



2020

## Becoming-Pite: An Application of Deleuzian Theory to Chrystal Pite's Choreography

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Thesis title Becoming-Pite: An Application of Deleuzian Theory to Crystal Pite's Choreography

Intended date of commencement May 9, 2020

Read, approved, and signed by:

Thesis adviser(s) Dr. Brynnar Swenson Dr. Brynnar Swenson 5/1/2020  
Date

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Reader(s) Susan McGuire \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Becoming-Pite:  
An Application of Deleuzian Theory to Chrystal Pite's Choreography

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Dance,

College of the Arts,

The Department of English,

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences,

and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Kyra E. Laubacher

April 24, 2020

Art is productive; it produces affects. The artist, as creator, constructs the productive force which is harnessed and reproduced in the respective works of art. She thus creates the conditions for the production of affects, those qualities and intensities that bridge the gap between concrete and abstract and remind us of our human condition (Massumi 1995, 85). The philosophical concept of affect, explained by Massumi, describes an emotional response, or effect, that is not experienced in the conscious and emotional register. Affect is not emotion, but an intense strain of illogical sensation—the “crossing of semantic wires,” the association of entities that typically elude each other but whose union creates new sensations of intensity (86-8). Affect is a feeling the individual cannot place, often likened to the experience of goose bumps or other unconscious corporal responses. The fact that such sensation is ultimately inarticulable, elusive of concrete definition but still connected to material reality holds revolutionary potential. Not quite transcendent yet still out of our control, affect offers an inherent critique of the idea of the stable subject which permeates contemporary capitalist society. The human, subject to affect, is an unstable subject who cannot rely on the illusion of fixed order in the universe; the contents of the world are much too slippery to fit within a structured mold.

Art destabilizes the human, rupturing the concept of the individual as primary universal organizer. The artist recognizes infinite potential in the virtual as expressed through intensity, something semantically inarticulable but nonetheless accessible via artistic production. Chrystal Pite, contemporary dance choreographer, is one such artist in whose creations the workings of affect make themselves perceptibly clear. We may turn to poststructuralist philosopher Gilles Deleuze and his theories of multiplicity, repetition,

and nomadism in order to further understand the work that she has put forth. Pite, through art and affect, reminds us of the human condition of the de-centered individual, and Deleuze's theories assist in further understanding this message that her works convey—a necessary translative tool in consideration of our inability to comprehend affect through typical linguistic structures. In this thesis I will provide a novel analysis of Crystal Pite's choreography using the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze to expose her unique critical artistry and reveal how her creative process also allows us to better understand Deleuze's philosophy.

Pite's choreography reflects the multiplicitous communicative and affective propensity expounded by Deleuzian critical theory; her choreographic work is almost a physical manifestation of those very concepts. Applying Deleuzian literary theory to Pite's choreography assigns this work broad value that furthers the critical exploration of the way aesthetics, philosophy, and even politics are intertwined. It is critical that we continue to create connections across diverse disciplines and explore potential modes of thought; we are, as Deleuze writes in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), perpetually in a state of *becoming* as we conceive the world within and around us (42). This thesis aims to fuse the works of a choreographer and a philosopher into a unique assemblage of critical becoming, unveiling further modes by which one may understand the nature of the de-centered individual and the production of the overarching relationship between art and philosophy.

That dance carries communicative and affective power has been widely established within the greater field of dance rhetoric (Engelsrud 2007, Lavender 1995, Warburton 2011). The idea that dance may be treated with strict semiotic guidelines,

however, proves ultimately false, as dance incorporates various aesthetic, structural, physical, and kinetic properties which opens the door to wider exploration of meaning and communication than what pure text may allow. Unlike literature and philosophy, dance is not a textual medium. Dance is three-dimensional and utilizes time, sound, and space in a way that pushes the limits of complete comprehension via traditional forms of aesthetic theory. I recognize that this is not a new phenomenon, but innovative methodologies are nevertheless necessary to address the inevitable distortion that arises from the translation of choreographed movement—a physical, experiential sort of communication in real-time—into text. In abstracting and layering ideas in reference to three-dimensional space, this process opens traces of philosophy through the realm of dance. This distortion demands that we continue the analysis of dance-meaning as a system that transcends traditional semiotic understanding. The idea that the communicative and affective propensities of dance transcend liminal borders of grammatical or vocal translation is made productive of new forms of meaning when considered in relation to Deleuze's writings on the potentiality and multiplicity of languages and regimes of signs. Using this approach does, in fact, strengthen the analyses put forth in this study.

### **The Producers**

Gilles Deleuze belongs to the poststructuralist movement of philosophy and is considered one of the most influential figures in critical theory from the latter half of the twentieth century. Diverging from the earlier structuralism, Deleuze and his contemporaries depart from a fixed idea that understanding human life requires the

unveiling of its inherent relationship to a larger, universal, all-encompassing structure or form that is capable of translating the operations of human conception of meaning, value, and sense. The poststructuralist field rejects the mandatory nature of such a systemized reliance on assigned relationships, instead carrying forth the assertion that a binary view limits a more complex understanding of the relations which may act together in the production of the various forms and ideas encountered in human existence. Simply put, poststructural theory shifts binary forms to the fluid, or even choreographed, play of meaning. This transferal opens the chance for increased potential in terms of the production of meaning and of various forms themselves, and it is this liberating productive potential from which the bulk of Deleuzian theory stems. Within his body of work, Deleuze maintains that what humans understand as existence is comprised of forces, which in and of themselves are comprised of further infinite parts. All that exists does so within a constant state of re-formulation, association, and transformation by nature of their multiplicitous composition, and this carries profound implications in how we define our comprehension of the present moment. I will focus on Deleuze's central concepts of multiplicity, assemblage, repetition, territorialization, nomadism, and becoming, as they are deployed in *Difference and Repetition* (1968) and *A Thousand Plateaus* written in conjunction with Félix Guattari. Each concept discussed will act as a translative tool, providing a base of textual explication which one may apply to the physical world of choreography. To apply such components of Deleuze's post-structural theory to Pite's choreography spurs the development of reciprocal understanding, deepening one's capacity for appreciating each through the other.

Crystal Pite, born in British Columbia in 1970, has gained status as a premier choreographer within the contemporary dance field. As a young dancer, Pite performed with the world-class Ballet British Columbia (Ballet BC) for eight years before transferring overseas to Ballet Frankfurt in 1996 under the direction of contemporary ballet giant William Forsythe. There, she gained further insight into her existing conceptions of creation, performance, and improvisation in such a way that “created space” for the evolution of such elements in her own choreographic idiom (Girard 2003). In 2001, Pite took up the position of Resident Choreographer for Les Ballets Jazz de Montreal before establishing her own company, Kidd Pivot, in Vancouver a year later. Kidd Pivot is now internationally acclaimed as a leading dance company with a full repertoire of original pieces including *Betroffenheit* (2015), *Dark Matters* (2009), *The Tempest Replica* (2011), and *The You Show* (2010). Pite has also choreographed numerous full-length works on such esteemed companies as Nederlands Dans Theater, National Ballet of Canada, Ballet BC, Paris Opera Ballet, The Royal Ballet, and Pacific Northwest Ballet, among others. In consideration of style, Pite is most known for her striking visuals in both small- and large-scale works, incorporating hyperbolized gesture, extreme postural detail, sweeping momentum with fluid transitions, and seemingly spineless movement punctuated with jarring accents into her body of work. She is also recognized for her uncanny ability to imbue her works with intensely affective properties, creating such an atmosphere of feeling or perception within the performative space as sets her apart from many of her contemporaries. In surveying her work, it becomes increasingly apparent that Pite’s creative idiom aligns with much of Deleuzian poststructuralist theory as a separate but homologous iteration in choreographic form.

## **The Canon and The Multiplicity**

Pite's *The Seasons' Canon* (2016), *Flight Pattern* (2017), *Emergence* (2009), and *Body and Soul* (2019), have taken the dance field by storm with repute of choreographic excellence. Each of these pieces includes casts of thirty or more dancers, large-scale works which allow access to striking full-stage visuals and collective physicalities only possible with the utilization of large groups of bodies. Pite speaks of her method of choreographic adaptation between her work with smaller, more intimate groups of dancers and larger groups:

By using simpler physical structures over a large number of bodies, I can get the kind of complexity that I'm interested in. It's unlikely that I'm going to get that kind of complexity in an individual body in the time that I have. So the sinewy and sentient detail you might see in a Kidd Pivot dancer is transferred onto the collective; it exists, instead, in the expansive images [I] can build with thirty-plus dancers on stage. (Schabas 2019, 2)

The complexity and “sinewy” detail transformed onto a greater body of dancers allows for a macroscopic view of the multiplicitous nature of Pite's choreography, which is internally saturated with intricacies of complex weight-shifting, battling tensions, and her hallmark quality of nearly spineless fluidity. As these physical multiplicities of movement within the individual dancer expand onto the larger surface of bodies, motifs such as Pite's canon emerge and take shape in the forefront of the picture.

Fellow contemporary choreographer and established colleague of Ms. Pite, Lesley Telford of Inverso Productions, indicates that one of the defining characteristics of Pite's choreographic work is her “extremely groovelike, exceptional use of canon” (Lesley Telford, personal communication 2019). *The Guardian*, *ArtsEquator*, and *The*

*Arts Desk* have also commented on Pite's mastery of canon, a fundamental choreographic tool involving dancers' successive repetition of a choreographic phrase one after the other, and incarnate flow in such large-scale pieces. Some have even compared the visual panorama produced by Pite's canons to the mesmerizing installment "Kinetic Rain" (Chan 2019) or a "pulsing, rippling organism" onstage (Weiby 2016), and *The Guardian* writes that Pite's work stands as a "reinvention of the corps de ballet" (2019). The quality of Pite's canon is such that it appears to be a drawn-out temporal instant, almost a vision of fast paced, ultra-saturated temporal space as one would, paradoxically, see in slow motion visuals. Each transitory moment within the canon is so fluid and instantaneous, bleeding from one into the next, that the collective product projects the illusion of a single continuous force adapting and moving through space; the whole force gives the appearance of a sinuous body visually infinite in its temporal and spatial existence. Such an effect does largely depend on a vast number of bodies onstage—a quite visible multiplicity.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze puts forth the idea of the multiplicity, and then the assemblage, as elements of unbounded potential in thought and action as existence may permit. Of the multiplicity, Deleuze writes:

Ideas are multiplicities: every idea is a multiplicity or a variety. In this Reimannian usage of the word 'multiplicity'... the utmost importance must be attached to the substantive form: multiplicity must not designate a combination of the many and the one, but rather an organization belonging to the many as such, which has no need whatsoever of unity in order to form a system. 'Multiplicity', which replaces the one no less than the multiple, is the true substantive, substance itself. The variable multiplicity is the how many, the how and each of the cases. Everything is a multiplicity in so far as it incarnates an Idea. Even the many is a

multiplicity; even the one is a multiplicity. Everywhere the differences between multiplicities and the differences within multiplicities replace schematic and crude oppositions. Instead of the enormous opposition between the one and the many, there is only the variety of multiplicity - in other words, difference. (182)

Herein, even the one is multiple, and the multiple constitutes the idea in principle. There are no structural binaries—i.e. high and low, human and animal, tree and non-tree—but there are infinite measures of differentiation within and without the infinitely collective structure. No one element is destined to belong to another; all are fair game in the question of potential association. This allows for freedom and for possibility, equalizing elements of matter and of thought and furnishing them with the capacity for complete mobility in their potential relations with one another. Out of this theory arises the form of the assemblage: “There are only multiplicities of multiplicities forming a single assemblage, operating in the same assemblage: packs in masses and masses in packs” (Deleuze 1994, 3). The assemblage, strictly speaking, is a unique amalgamation of different pieces, bodies, or fragments which form a new body capable of producing an infinite number of potential effects. It is not designed to indicate a specific, predetermined outcome—a mandatory moral, for example, or a gumball in exchange for a quarter—but it allows for the creation of more relations set in motion by those encapsulated within the assemblage form. Deleuze describes the assemblage in terms of a book:

In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification... All this, lines and measurable speeds constitutes an *assemblage*. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity—but we don't know yet what the multiple entails when it is no longer

attributed, that is, after it has been elevated to the status of the substantive... The beauty of the assemblage is that, since it lacks organization, it can draw into its body any number of disparate elements. The book itself can be an assemblage, but its status as an assemblage does not prevent it from containing assemblages within itself or entering into new assemblages with readers, libraries, bonfires, bookstores, etc. (1983, 3-4)

Here, Deleuze writes of bodies within bodies, comparable to the image of the infinite number of atoms which assemble any given physical form. The assemblage may be constituted of any number of ideas—physical, theoretical, sensory, etc.—which may operate on their own speeds as they cross over each other’s paths on the field of free space. The joining of hands may constitute a couple, the union of poem and fragmented prose may materialize a book, and the fusion of dark contortion or spineless flow among various bodies onstage may create a striking visualization of kinetic canon. Most importantly, the assemblage is not limited to that which comprises it in any given moment. The assemblage contains the potential to form new assemblages with any number of external or internal bodies, continually evolving its existing form throughout temporal space. This is a sphere of creation and potential, and it is a phenomenon easily recognizable within Pite’s exceptional use of canon in her large-body works.

One may turn to the opening of the “Spring” section from *The Seasons’ Canon* for a clear visual example of the assemblage at work. The piece begins with the vision of an elongated mass of bodies, hunched over and connected limb-to-trunk facing stage left. After a few moments of individual movement introducing the simple motifs of head-twitching and full-body rippling, the group surges into a series of massive waves created by collective undulation, integrating the head twitching motif in unison. The mass then liquifies into an array of silky open-armed combés, wide-stanced and in canon at

separate intervals, like eddies in a busy current. While no longer physically connected, the group maintains its sense of multicellular union as a body comprised of seemingly identical repetitious movement. What appears to be the recurrence of the same movement is, however, a constant flow of change—a continuation and progression of the collective moving body that showcases its constant transformation within temporal and physical space. As each dancer performs the given motif, the whole mass, encompassing all that appears onstage at any given moment, changes in such a way that makes it irrevocably different from its prior state while maintaining its sense of totality; the mass is transformed and re-affirmed by effect of multiplicitous assemblage, a product of bodies within bodies which allows the collective to take on increasingly various forms and velocities.

As such, perhaps nowhere are Deleuze's concepts of multiplicity and assemblage more visually apparent than in Pite's canons. One body changes form and energy in execution of the choreographed sequence, then the next, and so on in a seamless shift with visible force, direction, and duration. Despite the similarity in individual movements, as the canon transpires the entire body onstage undergoes a shift as the multitude of energies and individual performances mesh collectively in one visually identifiable whole which simultaneously takes on identity as its own amalgamative being. What the audience sees at first glance is the moving shape of massed dancers—a rippling wave or twitching field—but with focused vision it is possible to isolate each constructive body in his or her unique performative space. The assemblage, while fluid and constantly evolving, evokes a sense of one-ness with its comprising parts—one-ness, that is, by association in respect of the assemblage's multiplicitous nature. This condition

places the assemblage in a mobile position within two extremes of being. On one side, Deleuze refers to lines of signification, those seemingly hard-lined principles or assumed truths and categorizations, as *strata* (1983, 7). Directly in opposition, in de-stratified territory, stands what Deleuze calls the *body without organs* (BwO), a body or concept with total lack of organization. To be clear, the BwO exists as a purely theoretical limit of extremity that involves a perpetual state of destratification and disassociation (3). The assemblage lies along the plane in between either extreme, thereby bridging the gap between strata and BwO:

On side of a machinic assemblage faces the strata, which doubtless makes it a kind of organism, or signifying totality, or determination attributable to a subject; it also has a side facing a *body without organs*, which is continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities to pass or circulate, and attributing to itself subjects what it leaves with nothing more than a name as the trace of an intensity. (5)

Given this illustration, to designate Pite's masterful use of canon as a visual embodiment of Deleuze's assemblage makes evident sense. For as much as each dancer creates the collective form in the present moment, they each constantly dismantle it with the continuation of their movement. The speed of transition with which Pite constructs her canons allow this process of constant stabilization and de-stabilization to occur instantaneously to the viewer's eyes. The shape morphs by nature of its parts in motion and transition—bodies rippling, heads twitching, forms sweeping across the floor—thereby determining the course for the assemblage's progression in time and space as it

occurs. Stable on one side and de-stratified<sup>1</sup> on the other, the canon-as-assemblage provides ample room for creation and further associative potential.

### **Repetition in Dance-Theater**

One may introduce Deleuze's theory of difference and repetition in relation to Pite's dance-theater work, noting its physical manifestation within these pieces of choreography on a number of different levels. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze defines "repetition" in the following manner:

Repetition only refers to unique systems/sequences (art is always repetition): To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent... The repetition of a work of art is like a singularity without concept, and it is not by chance that a poem must be learned by heart. The head is the organ of exchange, but the heart is the amorous organ of repetition. (1-2)

It is important to distinguish that by "repetition," Deleuze does not indicate the identical replication of a pre-existing event or condition. Such an occurrence, he maintains, is impossible in a world constructed of constant destratification, movement, and interchanging. Instead, repetition in Deleuzian theory denotes the recurrence of the production of *difference* (136). If nothing can ever be identical, what repeats is only ever the process of creation itself, which is inherently different in each of its materializations; "The present is always contracted difference... In consequence, the difference between

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 384-86. Deleuze describes "striated" space as that space onto which the dominant controlling body (State) projects its ideological lines of structure and hierarchical organization. Striated space remains thus unnatural in its rigidity and structural agenda; de-stratified space, contrarily, allows for the natural fluidity and mobility between and within bodies as they move upon the open plane of potential association or disassociation.

presents themselves is that between the two repetitions: that of the elementary instants from which difference is subtracted, and that of the levels of the whole in which difference is included” (184). As such, repetition begets difference as a productive force. This becomes visually apparent within the arts as creative media, and Pite’s choreography is no exception.

In her interview with Martha Schabas, Pite explains, “I don’t think I can just deliver dance moves—when I’ve tried to work on a purely abstract level, I’m not inspired. I think the best pure choreography I’ve made has been in direct response to trying to deliver a state or an image or an emotion or a scrap of narrative” (2). Simply stated, Pite does not create movement for the sake of movement itself. Her choreography must be fueled by some sort of external or internal inspiration—much more literary or spiritual than mathematic. Pite expounds on the broad base of research which she builds for herself, integrating months’ worth of reading, contemplation, and writing into her preparatory process for any given piece (2). This all takes place long before she begins to construct any sort of movement; the unseen, collectively catalyzing idea comes foremost, and it must be understood in its entire depth prior to its physical manifestation in dance.

Indeed, for as reputedly spellbinding and visually alluring as Pite’s works are, her choreographic focus lies much deeper than the surface of moving imagery onstage. The lines, forms, and impulses in her work are certainly present—and brilliantly constructed, nonetheless—but as she explains, she does not choose to choreograph with aesthetic or kinetic study as her primary agenda. Schabas is quick to note that such an approach is unorthodox in modern-day choreography, particularly in the

contemporary dance field in which Pite identifies. Bridging the gap between literal play-by-play narrative and the complete abstraction of popular plotless works, Pite's choreography offers a fusion of both sides—and perhaps more. Without the binary boundaries of either total narrative, as in Marius Petipa's classical ballets, or total non-narrative, as in William Forsythe's body of totally abstract contemporary ballet work, Pite is free to pursue the entire space of potential dance-communication that holds the potential to become. The crux of this ability lies in Pite's utilization of seemingly infinite different movement forms—from abstracted contortions to hyperbolized pedestrian gesture—with a critical insertion of affect, therein energizing the thousands of kinetic forms she creates with connotative or meaningful properties.

In her interview with the Banff Centre, Pite describes her decision not to “throw the baby out with the bathwater with [the] rejection of story” as many contemporary choreographers have done, but she checks this statement with the following clarification:

I'm not so interested in story ballet... I'm not interested in working with story in the same classical way, but I'm interested in using story as a way to get at humanity, and... using story as a way to connect other humans. So for me that has a lot of value, and that's something to take with us... it's less about passing on my knowledge than it is for creating the conditions for a kind of connection with other humans, and how they engage with that is up to them. I have my own discoveries through every process, and I gain knowledge with every project I do and every life experience that I have, but... I don't feel like I'm trying to explain or to teach or share that 'knowledge' with people. It's more like making space for that civic ritual of theater and that shared human connection that we have in that place. (2015)

“Space,” indeed, is something Pite accords her numerous viewers, including the dancers themselves. She is no choreographic dictator, nor does her work explode into anarchy. While room for interpretation in both performance and perception is made purposefully plentiful, those affective properties which the works exhibit are strong enough to allow both dancer and viewer to interact with them fruitfully; Pite’s works create a multiplicity of depth in understanding, affect, and ramification which exist within their own respective planes of thought, maintaining their individual integrities as independent bodies of work.

Critics often refer to Pite’s work as “dance theater” (Schabas 2). This is particularly true for those of her works created on her resident company, Kidd Pivot, based in Vancouver. Pite’s affinity for fusion goes far beyond the question of narrative or lack thereof, integrating itself into the whole of her works, from genre to movement to stage attributes. In such pieces as *Betroffenheit*, *The Tempest Replica*, and *Dark Matters*, among others, Pite skillfully amalgamates her choreography with high-level theatrical instrumentation, including highly developed lighting design, sound scores, scenery, costuming, and even puppetry to create intense compositions of aesthetic-sensory stimuli whose unique attributes transgress typical categorizations of dance work. *Betroffenheit*, an intensely poignant observance of loss and grief, was inspired by the untimely death of dancer Jonathon Young’s teenage daughter, and it stands as a primary example of Pite’s dance-theater mastery. Schabas illustrates the depth of the piece’s theater-scape in her personal account of the piece after viewing it at its Toronto premier in 2015 and once again thereafter:

The first part of *Betroffenheit*, which combines choreography and text spoken via voice-over, shows the protagonist (played by Young) trapped in an

industrial room where a talking surveillance system tries to save him from his guilt and despair. Eventually, he succumbs to his addiction, and the dancers, who'd been crossing the stage to taunt him, become the hallucinations of his high. In the second part, which uses less voice-over and more choreography, the industrial room dissolves into a nightmarish open space that suggests the desolate landscape of his grief. (3)

The piece includes a relentless voiceover repeating, “Just forget it,” “The whole show is set to go,” and “Look at this, remember?” filling the room with an ominous, psychologically-loaded internal dialogue to be shared by every individual within the theater space. The lighting is dark, spattered with jarring strobe lights against perturbing spotlights and mirror-like shadow work, and elements of uncanny absurdity make themselves present in a garish and scanty clown costume, cheeky pink feather fans, and a brief bowler-hat-bedecked homage to tap dance that, collectively and unquestionably, heighten the sense of psychological unrest that the piece is designed to encapsulate. Following this first half, the piece includes a second, much more abstracted and dance-oriented section which further develops the themes and affective powers introduced in the first part. Strikingly different in its stripped-down simplicity—pedestrian clothing, blank stage, caricatures left behind—*Betroffenheit*'s second half introduces a full repetition of its twisted theater-world predecessor, translated into a pure dance form which allows for the exploration of grief and trauma in abstract kinetic language. Schabas writes of the work as a whole, “[Pite and Young] devised a two-part structure that let them blend the abstract and the literal into a staggering expression of loss that has moved audiences around the world” (3). Such is the reputation that Pite has created in her dance-theater work, and she has certainly

done her part to uphold it within her collective repertoire. This distinctive style blending dance and theater materials, particularly in utilization of the twofold structure, sets Pite apart from her contemporaries, and it does so in a way that further solidifies her position as an artist whose work stands particularly homologous to Deleuzian theory.

In the simplest sense of the term, Pite's work in all capacities employs repetition by the very nature of being art; i.e. "art is always repetition." The choreographic and theatrical sequences which Pite constructs are, as has been established, specific in their individual integrities and thus repeatable in the sense of performativity along their unique lines of disclosure. They are works of art which clearly display the creative process, and Pite's renowned complexity in constructive energy provides a paradigmatic example. In consideration of Pite's dance-theater, however, we see the occurrence of repetition within a larger frame of repetition with the utilization of two distinct parts, a structure that works to reveal the constant transformation of the acting body of work. Deleuze writes:

Perhaps the highest object of art is to bring into play simultaneously all these repetitions, with their differences in kind and rhythm, their respective displacements and disguises, their divergences and decentrings; to embed them in one another and to envelop one or the other in illusions the 'effect' of which varies in each case. Art does not imitate, above all because it repeats; it repeats all the repetitions, by virtue of an internal power... For there is no other aesthetic problem than that of the insertion of art into everyday life. The more our daily life appears standardised, stereotyped and subject to an accelerated reproduction of objects of consumption, the more art must be injected into it in order to extract from it that little difference which plays simultaneously between other levels of repetition. (293)

In *Betroffenheit*, not only do the voice, the lights, the costumes, and the dance of the first section offer equal importance in the work's repetition of affect, but the piece's entire twofold structure drives the force of repetition securely home as it allows the viewer to experience the content once more, translated onto a different plane of affective property. As a visual performance of repetition, the piece certainly maintains its sense of coherence. *Betroffenheit* is far from a state of chaotic dismantling or disorganization—its establishment as a coherent masterwork of dance is well affirmed within critical rhetoric (Albano 2016), as Pite partitions the piece into two distinct sections for an intentional emphasis in the work's exploration of psychological trauma.

What remains critical to this specific repetition is the rebound effect that Pite's work allows. Because her work is neither so literal that room for personal interpretation dies nor so abstract that viewers cannot relate to it at all, the audience is free to engage with what appears onstage using continuous rebounds and echoes of thought—a dynamic BwO of inter- and intrapersonal cogitation—opening an infinity of potential association within that plane. The nature of the repetition fits this specific engagement with its mobility between extremes, and because of this Pite's goal of reaching “that shared human connection” is made possible on a multiplicity of levels. Schabas expounds on Pite's unique ability to connect with her audiences:

Pite's ability to create material that is as thematically concrete as it is emotionally affecting has helped her win over people who normally find dance alienating and esoteric or, alternatively, too decorative and light. Audiences “understand” what's happening in a Pite creation the way they would have a logical handle on the context and emotional stakes of a challenging play; critics sometimes refer to Pite's work as “dance-theatre.” But as a choreographer, her vocabulary is ultimately non-representational, meaning she can evoke more

slippery tones and moods than a playwright generally can. Her pieces often place us in a world ruled by instinct and the unconscious, settings more dreamlike and intimate than naturalistic theatre, but because of her work's structural rigour and clarity, we know how we got there; we never feel lost. (1)

While their content may indeed be slippery, delving into those parts of existence not easily definable in structured language, Pite's works provide a foothold for response that other choreography may neglect—a transfer of communicative material that transcends both ordinary choreographic and syntactical form. As Schabas notes, the two-part structure of Pite's dance-theater works prepares the audience for the ultimate destratification, fracturing, and abstraction that occurs within the significantly more dance-central second half; of the first parts, Schabas writes, “it's as if you've been given the keys to watch [the second half]... because you have all that content in your back pocket, you're able to connect so much more than you would if you started with part two” (3). As such, Pite takes her audiences through a pathway of construction and deconstruction—a pathway of purposeful repetition—in order to tap into the ultimate kernel of destratification that her works embody. The repetitious form of Pite's dance-theater, manifest both in overall structure and in the internal content of the pieces, thus opens space for reactivity within a space of infinite destratification, disassociation, and reassociation within the liquid parameter of a recognizable body. As such, the pieces allow their own creative capacities to reassert themselves utilizing this specific interplay of difference and repetition in theme, structure, and movement. As mentioned before, such a flexibility in nature opens the door for continued creative potential—a constant state of becoming that only time and further interaction may continue to reveal.

### **Dancers-Nomad and Becoming**

If all art is repetition, art stands as a constant force of modification, decentering, and movement—just as Pite’s canon displays. Stagnation is thus rendered impossible in the creative process, as is the falsehood of striated space as designed by the dominant State power to project the illusion of hierarchy and permanence onto the state of being. Movement and continuation lie at the heart of lived experience, encompassing both human and non-human entities, and those who engage with art consequently engage in constant travel across Deleuze’s smooth, non-striated space. Always progressing from point to point, such people maintain the title of *nomad*:

The space of nomad thought is qualitatively different from State space. Air against earth. State space is "striated," or gridded. Movement in it is confined as by gravity to a horizontal plane, and limited by the order of that plane to preset paths between fixed and identifiable points. Nomad space is "smooth," or open-ended. One can rise up at any point and move to any other. Its mode of distribution is the *nomos*: arraying oneself in an open space (hold the street), as opposed to the *logos* of entrenching oneself in a closed space (hold the fort). (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, xiii)

The nomad travels along a trajectory and thus progresses from place to place with constant velocity, passing through each point not to reach states of settlement but to continue her progression. She is not a line segment with marked beginning and end, but a *line of flight* in a perpetual state of simultaneous de- and reterritorialization—continual progression and becoming (380). As Deleuze explains, the nomad can only travel on “smooth” space that is free from hierarchical or dictated boundaries. In discussion of Pite’s use of assemblage and repetition, we have already established that her

choreographic material engages in the creation of smooth space that allows for the growth of productive potential. Accordingly, as they are embedded within the creative process and continually incarnate multiplicities of constant motion and transformation, both Pite and dancer become nomad:

The nomads are there, on the land, wherever there forms a smooth space that gnaws, and tends to grow, in all directions. The nomads inhabit these places; they remain in them, and they themselves make them grow, for it has been established that the nomads make the desert no less than they are made by it. They are vectors of deterritorialization... It is a tactile space, or rather "haptic," a sonorous much more than a visual space." (382)

In her choreography, Pite eludes the binding grasps of stability and balance—whether in the movement vocabulary itself or in the building of the pieces themselves. The fluid, spineless, and often unearthly qualities of movement for which she and her dancers are so deeply renowned transcend typical technical vocabulary, and thus eludes striated boundary or dictation. In her piece *Solo Echo* (2015), for example, a common choreographic motif presents itself in extreme arcing and expansive release of the arms and upper body, fueled by an underlying momentum which appears to surge from the spine. The dancers' bodies twist and unwind rapidly in constant flux and weight transfer, interrupted only with poignant moments of amplified pedestrian human contact. The lines of energy which pervade the dancers' movements remain free in their progression onward; the synthesis of movement is such that it appears entirely natural to the body despite its extremely idiosyncratic positionings and evolutions in space. This quality reveals Pite's increasing freedom in movement construction, for as she refrains from assembling her movement phrases upon established vocabulary, she eludes obligation to

align her choreography with pre-determined avenues of motion. One must distinguish, however, that with the absence of technical vocabulary the works are far from lacking in any capacity. In truth, Pite's choreography is always incredibly refined and strikingly specific—so very specific, in fact, that Pite works relentlessly with her dancers on the development of the desired quality of movement, utilizing the minutest of details and expanding their accessibility within her own idiom. Such specificity is necessary if the desired effect is to be conveyed, given the fact that Pite's movement does not align with technical vocabulary that dictates an encoded method of execution. In a creative environment in which infinite variations of movements, postures, or qualities are possible, the attention put towards refining and clarifying the ones to be performed must increase accordingly to uphold the integrity of the piece.

All the same, the work that Pite creates paralleling Deleuze's smooth space is free from the limitations of stability and hierarchical structure. In her interview with the Banff Centre, Pite elaborates on the importance of such freedom and mobility in her choreographic process, describing how her unpredictable relationships with doubt and the unknown fuel much of the creative force behind her:

Doubt is about my relationship to the unknown—what I don't know and what I can't know when I'm creating something—so there's that aspect of doubt which feels... potent and charged and full of possibility... The kind of doubt that I find inspiring is the experience of not knowing and having a dialogue with what I cannot understand and trying to create something with that, or inside that... To be convinced of something feels more restful, feels more stable... it doesn't have that kind of tension in it... I feel like I need a lot of tension in order to create things. (Girard 2015)

The “tension” of which Pite speaks in this illustration indicates a constant pulling, or pressure—a constant state of motion comprised of infinite movements in infinite directions that pull the energy off-balance in such a way that inspires further energy with their momentum. This is true in both physical and ideological frames of reference, for as much as Pite speaks of this tension in her process of creating choreographed work, the same tension is clearly visible within the choreography itself. One may look to another example of Pite’s work, *Flight Pattern*, set on The Royal Ballet to see this phenomenon in clear physical display. Schabas describes Pite’s characteristic choreographic movement in the following manner:

Pite’s choreography relies on dramatic imagery and suspenseful momentum, underpinned by a deeply rooted sense of flow. The dancers appear so elastic at times that their bodies can look boneless, with every inch of a leg articulating as it extends upward or a back undulating like a ribbon of smoke. Pite’s dancers are always immaculately trained, but they also possess the artistry that lets them work against their technique when the narrative calls for it, appearing ungainly, reactive, flawed... there’s so much detail in Pite’s style, so much of a sense of process made visible that, at times, it feels as though we can see more than what’s in front of us. The movement stretches our visual comprehension of time—we get flashes of the in-between, as though we can make out the pixels.

(3)

Words such as “tension,” “flow,” and “in-between” fall right in line with Deleuze’s description of the nomad. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, he writes that the entire life of the nomad is “the intermezzo,” and that “even the elements of [the nomad’s] dwelling are conceived in terms of the trajectory that is forever mobilizing them” (380). The nomad, accordingly, lives in the in-between that connects each past-turned-present moment to the next, always playing with the precipice of what could be. Pite’s dance is, indeed,

nomadic for as much as it embodies the perpetual state of travel, transition, flow, and potential. Her work stands such that it appears as if the body, the energy, or the piece as a whole could go anywhere, permeating that very sense of continuity and progression from the level of individual dancer to group to overall construction. In short, what Pite creates on all levels is a sense of *becoming*.

Deleuze asserts that “the nomad exists only in becoming” (430). Her trajectory is mobile, constituted of an ever-increasing collection of moments in temporal space that collectively contribute to who she becomes. These moments, however, are not steps or stations along a predestined route, but are instead aftereffects of the potential states of being in time and space. She changes constantly and is herself the action of becoming incarnate. Deleuze writes:

A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification... To become is not to progress or regress along a series. Above all, becoming does not occur in the imagination, even when the imagination reaches the highest cosmic or dynamic level... What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes... (237-8)

The becoming is thus always new and always real, even if the associations made occur only within the ideological plane. What one must be careful to note, however, is the absence of the endpoint in a becoming. Similar to the geometrical line, it is infinite on both ends, though free from strict linearity and unrestricted by one-dimensionality.

Moreover, the becoming is a power—it creates:

This is the point to clarify: that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the

first. This is the principle according to which there is a reality specific to becoming... Finally, becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation... becoming is involu-tionary, involution is creative... (239)

She who creates utilizes the becoming, or a multiple of becomings. Pite clearly does this, and she does it in such a way that makes the becoming visually manifest and recognizable in time, space, and energy. While the shapes and images that Pite constructs are both important and visually enamoring, the elements which add the density and unforgettable edge to her work are the spinelessness, the tension, the multiple, and the in-between. These are the key points which contribute to those elements for which she has been heralded a choreographic genius, and it is with these that she has developed her mastery of assemblage, repetition, and becomings in contemporary choreography. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Pite has earned the title of “genius” by several accounts, for as Deleuze writes, “The genius is someone who knows how to make everybody/the whole world a becoming” (200). For as homologous as these two figures are in their work, perhaps it is no coincidence that one would support the other in this way. Yet the becoming does not end here—as long as minds continue to ponder both Pite and Deleuze and their respective works, the potential for understanding each will remain an enduring process.

### **Reciprocal Understanding, Expansion, Production**

As product of creative power, art remains perpetually *becoming*, carrying with it an indelible propensity for philosophical understanding. In turn, as philosophy allows the development of increasing artistic production and comprehension, those very works of art

reciprocate their relationships with theoretical understandings by nature of their being, physically manifesting those theories in other forms understandable by other means. The relationship is complementary and reciprocal, translating one through the other with ever-expanding capacity for as much as the world is comprised of multiplicities. As such, the partnering of Pite's choreography with Deleuze's post-structural theory stimulates growth along one such plane of reciprocal understanding, deepening one's capacity for appreciating each through the other; comprehension of Pite's work through a Deleuzian lens augments comprehension of the work itself, and vice-versa. While intensely niche-specific, such analysis does reveal much about the greater relationship between art and philosophy. The details unearthed in the above analysis—repetition through canon, assemblage in dance-theater, and dancers-nomad—comprise the critical base upon which the entire panorama builds. To take a wider view of such a multifarious relationship as that espoused between art and philosophy would, in fact, prove unfruitful, as one's ability to discern those very details which construct the relationship would dwindle facing the bulk of infinitely possible methods of association and comprehension. In analysis of Pite's choreography through a Deleuzian lens, the conditions of philosophic creation through art, the artistic form, and the fusion of these two concepts in the form of creative means have been illustrated with discussion of canon as assemblage, dance-theater as repetition, and dancers-nomad within Pite's creative idiom. Given the results unearthed in such discussion, the homologous nature in which both figures' works may be united serves as a vehicle through which one may peer into the wider potential for relation between art and philosophy. This discussion, as such, does not end here. For so long as artists continue to create and minds produce conditions of meaning, the space within

which comprehension of both artistic and philosophic conception will continue to expand. Art produces affects, philosophy produces concepts, and each produces the other.

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