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"Beyoncé is Not the Worst Copycat:" The Politics of Copying in Dance

Abstract   Beginning with the example of Beyoncé's music video for her song "Countdown," which copied movements from Anna Teresa De Keersmaeker's early choreographic work, this article explores the role of plagiarism, reconstruction, and recreation in contemporary dance. With regard to theories of repetition (such as those of Søren Kierkegaard and Giorgio Agamben), a particular focus is placed on the ephemerality and corporeality of movement, arguing for the convergence of copying and repetition in dance. While, due to the restrictions of human anatomy and the responding characteristics of movement, dancing is always already interwoven with the process of copying, it is, however, the inevitable inexactitude of these copies that guarantees the non-iterability of dance, as well as its alteration and innovation.

Keywords   Beyoncé, Anna Teresa De Keersmaeker, contemporary dance, plagiarism**,** non-iterability

> *"The irreconcilable elements of culture, art, and amusement have been subjected equally to the concept of purpose and thus brought under a single false dominator: the totality of the culture industry. Its element is repetition."*[1]

Stolen dance moves

Beyoncé's video "Countdown,"[2] released in October 2011, provoked an extensive public discussion on the role of copyright in contemporary dance that began in social media and spread to newspapers, radio, and television before choreographers and performers countered with their response.[3] The discussion arose when Beyoncé and Adria Petty, the director of the video for "Countdown," were harshly accused of having stolen, plundered, or at least copied dance moves created by the Belgian choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, namely from her two pieces *Rosas danst Rosas* (1983) and *Achterland* (1990), two of the most important choreographic works of European dance in the 1980s and 1990s, and which are now easily accessible on DVD and YouTube.[4] Compilation videos juxtaposing the so-called *original* movement material in De Keersmaeker's pieces and the allegedly copied moves were uploaded to YouTube shortly after Beyoncé released her video for "Countdown."[5] Finally, De Keersmaeker herself commented on Beyoncé's and Adria Petty's appropriation of her dance moves, judging it "rude" and stating that "what's rude about it is that they don't even bother about hiding it [...] this is pure plagiarism."[6] In the following, Beyoncé attempted to defend herself from these accusations by confessing that she was inspired by De Keersmaeker's work but also, ironically, extending her source of inspiration to many other artists as well:

> Clearly, the ballet *Rosas danst Rosas* was one of many references for my video "Countdown." It was one of the inspirations used to bring the feel and look of the song to life [...] I was also paying tribute to the film *Funny Face* with the legendary Audrey Hepburn [...] My biggest inspirations were the '60s, the '70s, Brigitte Bardot, Andy Warhol, Twiggy and Diana Ross. [...] I've always been fascinated by the way contemporary art uses different elements and references to produce something unique.[7]

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1 Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 108.
2 "Beyoncé - Countdown," YouTube video, 3:32, posted by "beyonceVEVO," October 7, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/2XY3AvVgDns.
3 See for example La Rocco 2011.
4 "Rosas | ROSAS DANST ROSAS," YouTube video, 8:23, posted by "Kaaitheater," October 10, 2008, https://youtu.be/oQCTbCcSxis; "Danza Contemporanea / "Achterland" - Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker," YouTube video, 1:08:54, posted by "Ana Moyano," November 19, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/mTCIVAXDstk; see also Keersmaeker and Cvejić 2012. For a recent, in-depth analysis of this controversy, see Kraut 2016, 263–280.
5 See for example https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3HaWxhbhH4c.
6 Keersmaeker, quoted in McKinley 2011.
7 Beyoncé, quoted in McKinley 2011.

While Beyoncé insisted on the uniqueness of her appropriation—she nevertheless released an alternative video for "Countdown" a few weeks later, which excluded the copied dance moves—De Keersmaeker published another statement that extended the accusation of plagiarism against Beyoncé by also comparing her video to the film-version of *Rosas danst Rosas* shot by Thierry De Mey in 1996:

> When I saw the actual video, I was struck by the resemblance of Beyoncé's clip not only with the movements from *Rosas danst Rosas*, but also with the costumes, the set and even the shots from the film by Thierry De Mey. Obviously, Beyoncé, or the video clip director Adria Petty, plundered many bits of the integral scenes in the film [...] People asked me if I'm angry or honored. Neither. [...] I am glad that *Rosas danst Rosas* can perhaps reach a mass audience which such a dance performance could never achieve, despite its popularity in the dance world since [the] 1980s. And, Beyoncé is not the worst copycat, she sings and dances very well, and she has a good taste! [...] And, what does it say about the work of *Rosas danst Rosas*? In the 1980s, this was seen as a statement of girl power, based on assuming a feminine stance on sexual expression. I was often asked then if it was feminist. Now that I see Beyoncé dancing it, I find it pleasant but I don't see any edge to it. It's seductive in an entertaining consumerist way.[8]

But is it possible to plunder choreography, to steal a dance move, or take a dance movement from someone else when dance—as is often said—is highly ephemeral? Dance does not last, but vanishes almost instantly, and this ephemerality is one of the main reasons why the question of copying in dance is so precarious and delicate. The implicit understanding of dance as a highly transient art also influenced discussions about Beyoncé's video. By stressing the peculiarity of her alleged plagiarism rather than the hard facts of copyright infringement and its legal consequences, the critics, choreographers, and performers re-sparked historical debates on the "inferior" nature of dance, due to its temporal and ephemeral nature.

It is intrinsically difficult to connect dance with copying because dancing does not last. When a single movement or a series of movements is imitated, or "copied" one might say, the object of imitation has already vanished.[9] This transient character makes dance inherently un-copyable; it comes as no surprise that the world of contemporary dance rarely uses the exact term "copying." In fact, it negatively suggests an inauthentic and mechanical repetition of someone else's movements, without implying that this someone has ownership on his or her movements and could reclaim a

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8   Keersmaeker, quoted in La Rocco 2011.
9   On the related case of non-reproducibility in performance art, see in particular Phelan 1993, 146–66.

copyright. Rather, the "copier" would refrain from calling this reproduction a copy mostly because of the cultural history of Western dance aesthetics since the rise of Modernism advocated for individual expression in movement. Instead of the term "copying," dancers, choreographers, and dance scholars would rather speak of "mirroring," "quoting," "imitating," and "repeating." Dancing primarily prefers the latter term in the rehearsal process (which in French is even called *répétition*) as well as in performances, when a dancer repeats a single movement or a group of movements several times. One may also speak of repeating a movement when several dancers perform the same step, twist, turn, or leap synchronically or one after the other.

Copyright of dance

Copyright of dance does exist, however, and various politics of copying in dance reflect the economic and political circumstances of these copyright laws. Beyond the obvious differences between the contemporary politics of copying dance in the US and Europe that culminated in the Beyoncé-De Keersmaeker controversy, the history of copyright in dance reveals the entanglement of choreography with political, economic, and juridical aspects.[10] Choreography, from its outset, has been linked to the politics of power, due to the way that choreographic movements were literally prescribed: Dance moves were written down in dance notations that then distributed in order to restage or, as one may put it, "copy" the same choreography at another place and time.[11] This applies particularly to the Beauchamp-Feuillet notation, the most influential dance notation for Baroque dance. Commissioned by Louis XIV, devised by Pierre Beauchamp in the 1680s, and published by Raoul-Auger Feuillet in 1700, its main aim was not to capture evanescent movements, but to guarantee a similarity between realizations or copies of the same choreography. On the one hand, this similarity was sought between the different versions that were realized in different cities. On the other hand, it was perhaps even more crucial that each of these versions shared a visual congruence of distinctive similarity with the authorized master-choreography developed around the royal court in Paris. Only through this congruence could the imperative character of a royal choreographic work be guaranteed and realized.[12]

With the background of this copyright strategy, it would only be a few decades later, that the *Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques* (SACD), a copyright collecting society for authors initiated in 1777 by the French playwright Beaumarchais, extended the performing rights

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10 On the history of copyright in dance, with a particular focus on the Northern American context, see Kraut 2016.
11 See Lepecki 2004, 126.
12 See Jeschke 1983.

to theatrical and choreographic works. Theoretically, from then on, there was the option to register a choreographic work for copyright. Nevertheless, a famous historical example of a denial of copyright for dance reveals the precarious relationship between movement-based performances and the claim of authorship. This is the case of the American dance pioneer Loïe Fuller, who wanted to prevent the illegal imitation of her *Serpentine Dance* and whose juridical invention against Minnie Renwood Bemis was dismissed by the US Circuit Court in 1892. This decision even set a precedent "that remained in place in the United States until the 1976 Federal Copyright Law explicitly extended protection to choreographic works."[13]

The court's argument reiterated the alleged inferiority of dance, historically constructed because of its increased evanescence that transcended even the transience of music and theatre performances which, unlike dance, could mostly rely on a written score or dramatic text. In the particular case of Loïe Fuller, the ephemerality of dance was even paired with a lack of narrative and a decisive tendency towards abstraction, both of which played leading roles in the court's decision. If nothing like a story or a dramatic structure exists, it is hard to define what the object of copyright actually consists of, when this very object—a movement or a series of movements—vanishes at the moment it is produced. Considering this alongside the notion of pleasure that this ephemeral art is connected with—an only slightly hidden link to the tradition of religiously-motivated prohibitions of dance—Loïe Fuller's claim to copyright for her work was dismissed. The court held that:

> An examination of the description of the complaint's dance, as filed for copyright, shows that the end sought for and accomplished was solely the devising of a series of graceful movements, combined with an attractive arrangement of drapery, lights, and shadows, telling no story, portraying no character, depicting no emotion. The merely mechanical movements by which effects are produced on the stage are not subjects of copyright where they convey no ideas whose arrangement makes up a dramatic composition. Surely, those described and practiced here convey, and were devised to convey, to the spectator no other idea than that a comely woman is illustrating the poetry of motion in a singularly graceful fashion. Such an idea may be pleasing, but it can hardly be called dramatic.[14]

The long history of dance notation since the fifteenth century and the increased importance of capturing movement through photography, film, video, and computer programs demonstrates that the mere equation of dance with traceless evanescence lacks sufficient complexity. Clearly, it

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13   See Kraut 2016, 43–83, here 43. Rancière 2013, 101.
14   "Fuller v. Bemis, Circuit Court S. D. New York, 18 June 1892." *Federal Reporter* vol. 50, no. 989 (1892): 926. Quoted in Rancière 2013, 102.

is true that dance does not exist beyond the very moment of its performance, and that any attempt to capture movement without any loss is prone to fail, but this does not mean that there are no techniques and aesthetics of copying in contemporary dance. However, these issues are mainly discussed under the terms of repeating and recreating movement rather than of copying, duplicating, or even stealing dance. Most of these choreographic methodologies deal with the cultural heritage of dance, and struggle not only with the ephemerality of movement itself but with the historic distance between the actual creation of a choreography and its recreation, often years later, with different dancers and under a different set of circumstances. Needless to say, these recreations, or "reconstructions" as they are called, face copyright infringement laws and claims of ownership for specific movements. The problem is exacerbated because any trained dancer can easily repeat them and will do so, inevitably and not on purpose, since the possibilities for bodily movement are limited; steps and leaps, even when under copyright, will be reproduced involuntarily.

Along with the question of how minute a movement has to be in order to be un-trademarked or "un-trademarkable," the phenomenon of unintentional copying applies likewise to Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. Postmodern dancers like Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs, and Trisha Brown influenced De Keersmaeker in the sixties and early seventies, and she may very well have copied specific dance moves or movement material from them. But the attempt to accuse De Keersmaeker herself of plagiarism and plundering postmodern dance pieces would be prone to fail, since the core of postmodern choreography includes simple, everyday movements—like walking, standing, kneeling, turning, and tossing or flipping the hair—all of which were inevitably and involuntarily copied by De Keersmaeker, as well as many other dancers and choreographers.[15] To make the whole nexus of copying and repeating, repetition and copy even more complex, De Keersmaeker's choreographic work—whether stolen, duplicated, or simply appropriated by Beyoncé—is in itself inherently structured by reiteration and alteration. The dancers in *Achterland* or *Rosas danst Rosas* repeat their simple dance movements systematically, with minimal choreographed variations that, along with involuntary slippages, amount to an inextricable network of highly similar yet always slightly varied movement sequences.[16]

Reconstructing dance

Now a major trend in contemporary dance due to increased funding, the reconstruction of influential works of the past tries to overcome the ephemerality of dance and seeks to retrieve what has inevitably been lost and what can be revived only to a certain degree from notations, sketches,

15 See Cvejić 2012, 14.
16 See Laermans 2015, 84–89.

and the bodily memory of former dancers. Perhaps the most prominent example is Vaslav Nijinsky's choreography for *The Rite of Spring* from 1913, of which no notation survives, but which nevertheless was first reconstructed by Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer with the Joffrey Ballet in Chicago, in 1987, following a seven-year study of remaining sketches and notes by Valerie-Gross-Hugo, Marie Rambert, and Igor Stravinsky.[17] Since 1987, Hodson's and Archer's attempt to reconstruct *The Rite of Spring* was restaged several times, with a climax in the hundredth anniversary of the piece in 2013, and performances in the Théâtre des Champs-Élysée in Paris and the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg.

Interestingly, Hodson and Archer are facing massive questions of copyright in their reconstruction of the work, which includes not only *The Rite of Spring*, but several other major Modernist dance works. At least in the case of Nijinsky's pioneering choreography, the legal status is quite clear: along with the composer Igor Stravinsky and the costume and stage designer Nicholas Roerich, Nijinsky declared the copyright for *The Rite of Spring* in 1913 with the *Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques* (SACD). With this declaration, the three contributing artists were given a copyright for the entire piece that would last for seventy years after the last among them died; this happened in 1971, with the death of Igor Stravinsky. For this reason, not only the music, but also the choreography for *The Rite of Spring*, is still under copyright protection; each performance would necessitate the payment of large royalties that Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer cannot afford.[18]

The case gets even more complicated; in the meantime, the French choreographer Dominique Brun has created another reconstruction of the same piece, rougher and less tamed than Hodson's and Archer's version, and therefore probably closer to the lost version from 1913 that caused the famous riot on 29 May, 1913. While Brun is apparently willing to pay the royalties—or has at least applied for the permission to perform *The Rite of Spring*—Hodson and Archer have chosen another method to deal with the question of copyright infringement: they do not claim to have reconstructed Nijinsky's epochal work, but rather speak of a "reasonable facsimile" that only approximates what the first work would have looked like.[19]

It seems to be futile to measure how much of Nijinsky's choreographic works remains in this facsimile and how authentic this legalized copy is or is not. The problem is more demanding: we have to keep in mind—and particularly in the case of Hodson's and Archer's attempt, it is hard to overlook—that contemporary movement training, as well as nutrition and other cultural determinants, have created dancers whose bodies move and dance differently than those from former centuries and decades. Solely with regard to physique, the muscularity and the movement capacities

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17 See Hodson 1996; Hodson and Archer 2014.
18 See Hahn 2013.
19 Hahn 2013, 27.

of contemporary dancers transform the reconstruction of an older dance work dramatically; hence it does not make sense to speak of an exact copy. This also applies to those cases when choreographers themselves re-en-act their own works from decades ago. The problems that plagued dance pieces from early Modernism, such as Vaslav Nijinsky's choreography for *The Rite of Spring*, or later works from the mid-twentieth century like Mary Wigman's version of the *Frühlingsopfer*, set to the same musical score by Stravinsky, affect postmodern dance as well. A significant case is Lucinda Childs's work *Dance*, from 1979 which, unlike the case of Nijinsky's work, has been archived through film recordings. While skinny dancers flap their arms imprecisely in the 1979 version, the dancers in the 2009 ver-sion move their athletic and visibly-trained bodies almost without any loss of control.

Childs's attempt at self-copying is more exact than the piece that it approaches, yet it also lacks the fascinating tension of the earlier version which derived from the strong implication of a choreographic structure and the individual and involuntarily imprecise execution. Moreover, in the same manner that the physiques of the dancers have changed, so have the viewing habits of audiences. What was new and astonishing decades ago has become commonplace, or will now be analyzed in a much more detailed and sophisticated way. In shifting the focus from the process of copying in dance to the notion of a copy in dance, the question of whether any such copy in dance is possible or not also relies on the collaborative relationship between the dancers and the audience. The audience inher-ently influences and helps to generate a dance and is thus involved in the creation of the copy of a dance and, most importantly, in preventing its exactness. For, due to the ever-changing composition of an audience, which is structured differently at each performance, no exact repetition of the same dance event can be guaranteed.

Besides the attempts to accurately reconstruct former dance pieces, be they the choreographer's own or someone else's work, another trend in contemporary choreography creates performances that deal self-reflec-tively with the impossibility of restaging older works and the constrictions that come with wanting to quote from them. These works clearly mark the difference between the alleged original and the copy, often in an ironic way, e. g. by changing the gender of the main characters or by referring to looming copyright infringements in the performance itself. Josep Cabal-lero García exemplifies this trend with his work on Pina Bausch's legend-ary version of *The Rite of Spring*, which her company still performs today, and from which foreign choreographers are only allowed to reproduce short sequences of dance movements. In his solo *SACRES*, from 2013, the male dancer Josep Caballero García incorporates iconic movements from Bausch's *Rite* that, in her version, are only performed by female dancers, such as the dynamic crunching of the elbows in the stomach while the upper body convulses. In other parts of the performance, Josep Caballero García, who has himself been a dancer in Pina Bausch's company, has his

head covered by a paper bag bearing a comic version of Pina Bausch's face, thus ironically indicating that now, as a solo male dancer, he would infringe on the copyright imposed on the movements while, as one of Bausch's dancers, he would not.

Responding to movement

I will now deal with the relationship between copying and dancing in a more general way, extending the idea of copying beyond the question of legally or illegally-repeated dance moves. First of all, we have to keep in mind that the question of copying in dance is not only related to the ephemerality of movement but has to deal with its corporeality as well, for in dancing, the process and product are indistinguishable: dancers expose themselves as moving bodies yet become the movement they fulfill. Thus the process of copying a dance move is nothing less or nothing more than its own product: the process of copying is the copy. In addition to this convergence of the repetition of a step and the repeated executed step, the condition of the body and its limited possibilities of movement always restrict the process of dancing. This constriction is much more general than any possible copyright may be, since the law of gravity applies to all human bodies as does the specific combination of bones, muscles, joints, and tendons that predetermine any movement, making it very difficult, if not impossible, to invent a movement that no one else has ever executed before. Thus we can say that copying always affects dancing and that a copy-free dance does not exist. From this we can also question the idea of originality in dance, especially the premise that no movement is ever entirely original since it has been executed many times before. In the case of a strongly codified dancing style like classical ballet, the almost alphabetical taxonomy of movements also prevents any originality of a figure or position.

While ephemerality reduces the amount of copying in dance by immediately extinguishing what may eventually be copied already at the moment of its emergence, the constrictions of the human body radically extend the idea of copying to almost general understanding. Any movement will always be at least partially a copy of other movements because the human possibility to move is limited and the sheer anatomy does not allow for radically innovative movements that have never been made before. However, with regard to the exactitude of the repetition, the relatively limited possibilities for a moving body paradoxically lead to an effect very similar to the mere singularity caused by dance's transience. Truthfully, these limitations impose traces of copying on each movement, yet the repeated performance of an already-executed movement also emphasizes its endless variations. Always slightly different, no movement is absolutely the same as another movement; it will inevitably be singular and exist in its own time. Each step is different from any other, and each turn is marked by the

conditions under which a particular body behaves in a particular place and time. By focusing on these differences, the complexity in the relationship between copying and dance suggests that, in dance, no exact copy exists at all. Due to the limited possibilities of movement, dancing eliminates concepts of originality; the same applies to the exactitude which dancers can never fulfill due to the individuality of their bodies.[20]

Thus copying in dance can be theorized in a two-fold way by pointing out the universal character of copying as well as the impossibility of exactness in its general repetitiveness. Dancing can't be entirely new and is simultaneously never the same. This dialectical approach to the relationship between copying and dance becomes more complex when we take into account the fact that no dancer dances in a vacuum, but is conscious of tradition, historical context, and, mostly important, of his or her audience. The latter is the exposure to spectacularity, to a situation of otherness, when people other than the dancer watch him or her moving.[21] On the one hand, this exposure is consistent with the singularity of movement, since the specific situation of the audience even stresses the particularity of each leap or step. That is, the various perspectives from the audience (i.e. front row vs. balcony) affect each audience member's visual impression of the dancers; those onstage can appear as slightly or strongly contorted, or as twisted and clenched. In this sense, everyone sees the movement in a singular way. On the other hand, the exposure to an audience reinforces the notion of copy, for the spectators watching a dance piece, with their own bodily experience and their knowledge of other situations of similar movement, testify that no dance is completely original.

To a certain degree, even the improvised solo in which someone dances alone in the studio and without an audience bears aspects of copying. Here, the dancer reacts and responds to an imaginative body and transfers phantasmagoric movements from the imagination to bodily reality. Laurence Louppe, the French dance theorist, has developed this idea into a theory of dance which posits that it is always a secondary and deduced movement, in which dancers read—or, we might also say, *copy*—what is already written in their imagination.[22] Understood in this general sense, dancing as copying is strictly relational and corresponds to others, whether they be imaginative or real counterparts, such as dance partners on stage or people in the audience.

In focusing on the reception of copying rather than on questions of similarity or imitation, the notion of dance as copying here almost converges with mimesis as a non-repressive and non-violent approach to the other. Following Adorno's and Horkheimer's idea of proper mimetic behavior,

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20 Regarding the inevitable fragmentation of choreography in a plurality of spatial inscriptions, cf. Derrida 1985. For the idea of "originals" as "works related to and derived from copies," see Elkins 1993, 120.

21 See Nancy 2008, 65.

22 See Louppe 2010. On the complex relationship between copying and writing, see also Sanchez-Stockhammer (this volume).

dancing can be described as a "snuggling" adaptation meant to preserve the non-identical in particular.[23] However, as an adaptation in that sense, dancing has a doubly critical character: it criticizes objectification of the other and is itself endangered and at risk of approaching otherness in a "non-snuggling" way, seeking to govern and rule the other by mimicking and degrading him to an object of imitative copying.

Strangely, contemporary dance theory tends to neglect the second aspect and is almost in denial about how dance violates the non-identical. Dance theory rather focuses on the first aspect, which sees dance as a powerful counter-model to oppressive social relations.[24] In consequence, copying in dance would lose its pejorative character entirely, almost to the degree that dance as copying is conceptualized as a new model of successful communication among individuals. This emphatic approach to dance comes particularly in view when we consider the current ideas about how dancers actually embody copying in dance, or how the copying process is conceptualized in terms of bodily response. Pivotal to these questions is the notion of *listening,* a term coined in the context of contact improvisation which describes a form of both conscious and subconscious perception.[25]

Part of a relational network between two or more dancers, bodies practice *listening* when they are receptive to the movements of others in a multi-sensorial way, including the senses of hearing, sight, touch, perhaps smell, and—most importantly—kinesthetic and synesthetic perception. Improvisation theories conceptualize listening as a process of mutual receptiveness and response that comprises approximation and alignment not only to another, but also to moments of bodily emulation and unintentional copying. Even beyond the willful imitation of the movement of others, the process of listening can become a way of copying, at least when copying not only applies to the constitution of visual similarity, but rather concerns a form of embodied mimesis. Perhaps rarely realized completely by entire bodies over a long period of time, but always partially by some limbs and for a few moments, a moving body taking part in a contact improvisation and listening to other bodies will copy foreign movements by paralleling his or her body to others. And that body will then be copied by others who respond to the response and copy the copy.

The vertiginous thrill of inexactitude

The difference between a first and second copy can be understood in terms of privation, losing, even of failure, as if the second copy loses an exactitude that the first copy might have had. This understanding of copying

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23 See Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 148.
24 See for example Husemann 2009.
25 See Brandstetter 2014, 221.

as privation, as lacking in exactitude, originality, and authenticity, coincides with a melancholic view on the impossibility of repetition. It is not by chance that, with regard to dance as one the most ephemeral art forms, this melancholic reaction to the impossibility of an exact copy may escalate to mourning, grief, and despair, especially on the side of the audience, as they are prominently reported to do in Søren Kierkegaard's reflection on repetition. Kierkegaard here focuses on the unrepeatability of dance and extends this principle to the general impossibility to regain exactly what has been lost:

> I was at the Königstädter Theatre the next morning. The only thing that repeated itself was that no repetition was possible [...]. The little dancer who had bewitched me the last time with a graceful manoeuvre that resembled the beginning of a leap, had made the leap. [...] After several days' repetition of this, I became bitter, so tired of repetition that I decided to return home. I made no great discovery, yet it was strange, because I had discovered that there was no such thing as repetition. I became aware of it by having it repeated in every possible way.[26]

In the field of dance in particular, we can also look at the impossibility of repetition in a much more welcoming and supportive manner by stressing the creative effect any incorrect repetition might have. For it sets free a whole dynamic of alteration resulting in the mere non-iterability of dance. In the course of repetition, and in the process of copying, physical constitutions and emotional and cognitive processes will always influence and change the way a pose is struck, a leap is set, or a figure is enacted. Thus, due to the fact that each dancer dances in a slightly different way and is not able to repeat even one dance movement without any variation, copying in dance is always already affected by inexactitude that results in the singularity of each movement.[27] It is here, in the non-interability of dance, or in the vertiginous thrill of inexactitude,[28] that the power of the copy is at work. For Giorgio Agamben, such repeating processes, always interwoven with alteration and never identical to themselves, even carry out a "messianic task,"[29] for they essentially involve creation as well as "de-creation:"

> Repetition is not the return of something identical; it is not the same as such that returns. The force and the grace of repetition,

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26 Kierkegaard 2009, 38.
27 See Schwan 2013, 223.
28 This expression refers to William Forsythe's ballet *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude* (Premiere: 20 January 1996, Ballet Frankfurt), a dance piece exposing the virtuosity of dancers in their attempts to execute movements with as much precision as possible.
29 Agamben 2002, 318.

the novelty it brings us, is the return as the possibility of what was. Repetition restores the possibility of what was, renders it possible anew. [...] But it is not a new creation after the first. One cannot consider the artist's work uniquely in terms of creation; on the contrary, at the heart of every creative act there is an act of de-creation [...] it means de-creating what exists, de-creating the real, being stronger than the fact in front of you.[30]

However, with regard to the everyday character of movement, the ordinariness of dance training and the exhaustion of rehearsal, it is appropriate to put this more prosaic understanding of copying on a level with Agamben's emphatic embracement of the inevitability of difference and innovation. Particularly in postmodern dance, and since then in many forms of contemporary dance, everyday movements play a decisive role in choreography and mark a renunciation of singularity and exposed virtuosity. To frame the prosaicness of these movements theoretically, we may return to Kierkegaard—specifically, to the very beginning of his reflections on repetition, where he compares repetition with a snugly-fitting cloth and distinguishes it from recollection and hope. Though repetition—or copying—is not possible as an exact and pure reconstitution of what has been, it has

the blissful security of the moment. Hope is new attire, stiff and starched and splendid. Still, since it has not yet been tried on, one does not know whether it will suit one, or whether it will fit. Recollection is discarded clothing which, however lovely it might be, no longer suits one because one has outgrown it. Repetition is clothing that never becomes worn, that fits snugly and comfortably.[31]

Thus, summarizing the theoretical approach to the role of copying in dance, we can state the ambivalence of an impossible identical repetition on one hand, with all its aspects of melancholia and prosaicness, and a dynamic of alteration, difference, and innovation, on the other. And we have to keep in mind, that we cannot separate the product of moving from the movement itself, so that in the particular case of dance, much unlike in any other form of art, copying and repeating almost converge. This leads us to our next section's focus on how contemporary dance interweaves emulation and recreation, especially through multimedia-based publishing, as Beyoncé's appropriation demonstrates. It speaks to the power of the copy that, in the wake of the scandal, Beyoncé's appropriation found its own imitations and that De Keersmaeker's original choreography *Rosas danst Rosas* was creatively copied hundreds of times.

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30 Agamben 2002, 316.
31 Kierkegaard 2009, 3.

The power of re-creation

The discussion of the thin line between robbery and recreation took a completely unexpected turn when De Keersmaeker—supposedly in an attempt to show her support for creative responses to her work in order to prevent the impression that she objected to them—mounted the program *Re:Rosas! The fABULEUS Rosas Remix Project*.[32] De Keersmaeker and her company released an entire website for the recreation of *Rosas danst Rosas* aiming to incite school classes and groups of younger people to re-enact the piece in their own surroundings, film it, and upload the new version to the website.[33] With the possibility to download the original music for the piece, the website for the *Re:Rosas! The fABULEUS Rosas Remix Project* combines historic video recordings of the piece, the 1997 version filmed in an old technical school in Leuven by Thierry De Mey, and several documentary videos. Yet, the main focus is set on three training videos teaching the movement score for *Rosas danst Rosas,* the work's structure, and finally the entire choreography. Of course, all the uploaded recreation videos are also available, and among the hundreds of versions (346 as of April 2016), one can find contributions not only from Belgium, but from countries worldwide:

> 30 years ago, dance company Rosas put itself on the map with the production *Rosas danst Rosas*. This choreography has since been staged all over the world. And now it's your turn. Dance your own *Rosas danst Rosas*, make a video film of it and post it on this site. In the following videos choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and dancer Samantha van Wissen will teach you the moves, step by step, from the second part of the performance. After that it becomes your dance: *you dance Rosas*. In a different setting, with a huge number of dancers... any way you like![34]

However, the motto "any way you like" does not mean an opportunity for the wild plundering of a famous dance score of the 1980s. On the contrary, the score is rather fixed and most of the recreation videos copy it decently, with evident variations in to what extent they follow De Keersmaeker's choreography in the exactitude of their movements. In addition, while the age spectrum of the participants ranges widely from kindergarten-aged children to university students, the recreation videos tend to be more exclusive in terms of gender variety. Clearly the vast majority of the participants

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32 The word "fabuleus" is the Dutch version of the English "fabulous." In addition to this, the particular spelling draws a connection to the theatre and dance company *f*ABULEUS with its specific focus on young audience and talent development. See "*f*ABULEUS." Accessed February 20, 2017. http://www.fabuleus.be.

33 See "Re:Rosas! The *f*ABULEUS Rosas Remix Project." Accessed February 20, 2017. http://www.rosasdanstrosas.be.

34 Introduction to *The fABULEUS Rosas Remix Project*. Accessed February 20, 2017. http://www.rosasdanstrosas.be/en-home.

are female, and in recreating De Keeersmaeker's original flipping and tossing of long hair, they reinforce the ideological background of allegedly feminine movements symmetrically repeated as a statement of girl power. Only a few versions show male dancers reenacting this reputedly feminist score, interestingly reinforcing the sexual character of the movements by dancing them with bare chests and erotic, almost aggressive, dedication.[35] What began in 1983 as a statement of girl power has changed into a queer, voguing-like appropriation, not necessarily with a homoerotic subtext, but clearly transforming and transcending an all-too-narrow aesthetic equation of femininity with hair toss and sitting cross-legged.

An explicitly queer appropriation emerged with Ton Do-Nguyen's adaptation of Beyoncé's Video *Countdown*, which the then sixteen-year-old teenager from Pennsylvania uploaded to YouTube in July 2012.[36] The shot-for-shot recreation, which went viral shortly after the upload, shows Ton Do-Nguyen wearing a blue sleeved blanket (or "Snuggie") instead of the various elaborate robes and bathing suits in which Beyoncé moves in front of the camera. The material derived from De Keersmaeker's early dance pieces in particular appears as a grotesque deformation when danced by a sixteen-year-old male under a sleeved blanket. With this Snuggie, Ton Do-Nguyen unwittingly pays tribute to Kierkegaard's mention of repetition as a cloth that "fits snugly and comfortably," and this peculiar costume clearly marks the difference between his appropriation and the prefiguring video. Dancing in his Snuggie and always wearing his metal-framed glasses, it is clear that Ton Do-Nguyen is not Beyoncé in drag and that his copy fails deliberately.

This failure of copying Beyoncé, along with the immense meticulousness with which Ton Do-Nguyen has executed his shot-for-shot recreation, makes his video a distinguished example of what Judith Halberstam has coined the "queer art of failure." According to Halberstam, this art of failure "dismantles the logics of success and failure with which we currently live. Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmarking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world."[37] In this sense, Ton Do-Nguyen's imperfect emulation, though a product of avid fandom, not only undermines Beyoncé's exposure of wealth and sexual attractiveness, but even ironizes and questions the commerciality of the emulated "original," which is of course itself a sample of borrowed inspiration and

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35 See for example "Cravos danst Rosas," Vimeo video, 4:17, uploaded by "Irene Bandeira," September 29, 2013, http://www.vimeo.com/75739022.
36 See for example "Countdown - Beyoncé (Snuggie Version)" Dailymotion video, 3:33, uploaded by "Spi0n," July 18, 2012, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xs8u08_countdown-beyonce-snuggie-version_fun. For queer appropriation of Beyoncé's videos in general, cf. Bench 2013.
37 Halberstam 2011, 2.

imitation.[38] His recreative appropriation, or pastiche, highlights the whole nexus of reference, repetition, and alteration that governs copying in dance, and which extends beyond a logic based on a single "original" and a plain "copy."[39] As a result of this, the emulation of a dance could even be better than the dance it emulates and can add humor to the repetition process. So, when Beyoncé herself finally responded to Ton Do-Nguyen's video on her website, she could only affirm its dynamics of difference and innovation by calling Do-Nguyen's copy "brilliant" and stating: "I think he did this video better than I did! Love. B."[40]

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38 For the relationship between YouTube aesthetics and copyright, see Hilderbrand 2009, 225–243. See also Vernallis 2013, 127–154. For the dialectics of appropriation between criticism and affirmation, see Crimp 1993, 127–137.
39 On the emptying-out-effect of the copy, see Graulund (this volume).
40 Beyoncé 2012.

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