

DANCE LIKE EVERYONE'S WATCHING: NIETZSCHEAN PHILOSOPHY IN THE
WORK OF MARLEE GRACE

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by

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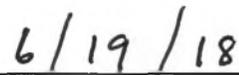
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San Francisco, California
2018

This project intends to fulfill two purposes: to address a gap in Nietzsche scholarship surrounding the subject of dance, and to engage with a dance project, *Personal Practice*, that has yet to be the object of critical consideration. I would like to argue that Nietzsche not only properly diagnoses a widespread illness endemic to Western culture, but provides a means for its cure through the practice of revaluing values. I will look at Marlee Grace's project *Personal Practice* as a natural exploration of this idea, and show how Nietzsche's beckoning towards embodiment plays out in the modern world of technology and social media. Marlee Grace and Friedrich Nietzsche express an ultimate faith in the human project through practice in order to create value, inspire meaning, and abundantly love life with the entirety of the self.

I certify that the abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee



Date

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read "Dance like Everyone's Watching: Nietzschean Philosophy in the Work of Marlee Grace by Jessica Nicole Lynch, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Humanities at San Francisco State University.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Christina Ruotolo", written over a horizontal line.

Christina Ruotolo, Ph.D.
Professor of Humanities

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Carel Bertram", written over a horizontal line.

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Professor of Humanities

In July of 2016, I found the *Instagram* account of Marlee Grace. I'm not particularly active on *Instagram*, but I was watching a video posted by one of my favorite singer/songwriters, Katie Crutchfield, a.k.a Waxahatchee. In the video, she plays guitar and sings with her twin sister while a third person dances. The three women never leave the frame. The caption reads:

made this video w my blood/soul sisters [@havecompany](#) & [@allisoncrutchfield](#) at my house tonight...i wrote this song today...follow [@personalpractice](#) marlee is endlessly inspiring.

The song ends up being the title track of Waxahatchee's fourth record, and the dancer in the video ends up being the subject of this paper.

Inspiring indeed. I remember clicking on her account, a webpage called *Personal Practice*. I was so intrigued, I'd never seen anything like it. The account consists of a collection of short videos, about 5-20 seconds, of her dancing. What is this? Dancing, yes, but how? At the time of my writing this, there are 735 videos. The account has 30,000 followers, but she doesn't follow any other accounts. It exists in order to document one woman's dancing, every day.

Grace obtained a bachelor's degree in dance from the University of Michigan. Upon graduating, she got sober after years of alcoholism and drug use. She got married, and opened a small business and community center in Grand Rapids, where

she sold handmade goods and created a residency program to host artists. During that time, she found that she was not dancing as much as she would like. The project began in Pennsylvania in July 2015, and continues to this day. She created *Personal Practice* as a way of holding herself accountable to a promise she made to herself: to dance every day. She dances in all sorts of places— her bedroom, friends' houses, outside, at the mall, etc. The project has seen her through a divorce and a move across the country. In 2017, she published a book she wrote about *Personal Practice* called *A Sacred Shift*, which documents the project in written form, cataloguing song titles, locations, and comments. In the introduction, she writes:

Personal Practice serves as an archive that chronicles the end of my marriage, moving out of my home, many stages of grief as I witnessed my friend family have babies, lose those babies, lose their parents, their pets, their friends. It documents me falling in and out of love, more than once...and then closing my business, getting rid of almost everything I own, and moving to California. It documents my body changing, getting stronger and then weaker, and then stronger again. (8)

People leave all sorts of comments on her videos, sometimes tagging friends and family saying, “Check this out, I think you’d like it.” What is it about Grace’s project that people find so compelling?

Personally, I am interested in Grace's project because I also dance every day as a personal practice. I grew up practicing ballet, jazz, and modern dance, but stopped sometime in high school. Shortly after, I moved from my home in southern California to the San Francisco Bay Area, and found myself needing a creative outlet. I discovered that something of the years I had spent training in the practice of dance was latent in my body and was somehow accessible to me after a long hiatus. I started dancing more—just at home. I put on whatever music I wanted and danced, sometimes in the morning, or after work. It has never been something I took very seriously (because how should one take dancing around in a t-shirt seriously?) but it is something that I have been doing almost every day for years. This is what is intriguing to me about Grace's project— she takes it seriously. As if dancing at home is a legitimate form of art; as if informal dancing is capable of generating value in ways that are more easily recognized in dance on a stage. I have taken formal dance classes since high school and have considered branching out from my living room mirror, but nothing seems to touch on what I experience while dancing at home. I started dancing more at the same time I started studying philosophy, and I have always been amazed at how well they work together. Dancing in private has always felt like an intimate way of pulling things into a center and connecting to myself. It allows me to explore and understand myself in ways that a class setting prohibits.

This paper is also about Nietzsche. I started reading Nietzsche as a teenager, and he has remained compelling to me for well over a decade. He is a bizarre and contentious

philosopher, writing essays and axioms that criticize Western culture and blur lines between poetry and philosophy. His work is wild. He is at times completely lucid, while at others incoherent and self-contradictory. Few philosophers are as misquoted, misunderstood, and notorious as Friedrich Nietzsche. Often considered one of the first existentialist thinkers, he inspires a life affirming ethos wherein each individual is responsible for generating meaning for themselves by overcoming their own suffering. Nietzsche has always been a visionary critic of Western culture, and I have found that both the roots and branches of his criticisms are still applicable to contemporary Western life.

While taking Sandra Luft's course on Nietzsche and Postmodernism at San Francisco State University, I noticed his extensive use of dance imagery. I began investigating how and why he attributes so much importance to dance, and why the metaphor persists throughout his books, from the earliest to the latest. I've found that idea of dance is central to his life's work in philosophy. Therefore, I was surprised to discover the scarcity of literature on the subject; in the arena of Nietzsche scholarship, dance is rarely considered. Likewise, Nietzsche is conspicuously absent in dance scholarship. The introduction to the *Routledge Dance Studies Reader* claims, "Of the classic Western philosophers, only Nietzsche gave sustained attention to dance," but he is not mentioned further in the text or footnotes (9). In a paper on Nietzsche's aesthetics and judgement of style, Babette Babinch writes, "There is here the possibility of an extraordinary philosophy of dance, as this runs in [Nietzsche's] work from start to finish"

(250). However, she does not develop this philosophy any further. In all of my research, I have found only one critic who works on the relationship between Nietzsche and dance in the way it deserves.

Kimerer L. LaMothe wrote *Nietzsche's Dancers: Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and the Revaluation of Christian Values* from a religious studies perspective. Lamothe's text shows the extent to which Nietzsche wrote about dance, and the specific ways in which his work was influential to Martha Graham and Isadora Duncan, two influential dancers and choreographers largely responsible for the development of modern dance. LaMothe writes about Nietzsche's direct influence on their thinking about dance, and how his writing helped them to gain a clearer vision for their art. She has researched all of the instances in which Nietzsche references dance throughout his writing career. Her work has been invaluable in my attempt to understand mine, especially in providing research details that are beyond the scope of this paper. Additionally, Grace's project adds to LaMothe's discussion of Nietzsche and dance. Grace's Nietzscheanism is different from that of Duncan and Graham because she lives and works in the age of the internet and technology; her problems are more contemporary. Duncan and Graham used Nietzsche to revalue their own relationships to Christianity, but Grace revalues her relationship to technology and performance space, seemingly without having read Nietzsche. Grace does, however, carry their torch in a certain sense, because she thoughtfully rebels against traditional dance conventions. This project intends fill a gap in existing scholarship about Nietzsche's attention to dance.

So, what does a nineteenth century German philosopher have to do with a dancer from Michigan on *Instagram*? I realize this project is a strange effort in a lot of ways. Why put these two artists next to each other? I feel inspired to do it in spite of the seeming randomness and potential irreverence because I see these artists as having a special kind of overlap.¹ They both seem to understand that it is the nature of the human being to be moved. Their works touch on the core of what it means to be an embodied self, and how this self is able to overcome adversity, redeem life, and exist in the world. Additionally, Grace's project subverts and questions what it means to be a dancer in ways that seem quite Nietzschean to me. I initially attempted to discuss her project in terms of contemporary dance scholarship, only to find that such scholarship seems primarily interested in topics that are peripheral to what I am interested in, such as questions of performance, race, gender, and sexual orientation. While these components of dance studies have profound implications for the meaning of dance in contemporary culture, they are not necessarily interesting to me in this context. I am interested in the basic kind of ongoing human investigation that happens in Grace's dances. In her book, she writes:

¹ Reichmann and Pellissari tackle a similar project that applies Nietzsche's philosophy of dance to a Brazilian novel. They work primarily from Nietzsche's first book *The Birth of Tragedy*, which develops his theory of the Apollonian and Dionysian. This theory discusses dance as a kind of orgiastic, self-effacing communal activity. I do not think *The Birth of Tragedy* encapsulates the stakes of dance for Nietzsche as well as his more mature works, mostly because it ignores the role of practice.

I just wanted to get myself to dance more, and the only way I could figure out how was to say 'hey look I did this today' and then do it every single day. (10)

Her work articulates something that undercuts notions of identity, politics, and performance studies. Her project shows dance as a fundamentally personal practice that retains a spontaneous quality, not as one specific performance designed to incite particular ideas and emotions in an audience. Nietzsche is the only critic I found who is also interested in dance in this context. These two projects seem unrelated, but closer examination reveals a connection between Nietzsche and Grace that belies a superficial interpretation.

Nietzsche's ideas are still as fresh, invigorating, and haunting as they were 150 years ago, because he not only properly diagnoses the widespread illness endemic to Western culture, but offers a cure. Grace's work is naturally sensitive to this illness. They are two people working on the same problem. The goal of this essay is to demonstrate that each will illuminate the other.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is Nietzsche's masterpiece, written at the height of his luminosity. It is Nietzsche's attempt to revalue Christianity through art. Zarathustra embodies Nietzsche's ideal as a dancer and life affirming yeasayer. Largely reminiscent of the New Testament, *Zarathustra* is a loose narrative of the travels, sermons, dreams,

and aphorisms spoken by a wandering teacher-prophet. It is brilliantly poetic and richly explores Nietzsche's highest ideal of self-overcoming. The text itself is opaque and tangled with no clear plot line. I will work through several key parts of *Zarathustra* in order to identify what I consider the core of Nietzsche's philosophy, clarifying some of Nietzsche's ideas in order to develop their application to dance.

Much of Nietzsche's work involves identifying problems with Western culture. Nietzsche believed that other, earlier cultures, were comprised of healthier, stronger individuals-- people who were capable of generating cultures with life affirming values in the forms of religion, myth, and art. However, as stronger individuals continued to conquer and overpower the weaker, the weaker inevitably grew resentful and unconsciously created a new system of values that would serve the interests of the "herd mentality." According to Nietzsche, this is the origin of Christianity. It is a system of slavery to the illusion of morality, designed to establish weak people in positions of power while strategically suppressing the strong by encouraging guilt and shame. For him, Christian values are comprised of life-denying psychological tricks, designed to keep people restrained, resentful, sick, and enslaved. Zarathustra says in "Of the Afterworldsmen":

It was the sick and the dying who despised the body and the earth
and invented the things of heaven and the redeeming drops of blood: but

even these sweet and dismal poisons they took from the body and the earth!

They wanted to escape from their misery and the stars were too far for them. Then they sighed: 'Oh if only there were heavenly paths by which to creep into another existence and into happiness!' - then they contrived for themselves their secret ways and their draughts of blood!

Now they thought themselves transported from their bodies and from this earth, these ingrates. Yet to what do they owe the convulsion and joy of their transport? To their bodies and to this earth. (60)

Christianity has taught the West to be ashamed of the body, that the intellect is superior to the senses, and that it is necessary to sacrifice this world in order to attain salvation in the next. According to Nietzsche, Christianity is the worst kind of miseducation because it contaminates both the body and the soul. It is a philosophy generated by sick people, for other sick people. In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche writes, "Hatred of *mind*, of pride, courage, freedom, *libertinage* of mind is Christian; hatred of the senses, of the joy of the *senses*, of joy in general is Christian" (143). People born into this culture are necessarily conditioned in its values and ideals. Sickness results when values originate in a place outside of the self, and Christianity is sick because the interior framework it offers is rooted in resentment and can only breed more of such. Nietzsche writes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "All living creatures are obeying creatures...he who cannot obey himself

will be commanded. That is the nature of living creatures” (137). Nietzsche thought most people need to be Christians because they lack the courage, strength, and will to become self-determining beings. When a culture has been such imbued, it has degenerated into decadence.

Cultural decadence sets in when the moral systems promoted by society deny essential human truths, thereby preventing development, strength, and health in human beings. A decadent culture is caught in the throes of weak, lazy values, feasting on and promoting decay. Symptoms of decadence include exhaustion and resignation, wanting not more from life, but less. It is the desire for *deus ex machina* quite literally— a desire to give up, be saved, and escape. It is the failure to understand that life is not about preservation but expansion. LaMothe says that Nietzsche “identifies a distinctively modern decadence characterized culturally and among individuals by forces of desensualization and oversensitization” (33). According to LaMothe, desensualization occurs when people lose touch with their bodies, and hence the ability to receive sensory information about being in the world. Desensualization stems from privileging the intellect and suppressing bodily instinct. Similarly, oversensitization occurs when a distorted emotional impulses overpower bodily impulses. Both prevent education and understanding, keeping the individual blind to a different way of relating to life. Nietzsche argues that we must use the intellect, emotions, and physical body in order to generate new values for ourselves, rather than grasping at the straws society presents us with. Zarathustra speaks of those living under such conditions, saying:

Alas! the time is coming when man will give birth to no more stars...

‘What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?’ thus asks the Ultimate Man and blinks.

The earth has become small, and upon it hops the Ultimate Man, who makes everything small. His race is as inexterminable as the flea; the Ultimate Man lives longest.

‘We have discovered happiness,’ say the Ultimate Men and blink. (46)

This is the contemporary world of nihilism. There are no stakes for anything. Desensualization denies access to the body as the primary site through which human beings create meaning, and oversensitization makes it impossible to determine value. Zarathustra says, “One must have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star” (46). Chaos and therefore dance cannot exist under the influence of nihilism, making the confrontation of nihilism within the self essential. LaMothe puts this well:

Dancing is a kind of activity that not only guides a person in attending to his instincts, but strengthens those instincts. As the instincts grow stronger so too does the conflict among them. However, a person with strong instincts also develops the ability to tolerate the conflict, and even

welcome that conflict, as the condition out of which he can become who he is. (96)

Chaos and conflict form the site of creativity, whereupon the individual becomes the battleground for the human experience. People must experience chaos to generate movement, for without conflict, the impetus to move vanishes.

Nietzsche's recognition of decadence developed alongside his interest in natural science and Darwin's theory of evolution. It became even more apparent to Nietzsche that the human being cannot look to God, or science, for answers. Science pointed to the idea that God did not create mankind in his own image, because all of life is a product of evolution. As Zarathustra says of a hermit he meets in the forest, "Could it be possible! This one saint has not yet heard in his forest that *God is dead!*" (41). Any meaning that people derive from religion or myth has become irrelevant because science has hijacked metaphysics. In a lecture on Nietzsche, Princeton professor Michael Sugrue says:

Darwin has fundamentally changed our understanding of ourselves and we can never go back. Darwin has conclusively proven that human beings are a part of nature. They are not part of God's providential plan, there was no such thing as Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. In fact, all we are are complicated apes. He looks at the whole history of human beings and at the status of history and says, we going to have to rewrite our history...God is dead, it's just that none of you people have figured

that out...what are we going to do to find some value here in the world? We have to make choices, we have to make decisions, if we can't do it based on the ancient religious myths, what will we do? (10:16-12:23)

The cultural conditions in late nineteenth century Europe catalyzed a shift in consciousness as it came to terms with the idea that it is now impossible for people to derive meaning from religious systems. Western culture functions within the shell of the Christian tradition, retaining its life-denying values while failing to offer any kind of teleological alternatives. Science is the natural progression from an overly-intellectual Christianity, and is just as useless for the purposes of generating meaning and purpose for the individual life. This has left an entire culture stranded and afraid, because beliefs have expired and have no replacement. Zarathustra hears a prophet speak:

We have harvested, it is true: but why did all our fruits turn rotten and brown? What fell from the wicked moon last night?

All our work has been in vain, our wine has become poison, an evil eye has scorched our fields and our hearts.

We have all become dry; and if fire fell upon us we should scatter like ashes - yes, we have made weary fire itself.

All our wells have dried up, even the sea has receded. The earth wants to break open, but the depths will not devour us!

Alas, where is there still a sea in which one could drown: thus our

lament sounds - across shallow swamps.

Truly, we have grown too weary even to die; now we are still
awake and we live on - in sepulchres! (156)

Human beings have killed God, and science cannot take His place—now what?

Ultimately, everything for Nietzsche boils down to questions of value and the human necessity for it. How are we to give our lives meaning? How can we determine value? What does the responsibility of self-overcoming entail? How do we find the strength to continue when we fail to do this? How do we recognize and stand up to the pressures of society? How do we create value and meaning in a decadent, nihilistic culture? How do we overcome the decadence and nihilism within ourselves?

For Nietzsche, the only way to overcome decadence is through the revaluation of values. It requires understanding what causes suffering, and allowing it to teach us who we are, and who we want to be. Nietzsche realizes that in order to truly and fairly relate to Christianity, he must use it to create something different, rather than simply condemn. This relationship can look like repression and resentment, or strength and ability. Nietzsche writes, “Spirit is the life that itself strikes into life: through its own torment it increases its own knowledge” (127). This requires the human being to thank suffering for its wisdom, and invite it to come back. The individual is responsible for creating his or her own new culture from the ashes of the old. A decadent individual cannot do anything about a decadent culture. The best any individual can do is to

continually will his or her own overcoming of decadence. Nietzsche calls this the will to power. It is an enormous amount of pressure, but the only available path. We will come to understand why we suffer, and how to use suffering in order to overcome it.

For Nietzsche, the revaluation of values begins with restoring faith in the human body and in the earth. He writes, “There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom” (62). In order to revalue Christian morality, or Western mythology surrounding the body, the individual must connect to his or her own body and sensory experience, for decadence is trained into the whole individual insidiously, just as sickening to the body as it is to the spirit. The conditions of this connection require a movement away from the internalized shame imposed by the tradition that created sin. It also requires the will, the decision, to continue doing so indefinitely. Connecting to the body allows the senses to be educated with direct experience. Education requires the use of the entire body, not just the mind, because for Nietzsche, there is no difference. He writes:

You say “I” and you are proud of this word. But greater than this - although you will not believe it - is your body and its great intelligence, which does not say “I” but performs “I”...

Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage - he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body. (62)

The human being does not realize that the powerful feeling that comes from saying who

and what you are pales in comparison to actually doing who and what you are. The physical experience of living in the human body generates all thoughts and all feelings. The Self is not a product of the heavens or of culture, but of the individual human being. LaMothe writes:

Metaphor making lies at the root of all psychological and social phenomena, including language and art, science and religion, and our sense of ourselves as individuals and humans...Metaphor making as a fundamental drive of bodily humans highlights what becomes a crucial ingredient in Nietzsche's embrace of dance as a metaphor. 'Dance' provides persons with a means of reawakening to the primary levels of metaphor making-- the self creating capacity of their bodily being. (34-35)

Because the body is how human beings receive sensory information, it is the only medium through which we can generate metaphor. Nietzsche sees how Western Christian morality insidiously controls the individual's sensory experience, instead of allowing it to teach. He advocates for a reorientation towards the body, which can expose the ways in which we are both desensitized and oversensitized. This information can in turn allow for the generating of new values.

Therefore, Nietzsche's life's work in philosophy arrives at dance as the ultimate life-affirming discipline. Zarathustra says, "I should believe only in a God who

understood how to dance” (68). Dance is constantly present, requiring flexibility and awareness. The moment it stops moving, it ceases to exist. It is both a discipline of self-knowledge and a practice of producing metaphors. Experience is honest and immediate--the body shows us who we are, and what it is that we’re doing. Metaphor allows the human being to mediate experiences by creatively affirming life. This is why dance is Nietzsche’s highest ideal. This is monumental. If we can understand what Nietzsche is attempting with his work in philosophy, we cannot possibly think of dance in the same way. His philosophy revolutionizes what practicing dance means. LaMothe provides a salient interpretation of the first occurrences of Nietzsche’s dance imagery in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. She writes:

As early as the first pages of the “Prologue,” Nietzsche identifies Zarathustra as a dancer; he is the chorus, the image of a Dionysian worshipper and companion. As Zarathustra descends from his mountain to share his love for ‘man,’ a hermit-saint recognizes him: “Does he not walk like a dancer?” The hermit has faith in God; the dancer has faith in the earth and in the *Urbmensch* as the “meaning of the earth.” His ability to dance is a sign of this revalued faith. As Zarathustra enters the marketplace, moreover, he sees a tightrope walker—in German, “rope-dancer,” Seiltanzer. He compares this rope-dancer to a man overcoming himself, dancing along the rope from animal to

Übermensch. To dance is to learn and to know that “God is dead”; to dance is to cultivate and to have faith in the earth; to dance is to express and to give birth to new values. (255)

Nietzsche associates dance with clarity and lucidity. The hermit saint says, “His eyes are clear, and no disgust lurks around his mouth,” recognizing that Zarathustra has overcome resentment, and now “walk[s] like a dancer” (40). This dancing spirit within Zarathustra indicates his power to create value and meaning. Zarathustra confirms this when he says, “I know how to speak the parable of the highest things only in the dance” (135). This statement has powerful implications for Nietzsche’s work. He admits that language is ultimately insufficient to express his highest truth. Nietzsche’s highest ideal is therefore not language but dance.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is a text that itself dances. *Zarathustra* asks readers to dance over and beyond everything—stars, oceans, mountains, etc. Nietzsche had to write *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in such a chaotic and confusing style because of his insistence on the necessity for making meaning; the form reflects the content. It is a book written in the spirit of itself. Sometimes language fails, and *Zarathustra* is not afraid of that. Nietzsche writes two songs in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “The Dance Song” and “The Second Dance Song.” These passages are some of the most confusing parts of the entire book, wherein Nietzsche describes his love of two women, Life and Wisdom. However, Nietzsche’s language seems to break down here only because it reaches so high.

Nietzsche understands that language must necessarily risk becoming meaningless, because words are merely symbols, a system of signs. Language is inherently creative and poetic because it arises from sensory experience. Therefore, language, along with dance, also occupies space at the primary level of metaphor making.

While LaMothe's discussion of bodily becoming, metaphor making, and kinetic images provides a life affirming ideal for the practice of life, her argument arrives at literal dance as the only way to revalue values. She dismisses the idea of the potential for the dancing spirit to permeate any and all aspects of life. She writes:

The body that writes is still, stiff. The mind that thinks is empty. Consciousness is concentrated into a point so small that it disappears. The writer has thought herself into a void. It is time to draw consciousness back into the fibers of the body, and breathe blood back into the reservoirs of muscle memory. (232)

LaMothe knows that no physical evidence exists that proves that Nietzsche himself literally danced. Because she insists on the necessity of literal, physical dance, she excludes Nietzsche from his own philosophy. Her work illustrates the importance of dance for Nietzsche, but ends up refusing the idea that he could have embodied his ideal. LaMothe's discussion of Nietzsche and dance is thorough and sensitive, but falls short in that it denies the possibility that the practice of dance could look like a lot of things. Grace's practice begs this question because her dances blur lines between dance

and everyday life. In one dance, she eats a cookie, in another, she pets a dog. She performs these activities self-consciously and intentionally as part of *Personal Practice*. She understands that in order to revalue values, the practice of dance must constantly be taking place. Because it is impossible to always be dancing in the performative sense, the metaphor must encompass all of dance practice, and then move beyond it. This movement is what affirms life and revalues values, even if it looks less like dance and more like language (or anything else for that matter).

Practice emerges as the most critical component of the revaluation of values, because the individual must continually will self-overcoming. The idea of practice in Nietzsche's work is subtle but pervasive. The will to power, self-overcoming, and revaluing values are events which occur not once or intermittently, but by necessity all the time in the form of practice. Zarathustra speaks about practice in this sense:

And when I beheld my devil, I found him serious, thorough,
 profound, solemn: it was the Spirit of Gravity - through him all things are
 ruined.

One does not kill by anger but by laughter. Come, let us kill the
 Spirit of Gravity!

I have learned to walk: since then I have run. I have learned to fly:
 since then I do not have to be pushed in order to move. Now I am nimble,

now I fly, now I see myself under myself, now a god dances within me.

(68-69)

The “enemy” of dance is the Spirit of Gravity, that which makes heavy. However, without gravity, dance would be impossible. The gradual practice of working with gravity itself gives Zarathustra the ability to fly, to overcome his devil. This leads to an eternal dance with the Spirit of Gravity, over and beyond abysses. This is Nietzsche’s ideal relationship to suffering: always striving to overcome it while recognizing its necessity. As Zarathustra says in part four:

Truly, I too have learned to wait, I have learned it from the very heart, but only to wait for myself. And above all I have learned to stand and to walk and to run and to jump and to climb and to dance. This, however, is my teaching: He who wants to learn to fly one day must learn to stand and to walk and to run and to climb and to dance - you cannot learn to fly by flying! (213)

Learning to dance requires patience with oneself: practice is self-knowledge, and self-knowledge is practice. It requires discipline, training, and commitment. This learning, like any learning, demands creativity, flexibility, and struggle. It can look like so many different things. Practice means doing something even when you don’t feel like it. It means sometimes being open and experimental. It can be fun, miserable, rooted in

previous experience, or completely new. LaMothe finds Nietzsche advocating for practice in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

What is essential ‘in heaven and on earth’ seems to be, to say it once more, that there should be obedience over a long period of time and in a single direction: given that, something always develops, and has developed, for whose sake it is worth while to live on earth; for example, virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality— something transfiguring subtle, mad, divine. (Nietzsche via LaMothe, 92)

This obedience that Nietzsche speaks of is the essence of practice. From this discipline one finds a reason for living. Indeed, if these are these stakes, practice is all we have. Again, LaMothe quotes Nietzsche saying in *The Gay Science*:

The great health—... Whoever has a soul that craves to have experienced the whole range of values and desiderata to date... whoever wants to know from the adventures of his own most authentic experience how a discoverer and conqueror of the ideal feels, and also an artist, a saint... needs one a thing above everything else: the great health— that one does not merely have but also acquires continually, and must acquire because one gives it up again and again and must give it up. (Nietzsche via LaMothe, 94)

Here, Nietzsche discusses giving up one's own health as the condition for having it at all. Health, like meaning and value, is generated through destruction. It is knowledge of the self that is generated through the wisdom of the body, and the intimacy of this knowledge cannot but affirm life.

To discipline oneself to wholeness is to enact a love for one's self so great that it expands to include, forgive, and redeem all dimensions of oneself.
(LaMothe, 96)

LaMothe thinks that dance is an inherently religious practice, and that Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham consciously used dance to overcome the ascetic Christian values of hostility towards the body. She calls this "theopraxis," which is "a complementary practice for creating and becoming our highest ideals of self" (LaMothe, 48). Theopraxis allows the dancer to create kinetic images, or metaphors of the self, and "educate the senses to the rhythms of bodily becoming" (LaMothe, 58). For LaMothe, these kinetic images produce wholeness and meaning.

I would not argue Marlee Grace is trying to dismantle and redefine Christianity through her *Instagram* account. However, what she is doing is remarkably Nietzschean, especially because she does not appear to be directly influenced by Nietzsche. She embodies and plays out the drama in her work, thereby attesting to the perennial, sensitive, and grave nature of Nietzsche's ideas.

Because dance culture is connected to the larger culture, it is inevitably contaminated by the same nihilism and decadence that infects the individual. In contemporary Western culture, in order to be considered a dancer, one must be a professional. This requires years of training focused on development of technical skills, years of dancing to the music of teachers, performing and rehearsing choreography in order to perform dances for a panel of judges, or an audience in a theater. It requires the body to look a certain way, i.e. thin. The audience experiences these feats of athletic movement with an attitude of awe and appreciation. In order to make the cut as a professional dancer, one must have invested one's entire life in the pursuit. A dancer could put decades of work into the art with no guarantee of making it in the field, and for those who do, the career is short-lived. For those who do not enter the professional dance world, platforms for dancing outside the institution are rare. Outside of the studio or theater, options are very limited. People can dance at shows, the bar, or the club. There's the wedding reception. And Zumba. What about yoga? Maybe just a gym membership and a Spotify playlist will do. The practice of investigating embodiment is inaccessible in this culture. This is tragic, because, at some level, everyone loves dancing. They love dancing because they love music. Our culture is up to its ears in inspirational quotes, such as "Dance like no one is watching," and even Nietzsche's, "And let that day be lost to us on which we did not dance once! And let that wisdom be false to us that brought no laughter with it!" (Zarathustra, 228). If perchance an opportunity to dance presents itself, it is surrounded by a strange sense of shame. No one wants to be the first one on

the dance floor, and certainly no one wants to be seen dancing outside of an appropriate context.

Today, we have inherited the neuroses of both a Judeo-Christian culture and a scientific culture. Society is founded on both Christian ideals and a scientific resistance to those ideals. Most ubiquitously, ascetic Christianity and scientific intellectualism have developed into the form of technology. The internet, social media, and smartphones can promote the disembodiment, alienation, and shame previously induced by Christianity. They seduce people into comparing themselves to others and neglecting the sensory world. To use a randomly chosen but easily recognized example from contemporary culture, the Apple store is perhaps the bastion of this ideal— it is an austere, post-human world, sanitized and intellectual. It only sells those devices necessary for the re-creation and reinforcement of these values. However, just as Nietzsche argues that a simple rejection of Christianity is impossible, it would be equally unreasonable to reject technology outright.. As human beings, we have no choice but to be steeped in our own culture. Revaluing the values of our culture allows for us to understand our relationship to it and figure out how to situate ourselves within and outside of its functioning. Grace's project is, in a way, a commentary on the use of the internet, social media, and smartphones. In *A Sacred Shift*, she writes:

So many people who take my class found me because of a smartphone app, not because I have a college degree in dance. They come to my class

because they too are looking for ways to be in their body, with others, off of the screen. And that has been the greatest gift of all. (10)

She treats *Instagram* as a vehicle for making things happen in real life, using the internet as a way to get off the internet. There is something cyclical, self-contradictory, and necessary about the conditions of this project that reminds me of Nietzsche. She bridges from an intimate solitary practice to having that practice viewed by tens of thousands of others. This is not a rejection but a reorientation— a revaluing of values.

Grace calls attention to what it means to be a human being trying to dance in contemporary Western culture. She also implicitly challenges the notions of classical dance traditionally upheld as necessary signifiers of skill and ability, namely technique and flexibility. Compared to the technical training of classical ballet, her dances seem self-nourishing and gentle. Some of her dances are so informal, they seem to be more like dance sketches. Her work argues that dance does not have to be formal to generate the experience of learning. She instead favors an experimental, improvisational approach to movement. This approach allows her to move through space with freedom and sensitivity. By improvising, she is able to work with previously studied movement and muscle memory to generate dances that exist only in the moment. She has gained a vocabulary of movement through practice, and this enables her to explore her own being in the world. She illustrates that practice cannot be serious all the time.

With *Personal Practice*, Grace offers a solution to the problem of space and scarcity of platform for dance in contemporary Western culture. Her work overcomes the problem by showing that it is an illusion. She shows that there is no problem of space, because dance can happen anywhere. She creates space out of nothing, both on the internet and in real life. Additionally, by putting the project on *Instagram*, she creates a platform, a place where people can see her work. She challenges the idea that dance must exist in a particular form and context. She creates space for an embodied practice on the internet, a place where embodiment does not exist. By thinking about , she has redefined what dance can be in our culture.

The physical locations of her dances are diverse and unconventional. There are several videos of her dancing on the edge of a cliff in Point Reyes, outside and with no music. There is wind blowing into the phone speaker. This dancing could not possibly be more connected to the earth, and serves as a medium of connecting her body to it. Equally connected to the earth is the dance inside the grocery store, the dance in her sweatpants in the kitchen, and the dance in the yard. Even the dances she makes at home and friends' houses are so human, they cannot be further from the intellectual constraints of ballet, Christianity, or the internet. There is no right and wrong way to dance, just as there is no right or wrong place to dance--these concepts become irrelevant. There is only the experience of moving in a human body and listening to it in order to improvise. There is practice but not planning. In her book, Grace writes:

slowly and patiently learning that
 nothing is forever & nothing can
 be planned and time time time (64)

The implications of divorcing dance from its traditional constraints are profound. What is unique about her project is that she calls attention to dance as being portable and accessible. There is an endearing honesty and humility about the project. She dances to music that she likes, mostly pop and oldies, but also experimental ambient music. Like Nietzsche says, “Not good taste, not bad taste, but my taste” (213). Grace writes:

twenty seven year old grand rapids
 woman discovers Justin Bieber in 2015,
 enters into a new joy for living (56).

Dance and music are inherently connected, and the experience of being moved by music is an essential component of dance. For Nietzsche, to be connected to music in this way is to experience divinity. Grace’s relationship to pop music is the perfect example of revaluing values. In the process of participating in her culture, she takes from it what is useful to her without shame, and reshapes it into something life-affirming. She is not afraid to find joy in the context of what is available to her. This is not about denial or escape. It is an overcoming of decadence, a natural learning of how to use things in life in the service of health. Additionally, such experiences of music that generate dance are

inevitably personal and spontaneous. Both Grace and Nietzsche suggest that sometimes dance is not for anyone besides the self. Grace writes:

every tiny move a tiny love letter

also the art of just lying down

when the tiniest moves are your

biggest moves and every tiny

dance a love letter to yourself

and an invitation (55)

Here, dance exists only for the dancer. She has many followers, but she follows no one. There is no physical audience-- in fact, no other people. There is no theater, no lights, make-up, costumes, tickets, or money. No showy technique. No rules.

Everything is broken, and she has done as Zarathustra:

I, the sufferer, overcame myself, I carried my own ashes to the mountains,

I made for myself a brighter flame. (59)

She has created something completely new from the ashes of the broken components of both dance culture and contemporary Western culture at large, generating new ideas for what dance can be.

In addition to creating new ways of conceptualizing dance, she has generated a new way to conceptualize *Instagram*. She seems to understand what is broken about our culture's relationship to social media, because she participates in social media as a cultural being. We, as a society, spend hours posting, scrolling, and comparing. She is no stranger to the philosophical problems and nuances of smartphone use. However, instead of rejecting the platform entirely, she evaluates it, and figures out how to use it in a manner that promotes health. In an interview Grace did for the *New York Times* about *Personal Practice*, she says, "An important question for me is how do we put the phone down and participate in our real lives as movers, as embodied people?" This kind of questioning that is rooted in direct experience is exactly what Nietzsche advocates for in his work, and parallels his own relationship to Christianity. He works with it rather than running away from it. She explores this tension through her work and practices navigating it as a serious component of the medium.

This project is shared publicly on *Instagram*, and consequently participates in a form of cultural exchange. As an artist, Grace is connected to others in a larger cultural context. Sharing work publicly promotes relationships and community, and actively shapes social values. This connection is the essential component in cultural exchange, because it gives birth to new values. Although people primarily respond to her posts textually, some people leave comments saying how she has inspired them to start making their own videos. *Personal Practice* questions ideas of what it means to perform, and what it means to observe.

Like Nietzsche, both Grace and her work exhibit an inspiring bravery. Her daily practice of dance has seen her through many difficult times and life changes. Any daily documenting of life must necessarily include all of life: highs, lows, and everything in-between. As Nietzsche affirms, chaos, struggle, and suffering are essential to education and creativity. Grace's project illustrates this day after day, as she practices working with chaos:

Archiving this work in physical form, taking a look at every single video, watching myself in front of the painting in my living room less and less, was incredibly painful. And incredibly healing. And just, it was cool. It was weird. It got really fucking sad. 2016 was so so sad. I cried so so many times. Getting divorced is really sad. Moving away from the only home you've ever known is so fucking sad. BUT! It's also so completely life giving to be free of what isn't serving you anymore. And documenting that year through my movement reminded me that you can feel all of it at the same time. (7)

Grace's breaking with traditional conceptions of dance and social media opens the door to further questions about art. The interdisciplinary nature of Grace's project generates new ideas about what art in general can be. *Personal Practice* is a video making, writing, and philosophy project just as much as it is a dance project. The collection of videos on the page has amassed a certain amount of gravity. She

intentionally posted them in a public place as a collection, some permutation of autobiographical documentary. Film bridges the space between the intimacy of practicing something alone and the ability to share a piece of that with others at the same time. Grace recognizes that making a video as well as a dance everyday is a necessary part of her practice. Video makes dance, an art form that is inherently ephemeral, seem permanent. Videos are posted in the wake of each day of movement, which along with other days and other videos, create a body of work in the form of miniature documentaries. This has the effect of transforming what is a personal practice into a kind of performance. Usually, dancers practice a performance, but Grace performs a practice. She shows up every day in spite of any of the million things that might get in her way.

For a large section of Grace's book, she talks about different kinds of practices that exist for her. She writes:

when you feel defeated and don't want
to practice but the practice is what keeps
the defeat at bay practice

looking back to see what's
different practice

always loving everyone i've

ever loved practice

every hour longer awake a more full heart

for being alive less

feeling alone

hello monday practice

permission to feel practice. (28-31)

Practice is connected to everything in life, as these various kinds of practices demonstrate. Practice doesn't always look the same, and therefore requires flexibility and improvisation by nature.

Personal Practice blurs the lines between dance, film, and art, just as Nietzsche blurs the lines between philosophy and poetry in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Both Nietzsche and Grace affirm life through creating art that allows them to revalue nihilistic cultural values. The culmination of Nietzsche's work arrives at the individual practice of literal and metaphorical dance as the individual practice of self-love. For him, philosophy, the love of wisdom, is the art of cultivating love of self through practice. It is the essential, perennial human project with diverse emanations. Grace understands the project, and the stakes movement and embodiment have for the human being. Marlee Grace and Friedrich Nietzsche practice ultimate faith in the human project: to create value, inspire meaning, and abundantly love life with the entirety of the self.

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