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ABSTRACT

In this article, I explore the relationship between dance and the work of Nelson Goodman, which is found primarily in his early book, *Languages of Art*. Drawing upon the book’s first main thread, I examine Goodman’s example of a dance gesture as a symbol that exemplifies itself. I argue that self-exemplifying dance gestures are unique (among other self-exemplifying symbols) in that they are often independent and internally motivated, or “meta-self-exemplifying.” Drawing upon the book’s second main thread, I retrace Goodman’s analysis of dance’s relationship to both notation in general and also Labanotation in particular. My argument is that dance gives the false impression of being notational, or is “meta-notational.”

KEYWORDS

Nelson Goodman, dance, gesture, exemplification, Labanotation

Reararticulating *Languages of Art*: Dancing with Goodman

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In this article, I explore the relationship between dance and the work of Nelson Goodman, which is found primarily in his early *Languages of Art*.¹ Drawing upon that book's first main thread, I examine Goodman's example of a dance gesture as a symbol that exemplifies itself. I argue that self-exemplifying dance gestures are unique (among other self-exemplifying symbols) in that they are often independent and internally motivated, or "meta-self-exemplifying." Then, drawing upon the book's second main thread, I retrace Goodman's analysis of dance's relationship to notation in general and Labanotation in particular. My argument is that dance gives the false impression of being notational, or is "meta-notational."

1 • Meta-Self-Exemplification

1.1 • Exemplification

Goodman observes that though “seldom given much attention,” exemplification is “an important and widely used mode of symbolization in and out of the arts.”² His first example is a “tailor’s booklet of small swatches of cloth.”³ Goodman notes that although such a swatch possesses many properties, including a certain “color, weave, texture, and pattern,” the swatch only exemplifies its color.⁴ That is, of the many things that are true of the swatch, only its color is intended to be illustrative. Similarly, one might point to a random dog on the street in order to teach a child what dogs are, in which case it would be exclusively the membership in the species of dog (rather than other attributes like fluffiness or being named “Sam”) that a particular dog would exemplify. This is so because, as Goodman puts it, “exemplification is possession plus reference.”⁵ In other words, the swatch possesses both rectangularity and a certain color, but it does not refer to the rectangularity, only the color – at least in the tailor-world, which is “the particular system of symbolization in effect.”⁶

Goodman then specifies that in exemplification only “predicates and other labels” are involved; thus, “while anything may be denoted, only labels may be exemplified.”⁷ In simpler terms, only grammatical predicates – and not grammatical subjects – can be exemplified in Goodman’s sense. For example, Sam the dog can exemplify “being a dog,” but nothing can exemplify Sam as an existing entity (because that is simply not what exemplification means). The concept “label” here includes not just linguistic predicates but also symbols “from other systems – gestural, pictorial, diagrammatic,” all of which “function much as predicates of a language.”⁸ In other words, verbal language provides labels, but pictures (like on a restaurant menu) and gestures (like greeting someone with a friendly wave) provide labels as well. Goodman’s specific attention to gesture and his affirmation of its language-like characteristics have important implications for dance, ultimately constituting the first of several suggestions that dance played an important role in Goodman’s initial conception of labels and symbols.

1.2 • Self-exemplification

Dance is also important in Goodman's subsequent discussion of self-exemplification. Fairly casually, he acknowledges the existence of "symbols that refer to themselves," his first example being the word "word."⁹ That is, "word" both refers to words in general (such as "dog" and "Sam") and is also itself an example of a word. Goodman's first example of a dance-relevant gesture which denotes without exemplifying is tapping one's feet while listening to music.¹⁰ Put simply, although tapping one's feet to the music denotes that one is hearing catchy music, the actual feet-tapping does not itself serve as an example of catchy music. As for the converse case (namely gestures which exemplify without denoting), Goodman anticipates that one example might appear to be that of a physical education instructor's in-class demonstrations, such as executing the dance move known as "jazz hands." When the instructor spreads her/his fingers wide and then spreads her/his hands slowly apart and downward, one might think this merely refers to the activity of performing "jazz hands." After careful consideration of this example however, Goodman concludes that something else is going on:

since the demonstrations are part of the instruction, and are accompanied by and may be replaced by verbal directions, and have no already established denotation, they may — like any sample not otherwise committed as to denotation — be taken as denoting what the predicates they exemplify denote, and are then labels exemplifying themselves.¹¹

Put differently, since the instructor's execution of the "jazz hands" move would not have some pre-existing denotative function (as opposed for example to the "peace" sign), then that execution could be understood to refer to the same things in the world (executions of that move) to which the verbal instruction (yelling out "Jazz hands!") also refers. Denoting what the label that you exemplify denotes is nothing other than self-exemplification. In short, the instructor's performance of jazz hands is an example of the performance of jazz hands, offering "itself" as its own example.

Goodman's second dance-relevant example of a self-exemplifying gesture is that of a mime who is miming walking, although Goodman acknowledges that in the world of pantomime ("as in English and in painting") such examples are "in the minority." The one art form for which this is not the

case, according to Goodman, is dance. This is not to say that dance does not include many gestures that denote or exemplify without doing both. Indeed, particularly in regard to classical ballet, I agree with Goodman that some “elements of dance are primarily denotative, versions of the descriptive gestures of daily life (e.g., bowings, beckonings) or of ritual.” For example, a dancer may wave “hello,” not in order to offer said wave as an example of waving but rather to merely carry forward a plot in which two characters have a happy meeting. On the other hand, “other movements, especially in the modern dance, primarily exemplify rather than denote.” For example, Martha Graham introduced a whole new vocabulary of moves for (especially female) dancers, characterized by strength, assertiveness, and percussiveness. And these moves did not refer to preexisting activities being performed by typical Western women in their ordinary lives. What such merely-exemplifying (and not also denoting) gestures exemplify for Goodman are “not standard or familiar activities, but rather rhythms and dynamic shapes.”¹²

In Goodman’s beautiful and fascinating description, such exemplifications “may reorganize experience, relating actions not usually associated or distinguishing others not usually differentiated, thus enriching allusion or sharpening discrimination.” In the case of my previous example, Graham brought femininity, strength, assertiveness, and percussiveness into a new and powerfully expressive relationship. Goodman rejects any characterization of such movements “as verbal descriptions” as being “absurd”; rather, “the label a movement exemplifies may be itself; such a movement, having no antecedent denotation, takes on the duties of a label denoting certain actions including itself.” Such a phenomenon in fact is an example of how (as “elsewhere in the arts”) dance’s vocabulary “evolves along with what that vocabulary is used to convey.”¹³ To give a non-dancing example, it is a bit like what happens when one friend starts making a funny new movement, which then takes on the status of an inside joke, and eventually becomes a kind of shorthand for the type of person the first friend is, a shorthand which can be used by any friend in the group.

1.3 • Self-exemplification in dance

The previous passage from Goodman offers several important insights for the present investigation. First, by way of clarification, Goodman seems to be saying that at least some of the abstract movements in dance, particularly in

modern dance, function in their very enactment to create new “types” of moves, of which each such movement thereby becomes the first “token.” For example, Martha Graham’s famous “contraction and release” move suggests a novel connection between the attributes of strength and vulnerability.¹⁴ And since this connecting power derives from the fact that a move like contraction and release does not in its first appearance belong to any preexisting conventions or “symbol schemes,” creativity is absolutely essential. In a given dance, the creation of a self-exemplifying gesture is the creation of a brand new move that instantaneously “holds its own” in the vocabulary of that dance. In other words, the new move immediately has the potential to be on equal standing with all the existing moves in that dance, at least for the purpose of that performance. And by “holding its own,” I mean that all moves, even new moves, have the potential to be repeated so that they organically amplify the established “lexicon” of dance in general.

Second, I would like to extend this idea further, shifting the exemplary discourse from modern dance to contemporary Latin dance.¹⁵ On one hand, like ballet, a Latin dance such as “salsa” (or “mambo”) involves a formalized repertoire of moves, which constitute at least part of salsa’s symbolic vocabulary. For example, the leader’s left hand’s holding the follower’s right hand and tracing an upward moving diagonal constitutes the standard “lead” for “the follower’s right-hand turn.” On the other hand, as in modern dance, both leader and follower in salsa are given a significant degree of latitude in regard to everything else about this move, including all other aspects of the specific body parts (including the hand and arm) that are otherwise directed by that move. In the follower’s right-hand turn, for example, the leader can turn her/his head in any direction, smile or frown in concentration, and also raise her/his arm more or less forcefully, smoothly, rapidly, and with a slight twist or extension of the fingers, etc. All of these non-governed movements both allow for the expression of personal style or uniqueness and arguably constitute a different kind of example of the rhythms and dynamic shapes that Goodman finds especially prominent in modern dance.

The central difference between, for example, the follower’s right-hand turn in salsa and contraction and release in modern is that the latter has become a self-exemplification which is universal in scope (insofar as it illuminates an aspect of dancers’ inner experiences) while the former is particular in scope (insofar as it illuminates some aspect of a particular dancer’s singularity).¹⁶ In other words, an improvised move could be on equal standing for a given dance performance on a given night, even though it would be impossible for that improvised move to become enacted in the repertoire of most salsa dancers around the globe based on just the one night’s performance.

Some readers might object that there is an important difference between on the one hand contraction and release and on the other hand the right-hand turn in salsa. To wit, it may appear that in the case of contraction and release, the move is part of the dance's own symbol system; while in the case of the right-hand turn, the move is part of a separate symbol system employed by the dancer to learn the dance's own symbol system.¹⁷ I would argue however that in a social dance, this separation into two separate symbol systems, in which the performers employ an additional system to learn the system of the dance, breaks down. Because salsa is a social dance, most salsa dancers learn much or all of the dance "on the fly" while in the middle of executing the dance. And since the dancers are primarily executing the dance for themselves and each other, typically on a floor-level space (which limits any non-dancing persons' ability to observe the execution of the dance), there is no clear distinction in most salsa dances between performers and audience. A majority of the non-dancers, moreover, usually talk and drink instead of watching. (Otherwise, they would probably be dancing themselves).

Third, I wish to carefully unpack Goodman's phrase "dynamic shapes." Shapes can be either pure abstractions (such as the shape of the triangle described in the Pythagorean Theorem) or concrete features (such as the triangles of the Egyptian pyramids). The etymology of the word "shape" comes from the Old English word *gesceap*, which means "creation, creature; make, structure, natural character; form, figure, configuration, pudendum ... also decree, destiny."¹⁸ Shape thus unites the contemporary meaning of structural form with a whole theology of creators, creatures, and destiny, thus suggesting the saying, "Design is destiny." Importantly for the present investigation, these other connections trouble the commonsensical understanding of shape as a neutral, independent fact as opposed to something like one moment in a more complex activity, process, or — in terms of the other word in the phrase under consideration — dynamic. In the cases of "decree" and "destiny," for example, this dynamism is found in how much activity and work must be done in the present — from the position of the one who has been given the decree or had the destiny chosen but who has not yet acted on the decree or fulfilled the destiny. This future activity thereby reaches back retroactively into the lived present and infuses that present with energy.

"Dynamic" currently means something that is in motion, perhaps implicitly full of the energy that motion requires, and its etymology comes via Leibniz's French from the Ancient Greek *δύναμις*, meaning "power, strength," a word that is of utmost importance in Aristotle's philosophy.¹⁹ This *dynamis* connection emphasizes that which makes the energetic motion of the dynamic possible in the first place: the strength that both gives and maintains its shape.

Thinking “shape” and “dynamic” together therefore shows both that every shape is dynamic in its origins and “destinies” and that all dynamism is shaped by the strength that infuses it. The challenge is to describe “dynamic shapes,” as Goodman uses the phrase, in a way that does not reduce to meaningless tautology. Insofar as the etymology of “shape” betrays a hidden dynamism, Goodman calls self-exemplifying gestures “dynamic dynamisms” or “shaping shapes”— as if there were any other kind of shapes.

1.4 • Dance as meta-self-exemplification

Once again, dance provides the solution to the problem. Dance is a privileged site of the illumination of the aforementioned neglected aspects of the two words that make up the phrase “dynamic shapes.” That is, dance is a locus where shapes manifest themselves in their beginnings, their endings, and the journeys that connect the two. That is, no shape is static, and all are in fact frozen time-slices of movement (like standing up conceived as a frozen moment between getting out of bed and sitting down at the breakfast table). And although one might think that, instead of shapes manifesting themselves, it is the dancers who dance the shapes directly, this is arguably impossible insofar as dancers are four-dimensional beings who necessarily produce (at least 3-dimensional) objects, of which these 2-dimensional shapes are the third-person perceptual residues or epiphenomena. To put the point differently, most activities, including most art forms, assume certain shapes as given and erect more dynamic shapes against this background of the former (relatively static) shapes. In dance however there is no absolutely fixed set of shapes since any shape is eligible for change, removal, or replacement — including every line, surface, and depth of the body as well as clothing, individual movements, and interpersonal interactions with the bodies of other dancers.

Moreover, in dance, the strength of the body leaves nothing to the imagination in regard to the “where” from whence comes the “what” of the performance’s dynamism. To put it in Goodman’s terms, dance is the self-exemplification of shape and dynamism per se, because a shape in dance denotes other examples of that shape in the world and does so by foregrounding itself as an example of that shape. Dance transforms shapes and dynamism from mere useful tools (for construction, math, beauty, or whatever) into purely referential possessions of themselves as shapes. Put simply, dance is shape as an end in itself. Much like in a free verse poem — as

opposed to ordinary conversation – every word is only there because of the specific word that it is and so that it can receive the spotlight; so in a dance, every visible shape is specifically selected for what it is and placed in the spotlight of our attention.

Of course this is also true in the other arts (as several of my previous points suggest) albeit to different degrees and in different ways. The history of Western painting, for example, includes many examples of self-exemplifying images, brushstrokes, or gestures. However, the difference between non-dancing and dancing gestures is that for every non-dancing gesture there remains some material product that can be interpreted as the purpose of that gesture whereas every dancing gesture by definition evaporates the moment it occurs, leaving no trace, let alone an enduring material product.²⁰ In other words, whatever might be left of static-ness in the shapes that make up dance's "dynamic shapes" is undermined by the fact that dance's gestures do not occupy a stable spatiotemporal location in which to be viewed as objects or entities. Dance gestures are instead pure process or activity.

Perhaps the reader will object to the implication that every non-dancing gesture makes something, or engages with some object outside the gesturer's body in order to achieve some purpose. Scratching one's head, for example, may seem to be a gesture which does not fit this description. If one were to regard head-scratching as a gesture (which might not be feasible given the lack of both conscious intent and semantic content), I would argue that its purpose would be to perhaps relieve an itch, or discharge nervous energy, and that its material product would be the change in the skin of the head (perhaps including tiny scratch marks?) and the nervous system. More generally, a gesture's default status is to use materiality to communicate a message to a second person in the world, so dance's self-exemplifying gestures are the exceptions (and it is important to recall that not all dancing gestures are self-exemplifying), while head scratching (insofar as it is a gesture at all) is the norm.

I would therefore argue that dance gestures have something "meta" about them. The idea is that a merely self-exemplifying gesture both refers to something in the world and also refers to its own referring to that thing in the world. To return to Goodman's first example of self-exemplification, the word "word" both refers to words in general and refers to itself as an example of a word. And "word" does this in a stable and static way by always "staying put" long enough to illustrate its point. By contrast, dance's self-exemplifying gestures go beyond mere self-exemplification by dynamically refusing to stay

put long enough to preserve the example of self-exemplification as a clearly graspable phenomenon.

Perhaps the reader will object that there are particular dance moves that “stay put” long enough to be identifiable across different dances and different performances of the same dance, such as a pirouette. In response, I would first note that a pirouette is not a member of the “self-exemplifying” subset of the set of all dance gestures. However, even if one were to interpret it as such, a dance gesture like what call a “pirouette” only stays put insofar as it is locked in place by a regimenting power structure which denies dancers the freedom to blend moves into each other. Thus, there exist what we could identify as quasi-pirouettes, or pirouette-esque moves, but we would only need to do make such identifications because the conventions of ballet (including ballet instruction) force certain forms onto the dancers' bodies. In short, “pirouette” only stays put to the extent that we freeze it, and use it to keep dancers' bodies bound.

More specifically, something in certain self-exemplifying dance gestures goes beyond the level of mere self-exemplification. This can be seen most clearly perhaps by contrasting it with the merely self-exemplifying example of **red** (i.e., **red text**), which necessarily relies on some external assistance in order to perform its self-exemplification. **Red** requires that the person using the word-processing software not only perform the necessary tricks to shift the color of the text from black to red, but also provide **red** with a reason for it to appear at all on the occasion in question. Certain self-exemplifying gestures in dance however, such as those which concern “rhythm” and “dynamic shape,” are not merely self-exemplifying but also self-creating or self-motivated insofar as the dancer performs them without external support or assistance and as ends-in-themselves, perhaps even without any conscious intent (as when one involuntarily slips into a dance while walking down the street).

But perhaps some readers will object that such dance gestures are not in fact self-motivated but rather motivated in part by previous moments in the dance. One form this motivation might take is the development of a musical theme.²¹ In that case, I would argue that the gestures to which I am referring take place in improvisational dances such as jazz dances and certain aleatory dances. In these dances, there is no pre-given theme, the development of which would compel or motivate later notes to follow previous ones. Even in the absence of a theme, though some audiences may seem to sense a kind of activation of later moments by previous moments or a kind of motivation of later shapes by earlier shapes. Even in this looser formulation however, at least in regard to more improvisational dances such as salsa, any such activation or

motivation would have to be constructed retroactively. This construction would amount to a tracing of the dynamic series of shapes that could not have been predicted even by the dancers or choreographers in the “real time” of the present.

The reason for this is that every gesture in dance is potentially polysemous, capable of presaging various subsequent movements. To return to the example of the right-hand turn in salsa, the diagonal lift of the leader’s left hand, which initiates the turn, can just as easily be inflected at the last moment toward the partner’s forehead. This slight difference is used to initiate the lead for the right-hand drape instead (in which the partner’s hand is guided over his/her head as if the partner were smoothing his/her hair with the leader’s hand cupping the follower’s hand). In short, the beginning of the diagonal lift can motivate or activate a right-hand turn or a drape or multiple other moves. One could almost say, therefore, that these types of self-exemplifying dancing gestures “gesture themselves.” Perhaps one could legitimately regard dance gesture as potentially involving meta-self-exemplification.

2 • Meta-Notationality

2.1 • Notational versus non-notational arts

Before I turn directly to notation, it may be helpful to summarize Goodman’s larger discussion of forgery, within which he introduces notation. Though this forgery discussion ultimately focuses on music and dance, it begins in a thoroughly comparative way, as suggested by Goodman’s claim that “in music, unlike painting, there is no such thing as a forgery of a known work” because “all correct performances are equally genuine instances of the work.”²² Music is thus an example of what Goodman terms an “allographic” art form while painting is an example of an “autographic” one, meaning that “even the most exact duplication of [a painting] does not thereby count as genuine.”²³

As for the other canonical arts, Goodman asserts that “sculpture is autographic” because it is similar to the autographic art of painting while “[a]rchitecture and the drama, on the other hand, are more nearly comparable to music.” The reason for the phrase “more nearly” here is that architecture’s

need for external assistance in moving from blueprints to buildings and drama's need for stage directions raise the possibility that these two arts are "less purely allographic" than music.²⁴ In this way, a significant shift has already occurred, namely from a pure dichotomy to a continuum of degrees, thereby raising a host of questions which, for Goodman, "cannot be answered" prior to "some rather painstaking analysis."²⁵ Dance, although already implicitly at stake via its frequent inclusion in drama, is formally introduced by Goodman here as the first step in this "painstaking analysis."

"Since an art seems to be allographic just insofar as it is amenable to notation," Goodman begins, "the case of dance is especially interesting."²⁶ While this explicit turn to dance certainly foreshadows its ultimate role for Goodman as a necessary part of his full-blown classification system, dance may actually have been the phenomenon that suggested these problems to Goodman in the first place. To put it figuratively, dance as a "white hat" hacker designing foolproof software may have originally been the "black hat" hacker who undermined the original version of the software. That is, perhaps dance already destroyed Goodman's initial classification system, like a virus in a cyber-attack, as a result of which Goodman then hired the same hacker to design a less vulnerable IT fortress. But this left the system still vulnerable should the white hat hacker choose to switch back to the original black hat. A non-dancing analogy here would be the motif in which a government or wealthy individual hires a known thief to design or test a foolproof new antitheft system and is thus rightly suspicious that the thief will use her/his abilities to double-cross her/his employer.

One reason to think that dance helped Goodman formulate these problems (and not just their solutions) is that prior to this moment in the text, Goodman has focused primarily on Hegel's five central arts; and the history of aesthetics shows that attempts to go beyond those five frequently undermine their own classifications.²⁷ Goodman ascribes dance's interestingness here to its being "an art without a traditional notation; and an art where the ways, and even the possibility, of developing an adequate notation are still matters of controversy." In other words, as is so often the case in various contexts, dance appears to get things heated with a heat that extends to its neighbors as Goodman suggests that dance's relationship to notation raises questions about the use of notation in the arts generally. His answer to these questions takes the form of the following narrative: perhaps at the beginning of human history "all arts are autographic," but — exclusively in the case of those arts whose works are "transitory, as in singing and reciting, or require many persons for their production, as in architecture and symphonic music" — as the ages wear

on, "a notation may be devised in order to transcend the limitations of time and the individual."²⁸

The central achievement of such a notation, in Goodman's view, lies in its "establishing a distinction between the constitutive and contingent properties of a work"; nevertheless notation is guided "by the informal classification of performances into works and by practical decisions as to what is prescribed and what is optional."²⁹ Thus in music for example, the opposing qualities of objective and subjective (or substantial and idiosyncratic) might be distinguished after the first appearance of its notation. But in painting the line between these pairs of qualities remains invisible to this day; or more precisely to even speak of such a line for an art like painting might constitute a kind of category mistake.

2.2 • Dance as an allegedly notational art

As for dance, it is clear to Goodman that it is both ephemeral and dependent on entire communities and thus "qualifies on both scores" as allography.³⁰ But this conclusion is perhaps too hasty. That dance is ephemeral – if "ephemeral" means something like "does not leave behind a static material object at the end of the work" – seems true enough, but that dance always requires more than one person is far less obvious. Presumably, Goodman is thinking here of dance as a part of theater, for example in an Ancient Greek chorus, but there are also many solo dances, many of which are performed by the same person who choreographed them. That Goodman would have simply forgotten about solo dances seems implausible, so perhaps he has some other reason for excluding them.³¹

To whatever degree it is allographic, dance, like music, is for Goodman constitutively immune from forgery because to that same degree, dance's essential properties are determinable, independent of its histories of production. That is, to whatever degree dance can be annotated, as with Labanotation, dance according to Goodman is a kind of "paint by numbers" process which anyone can master and follow without having had to study with a certain choreographer at a certain time and place. Goodman's introduction of the rhetoric of 'allographic' here marks the beginning of his detailed discussion of notation defined as a "theoretically decisive test for determining that an object has all the constitutive properties of the work in question without

determining how or by whom the object was produced.”³² Put differently, Goodman’s allographic arts are those in which the essence has been completely distilled through mathematically-precise tools, and thus notation marks the complete victory of the machine over the human, of technology over authenticity.³³ In music, for example, musical notation indicates what is most important or essential to music, namely, time signatures, pitch, mathematically precise rhythms, etc. (as opposed to volume, the exact shape of the body as one plays the instrument that produces a given note, etc.).

This Luddite framing is admittedly uncharacteristic of Goodman, in whose sunnier terms (albeit with similarly violent political connotations) the “allographic art has won its emancipation not by proclamation but by notation.”³⁴ From whom or what, however, has the art of music “won” its “emancipation”? Was music’s previous “master” the individual artist, like those to whom other arts such as painting remain “enslaved” to this day? This very question presupposes that an art form is ontologically capable of either having a master or being free, but perhaps this is another category mistake. Perhaps only living beings can meaningfully achieve emancipation.³⁵ I will return to this issue and its important political connotations below.

Assuming that such freedom for an art such as music is possible, one might conclude that the rest of the arts too could and should be translated into unique notations. Remember, however, that for Goodman the other arts – again except dance – could only be annotated in artificial and meaningless ways, exemplified perhaps by the paint-by-numbers feature found in certain coloring books. To reprise Goodman’s earlier claim regarding what makes such notations fake, (or in Goodman’s terms, “forged”), where “a pertinent antecedent classification system is lacking or flouted, a notational language effects only an arbitrary, nominal definition of a ‘work,’ as if it were a word newly coined,” and thus one lacks “material grounds for choosing one systemization over another.”³⁶ Although the word “fake” here might seem too pejorative, my reason for using it is to follow Goodman’s rhetoric of “forgery” (with which he introduces notation).

For another art such as painting, the problem then would lie not with any notation in itself but with the impossibility of choosing the right notation among what would amount to equally arbitrary options. To clarify, I am talking about notating the “paint by numbers” type of activity for the painting itself, rather than notating the gestures that produce the painting, attempting to follow Goodman’s own example. In other words, a genuine notation requires that there be at least two historical narratives regarding an art, one of which must classify distinct works independently of the production of those works.

Although Goodman does not pursue this point, these two aspects imply that something can fail to be a notation in two importantly different ways.

Paint-by-numbers fails in one way because it does not belong to a classificatory narrative, but other quasi-notations could fail by classifying only via behind-the-scenes connections to other narratives of art production. To clarify, with “behind-the-scenes” here, I am referring to Goodman’s claim that a given notation must have absolutely no connection to the historical way in which the artistic method has arisen, or else that notation is problematically still linked to history, authenticity, traditions of mastery, etc., as a result of which linkage, questions of forgery could still meaningfully arise. And although the reader might object that paint-by-numbers belongs to art for children, which itself has a long history, I would respond that paint-by-numbers does not produce art, but rather helps train children in a way that primes them to later produce their own art.

To paraphrase Goodman’s main point here, he is claiming that notation classifies the world in new and productive ways. In other words, Goodman claims that notation classifies the world in new and productive ways. And if art is notational, then this notational structure constitutes a good reason to think that art, like science, classifies and creates worlds rather than, as is typically assumed, merely imitating things and expressing feelings in preexisting worlds. But if my previous point is correct, then the arts most deserving of the name “arts” are not notational. Fortunately however, even if this is true, the self-exemplification of the arts could still facilitate the world-making function that Goodman ascribes to them. Through a series of intricate steps, his entire project could be understood to rise or fall with dance’s amenability to notation.

2.3 • Goodman’s stake in dance’s allegedly notationality

Goodman acknowledges that the “possibility of a notation for the dance was one of the initial questions that led to our study of notational system,” lending significant support to my earlier suggestion that dance was formative for his conception of the problem of notation and forgery from the very beginning.³⁷ Notation constitutes the second of Goodman’s “two routes of investigation” in *The Languages of Art*.³⁸ As to the specific reason why notation and therefore dance are so important for Goodman, I would suggest the following account.

Dance is the only other art besides music to which Goodman attributes a legitimate notation (because literary artworks are in natural languages, which are only quasi-notational), but if the controversial issue of dance notation were to definitively implode, then Goodman would have only one potentially notational art (namely music), and for him “an art seems to be allographic just insofar as it is amenable to notation.”³⁹ The presence of only one allographic art would in turn undermine the autographic/allographic binary at its foundation; because how can any classification be meaningful if it puts all but one thing into one brand-new category and everything else into another? The existence of this binary is itself crucial for Goodman because, as previously noted, it bridges art and science.

2.4 • Dance’s resistance to notation

The first thing that strikes Goodman as unusual about dance is that it is “visual like painting, which has no notation, and yet transient and temporal like music, which has a highly developed standard notation.”⁴⁰ Goodman is anxious to anticipate the objection that dance “is far too complicated to be captured by any notation,” with the claim that “a score need not capture all the subtlety and complexity of a performance”; instead, a score need only “specify the essential properties a performance must have to belong to the work; the stipulations are only of certain aspects and only within certain degrees.”⁴¹

Even with this provision however, it is not clear that dance artworks are best defined as classes of performances corresponding to a score for at least two specific reasons. First, whereas in Western classical music (since that is the only genre that Goodman considers), one must study scores in the form of sheet music to acquire the ability to give a performance of any score, virtually no dancer acquires the ability to perform a dance through a dance score in the form of Labanotation, for example; on the contrary, most dancers have probably never even seen an example of dance notation. Moreover, it would be constitutively impossible to learn to dance through any notation alone because dance is an embodied practice that requires an embodied instructor and an embodied education. It is worth noting however that this last claim is true of music as well. Thus, insofar as one defines music as an embodied, performative practice, one also undermines the notationality of music.

A second reason why dance artworks in general are not best defined as merely performances of a score is that the cultural authenticity of a dance and/or the identity of a dancer – for example, as raced or gendered – are in many cases considered essential aspects of the performance; and these aspects cannot be captured in a neutrally reproducible way in notation. For example, in American minstrel shows, often performed in blackface, a given dance performance was frequently defined not only by reference to a score but also or instead by the cultural authenticity of the performance and the racial identity of the dancer.⁴² More specifically, if a particular audience considered a particular dance authentic only if performed by a black person, then any dancer raced as white would not have been able to perform that work for that audience even with a perfect notation perfectly transposed into movement. Goodman’s stated reason for thinking that “such requisite antecedent classification exists for the dance” is that without looking at scores, audiences “make reasonably consistent judgments as to whether performances by different people are instances of the same dance.”⁴³ However, Goodman fails to offer any evidence for this claim, and based on my own twenty years’ experience in dance, I would argue not only that most people would not in fact be able to distinguish most dances but also that any apparent exception to this inability would derive from the distinguisher’s own dance education. This claim will perhaps seem less debatable if one shifts from the typical focus on specific dances in musical theater to the world of folk and social dance. For example, many dancers, even those with years of experience, frequently struggle to distinguish salsa, merengue, and bachata dances from one another at a given event. The reason for this is that most dances across history and the globe are folk or vernacular dances, and such dances evolve, blend, and become identified as distinct new dances in continuously, imperceptibly, and physically remote ways.

2.5 • Labanotation’s failure as indicator of dance’s resistance to notation

After merely asserting that non-dancers possess this independent ability, Goodman then claims that dance is not merely theoretically amenable to notation but has already been effectively captured by Rudolf Laban’s “Labanotation,” which to Goodman “seems deservedly to have gained most recognition.”⁴⁴ On one hand, since I have argued that dance artworks are not (merely) classes of performances and thus do not have any notation-relevant

essential properties, Labanotation's merit in capturing such properties is thus irrelevant – at least as this merit is compared to real or potential rival notations. On the other hand, however, I would suggest that Labanotation reveals different degrees of inadequacy depending on the type of dance to which it is applied, which suggests that there is a kind of meaningful co-variation worthy of exploring between Labanotation and dance. More specifically, Labanotation seems least inappropriate to ballet, keeping in mind that ballet is generally understood as the most formal and rigid type of dance; more inappropriate to modern and post-modern dance, perhaps due to the comparably greater importance of individual emotional expression in the latter dances; and most inappropriate in virtually all other dances, including jazz, tap, clogging, hip-hop, and ballroom.

According to *Laban for Actors and Dancers*, a concise introduction to Laban's work, written by his student Jean Newlove, Laban conceptualized all movement as ranging on a set of continua from "flexible" to "direct" (in how it traverses space), "sustained" to "sudden" (in how it consumes time), "light" to "strong" (in its attitude toward its weight), and "free" to "bound" (in how it flows).⁴⁵ Against this background, the system of Labanotation consists of pictorial symbols whose (a) shape, (b) shading, (c) length, and (d) position on a staff indicate (a1) nine directions in space relative to the body's center, (b1) a low, middle, or high spatial position of the entire body, (c1) duration of the movement, and (d1) the body part to execute the movement, respectively.⁴⁶

Goodman admits that Labanotation actually violates two of his five necessary conditions for notation, which makes it even more confusing that he then immediately thereafter reaffirms Labanotation's status as notation. In Goodman's words, these five conditions are "unambiguity and semantic and syntactic disjointedness and differentiation."⁴⁷ As this terminology suggests, these concepts are highly complex and technical, but the gist is as follows: in a notation, every symbol must correspond to only one phenomenon in the world, and every phenomenon in the world being referred to must be referred to by one and only one symbol. "All in all," Goodman concludes, "Labanotation passes the theoretical tests very well – about as well as does ordinary musical notation, and perhaps as well as is compatible with practicality."⁴⁸ According to what kind of standard, however (outside of baseball), does missing two out of five points count as doing "very well"?

Similarly surprising, therefore, is Goodman's subsequent claim that "the development of Laban's language offers us an elaborate and intriguing example of the process that has come to be called 'concept formation.'"⁴⁹ Although Goodman offers no elaboration as to why this is true, I would suggest the

following possibility, which is inspired by my previous considerations of Goodman's use of the rhetoric of violent political struggle. Dance could be understood as an art form that attempts to transform what is in certain respects the most intransigent content, namely the human body. Thus, any theoretical attempt to capture dance discursively would have to endure the longest, most elaborate process imaginable. One by-product of this process therefore would be yielding quantitatively more (and qualitatively more intense) traces of that struggle (compared to theories which had to grapple only with comparably abstract or immaterial art forms).

2.6 • Political implications of dance's resistance to notation

This metaphor recalls my previous observations regarding Goodman's use of the racially-connoting rhetoric of "emancipation" and "authenticity" in regard to notation. The connection between the idea of dance as notational and the idea of emancipation is that dance as a practice is associated in the modern-day Western world with various disempowered beings and communities, including women, people of color, non-heterosexual men and women, the poor, non-Westerners, children, and nonhuman animals.⁵⁰ Thus, I would argue that the power relationships whereby the artistic production of these beings and communities is co-opted – and even classified using notation – are complex and important to keep in mind.

One could even liken dance to a war of emancipation, such as the famous Haitian slave revolt of 1791. Such fights for independence, waged by the formerly-enslaved, darker-skinned peoples of Africa, Southeast Asia, South America, and the Caribbean, came later and after more extended struggles than did those of the lighter-skinned peoples of the global North. These global southerners remain linked to dance in the imaginary of global northerners. Perhaps the comparatively greater intensity of dance's apparent movement toward freedom – from "autographic" to "allographic" – might be connected to dance's association with the peoples of the world whose fight for freedom has been the longest and most difficult. I say "apparent" here because it is only in Goodman's terms that this would mean freedom for dance. From my perspective, what Goodman describes as 'freedom' is more like the mislabeled "freedom" of complete conformity, melting away all one's racial and cultural specificity into the bland whiteness of the majority, forgetting how to

dance by learning how to move in mechanical obedience to the dancing equivalent of a musical score.⁵¹

This metaphor of a war of emancipation might also be useful in thinking about Goodman's reason for affirming Labanotation despite the latter's failure of his test for notation. Perhaps, since Goodman's concept of notation constitutes an attempt at a conceptual capture of a certain phenomenon, and since a perfect catch ultimately appears impossible; then rather than conclude that concepts have failed, perhaps Goodman instead concluded that to capture part of the phenomenon – and then to crucially redefine that part as the entirety or essence of the phenomenon – was in actuality to capture the phenomenon itself. To specify the metaphor at the level of the war's individual commanders, Goodman's move might be comparable to the losing general, now a prisoner of war, clinging to a lock of the opposing general's hair as delusional evidence of triumph.

Understood in this way, Goodman's concluding valorization of Labanotation is of course pervasively flawed. Even more troubling is Goodman's subsequent affirmation of how Laban "conceived his system as a notation not merely for dance but for human movement in general, and went on to develop and supplement the system as a means for analyzing and classifying all human physical activities." In further affirmation of Laban's project, Goodman observes that the "need for some such system is especially apparent, for example, in industrial engineering and psychological experimentation."⁵²

Unfortunately, Goodman does not acknowledge the problematic potential political implications of such an expansion of Labanotation, as illustrated for example in the elaborate efforts of totalitarian regimes to completely control the movements of the bodies of every member of their populations. Fortunately, much as the unruly multiplicity of actual dances seems to have resisted Goodman's pristine theory of notation, the irreducibly singular movements of individuals and communities within such totalitarian regimes have so far valiantly resisted those controlling attempts since such regimes are unfortunately less radically opened-minded than Goodman himself. Although one might argue that not all dance notations need to be extended beyond dance to non-dance movement, it has become increasingly difficult to justify the distinction between dancing movement and non-dancing movement and thus even the existence of non-dancing movement. The watershed moment here is usually identified as choreographer Yvonne Rainer's (in)famous "NO manifesto."⁵³

2.7 • Dance as meta-notational

To rehearse the insights of this section: (1) dance does not always rely on more than one individual and thus had less cause historically, *vis-à-vis* Goodman's narrative, to become notational in the first place; (2) dance artists, unlike musical artists, cannot master their art through notation, making any such notation peripheral; (3) notation is supposed to definitively distinguish the essential properties for a performance to be "of" a given score, but the identity of a dancer, which cannot be incorporated into notation, is frequently an essential aspect of a dance performance; (4) dance does not clearly possess a classification system prior to the production of dances because people appear to possess such a classification only to the degree that they have been trained in dance productions; and (5) the most widespread dance notation does not even meet half of Goodman's conditions for notation.

Overall then, dance is unique — as in so many other ways — in its relationship to notation. On one hand, like music, dance possesses at least one standardized notation (and in fact at least thirteen historical notations).⁵⁴ On the other hand, and like virtually every other art, even the best imaginable dance notation is without historical necessity and precedent and also without pedagogical, theoretical, and occasionally practical sufficiency, and it can therefore be imposed on dance only artificially and meaninglessly. Put differently, unlike music — which has a notation and should because it works — and unlike the rest of the arts — which have no notation and should not because they would not work — dance uniquely has but should not have a notation because that alleged notation only works in a way unconnected to dance history, education, or practice.

As a consequence, I would suggest that dance could be meaningfully understood as meta-notational in that dance is the only art that deceptively appears to have a meaningful notation while in fact having none. In other words, it seems inappropriate to lump dance together with other arts like painting as "non-notational arts" since dance possesses a globally-recognized notation albeit of debatable value. On the other hand, I have attempted to show in this section that dance exceeds the bounds of any notation, wriggling free of its constraints no matter how tight the bindings. Thus, dance is an annotated art which continuously moves "meta" (beyond) the existing notations. In this sense at least, dance could be meaningfully described as "meta-notational."

3 • Dance as Meta-Notational Self-Exemplification

Combining the efforts of my first two sections, I offer the following Goodman-inspired definition of dance: “meta-notational self-exemplification.” What this means is that dance is the art which both refers to itself and also exemplifies itself as that which appears notational but ultimately goes beyond notation and with politically problematic consequences. In other words, dance is a performance which is not only caught up in misperceptions but also both “says” this about itself and “shows” this through itself. In conclusion, I would suggest that we build on Goodman’s own conclusion to *Languages of Art* – again replete with dance-connoting rhetoric – by adding that “how we feel in our bones and nerves and muscles as well as grasped by our minds” and that “all the sensitivity and responsiveness of the organism participates in the invention and the interpretation of symbols” – adding only that how we feel, for example in our varied artistic endeavors, is knowable in our minds as well as in the rest of our bodies; and that symbol-creation, for example in our varied scientific endeavors, requires all the sensitivity and responsiveness of the organism, without which the consequences have been and will continue to be politically disastrous.⁵⁵

• Notes •

- 1 Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978), x. For one recent example of Goodman’s influence on dance scholarship, see Gabrielle Klein and Sandra Noeth, eds., *Emerging Bodies: The Performance of Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012).
- 2 Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 52-53.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 4 *Ibid.* Goodman will later modify this claim, adding that swatches also exemplify, in Nelson Goodman and Catherine Elgin, *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), 22.

- 5 *Languages of Art*, 53.
- 6 Incidentally, and in a foreshadowing of his explicit discussion of self-exemplification, in the world of philosophy (as opposed to the world of tailoring), for example here in Goodman's text, the swatch becomes an example of the phenomenon exemplification, and thereby exemplifies itself!
- 7 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 59.
- 10 Incidentally, although this gesture, according to Goodman, is "called forth by the music" (rather than "calling it forth") the gesture nevertheless qualifies as a label on his view, specifically because labels "may be used to record or to prescribe," and they "need not themselves have any particular properties in common with the music" (*Ibid.*, 61, 62). In other words, something can denote something else without being similar to the denoted object and without causing the denoted object to exist. I would argue, however, that in various senses, foot-tapping does in fact function to "call forth" the music. Consider for example a concert in which the audience amplifies its applause with loud foot-stamping, in part in an effort to persuade the performer to do an encore.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 63.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 64.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 65.
- 14 See, on this point, the groundbreaking work of Gerald Myers, especially *Who's Not Afraid of Martha Graham?* (Durham: American Dance Festival, 2008).
- 15 Although these analyses of contemporary Latin dance are similarly applicable to a variety of other dances and types of dance (including tap, jazz, hip-hop, post-modern, and various folk dances), an adequate consideration of these applications is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the present investigation.
- 16 See Martha Graham, "I am a Dancer," in *Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, ed. Alexandra Carter and Janet O'Shea (New York: Routledge, 2010). Although the latter characterization implies that an indefinitely large number of moves could exemplify the same aspect of a dancer's uniqueness, this is not a problem on Goodman's terms because self-exemplification requires only that the move have no prior denotation (through convention), not that no two moves be symbols for the same object.
- 17 I am indebted for this suggestion to an early reviewer of this article.
- 18 "destiny, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2014. Web. 9 March 2015.
- 19 See, for example, Joe Sachs, *Aristotle's Physics: A Guided Study* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1995).
- 20 And even if the attempt is made to produce such a material object as remainder of the dance, as for example by filming a given dance performance, then all that is achieved thereby is that one has created a new cinematic artwork (along with its cinematic material product in the form of film). The dance itself, in such a case, has still not produced its own material product.
- 21 I am indebted for this insight as well to the same early reviewer of the article.
- 22 Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 112.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 113.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 120.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 121.

- 27 For one discussion of this repeated failure of classification systems, see John Dewey's chapter "The Varied Substance of the Arts," in *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigree, 2005), 214-244. Though this reluctance to consider all of the arts is of course unjustifiable, one can nevertheless sympathize with the architects of such schemes in light of what, as the reader will see below, happens to Goodman's own hyper (as "above measure") classification.
- 28 Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 121.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 31 One possible reason for this suspicion is that Goodman's counterintuitive omission is immediately followed by his long-delayed definition of forgery. Perhaps, that is, Goodman is offering – in the guise of an authentic description of dance – what I will term a "forged" description. In support of this possibility, a forgery for Goodman is "an object falsely purporting to have the history of production requisite for an original of the work," and a description is an abstract object therefore a description (like an artwork) also has a kind of history of production (*Ibid.*, 122). Along these lines, then, I would suggest that a description is a non-forgery if it results from familiarity/experience with the described entity, but if it instead merely purports to be the product of such familiarity/experience, and is instead artificially, externally imposed on the described entity, then the description is a forgery.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 33 I use the word "victory" here, with its connotations of warfare, to remind the reader of Goodman's narrative, in which all art forms began with singular artworks that were irreducibly linked to their histories of production but later fell victim, one after the other, to allographic precision – etymologically an "other-writing" in which the self of the artist is eclipsed and dispensable.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 35 If this rhetoric seems hyperbolic it may seem less so below, where I explore Goodman's affirmation of Laban's attempted expansion of his dance notation to cover any and all human movement whatsoever – a comprehensive and totalizing science of movement in which something like dance might achieve emancipation, but who know how much else, human beings included, might fall (further) into slavery.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 197.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 211.
- 38 *Ibid.*, xii.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 211.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 212.
- 42 Even if one were to attempt to include dancer identity into dance notation, perhaps on the model of instrumentation in Western classical music, one would not be able to both specify, in the case of minstrelsy, for example, both the identity of the dancer (such as "black") and also an ever-current definition of such identity markers (such as "a person possessing one drop of black blood"). See, for example, Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 43 Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 213.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 213.

- 45 Jean Newlove, *Laban for Actors and Dancers* (London: Routledge, 1993), 70-73.
- 46 An accessible introduction to Labanotation can be found at the Dance Notation Bureau's website "Read a Good Dance Lately?" <http://dancenotation.org/lnbasics/frameo.html>. Accessed January 31, 2015.
- 47 Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 156.
- 48 Ibid., 217.
- 49 Ibid., 214.
- 50 See, for example, Joshua Hall, "Revalorized Black Embodiment: Dancing with Fanon," *Journal of Black Studies* 43, no. 3 (2012), 274-288.
- 51 I am indebted, for a third time, to the aforementioned reviewer for the suggestion to connect these two analyses.
- 52 Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 218.
- 53 Yvonne Rainer, "Some Retrospective Thoughts," *Tulane Drama Review* 10 (1965), 178. And for an important example of such analyses, see Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Middletown: Wesleyan, 1987).
- 54 For an extended comparison of thirteen such notational systems, see Ann Hutchinson Guest's *Choreographics: A Comparison of Dance Notation Systems from the Fifteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 1998).
- 55 Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 259.

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