

**‘BEING IN YOUR BODY’ AND ‘BEING IN THE MOMENT’:
THE DANCING BODY-SUBJECT AND INHABITED TRANSCENDENCE**

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Abstract

Sports studies is currently dominated by the intellectualist approach to understanding skill and expertise, meaning that questions about the phenomenological nature of skilled performance in sport have generally been overshadowed by the emphasis on the cognitive. By contrast, this article responds to calls for a phenomenology of sporting embodiment by opening up a philosophical exploration of the nature of athletic being-in-the-world. In particular, the paper explores the conceptualisation of immanence and transcendence in relation to the embodied practice of dance, engaging with Merleau-Ponty’s important insight that the body can be a source of transcendence. I also draw on data from in-depth qualitative interviews with professional contemporary dancers to explore dancers’ concepts of ‘being in your body’ and ‘being in the moment’, and to suggest that during the actual embodied practice of dance, dancers do not experience transcendence and immanence as they are conceptualised in philosophy. Rather, I argue, dancers experience a third mode of being that is somehow in-between these two binary terms. I have called this ‘inhabited transcendence’.

Key Words:

transcendence, immanence, Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology, dance

Introduction

Sports studies is currently dominated by the intellectualist approach to understanding skill and expertise exemplified by the information processing model. This means that questions about the phenomenological nature of skilled performance in sport have generally been overshadowed by the emphasis on the cognitive, coming, in particular, from sports psychology, but also from the dominance of philosophy of mind within sports philosophy and beyond (Breivik 2007). In contrast to this trend, this paper responds to calls for a phenomenology of sporting embodiment by opening up a philosophical exploration of the nature of athletic being-in-the-world (Kerry and Armour 2000; Allen-Collinson 2009; Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007; Hogeveen 2011; Moe 2004; Hards and Hogeveen 2016).

Drawing on the work of phenomenologists Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Dreyfus has offered what is generally considered the fullest phenomenological model of skill acquisition and skilled performance (see, for example, Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986). The information processing model (originating in the work of Fitts and Posner 1967) locates skill entirely in the cognitive realm suggesting that our minds operate as computers processing information from the environment through a series of learnt rules. As we move through the learning process to develop expertise in the skill, the rules we follow become more complex and refined, leading to enhanced performance, and our processing of external stimuli happens at an increasingly unconscious level. In contrast to the information processing model, Dreyfus (2002; Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986) suggests that while learners acquiring a skill will be reliant on following rules, once the stage of expertise has been reached, the learner is able to operate intuitively

in a state of ‘absorbed coping’ without any need to process information at the cognitive level (whether this be conscious or unconscious).

Recent work on skill in the philosophy of sport has supported the applicability of Dreyfus’ model for understanding embodied skill in the context of high level sports practice (Moe 2004, 2005). The emphasis on the automatic nature of expert movement in this account has, however, been criticised by Breivik (2007, 2013) as mirroring the information processing model in its denial of a role for consciousness at this level, thus reducing expert practice to zombie-like behaviour. Breivik (2013) further notes that the focus on ‘being in the zone’, ‘peak experience’ and ‘flow’ in sports psychology has distorted our understanding of elite performance by ignoring a role for consciousness. In contrast to this, Breivik (2013) emphasises that sportspeople often report a heightened state of consciousness or awareness. He therefore argues that Dreyfus’ model of skill acquisition and his concept of absorbed coping is unsatisfactory for pinpointing the role of consciousness in elite performance (see also Breivik 2007; Bailey and Pickard 2010; Eriksen 2010; Hogeveen 2011; Larsen 2016).

The aim of the current article is not to further enter into debates about consciousness predicated on a particular theory of mind, but rather to shed light on some of the underpinning issues at the ontological level through a return to some of the foundational phenomenology. As such it engages with the work of Merleau-Ponty with a particular focus on how notions of transcendence and immanence can be utilised and developed to help us understand awareness during skilled embodied practice. The paper explores the lived experience of individuals engaged in the expert

performance of physical skills through a particular focus on professional dancers trained and working within the tradition of contemporary dance. The article draws on empirical dataⁱ for its ability to generate accounts of the lived experience of athletic embodiment – such as the experiential categories of ‘being in the moment’ and ‘being in your body’ – which can be fruitfully explored in relation of Merleau-Ponty’s non-dualist phenomenological philosophy.

In place of the traditional dichotomy between mind and body – subject and object – through Merleau-Ponty’s (2002) philosophy we can begin to think about embodied being in terms of the concept of the ‘body-subject’ (Crossley 2005, 11; Williams and Bendelow 1998, 6). This is a notion of embodied being that is poised in-between the traditional binary terms, having irreducible elements of both traditional Cartesian subjectivity and traditional Cartesian objectivity. Most significantly for the current study, and as will be elaborated later, Merleau-Ponty’s non-dualist understanding of embodied being also has radical implications for the conceptualisation of transcendence and immanence (Young 1998; Weiss 1999, 46).

This paper is, however, concerned not only with the non-dualist *theorising* of transcendence and immanence as modes of embodied being, but also with attending to the lived experience of athletic embodiment through an engagement with transcendence and immanence as they are actually experienced by the dancing body-subject during the embodied practice of dance. Indeed I contend that if we are to truly move away from dualism in our understanding of human being, we need not only to conceptualise embodied being adequately in philosophical terms, but also to engage with lived embodied practice. The article therefore considers dancers’ accounts of

their relationships with images of their own dancing bodies in relation to notions of interrupted or inhibited transcendence, and also explores two concepts which the dancers used, those of 'being in your body' and 'being in the moment' in relation to a new non-dualist concept I have termed *inhabited* transcendence.

Objectification: Interrupted or Inhibited Transcendence

Transcendence and Immanence

Existentialist phenomenologists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir identify different modes or dimensions of human being or existence including that of being-for-itself and that of being-for-others. It is in relation to these modes of existence that the dual terms of transcendence and immanence are defined in the work of these philosophers, where transcendence is understood to be characterised by the freedom and the orientation or openness towards the future of the being-for-itself, and immanence is understood to be characterised by the sense of rootedness to the past of the objectified being-for-others.

For Sartre (2003) and in particular de Beauvoir (1997), this transcendence/immanence distinction is closely tied to the mind/body distinction where the mind is held to be our primary source of transcendence and the body to be our primary source of immanence or being-for-others. Under this framework, and especially in the work of de Beauvoir (1997), the body is in the negative position of holding us back and imprisoning us in materiality, objecthood and being-for-others, while the mind has the privileged position of affording us transcendence: freedom and self-determination.

In consideration of the traditional male/female, culture/nature, mind/body binaries, de Beauvoir (1997) also highlights that it is woman in our society who is mainly associated with the body and thus with immanence, meaning that she is typically denied the transcendence afforded to men. Immanence and the objectification of being-for-others can therefore be seen not to be purely contingent on the individual

subject experiencing the look of the Other at a certain point in time. Rather it is related to the ways in which experience of self is mediated by a particular social context, as Young (1998) explores in her phenomenological analysis of women's experience – in the broad social context of patriarchal society – of inhibiting self-consciousnessⁱⁱ when engaged in physical activities. One can experience oneself as a being-for-others and thus experience immanence even when one is unwatched or alone.

In contrast to Sartre and de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty (2002) suggests in *Phenomenology of Perception*, that the body can in fact be a primary source of transcendence rather than immanence. For Merleau-Ponty, the body (or rather the body-subject) has its own form of intentionality – motor-intentionality – which entails a direct (pre-reflective) embodied understanding of and orientation towards the world beyond the individual. This bodily understanding is defined as an experience of practical competence characterised by ‘the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance’ and it ‘has its abode neither in thought nor in the objective body, but in the body as mediator of a world’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 167). The body(-subject) thus has qualities that might be more traditionally associated with the Cartesian mind or subject, and thus with freedom as a being-for-itself.

He does also concede, however, that the body may be a source of immanence under certain circumstances. Following Heidegger's (1996) conceptualisation of equipment and the ready-at-hand, Merleau-Ponty (2002) considers the important distinction to be in relation to whether the embodied agent's focus is on the task they are performing –

on the intention of the action, such as to drive a nail into the wall – or on the body itself – the hand wielding the hammer. For Heidegger, when the focus is on the task, the skilled practitioner is absorbed into the immediate environment – this is why Dreyfus uses of the term ‘absorbed coping’ to describe proficient or skilled behaviour – and experiences him or herself as a being-for-itself acting on the world. Likewise for Merleau-Ponty when we are task-focussed and our engagement with the world is characterised by pre-reflective motor-intentionality, the body can be a source of transcendence. This transcendence is, however, interrupted by immanence when we focus on our bodies as this focus renders the body an object to us and our experience of self is reduced to a being-for-others.

Making Shapes

This distinction between the body as a source of transcendence during task-focused action and the body as a source of immanence when we focus on and objectify it can help us understand dancers’ experiences of how the objectification of the body in the mirror image distracts from or interrupts the uninhibited flow of the dancer’s movement. Indeed over-reliance on the mirror (or photographic) image of the dancing body was understood by the dancers to focus too much attention on ‘making shapes’ and on the objective positioning of the body in space:

*I think if you think too much about what things look like from the outside
you start making shapes. [Rhianna]*

This, in turn was experienced as alienating in that it distanced the dancer from direct engagement with their dance practice and also potentially disrupted the ability of the dancer to adequately invest in and perform the choreography for an audience:

It sort of takes away the realness if you're looking at just like positions and shapes – then when you're actually dancing it can also just look like you're doing a shape or position. [Christina]

This sense of the paucity of images which render the dancing body an object positioned in space is also captured by Sheets-Johnstone (2009) in her work on kinaesthetic awareness and memory in dance. For Sheets-Johnstone the dancer's awareness of movement cannot be reduced to

'awareness of changed positions ... [as] while the perception of movement certainly includes positional awareness, it is quintessentially a *dynamic* awareness' (2009, 270, emphasis in original).

Thus photographic images were also problematic as they rendered dancing bodies mere shapes or patterns in external objective space rather than capturing the subjective experience of dance, which was felt to be internal to the living, moving, communicating body-subject:

You can maybe look at a photograph of you doing it, but you can't, it's about movement, you're not going to be standing like a photograph, I mean you might do but it's part of a movement, it's part of a thing that's going on: it's live. [Louisa]

The distinction here, in Merleau-Pontian terms, is between the body as object and the experience of the lived-body or body-subject acting on the world through motor intentionality:

When I put my hand to my knee, I experience at every stage of the movement the fulfilment of an intention which was not directed at my knee as an idea or even as an object, but as a present and real part of my living body, that is, finally, as a stage in my perpetual movement towards a world. (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 167)

Acquiring and experiencing skill

This sense of experiencing the body as part of your own subjective presence to the world rather than as an object (shape) in the world was described by a number of the dancers with the phrase 'being in your body'. 'Being in your body is, however, a mode of experience that characterises expertise with a movement sequence and is thus not necessarily present in the early stages of the learning process:

There might be a point when you first learn a piece when you're not in your body because it takes time to let the movement settle in your body.

[Louisa]

This distinction is consistent with Dreyfus' model of skill acquisition where the learner needs to rely on conscious mental representations of the correct movement or of the rules for appropriate movement. For Dreyfus (2001), the expert passes through this stage into a state where movement emerges intuitively rather than requiring

mental processing. At points when problems emerge, the expert does however, revert to thinking things through at the representational level, inkeeping with Louisa's description of an interruption to the state of 'being in your body' when something goes wrong or correction to a movement is required:

... when you're trying to be in your body but your brain's going "what am I going to do? What am I going to do? How am I going to fix this?"- so I mean that's different – that's OK to be out of your body at that point because you're trying to deal with stuff. [Louisa]

In the terms of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, on whom Dreyfus draws, the transcendent or absorbed phase of expert movement is interrupted when the task-focus can no longer be sustained because of a problem with our surroundings or equipment – a change, for example, to a costume, a floor space, a melody, a partner, a phrase of movement – and we find ourselves needing to consciously process what is going on rather than just being able to act intuitively. Steven, for example, described his experience of taking correction to movements that he had already learnt in terms of conscious intervention and representational thought:

Sometimes you have to put like a little tag, like a little mental tag where you have to go – "OK it's this, not what you were doing before" and that's kind of how rehearsals work like when you rehearse someone will give you a correction and I'll almost put like a little flag or mental checkpoint. [Steven]

This was also the stage (learning something new or taking correction) in dance when the dancers reported that they made most use of the mirror as they tried to get a sense both of how a different pattern of movement looked externally and of the correlating internal sensation of the movement. At these times it is therefore appropriate to engage with the external perspective on the body so that dancers can further develop and refine their internal proprioceptive sense of a movement. This is, however, only a temporary situation or exercise, and all the dancers insisted that external objectification of the body was an inferior and problematic form of awareness compared with feeling the movement ‘in your body’:

Every time I see pictures I get depressed, I hate it – so the image, you know, is not the dance – it’s definitely inside. So that is interesting, that movement can be inside of my body – you know? – and of course you have all the pattern – you know? – my legs, how my legs go, but more interesting is the feel for me. [Marco]

The Gaze of the Audience

It is, however, worth noting that in so far as the task of contemporary dance is expressive and communicative, it is not fully realised if there is no external viewer, no recipient of the communication, no audience. Indeed, as noted above, when a dancer finds him or herself regarding his or her own bodily movement as a series of shapes, the problem the practitioner faces is that they then struggle to engage with the real act of dancing, that is, using the movement to communicate at some level with an audience. In the following quotation, for example, Louisa compares the false

perspective of the mirror with a more correct understanding of how the movement looks to the audience:

The mirror does lie: it's not a good thing to look in the mirror ... you can see it every now and again to check but I think generally it's better for me not to have a mirror because then I'm feeling the movement and that's always more correct than looking at it because nobody sees the movement from here. [Louisa]

To be observed by an audience is thus not, for a dancer, interrupting of transcendence in the way that objectification in the mirror image may be. Rather it is the desired form of engagement with the movement; it is the means by which the dancer acts on the world beyond the self.

Again, Merleau-Ponty's work offers us a way of making sense of this as, *contra* Sartre (2003), the look of the Other is not necessarily understood in the negative sense of being objectifying and alienating under Merleau-Ponty's framework. The negative – objectifying or alienating – effect of the gaze is possible when mutual recognition does not occur in our encounter with the Other, leading us to feel that our actions and expressions are 'not taken up and understood, but observed as if they were an insect's' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 420). More usually, however, intersubjective relations, for Merleau-Ponty (2002, 1964), are communicative and reciprocalⁱⁱⁱ and thus do not, as a matter of course, involve the Other objectifying or 'capturing' us with the look (Crossley 1993; Levin 1991).

Bodies and Tasks in Somatic Practices?

From the above discussion, we can therefore see some support for Merleau-Ponty's distinction between task-focussed (bodily) transcendence and body-focussed immanence: The positive or transcendent experience of dance is interrupted by the intrusion of immanence when the image leads the dancer to focus on the shape of the body rather than on the 'task' of dancing. Moreover, the Dreyfus model is helpful for understanding dancers' progress from consciously processing queues (verbal, musical, visual, etc.) from the environment to reaching a stage where the skills are learnt and performance becomes intuitive rather than requiring the dancers to reflectively process instructions (Steven's mental checkpoints) or to look in the mirror to check alignment.

In place of the traditional dualism of the transcendence of the mind and the immanence of the body, then, there is perhaps a temptation to think in terms of a new dichotomy between the transcendence of the task-focused body-subject, and the negative, restrictive immanence experienced when the physical body itself is the focus of attention. My argument in this paper is, however, against this new dichotomisation on the grounds that it does not sufficiently account for the body-awareness of the task-engaged expert dancer.

Indeed the conceptualisation of skilled behaviour in the Dreyfus model as 'absorbed coping' has elsewhere been noted to be problematic to the extent that it renders the expert physical performer 'mindless' or 'zombie-like' (Eriksen 2010; Breivik 2013).

Absorbed coping may be an appropriate description of our everyday experience of proficiency in tasks such as walking or driving to work where we may operate ‘on auto-pilot’, our intuitive driving or walking skills, knowledge of the route and proficiency in dealing with likely obstacles taking over and allowing the mind to wander elsewhere. Yet it has been argued that it does not fully characterise the experience of highly skilled physical performers such as sportspeople (Larsen 2016; Breivik 2007, 2013). Indeed as Breivik (2013) notes, elite athletes are not lacking in consciousness and awareness, they are not operating on ‘automatic pilot’ with their minds wandering elsewhere, rather they experience a strong subjective feeling of presence in the situation and often a sense of heightened awareness.

For Breivik the argument here revolves around a role for consciousness during highly skilled performance. Thus he critiques both the information processing paradigm and the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition for their failure to account for elite athletes’ (heightened) consciousness, but his position leaves open a distinction between task-focussed attention as useful and body-focussed attention as potentially disruptive of flow. Indeed he aligns himself with recent articulations from sports psychology of the performance benefits of task orientation over ego orientation:

One needs to stay focussed in an [sporting] event, but one must focus on the right things and not focus too much or too narrow. ... Most of the time, it is better that the body is in the dark zone [i.e. not the focus of attention], from which the bodily parts and movements can come forth to solve the tasks that need to be done. (Breivik 2013, 96)

While I agree with Breivik and others that we need to account for the expert athlete's awareness in any model of physical skill that can be deemed applicable to sportspeople, my interest in this paper is in moving beyond the task-focussed/body-focussed distinction on the grounds that it is not useful for fully understanding body-awareness in the experience of dance. In the following section I therefore suggest a new concept which sits in-between the traditional transcendence/immanence binary, suggesting that rather than the body-focus necessarily producing an experience of inhibited or interrupted transcendence, we need to attend to how the body-aware dancer experiences what can be thought of as a state of *inhabited* transcendence.

‘Being in your Body’ and ‘Being in the Moment’: *Inhabited* Transcendence

This section focuses on a detailed examination of two concepts evoked by the dancers: that of ‘being in your body’ and that of ‘being in the moment’. These concepts help us to see how Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body as a source of transcendence plays out in the embodied practice of dance, but they also emphasise the problems associated with thinking in terms of a dichotomy between transcendence and immanence, even in the way that Merleau-Ponty does with the distinction between task-focussed and body-focussed action. I suggest not only that a clear distinction between task-focus and body-focus is often impossible to make for the dancer, but also that this distinction does not fully help us understand dancers’ own evocations of transcendence.

Body-Awareness: ‘Being in your Body’

As noted above, dancers employed a notion of ‘being in your body’ to describe an experience of body-subjectivity. Louisa describes ‘being in your body’ in terms of feeling comfortably situated or grounded in her body:

‘So that’s kind of to be in your body – how it sits – that I’m comfortably there and that I’m correct within my presence there. [Louisa]

This notion of comfort or harmony is further echoed in Marco’s description of how it feels to be ‘in harmony with your body’:

It's peaceful and em, it's peaceful, it's comfortable, you know, it's pleasurable so it's like a, mmm, it's really very difficult to explain, it's just there, it's in your body and you know it's good and everything's working, you know? ... em, it's quite hard to explain. [Marco]

Marco's sense of "it's good and everything's working" also echoes Merleau-Ponty's evocation of bodily understanding as an experience of 'the harmony ... between the intention and the performance' (2002, 167).

For Merleau-Ponty, however, the skilled practitioner transcends their bodily physicality and situatedness in the world to the point where body and equipment fall out of focus and we enter a state of what Dreyfus would call 'absorbed coping'. Thus the comfortable, grounded or settled feeling described by the dancers is referenced in the following description from Merleau-Ponty (2002, 168) of the expert organist gaining a bodily understanding of a new instrument:

He sits on the seat, works the pedals, pulls out the stops, gets the measure of the instrument with his body, incorporates within himself the relevant directions and dimensions, settles into the organ as one settles into a house.

Yet the continuation of the description reveals that body and equipment are not the focus of musician's attention, but are reduced to 'mere' conduits which facilitate the turning of the intention into the music:

During the rehearsal, as during the performance, the stops, pedals and manuals are given to him as nothing more than possibilities of achieving certain

emotional or musical values, and their positions are simply the places through which this value appears in the world. Between the musical essence of the piece as it is shown in the score and the notes which actually sound round the organ, so direct a relation is established that the organist's body and his instrument are merely the medium of this relationship. (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 168)

The issue here for Merleau-Ponty is to navigate a path between the intellectualist paradigm which considers bodily skill to be underpinned by reflective thought and the behaviourist paradigm which considers pre-reflective bodily movement reducible to a basic stimulus-response mechanism. Through his reconceptualization of the body as the body-subject, he is able to establish an argument that allows that the body has intentionality, the body can understand, and that the body can be a source of transcendence. Without call for reflective thought, the skilled organist can produce beautiful music. Bodily movements are no longer physical projections in objective space, rather 'they draw affective vectors, discover emotional sources, and create a space of expressiveness' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 168).

While this further resonates with Louisa's description of 'being in your body' –

You have to get to a point where you, you're in your own body and you're, you're not doing shapes, you're finding out where it comes from. [Louisa]

– the way in which the body drops out of awareness in Merleau-Ponty's account of bodily-mediated transcendence (and in Dreyfus' account of absorbed coping) does not fully do justice to the dancer's experience of embodied transcendence as captured in the notion of 'being in your body'. Rather for the dancer, we are dealing not with a

body which recedes into the phenomenological dark zone, but with a form of bodily-mediated transcendence which includes a foregrounded awareness of one's (comfortable) situatedness or groundedness in one's own body. The experience of dance expertise as characterised by a sensation of 'being in' the living moving body is thus one which includes experiential elements associated with Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of task-focused transcendence, but also elements associated a direct body-awareness and thus with immanence.

Immediacy: 'Being in the Moment'

In addition to emphasising the importance of 'being in your body', Louisa goes on to evoke a notion of 'being in the moment' that captures a sense of a need for (even) the expert dancer to focus on the here and now when performing:

... just to be in that moment – don't over-do it, don't think about what's coming next, just do the thing ... instead of trying to think of the whole piece, if I live in the moment and it's, the first thing I have to do is step on stage, and if I do that one hundred percent in that moment then it gives it full value, but if I step on stage and I'm half way through the piece in my head already then I'm not really in it, I'm somewhere else. [Louisa]

This idea of not letting the mind wander ahead to focus on something beyond the here and now of bodily movement is also echoed by Marco's description of how being in harmony with your body requires that you do not think about other things but simply have a grounded, focussed, in-the-moment awareness of the body: '*your brain is inside [in your body] and you know everything that's going on*' [Marco].

Other dancers similarly described the importance of staying focussed on or immersed in the immediate context of the movement. Failure to do this, like the failure to sense the movement rather than make shapes as discussed above, somehow distracts or detracts from the communicative experience of dance:

I think if a work is made very, very well you can see the essence and then the performer becomes immersed in the work and then it works, then you get dancers who comment on the work while [it is in progress, which] ... doesn't necessarily give the work its chance to communicate. [Ben]

Another dancer further describes his reaction to watching performers who try to go beyond an immediate engagement with the movement by layering a dimension of self-promotion onto the performance rather than staying true to the immediate context of the work:

If they're not committed in the detail then it's like you watch somebody else because it's, it's distracting, but often that's about them trying to show off and trying to put themselves forward rather than be sincere to what the movement was. [Daniel]

This notion of immediacy or 'being in the moment' was thus related to the idea that the real expertise of dance is in the ability to have an immediate and 'sincere' experience of the 'essence' of the movement as an end in itself – a communicative act in itself – rather than trying to think ahead or push a supplementary agenda such as

‘showing off’. This was related to achievement of a sense of communicative openness and honesty in both physical and mental/emotional terms. At the physical level, Louisa describes how ‘being in the moment’ allows the dancer to

... open up a void where you're a bit more free to respond very quickly when things don't go the way it's supposed to ... if I'm in the moment and I'm true to that moment then it is what it is so if I went on and I lifted my leg and I did a little judder then I go with it, rather than fight it. [Louisa]

This physical openness or responsiveness of the dancer who is in his or her body and ‘in the moment’ is thus experienced as freedom to act intuitively without feeling self-conscious or inhibited about the movement which is currently taking shape in the body.

In contrast to the typical evocation of transcendence as future-focussed, then, dancers reported feelings of freedom and a more successful connection with the communicative essence or intention of the movement when they did not think ahead of or beyond the here-and-now. Thus their most positive, free and ‘sincere’ experiences of dance – their experiences of transcendence in the sense of reaching out to the audience – occurred when they stayed resolutely grounded in the present – a condition generally associated with immanence – and focussed on fully experiencing their moment-by-moment awareness of the moving, dancing body.

The dancer’s understanding of expertise as characterised by an ability to ‘be in the moment’ therefore suggests that the typical distinction between transcendence as

future-oriented and immanence as a rootedness in the present fails to successfully capture the experience of expert body practitioners such as dancers. Conceptualising a third in-between state of *inhabited* transcendence thus once again allows us to account for dancers descriptions of their dance expertise as characterised by elements of transcendence, such as feelings of freedom, communicative efficacy and self-determination, and by elements traditionally associated with immanence, such as the subjective experience of a groundedness in and attentional focus on the here-and-now.

Concluding Remarks: *Inhabited Transcendence*

This paper has built on emerging discussions in the philosophy of sport regarding a role for conscious awareness during the expert performance of a physical skill (Breivik 2007, 2013). In a departure from the dominant information processing paradigm for understanding skilled behaviour in sports, I have sought to explore and reassert the utility of a phenomenological understanding of physical expertise through a return to Merleau-Ponty and an engagement with the more recent development of his work in Dreyfus' phenomenological model of skill acquisition. As mentioned in the introduction, the point here has not been to engage further in a discussion of consciousness predicated on a particular theory of mind, but rather to explore the ways in which the existentialist concepts of transcendence and immanence can open up alternative understandings of the phenomenological experience of athletic expertise.

Merleau-Ponty radically challenges understandings of transcendence/immanence developed in the work of Sartre and de Beauvoir by suggesting that the body is not necessarily a source of immanence. Rather, bodily engagement in skilled activity is typically characterised by task-focussed motor-intentionality and the body can thus be a source of transcendence rather than a limitation upon it. This shift away from mind-body/subject-object dualism in the work of Merleau-Ponty is particularly helpful in accounting for the lived experience of elite performers of embodied physical skills, as has been shown above in relation to the case of professional contemporary dancers.

Careful attention to the intricacies of the lived embodied experience of physical expertise can, however, help us even further refine our philosophical understanding of skill (Larsen 2016; Ravn and Hoffding 2017). In attending to the experience of dance through an engagement with the accounts of dancers themselves, I have gone beyond Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of bodily-transcendence as reliant on having a task-focus to explore how even direct focus on the body need not necessarily interrupt transcendence. This is because awareness of the immediate physicality of the dance and the dancing body does not necessarily mean objectification for the dancer. Rather it is the lived experience of immediate bodily presence to the world that characterises their expressive and communicative action on the world, their experience of transcendence.

This is not to say that the dancer does not have an awareness of their overall task, but that it is a fully present and somatically grounded awareness – an *inhabited* awareness – rather than one which pushes the subjective experience of bodily presence into the phenomenological dark zone. Likewise, others who perform physical skills in the service of the sporting task such as winning a race may have what Breivik (2013) refers to as a heightened subjective experience of presence. This does not mean they are not focussed on, for example, scoring a goal to win the match. The experience of dancers presented in this paper, however, suggests that it is problematic to theorise physical expertise and the completion of physical tasks at the elite level in such a way that denies that such an experience may be characterised by both an awareness of one's (embodied) ability to act on the world and an awareness of one's corporeal presence in the moment. As I have demonstrated above, the clear distinction between the body as site of transcendence or immanence in relation to task-focus or body-

focus does not hold in the case of professional contemporary dancers, and I would suggest that this is another unnecessary dualism that we need to leave behind to fully understand the body-subjectivity of body experts performing physical skills at an elite level.

In place of this dichotomy, I have argued that a focus on how the dancers' concepts of 'being in your body' and 'being in the moment' potentially opens up a space in-between traditional divisions between subject and object, and transcendence and immanence. Captured in these experiential categories is the description of a state of being-in-the-world which is simultaneously characterised by on the one hand the physical and temporal groundedness and immediacy of immanence and, on the other hand the freedom, self-determination and communicative efficacy of transcendence: a mode of being I have called 'inhabited transcendence'.

Each form of body expertise of course has its own experiential characteristics, and the body awareness of elite contemporary dancers may well be shaped by their practice as performing artists in ways which differ from the body awareness of competitive sports dancers or other sportspeople. My contention is, however, that in attending to the lived experiences of particular body experts (in this case contemporary dancers) we are able to open up conversations about what is missing from our broader understanding of skill and expertise in elite body practitioners in a way that has resonance for the philosophy of sport more generally.

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ⁱ The data was collected through in-depth qualitative interviews that I conducted myself with a total of 16 professional dancers based at two separate repertory companies in the United Kingdom. Eight of the participants were white and eight were from minority ethnic backgrounds; eight were male and eight female; and their ages ranged from approximately 18 to 45. For more information on the research methods, see Purser 2017b.

ⁱⁱ The feeling described by Young (1998) is inhibition regarding full bodily engagement in physical activities (she uses the example of the throwing action) because of a sense of an uncomfortable awareness of how one's body may look to others. For Young, this stems from the ways in which young girls, socialised in patriarchal society, are taught to understand their bodies as on display for and open to the judgement of others. [For more on how these gender differences regarding the inhibiting effects of self-awareness may relate to highly competent professional dancers, see Purser 2017a]

ⁱⁱⁱ I have noted elsewhere (Purser 2011) that dancers also distinguish between the negative (objectifying and alienating) experience of the use of the mirror or other external images to learn a choreography, and the positive experience of intersubjective 'mirroring' in situations where they pick up or respond to movements from another person. This again, speaks to the importance of the communicative or reciprocal nature of intersubjective relations.