Influenced by the Tanz- and Lebensreform (dance and life reform movements) and the general dynamic of the arts, dance around 1900 emerges as a central cultural metaphor: Friedrich Nietzsche conceives his philosophy by using dance metaphors, Arthur Symons (in analogy to the idea of the theatrum mundi) employs the metaphor of ‘The World as Ballet,’ and the British social reformer Henry Havelock Ellis imagines all spheres of human life as dance in his book The Dance of Life (1923). At the turn of the century, dance as a prominent figure of thought particularly inscribes itself into the discourses on art and aesthetics. In this context, depictions of dancing and dancers not only become popular visual motifs, but dance also emerges as “the key medium of all arts trying to reflect the new technological age as an era defined by motion.” Hence, the avant-garde movements use the paradigm of dance at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries to articulate

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1 Translated by Henry M. Taylor.
programmatic concepts of a dance-like poetry and literature, a theatre essentially influenced by dance (as with the theatre reformers Edward Gordon Craig and Georg Fuchs), as well as dance poetics in the fine arts. Finally, employing such enigmatic terms as ‘choreo-cinema,’ ‘cinedance,’ or ‘cine-choreography,’ film theory, and film aesthetics articulate concepts with dance as the model for regarding film as choreography. In these avant-gardistic concepts, the idea of dance seems to have become its own metaphor, as dance critic Helmut Ploebst notes. Also current theories of intermediality such as Uwe Wirth’s typology of different forms of intermedial rapports describe the functioning of such intermedial agendas as metaphorical appeals. In distinction from concrete medial manifestations of intermediality, according to Wirth these art theory manifestoes have to be understood as conceptual transfers between media: “A conceptual graft is the metaphor for a medial graft.”

However, in so far as the poetological manifestoes around the turn of the century rely on the model of dance, they remain largely vague about whether they are speaking of it literally or in a metaphorical sense. The writers and artists drafting art manifestoes under the paradigm of dance rather seem to raise doubts about their speech being metaphorical. It is this ambiguity of the metaphorical in speaking about and through dance that I want to focus on in the following considerations and, in using the example of the theoretical discourses around 1900, examine the relationship of dance to metaphor. Where does literal speech of and about dance end, and where does a discourse begin which has to be understood and contextualised as metaphorical? What is the difference between the non-metaphorical, ‘actual’ being of

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8 See Brandstetter 386ff.


dance, and an understanding of dance the meaning of which has ‘simply’ been transferred?

I “Not a mere metaphor?”

First doubts about the metaphorical status of popular dance imagery around 1900 are voiced by the already mentioned British sex researcher and social reformer Henry Havelock Ellis, whose book *The Dance of Life* exerted sustained influence on contemporary cultural and philosophical discourses, as well as on theories of dance.12 Interestingly, in a metalinguistic commentary Havelock Ellis explicitly points out that his speech of the “dance of life” is not to be understood metaphorically:

[...][I]t is necessary to insist upon life as a dance. This is not a mere metaphor. The dance is the rule of number and of rhythm and of measure and of order, of the controlling influence of form, of the subordination of the parts to the whole [...].

Thus, our world is, even fundamentally a dance, a single metrical stranza in a poem which will be for ever hidden from us [...].13

Being much more than “simply” a linguistic analogy, Havelock Ellis stresses that his talk about the “dance of life” refers to a conceptional or structural figure of ideation and perception which aligns life and dance in analogy to one another. Life itself is to be understood as dance, just as, conversely, the dancer’s movements represent the essential emanation of the dance of life. I would like to begin with this explicit negation of metaphoricity in Ellis, because it strikes me as symptomatic in two ways concerning the relationship of metaphor and dance in the aesthetic discourses:

First, Havelock Ellis insists that behind what we initially and linguistically comprehend as dance metaphor, there already exists a ‘wide’ notion of dance, which prevents it from being primarily defined in institutional terms or through its tie to the human body (and hence Ellis may almost be considered an early exponent of cognitivist metaphor theories14). Instead of a purely linguistic transposition, Ellis’ “dance of life” in effect aims at a relationship of mutual (and interactional15) influence of both metaphorical speech and cultural conceptions of dance. Starting from this premise, on a first level of reflection I would like to explore in a meta-theoretical perspective the discu-

sive field of ideas around the turn of the century in which dance is not only discursively, but also conceptionally metaphorized as a potential ‘dance without a dancer.’ Therefore, we must ask, what are the intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic conditions encouraging a comprehension of dance which seems in itself already metaphorized?

Secondly, Havelock Ellis’ meta-linguistic commentary also makes clear that these historical theories which productively align dance and metaphor not only claim dance’s metaphoricity, but also negotiate the very terms according to which metaphorical meaning is produced. Different from Havelock Ellis, who explicitly marks his speech as non-metaphorical, the relationship in the models under scrutiny tends to present itself as ambiguous, and as productively making use of an ambivalent, blurry rapport. Hence, in an inverted perspective, dance becomes a figure of thought through which the metaphorical may be conceived. From this perspective, I would like to propose reading the discourses on the metaphoricity of dance on a second level as the locus in which the concept of metaphor is both negotiated and re-conceptualised.

In order to fathom the relationship of dance and metaphor as a double question pointing in either direction, dance and metaphor should not be limited in their meanings by a priori definitions, but considered as two flexible variables shaping each other and positioning one another in both theoretical models, respectively. Subsequently, I want to explore the processes and conditions of the affinities between dance and metaphor through three select theoretical positions on aesthetics, ranging from Mallarmé’s texts on dance in the 1880s to Valéry’s *Philosophie de la danse* in 1936.

II ‘Dancing’ as a Metaphor: Metaphoricity as a Poetological Model in Mallarmé’s Writings on Dance

Source and focal point of the following considerations is a much commented-on passage from French poet Stéphane Mallarmé’s writings, “Crayonné au théâtre” (1886). In *Ballets*, a feuilleton review of the ballet performances of *Viviane* and *Les deux pigeons*, two dancing parties typical of 19th-century theatre and dance productions, Mallarmé criticises the illusionism of contemporary dance and staging practices. These he counters with his own, alternative conception of the ideal dance:

> Le jugement, ou l’axiome, à affirmer en fait de ballet!
> A savoir que la danseuse n’est pas une femme qui danse, pour ces motifs juxtaposés qu’elle n’est pas une femme, mais une métaphore résumant un des aspects élémentaires de notre forme, glaive, coupe, fleur, etc., et qu’elle ne danse pas, suggérant par le prodige de raccourcis ou d’élans, avec une écriture corporelle ce qu’il faudrait...
By virtue of this paradoxical double negation (the ‘ideal’ dancer is not a woman, and she doesn’t dance), Mallarmé crosses metaphor and dance in a continuous undecided oscillation between the described dance performance on the one hand, and an imaginary, metaphorical speech of dance on the other. In pursuing his idea and line of argument, it is revealed that his concept of metaphor is itself metaphorized. By analogising his notion of an ideal dance with the functioning of metaphor, Mallarmé declares metaphor as the poetic paradigm of his imagined ideal dance. Just as the metaphorical meaning is constituted by shift away from its ‘actual’ context, Mallarmé considers dance to be defined by a process of being detached and transposed: it becomes an expressive event separated from the moving body. Now no longer a woman, but only a metaphorical sign, the dancer herself (“jamais qu’emblème, point quelqu’un [...]”\(^{17}\)) becomes the medium (in an almost mystical sense) of a dance transcending and continuously eluding her. In Mallarmé’s symbolistic art conception, metaphor and dance are equally negotiated as models of a suggestive mediality, as a movement of departure from unambiguity.\(^{18}\)

A few years later, Mallarmé sees his programmatic design of dancelike mediality realised in the serpentine dances of the American Loïe Fuller, whose performances he eulogises in his essay *Autre Étude de danse: Les fonds dans le ballet*.\(^{19}\) Through the use of the newest light and projection techniques as well as metre-long web panels animated with the help of sewn-in sticks, Fuller, the ‘electric fairy’, creates motion sculptures up to three metres high which seem to dissolve her physicalness. According to the accounts of fascinated contemporaries, Loïe Fuller’s veil dances seem to transcend the dancer’s body, the viewer perceiving only traces of movement or signs of a dance transmitted in space through wavy panels.\(^{20}\) The decisive relocation of dance in both Mallarmé and Loïe Fuller’s dance aesthetics, therefore, consists of defining the mediality of dance by recourse to metaphor and no longer via the dancing body, but as a process of abstraction and transference.

This in itself already metaphorized notion of dance allows Mallarmé by reverse logic (this being his second argumentative twist) to postulate dance

\(^{17}\) Mallarmé 170.
\(^{18}\) See Brandstetter 332ff.
\(^{19}\) See Mallarmé 180-85.
itself as a metaphor for the elusive production of meaning in the other arts, particularly in poetry. As “écriture corporelle” or “poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe”\textsuperscript{21} dance becomes the paradigm of a poetic writing seemingly generating itself automatically, while relegating the author to the background.\textsuperscript{22} Between the concept of a dancelike poetry and dance imagined as writing process, Mallarmé opens up a dynamic field of metaphorical transfers and counter-transferences in which metaphor, dance, and writing mutually affect and replace one another.

Hence, the metaphorical seems to be at work in Mallarmé’s conception of dance on (at least) three continuously overlapping levels: first, as metaphorical speech about dance (dance as metaphor or writing); second, metaphor as a model of dancelike mediality (dance as detached, ambiguous transference); and third, the metaphorical transposition of the dancelike to other arts (poetry as dance). It is precisely through the fuzziness of these three lateral or superimposed levels that Mallarmé is able to stage his concept of dance as an ambiguously localised, creative principle capable of realisation beyond ontological media boundaries, which can take place in the performance of the dancer as well, in the performance of dance as well as in poetic writing. Hence, the distinction between actual and metaphorically transposed dance, with the often implied devaluation of metaphorical speech as derivative, is suspended in Mallarmé’s approach.

III Dance as “Weltentanz”: The Suspension of the Metaphorical in Rudolf von Laban’s Universalist Dance Theory

Interestingly, concepts of metaphorical dance transcending the human body not only emerge in dance-extrinsic contexts (as in the notes of a poet like Mallarmé), which might understandably be presumed to employ a transposed notion of dance. In the aesthetics and dance theories of the protagonists of the so-called freie Tanz and Ausdruckstanz (ranging from Isadora Duncan to Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman),\textsuperscript{23} discursive and conceptual metaphors also cross in diffuse ways. The dance aesthetics of the freie Tanz via explicit proximity to the corporeal, nature, and Lebenswelt (lifeworld) seeks to establish a comprehensive reform of life.\textsuperscript{24} Hence, in the midst of the dance discourses there emerges around 1900 a ‘broad’ notion which locates

\textsuperscript{21} Mallarmé 170.
\textsuperscript{23} Brandstetter 33.
\textsuperscript{24} See Sabine Huschka, Moderner Tanz: Konzepte — Stile — Utopien (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002) 29ff.
the essence of dance in its ubiquity and abstraction. Correspondingly, this new dance is no longer staged exclusively within the institutional frame of theatre and opera, but declares nature or the mythical space of ancient ruins to be the actual place of performance and source of inspiration for the creation of dance movements.25

The universal claim of the freie Tanz also manifests itself in contemporary theoretical writings eager to establish their new conception of dance as ideological paradigm. In 1920, the Austro-Hungarian dance theoretician and pedagogue Rudolf von Laban publishes his book Die Welt des Tänzers: Fünf Gedankenreigen, in which he comprehensively presents his theoretical ideas on the subject. Among adherents, the publication quickly becomes the “bible of the new dance.”26 Already the book’s title, “a round dance of ideas,” suggests that its subject is excessively metaphorized not only on a linguistic level, but also conceptualised in a dense field of metaphorical references.27 Interestingly, Laban himself notes the ambiguous status of his speech. “Such fundamentally different things are called dance or the art of dance,” he writes in the introduction, “that neither definite idea nor full evaluation may be attained.”28 And further: “Dance is never a pure term, it never or hardly ever expresses an agreed-upon meaning.”29 Defying conventional usage, the expression’s fuzziness allows Laban to found his understanding of dance in a universal dance philosophy (‘choreosophy’) aiming to transcend the “erroneous understanding of dance performance as purely material physicalness.”30 Through recourse to contemporary philosophies of vitalism,31 Laban considers dance a “ubiquitous tension force”32 which reveals itself in different cultural and social phenomena, but above all in the dancer.

Tanz ist es, der aus dem Gedankenreigen des Dichters, dem Klangreigen des Musikers und den Bildern der Maler, Former und Geräteschaffer zu uns spricht. Tanz ist alle Kultur, alle Gesellschaftlichkeit. Tanz ist die Schwungkraft, die unantastba-

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25 See e.g. Isadora Duncan, My Life (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927).
29 von Laban 46.
30 von Laban 1.
32 von Laban 6.
re Vorstellungen zur Religion reiht. Tanz ist alles Wissen, Schauen und Bauen, das
den Forscher und Tatenmenschen erfüllt. Doch das reinste Abbild des Tanzes der
Tänze, des Weltgeschehens, ist der Reigen, den der Menschenkörper schwingt.33

More than a gymnastic physical practice, Laban views the dancer’s move-
ments as a crystallisation of the holistic principle of a ‘dance of dances,’ the
kinetic energy of which is thought to be present in all phenomena of life and
culture. Obviously influenced by romantic concepts of thought, Laban imag-
ines this higher dance force as indicator of an ineluctable holism suspending
the differences of body and soul, the abstract and the concrete, of micro- and
macrocosm. Elsewhere, Laban states that in dissolving dichotomies this holis-

tic principle constitutes the ‘profound’ content of the art of dance.34 It there-
fore seems that Laban’s concept of dance at its core reverses the relationship
between the actual and the tropical: While he declares the ‘dance of dances’
to be the effective essence of dance, the dancer’s dance is merely its deriva-
tive or, in Laban’s terminology, its Abbild (copy). It is precisely the dance
notion’s ambiguity, as reflected on by Laban himself, which seems to enable
the mutual transpositions between the macro- and microcosm of the choreo-

graphic world affairs. As such, his approach is virtually founded on a puzz-
ing notion presupposing the commutability of dance as both actual and
metaphorical, corporeal and world-embracing. Just like Mallarmé, Laban’s
theory assumes an unfettered transferability of dance, which can be neither
located materially or phenomenologically, nor related to a specific medium.

With such a totalising conception, separated from the dancer’s body, eve-

ything becomes ‘dance’ (— supposedly in a non-metaphorical sense —), and
connected with the holistic dance of the world. By suspending the difference
between actual and metaphorical speech, Laban’s concept effectively cancels
out the possibility of a metaphorical meaning of dance: hence, as a radical
consequence, strictly speaking all discourse on dance would have to be read
literally.

IV Intermedial Metaphoricity: ‘Absolute’ Dances in Paul
Valéry’s Dance Philosophy and the 1920s Avant-Garde
Discourses

“Encore un peu de courage. Poussons un peu plus loin: un peu plus loin de
’idée immédiate et accoutumée que l’on se fait de la danse.”35 With these
words, French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry encourages his readers to

33 von Laban 8.
34 von Laban 9.
1401.
take one more step of abstraction in thinking about dance. Roughly fifty years after Mallarmé’s essay *Ballets*, Valéry picks up on his teacher’s ideas in his paper “De la danse” from 1936. He writes: “Mallarmé dit que la danseuse n’est pas une femme qui danse, car ce n’est point une femme, et elle ne danse pas.”36 Interestingly, Valéry seems to take the double negation of the dancer, which I have previously tried to situate in the context of a poetics of metaphorical detachment and transposition, quite literally, as the following passage indicates:

La plus libre, la plus souple, la plus voluptueuse des danses possibles m’apparut sur un écran où l’on montrait de grandes Méduses: ce n’étaient point des femmes et elles ne dansaient pas. [...] Là, dans la plénitude imcompressible de l’eau qui semble ne leur opposer aucune résistance, ces créatures disposent de l’idéal de mobilité, y détendent, y ramassent leur rayonnante symétrie. Point de sol, point de solides pour ces danseuses absolues; point de planches; mais un milieu où l’on s’appuie par tous les points qui cèdent vers où l’on veut.37

What Valéry celebrates in a series of superlatives as the apotheosis of dance (“la plus libre, la plus souple, la plus voluptueuse des danses possibles”), paradoxically refers to an event which empirically is not a dance at all, but a film depicting underwater encounters of jellyfish. This ‘dance’ has, as Gabrielle Brandstetter notes,38 already undergone a double media shift: from the dancer’s physicalness to the fluid consistencies of the Medusas, and from the presence of the stage performance to the light projection of the film. Through their filmic representation and the poet’s aestheticizing look, however, the Medusas phenomenologically reveal themselves to be “danseuses absolues.”39 Therefore, the authority to define the absolute dance is shifted to the level of interpretive reception.40 Locating dance in the viewer’s perception allows Valéry’s concept a chiastic inversion of the actual and the metaphorical, as already implied in Laban’s writings: an at first glance ‘metaphorical’ motion sequence, detached from the actual meaning of dance and transposed to the medium of film, is now declared to be the true, ‘absolute’ dance. Valéry is less concerned than Laban with the fuzziness of actual and metaphorical speech, than with positing the principle of dance as absolute, as “une idée assez abstraite de la Danse,” which he distinguishes from dance in

37 Valéry, “De la danse” 34.
38 Brandstetter 306.
39 Valéry, “De la danse” 34.
the narrow, literal sense, “la danse proprement dite.” While in Mallarmé and Laban actual and metaphorical dance mutually overlap, Valéry’s postulated absolute dance appears at the outset detached from any material or medium-specific being. While Mallarmé describes the process of a dancer being metaphorized or turned into a sign, Valéry’s account of ‘dance’ is already the product of a transfer (achieved by the interpreter and the filmic medium), a dance already become sign. Moreover, dance in Valéry’s conception becomes the very idea of artistic poiesis; a kind of hyper-medium encompassing all the individual arts as particular instances of the one dance as a general principle of creation. In this sense, the media change to film not so much implies metaphorization, but rather that at this point the principle of dance is actualised through the form and medium of film.

This idea of absolute dance manifesting itself beyond the body of the dancer also runs through the dance-theoretical discourses of the 1920s. Hence, in his book Tanzkunst from 1926, dance theorist Fritz Böhme refers to the potential of dance as realising itself not via the human body, but through the supposedly dance-like movement of objects — with inklings here both of Kleist’s Marionette Theatre and the dance avant-garde’s striving towards transcending physiological dance. Tellingly, Böhme conceives these instrumental dances (Instrumentaltänze) as a process of “transferring dance’s inspiration to material other than the human body.” Apart from coloured light projections, above all (experimental) film is thought to make it possible to “largely disconnect the physiological tie between work and body, so that one may speak of an absolute creation of motion.”

The assumption that the essence of dance could be prominently featured through the medium of film found its continuation in the notion of a dance-like cinema in contemporary film criticism and theory. In a critical review of 1921, the film theoretician Bernard Diebold discusses Walter Ruttmann’s abstract film experiments and concludes that the motion-play of rhythmically animated geometric forms in Lichtspiel Opus 1 “comes closest to being ‘absolute dance.’”

These meta-narratives of an ‘absolute dance,’ equally present in discourses on dance, film, and aesthetics are no longer specific to a given medium and subvert both intermedial borders and the separating line between literal and metaphorical speech. Hence, this essentialist notion of dance con-
stitutes the vanishing point of the interplay between dance metaphors and transposed dance concepts described above. Crystallising the production of dance, the discourse of absolute dance is committed neither to clear definition nor to concrete idea; rather, it suggests itself as an all-embracing and instinctive description of visual phenomena in motion, which now can only be depicted ‘as dance.’

V Conclusion and Outlook: Dance as a Theory of Metaphor

From the metaphorical dance of the dancer in Mallarmé, through Laban’s ‘universal dance,’ to film’s dance potential in Valéry and Böhme: this cursory overview of the relationship between dance metaphors and concepts in the avant-garde’s manifestoes has revealed the distinction between definition and metaphor of dance to be extremely unstable. In the aesthetic theories of Mallarmé through Valéry, literal and transposed usage of the term dance oscillate ambiguously and continuously revolve the dichotomy of conceptual and metaphorical speech.

This result is partly attributable to dance’s frequently evoked ambivalence, which at the beginning of the 20th century seems to vouch for the compatibility of opposing tendencies. Thus, French dance critic André Levinson writes in 1927: ‘De tous les arts, la danse se révèle le plus matériel mais aussi le plus abstrait. Elle résout l’antithèse de la chair et de l’esprit; c’est là son miracle.’ In a similar vein, literary scholar Frank Kermode considers the dance metaphors of the symbolist art theories as a paradigm allowing for the dissolution of modernity’s central dichotomies: “The dancer [...] reconciles antithetical movements: the division of soul and body, form and matter, life and death, artist and audience.”

As a puzzling, doubly reversible figure, dance has the potential of uniting principles that occidental philosophy traditionally conceives as opposites, which would also account for the metaphor’s power in the discourses outlined here. Different from contemporary Sprachkritiker (linguistic critics) like Fritz Mauthner or Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the theories under consideration refrain from pitting the utterable against the unutterable, or the literal against the figurative; rather, they make productive use of the oscillating field of transference and counter-transference between idea and metaphor in articulating the mutual relationship of dance metaphors and concepts. Hence, Mallarmé, Laban, and Valéry use fuzzy referentiality as a strategy of

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legitimising a wide understanding of dance or, on the contrary, to transcend
the physicalness of dance by a universalist claim.

The commutability of metaphorical and conceptual references not only
appears grounded in the ambiguity of the term dance, but can also be attrib-
uted to the specific rhetoric of the historical discourses examined here. As
artistic theories, the paradigms of Mallarmé, Laban, and Valéry are less con-
cerned with establishing a coherent and consistent terminology than with
producing enigmatic, dynamic systems of thought characterized by internal
tensions, turns, and logically insoluble paradoxes. As forms of “aesthetic
thought”\textsuperscript{50} these discourses seem less eager to communicate through theo-
retical models or concepts,\textsuperscript{51} preferring instead the ambiguously metaphor-
ical as a more open, flexible, and subjective form of speech.

Yet despite their affirmation of subjectivity and contradiction, these mani-
festoes also indicate that the distinguishability between metaphorical and
literal speech is not a necessary condition for understanding the dance meta-
phors examined here. Their fuzzy, ambiguous status does not seem to impair
their communicative power. Rather, these theoretical contexts appear to dis-
solve the distinction of idea and metaphor in a dynamic ‘x as well as y’: thus,
the speech of the ‘dance of life,’ of ‘universal dance’ or of the ‘dancer as
metaphor’ on the one hand functions as conventional metaphorical discourse
capable of evoking systems of associated commonplaces which are trans-
ferred into new contexts. On the other hand, the metaphoricity of such
speech is mirrored by an enhanced concept of dance capable of positing the
tropical nature of this discourse as the actual purpose of dance, without con-
fining any of its suggestive power.

All these vertiginous twists, turns, oscillations, and transpositions be-
tween the metaphorical and dance finally also affect the notion of metaphor
itself. Considering the latent fuzziness of literal and metaphorical speech, it
seems that the latter may no longer be defined through its difference from the
actual. Therefore, based on these thought models, how can the metaphorical
be grasped if the distinction of \textit{proprum} and \textit{improprum}, literal and figurative
speech, has become unreliable? As a possible answer I would like to suggest
one final inflection that seems to be implicit in the discourses quoted here. In
exposing the meta-theory of metaphor negotiated by these theories, dance
would appear as the privileged idea of a changed understanding of the figu-
rative. At the risk of introducing one more metaphor in this discussion (if
only they are the “good ones”\textsuperscript{52}, as Max Black points out), dance as the meta-

\textsuperscript{50} See Wolfgang Welsch, \textit{Ästhetisches Denken} (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990) 46ff.
\textsuperscript{51} See Rüdiger Zill, “Metapher als Modell: Die Figur des Neuen in der Genese wissen-
schaftlicher und philosophischer Theorien,” \textit{Die Figur des Neuen}, ed. Wolfgang Sohst
\textsuperscript{52} Black 39.
phor of metaphorical speech thus particularly stresses the dynamic functioning of transferred meaning. In view of the oscillation outlined here between actual and figurative speech, this dynamic should not be imagined as a linear displacement of a term from A to B; rather, it should be considered as cyclical reference continuously exchanging the extremes of metaphor and concept, focus and frame in mutual displacement and deference. Hence, metaphor’s figurative movement could be depicted as an endless turning and spinning, or as a pirouette, as Paul Valéry indicates towards the end of his essay “Philosophie de la danse” (1936): “Qu’est-ce qu’une métaphore, si ce n’est une sorte de pirouette de l’idée dont on rapproche les diverses images ou les divers noms?”

As a way of imagining the metaphorical, the pirouette not only suggests the centrifugal dynamic described by Valéry, but also its transference and circular reference. Pointing to Mallarmé, Jacques Derrida similarly conceives the pirouette as a self-referential movement, which, turning on itself, aspires to the place of the Other, blending the same and the new in its referential turn:

Comme pirouette, la danse de l’hiéroglyphe ne peut se jouer intégralement en dedans [...] à cause d’un certain déplacement latéral: en tournant incessamment sur sa pointe, l’hiéroglyphe, le signe, le chiffre quitte son ici, comme se fichant, toujours ici en passant d’ici à là, d’un ici à l’autre [...]. Chaque pirouette n’est alors, dans son tournoiement, que la marque d’une autre pirouette, tout autre et la même.

As an impermanent sign of as-if, fluctuating between self- and external reference, the pirouette-like game of metaphorically produced similarities and self-cancellation cannot be arrested, nor can the oscillation between the actual and the figurative, between analogy and difference. Hence, and more poignantly, the metaphoricity of dance implies a notion of metaphor no longer determined by difference; instead, and seen under the paradigm of dance, the process of metaphorical meaning production has to be negotiated as a dynamic oscillation of actual and figurative speech.

53 Valéry, “Philosophie de la danse” 1403.
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