THE BLOOMSBURY HANDBOOK OF DANCE AND PHILOSOPHY

Edited by Rebecca L Farinas and Julie C. Van Camp

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CHAPTER 1.2

Teaching Dance and Philosophy to Non-Majors: The Integration of Movement Practices and Thought Experiments to Articulate Big Ideas[1]

MEGAN BRUNSVOLD MERCEDES AND KRISTOPHER G. PHILLIPS

Philosophers sometimes wonder whether academic work can ever be truly interdisciplinary. Whether true interdisciplinarity is possible is an open question, but given current trends in higher education, it seems that at least gesturing toward such work is increasingly important. This volume serves as a testament to the fact that such work can be done. Of course, while it is the case that high-level theoretical work can flourish at the intersection of dance and philosophy, it remains to be seen how we might share this with undergraduate students. For many of us in philosophy and dance, a large number of the students we teach are neither philosophy nor dance majors. As such, we are familiar with the challenge of convincing our students to care about our fields. Both philosophy and dance, *qua* disciplines on a college campus, face similar challenges. These disciplines are often deeply misunderstood, frequently presumed to be "impractical" (a powerful, but confused objection[2]), intimidating, and frivolous. In this chapter, we offer an account of the course we co-taught at Southern Utah University, titled "Movement and Space," as a rough framework for how to introduce the intersection between philosophy and dance to our students while simultaneously breaking students of their misconceptions. We offer a way to engage students and professors alike in a truly interdisciplinary educational experience. Treating philosophy as an embodied endeavor, and employing philosophical concepts through the act of dance encourages students and faculty alike to rethink the fundamental nature of aesthetics.

The Honors Program at Southern Utah University (SUU) has a history of offering interdisciplinary courses centered around a unifying theme (e.g., Time, Fear, Play). Traditionally, each course is partitioned into distinct sections, with different instructors teaching a unit from the perspective of his or her respective discipline. With "Movement

and Space," in addition to facilitating the discussion of space and motion from three separate disciplines, we saw an opportunity to engage in a truly interdisciplinary pedagogical approach.[3] After a preliminary planning session, we articulated a mutual desire to experiment with an improvisational approach to the structure of the course itself. As such, we decided to keep teaching responsibilities in perpetual rotation, enabling each lesson plan to build on those that preceded it. The "final" syllabus had gaping holes with regard to content to ensure such a possibility.

We framed the course in terms of the following questions: *What is movement? What is space?* Most pointedly, how might the exchange of ideas about the notions of movement and space be influenced by a mash-up of philosophy seminars, movement labs, and film screenings? In an effort to provide an introduction to the intersection of philosophy and dance in undergraduate course work, this chapter reflects on some of the key learning outcomes for both students and instructors as a result of this pedagogical experiment. By providing examples of texts, lesson plans, sample assignments, and tools for assessment, we hope to illuminate the successes and shortcomings of our endeavor, while furthering the discussion in support of interdisciplinary pedagogy. Importantly, we believe that the nature of the interdisciplinary work students did in this course provided opportunities to experience embodied cognition in action, which served to ground abstract philosophical content. Additionally, we believe that the integration of abstract, esoteric philosophical and embodied inquiry, created the opportunity for a more thorough investigation of "big ideas" regarding movement and space from all aspects of the self, whether intellectual, physical, emotional, or psychological. The integration further served to demystify the practice of both philosophy and dance for non-majors.

PREPARATION

As the course content would be derived from contemplations regarding "movement and space," through Philosophy, Film, and Dance, we devised a rotational seminar schedule that would introduce foundational ideas regarding movement and space from each of our disciplines, while allowing for interplay between the disciplines. We each had an idea as to how we wanted to begin, but remained committed to the fluidity of our "lesson plans," acknowledging that the course content would likely change because of the previous seminars. Each student had to lead her own seminar on a topic of her choosing. Given this flexibility and the diversity of student interests, we simply could not anticipate the direction subsequent course meetings would take. In essence, we hoped to allow the structure of the course to mirror the improvisational practice the students would engage with during the movement sessions. Here is an example of how we envisioned the first few weeks of class:

Week One

Seminar 1: Philosophy—Introduction to logic and Zeno's paradoxes of motion

Seminar 2: Philosophy—From Aristotle's *Physics*

Week Two

Seminar 3: Film—Space and Movement in Film: an Introduction

Seminar 4: Film—Brief History of Space Movies

Week Three

Seminar 5: Philosophy—From *Critique of Pure Reason,* Kant

Seminar 6: Philosophy—Embodied cognition from "Free Presence," Alva Noë

Week Four

Seminar 7: Dance—"The Movement of Life," "Big Babies," Mark Johnson

Seminar 8: Dance—"Still/Here," Bill T. Jones and Bill Moyers

Week Five

Seminar 9: Student Seminars 1–4

Seminar 10: Philosophy—"Correspondence," Clarke and Leibniz

The following weeks continued to bounce between disciplines. The "final" syllabus had five TBA slots, identifying only philosophy, film and dance seminars as general topics, allowing us ample opportunity to build on previous seminars.

"HONRS 2010/4010: Dialogue in the Disciplines," serves as a requirement for Honors students seeking an Honors Degree. The ambiguous title allows the program to change the topic of interdisciplinary study, so students often sign up without knowing the theme or content of the course. As a result, our students walked into the classroom having no idea that they would be both engaging in philosophical reflection and dancing, let alone that they would be doing both at the same time. We mention this because it sets the scene of the first class where, in addition to describing the pedagogical experiment of this interdisciplinary course, the students engaged in their first physical movement seminar.

This introduction to dance provided two important foundations for the subsequent seminars, and was broken down into two short segments. First, "The Name Game"—a game of accumulating movements where each participant assigns a movement/gesture to her name that corresponds rhythmically to the syllables in her name. Each student performs the movement while saying her name, which is followed by a chorus-like response from the other classmates. Each person's name/gesture is added to the one before, thereby creating a movement phrase comprising each individual's gesture. While it may appear to be little more than an ice-breaker, this activity was selected for its specificity of movement design. In performing a simple gesture associated with the rhythm of one's name (and the longer phrase constituted by the gestures of their classmates), students were introduced to shape, motion, time (rhythm and repetition), effort/dynamics, and quality, along with the skill of movement retention—all foundational elements of dance. Also embedded in this activity are the notions of literal gesture as opposed to abstraction, in that students were instructed to choose movements without considering the possible meaning or interpretation of them.

The second activity dealt primarily with space. Participants were asked to move the tables and chairs to the perimeter of the room to allow us to walk casually around the room. Both faculty and students were instructed not to touch each other, but to try and fill up all the negative space in the room, weaving through each other in various floor patterns. After some time, we restricted the size of the movement space, allowing participants only half the space to navigate. We restricted the space once more, now working with only a quarter of the original space. To finish, we opened up our walking to encompass the entire room once more. We followed up with a brief seminar-style discussion on proximity, speed, self-awareness, kinesthetic awareness, and personal space.

With these two short and relatively simple activities, we were able to directly address the complexities of embodied cognition. Prior to the formal study of the notions of movement and space, students experienced the personal, physical manifestations of

movement and space in their own bodies. Aided by a heightened awareness of such experiences, they began to decipher these concepts and articulate preliminary definitions of movement and space. In essence, the short movement exploration provided an embodied introduction to their first philosophy seminar.

PREPARING THE CONCEPTUAL SPACE: PLANNING AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPACE AND MOTION

In preparing the philosophy aspect of our class on space and motion, our original thought was to focus on the abstract, disembodied, conceptual issues involved in understanding space as an entity. Starting with Zeno's paradoxes and working up to Kant's *a priori* intuitions about space through Aristotle, Lucretius, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Newton, this section of the course was shaping up to be a traditional analytic history and philosophy of science course focused on getting a handle on space, and to a lesser extent, motion.

When we abandoned the partitioned structure of the course, we also abandoned historical narrative. Taking into account the content from the seminar immediately preceding, the challenge shifted from fitting in the entire history of the concept of space to developing a coherent narrative for both students and instructors. On its face, it seems that theoreticians and practitioners of dance are more closely aligned with phenomenological, embodied approaches to conceptual issues, rather than the disembodied, abstract, "analytical" approach. Finding a way to bridge the gap between the so-called "analytic" and "continental" philosophical methodologies became an immediate necessity. Insofar as they are primarily historical, most of the philosophical sources lend themselves to multiple interpretations, as they predated the analytic–continental divide. Still, it has long been a tradition in philosophy, dating back at least to Plato, to see the body as a hinderance to clear thought, as something to be transcended or at least ignored.[4] *Embodied* cognition and experience as a topic of philosophical discussion is a relatively recent development.[5] Throughout history philosophers seemed to take mind–body interaction as a given. When pressed about how mind and body interact by Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, Descartes effectively advised her to go for a walk (or just engage in the mundane day-to-day activities) in order to see *that* they do.[6] We will return to Descartes below, as we think that his views on the mind–body problem have been misunderstood by some philosophers and some dance theorists alike. In addition to utilizing historical sources, moreover, we were inspired by the in-class dance and movement exercises to broaden the scope of what we could offer and so included some work by Alva Noë on embodiment and dance as a form of epistemology. Noë's work, while not uncontroversial, provides a means for the students and instructors alike to consider their own kinesthetic experiences from in-class motion practices not merely as a way to better understand themselves as embodied beings, but also to understand the relationship between highly abstracted conceptual issues and dance practices.

MOVING THROUGH SPACE

The dance component of this seminar was perhaps the most obvious discipline to address the notions of movement and space. Both concepts and their relationship to one another are the foundations of dance as an area of study. In addition to being integral to dancing,

the considerations of how and when we move, through what type of space, are what give rise to knowledge relating to the body as both a repository and instigator of the cultural, social, economic, gendered, aesthetic, and political discourse pertaining to ourselves and others.

At the inception, we were emphatic about holding the movement seminars in the dance studio. We wanted to cultivate as much physical investigation as possible through dance. Yet, dance scholars, dance philosophers, and dance-makers have all contributed to the theories of movement as a basis for meaning, and we soon realized we would be remiss not to include a few of their theories to aid our discussions and movement sessions. Thus, to continue with the considerations put forth by Aristotle, Kant, and Noë, for our first official dance seminar we launched into the first two chapters of Mark Johnson's *The Meaning of the Body,*[7] "The Movement of Life," and "Big Babies." Johnson aims to establish the importance of bodily movement and its relationship to space as vital conditions for creating meaning:

> From the very beginning of our life, and evermore until we die, movement keeps us in touch with our world in the most intimate and profound way. In our experience of movement, there is no radical separation of self from the world. We move in space through constant contact with the contours of our environment. We are in touch with our world at a visceral level, and it is the quality of our "being in touch" that importantly defines what our world is like and who we are . . . There is no movement without the space we move in, the things we move, and the qualities of movement, which are at the same time both the qualities of the world we experience and the qualities of ourselves as doers and experiencers.[8]

Johnson's views about movement as a basis for meaning rely heavily on Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenological analysis, in her seminal work, *The Primacy of Movement.* Here, Sheets-Johnstone lays out the four basic qualitative parameters of movement. They constitute both theoretical meaning, and our embodied experience. They are *tension, linearity, amplitude,* and *projection.* Johnson transcends Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenological depiction of "how these movements are felt and experienced by us," and suggests that, "prior to conscious experience, our bodies are inhabiting and interacting meaningfully with, their environments beneath the level of conscious awareness"[9]. He suggests that these qualities attributed to conscious movement form the basis for meaning from our unconscious movement and interaction with the world. This philosophical introduction to the idea of movement as a basis for meaning allowed students to grapple with their decidedly abstract assertions about movement and space, but it also provided the framework and terminology for our first movement session in the dance studio.

Before entering the studio, we held a seminar on Bill T. Jones' choreographic masterpiece, *Still/Here.* Students watched the documentary by Bill Moyers, which includes interviews between Moyers and Jones, as well as footage of the movement workshops Jones hosted around the country in which he asked individuals suffering with terminal illness to come together and explore their varied experiences through movement and dialogue. The movement generated in these workshops served as the foundation for the movement Jones crafted for his company of professional dancers. For our students, the documentary illustrated the intersection between movement and meaning as discussed by Johnson and Sheets-Johnstone. Furthermore, the documentary displayed the incredible risk-taking demonstrated by the workshop participants, most having had no prior dance

experience. Many of our students expressed trepidation with regard to upcoming movement sessions. Having our students witness these individuals dive into their movement explorations with little to no hesitation opened the door for our students with regard to their own movement practices.

EMBODIMENT, SELF-KNOWLEDGE, AND CARTESIAN PHILOSOPHY

We noted above that there has been a tradition in the history of philosophy to ignore or attempt to transcend one's body. In several of Plato's dialogues, Socrates appeals to the received wisdom that one should know oneself.[10] We also noted that there has been a long tradition of seeing this invocation as aimed principally at trying to get to know oneself *independent* of our embodiment. Perhaps the clearest expression of this can be seen in the work of René Descartes. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy* he argues that the essence of the self is a disembodied substance the principal and defining feature of which is thought. He writes, "But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions" [11]. Without getting bogged down in interpretive issues, we can note that in this passage Descartes' meditator is enumerating the modes of thought that seem at this point in the meditative process to be necessary to one's existence. We will notice that none of these modes *require* embodiment (though on his considered final view, imagination and perception exist only in minds that have been embodied), so we are entitled to conclude that the body is at best an accidental and unimportant feature of the self. Few things could be more antithetical to the project of dance.

Dance theorists, cognitive scientists, and philosophers alike have bristled at Descartes' view as presented in the *Meditations*. Indeed Descartes has been presented as something of the arch-nemesis of anyone defending embodied cognition. After all, Descartes is the one who claims that the mind and body are separate! While it is tempting to read Descartes in this way, Descartes scholars have long known that this badly misreads and oversimplifies his position, "[f]or Descartes, of course, was firmly committed to the possibility of physiological accounts of the various emotions, sensations, and patterns of reflex behavior, as well as of imagination and what he calls the corporeal memory"[12]. Such a misinterpretation is natural, however. Descartes admits that his primary goal in the *Meditations* was to "prove the distinction between the soul and the body," so he attended only to how they *could* exist separately rather than the obvious fact that "being united to a body, it can act and be acted upon along with it"[13]. That Descartes was not only aware of the union of mind and body, but found the mind–body union important is suggested by a few passages. In a letter to Elisabeth, Descartes suggests that spending too much time on the pursuit of abstract metaphysics is actually harmful to the self. Instead he urges her to study thoughts that incorporate both the intellect *and the senses*[14]. We noted above that according to Descartes' considered view, a person only has sense experience when (or as a result of) being an embodied creature. That Descartes valued embodied knowledge is also suggested by a passage from the *Preface to the French Edition of the Principles of Philosophy*. There he likens philosophy to a tree—calling the roots metaphysics, the trunk physics, and the branches the other sciences. He notes, "just as it is not the roots or the trunk of a tree from which one gathers fruit, but only the end branches, so the principal benefit of philosophy depends on those parts of it which can

only be learned last of all"[15]. While philosophers have long harbored a bias against the body, there has been significantly less enthusiasm for those who wholly ignore our embodied nature than one might think.

That even Descartes (perhaps the paradigm dualist) understood the importance of embodiment has far-reaching implications for the possibility of interdisciplinary work. To be sure, the intersection between philosophy and dance offers opportunities to expand the traditional "analytic" notion of self-knowledge. That we would engage students on the level of an analysis of the nature of space and motion was perhaps to be expected—but that kinesthetic self-knowledge would end up playing a central role in the students' thought on the nature of space might be surprising to the analytic philosopher. Yet, several of the students in the course noted in their journal entries, in their analysis papers, and in class discussion that the more abstract concepts discussed in, for example, Kant did not really make sense until they were forced to attend to their bodies in space through movement practices. Philosophers might take it for granted that we are embodied and that we are relatively aware of ourselves as such. Indeed Descartes thought this was obvious. But the student reports seem to confirm that when it comes to fully grasping space, knowing oneself as embodied in a more robust way helped to ground the more esoteric concepts. We will elaborate on this below. For now it is worth noting that there is some reason to think even Descartes would find this an intuitive outcome. He wrote that he spends only "a few hours a year on those [thoughts] which occupy the intellect alone"[16]. The rest of the time he relies on the senses, which are, after all, the result of embodiment.

OUTCOMES, METHODS, AND ASSESSMENTS

As is the case with the majority of the Honors courses at SUU, we did our best to avoid lectures opting instead for a seminar format. In addition to full participation in instructor-led seminars, students were expected to lead a seminar based on content of their choosing. Additional course requirements included weekly journal entries (wherein students were expected to reflect on each week's seminars and further develop their understanding of the concepts of movement and space), a term project of the student's choosing (including a project proposal), critical analysis papers on the films we screened and discussed in class, a philosophical paper defending an analysis of the nature of space (either their own, or one advanced in the philosophical literature), a concert critique, and a group dance composition.

The following is an excerpt from the course syllabus that demonstrates how the selected activities aligned with the learning outcomes for the course, including the methods of assessment we utilized.

Table of Assessment Methods

Learning Outcome	*Learning Activities*	*Assessment Methods*
Prepare for, participate in, and lead insightful academic seminar discussion	Seminar preparation and participation	Seminar
Perform sophisticated academic research, and share, analyze, apply, and cite that research with others through scholarly discussions, written assignments, and oral presentations	Seminar preparation, project preparation and research, proposal drafting, and presentation preparation	Term project

Learning Outcome	*Learning Activities*	*Assessment Methods*
Understand the nature of movement and space in different contexts, within different disciplines, and throughout history	Assigned work, class instruction and discussion, seminar participation, in-class exercises, and experiential activities	Journal and term project
Explore and cultivate a personal definition, application, and appreciation of movement and space.	Experiential activities, in-class exercises, and journal writing	Analysis paper, dance composition, and term project

Here we would like to explicate three of the assessment tools we employed—student-led seminars, the philosophical analysis paper, and the group dance composition—to illustrate how we were able to facilitate interdisciplinary engagement through the intersection of theoretical and embodied investigation. In doing so, we will demonstrate the ways in which our overarching project promoted deep learning and a genuine appreciation of the subtleties of both dance and philosophy.

TRUE INTERDISCIPLINARITY: STUDENT LED SEMINARS ON VIRTUAL, PERSONAL, PERCEIVED, CONCEPTUAL, AND CONSTRUCTED SPACE AND MOTION

The inclusion of student-led seminars served two objectives. First, it required the students to do outside research and engage in critical thinking about movement and space from a perspective incorporating the students' personal interests. Second, it provided the students an opportunity to prepare for and lead a seminar in a nontraditional way. Rather than necessitate the student seminars stay within the confines of our disciplines, we encouraged students to find a topic of their choosing relating to movement and/or space. While many students provided readings for the class prompting exciting discussions, some students led activities both in and out of class, (including an adventure in play-doh, navigating space without sight, and experiments related to how sound changes based on space). Additional examples of content explored in student seminars included: proxemics (specifically as it relates to cultural contexts), movement and touch relating to individuals on the autism spectrum, considerations of virtual space and motion through video games, and power dynamics navigated through interpersonal and physical space between professors and students (both in the classroom and office hours).

In keeping with our general strategy—making everyone involved work outside of their comfort zone—we reserved three sessions that were ostensibly to be led by professors, but for which we encouraged one another *not* to prepare anything. Walking into a class with literally nothing planned is both terrifying and exhilarating. This strategy ended up having interesting payoffs each time we tried it; the sessions resulted in faculty-led seminars in name only. The onus was placed on the students to push themselves to think on the spot, as there was no assigned reading, nor was there any guidance concerning what we *should* do. It turns out that being unprepared for class is something that honors students are neither accustomed to nor comfortable with. Despite the initial awkwardness of the first few minutes of class, these were some of the most rich discussions in which we were able to engage.

The first unplanned session followed a dance performance students attended. The viewing assignment also required them to write a response for one of the works performed, providing ample substance for the discussion. Students immediately questioned the meaning of the dances, asked questions about authorial intent and its relevance to meaning of the composition, questions about the nature of representation, and expressed broad concerns about value in general and the value of the arts specifically. It was here that some of the traditional views of philosophical aesthetics found their home. Naturally, there was significant disagreement between the students about the nature, importance, and transparency of the "meaning" of art works. Additionally, we were able to explore the nature of value in a broad way—what is the importance of art in our society? Why do we think that certain works are "good" while others are "bad"? While we may have felt somewhat uneasy about the course of the discussion at first given the level of abstraction at which we were exploring the issues (it seemed at best orthogonal to the central theme of space and motion), two considerations became apparent upon reflection. First, the rich discussion stemmed from and was ultimately *about* the observation of embodied beings moving through space. Second, what the students were inadvertently doing was applying some of their limited philosophical training to their natural curiosities about the conceptual space that surrounds the practice of dance.

It is also significant that this aesthetics seminar addressed one of our initial goals as instructors, namely, how to motivate non-majors to notice how engagement with philosophy and dance relates to their other courses of study and lives in general. Due to some general misconceptions we will mention shortly, cultivating new dance audiences, and arts patrons in general, can often be a challenge. Many audience members feel intimidated, and consequently shut out of enjoying dance as a performing art due to the misguided notion that there is something definitive "to get," some puzzle to solve about the meaning of a dance work. If this definitive meaning eludes them, they have failed as an audience. Deriving meaning from art is only one of many effects of engaging with art (and certainly there are a *multitude* of artworks that have no underlying meaning); still many young viewers get bogged down by self-imposed pressure to discern "the" meaning from a piece of art.

Our students (primarily uninitiated in viewing concert dance and/or offering critical analyses) were able to offer thorough, sophisticated, and diverse analyses of the works. In describing their aesthetic experiences—whether infused with meaning, emotionally responsive, or grounded in the appreciation of form and structure—students universally ascribed their ability to enjoy the performance to their own physical investigations. They noted the ways in which their experience moving in the studio made them acutely aware of the dancers' movement qualities and how each choreographer defined and shifted space. Though already a common practice, our students seem to provide more evidence for embodied practice of the arts across all disciplines with respect to arts appreciation courses. One final outcome of this assignment and subsequent seminar is that one of our students wrote the program note for the dance department's concert the following semester. Her writing, based squarely on the fruits of this seminar, offered examples and insights unique to the aesthetic experience for dance audiences, encouraging multiple ways in which to engage with and ultimately enjoy the performance.

Movement is often considered to be constrained by various kinds of barriers: some physical, some metaphorical, some socially constructed. Returning to the first day exercise where we asked all of the participants to move through the space in our classroom taking note of ourselves and one another, experiencing the space, artificially imposing limits

upon our ability to move allows us to examine the nature of barriers. These barriers were self-imposed, as there would have been very little by way of repercussions for a student (or professor) who violated the "rules." Still, such barriers seemed very real. In the second unplanned session, we found students asking questions concerning the nature of physical space, the nature of barriers (physical and nonphysical), and how both physical and nonphysical barriers could influence behavior. In particular, students raised important questions about the role that barriers play in the development of power dynamics and how such dynamics manifest themselves on college campuses. This is an important discussion for several reasons. First, it is instructive to students who might not have the conceptual resources to spell out the precise nature of disproportionate power dynamics, and the ways that such relations can muddy the waters with regard to broader social issues. To be sure, the existence of disproportionate power dynamics between professors and students is easy enough to identify generally, but recognizing the precise nature of such power relations is not easy to elucidate. Yet there are broader social barriers that are inextricably bound to these issues. Perhaps because of the difficulty in making precise the nature of power dynamics, the discipline of academic philosophy has been plagued with abuses of power. A number of prominent men in philosophy have been exposed for their plainly immoral abuses of power. We should expect philosophers to do and be better. If anything, this highlights just how important it is that we have these discussions with our students. This seminar offered a unique opportunity to address the nature and necessity of certain kinds of barriers. As an added layer to the value of this discussion, it is worth noting that the demographics of the class consisted of fourteen women (thirteen students, and one professor), and two men (both professors). This offered a unique opportunity to attend to one's embodied self and to see how embodiment, sex, and gender expression play a role in developing barriers, power, and different experiences of space.

We began with a somewhat superficial discussion of the importance of physical barriers—e.g., walls prevent inclement weather from harming us, provide us with privacy and safety. But it did not take long for the discussion to shift from barriers as merely physical to symbolic or metaphysical. The discussion opened the door, so to speak, for us to ask about student reticence to visit professors during office hours. Almost unanimously, the students expressed that faculty offices felt "uncomfortable" because visiting office hours seems like an intrusion on the "personal space" of the faculty. A number of factors are at play here—first, our students see faculty offices as an extension of the professor's home rather than an extension of the classroom (where while there is a clear hierarchical structure, typically with the professor as the "expert" in front of the room and as a place where everyone feels more or less welcome, students see the office as a personal space, and when invited in indirectly during office hours, it is uncomfortable to "intrude"). Second, it is not a trivial point that the level of formality with which we engage our students imposes an intellectual barrier to student comfort with us. One student described a situation in which she traveled on a study abroad trip with a professor from campus, wherein not only did she begin to refer to this professor by her first name, the nature of their spatial navigation (traveling in a foreign city) drastically changed their interaction with one another. Our student noted that once back on campus, she struggled with their interactions as she was no longer sure what was appropriate. Thus even the names by which we ask students to address us contributes to barriers between us.

Formality, when paired with the typical professorial delivery of material, imposes another barrier. A significant body of research suggests that the most effective teachers are those with whom students can identify and feel not only an intellectual affinity, but a

moral connection[17]. In short, when students feel that their professors are *persons* who care for them, they tend to be more successful learners. Navigating the careful balance between breaking down *some* of the barriers between faculty and students proved an important discussion. In our seminars generally and this seminar specifically, students were able to see three faculty members argue, banter, and be visibly vulnerable (whether that was through openly admitting how uncomfortable it is to come into class unprepared or otherwise). This helped to humanize us to our students. Additionally, watching two middle-aged male humanities professors try to move around in the dance studio introduced a new level of vulnerability. Of course, while we were able to foster a sense of interpersonal proximity, it is important not to become too familiar with students for the reasons we stated above. There are barriers between faculty and students for a reason. It is for these reasons that this was such an important session; we were able to engage students and one another in a frank discussion of the delicate balance between breaking down and preserving barriers between professors and students. It shows that the class was willing to think about spatial relationships from a context outside of our disciplines.

The final unplanned session followed the due date for the students' philosophical analysis papers. We asked students to provide a brief, focused, two-to-three page conceptual analysis of the nature of space. We will discuss this assignment and how it turned out in some detail in the next section; here we want to discuss the nominally professor-led seminar that was borne of the papers. On the day that the students turned in their analyses, having been charged with providing an analysis of the necessary and sufficient conditions for space such that their analysis would encompass both the embodied experience and conceptual grasp of the nature of space, we encouraged the students to argue against one another for their preferred interpretations. After having only had about five class periods of formal philosophical training, the students rapidly formed factions and began laying out their analyses. Some tended toward the Kantian idea that space is an intuition that helps to structure our embodied experiences but is nothing beyond that, while others wanted to draw a hard and fast distinction between the experience of space and the reality of mind-independent space. What was striking was how explicitly the students incorporated phenomenological considerations when discussing epistemological concerns about the disconnect between experience and reality. There is little doubt that this numbered among the most rewarding discussions from the semester.

UNDERSTANDING BIG IDEAS THROUGH CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

One of the learning outcomes we sought in our students was to have them explore and cultivate a personal definition, application, and appreciation of movement and space. We used a number of mechanisms to assess their development in this way, but one of them is worth paying special attention to: we asked students to build on both the philosophical work we had done over the course of the semester as well as the kinesthetic work they had done to develop a brief, focused, analysis of the nature of space. This project was due late in the semester, so there had been ample time to reflect on the work of historical philosophers as well as the dance theorists and on students' own embodied experiences. In short, they were to synthesize all of these thoughts and experiences into a carefully argued two-to-three page analysis of the nature of space.

Prior to the class period during which students were to turn in their papers, we held five sessions dedicated to philosophy. The first two were dedicated to the study of formal

reasoning including logic, conceptual analysis (including a discussion of necessary and sufficient conditions), and paradoxes. Considering that these are non-majors, and the class is not a formal logic course, we considered it best not to get bogged down in the technical machinery. Still, having a solid foundation in such reasoning is central to fostering philosophical work at the early stages. As we noted above, we asked students to read and reflect on selections from Aristotle's *Physics*, Kant, Leibniz, Newton, and contemporary work by Noë, among others. As is traditional in philosophy, we distinguished questions concerning *our knowledge* of the way the world works from *mind-independent facts* in the world. This distinction ended up playing a central role in many of the final analyses of the nature of space.

One of the central claims that appeared in nearly all of the student analyses was that there *is* an important distinction between what space is and the way that one *experiences* space. Those students who focused on the epistemic gap between experience and the world suggested that a major motivation for drawing this distinction in such a forceful way was their experience in the dance studio. In keeping with the Platonic dictum that we should try to transcend our bodies, philosophers often gesture toward the subjectivity of experience, but even such discussions tend to be very abstract and removed from the embodied phenomenology—the analyses our students produced engaged with the *experience of space* in a way that was much more robust than many philosophers dare to offer.

Some students used this distinction between epistemology and metaphysics to argue for a Newtonian conception of the absolute nature of space, flying in the face of the received view of the relativity of space. Still others leaned on their experiences observing and participating in dance performances to develop an account of the radical relativity of space. One student effectively articulated Margaret Cavendish's distinction between "space" and "place" in her analysis (though in not so many words) by appealing to the nature of motion in dance and the relative location dancers possess. Several students expressed that over the course of writing their papers, they were pushed to change their minds about their thesis. One student was so moved by an objection she raised against her own view that she ended up scrapping the paper she had written, and started over from the opposite perspective. While in some ways the papers reflected the naivety of the early philosophy student, there were more indications that the level at which these students were thinking was decidedly more advanced than one might expect from an introductory student. This is particularly striking as the students had such limited formal instruction in philosophy. That students were able to engage in a relatively high level of analysis, both in terms of *a priori* philosophical analysis and in terms of *a posteriori* embodied epistemology, suggests that our experimental course helped students break down the conceptual partitions between the seemingly fundamentally different disciplines of philosophy and dance.

UNDERSTANDING BIG IDEAS THROUGH THE CREATIVE PROCESS

In an effort to address two substantial learning outcomes for this course—to understand the nature of movement and space in different contexts, within different disciplines, and to explore and cultivate a personal definition, application, and appreciation of movement and space—we asked the students to create a dance composition as one of their final projects. In addition to the final philosophy papers, this assignment illustrated both the

sophistication with which students were engaging with notions of movement and space, as well as their immense growth with regard to understanding and *articulating* these ideas.

As this composition assignment was the culmination of all the previous movement explorations, it will be useful to lay out how each prior session prepared the students for such a monumental task. The movement sessions were not consecutive, rather, they were interspersed with philosophy, film, and student seminars. Before we outline the movement session schedule, it is important to return briefly to the issue of power dynamics in the classroom.

The dynamics between professors and students are quite different between the disciplines of philosophy and dance. While it is commonplace and to some extent expected that professors will make adjustments to a student's posture and movement in the dance studio (tactile feedback being an intrinsic and effective pedagogical method), in a philosophy classroom professors do not (or at the very least *definitely ought not*) even consider such contact with students.[18] Additionally, in most dance improvisation courses, students routinely come into physical contact with each other, as learning how to partner effectively requires repeated engagement with weight-sharing practices. All this being said, those involved in the dance discipline (including professors, dance teachers in elementary and secondary education, and prominent choreographers) are not immune to issues regarding the abuse of power. Thus most dance professors include mention of physical touch as part of their pedagogical practices at the onset of class and often include it in their syllabi. We repeatedly reminded students of their autonomy, reminding them that they should take risks with regard to their personal movement explorations, but that they should choose their level of tactile engagement with others. For our students, these new interactions initiated some of the dialogue in the seminar related to power dynamics including how to navigate interpersonal space with their professors and each other.

Here is a breakdown of the days that were allotted to dancing in the studio. With the exception of the final movement class, which focused on specific tools for composition, all of the movement classes were based in improvisation practices.

Movement Session 1: Building a Movement Lexicon

Content: Perception & Awareness, Introductions to the Elements of Dance—movement, shape, time, effort

Movement Session 2: Elements of Dance Paired with Philosophical Vocabulary

Content: "Four Basic Qualitative Parameters of Movement" Maxine Sheets-Johnstone—tension, linearity, amplitude, projection

Movement Session 3: Elements of Dance Continued

Content: Laban Movement Analysis—weight, time, flow, space, movement and its relationship to sound

Movement Session 4: Space

Content: Use of physical studio space, spatial relationships/proximity, responding to and interacting with architectural details, exploration of weight-sharing, and contact improvisation

Movement Session 5: Introduction to Composition

Content: Choreographic Devices/Manipulating a Motif, "Rules" for Group Dances

Movement Session 6: Composition Assignment and Work Day

Content: rubric of the assignment outlined in detail, students self-selected into groups (four or five dancers per group), remainder of the day spent working, final completion will necessitate outside rehearsals

Assignment Description:

- All dancers must contribute original movement and ideas related to spatial organization
- Dances must have a clear beginning and ending
- Dances must be at least 3 minutes, no longer than 8 minutes, have a title and sound score
- Improvisation may be used as a choreographic tool (a way to generate movement and ideas for your composition), it may also be used as an element of your final piece, though the majority of your dance should be "set material"
- Inspiration for your dances can come from anywhere: a poem, image (painting, photograph, image from nature), auditory/written tasks, philosophical musings as to the nature of movement and space, a personal narrative, physical response/interpretation to one of the films watched and discussed in class, etc.
- *Note: You may not have a specific "concept" when you start making the work, it is very common to have the concept of a dance emerge through the process of creating it*

Much if not all of the content covered in the movement sessions is integral to dance studies, especially with regard to dance technique and improvisation/composition courses. Additionally, this content fits within the bounds of an introductory or dance appreciation course for non-dance majors. What is perhaps most significant is that these students were given a total of *five* movement classes before they began working on their own dance compositions.

The level of sophistication these students achieved in such a short amount of time and with such finite exposure to dance in general, was no doubt due to their consistent interdisciplinary engagement with the material—specifically, the heady, abstract philosophical theories that students battled with during earlier seminars. Additionally, the students' foray into topics of their choice through student-led seminars required a level of conceptual integration that may not typically be asked of students in a discipline-specific course. Having spent fifteen weeks grappling with how movement and space relate to issues of culture, power, gender, economics, politics, and a host of other social issues, these students crafted dance compositions that were comparable to (and in some cases even surpassed) those of formally trained dance students, especially with regard to their use of space and how it is infused with meaning.

CONCLUSION: GAINS, LIMITS, AND IDIOSYNCRASIES

Throughout the semester, we witnessed significant gains not only among our students, but between ourselves. The students, all majoring in disciplines well outside of what we teach, were able to engage in high-level work in both dance and philosophy. In addition to their ability to complete this work, we were able to break down serious misconceptions about

what is involved in, and what is important about the arts and humanities. We will address these gains in more detail below, but it is worth noting the limits of what we have done. We do not want to overstate the universality of our findings. To be sure, some idiosyncratic features of our course likely affected the effectiveness of our experiment. First, the course was particularly small, having only thirteen students in total. This is perhaps a luxury that not all programs enjoy. We recognize that the true seminar approach would likely not succeed with a group too much larger than this, and we were fortunate to have a group of this size. It is also worth noting that while the students in the class were not dance or philosophy majors, they were honors students. While this is not a guarantee that the students are stronger than non-honors students, it is *prima facie* reason to think that these students may have been more prepared for interdisciplinary work that challenges the traditional partitioning of college coursework.

Regardless of these limitations, the outcomes from the class are striking. Students without antecedent interest in, and minimal awareness of philosophy and dance were able to produce sophisticated work in both fields pulling theoretical work into the embodied practice of dance and using kinesthetic movement exercises to inform and develop their understanding of abstract philosophical concepts. One student expressed that "Kant didn't make any sense until I had to pay attention to my embodied experience in the studio." She went on to defend Kant's analysis of space as an *a priori* intuition in her analysis paper. This helped to disabuse students of their preconceived notions of these fields as impractical, and intimidating. In addition, by asking students to bring their own academic and extracurricular interests to bear on the topic at hand, students were able to tie their own majors (including psychology, hospitality, and marketing among others) to dance and philosophy. Far from frivolous, the students walked out recognizing that most academic pursuits are closely tied together.

But the payoffs were not limited to the students. As faculty, we typically feel comfortable in the classroom or the studio. After all, that is where we spend quite a bit of time being experts in our fields. As we noted above, this can be intimidating to students, and it is easy to forget this. That we were encouraged to step outside of our comfort zones and teach material we had not taught before, or teach in a way we had not taught before, or to dance when we are philosophers, demonstrated a few things to students, ourselves, and one another as educators. It shows students that faculty are people who get uncomfortable, who do not have all the answers and who both can and do continue to learn despite being "done" with their education. This helps to break down perceived barriers to learning. Working closely with faculty who study seemingly very different disciplines provided each of us a number of valuable lessons about ourselves too. We learned a tremendous amount about teaching in general as well as the content of one another's disciplines. That we had to attend one another's classes because of the improvisational nature of the syllabus ensured that we would foster a truly interdisciplinary environment. We were fortunate to collaborate on this project, and this is a testament to our successes. Indeed, we have been inspired to continue the discussion of the intersection of dance and philosophy and look to pursue further scholarly efforts at this intersection.

NOTES

1. We would like to thank Kyle Bishop, Kira Knapp, Julie Van Camp, and the audience at the 2016 *Engagement Dance and Philosophy Symposium* for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

2. See Kristopher G. Phillips, "Is Philosophy Impractical?," in *Why the Humanities Matter Today*, ed. Lee Trepanier, 37–64 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).
3. Though this chapter focuses on the intersection between dance and philosophy, film studies was the final player in our triad.
4. *Phaedo*, 61C–69E.
5. See, for example, Susan Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 42. In a discussion of the self as embodied, she notes that historically philosophers have followed Plato's recommendation that we despise the body and avoid it, suggesting that the contemporary reticence to identify the self with a body is derived from "an ancient bias against our physical nature."
6. Letter to Elisabeth, 28 June 1643 (Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: The Correspondence*, p. 227).
7. Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
8. Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, p. 2
9. Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, p. 4
10. See *Philebus*, 48C; *Alcibiades I*, 124A, 129A, 132C; *Charmides*, 164D; *Phaedrus*, 229E; and *Protagoras*, 343B.
11. Rene Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, edited by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 19.
12. Margaret Wilson, "Cartesian Dualism," in *Descartes: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, edited by Michael Hooker, 197–211 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 199.
13. Rene Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: The Correspondence*, edited by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 218.
14. Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: The Correspondence*, p. 218.
15. Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, p. 186.
16. Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: The Correspondence*, p. 227.
17. See, e.g., David Hansen, "Reflections on the Manner in Teaching Project," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 33(6) (2001): 730.
18. As we noted above, it has been far too common that philosophers have engaged in an abuse of the power that they possess. There have been a number of high-profile cases that have come to light in recent years where male professors have taken advantage of their position to assault, abuse and retaliate against students. Such behavior is obviously morally reprehensible and should be condemned at every opportunity. That the intersection of philosophy and dance introduces opportunities for philosophers to be in a studio with students in a dance context is not an inconsequential outcome of this pedagogical experiment. We firmly believe that additional vigilance is required in these contexts.