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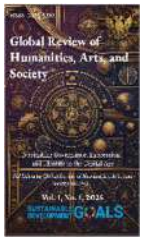
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Dance Creation Based on Plato's Theory of Art: A Study of *Alienation* — Who Is Living My Life?

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Abstract

This study explores the application of Plato's theory of art in the context of dance creation, with a focus on the dance film *Alienation – Who Is Living My Life?* as a case study. According to Plato, art is a form of "mimesis" — an imitation of reality — that should uphold moral guidance while maintaining rationality and order. Grounded in this theoretical framework, the research investigates the significance and value manifested through the dancer's body as a medium in the reconstruction of reality via dance on screen. The choreography centers on the theme of the modern workplace, utilizing symbolic gestures, ensemble staging, and contrasting physical languages to portray the individual's existential condition under social structures. Through repetitive compositional structures and spatial arrangements, the work reinforces its philosophical underpinnings. The findings suggest that Plato's aesthetic perspective not only offers a robust theoretical foundation for dance creation but also encourages works to transcend mere emotional expression, becoming a medium for critical reflection on social realities. This provides a fresh lens through which contemporary dance creation may be reconsidered.

Keywords: Plato, theory of art, dance creation

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1. Introduction

As a vital form of artistic expression, dance has, since antiquity, served not only as a vehicle for cultural transmission and emotional expression but also as a medium for reflecting social realities and engaging in philosophical inquiry. Plato's theory of art—particularly his concepts of *mimesis* (imitation) and *idea* (ideal forms)—offers a foundational philosophical framework for understanding the essence of art. Rather than viewing art as a mere replication of the physical world, Plato advocates for its transcendence beyond appearances toward the pursuit of higher truth and beauty. This perspective holds profound implications for contemporary dance creation: dance should not be confined to the arrangement of physical movements but should also function as a mode of exploration into life, society, and metaphysical questions.

In *The Republic*, Plato identifies art as *mimesis*, yet he also cautions against the seductive power of sensory appeal in the arts. He asserts that art must be guided by reason to uphold social order and moral values. This philosophical stance finds expression in classical Greek art, such as vase paintings and murals. For instance, the *Panathenaic amphora* exemplifies rationalized aesthetics through its precise depiction of athletic form, while the frescoes of the Palace of Knossos demonstrate how group dances construct collective identity through harmony and order.

In the contemporary era, dance film has emerged as a new mode of dance expression. However, many such works tend to prioritize emotional resonance and visual impact, often at the expense of philosophical depth and critical engagement with social issues. This raises a vital question: How can dance films maintain intellectual substance, so that the work transcends sensory pleasure to become a platform for rational reflection on reality?

Plato's theory of art has had a lasting impact on the history of Western aesthetics. During the Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci echoed Platonic ideals in his *Treatise on Painting*, arguing that art should transcend the real to pursue ideal beauty—an idea aligned with Plato's concept of the world of forms. Although Platonic thought has been widely explored in fields such as visual art and literature, its application to dance film remains relatively underexamined. With the advancement of media technologies, dance film has developed diverse creative techniques; yet many productions still emphasize visual spectacle over philosophical construction. For example, Pina Bausch's *Carnations* employs surreal movement and spatial arrangements to reveal how social structures shape individual experience—a method that aligns closely with Plato's emphasis on rational form and moral function in art.

This study adopts a methodology that combines theoretical analysis with creative practice. On the one hand, it delineates the core tenets of Plato's aesthetics and their implications for dance as an art form; on the other, it examines how these ideas may be applied and challenged

in the process of creating a dance film.

The dance film *Alienation – Who Is Living My Life?* represents an experimental response to Platonic aesthetics. The conflicts, resistance, and struggle embodied in the choreography are not merely physical arrangements but abstract representations of reality. The work invites audiences to reflect on the nature of life and the condition of human existence through its visual and emotional impact. Through this research, we aim to demonstrate that dance is not only a form of artistic expression but also a mode of philosophical inquiry—one in which Plato's theories continue to serve as an enduring point of reference.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Art as "Imitation of Imitation"

Plato contends that the physical world perceived through the senses is merely a shadow of the "World of Forms," and that artistic creations are imitations (*mimesis*) of this already derivative world. Hence, art is thrice removed from the truth. This notion forms the foundation of Plato's *Theory of Forms*.

"We say there are three kinds of beds: one that exists in nature—namely, the essence of the bed in the world of Forms; one made by a carpenter, which is an imitation of the ideal bed; and one painted by an artist, which is a copy of the carpenter's bed."

— *The Republic*, Book X, 597b

Within this philosophical hierarchy, Plato assigns art a paradoxical status: his theory of "imitation of imitation" operates as a double-edged sword—it exposes the epistemological limitations of art while simultaneously opening avenues for transcendence in artistic creation. In *The Republic*, Plato constructs a rigorous metaphysical stratification: the world of Forms, which represents eternal and immutable truth, stands at the apex; the physical world, being a mere copy, is secondary; and art, as a representation of this copy, occupies the lowest tier. This places art at the very bottom of the cognitive order, implying that the artist is but a mirror-bearer—crafting illusions that not only deviate from the truth but also risk unsettling rational order through emotional stimulation.

This philosophical critique has prompted deep reflection within the field of dance. As a spatial-temporal art rooted in the body, dance engages in a unique mimetic mechanism. Movements of the dancer may stem from imitation of natural phenomena, or arise from purely internal, formal invention. In traditional narrative dance, the direct representation of life often validates Plato's concerns. However, the evolution of modern dance opens new possibilities. From Isadora Duncan's free dance to Cunningham's chance-based composition, from Martha Graham's psychological expressivity to William Forsythe's deconstruction of movement, dance has gradually shifted

away from replicating surface reality toward exploring the abstraction and purity of bodily language.

The creation of the dance film *Alienation – Who Is Living My Life?* is a direct artistic response to this philosophical predicament. Rather than depicting warfare in a literal or representational sense, the work constructs a metaphorical world through oppositional bodily tension, spatial compression, and fragmented cinematic editing. The dancers' struggles are no longer mere reenactments of combat but become a visual poetics of energy exchange. The wounded bodies are not symbols of violence per se, but manifestations of human resilience. This creative approach echoes the essence of Plato's *Theory of Forms*—that art should not merely imitate appearances but strive to apprehend the eternal realities beyond them.

The evolution of contemporary dance aesthetics offers a renewed lens through which to engage with Platonic thought. When dance emancipates itself from the imperative to imitate reality, when movement ceases to be an emotional illustration, it acquires the potential to transcend Plato's "imitation of imitation" and emerge as a unique mode of truth-revelation. Heidegger's reflections on the essence of art help illuminate this shift: genuine artistic creation does not mimic the already-existent but allows the truth of being to unfold within the work. In this sense, dance can surpass the cognitive hierarchy established by Plato, enabling a more authentic mode of existence to emerge through the poetic motion of the body.

The creation of *Alienation – Who Is Living My Life?* may be viewed as a philosophical practice in its own right. The work's physical confrontations, its cyclical movement trajectories, and its sculptural stillness are all choreographic devices designed to bypass surface reality and probe the essence of being. Rather than diluting the work's philosophical intent, the cinematic interventions—close-ups, slow motion, montage—enhance the metaphysical dimension of bodily expression. This cross-media exploration demonstrates that contemporary dance need not passively submit to Plato's critique. On the contrary, it may engage in a productive dialogue with Platonic thought, not as a condemned imitator, but as an equal partner in the manifestation of ideals.

Revisiting Plato's aesthetics reveals a profound dialectical tension. His critique of art paradoxically illuminates a path toward artistic transcendence; his suspicion of imitation becomes a call for art to pursue eternal truth. In reinterpreting Plato's "imitation of imitation" in the context of contemporary art, we uncover not merely limitations but also emancipatory potential. When dance consciously distances itself from the phenomenal world, it may, paradoxically, come closer to the wellspring of truth. This may well be Plato's most enduring philosophical legacy for artists: that true artistic creation always exists within the creative tension between imitation and transcendence.

2.2 The Moral Function of Art and the Social Responsibility of Dance

Plato asserts that art should serve the moral fabric of society, shaping the rationality and virtue of its citizens. In *The Republic*, he advocates for a rigorous selection of artworks that contribute to the public good and the exclusion of those that may mislead or corrupt.

"Rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul and take strongest hold upon it, imparting grace and making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful."

— *The Republic*, Book III, 401d

Plato's vision of the ethical role of art rests on the belief that artistic education must contribute to the cultivation of virtue. He particularly emphasizes that the rhythms and harmonies of music and dance can deeply influence the moral character of the soul. This view is expanded in *The Laws*, where he elaborates on how choral dance disciplines the body and instills collective identity, thereby reinforcing civic virtue. This fusion of aesthetic form and moral pedagogy holds great relevance for contemporary dance creation. When ensemble dancers perform precise formations and symmetrical transitions, they are not only achieving visual beauty but also enacting a visible model of moral order.

Plato's moral critique of art includes strict content regulations, requiring the removal of elements that might weaken courage or incite indulgence. In the context of contemporary choreography, this suggests that themes involving violence or desire should undergo aesthetic transformation. In *Alienation – Who Is Living My Life?*, for example, the choreographer abstracts scenes of combat into spatial constriction and energy confrontation. The tension is preserved, but the depiction avoids aestheticizing violence. This aligns with Plato's principle of artistic purification—the establishment of aesthetic distance to facilitate moral edification.

On the level of reception, Plato offers a striking psychological insight: he warns of the risk that art, by appealing to emotion, may erode rational judgment. This observation provides an important reference point for understanding the ethical effects of dance. Recent research in neuroaesthetics has shown that watching dance activates the viewer's mirror neurons, validating Plato's concerns about art's powerful affective influence. Choreographers must therefore reflect carefully: What values are being internalized by audiences who emotionally resonate with the dancers' movements?

While Plato's ethical aesthetics may reflect the constraints of his historical context, his core proposition—that art should elevate the soul—remains inspiring for contemporary dance. In today's pluralistic value systems, dance need not serve as a moral sermon, but it should remain committed to human elevation. This commitment

manifests not only in the choice of themes but also in the refinement of artistic language. When a dance work moves its audience while provoking critical thought, it fulfills the very function that Plato envisioned for art: not merely to mirror the world, but to actively shape better souls and a better society. This is both the social responsibility and the existential value of dance.

2.3 Platonic Rationality: Order, Symmetry, and Repetition

Plato maintains that ideal art must embody order, rationality, and harmony, avoiding excessive emotionality and sensationalism. He repeatedly praises the use of symmetry and repetition in his dialogues, linking them to his metaphysical belief system. In *Timaeus* (53c–55c), he details the five Platonic solids and their relation to the structure of the cosmos, with the dodecahedron symbolizing the rational soul of the universe through its perfect symmetry. This geometrical worldview leads him to argue in *The Republic* (529c–530d) that astronomy should transcend empirical star-gazing and seek instead the "true motions"—the perfect, circular orbits of the ideal celestial bodies.

In the arts, Plato explicitly states in *Philebus* (64e–65a) that *metron* (measure) and *symmetria* (proportion) are essential qualities of beauty. When an artwork exhibits quantifiable relationships among its parts, it evokes in the soul a recollection of the Forms. This is further developed in *The Laws* (656c–657b), where Plato criticizes works that violate the principle of symmetry for disturbing the soul's harmony, while those that conform to geometrical rules serve moral purposes. Notably, in *The Republic* (Book III, 401b–d), Plato associates rhythmic repetition in music with the cultivation of temperance—a point that extends directly to his understanding of dance.

Philosophically, Plato addresses the idea of repetition in the *Parmenides* (145b–147b) through his dialectic of the One and the Many, suggesting that Forms are unified by being "participated in" by multiple instances. This metaphysical view translates into artistic form as structured repetition. In *Timaeus* (36b–37c), he describes the cyclical movement of the world soul, founded on patterns of identity and difference. In *Symposium* (206e–207a), he even equates biological reproduction with the human pursuit of eternity—a notion that influenced the Greek artistic fixation with motif repetition. The *charioteer of the soul* metaphor in *Phaedrus* (246c–247c) further underscores the ideal of dynamic equilibrium, where the rational soul maintains symmetry between conflicting impulses. These texts confirm that symmetry and repetition are integral to Plato's aesthetics as necessary bridges between the sensible world and the world of Forms.

In *Alienation – Who Is Living My Life?*, symmetrical composition and repetitive choreography play a central

role. The recurring dance sequences represent the disciplining force of modern professional life. The spatial design balances symmetry with strategic asymmetry, maintaining visual harmony while introducing tension that metaphorically expresses competition and instability. This rational formalism aligns with Plato's vision of artistic elevation in *Phaedrus*—when viewers are captivated by formal beauty, their rational faculties are awakened. Thus, they are encouraged to move beyond the surface of conflict toward contemplation of justice, peace, and the essence of human struggle. This aspiration reflects Plato's ultimate ideal for art: not to imitate appearances, but to reveal the truth.

3. Symbolic Expression in the Dance Film *Alienation – Who Is Living My Life?*

3.1 Content Analysis of the Choreographic Narrative

The dance film adopts a surrealist aesthetic and unfolds through a five-chapter narrative progression, gradually delving into themes of psychological alienation and self-awakening in the modern individual.

Chapter One: Bodies of Gears

Seven dancers are confined behind a stretch of black fabric, revealing only the upper halves of their bodies. Their movements are decomposed into repetitive, mechanical gestures—elbow flexions resemble piston strokes, while footsteps trace equidistant linear patterns on the ground. Together, they form a precision-driven human gear system, where repetitive motion pushes the sense of alienation within assembly-line labor to its extreme. This section establishes the emotional landscape of industrialized dehumanization.

Chapter Two: The Thorny Growth

The rigid rhythm of discipline is disrupted. In an age of mass production, individual agency and independent thought persist. The lead dancer's inner desire intensifies, yet he fears disturbing the collective and becoming an outcast. Trapped between the urge to change and the serenity of conformity, he spirals into an internal dilemma. Dancers embody this tension through erratic, branching movements that resemble wild cognitive tendrils. The lead begins to deviate from the group's choreography, signaling the onset of rupture.

Chapter Three: Crystallization in Darkness

All stifled expressions eventually crystallize in obscurity, becoming rivets that pierce through the age of silence. The piece enters a phase of renewed struggle, where silent screams manifest as dramatic bodily resistance. The lead attempts to tear through the black fabric—symbolizing social regulation—but is repeatedly restrained by other dancers. These moments depict a visceral battle between self and system.

Chapter Four: The Formal Revolution

The fragmentation of thought gives rise to a revolution in form. Realizing that confrontation only reinforces systemic control, the lead dancer begins to deconstruct his own movement logic in search of a resonant frequency. The choreography abandons traditional forms, embracing improvisation rooted in internal expression. Lead and ensemble dancers engage in spontaneous interactions, rejecting symmetrical structures and golden-ratio aesthetics in favor of asymmetry and disruption.

Chapter Five: Constellations of Resonance

The ensemble sheds its mechanized uniformity. Each dancer develops a unique movement frequency, yet an underlying numerical logic facilitates a harmonious resonance. Individuality and collective order coexist in a system of dynamic equilibrium, suggesting the emergence of a new order.

3.2 Analysis of Choreographic Vocabulary

In **Chapter One**, the dancers emulate the gestures of industrial assembly lines, deconstructing joint articulation into geometric precision. Arm swings are constrained to 90-degree angles; step intervals follow strict measurements. The ensemble's formations employ mirrored symmetry and translational repetition to evoke a chilling sense of order. This mechanical aesthetic reflects Plato's critique of *mimesis* in *The Republic* (Book X, 597e): the dancers do not merely imitate labor, but become "phantoms of the Form"—a second-order imitation that alienates them from truth. As Plato writes in *The Laws* (656c), rigid formalism can suffocate the vitality of the soul. Here, the dancers' perfect synchronicity constitutes a flawed replica of the world of Forms, revealing the spiritual cost of aesthetic overregulation.

In **Chapter Two**, improvisation replaces pre-programmed choreography. Free bodily language represents the eruption of thought: some dancers echo neural pulses through subtle tremors and breath patterns; others spiral from the spine in chaotic rotation. The group transitions from mechanical synchronicity to resonant disorder. Projection mapping is introduced—dancers improvise behind a translucent screen, suggesting the boundless extension of thought, while the lead dancer remains motionless in front, forming a temporal and spatial duality. This sequence metaphorically enacts the *chariot allegory* from *Phaedrus* (246e), where the unruly horses symbolize desire and the reins of reason strive to regain control. The unpredictability of improvised movement reflects the soul's obscure recollection of the world of Forms.

In **Chapter Three**, antagonistic movement breaks geometric order. The lead's body confronts the ensemble's resistance, his repeated efforts to escape representing suppressed self-expression. This mirrors Plato's theory of psychic conflict in *The Republic* (Book IV, 439d): a struggle

between reason (manifested in mechanical rhythm) and passion (embodied in chaotic motion). However, *Gorgias* (493a) cautions that pure resistance may lead to an even greater imprisonment. In this piece, the ripple effects triggered by dancers colliding with grid structures serve as a visual metaphor for the futility of combating phenomena with phenomena.

In the **final chapter**, the lead and ensemble dancers gradually synchronize into shared frequencies. The choreography transitions from mechanical symmetry to dynamic balance, echoing the orbital harmony of celestial bodies—each dancer autonomous, yet united. The individualized movement frequencies embody Plato's idea of each soul's unique motion (*Phaedrus*, 247c), while their collective resonance enacts the vision from *The Laws* (653d), in which dance becomes a means to learn the cosmic order. Here, aesthetic form gives way to metaphysical insight: the audience is not merely captivated by beauty but is drawn into a rational contemplation of conflict, justice, and peace. This transformation fulfills Plato's highest ideal for art—not the imitation of appearances, but the manifestation of truth.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Grounded in Plato's theory of art, this study has examined how his critique of *mimesis*—and the dualism between soul and body—can be reinterpreted through the choreographic process of *Alienation – Who Is Living My Life?*. The findings suggest that Plato's notion of art as an "imitation of imitation" paradoxically opens a path for dance to deconstruct alienation: when bodily movement no longer serves as a mere replication of reality but, rather, as an abstract and fractured reconstruction of hidden modes of existence, dance becomes a philosophical praxis of "anti-mimesis."

In *The Republic*, Plato argues that art is not merely aesthetic but inherently ethical. He insists that art should cultivate *arete* (virtue) among citizens rather than arouse base passions or disrupt moral order. The present study reveals that *Alienation* does not evade this moral dimension but, through its critical bodily language, fulfills dance's role as a mirror of society. Instead of aestheticizing alienation, the work confronts its inhuman conditions head-on. Through embodied struggle, repetition, and collapse, it compels the audience to reflect on the dehumanizing tendencies of contemporary life. Improvised sequences serve as symbolic ruptures—momentary escapes from disciplinary systems—suggesting the possibility of "another way of living." This aligns with Plato's vision of art as a means of elevating the soul. When audiences experience empathic tremors through the dancers' corporeality, dance transcends personal expression to become a collective arena of moral reflection. This may be understood as a contemporary echo of Plato's

ideal: art as a force for civic harmony.

Alienation thus demonstrates that art can function simultaneously as philosophical inquiry and moral practice. It offers no facile redemption but, through the visceral truth of the body, prompts an honest response to the existential question: "Who is living my life?"

The central tension between "mechanical repetition" and "improvisational disruption" in the choreography effectively inverts Plato's proposition that the soul must govern the body. In a society shaped by systems of discipline, the so-called "rationally guided life" may itself be the true source of alienation. Sudden imbalances, gasping breaths, and unscripted interactions on stage expose the illusion of rational perfection—embodied "errors" that pierce through the instrumental logic of modern life. This resonates with the *Allegory of the Cave*, in which Plato questions the boundary between appearance and truth. Here, it is not the soul that illuminates the shadows, but the body that destabilizes the false light.

This choreographic approach unveils new dimensions within Platonic aesthetics:

First, the *non-verbal* nature of dance allows it to bypass the conceptual constraints of the ideal world and instead directly express the embodied experience of alienation.

Second, when spectators experience visceral empathy in response to the dancers' pain or unorthodox movements, it testifies to the possibility of *anamnesis*—not of abstract ideals, but of a bodily essence forgotten in the modern age.

In a time when algorithms and artificial intelligence increasingly shape human decisions, we are called to reassess Plato's emphasis on reason as the antidote to alienation. Perhaps dance—as one of the oldest and yet most avant-garde art forms—can, through its radical *presence*, continue to offer non-verbal responses to enduring philosophical dilemmas.

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