

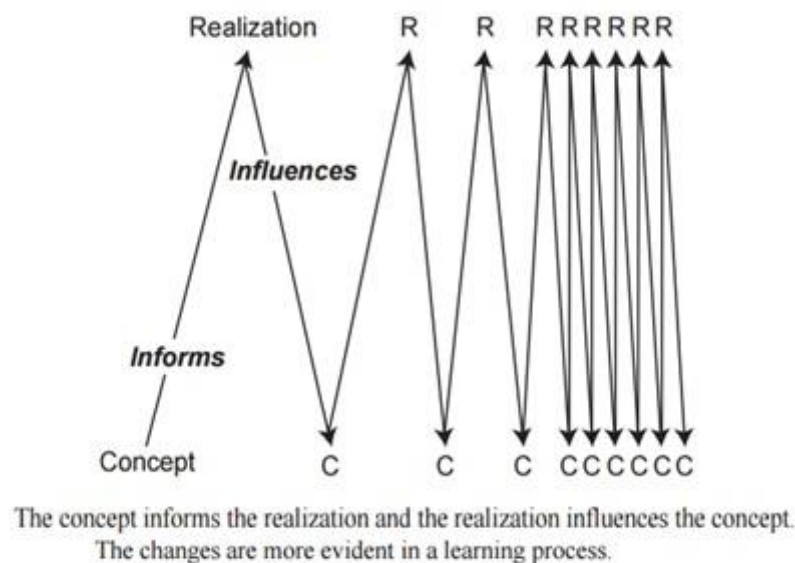
Writing a Dance:

Epistemology for Dance Research (excerpt)

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...“[F]ilm provides a record of a particular performance, rather than a record of a particular choreography in its ‘pure’ state” (Anya Royce Peterson). [...] If we ignore the “particular performances,” is there **a dance** that can be accessed “in its ‘pure’ state”? [...] Susan Kozel debates the objections she has been facing when she works with motion-capture techniques and virtual representations of dance: “What is human movement in the absence of the body?”[...]

We suggest that dance has two dimensions: the realization and the concept. The realization is the actual dancing of **a dance**. The concept for the same dance is the potential of skills, understanding, and knowledge that enables an individual or a dance community to dance that particular dance and to recognize and relate to each particular realization of it. A realization is the only full and proper way in which **a dance** becomes available for us. We consider demonstrations, rehearsals, and illustrated explanations as secondary and only as hints to a full expression of **the dance**. Consequently we see the full, normal realization as the primary source to, and the only fully valid form of, dance. The realization makes dance available perceptually. The skills and knowledge of the dance concept are invisible, but they are necessary for and integrated in the realization. Each realization of **a dance** can in principle add to the dance concept and this *influenced concept* will in turn affect the next realization. This will be a continuous process for a dancer: her concept is not fixed, but can be affected by each new realization, whether it is her own or she is experiencing somebody else’s realization. The changing concept will in turn affect each new realization. [...] The dilemma in working with any kind of “concepts” people may have about cultural systems is that norms and ideals may be strong and clear enough for people to talk about them, but they may not be carried through with the same consistency in realization. What people think and say they do, after all, is not always what they actually do. [...] The realist, like her colleagues in philosophy, would believe that it is possible to grasp intuitively the idea of **a dance** (essence of dance realizations) through realizations of dance. She would approach **an** invariant **dance** through singular phenomenal variations—realizations of it—and would believe that the basis of her dance knowledge is the real invariant dance, rather than variant phenomenal realizations of it. The dance-research nominalist would rather think that **a dance** doesn’t exist in reality—it is an abstract of our intellectual activity. The dance-research nominalist would believe that our understanding of **a dance** is constructed by our categorizations and the concepts we use. [...] In the world of dance criticism, the dance realization instead of **a dance** (work) (as in a dance concept) is supposed to be the main target.



[...]

When we analysed a good number of realizations of a *pariserpolka* in one dance community, Sauda, we found four motives that were continuously repeated in the same order. These four motives represented one runthrough of the dance done to eight bars of

music. There were, however, a number of variations to most of the four motives. The *pariserpolka* was done as a fourmotive dance all over western Norway, but different communities could use different variations of the motives. We could ask: are the *pariserpolka* variants in hundreds of communities all over western Norway **one dance**, or would it make more sense to say that the way *pariserpolka* is done in Sauda is one dance, “***pariserpolka from Sauda***”. If the latter is the case, then all the different communities would have their own version of *pariserpolka*. Would it make sense to call the *pariserpolka* in the neighbouring place of Sand, “*pariserpolka from Sand*,” even if it did not have any other variation elements than what we found in Sauda and, to the contrary, had even fewer? Consequently there is hardly any answer to the question “How many traditional dances are there in Norway,” mainly because we cannot tell what **a dance** is.’