation.

Technique as a self-organisation of the body through time

Considering embodied knowledge as relational is critical to examining the specificity of the kind of learning developed in dance and the agility that is required of the dancer to sustain a more ethical practice. Indeed, the body's knowledge is not fixed or stable. It evolves and develops with the dancer. It follows its own history. Over time, the training of a dancer reflects the tension between the past of the body and the demands of the future. To forge this temporal agility in dancing, it is necessary to conceive of techniques as an open field of knowledge rather than sets of instructions and repeated steps. As Ingo Diehl (2018, np) argues, 'there is no set technique but a relation to it'. Diehl posits that each dancer develops their own body memory and archive of experiences as unique biographies of training (2018, np).³ This temporal aspect of training is reflected in many of the conversations in this book where contributors share their own training history and their relation to it. The body of the dancer is considered a living flesh with its own genealogy (Van Imschoot, 2005), capable of creating meaning through a repetitive process of training. This approach foregrounds creativity in technique classes. For movement analyst Hubert Godard, in dance training, '[i]t is not the repetition of movement but the experience of gesture and as such the "creation of sensory meaning" (fabrique du sens) that gives a sense, a direction, to the senses' (Godard, 1994: 30). Memory here is not understood merely as a tool to reproduce existing gestures but rather as a perceptive faculty of the body to create a continuity of sensory meaning. Godard defines the perceptive organisation of the dancer's body as an active projection which he

calls a 'project about the world' (1994). This leads us away from an idea of technique in dance which is contingent upon an instrumentalist conception of the body as a mechanical process of learning skills. The dancer's body is understood as an organising structure of respiratory, postural and perceptive movements (Godard, 1994); and thus, the dancer's body is capable of creating meaning through the constant organising of its changeable organic structure. Techniques in dance can then be defined as a way to cultivate through time this self-organisation of the body.

This need for a sense of continuity in training is seen as an ethical concern throughout the book due to the challenges that dancers are facing in navigating fragmented and heterogenous knowledge in late capitalist society. Indeed, somatic and dance educators have been demonstrating the critical potential of bodily knowledge in the face of neo-liberalism (Ginot, 2010; Fortin, 2017). Neoliberal logics challenge the production of culture in society as its policies aim at privatising public services into commercial ventures, including in the fields of education, health and social care, and the arts. Moreover, in the context of post-Fordism, working practices emerged during the shift from the production of goods to the production of information and services. In this new economy, artists have become the role model for contemporary workers as they are described as multiskilled, flexible and resilient (Kunst, 2015). However, the political economy of the dancing body, subsumed into the global forces of the market, can also be seen as being exploited by capitalism. For Kowal et al., dancers 'are disciplined, self-controlled' and become 'expert in self-promotion to avoid the risk of precarity that is the downside of the loosening of social bonds in times when global markets replace nation-states and their systems of social security' (2017: 12). The tension between the blurring of artistic strategies into contemporary life and labour and a resistance to neoliberal agendas informs the discourses that traverse the field and practices of dance – including its education and training.

Whereas the conditions of dance production and education are increasingly formatted by market forces (as seen in increases of short-term project-based creative processes, freelance remuneration for creative workers, network pressures and consumerist universities), one of the consequences of this regime for dancers is an increase of precarious and uncertain working conditions, and an intensification of the eclectic 'supermarket' approach to body-training. How can the 'nomad' dancer going from project to project or class to class resist a fast, fragmented, interrupted sense of time while responding to the imperative of contemporary adaptability? Bojana Bauer questions in her discussion on dance training, '[w]hat set of tools is needed for the work on and with a body trained in versatility' (2009: 77). For Bauer, the 'hopping' from technique to technique does not allow for the transformative processes needed to connect the body-mind of the dancer with the world. It undermines the creative process of learning dance and the role of perception in dancing which is crucial for forging active and critical dancers. Perception, Bauer argues, 'is a matter of creation and of decision, taking responsibility

for the world the subject lives in and not the contrary'. She calls for a training practice that explores the critical actions of the dancers, whereby 'learning [is] inseparable from creation' (2009: 78). The concept of ethical agility in dance is proposed as a possible framework to explore such an approach to technique training.

Ethics in dance

The argument that dance entwines embodied knowledge with ethics is timely. It is consonant with the broadly posthumanist feminist discourse (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013) which challenges the dominant role of cognition and language over lived experience in ethics theory. Posthumanist ethics draws on Emmanuel Levinas' understanding of responsibility. It is based partly on the idea that as responsibility is a relation of bodily engagement, we cannot be indifferent to the other who is different from us (Levinas cited in Barad, 2007: 392). Embodied ethical engagement is more compatible with the intra-actions within which the natural and social world are mutually embedded (Barad, 2007).

Following these theoretical developments, ethics in dance has been the subject of recent scholarly concern with the development of a more humane culture in dance (Bannon, 2018; Aili, Katan-Schmid and Houston, 2020; Jackson, 2022). A focus on ethics in dance highlights the rich potential inherent in the way that dancers learn to actively engage with each other (Bannon, 2018). Drawing on Barad and Braidotti, Bannon locates dance as a valuable ethical activity to challenge division in society by exploring what it is to be human in constant relation with each other and the earth (2018: 9). Attention to ethical relations in dance training allows us to explore ways to cultivate a sense of mutuality and maintain the interrelationships among each other. For Bannon, this process is about learning to be *self-in-relation*. She posits that 'Such an ethical approach concerns the manner of engagement, the manner of individual and group behaviours and the chosen values that are put to active use in the complex process of teaching and learning contemporary dance' (2018: 5). These manners can be defined as embodied techniques in dance which are characterised by specific processes of ethical engagement.

If the arts are not simply about the mastery of technical skills, the technical skills that we might be striving for in contemporary dance training can point to non-linguistic modes of thinking (Bannon, 2018: 84). Such thinking, I argue, embodies ethical techniques. For example, through moving, dancers are involved in 'a thinking of decision-making' (Aili, Katan-Schmid and Houston, 2020). Each step or movement – whether produced from a known shape or not – involves a technical knowhow which is coupled with a tacit decision of perception. Regardless of the style of dance, this approach to technique requires the acquisition and the development of skills of attentiveness and attunement to the immediacy of the moment. Using techniques in dance which foreground this heightened sense of agency in training is an

ethical activity wherein the dancer is engaged in a balanced and attentive process of ethical decision-making. In the context of community dance, working with attentiveness involves caring for the ways that the participants are feeling, in order to establish a safe and inclusive environment (Aili et al., 2020). Participative dance techniques require dance facilitators to develop the skill of ‘moulding’ their practice around people rather than the traditional approach to teaching dance as a fixed structure in order ‘to mould bodies to the technical demands of the form’ (Houston in Aili et al., 2020: 384).

As relational techniques, dance practices can have a profound ethical impact on the expansion of the ‘social good’ (Bresnahan, 2014). If we consider that art activities (including dance) can foster cooperation, the relations emerging in the techniques we use to teach and learn dance can develop ethical and social exchanges. Levinas’ ethics is built around the responsibility of the other (Levinas, 1985). This understanding points to the ethical potential of the collaborative exchange between people moving together in creative practice (Bannon, 2018) and opens the field of possibility for dialogical techniques of working together in educational and professional dance contexts. Furthermore, ethical responsibility can also be thought about in relation to the exchange between dancers and spectators. For Levinas, the central meaning of ethics lies in the inevitability of the exchange with the other. When the Other calls us, we have no options but to respond. Performance theorist Helen Grehan (2009) argues that the inevitability of the Other’s call is parallel to the reactive nature of the exchange with audience members in performance. Confronted with the Other, spectators can leave the theatre unsettled with the responsibility to reflect on their position in society (2009: 6). This mutual ethical responsibility needs to be acknowledged and practiced in contemporary dance training. If the presence of the audience is at least frequently central to performance, dance education needs to pay attention to the potential of this ethical exchange. Whereas contemporary society is oversaturated with mediatised performance, the ethical value of live performance is endangered if educators fail to address the challenges and processes involved in spectatorship in arts education curricula (Prendergast, 2004: 36).

This volume gathers theoretical and practical perspectives on embodied ethics in dance which I thematise below in relation to the concept of ethical agility. While this is not an exhaustive list, taken together these ideas characterise a framework from which to explore the training of dance as an ethical embodied practice.

Decision-making

Ethical agility is understood as a movement of internal and external forces in dancing. It relates to the attentive process of decision-making in so far as it involves a movement in between knowing and feeling. When a dancer is engaged in the experience of a movement, they cannot control ‘all the instances of movement in advance’ (Katan-Schmidt in Aili et al., 2020).

A multitude of micro-moments of embodied decision-making are involved in processes where attentiveness to external and internal forces is required. The agility of the dancer is measured by the degree of connection between her personal capacities (knowing-how) and the environmental conditions (feeling/attuning). In moving, dancers adjust between knowing and feeling in order to organise, project and communicate a perspective ‘about the world’ (Godard, 1994).

Collaboration

Ethical agility is also the process from which dancers attune to others whether it is other dancers to move within the space or audience members. Such an approach to training requires us to develop ‘behaviours towards being-in-community with other, and towards our selves’ (Bannon, 2018: 9). The collaborative learning emerging from that process is bound to the responsive attention of the dancer oriented to doing, thinking and feeling with others. In educational setting, this leads to a more dialogical approach to teaching dance techniques. Whereas in socially engaged practice, this process can refer to the ability to be ready to accommodate the others; this ‘readiness’ is the underlining principles of an ethics of care (Houston in Aili, Katan-Schmid and Houston, 2020).

Virtuosity

Applying the logics of ethics in dance technique invites questions around what virtuosity means in dance. On the one hand, the association of the notion of virtue with the idea of technical prowess led to a mechanical vision of virtuosity. On the other hand, virtuosity can also be framed from a more dynamic perspective. Active participation to social and political life developed virtuosity as a ‘performative contribution to the public sphere’ (Burt, 2017: 62). While the versatility of styles required by the industry can be seen by some as a mark of virtuosity (Foster, 2011; Osterweiss, 2013), for others, it is in its degree of emancipation from dominating techniques of production in dance that virtuosity can be reframed (Burt, 2017). However, cultural differences need to be considered when defining the value of virtuosity in dance. Osterweiss’ work on the concept of virtuoso in African American choreography is helpful for highlighting the importance of decolonising perspectives on virtuosity. Drawing on Africanist aesthetics ideas, she describes what I understand as the ethical agility of the dancer, as a body/mind that mediates between flesh and spirit and connects with the earth through the performance (2013: 65). This perspective can shape a more inclusive rethinking of virtuosity in dance technique away from a mechanic ‘soulless’ practice and towards an embodied relation with the earth. While this collection of essays, conversations and manifestos offers a wide range of perspectives on virtuosity in contemporary dance technique – including its relationship with

spirituality – overall there is something of a shared consensus for recognising what Ramsay Burt observed as ‘the potential value of virtue as a quality arising from dance practice’ (Burt, 2017: 62–63). Contributors, in this volume, offer a plurality of perspectives on the ways in which in a British context the practising of ethical agility in training is also concerned with cultivating a quality of connectedness with the public sphere.

Enjoyment

An ethics of engagement can be understood as a responsibility which entails a persisting movement between public concerns (other) and enjoyment (self). Joy can link private emotions with public concerns. Through dancing, joy offers an ethical direction to the dancer’s individual desire. Grasping the ‘in and out’ movement is part of the agility developed by the dancer through the practice of relational techniques. By valuing dance as joyful relational techniques, the ‘in-between’ spaces of ambivalence, flux and flow can be explored as a form of ethical agility.

Conclusion

Redefining contemporary dance through an ethical examination of its techniques is also engaging in a gesture of emancipation for British dance. The collection of contributions in this volume frames the identity of British dance beyond the dominant influence of American and West-European techniques. It engages with a wider range of diverse and inclusive approaches that have characterised the development of dance training in Britain in the past few decades.

Structured into its four parts of concepts, practices, conversations and manifestos, the volume reveals insights from established practitioners and educators. This highlights the possibilities for leading dance practice towards a rebalance of the overpowering hierarchy in Western dance techniques in schools, universities and conservatoires. Our contributors rethink the values of contemporary dance training by offering specific pedagogical approaches which describe alternative ways of teaching dance techniques.

Multiple voices are present across the book, including expressions of African and Asian principles as well as methods emerging from different bodies in training. Together they express ideas about dance training as an ethical embodied practice. I have theorised these ideas through this introduction in relation to issues of representation and inclusivity in dance, collaboration and decision-making processes, virtuosity and enjoyment. This framework is not intended to depict a definitive essence of what contemporary dance training in Britain is. Instead, it suggests a set of concepts, based in the established practices discussed in the book, which, in turn, illuminates important questions about dance and its contemporaneity.

Notes

- 1 An updated version of the Dancers' Charter can be found on the Dance One UK website at <https://www.onedanceuk.org/programme/healthier-dancer-programme/industry-standards>.
- 2 Kwan articulates three characteristics of current dance practice: the 'intrinsic contemporaneity of dance', an aesthetics based in presence and contingency and a desire to reflect of past practices.
- 3 For more insights into key techniques in contemporary dance in Germany and Europe see Ingo Diehl and Friederike Lampert's publication *Dance Techniques 2010 Tanzplan* Germany.

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