



Dancers Iris Platt and Angela Falk with rehearsal director Valeria Solomonoff. Jacob's Pillow Research Residency, Artistic Director Ilya Vidrin. Photo Credit: Sue Murad (2018)

PARTNERING AS RHETORIC

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Keywords

rhetoric
partnering
ethics
paralinguistics
Lloyd Bitzer

Abstract

Bodily rhetoric is a burgeoning field, with scholars investing attention to the ways in which non-verbal communication mediates change between individuals and groups in complex scenarios, including political settings. Scenarios in which individuals move together – whether in completely extemporaneous situations or in existing forms such as Contact Improvisation, Argentinian Tango, or Classical Pas de Deux – pose a similarly complex communicative problem. Drawing on the work of Lloyd Bitzer, I demonstrate how rhetorical theory provides methodological insight by which we can better understand the dynamic practice that is always already happening in situations where individuals move together.

Introduction

When considering the act of dance partnering, whether a dyad, trio, or large group dynamic, it is reasonable to wonder about the character of non-verbal interactions between moving bodies. That is, the movement idiosyncrasies of each individual, as well as the quality with which they engage each other in and through movement. For example, people can move together in a way that is dialogic – a (non-verbal) coordinated effort between two or more individuals – as well as a sort of “polyphonic” monologue, wherein multiple bodies interact as one while retaining their own distinct movement quality. Polyphony here is an extension of the musical concept; though bodies are not strictly speaking voices, it may be a useful term to describe how nuanced cues, with or without physical contact, provide the space to retain individuality while moving together. In both scenarios, individuals rely on a process of listening and responding to impulses and cues, be they physical or perhaps even energetic. Whether through coordination, harmonization, synchronization, or other communicative efforts, this essay investigates the potential for cues and impulses to function as persuasive elements that impact communication between partners. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to parse the nature of dance partnering itself, I move to present partnering as a rhetorical act that relies on a certain type of non-verbal persuasion between two or more individuals moving together physically and/or energetically.

By invoking the work of prominent scholars of rhetoric, namely Lloyd Bitzer and George Kennedy, I will attempt to construct a theoretical understanding of bodily (physical and energetic) discourse. To set up this argument, however, requires understanding how a rhetorical framework offers a relevant methodology to parse the ways in which partnering explicitly necessitates critical (bodily) discourse. The framework is one in which rhetoric is understood in basic Aristotelian terms as the “available means of persuasion.”¹ Subsumed within this definition is an attention to quality – not only how a particular articulation (be it verbal, physical, or energetic) functions persuasively, but also the potential to discern properties such as tone, character, attitude, and so on. Positioning scholars such as George Kennedy and Lloyd Bitzer in conversation with

dance provides insight into non-verbal modes of communication, which I take to be a prominent feature of dance partnering. This structure is hermeneutic, as its content models how partners can potentially interpret each other and how each partner will (or will not) reciprocate. That dance can be communicative in a performative way, to an audience, is an argument articulated by leading scholars including Maxine Sheets-Johnstone,² Susan Leigh Foster,³ and Graham McFee,⁴ as well as countless movement and dance practitioners. The arguments presented in this paper, however, explore how dance partnering facilitates (or inhibits) the transfer of information between the very bodies that move together, extending the traditional concept of audience to a more intimate setting of those within the practice. I ask how partners act as performer and audience for each other, in real-time, and how discrete movements, continuous as they are in practice, lend themselves to the rigorous study of non-verbal (physical) dialogue. To probe the conditions by which partners interpret cues and impulses from each other, I ground specifically into the work of rhetoric scholar Lloyd Bitzer, who demonstrated the significance of situations from which rhetorical discourse emerges.

It is important to note here that examining dance through a rhetorical framework is not a new approach. Cases are visible as far back as Plato in the ethical concerns of Greek *choraia* (a term designated for both music and dance),⁵ and more recently endeavored by the work of rhetoric scholar and choreographer, Cynthia Roses-Thema. Following her claim that dance performances function as rhetorical situations,⁶ this essay utilizes a similar rhetorical framework to understand the conditions by which partners interpret and understand each other. Conversely, examining rhetoric through the lens of movement is also not a new approach. Speaking of movement and mobility more generally, rhetorical theorist Helmut Pflugfelder claims:

Rhetoric is very well suited to addressing mobility concerns in part because movement in the world – as enacted by the coordination of people and technologies – is argument. That is, when people move, they take part in and comprise rhetoric. Rhetoric is not limited to the language arts, but is epistemic. Rhetoric occurs whenever we create meaning, link meanings together to form

systems, or engage in a productive art. This rhetoric is never just the intervention of people into situations, nor the application of meaning to cold, dispassionate objects, but a process that occurs whenever people move in the world.⁷

What does it mean in this context for rhetoric to be epistemic? Robert L. Scott, a theorist who famously championed the rhetoric-as-epistemic doctrine, noted that, “man must consider truth not as something fixed and final but as something to be created moment by moment in the circumstances in which he finds himself and with which he must cope.”⁸ The epistemic in this case refers not to static, *a priori* knowledge, but perhaps closer to understanding that is gleaned in the moment. Scott posits, “if one can be certain, then one needs no commands or urgings (either from oneself or from others).”⁹ Acting in the face of uncertainty is a particularly cogent point for interacting non-verbally. For one, we can never truly know if a partner will be ready to respond, so we must attend to physical and energetic cues and impulses that communicate our partner’s state of presence. Acting with certainty may also mean acting from expectation, which can further inhibit attending to relevant stimuli, particularly if something unexpected happens. Fixed knowledge, or assuming that because something worked a particular way before it must always work this way, detracts from the process of attending to relevant stimuli. Thus, this is a study on the ways partners discern cues and impulses from each other; basically understood as listening and responding, or alternatively still, action/reaction. Cultural anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell developed a vocabulary for such cues that allow individuals to communicate and respond to one another, which he called “paralinguistics.”¹⁰ These bodily cues include touch (*haptics*), eye contact (*oculesics*), personal space (*proxemics*), culturally meaningful¹¹ gestures (*kinesics*; such as a wave or a thumbs up), culturally appropriate response timing (*chronemics*), and so on. This is particularly relevant for partnering, as these are the cues that one senses (visually and/or kinesthetically) and subsequently interprets when moving with other(s). Thus I ask, how are partners convinced by subtle movements, such as a lingering or avoidant gaze, and how does a rhetorical framework provide a model by which to make these tropes salient to practitioners, as well as observers?

Taking a step beyond paralinguistics, bodily movement itself need not have a narrative or one-to-one linguistic mapping to be considered rhetorical. As rhetoric scholar Jennifer LeMesurier suggests, the body can be understood as a “functional, intentional actor and bearer of ideological weight, capable of producing rhetorical influence [...] our range of rhetorical actions is guided by our embodied memories just as much as our training in argument or analysis.”¹² It is here that we can begin to explore the nature of bodily discourse.

Rhetoric and Energy

Expanding on the Aristotelian definition of rhetoric, George Kennedy, known for his expert translations of Aristotle’s work, offers the following view:

Rhetoric in the most general sense may perhaps be identified with the energy inherent in communication: the emotional energy that impels the speaker to speak, the physical energy expended in the utterance, the energy level coded in the message, and the energy experienced by the recipient in decoding the message. In theory, one might even seek to identify some quantitative unit of rhetorical energy – call it the “rheme” – analogous to an erg or volt, by which rhetorical energy could be measured.¹³

Though Kennedy is being somewhat provocative, perhaps even facetious, with his suggestion of a qualitative unit, we are still left with an open question of interpretation. How can the emotional and physical energies be interpreted and experienced, particularly non-verbally, when moving together? Harvard philosopher Catherine Elgin positions her epistemology in conversation with this kind of emotional understanding, noting “self-knowledge enables us to access the information our emotions embed.”¹⁴ How does one become aware of one’s own emotional energy in movements such as a particular gesture, look, or other non-verbal cue? How does such awareness impact the quality of a response from a partner? That is, the character of physical dialogue between two or more people, as well as subsequent ethical dimensions such as trust, care, vulnerability, responsibility, and so on? Elgin suggests, “if we can identify our emotions, assess our level of expertise, and recognize how sensitive

we are, we can profit cognitively from their deliverances. Reflective self-awareness pays epistemic dividends.”¹⁵ Though Elgin is situated within the field of epistemology, identification is a crucial concept to rhetorical studies. Indeed, according to eminent rhetoric scholar Kenneth Burke, identification provides the space for rhetorical discourse, as one is persuaded by content in which one can identify *with* another.¹⁶ Many concepts have been used by different cultures throughout history to describe such emotional, energetic identifications in relation to body and time. *Wuwei* in ancient Chinese philosophy¹⁷ and *duende*¹⁸ in flamenco are two prominent exemplary concepts, wherein an individual somehow transcends oneself (perhaps by channeling a divine presence) such that action flows seamlessly. Within the tradition of rhetoric, this seamless flow of time is referred to as *kairos*, which often translates as “felt” or “experienced” time. Rhetorical theorist Debra Hawhee holds, “*kairos* is thus rhetoric’s time, for the quality, duration, and movement of discursive encounters depend more on the forces at work on and in a particular moment than their quantifiable length.”¹⁹ Viewing partnering as a discursive encounter through the rhetoric-as-energy lens provides the framework by which we can explore the emergence of rhetoric that is non-verbally mediated.

To ground the argument, I turn to Lloyd Bitzer, who in his well-known (1968) paper introduces the reader to the notion that rhetoric is situational. Bitzer notes the pragmatic nature of interactions that seek a goal beyond themselves (such as inspiring action or inciting change), and names three constituents that together comprise a rhetorical situation: a) an exigency (or urgency to solve a particular problem), b) an audience that must be able to act as a mediator of change, and c) constraints that limit decisions and actions.²⁰ What follows is an outline of the exigencies, audience, and constraints pertinent to partnering.

Exigency in Partnering

Bitzer maintains that the first constituent of a rhetorical situation is the demand of an exigency. He notes, “any exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be.”²¹ So what, then, is the exigence in partnering? In dance, the exigence is often a product of the

problems a given form makes for itself, such as particular shapes, postures, or relationship to rhythm and music. Bitzer is careful to note that “an exigence is not rhetorical when its modification requires merely one’s own action or the application of a tool, but neither requires nor invites the assistance of discourse.”²² The obstacle a partnering situation presents, at the very base, is to successfully interpret the quality of shifting and sharing weight of others. One cannot simply rely on one’s own action to move *with* other(s) because one must act toward and react to other(s). The reasons are myriad, from satisfying an aesthetic ideal to achieving a state of transcendent connection. Thus, given the relational nature of bodies moving together, the act of partnering itself seems to invite the assistance of bodily discourse.

Before we can entertain the meaning of a particular movement, we must first be aware that each movement, no matter how small, can be significant in the process of communicating with others. These minute bodily movements form the discourse that is the primary communicative medium of partnering. The appropriateness of each action, be it an assertion, response, proposition, and so on, is an especially relevant concept to Bitzer, who notes, “the situation dictates the sort of observations to be made; it dictates the significant physical and verbal responses; and, we must admit, it constrains the words which are uttered in the same sense that it constrains the physical acts.”²³ Any movement form, such as Argentinian Tango, classical ballet, Kathak, or Contact Improvisation, will have its own set of conventions, which dictate how bodies can respond to each other. Bitzer states, “although rhetorical situation invites response, it obviously does not invite just any response.”²⁴ In other words, “to respond appropriately to a situation” means that one “meets the requirements established by the situation.”²⁵ Each situation is fairly unique, so it is difficult, if at all possible, to be able to prescribe appropriate responses divorced of context. The ability to notice how dancers are compelled to respond based on particular qualities, both kinesthetically and visually, is precisely what makes partnering a matter of rhetorical concern. With respect to physical contact, for example, rhetoric scholar Shannon Walters suggests,

Rhetorical touch takes place when bodies come in contact; the meanings produced by this contact are rhetorical in that they convey messages, craft character, and create emotion in a way that fosters a potential for identification and connection among toucher and touched. In short, touch is rhetorical because it is epistemic, creating knowledge, communication, and understanding about the widest ranges of embodiment and ways of being in the world. Understanding touch as rhetorical makes rhetoric accessible to a wider range of bodies and minds, increasing the means of persuasion and possibilities of rhetoric.²⁶

Again we are directed to the notion of rhetoric as epistemic, this time in an explicitly bodily sense. Walters highlights how touch reveals insight about the relationship between knowledge, communication and understanding. Positioning this within the epistemology of Elgin, the epistemic is a “cognitive achievement”²⁷ concerned primarily with understanding, rather than the limits of traditional epistemology (namely non-fortuitous justified, true belief). Elgin’s work does not, however, hierarchize the cognitive over the bodily, and so her work sets a solid framework for understanding *from and within* embodied practice. Her investigation of epistemic yield within the arts more broadly is especially valuable given her claim that “dance enriches our lives at least in part because it enables us to understand things differently than we did before.”²⁸ I believe understanding the nature of dance partnering in particular may reveal insight about the ethics of interactions, physical and otherwise, that extend beyond dance practices.

Within the demands of partnering, the physical dialogue that takes place necessitates agreeing on the appropriate conventions for negotiating movement. That is, if we are moving together within the context of a *milonga*, we will ostensibly be negotiating weight in a way that is significantly different than if we are moving together in the context of a Contact Improvisation jam. The same can be said if individuals are negotiating weight in a ritual form versus combat. Indeed this can be further differentiated if individuals are moving together in the context of capoeira versus aikido.

The claim that moving together entails agreement of appropriate conventions by which partners negotiate movement raises a concern of

whether partnering is a form of physical argumentation, albeit an informal approach. Earlier, I appealed to Ehren Helmut Pflugfelder, who stated “movement in the world is argument.”²⁹ Argumentation here is not in reference to the verbal exchanges that occur between partners, although those too are valuable. Rather argumentation here is in reference to the means by which partners convince each other that a given physical action necessitates a particular physical response. As rhetorical theorist J. Anthony Blair states,

arguments aim to move us by appealing to considerations that we grant and then by showing that the point of view at issue follows from those concessions [...] the process is impossible if the appeal is vague or ambiguous. Thus vagueness or ambiguity makes argument impossible.³⁰

It is important to note that Blair suggests that this is true of standard verbal and written arguments, as well as visual ones. If partnering involves finding agreement of how weight is shifted and shared, what are the tools with which dancers make their arguments? Of particular significance is the point of agreement the negotiation presupposes, which we can consider to be the space where an exigency emerges. Though partnering may not seem to be an argument in the formal sense, decisions are being made in real-time by each party based on interpreting the physical actions they direct at one another. In moving, weight is always already being negotiated, individually and in concert with others, regardless of whether the movement is extemporaneously generated or choreographed. For ease of communication, there must be agreement between each agent about which cues are meaningful and what constitutes an appropriate response. This agreement may be unspoken, simply by following the conventions of a particular movement form. Rhetoric scholars Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, who present a case for non-formal argumentation, state, “if we presuppose the coherence of reality and of our truths taken as a whole, there cannot be any conflict between facts and truths on which we would be called to make a decision.”³¹ That is, in partnering, to be able to communicate physically and achieve a state of connection, dancers cannot simply be moving randomly, even if it is improvised. While there may be no inherent truth-value in our physical arguments, we ostensibly interact with

our partners in a way that they understand us to be trustworthy. Thus, it seems there are certain consequences at stake if we are not aware of the ways we influence each other physically. That is of course assuming we want to level with our partner(s). Duping them explicitly, while beyond the scope of this paper, is still a provocative thought when considering how our smallest actions influence and are interpreted by our physical interlocutors. To make sense of the non-formal argumentation elicited in a partnering situation, of the point of agreement in the process of negotiating weight, let us focus on how an action executed by one partner is sensed and perceived by the other.

Audience in Partnering Situations

Bitzer claims “the second constituent [of a rhetorical situation] is the *audience*”³² (emphasis in the original). He states, “since rhetorical discourse produces change by influencing the decision and action of persons who function as mediators of change, it follows that rhetoric always requires an audience – even in those situations when a person engages himself or ideal mind as audience.”³³ Bitzer, like many before him, points to the performativity of rhetoric, yet is clear that one may engage oneself as both audience and performer. It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider audience-performer relationship in a more traditional understanding, yet if we consider a partnering scenario with two individuals, it is evident that each influences the other. It may still be unclear how each individual mediates change. In cases where partnering is sequenced choreography or improvised lead/follow, one partner relies on the other to complete actions based on certain predetermined cues (such as a change of direction or timing). In this way, though movements may be quite fast, one is acting as audience for the performer. It is interesting to note that it is perfectly possible that both individuals are moving at the same time. In such cases, as well as ones where there is no choreography, the spectating partner(s) must be very sensitive to potential cues, choosing when and how to respond. Bitzer clearly states that an audience must be able to act as a mediator of change.³⁴ Thus, as one partner listens and is influenced by the performer, so the spectating partner(s) elicit(s) change by reacting. In this way, partners are always switching fluidly between spectator and performer for each other, mediating change through subtle

cues that can be physical, visual, or perhaps even energetic. It is important to note that the absence of movement, the choice of stillness, can be a valid response, perhaps sometimes even more than choosing to respond by moving.

Bitzer notes, “in any rhetorical situation there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle; it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected.”³⁵ For a simple example, consider an individual who suddenly moves into close proximity of another. There is no limit to possible responses for the second individual, but for the purpose of this example, let us say the sudden proximity is unwanted. What cues may function rhetorically to communicate discomfort? There may be a tightening of the partner’s body, a slowing down or hesitation, or perhaps the individual simply continues moving past and avoids the interaction completely. These cues may easily be overlooked, creating a new problem (exigency) that needs to be addressed.

A more complex example may involve the quality of response time between each partner; or, following Birdwhistell, the *chronemics* of an interaction. At first glance, this may seem only relevant to forms where timing plays a principal role, such as ballet and ballroom. Timing in a practice such as Contact Improvisation is no less important however, given that concepts such as “pelvic tracking” are also time-dependent, despite the form having quite a capacious understanding of what signifies an “appropriate” response. A response may, for example, be too quick; rather than focus on responding by attending to relevant stimuli, and thus connecting to the impulse, one responds by executing an action based on a preconceived notion. If there is a particular aesthetic in mind (i.e. a particular line, pattern, movement figure, or even quality of effort), both the performing partnering and the spectating partner will be bound to movement that satisfies the aesthetic ideal.

This is perhaps the most difficult view to articulate, because there are multiple levels of complexity. For one, there is the case in which a particular aesthetic quality is perceived by an outside party. The outside perception may be a misinterpretation of what is being communicated between the performers because one may not be privy to what is

happening between moving partners. For example, gestural choreography may seem to indicate particular cultural tropes that are not significant to the performers themselves, such as when one dancer extends a hand to another seemingly in invitation but is really only extending the arm as part of the architecture of the choreography. This is as much true for gestures in western forms like classical ballet as it is for non-western forms (i.e. Balinese dance), wherein those inexperienced may misread or misunderstand the significance and/or semantic density of culturally meaningful gestures. On the other hand, a partner is always sensing and perceiving the cue kinesthetically, and so is also technically acting first as a spectator, before continuing on to perform a response as an actor. It is interesting to note that a partner may misperceive and/or give ambiguous cues based on poor conceptual understanding of the conventions of a particular form. A prime example is the cues in social dancing forms. To signal an underarm turn, a leader is taught to raise the arm of the partner, under which s/he can then perform the turn. Even with extensive training in other forms of dance, the signal to turn from the lifting of an arm may be a convention particular to the social form. Thus, without explicit previous experience in the social form, arriving at conceptual understanding of an underarm turn is unlikely (though of course, not impossible). The case is interesting to consider both for an individual who newly arrives to the social form as a leader or as a follower. The novice leader may raise the arm of an experienced follower for aesthetic effect, and so unknowingly leads the follower into a turn. Similarly, an experienced leader raises the arm of an inexperienced follower to no avail, given that the lack of experience prevents the novice from discerning the lifted arm as a relevant cue.

In relation to the misperception of cues, performance theorist Erving Goffman introduces an asymmetry within communication, noting how one is usually aware “only of one stream of [one’s] communication” while an observer is aware of that stream “and one other.”³⁶ Goffman points here to the way in which an interlocutor (observer/audience) experiences the “expressive behavior” of a performer in a given interaction. As dancers, we are apt to control our movement far more than is conventional in everyday life, yet Goffman’s claim is still relevant. The claim he makes is both epistemic and aesthetic in that the “other” in the conversation – whether an interlocutor or merely an onlooker – witnesses, interprets, and

subsequently derives meaning from particular visual cues, including posture and facial features such as a smile, frown, raised eyebrow, averted glance, and so on. In being preoccupied with form (aesthetic expectation), one may no longer be attending to relevant stimuli of the partner, as well as the possibility of accidentally expressing ambiguous, albeit subtle, cues (such as the case in the social form). Before arriving to the semantic construal of cues and impulses, it is clear that the aesthetic expectations of partnering practices may interfere with ethical dimensions such as care, responsibility, and trust. The main rhetorical concern that emerges from the tension between aesthetic and epistemic concerns in partnering is how partners are convincing each other that a particular cue is relevant and as such necessitates a particular response that is fitting (appropriate) to the situation. To get at this problem, we move to the constraints of partnering.

Constraints in Partnering

Bitzer claims “every rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are part of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence.”³⁷ He delineates between two classes of constraints, ones that are “originated or managed by the rhetor” and “those other constraints, in the situation, which may be operative.”³⁸ That is, the constraints that are created by the rhetoric of the individuals and those that are intrinsic to the situation itself. With respect to the operative constraints, a simple and obvious example is physics; there are only so many movements that are physically possible given forces such as gravity, as well as consequences of momentum, pressure, inertia, and so on. If one pushes a partner, the individual can respond by effortfully absorbing or effortlessly surrendering to the force of impact. The space itself is also intrinsically constraining – perhaps a ceiling is too low to execute a particular lift, or a room is too small to complete a full sequence with a supported *saut-de-chat*.

The constraints that are created make for interesting study with respect to dance partnering. Partners working together can begin to coordinate, conserving energy to seemingly defy gravity by finding ways to use momentum and inertia. There are the obvious considerations of measured

time (*chronos*), such as music or predetermined choreographic sequences, as well as less obvious elements such as internal bodily rhythms (*kairos*). In lead/follow scenarios, a follower is constrained by the timing of the leader. In extemporaneous leading, a follower is further constrained by not knowing when a partner will change direction, orientation, rhythm, or speed. A leader is subsequently constrained by the time it takes for a follower to respond. The *kairotic* element functions as a clear constraint in that the actor must be attentive to potentiality – when is a particular cue or impulse going to be most effectively received by a partner? This is perhaps especially true in ritual movement, as well as extemporaneous forms such as Contact Improvisation; though it is perhaps more acceptable to disrupt sequences in CI than in other forms (by actions such as jumping out of a lift), attending to the potential of one’s partner(s) provides opportunities to be intentional about response to previous action. Given that many of these practices are saturated with cultural meaning, distinct forms have their own communicative content and conventions, which serve as constraints. For example, both Argentinian and ballroom Tango typically do not involve both partners engaging in floorwork, though there may be choreographic choices that can involve floorwork (such as dips, death drops, and other “tricks”). Contact Tango, on the other hand, blends the conventions of Argentinian Tango and Contact Improvisation to provide dancers with more opportunities to interact through conventional foot patterns, as well as non-conventional floorwork and lifts. Irrespective of form, responding to movement is tricky given the myriad possibilities of articulation. As Elgin suggests, “we are prey to massive information overload. Inputs flood our sense organs. Infinitely many obvious consequences follow from every belief. To know, understand, perceive, or discern anything requires overlooking a lot. The question is: what should be overlooked?”³⁹ Taking a step back, it is evident that knowing which cues are relevant is something that is manifest in context, which necessitates a certain kind of sensitivity to movement. This claim, while reductive, serves as a strong argument for the embodied understanding derived from engaging in physical practice (in studio or social settings). Indeed, the first canon of Aristotelian rhetoric is discovery [*heuresis*], which seems to necessitate understanding the constraints to appropriately respond to an imminent exigency. Creating a universal formula that could prescriptively dictate which movement(s)

function persuasively is quite likely impossible, yet questioning the rhetorical nature of cues and impulses within practice may serve as a useful tool for increasing the efficiency of communication between partners. This I leave as a question to be asked physically within a partnering practice.

Conclusion

Understanding partnering as a rhetorical situation provides a framework by which to detect and analyze the subtle and intricate movements and cues that contribute to shared, embodied understanding between each moving body, whether the situation involves a dyad, trio, or a large group dynamic. The greater aim of this research is to contribute to the practice and training of dance partnering as a rigorous mode of communication, stemming from the firm belief that such an approach facilitates potentiality, freedom of expression, as well as an ability to exemplify connection in and outside of studio practice and performance events. This framework may be useful for interpreting partnering in a didactic setting, especially to promote specific articulation to satisfy one's own aesthetic fancy, be it technically virtuosic or otherwise. It may also, however, promote self-monitoring that can be inhibitory to expression. Cognitive psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky suggest a model of decision-making as a Two-System, wherein System One is quick-thinking and impulsive, and System Two is slow, rational, and self-reflective.⁴⁰ Training in partnering may begin as a System Two process, with slow, serial processing of cues and impulses, and become a System One process once principles become embodied. For some, the transition may be fast, and for others may take many years that it might not seem worth it to continue. Kahneman and Tversky suggest common heuristics that act as cognitive biases, the discovery [heuresis] of which harkens back to Aristotelian rhetoric and the necessity of attending to the situation in the moment. Plato himself suggests that philosophy (i.e. the love of wisdom), begins first with wonder [thauma] and continues with discovery.⁴¹ The ability to be curious within partnering lends itself well to philosophical investigation of how best to communicate with the partner in front of you.

Perhaps, however, the Two-System approach is too reductive for a complex process like partnering. Nevertheless, a significant lesson from cognitive neuroscience is the notion that “practice makes permanent”⁴² – meaning that if our practice is always self-monitoring, then we become really good at self-monitoring, making it difficult to be “in the moment.” Yet, by practicing this type of metacognition, we can gain articulation that can be quite freeing. This is not a paradox – to achieve the freedom of expression that can be technically virtuosic is largely a question about the way in which we practice attending to relevant stimuli. As Elgin notes, “by attending to and reflecting on our emotional responses, the situations that trigger them, and the orientations they give rise to, and by assessing the opinions they generate, we have resources for developing more nuanced and more accurate responses.”⁴³ If we hope to achieve a connection that emerges from attending to relevant stimuli and responding in a way that is appropriate to context, a rigorous physical practice is simply a necessity.

Notes

¹ Kennedy, “Rhetoric”.

² Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*.

³ Foster, *Choreographing empathy*.

⁴ McFee, *The Philosophical Aesthetics of Dance*.

⁵ Kowalzig, “Broken Rhythms In Plato’s Laws.”

⁶ Roses-Thema, *Rhetorical Moves*.

⁷ Pflugfelder, *In measure of the world*.

⁸ Scott “On viewing rhetoric as epistemic.”

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context*.

¹¹ Meaningful in this context refers to gestures that literally carry meaning, such as a thumbs up to connote success or a wave to connote hello or goodbye. A gesture counts as meaningful if there is a group agreement on what it means.

¹² LeMesurier, “Somatic Metaphors.”

¹³ Kennedy, “A hoot in the dark.”

- ¹⁴ Elgin, “Emotion and understanding.” elgin.harvard.edu/undg/emotion.pdf.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*.
- ¹⁷ Slingerland, *Effortless action*.
- ¹⁸ Lorca and Di Giovanni, *In search of duende*.
- ¹⁹ Hawhee, “Kairotic encounters.”
- ²⁰ Bitzer, “The rhetorical situation.”
[www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~raha/309CWeb/Bitzer\(1968\).pdf](http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~raha/309CWeb/Bitzer(1968).pdf).
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Walters, *Rhetorical touch*.
- ²⁷ Elgin, *True enough*.
- ²⁸ Elgin, “Exemplification and the Dance.”
elgin.harvard.edu/exemplification/danceex.pdf.
- ²⁹ Pflugfelder, *In measure of the world*.
- ³⁰ Blair, “The rhetoric of visual arguments.”
- ³¹ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*.
- ³² Bitzer, “The rhetorical situation.”
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life*.
- ³⁷ Bitzer “The rhetorical situation.”
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Elgin, “Emotion and understanding.”
- ⁴⁰ Kahneman, *Thinking, fast and slow*.
- ⁴¹ Chrysakopoulou, “Wonder and the Beginning of Philosophy in Plato.”
- ⁴² Willis, “The current impact of neuroscience on teaching and learning.”
- ⁴³ Elgin, “Emotion and understanding.”

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Biography

With backgrounds in cognitive neuroscience, rhetorical theory, and classical, contemporary, and improvisational movement and sound, Ilya has spent much of his time synthesizing his interests to investigate interdisciplinary collaboration. A graduate of Harvard University, Ilya's current research focuses on the ethics of non-verbal interaction, in and beyond dance.

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